



Men of Covenant October Message

“Love & Grace”

SLIDE #1 (Title Slide)

Our title for today’s message is: Love and Grace

Today’s message will explore why the unconditional love of god that emanates from His grace is so important to the Man of Covenant and our mission of Holiness

Let’s begin with what the world around us thinks about unconditional love.

Lets see that they think about the love God freely gives us

SLIDE #2 (Unconditional Love)

As you can see from the highlights on the slide – in general, they don’t even believe it exists!

Under #1, we see John Amodeo who says: **It’s an unrealistic ideal and unhealthy**

Under #2, we read from Stephanie King, who states: **You’ll be disappointed because it “kinda goes against human nature”**

Under #3 we see the Womens’ Therapy Institute say: **There’s no such thing and it’s not healthy. “Loving unconditionally sets a tone that says people can walk all over us with no consequences.”**

Lastly, under #4, Leo Seltzer shares that: **It’s only possible to love YOURSELF unconditionally. The author spends the next 9 paragraphs and 700 words sharing a word-salad explanation of how loving yourself unconditionally is feasible.**

SLIDE #3 LOVE/GRACE

So we have established that the “world” believes that unconditional love is impossible, unhealthy, unrealistic and unhuman ... but what do we, as Christian men believe?

What do WE think about unconditional love?

What does our faith say about it, and more importantly, HOW do we PERSONALLY experience it?

Let's talk theology first and we can frame our theology in a series of statements:

- God has gifted us the grace of unconditional love
- We can experience unconditional love because of His son Jesus Christ
- We are saved by accepting Jesus because of His unconditional love

HOW UNCONDITIONAL WAS IT?

He died a gruesome death to save the people that hated him

His physical pain paled in comparison to the anguish of the sin of all mankind

While he hung on that cross: We were His enemy, we hated Him, we opposed His holiness

BUT - He showed us love ANYWAY ... unconditionally

When we accept Him as our savior, we begin a lifelong purification process to reflect HIS kind of love to the world around us

You were given, ... so now give

Yes, we Christian men are well AWARE of unconditional love, no matter what the world has to say about it

Coming back to our earlier referenced stories of "unconditional love" we find that the "world" doesn't get it. The "world" thinks that this concept is impossible. The Godless world has no point of reference for agape love. Unconditional love is impossible for the world to understand BECAUSE they have no model for it - and their king (little k) is the flesh they live in, not the God that created that flesh.

So they miss it. They preach a message of love based on earning it and setting conditions upon it.

- So why all the psychology discussion?
- Why do we care what the world says about unconditional love?

Because we live in it (THE WORLD)

Because every day we get out of bed is a battle with it (THE WORLD)

Because when we watch TV or read the news, the information we consume is influenced by the world and the spirit of the age

Opposing the world, is God's kingdom

Standing against the world is Jesus Christ

Parallel to the world is our Spiritual life and we need to KNOW that unconditional love does exist

We CAN KNOW this because

1. We are saved because of it
2. We are the beneficiaries of it
3. We are called to share it

SLIDE CLEAR:

The bottom line is the world knows not love, and because they don't know the truth of unconditional love, then the world will tell you lies about it. Be careful with this lie because we LIVE in the world, where it's told again and again and satan wants you to believe it more than anything – let's dig deeper to find out why

SLIDE #4 (Love better)

I share all of this to point out that as a Man of Covenant, we will “love better” when we are filled and guided by the Holy Spirit and we will struggle to love better when captured by our flesh and the world around us.

- The former because IT IS love
- The latter because it KNOWS not love

SLIDE CLEAR:

- The world simply doesn't know unconditional love.
- BUT we DO!
- We find it in God's Holy Spirit and to love better we must ...
- Get in the spirit, stay in the spirit and rejoice in the spirit

SLIDE #5 LOVE/GRACE

MY CONFESSION

- As I begin today, I must confess
- I'm way out of my league, because ...
- I'm about to share a message on a topic I have little mastery over - “LOVE”
- I'm sharing it anyway, because so many of my personal struggles surround this very subject

Before we dive in on the subject of “love”, let me give you some background on a meeting Aaron Noble and I had a few weeks ago to discuss the Men of Covenant program. As we talked more about his thoughts, we began to bounce ideas off each other surrounding the high level process by which each of us actually pursues holiness. After all, that's why we are all here. It's written into our mission statement and written upon our hearts – we desire to live a more holy life.

