**Shelter-In-Grace**

**Part 4**

**Finding Refuge in ACCEPTANCE**

**John 6:37**

**John 6:37 (AMP)**

**“All that My Father gives Me will come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not cast out [I will never, never reject anyone who follows Me].”**

**INTRODUCTION:**

It doesn’t matter if you’re black, white, or brown, every human being longs to be accepted.

We often spend a huge chunk of our lives trying to prove to someone somewhere that we are indeed acceptable.

We long to be accepted by our families and by the people we work and go to school with. We want to be accepted by our husband or wife, by our mother, father, and grandparents alike.

And our cries for acceptance have only grown louder with the emergence of social media.

People spend hours each week trying to engineer the perfect lighting, the perfect pose, the perfect hair and the perfect smile to achieve the perfect selfie. The objective is affirmation through likes, hearts, shares, and comments because everyone longs to be accepted.

We’re even tempted to change the way we dress, the way we talk, the way we laugh, the music we listen to, and sometimes even the food we eat - all to be accepted by someone.

Humanity has an insatiable appetite for acceptance. And God put that appetite within us so that we might look to Him to fulfill it. When we don’t – when we seek to get our need for acceptance met outside of Him – we can literally hand our lives away.

We’re not the first to recognize this. Philosopher Blaise Pascal famously said, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ.”

# So much so that our culture has learned how to cash in on our desire to obtain acceptability.

A report from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons revealed that in 2018 Americans spent more than 16.5 Billion dollars on cosmetic surgery - in large part, because people simply want to be accepted by someone, even if that someone is themselves.

Part of our motivation for trying so hard to be accepted is not merely for the sake of acceptance itself, but to avoid the agonizing pain of rejection.

The truth is there’s no pain quite like the pain of rejection.

Rejection can happen in a moment but can haunt you for a lifetime.

It can influence the decisions you make, the risks you take, and the quality of the relationships you build. One instance of rejection can produce a lifetime of self-isolation for the sake of protection. And Jesus wants to heal that pain.

The pain of rejection is so real that scientifically speaking, it’s reported that the pain of rejection actually piggybacks on the physical pain pathways in your brain. In other words, your body processes the emotional pain of rejection the same way it processes physical pain in your body.

Rejection is painful.

In fact, the fear of rejection causes us to live dull, riskless lives, to stay silent when we should speak out, and to hold back when we should launch out. In our desire to avoid rejection we sign up for nothing, we stick with jobs we’ve outgrown, and we get cozy with no one.

So, the world we live in has adopted a formula for making oneself acceptable and avoiding the pain of rejection.

That formula basically looks like this, “If you want to avoid the pain of rejection you must perform at the level of perfection or at least make people believe you are.”

And we’re not merely told this in the world, but far too often and for far too long many of us have been told the same thing in the church: If you want to avoid the pain of rejection you have to perform at the level of perfection.

It’s been said that the last 2,000 years of teaching and preaching on how to successfully live the Christian life and please God could actually be encapsulated in a simple one-word exhortation: *Perform!* We’ve been told:

* If you don’t want to feel the pain of rejection, perform.
* If you want to be accepted in certain circles, you have to perform.
* If you want a place at the table, you have to perform.
* If you want to be acknowledged or loved - you have to perform.

You know the prescription. Bear down. Double up. Lather, rinse, repeat – in an endless, frustrating, shame-soaked cycle of defeat and failure.

We’ve all tried the “performance” approach.

So, because we long for acceptance and are hardwired to avoid rejection what do we do? We attempt to perform.

The problem is that the more we try to achieve perfection, the more aware of our shortcomings we become and the less acceptable we begin to feel.

It throws you into what feels like a cycle of defeat because you’re always trying to achieve a standard that’s unachievable and so the only option is failure.

Every human has the same two basic needs: To be fully known and fully loved. But we fear that if someone fully knows us, they’ll discover that we’re imperfect and won’t love us.

So, at some point, we shift our energy from performing to pretending but both are exhausting.

You see, we not only want to be accepted by those we worship with, but we all long to be acceptable to the God we worship.

**TEACHING:**

In the Bible, under the OC law of Moses, man’s ability to approach God was largely dependent on our ability to perform well.

This created a terrible dilemma because no matter how hard Israel tried, they simply couldn’t achieve perfect righteousness.

As we learned last week, there were over 600 laws that God’s people were required to keep in order to be in good standing with God. These were 613 rules, regulations, and rituals that were given by the request of man rather than the preferences of God, and according to scripture to break one of them was to break all of them.

This means that man’s ability to come before God was severely limited.

There were strict regulations regarding the sacrifices that were offered for worship and the atonement of sin.

Under the law, sacrifices that were offered would be meticulously inspected by the priest, and if there was so much as a single flaw, the sacrifice would be rejected and you’d have to start all over and try again.

