

“Getting Over Ourselves...”  
by Rom A. Pegram (2/19/17)

We’ve been learning about the topic of GRACE (& LAW) for the past several weeks, but how are we doing? Do we understand it all yet? Is the idea of GRACE crystal clear in our lives—in our everyday lives?

Well, every day of our lives, God’s GRACE is available to us—every day of our lives. It doesn’t matter what the past has to say. It doesn’t matter what your parents have to say ... or what your siblings have to say about you. It doesn’t matter where you’re at right now, or what your life has stood for to date. God’s GRACE is available to you right now ... in your everyday life...

And that’s what I want to talk about for a few moments today. Folks, all we really need in this life is GRACE ALONE, an incredible gift from God. Now, one of the ways to discern whether or not you’ve really got a grip on GRACE or not is to ask this question: *Have you been freed? Have you been freed from the need to ... impress?* Have you gotten over yourself ... and do you now depend totally on your relationship with a God of GRACE for your life to be fulfilled?

In 2007, a man named John earned the title of ‘The Worst Person in the World.’ John, a young professional in the Atlanta area, was awarded this title after an exchange he’d had with a young woman on Match.com (the internet dating sight). The young lady in question had made an overture by ‘winking’ at John (electronically), admitting in hindsight that she probably should’ve been more cautious considering his screen name was ‘IvyLeagueAlum’.

John responded with a short, introductory message, listing several facts about himself—some pertinent, some not (height, weight, schools attended, fitness regimen, etc.). He also asked a few pointed questions of his new admirer—where she’d gone to school, the kind of products she enjoyed, and what activities she currently participated in to stay in shape. He seemed especially concerned that his potential date wouldn’t be misrepresenting herself physically—apparently an area of deception he’d experienced before. More problematic, however, was *the self-satisfied tone* in which his concern was expressed.

Well, something about his message must’ve rubbed this young lady the wrong way, as she replied to him with an automatic ‘No thanks’, thinking that would be the end of the story. But it wasn’t. John couldn’t let this go. And here’s how he replied...

I think you forgot how this works. You hit on me, and therefore have to impress ME and pass MY criteria and standards—not vice versa. 6 pictures of just your head and your inability to answer a simple question lets me know one thing. You’re not in shape. I am a trainer on the side; in fact, I am heading to the gym in 26 minutes!

So next time you meet a guy of my caliber, instead of trying to turn it around, just get to the gym! I will even give you one free training session, so you don't blow it with the next 8.9 on 'Hot or Not', Ivy League grad, Mensa member, can bench/squat/leg press over 1200 lbs., has had lunch with the Secretary of Defense, has an MBA from the top school in the country, drives a Beemer convertible, has been in 14 major motion pictures ... etc.

*Can I state the obvious?* John doesn't handle rejection well, does he? He hasn't got over himself yet. He hasn't experienced the freedom that comes from knowing and recognizing and living by GRACE in his everyday life. Because, folks, *once you meet Jesus face-to-face, you get over yourself pretty quickly!* John not only defended himself, but he actually justified himself. John's problem though isn't his résumé; it's what he *thinks* about his résumé. And he hasn't learned yet that love based on certain standards of performance ... isn't really love at all. It's a relationship based on LAW ... with *no grace involved!*

If your everyday life looks like John's, you're in trouble! We might think John's is an extreme case, but not really. How many of us feel the need to justify who we are several times a day? How much time do you spend name-dropping or trying to prove yourself to others? Or have we been freed from the need to impress ... through the presence of God's GRACE? At the risk of stating the obvious, let me just say that *living strictly by the LAW ... is absolutely exhausting!*

Now, if a personal identity based on 'works of the law' looks like John's, what might a personal identity based on one-way love (GRACE) look like? Let's go to a letter from Paul, who once wrote a letter a bit similar to that of John's (Phil. 3:4-6, NLT):

Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! <sup>5</sup> I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. <sup>6</sup> I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

Paul, it would seem, had plenty to be proud of. Didn't he? But, unlike John, Paul doesn't end there. Listen to what he says next (Phil. 3:7-9, NLT)...

<sup>7</sup> I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

Paul, here, is speaking of the contrast between a life driven by LAW (i.e. full of judgment, contingent on performance, etc.) vs. a life driven by GRACE (based on unconditional love). One is earned, the other bestowed. One is a paycheck, the other a gift—a gift of a life free from having to live up to the law—*free from the need to impress!* That’s the life Christ died for—what Paul experienced. If anyone could’ve boasted, it would’ve been Paul. But, Paul learned that *the life God wanted for him—driven by GRACE, based on unconditional love—was the life more desirable!* Let’s look at that...

**GRACE IN RELATIONSHIPS.** When GRACE is absent, you end up with LAW only; it’d be like living with John, who wrote the nasty note on Match.com. ‘Nothing but demands on your life ... and *relational demand, folks, always creates relational detachment!*

One resounding principle at work in a life driven by LAW is this: *Expectation is the mother of resentment!* When our spouses or friends have failed to meet our expectations, we get angry and we blame. The book of James tells us what causes quarrels and fights among us ... and 10x out of 10 it’s our desires—our misguided cravings for self-approval. James puts it this way (4:1-2a, NLT): “What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it....” Maybe not physically, but we often are capable of killing the spirit of another, aren’t we?