Although this is not final, we boiled down the big parts of the process into 5 buckets:

SLIDE #6 (Buckets)

1. Salvation (John 14:16)
2. Submit to God (James 4:7)
- 3. Receive His grace (Titus 2:11)**
4. Be filled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)
5. Bear fruit of the spirit of Christ (John 15:16)

For the sake of today's message, I will assume that we have all completed bucket ONE, and that at this point all of us are, at some level, be submitted to God.

But the next bucket titled "Receive His Grace" was where Aaron's counsel was the most profound to me. It's in this bucket where I've stumbled personally and I wonder if more of us are in the same boat?

SLIDE CLEAR:

Focus your attention for a second on the word "Grace"

Exactly what does this simple but profound word mean? What is "grace?"

SLIDE #7 LOVE/GRACE

Alexander MacLaren born in 1826 was a Baptist preacher in England

For what does 'grace' mean? **It means a self-originated love.** Grace is love that has no motive but itself ... and which has its very home and throne in the heart of God Himself."

When we look to the bible for confirmation of MacLaren's words we find just how true they are. In 1 John 4:8 it says **"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love"** In this short verse we find God is love and His love is the foundation of His grace.. From John 3:16 we all know that love is the source of His grace and is God's motivating force behind His grace. Grace is an extension of His love, and from it we experience the blessings of: mercy, compassion, and redemption (2 Corinthians 12:9). Love and grace are inseparable and entwined aspects of God's character and nature.

So the origin of GRACE is LOVE because LOVE produces GRACE

Love then, IS a very important biblical concept to the Men of Covenant because we seek God's grace, mercy and compassion.

SLIDE #8 (Grace Quote)

Gary Gibbs – Director of ELIM evangelistic outreach

"My definition is "Committed love – on steroids!" By this, I don't mean that God's love for us is remotely artificial, but it is the strongest, most powerful inclination which God has towards human beings. It's outrageously lavish and totally counter-intuitive.

Bono the lead singer for U2 wrote: "Grace. It's a name for a girl. It's also a thought that Changed the world..."

SLIDE CLEAR:

There are those 2 words again, Love and Grace. Gibbs says it's God's most powerful "feeling" towards us. It's defies logic of the world, yet here it is, available to anyone who would ask

SLIDE #9 LOVE/GRACE

And this morning we will uncover how Love and Grace work together to empower the Men of Covenant to live lives that reflect the character of Christ.

Why so much instruction and discussion about "love" in the bible?

AND

Why such a "squishy" subject for a Men's group discussion?

The overarching answer to the overwhelming depth and breadth of the concepts of love within the bible can be answered by the fact that the bible IS a love story. It's a story of God pursuing his creation out of an unwarranted and undeserved love for us. It's the story of His love so deep that He sent His son to die for us, and it's a story that led to Jesus paying the ultimate price for our sin by dying on a cross OUT OF LOVE for us, and finally, it's a story of our creator who plans to come BACK to earth and live again among us for eternity – because of LOVE.

- How does God expect us to love, vs how the world describes love?
- Which kind of love should a Man of Covenant show?
- Importantly, what does love have to do with the pursuit of holiness?

Let's begin with the biblical commands surrounding love.

What does the bible say about the expectations surrounding love?

Mark 12:28-31

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Jesus says the entire Old Testament sits upon these two commandments. His answer to the Pharisees ask that they (and all men) make a commitment from the heart to it's principles, rather than simple legalistic

obedience to the law. Jesus asks that we stop trying to follow rules, and start following HIS EXAMPLE OF LOVE

As Christians we also need to understand that these 2 commandments are:

- Inseparable from each other
- The evidence AND the path to holiness

If you agree, then we better take a really close look at what this “love” is that Jesus tells us about. The way he uses the word “love” in Mark 12 is as a verb – in other words “go love”, show love to someone, be a person that loves, to put it into its most basic terms – put love into action.

