



## Part 1

### The Reward Trap

The need to be seen as special, as part of “the group,” is a major driving force in our lives. We are born with this need and will probably have it until the Lord calls us home.

We were created to belong, to be enriched by fellowship and live in the natural comfort and safety of close relationships. But few of us seem to live in that atmosphere we desperately need to have a full rich life and be at rest.

Very few of us have this blessing; and as a result, we strive to do whatever it takes to be accepted and loved, to be seen as “special.” In our striving, we are easily swayed and trapped into patterns of behavior that keep us from coming into God’s rest.

“Not belonging,” not fitting in, whether it is in our families, with friends, neighborhoods, schools or our community, is often one of the great fears we face, and most difficult struggle we have in life.

Yet, God in his word declares his care and love and deep desire for intimacy with us. God always sees us as special. He expects us to believe this truth and learn to embrace it, believing His good intentions for us, and thus be free to live in Him – free from the striving and the fear.

#### **Psalm 139:13-17**

*For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.*

*14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.*

*15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;*

*16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.*

*17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

But we strive none the less.

### **Fear of Not Belonging, Not Fitting In**

This fear is the driving force behind the need to earn acceptance. It influences every aspect of our life, robbing us of rest and peace.

When we are not sure of whom we are in Christ, we empower this fear and as a result, we will struggle and do whatever it takes to fit in, to belong, to be a part of the "inner circle."

We learn very early in life that doing "the right thing" gains us the love and acceptance we desperately need and hunger for. Eventually, "doing the right thing," may become so entwined with love and acceptance that we cannot conceive of being loved unless we have done "the right thing."

Or worse still, we may come to believe through experience, that "not doing the right thing" will earn us rejection and all the isolation and the pain that goes with it. The fear of not fitting in soon becomes the force that drives us; it becomes our great motivator, pushing us to do that which we may not want to do, just to gain the acceptance and delight of those around us. We soon learn to equate love with the actions we perform and not with who we are as a person.

When we operate from this place, what we do becomes a commodity, something that we can use as an exchange for love and acceptance.

The question the Apostle Paul asks in Romans 8 is in stark contrast to the very core of this "need to perform."

#### **Romans 8:35-39**

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

*36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."*

*37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

*38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,  
39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>1</sup>*

The scripture is clear that the love of God is free and that nothing will keep Him from loving us. However, for most of us, the experience has been the opposite; we have “learned” that love must to be earned and that it is easily lost.

God always intended us to live in the secure knowledge that we are loved because of who we are, and not for what we do or how well we do it.

However, in the world, one of the first lessons most of us learned as children is that love is a reward for success or good behavior. Once this takes root in us, it will open the door to fear, striving and insecurity, causing us to wonder constantly if we will be replaced in someone’s affections.

Now rather than resting and preferring one another we live with the fear that we are expendable and so we begin to compete for acceptance, suspecting others and easily slipping into judging them, thus creating strife and division.

**Proverbs 10:12**

*Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.*

**1 Peter 4:8**

*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*

We forget that it was His love for us that initiated the grace to save us.

**Romans 5:8**

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

God loved us before we knew Him. He made provision for us before we knew that we had a need for His mercy. He paid the price for us before we

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is New American Standard unless otherwise noted.

knew we needed to be redeemed. There was nothing we did or could do to earn His love or pay for His provision of redemption for us.

Everything we needed was paid in full at the cross and we did not have to earn or ask for any of it; it was given by grace, the incredible unmerited mercy of God.

The confrontation between the Lord Jesus Christ and Satan was already preordained; it was just a matter of time before God put his plan of redemption into action. We were never part of the plan, but we were certainly the reason for it.

**Genesis 3:15**

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He will bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. MJKV*

**Romans 16:20**

*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. MJKV*

It has always been God's initiative towards man that started the reconciliation.

**2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,*

*19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

*20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

*21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Yet, it seems that we have discounted the unmerited mercy of God through the finished work of Christ Jesus on the cross, and by our own "good deeds" tried to earn credit from God.

The frustration of the Apostle Paul becomes evident in his letter to the Galatians. They had received God's grace and gift of eternal life through

faith. However, they were now trying to earn that which so freely came from the heart of the Father.

**Galatians 3:1-3**

*"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" NIV*

When we accept salvation, we do so by faith in the Son's ability to forgive our sin and accept the fact that we are totally unable to do it ourselves. However, once saved, it does not seem to take long before we are back to trying to earn from God again by doing the "right thing."

We cannot earn from God! But we seem to be blinded to this truth, because we constantly try to "do the right thing" to get what is so freely available.

The lessons we have learned in early life have created in us a stronghold, an expectation, that love must be earned and kept through great effort on our part; this expectation is now transferred onto God the Father. This seems to be the constant tendency of most Christians—to backslide into striving, trying to earn acceptance and approval by human effort, and working to gain the pleasure of God.

*We become trapped by the need to prove to God, through our works, that His call, and His acceptance of us, is justified. We trap ourselves into performing for God, believing that this makes us acceptable and is what pleases Him, and we forget why Jesus came to earth.*

**John 3:16-17**

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

*17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."*

**Ephesians 2:4-10**

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us  
alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),  
6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the  
heavenly places in Christ Jesus,  
7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing  
riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.  
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that  
not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;  
9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.  
10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for  
good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we  
would walk in them.”

**John 8:31-36**

*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If  
you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of  
Mine;*

*32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you  
free."*

*33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and  
have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You  
say, 'You will become free?'"*

*34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone  
who commits sin is the slave of sin.*

*35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son  
does remain forever.*

*36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

We may know in our spirits and minds the free gift of salvation, but our hearts are still in the place of having to work hard to earn the love and acceptance of God by constantly trying to prove to Him how good we are. We try to earn enough “good” points to earn His gift of grace. We are still captive to the ways of the world and far from the heart of the Father whenever we try to “do for” God in an attempt to please Him.