And that’s what happens when we allow the LAW to have the upper hand in relationships. Our anger and *gracelessness* toward others is rooted in this fact: *we’re expecting them to provide for us what we can’t provide for ourselves* ... and then we take it out on them when they can’t. BUT...

When GRACE is present, it’s a whole different story! The Gospel describes an upside down kingdom where *acceptance precedes achievement* ... and *mercy comes before merit*. Look closely at the relationships you find most sustaining and least exhausting ... and I’ll bet you’ll find in those relationships an element of *unconditionality*—a real one-way love (GRACE). Someone once said, ‘The moment we try and leverage anything but LOVE ... we’re in trouble’ ... and that’s never more true than in relationships. Next, let’s look at...

**GRACE IN FAMILIES.** One-way love (GRACE) is often what distinguishes a warm household from a cold one. Children often move across the country to get away from a home life that’s been toxic ... where 2-way conditionality was the rule! A house full of conditions feels like a prison, doesn’t it? And if you’ve come out of a family like that, you may be in desperate need of one-way love or GRACE in your life. For GRACE, folks, has the power to bind generations together. I’ve not only experienced GRACE—*undeserved favor*—from my parents when I least expected it, but I’ve experienced the same from my grandparents too ... and you never forget that kind of love; it’ll hold a family together for the long run...

**GRACE IN MARRIAGE.** One author puts it this way: “A marriage is like a petri dish for the weight of conditionality and the beauty of one-way love.” Husbands and wives are

often so hard on one another, merciless with their demands and expectations, their criticisms and silences. And yet what brought many together in the first place was almost always an experience of GRACE...

When talking about the summer we met, I told Jane, “Jane, you were from Indiana ... and I was from Wisconsin. What do you think the chances were that you and I would ever meet, much less the way we did that summer?” And then, in my own schmulsy way, I said, “You know ... 37 years later it’s still crystal clear to me why I wanted to take a chance on you. But, for the life of me, I can’t figure out why you ever decided to take a chance on me!” And you know what it all boiled down to? GRACE. GRACE is always a gift ... and that’s what it’s been ever since. Here are some things I’ve learned over the years about GRACE in marriage:

- A marriage founded on one-way love avoids scorekeeping at all costs!
- A marriage founded on one-way love is not a 50/50 proposition; it’s 100%/100% from both sides...
- A marriage founded on one-way love gives up their rights to talk about rights...
- A marriage founded on one-way love—in theory, is one where both parties are constantly apologizing to each other, and asking for and granting forgiveness...

In other words, *no one is ever innocent in a grace-centered marriage!* And then let’s get into the last thing I want to touch on today:

**GRACE AND CHILDREN.** When it comes to raising children, one-way love is both the easiest thing in the world ... and the hardest. Jane and I are realizing that more & more as we’re now watching our children have children and we remember. The relationship with a baby, for instance, is just about as one-way as it gets; *they need ... and we give, period!* They have no illusions of their own power; the very idea of a baby doing something to deserve our love—other than exist—is laughable. And I don’t believe it’s any coincidence Jesus speaks of children so highly; he praises their ability to *receive* love...

It’s when our kids grow up that understanding the difference between law & grace becomes difficult ... and *urgent!* When I was real young, we lived in Pardeeville, Wisconsin, and my dad held a national position with the Wesleyan Church. He was on the road all the time. And my poor mom ... always had to deal with myself and my older brother getting into trouble. Usually, my older brother and I argued to see who would go first ... when Dad got home. In other words, we’d line up outside his office upon his return ... to see who’d get spanked first. However, many times, I have to admit ... it was just me who’d be lined up and waiting for what I had coming. The LAW was coming down, in other words. But one time Dad really surprised me. After my punishment, he asked me if I wanted to go with him on some errands—to ride along with him, just he and I, to spend time together. Now, folks, I don’t know if you know how rare this was. Dad was always on the road; he was never home. And if you got to go with him to run errands ... that was something special—*reserved for those who’d been good.* So, what was going on here? Well, this was one of my first lessons about God’s GRACE ... and the only answer I had for the special privilege given me on this day. And, again, you don’t forget one-way love (GRACE) like that!

Folks, how have you experienced God's one-way love in your life? Have you been freed ... so that GRACE can reign in all your relationships? With your families? In your marriage? With your kids and grandkids? Have you allowed the GRACE of God to help you get over yourself—free from that? Are you finally recognizing God's gift of one-way love in your everyday life?

A life of GRACE through faith ... is always about *getting what we don't deserve!* It's not about us; it's about God and the life God wants for us. We didn't do anything to earn it. But that's exactly what God wants for us—to know and recognize that GRACE is alive and well in our everyday lives...

I don't know about you, but I feel less exhausted just knowing that! And once we come face-to-face with GRACE in our everyday lives (just like Zacchaeus did), we'll have to respond! Once we meet Jesus face-to-face and know his GRACE, it's our move. And what we need to do is ... offer that same grace to others ... in every relationship we have in our lives. How freeing, folks, and how peace-filled our lives will be ... once we allow the GRACE of God to direct our every step...