To do this we really need to know what the characteristics of love are, and of course the bible provides those characteristics through the word of God via the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

1If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

I'm convinced that the Christian mans journey of sanctification, his pursuit of holiness and his commitment to follow Christ hinges on our response to Jesus's answer to the Jewish teacher of His day. Love God, and love your neighbor. The first and according to Jesus “the most important” commandment, is to “love God” and it is a deeper commitment than it appears to be on the surface, and I believe the second most important commandment “loving your neighbor” in the way Jesus expects us to love them becomes an impossible mountain to climb without having mastered the first

Jerry Linneman wrote a blog post in 2023 on a related subject where he said “How do I really know and feel God's love for me?” This is, almost always, the thing beneath “the thing”, it's what lies below ALL the other struggles (of a Christian man.)

WHY IT MATTERS TO MOC

When we accept Gods grace and love, we are capable of the same

That “godly” love then bears fruit through its holy actions

To put it another way, Holiness has it's origins, it's very foundation in “LOVE”

Without love we can not follow nor complete our mission “shepherding men in the pursuit of holiness”

Men of Covenant simply can't become holier without love because we are incapable of acting holy without it

Here's why ...

SLIDE #10 (How Grace helps us love)

1. Let God love you (Accepting His grace, to know agape type love)
2. Love God (Be filled with the Holy Spirit, and love what God loves)
3. Love each other (Bear fruit of the Spirit, of that love)

Guess what loving each other is? Guess what the outward manifestation of Christlike love is in a Man of Covenants life? Guess what that #3 up on the screen looks like in a Man's life?

That's right, it's HOLINESS. All of the things we are trying to do in pursuit of holiness are achieved when we love each other! No wonder Jesus stopped at just 2 commandments when challenged by the Pharisees.

SLIDE CLEAR:

Loving each other, removes all the anger, rage, hate, lust and countless other ungodly behaviors because they can not be manifested in love, they are NOT love and they are no longer part of our character.

Men, I know some of you have heard me say this before, but sometimes loving each others seems sooooooo hard to do. As I've prayed about it and studied why that might be, I've come to the conclusion that I've got a shortfall on the #1 commandment – Loving God:

- I still struggle at times to accept God's grace
- I don't always love God the way the bible says
- I don't trust him for everything in my life
- I don't follow His Holy Spirit lead everyday

I was more convinced than ever that my shortcomings in Loving God with all my heart, soul and mind were responsible for my lack in the area of "loving others" and this proved to be true when I began to write down what the outcomes of each would look like in my life.

What kind of "man" would I be if I loved like Jesus loved?

SLIDE #11 (How Can a Man NOT)

Well ... to put it bluntly, I found myself wanting
I fall VERY short of the standards you see on the screen
But for the grace of God, I know it and I want better for my God and myself

Man of Covenant - Loving God	Man of Covenant - Loving Each Other
Loves God with all his heart	Is kind to others

Loves God with his entire soul	Is patient with others
Loves God with all his mind	Is selfless with his time
Loves God with persevering strength	Is hopeful for others (always)
Hates sin and a sinful world	Speaks the truth in love
Is at war with his flesh	Protects what God loves (always)
Spends time with God daily	Trusts in others (always)
Yields to the Holy Spirit	Perseveres (always)
Seeks Gods direction for life	Is NOT envious, boastful, proud, dishonoring, self-seeking, easily angered, vengeful, delighting in evil
Loves God as Jesus loves him (agape)	

I began to look at what loving God would be according to what Jesus says in the bible
 THEN looked at the characteristics of love that Paul outlines in Ephesians

THEN I ASKED MYSELF HOW COULD I “NOT”

How can a man who loves God with all his heart ... NOT be kind to others?

You See:

- It is FROM a LOVE like we see on the screen that we become more Holy.
- It is FROM a position of unconditional LOVE that we bear the fruits of the spirit.
- It is FROM this kind of LOVE that we begin to manifest the character of Christ in our lives.
- With this type of LOVE we are able to “be holy.”
- Men of Covenant, this LOVE is our pathway to “pursuing holiness”

As Christian Man seeking holiness we are called to actively remove harshness, impatience, selfishness
 despair, lies, un-trust, envy, pride, rage, lust and anger from our lives

The more we remove, the holier we become and the more OUR lives look like the RIGHT HAND SIDE
 OF THE SCREEN – this is LOVE as described by Paul!

AND that Love begins with the LEFT HAND SIDE of the screen – God’s love for us and our
 understanding of it.

