

**LIBERATING GRACE**  
**Galatians 3:1-6**

**Good News About Grace**  
**April 21, 2013**  
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This morning I want each of you to take a little quiz with me. Consider how you would answer these questions: Do you ever feel guilty when you relax, knowing you've got a lot to do? Do you often feel dissatisfied, or discontent, with yourself or your situation? Do you have a tendency to see something wrong with things rather than what is right?

Do you ever find yourself using these phrases regularly, "I have to...I must...I ought to...I should be able to...?" Do you ever feel frustrated or maybe even angry at God feeling that his expectations on you are unreasonable? Does your relationship with God sometimes seem like a burden rather than a blessing?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions you may be afflicted with perfectionism. Perfectionism is by one definition trying to prove my worth by being perfect. It is a counterfeit spirituality. After years of being a pastor it's my opinion that perfectionism can be a major hang up for dedicated believers; for dedicated Christians and followers of Jesus.

It happens like this. As I grow in my faith in Jesus I learn more and more about what grace is all about; I realize that I can't earn or work my way into heaven. And yet as time goes on I start thinking that this is too good to be true, surely God must expect something of me.

So we can easily fall into one of two traps which are really two major enemies of grace. One of them is legalism...trying to earn God's approval through rules. The other is perfectionism...trying to prove my worth by being perfect. The Book of Galatians was actually written by the Apostle Paul in order to combat these two enemies of grace.

Paul says in Galatians 3:3, *"You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now you are trying to make it complete by your own power. This is foolish."*

Our message this morning will focus on Liberating Grace and how we can break out of the prison of performance and perfectionism. If we could only understand this, how to relax in God's grace, we would then find a new level of joy in our beings. We would find a new level of freedom in living our faith. Why however is perfectionism so destructive in each of us?

First of all it can defeat my initiatives. Have you ever been involved in a project where you have had a hard time getting started or simply getting around to doing it? One possible reason for this may be perfectionism. We may be waiting for the perfect timing; until the kids get out of school; until your ship of money comes in. In cases like this perfectionism can cause procrastination. We set our standards so high we become paralyzed in what we do.

A second thing is that perfectionism can damage our relationships. Do you enjoy being around someone who is always correcting what you do? Nobody likes to be nagged all the time. It's frustrating; it's irritating. Perfectionism, the desire to always correct, can damage relationships.

Now all of us are perfectionists to one degree or another and much of that is rooted in insecurity. Perfectionists who are harsh and demanding on other people are usually harsh and demanding on themselves. They're holding themselves to a high standard, and because they are doing that to themselves, they hold everyone else to that same standard. This can damage relationships.

A third thing is that perfectionism can destroy my happiness. In our minds we have this picture of our ideal self; it's that information we put on a job application. It's our ideal self, not the real one. And there's always a gap between what we want to be and what we are. We're always saying, I'm too skinny...I'm too fat...I'm too tall...I'm too short...I'm too clumsy...I'm not good at this...I'm not very smart (or as smart as others)...and on and on.

Does nagging work? No. And yet our worst nag usually lives under our own skin. We are often our own worst critic. What is the antidote to that kind of perfectionism? It is not found in any therapy or pill. It is found only as we experience the grace of God. We need to learn to relax in God's grace.

And yet how do we do that? We're going to look at another acrostic using the letters of the word, RELAX. The first letter, "R," stands for "Realize Nobody's Perfect." Psalm 119:96 says, *"Nothing is perfect except God's word."* This is why we need to build our lives on God's word of truth.

Remember a number of years ago there was a book called, "I'm Okay, You're Okay." Yet that is not true. There are certainly areas in my life that are definitely not okay and I'm sure there are some areas in your life that are definitely not okay. And receiving many little accolades and affirmations will not make us okay. It is only because of the grace of God that we are okay.

Now just because God says we aren't perfect, does that mean God isn't interested in my growth? Does that mean I don't need to repent? Of course not! God's grace does not mean I should just keep on being a jerk all my life. It means that God's love and grace accepts me as I am, and gives me the power each day to grow and change.

The next letter in relax is "E" for "Enjoy." I need to enjoy God's unconditional love. 1 John 3:1 says, *"See how very much our heavenly Father loves us for he allows us to be called his children."* When we follow Jesus and believe in him we are not just servants, we are children of God. We're part of God's family and the child of a king.

Here's the difference. A servant is accepted and appreciated on the basis of what he does; a child is accepted and appreciated on the basis of who he is. Those of us who are parents, are our children perfect? Of course not! Do we still love them? Yes. We love them in spite of their imperfections.

Do we scold them for stumbling or falling? No. We help them up again. Do we love them at every stage of their growth? Or are we waiting until they're mature before we love them? You know some think that God is waiting for us to grow up before he is ever going to smile on us. The truth is, however, that God loves us at every stage of our growth because his love is unconditional.

Romans 8:31 says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* The essence of God's grace is that he is for us; he is on our side. God is not in heaven saying, "What can I punish next in your life?" If we thumb our nose at God and say, "I don't need you," then God won't force himself on us. But if we

come in sincerity and honesty and say—I admit it; I’m not perfect; I can’t do it without you—God’s grace is there for us.

The third letter in relax is “L,” or “Let God Handle Things.” This is very important. At the root of perfectionism is the desire to control. We think if we can control things then they will be perfect. If I can control my spouse, then we’ll have a perfect marriage. If I can control my kids, then they will always be safe. If I can control my career, my success path will be assured.

And yet the reality is that most of our lives are out of control. We can’t control them. So what do we do when we can’t control the uncontrollable in life? 1 Peter 5:7 says, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” The basic essence is letting go. We need to let go and let God handle the things in our lives.

Remember things do not have to be perfect for us to be happy. There’s no such thing as a perfect vacation. If you’re waiting for one it’s never going to happen. There’s no such thing as a perfect marriage. You married a sinner and she married an even bigger one. There are no perfect kids. There is no such thing as a perfect body. There is no church that is a perfect church. There is no perfect job. We need to learn to enjoy life in the middle of less than perfect circumstances.

The fourth letter is “A,” or “Act In Faith, Not Fear.” Ephesians 2:8 says, “*For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.*” I am called to live by grace through faith; to put my faith in God’s grace; to realize that everything in our lives is a gift from God. This means we don’t need to live in the fear of perfectionism; we can rather live by faith and freedom in God’s grace.

One of the debilitating symptoms of perfectionism is constant fatigue. You’re always trying to control everything. One day we realize it’s not up to me. I can relax; I can let go; I don’t have to try to make things perfect in order to prove my worth.

The last letter in relax is “X,” or “Exchange My Perfection for God’s Peace.” Perfectionism destroys peace. We’re either going to live in perfectionism or in peace. It is Jesus who says to us today and everyday, “*Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.*” It’s an offer we can’t afford to refuse. It is a wonderful promise for you and me.

As we read the Bible, my friends, we read God’s standard of perfection. We read many things and know that there is no way we can measure up to that. There’s no way I can keep all those principles and follow all those rules. The good news is that we don’t need to worry because God’s already taken care of that; by his grace he has been the perfection for you and me.

The reality is that we are all going to fail in many ways in life. We’re going to fail and not follow through on many responsibilities we have been given. We’re going to fail to live up to the expectations that other people often foist on us. We’re going to let them down; we’re going to fail our own expectations.

And yet, my friend, we don’t need to worry about this if we’ve received God’s grace, if we’ve trusted in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. May we receive God’s grace today by faith, and may he liberate and set us free from our perfectionism so we can truly live for him each day.