



GLOBAL GRACE NETWORK

GGN is a teaching resource for ministers and churches all over the world. We advocate the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ - Jesus alone, grace alone, faith alone. Our purpose is twofold: to help the Church rediscover Jesus and to take this message to the world.

MARCH 2010

KEEPING OUR **focus** RIGHT



Where we put our focus makes a huge difference in our lives. Col. 2:1-2 encourages us, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the father. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

We are to set our minds on Christ - what He has done and who He is in us and for us. When we look at ourselves and others, we see lack and insufficiencies, but when we look at Him, there is neither lack nor insufficiency.

He is our righteousness, sanctification and wisdom. He is our faith, strength and ability. He is our life, hope and provider, and He is our hero! A friend of mine once said, "I don't believe in superstars. There is only one star, and He lives in each of us." That's true! Jesus is our Star, and since He lives in us we can all go out and make a difference in this world.

We are so glad to be able to stay in touch with you through Global Grace News. This newsletter goes to leaders and pastors all over the world. You are in our hearts, and you are important to the Lord. He will do miracles and change people's lives through you all!

We would also like to especially welcome you who are receiving the GGN newsletter for the first time. Please be encouraged to have a look at the previous articles as well - they are all available at the GGN website.



Mary Felde
Editor



Grace for all

All religions seek to please a deity. Is it the same way with Christianity? Must we please God to achieve His favor? Let's look at the difference between religions and the Gospel.

The whole world, mostly without knowing it, is crying out for grace. A common picture of God or gods is that of a deity towering omnipotent, unapproachable, indifferent towards human suffering, and in constant need of appeasement. Such gods usually exist in a different sphere, separated from us, preoccupied with themselves and with limited interest in human affairs, unless there is something to be gained for the deity itself.

Pleasing God

In addition to pleasing those around us, many feel obligated to please the

almighty. The concept of a displeased deity is inherent to religion. In fact, without this it is difficult to see how religion as we know it can survive. The Gospel story stands in stark contrast to all the gods that the human mind has imagined. The God of grace is not a taker, but a giver; there is no self-centeredness in Him. The mere concept of an untouchable deity is anathema to the Gospel. God, who so loved that He gave Christ, is determined to bless us with abundant life; wanting no separation between the mortal and the divine. In the face of the Gospel, why are so many still pre-occupied with trying to please a supposed displeased God?

“ In the face of the Gospel, why are so many still pre-occupied with trying to please a supposed displeased God? ”

The answer always entails some human deficiency, some area where we feel we did not measure up to the expectations that were set before us. The devout Muslim feels guilty when in the middle of Ramadan, the fasting month, hunger gets the best of him and he grabs some food before the sun goes down. Allah is displeased.

The Buddhist feels guilty for not meditating, or being available when the monks came by for the weekly collection. The Hindu worries about the displeasure of the gods when temple worship and prescribed prayers are neglected. Will he incur the wrath of the gods?

The Christian is haunted by failure, wondering if God is not answering prayer because of that secret sin. Oh, he tried to repent, and even received prayer from a well-known pastor. Still, the temptation is there. Surely God can't be pleased.

There are numerous ways to seek relief - pretension for one. Just act

like everything is OK. If others think we are good, then that makes it so, while if those around us disapprove, we too feel guilty. Best to put on a good face, and talk the Christian jargon - Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, and everything is OK. Yet, another guilt relief is constant religious activity in search for a remedy - confess sins and repent daily or preferably several times per day. Search your heart continually for some hidden transgression, then try to root it out, and promise to never touch it again.

Everything I have described so far can be put under one headline - LAW.

“ In fact, the business model of religion rests on these two concepts: a displeased deity and a guilty conscience. ”

Thirty-six and a half of the books of the Old Testament are written from the time period of the Law. The only exceptions are Job, Genesis, and half of Exodus. Why does the Bible give so much attention to law and legalism? Could it be, because all are tempted to rely on self-effort and performance-based legalistic religion rather than grace? Legalistic religion is not unique to the Jews; it is the essence of any religion.

The Business Model of Religion

In fact, the business model of religion rests on these two concepts: a displeased deity and a guilty conscience. Any rabbi, pastor, mullah, priest or monk worth his salt must know how to reinforce the idea of a displeased deity and fuel the anguish of a guilty conscience. That's how people stay hooked on religion. Of course, Jesus has blown

the business model of religion into a thousand pieces. By one sacrifice, once for all, He did away with the displeasure of God, putting away sins by the sacrifice of Himself.