SLIDE CLEAR:

There IS no other path than LOVE

Given that Love IS the path, we must look inward to see where we stand on “LOVE”

SLIDE #12 (How Do We?)

LOVE TESTS

Let’s examine our own hearts. Let’s see where we are on both commands:

1. How much do we love God? (is that a fair question? Jesus thought so!)
2. What is our capacity to love each other?

WE'LL START WITH GOD

- Is God more important than your wife?
- Do you love God MORE than your wife?

Good answer! Yes He is more important and he should be the priority in EVERYTHING in your life. Let's do some math and see if, as Men of Covenant, God IS the PRIORITY in our lives ...

If love demands relationship, then a measure of relationship must include time. It's one of the most valuable earthly treasures we have.

Let's go back to the subject of our wives for a moment. They are the most important EARTHLY relationship we have. So how much time do you spend together?

- We sleep 8 hours
- There are only 16 hours left in a day
- If we have a job, we see our wives morning and evening maybe 5 hours or so
- If retired, some men here spend 8 hours or fully half of their available day with their wives.

Time together = ability to develop relationship = growing in love

How much time do you spend with God?

How long were you with Him yesterday ACCEPTING HIS LOVE for You?

God's love is there, every day, since the beginning of time, and then before that too!

His unconditional love for you exists no matter if you reciprocate

Go to Him daily, ask for His Holy Spirit to shower you with that love

- Tell Him just how thankful you are for Him
- Praising His blessings upon your life
- Pause in the middle of the day to ask His direction
- Pray for Him to give you a heart more like His

I tested myself, to find just how long I was "with" God in a day – my answer was 30 minutes

I spend 8 hours with my wife and just 30 minutes with the Lord

When I dug even deeper to examine just how much of that 30 minutes I spent LETTING HIM LOVE ME, I'm not sure that I could claim even a minute.

Listen, I am NOT trying to make the point that God will "love you" based on how much time you spend with Him. The time spent with Him is to YOUR benefit. He already LOVES US more than WE are capable of fully understanding – WE'RE the ones that need the depth of understanding and knowledge of the fullness of His love and grace.

Loving God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength calls me to first understand, appreciate, enjoy and

believe that HE loves me, unconditionally - AND when I invest more in my relationship with God, He reveals more of exactly what HIS love is like for me. That FILLING of love FROM God is what drives our capacity to LOVE OTHERS.

We might say “Be loved by God – then go love others just like that”

This brings us right to the beginning of the second great command:

“Love others as you love yourself” – LET’S SEE HOW WELL WE LOVE EACH OTHER

Let me share a story with you of a grandmother who called the police to conduct a welfare check on her own daughter and granddaughter – she had not heard from them in a few days. The young lady was raised Christian, saved as a teen but had been struggling with drug addiction as a young adult. The police arrive to find her 2 year old baby girl still strapped into her high chair, badly dehydrated, sitting in her own feces, and barely alive. Her mother was in her bedroom face down in her own vomit. All around her were needles, pill bottles and drug paraphernalia. She was still breathing. The ambulance was called and we learned later that both Mom and the baby survived. The baby was placed in foster care while the mom was jailed and charged with child neglect.

- What were your feelings when you heard this story?
- How many of us, even for a second, had feelings of anger toward that drug addicted mother?
- How many of us felt that she “deserved” the harshest punishment?
- Some of us might have thought that they should strap HER in a chair and leave her for a few days without food and water?

Ever had these thoughts? I have, sadly – many times

SLIDE CLEAR:

You see, the measure of our Christian love is when we feel the same level of compassion toward the drug addicted mother as we do the criminally neglected and entirely innocent child. When we can feel the pain the Mom feels in being overwhelmed by addiction when she still so desperately loves her daughter. When we hear a story like this - instead of judging and being filled with anger, we pity her and silently pray that she can recover, become clean and be restored to her family again. When we ask God on her behalf to bring her out of the darkness of addiction we open a window into our heart and a measure of how we show Christian “love.” In short, we love with a “Christian love” when we ... Love HER, like God loves HER . . . like God loves you

SLIDE #13 (Love and Grace)

WRAPPING IT ALL UP

So where does this leave us? What do the answers to these questions tell us about ourselves?

