

Let's get right to the point about today's episode—it's opening a series about *limits*. What, you say? Whatdya mean—*limits*? Well, I mean the defined boundaries of life...the behaviors...the playing fields...the restrictions...the possibilities—yes, what we might call the “rules” or “guidance” or “right relationship” governing how we operate. Who gets to decide the boundaries as to how we're to do things? Are many of those restrictions made by God? Or made by people themselves, both individually and in groups...for better or for worse? The truth is, limits can be good or bad—and they originate from a variety of actors.

But often the most crippling limits are the bad limits that individuals and groups choose to impose on themselves. That's the focus of this initial episode in this series of podcasts focused on limits.

So. Here's the key point to start: a huge proportion of people who identify as God-followers demonstrably “settle for less” than God has appropriated for them. That's right—they're often choosing to *settle for less*. But we must be careful here—many times people who think they are supposedly “going for more” are actually choosing a path directly leading to settling for less!

After the Israelites were miraculously delivered by God out of their lives in slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, they *immediately* grumbled about God's approach to providing for them and yearned to be back in a life of slavery in Egypt again! Yes, in Jeremiah 11:7-8—a passage that's somehow overlooked by many a Bible legalist—God reports that Israel disobeyed His voice and *therefore God responded by giving them the Mosaic law*. Think about that: first, far before the Law was even given, Israel's ancestor Abraham lived a great life of faith and obedience. But His descendants delivered from Pharaoh's rule did not live in faith... for generations! That's a *group* mindset of settling for less than the reality lived out by Father Abraham!

This reality of the Israelites having “settled for less” by their choices is affirmed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until [Christ] should come...” (3:19 ESV) Then, tellingly, Paul goes on to write this to the Galatian believers in verses 23-29...

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

All that points clearly to this: Israel, Abraham's physical offspring coming out of physical slavery ended up settling for less *spiritually* in response to their lesser mindset, their immediate disobedience. But since the Cross, believers are “not under law but under grace!” That's right: Paul wrote this to believers in Rome: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)

But here's the thing. There are many people who say they are Christian...but then every day they choose to live under the law—yes, actually living out the false understanding that their living under the law is the goal! But Paul indicates they are thus choosing to give sin dominion over themselves! That's right: Biblically, these folks have settled, they've chosen to “settle for less” than what Christ has provided for them. But many millions do exactly that every day! And that's very sad. And that's very unnecessary!

Stop and ponder that for a minute for yourself! Are you quite fully living under God's grace...or are you often laboring on a futile hamster's wheel of living under the law—running faster and faster yet not getting to the destination God intends for His children...*that of living grace-full lives in Christ!*

Hey, you might be thinking, my church is what directs my focus on the Mosaic Law as the standard for Christian living, not grace. Yes, groups can be very powerful. Some families, denominations, churches, pastors, and elders can and do represent Christ very well. But many of those same types of groups do not! We covered just that in a recent episode...the COYOTE principle: Carefully Own Your Own Theology Early!

But you know what? Even someone like Moses can choose a path that leads to settling for less. You see, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land “because [he] broke faith with [God] in the midst of the people of Israel...in the wilderness of Zin, and because [he] did not treat [God] as holy in the midst of the people of Israel.” (Deuteronomy 32:51) Yes, even though his guidance of Israel was generally solid, Moses was limited by virtue of his choices when buckling under the specific pressures of leadership—yes, by his breaking faith and not treating God as holy. *Yes, Moses settled for less and thus received less.*

Now sometimes “settling for less” is fostered by a measure of a mob mentality, a kind of strong democratic impulse. An example of that is when the whole of Israel asked for kings, thus replacing God as King (1 Samuel 8)! And that was a signature event in all history. Israel literally asked for human kings rather than God’s continuous deliverance of His people through judges. Amazingly—like every other nation in history—Israel chose to rely on humanity rather than God. The consequences of their choice came in due course, of course—both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were sacked!

But here’s what’s clearly very important: the seasons leading to *all* those events are captured well in Psalm 78:41-43: “They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields.” *Now that’s settling for less—many times!* Frankly, more than any other picture, that’s an accurate portrait of the ways and means of Israel—even to *this very day you see that very truth!*

Still, an episode in the life of Elijah is really key here. 1 Kings 19:14 says this: “[Elijah] said, ‘I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’” But then God says this in response to Elijah claiming to be “the only one” (in verse 18), “I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” You see, it wasn’t Elijah alone *who did not settle for less*—God had seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed to Baal, the false god. Yeah, that’s seven thousand folks *not* settling for less!

Wow. Through these sketches documented in the Old Testament, we start to lay some groundwork and capture some extremely helpful pointers unveiling a self-imposed, chosen mindset of settling for less—or *not* settling for less!

First, from our beginnings, both individuals and groups have had a propensity for choosing a self-imposed mindset of settling for less, often taking a path different than God’s. And consequences do follow!

Second, settling for less in both actions and consequences is just as much a New Testament affliction as it is Old Testament truth for Israel, Moses, and Elijah. Witness the need for Paul’s corrective epistles for churches and 2,000 years of many choosing to live under Mosaic Law rather than under God’s grace!

Third, groups, communities, and religious “tribes” can be led either fruitfully forward or badly astray. And such groups can become a bit of a mob, creating an “end” of their own making—displacing solid anchors and instructive experience. That’s even true for a nation like Israel that replaced God as King.

Fourth, whether for individuals or groups, the more that each “settling for less” occurs, the deeper the forging of that mindset. That’s often the story of people, businesses, churches—and a nation like Israel.

Fifth, in God’s economy, the reality and principle of “the seven thousand” is *always* there—God always knows identity and activity of that faithful remnant obedient to His purposes, like the Great Commission!

So, how about you...your workplace...your nation...your local church...your family? Are you deeply mired into a self-imposed, chosen mindset of settling for less than God’s plans, less than God’s grace, less than God’s commands to love and go forth and make disciples? Are you replacing God’s mindset by self-imposing one of your own? *Or are you dwelling in the mindset of “the seven thousand,” trusting in God...trusting in the fullness of His provision...knowing His commands will enhance the ultimate fruits?*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Sure, it's easy for many of us to spot the flaws of people in the stories of the Old Testament. But what about those around us as believers today—are they often in a mindset of settling for less than what God intends in the abundant life and obedience to God's purposes like the Great Commission? A life "not under the law but under grace?" Discuss.
  
2. How about your church leaders and those who disciple you? Are they consistently compelling you to victory over a mindset of settling for less? Or are they working to make sure you are staying inside the coloring lines *that they have drawn or your church has drawn* as to how God can work in your life? Discuss.
  
3. Look again at the previous discussion questions and recall your answers. Did you find it easy to see the flaws in the mindset of fellow believers? Or of your current church leaders? OK, but how about you? Are you personally, robustly following the commands of Jesus to go forth and make disciples to the end of the earth? Are you "not under the law but under grace?" Are you loving...or are you condemning...your neighbors in this era of cultural strife? Be specific and concrete in your analysis.