Religion literally means “to bind up” and it binds you in a system of pretence and condemnation towards your self and the world around you. For those who are weaker in their emotions, this leads to a life of self-loathing and never feeling good enough. The thoughts that plague the mind are: “if only I could...,” “I should have...,” “I need to try harder to...” Meanwhile those with a stronger psyche, while knowing their own inconsis-

tencies and failures, still see themselves as stronger than others. No matter what failure they see in their own souls, they take courage in the fact that they are not as sinful as others. The logic may sound like this: “I'm not what I should be, but thank God I'm not like...” or “No one is trying as hard as me; no one is as committed.”

Religion sooner or later leads to blaming God: “I just can't understand why God doesn't answer my prayers. I've done everything I know to do: repent, fast, go to church. I just don't understand.”

The purpose of the law is to make us thirsty for something better.

“ Religion sooner or later leads to blaming God ”



Only when we come to the end of our own ability, exhausted, frustrated and worn out by our inadequacies, are we suddenly ready to receive grace.

Here is an invitation to the world: All who are worn out by your own inadequacy - Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians of all kinds - there is a better way. God, the Creator, has given undeserved, unmerited, unearned favor to you. That's right - you get something from God for nothing; it's totally free. Why? Because Jesus has already paid for it. No further payment is needed.

Salvation is not that we give our life to Christ

Who is giving to whom?

Those, who receive this gift of grace, notice a dramatic change called salvation. Salvation is not that we give our life to Christ. No, it's much greater—it is *Christ giving His life to us*. It's amazing how we have made even salvation legalistic: "I prayed the sinner's prayer," "I gave me life to Christ," etc. God doesn't want your life, and what could He possibly do with it? No, the miracle is that Christ's life comes into you, and now He lives in you. Your holiness, righteousness, and new life are entirely dependent on Christ living through you. Look at these scriptures:

“Your holiness, righteousness, and new life are entirely dependent on Christ living through you”

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Christ Living in You

Christ is now our life. Yes, we are still in our flesh, but hidden in Him, favored by Him, and energized by His faith in us.

How did this happen?
By grace.

Undeserved: Simply put, you don't deserve God's goodness, and could never deserve it. The only way to receive it is as a gift of grace from God.

Unmerited: There is nothing in us that merits or obligates God to bless us. What seems like merits to us - our hard work, good intentions, dedication - are not merits at all.

Unearned: You have heard it said, “Nothing is for free.” There is a lot of truth to that statement, except when it comes to God, because with God everything is free, since Jesus' all-inclusive sacrifice has already paid for it.

This is the word of reconciliation. Once you believe it, you can never be the same. Look how it affected Paul:

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).



Peter Youngren

Senior Pastor of
Celebration Church, Canada
Founder of
Celebration Ministries
Member of
GGN Board of Directors

www.peteryoungren.org

DYNAMIC, JESUS-CENTERED TV



www.gracetelevision.net

Available online 24/7 — new exciting programs daily!

Two Articles

We hereby present two short teaching articles by Steve McVey, both focusing on holding on to the Gospel and not religion. **By Steve McVey**

Losing Your Religion

I lost my religion years ago and I'm doing so much better now. I'm not exaggerating to make a point. I really mean it. Sometimes people will say to me, "What do you *mean* when you say you lost your religion?" The answer is simple.

The origin of the word "religion" explains its problem. Religion ties people up tight, obligating them to a particular set of standards and behavior. In time the word became associated with the obligation men had toward ancient gods.

In modern terminology, the word denotes the idea of performing certain actions with the goal in mind of gaining divine favor. Religion is a greenhouse for legalism because it focuses on duty and performance. It puts the duty on man to reach God by his actions. It puts a bond on people, consequently leaving them in bondage.

Authentic Christianity is different from religion in many ways. A recent comment made about boxing

illustrates what I mean. Somebody said, "To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there's no music, no choreography and the dancers hit each other." His comparison between boxing and ballet illustrates the union that exists between authentic Christianity and legalistic religion. There is none.

God's actions are sufficient

Authentic Christianity is grounded in the *Gospel*. The word "gospel" means "good news." What is the good news? It's that we don't have to try to reach God by our actions anymore, but that it is God's actions that unite us to Him. It's the good news that God has reached down to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It's the good news that the cross and empty tomb were sufficient to cause God to tear up the score card on your life and to call the game over - with you as a winner.

All we need is to trust in the finished work of Christ. That's it - nothing else. The disciples once asked Jesus, "What should we do

Tied by Religion

Understanding the true meaning of the word "religion" will help clarify my statement. The English word is taken from the Latin word *religio*, originally meaning "obligation" or "bond." It was probably derived from the verb *religare*, which means to "tie tight." (Taken from *The Dictionary of Word Origins*, by John Ayto.)

