

LOVING YOU THROUGH YOUR LAW

by Rev. Chuck De Groat

Grace is nice until you realize that God expects something in return.

These were the words of a woman whom I counseled some years ago. She was a very pleasant woman of about 60, and she knew a lot about “obligation” and having things expected of her. After several sessions, she began opening up about her father — a man who showed little affection, but demanded perfection. She was angry, but she could never get over her sense of allegiance to him. Her words were: “He did so much for me. How could I ever be angry with him?”

This twisted picture of “love” is what many of us grew up seeing as normal. It’s the picture many of us have of our Heavenly Father. We see him as demanding, expecting gratitude, giving gifts that require something of us. When I began describing to this woman what real fatherly love looks like — how God loves to lavish us with his grace, how he doesn’t require a thing in return — she broke down in tears. Her feeling was one I could relate to: “If God is really this good, I’ve been living a lie.” Her next thought was equally as penetrating: “How can I even trust this kind of love?”

Note the fear and self-protection. It’s where we all live. We’ve been so imperfectly loved in contrast to God’s perfect love that it’s hard to conceive of all he has for us. It’s hard for us to picture him as a groom relentlessly pursuing the heart of his bride. We run away from such perfect love for fear that it will ultimately disappoint us. And we stay in bad relationships that ultimately increase the damage already done. Look around at the many women (and men) that accept abusive relationships, simply believing they are not worth being lavished with a powerful and relentless love.

Now, picture a God who knows all of this, and still desires to set us free from the bondage of our own loveless pasts. Picture a God with a two-pronged approach to winning us back. First, he gives us his law. And then, he gives us his only Son, the beloved first-born of all creation. His law reveals not obligation, but his deep desire to see his people live well. His Son demonstrates that by living not by obligation, but by a chosen desire to love his Father with all his heart.

Picture a God whose sole desire from ages past has been to win the hearts of his own. In doing so, his beloved bride has turned her back time and time again to other lovers, seeking momentary fulfillment in temporal pleasures and adulterous relationships.

Finally, picture the adulterous bride realizing how unfaithful she has been. Imagine the sorrow, the tears, the unbearable grief such sin would produce. However, seeing the newly tenderized heart of his bride, the groom takes her, cleans and covers her, and once-and-for-all claims her as his own (see Ezek. 16), even dying for her eternal love.

The bride, no longer in bondage as a prostitute, is exceedingly joyful, and wants nothing more than to “run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free” (Ps. 119:32). Her greatest joy comes in loving him with heart, soul and strength, not out of obligation, but because of her passion for him.

Lord, “I lift up my hands to your commands because I love them” (Ps. 119:48) — because I love you.