Here’s what I discovered about myself:

- I don't always love the way Jesus commanded and the way Paul describes
- I don't always share love the way a spirit filled Christian man should

AND WHEN I EXAMINED “WHY,” I FOUND:

- The world doesn't understand or believe in unconditional love
- We are programmed by the world around us to believe that all love comes with strings attached
- Love with conditions is a shallower love, a more tentative love – dare I say a “Lukewarm” love
- The bible says that God's love is a no strings, no conditions, never failing, always preserving love
- When I don't seize God's love, it becomes hard to then ACT in reflection of His love and grace
- And when I miss the depth of God's grace for me, I drop out of the spirit, and back into my flesh
- My Christian walk then becomes “Lukewarm” because it's hard to share what you don't know

And, the lesson for all of us?

We can't love well, unless we know how well we are loved

BibleRef had a great biblical insight into the model we should follow. Let me read you what they wrote: “If God so loved us: Having received this love from God, we are directed to love one another. This pattern of receiving from God, then giving to others was familiar to John as we see in John 13:14. When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, and showed such great love and servanthood to them, we might have expected Him to conclude by gesturing to His own feet and asking who among them was going to do to Him what He had just done for them. Instead, Jesus said:”

John 13:14

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

The proper way to love God in response to His love for us is to go out and love one another BUT to do that, as we read earlier, we need to have accepted and internalized God's love and grace for us.

Titus 2:11-13

11For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Paul says that when we accept all of God's grace, when we let God love us because of His nature, we will put ungodliness and worldly things in our past because he says “Grace Teaches Us” and we follow its lead to become more holy over time. The blessing of accepting the “teaching” of God's grace gives us insight into what the highest level of Love looks like, and puts God's love in our heart. That love then becomes manifest in our lives and we begin to reflect Christ's love to others. The outcome is a man living a more holy life, one that pleases God and leaves a Kingdom legacy

While none of us save Jesus himself ever gets to claim the mantle of “Holy,” by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we CAN be made MORE holy tomorrow than we were today. And THAT’S why we are here this morning men. That’s why we meet each month as the Band of Brothers. To shepherd each other in the pursuit of holiness. To be more holy tomorrow than you were today and the path towards holiness begins with Grace and Grace IS Love. A type and kind of LOVE that is NOT humanly possible without the Holy Spirit inside every man. When we accept God’s grace AND accept His unconditional LOVE - we will LOVE Him and the people around US the very same way

CLOSING

Paul wrote a prayer within a letter to the Ephesians more than 2,000 years ago, and it’s just as applicable to the Men of Covenant today.

SLIDE #14 PRESS ONCE (Ephesians)

Before we read it, let’s focus on 2 words. “ABLE” and “COMPREHEND”

The prayer here is for the immensity of understanding, NOT the thoroughness of comprehension, of the fullness of God (3:19). “Able” in the Greek is stronger than in the English, carrying the idea of eminently able or to have full strength. “Comprehend” in the Greek conveys the idea of **apprehend**. The idea of “understand” is not strong enough. We are to **seize or take possession** of what God wants for us.

SLIDE #14 PRESS AGAIN (Ephesians)

16That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18May be **able** to **comprehend** with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.(Eph. 3:16–19)

SLIDE CLEAR:

See the original Greek written on the bottom. The words are of power, or owning, and having full assurance of accomplishment. Paul is saying – I pray you don’t miss this!!

SLIDE #15 (Love and Grace)

Men, you're here today because you desire to know God's love
BECAUSE OF CHRIST you CAN know that Love

When you wake up tomorrow, ask yourself:

- How will I accept God's love and grace today? How will I share that same grace with others?
- How will I be a more loving Dad? Husband? A more loving Christian? Brother in Christ?
- How will I show God love today? How will I find ways to spend more time with Him?
- Where can I show kindness, patience and hope to someone?
 - ...because these things have been shown to you

Ephesians 3:18 says that God wants you to be able to:

- Comprehend this love
- To seize His love – to take its fullness upon you

SLIDE #16 (Because of Christ)

I love you Brothers AND you know why I love you, don't you?
Because God loves me
He loves each of you too.

Let's accept that love into the very fabric of our being
Into our spirit and our flesh.

It's then that we can love others as God loves us

When we do, we become holier men

And THAT'S WHY WE ARE MEN OF COVENANT