Religion is a greenhouse for legalism because it focuses on duty and performance

“Religion will obligate you to work for God, but Jesus will liberate you to serve because of love”

that we might work the works of God?” The answer Jesus gave sounds strange to religious ears. He said, “This is the work of God – *that you believe* on Him who He has sent” (John 6:28-29). Believe – that’s it.

Some might ask, “Aren’t we to do certain things?” The answer is that we *will* do certain things, not because we’re trying to score points with God, but because it’s a part of our spiritual DNA to produce godly works. Others may mistakenly think that we are behaving religiously, but we aren’t. We are

simply acting like who we are – containers and conduits of divine life.

Do you need to lose your religion?

Religion will tie you down. Jesus Christ will set you free. Religion will obligate you to work for God, but Jesus will liberate you to serve because of love. Religion will leave you exhausted. Jesus will invigorate your spirit with divine life continuously.

Yes, I lost my religion. As a result,

I’ve come to know Jesus intimately. I wouldn’t trade that knowledge for all the religion in the world. I still do many things that probably look religious to others, but that’s not the case. I’m just enjoying Jesus and doing what I want (which happens to coincide with what *He* wants).

Do you need to lose your religion? You’ll find yourself much better off when you find your life in Christ. Go ahead, do it. Say good-bye to the bondage of being tied up by religious duty and fall into the arms of Jesus Christ. You won’t be sorry.

Learning To Love God More

I recently heard a sermon online about lamenting the fact that Christians don’t love God the way we ought to love Him. “How do you expect to be used by God if you don’t even fully love Him?” the passionate preacher proclaimed. His message reminded me of the many sermons just like it that I used to preach, but it reminded me even more of the many years I struggled to love the Lord the way I felt I should.

The greatest commandment

It’s a sincere endeavor to love the Lord, but so often is misguided. A lawyer once came to Jesus and asked Him, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Notice what the man was asking about here. He was asking

about *the Law*. Jesus answered his question, saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and foremost commandment.” In response to the man’s question about the greatest law, Jesus answered that it is to love God.

This verse has been abused many times by well meaning Christians because they fail to understand its context. It’s important to note that

So if you focus on how much you should love God, that law will condemn you and cause you to be filled with a sense of guilt

the man was asking Jesus about *the Law*. As odd as it might seem, when we believe our greatest need is to try to love God more, we set ourselves up for failure. That's because of what the Law does to a person.

The Bible says that the Law stirs up sinful passions (See Romans 7:4). It stimulates rebellion against the very thing it demands. So if you focus on how much you should love God, that law will condemn you and cause you to be filled with a sense of guilt. It isn't possible to love Him like we want to until we understand how much He loves us. Then, and only then, will we find love for God swelling up within our hearts.

Haven't you found this to be true in your own life? When you've focused on loving Him more, did you feel like you were succeeding? Or did you find yourself literally praying for help to love Him more? "Lord, help me to love you more" was evidence that you knew you were falling short in that area.

focus on how much He loves you, not on how much you love Him

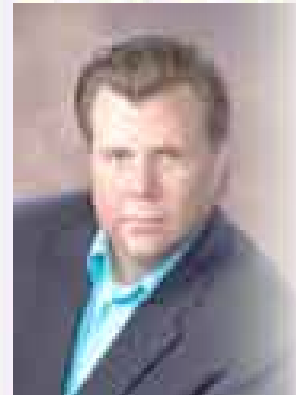
How to love God more

The Bible says, "We love, because He first loved us." Do you want to love God more? The key, then, is to focus on how much He loves you, not on how much you love Him at any given moment in life. The most important thing in your life isn't to struggle to love God more. By what power can you do that? Haven't we all struggled in that area? The secret is to begin to focus on how much your heavenly Father loves you.

As you grow in your understanding of the great love that He has for you, you'll find that what happens is the love within you will be awakened and motivated. In response to His love, it will grow and flourish and you'll find yourself loving Him more and more and, for that matter, even loving everybody else around you more and more too.

A legalistic view on the love relationship we have with our Father

shifts the focus away from His goodness and grace and puts the responsibility on us. Grace reminds us that He is the initiator and we are the responders. The Bible says that God loves us; it's all about His love for us, and when we focus on that, instead of on our love for Him, we will discover that knowing the love of God for us becomes the catalyst for experiencing and enjoying His love in a deeper way than we have ever known. We will find that our own love for Him grows by leaps and bounds.



DR. STEVE MCVEY

Florida, US
President of
Grace Walk Ministries
www.gracewalk.org