There were also super strict regulations pertaining to who was considered “clean” and “unclean” that would determine who could even approach the sanctuary in order to participate in worship. For example…

* If you had a rash or any other skin condition, you’d be considered unacceptable.
* If you touched a dead body or dead animal, you’d be considered unacceptable.
* If you ate food that was considered unclean, you’d be considered unacceptable.
* If you came into contact with someone who was ceremonially unclean, you’d become unacceptable.

And if at any point you were deemed unacceptable, you’d have to go through a lengthy process of being made acceptable again, but this was always temporary at best.

Of course, all of these various hurdles that man had to jump over were designed by God to reveal our need for a Savior.

Our inability to become divinely acceptable became even more clear when God instructed His people to build him a Tabernacle.

This was the place where He would dwell among his people. There was a place in the Tabernacle called the Most Holy Place that almost no one was allowed to enter.

This place was reserved for one man - the high priest who would enter on behalf of the people once per year and only after a lengthy series of hundreds of thousands of sacrifices made on behalf of the Israelite people to ensure that the sins of the entire nation had been atoned for. One Jewish historical text suggests that 1.2 million sacrifices were offered on one specific Passover. Only by offering the perfect amount of sacrifices with the perfect standards required by the law could the high priest enter into the presence of the Lord.

Even then, he would enter this most holy place with a rope tied around his ankle so that if he didn’t meet all of the standards as required by the Law and hadn’t made himself properly acceptable, and he died by means of divine judgment upon entering God’s presence, his dead body would be pulled out by that rope.

Even Moses, who is called the mediator of the OC couldn’t see the face of God and live. (**Exodus 33:20**).

And this process of offering sacrifices happened every year, over and over again until finally Jesus, our Savior, whom John the Baptist called the Lamb of God arrived on the scene. He became the once and for all final sacrifice for sin putting an end to man’s inability to be acceptable.

The Author of **Hebrews** (10:10 NLT) writes…

**“For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.”**

Suddenly every man who put their faith in Jesus was acceptable and God was accessible!

In **Ephesians 3:12** (NIV), the Apostle Paul wrote that,

**“…through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”**

Jesus was the final sacrifice for sin and His blood has cleansed you and made you both acceptable and completely accepted so that you can approach God with freedom and confidence.

In **Ephesians 1:6** (NKJV),Paul wrote:

**“…to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”**

Because of Jesus, we are accepted!

So, here’s 3 things we need to know about what it means to find refuge in acceptance:

**Finding Refuge in Acceptance means…**

**1 - Jesus was REJECTED so you wouldn’t be.**

**John 1:11** (NIV)

**“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”**

Jesus took the punishment that we deserved to give us the life we didn’t.

Upon the cross Jesus declared “It is finished!”

Our sins were atoned for and the barrier that kept man from God was eliminated. Upon Jesus uttering the words “It is finished” on the cross, the Bible says that the veil in the temple separating man from God was torn in two from top to bottom. And notice it was from top to bottom because if it had been the other way around man could’ve torn it himself. This curtain was 30 feet high and 4 inches thick. No man could’ve initiated the tearing of the veil. It was something only God could accomplish – from top to bottom. Sadly, many people spend their lives in an effort to sow the veil back together. That’s a simple definition of religion. Don’t waste your time with that.

All of our sins had been eternally atoned for and the wall of hostility separating God and man had been eliminated.

According the **Hebrews 4:16** (NKJV)**,** we can now

**“…come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

Man, no longer has to fear being rejected or being seen by God as unacceptable.

**2 - Jesus was PERFECT so you wouldn’t have to be.**

**Titus 3:5** (GNT)

“…he saved us. It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us.”

**Jesus was perfect but rejected, so that we would never have to be rejected for being imperfect.**

Your acceptance by the Father isn’t based on your performance, but upon Jesus’ performance on the cross. God has not lowered his standard of acceptance. Perfection is still the Fathers standard, but Jesus met that standard on your behalf.

You’ll hear a lot of people resist the gospel of grace because they think that God is turning a blind eye or lowing the standard. But nothing could be further from the truth! God has not lowered his standard, rather has elevated you! As we discovered last week that’s what the gift of righteousness is all about.

This means that according to the Bible, you’re no longer asked to perform for Him, you’re now simply asked to trust in His perfect performance for you.

In John 6, a group of people asked Jesus about how to be accepted. Specifically, they asked Him which works are required in order to be accepted by God. Take a look with me…

**John 6:28-29** (NIV)

**“Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”**

To be accepted by God we’re not called to performance or a bunch of religious activity. According to Jesus the work that God requires is simply to believe in the one he has sent!

Upon placing your faith in Jesus you’re accepted – period. You cannot add anything to it or take anything from it.

**3 - Jesus’ acceptance by the Father shows us we’re accepted.**

Studies have shown that in the heart of every child is a cry for his father’s acceptance and approval. Something happens when a father says to his boy, “Daddy is so proud of you.” Or when a father says to his girl, “You will always be Daddy’s favorite girl.”

And you can catch such a similar special moment in the Bible when God the Father displayed His acceptance and approval of His Son.

Upon placing our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross, Jesus’ acceptance by God the Father became our own.

**Matthew 3:17**(NIV) records the Father’s acceptance of His son:

**“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”**

At the point of the Father’s affirmation of His Son in Matthew 3, Jesus hadn’t done one thing to earn His Fathers acceptance.

You can go back and study Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you’ll discover that Jesus hadn’t done anything to earn this acceptance.

He hadn’t healed anybody yet.

He hadn’t raised anyone from the dead yet.

He hadn’t performed any miracles yet.

He had preached any sermons yet.

But the Father completely loved and completely accepted Jesus as His beloved Son. He declared that though Jesus hadn’t done a single thing to earn that love and acceptance, He was well pleased with Him.

Now, you may think that God would naturally say that of Jesus, but not of us. The truth is that Jesus came for us and as us. He died for us and as us. He received the acceptance and approval of the Father for us and as us. He came as our representative. He came as our substitute.

And upon placing your faith in Him, Jesus’ acceptance becomes your own and this is how the Father relates to us and accepts us.

On the basis of our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross, not because of our ability to perform for Him or prove something to Him.

We’re completely loved and completely accepted by God the Father and according to the words of Jesus in **John 6:37**, our theme verse.

**“… the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not cast out [I will never, never reject anyone who follows Me].”**

Because of Jesus, you can find refuge in acceptance. You can wake up every day knowing that you’re His beloved, unconditionally loved and wholly approved.

**CLOSING:**

Today is Father’s Day and I realize that this can be a happy day for some and for others it can be a painful day. But no matter your experience as a father or a child on this earth, you can hold your head high because you have a heavenly father who accepts you. This means you can live and walk with confidence knowing that even if you’re rejected by man, you’ll never be rejected by God!

You have the love, favor, and acceptance of the One who matters most.

Because of Jesus, you’re loved for who you are, not what you do!

You can fulfill your God given destiny knowing you’re standing in the place of undeserved privilege, you’re completely favored and entirely accepted in the Beloved!

Your heavenly Father loves you and is pleased with you.

The more you know these truths, the more you can expect good things to happen in your life. You can expect to be healthy and whole. Instead of being easily frightened or threatened by anything or anyone, you can be confident that you’ll win every fight of life. Instead of living in fear of rejection, you can live everyday knowing you’re totally accepted.

From a pastor’s heart…

Divine acceptance will change the world but before it does it must first change the church. For too long the church has been known as a place of rejection, judgment, and condemnation. This is the inevitable consequence of mixing grace with law and preaching a partial gospel. This mixed message makes the children of God fearful of their heavenly Father, it causes the saints to hang back in the fringes of the kingdom, and it paints a frown on the face of Love.

Can you imagine God the father frowning at Jesus? Of course not. Then neither is he frowning at you.

In the OC they prayed for the day when the Lord would make his face shine upon you, be gracious to you, and give you peace. Good news! You’re living in that day! He’s looking at you full in the face and beaming with galaxy-sized smile. You’re the apple of his eye and he rejoices over you with singing.

If the capital C Church truly believed this…it would transform it from the inhospitable church it’s been to the accepting church it’s called to be. **Romans 15:7** makes it clear…

**“Accept one another, as Christ accepted you.”**

Imagine if we did that, with everyone, everywhere. We wouldn’t be able to exclude the rabble and the riffraff from our congregations and communion. Instead, we’d have to start making welcome announcements like this:

“We extend a special welcome to Calvary Church. Those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, black and proud, y no habla Ingles. We extend a special welcome to those who are newborns, poor as dirt, skinny as a rail, or got a hitch in their git-along. We welcome democrats, republicans, and libertarians. You’re welcome here if you’re “just browsing,” just woke up, or just got out of jail. We don’t care if you’re more Lutheran than Luther, or more Catholic than the Pope, or haven’t been in church since 1979. We offer a special welcome to those who could lose a few pounds, think the earth is flat, work too hard, can’t spell, or came because grandma made you. We offer a special welcome to those could use a prayer right now, are three-times divorced, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid, or got lost and wound up here by mistake. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. If you blew all your money gambling, you’re welcome here. We welcome tourists, seekers, doubters, bleeding hearts…and YOU! WELCOME HOME!”

The gospel isn’t an invitation to accept Jesus; it’s the stunning announcement that he accepted you. All this is to the praise of the glory of his grace. Find refuge right there.

**Today’s Confession:**

**“My Father loves me, and my Father accepts me!”**