

# **Be the Real You – You Don't Have to Prove Anything**

*By Bobby Schuller*

I so believe that in that creed that we say every single Sunday, there is a tool. A tool that will allow you to tap into joy, peace, believe it or not even more fun in life, endurance, energy if you really believe the gospel of grace that we just proclaimed just now.

And so today I just want to tell you that you're a terrific person and that yes, you might have flaws and different things, but that is what is a big part of being a human being, right? We all have flaws and imperfections. And I think that today I want to encourage you to stop acting and to stop pretending and to take your mask off and to allow others to love you just as you are. That's very hard, isn't it? It's hard to stop pretending. All of us have a little bit of that. You have to, you can't get on in the world without a little bit of pretending. But most of us pretend too much. We are often like peacocks with our feathers flying and we fly these beautiful blue feathers. And the idea of the peacock is to seduce, so we use these feathers to draw people to us, to get people to like us, and to love us. And very often it's a deception, isn't it because peacocks can't fly. They're just pretty fat chickens that are not getting anywhere.

So much of our life is like that but we really only receive power from God when we let go of having to prove ourselves to others and

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not when we're perfect, but when we simply have faith and believe. Can I get an amen?

So I started to think about this. This is something a pastor said years ago, and I've never forgotten it and it came to my mind a couple months back. The bible says that perfect love casts out all fear. What if at its core all of the decisions we make in life are driven by one of two emotions, by either fear or by love. What if everything we do in life is because we're either really afraid and anxious, or really in love and driven, reaching out, loving others. And I want to obviously promote the idea, the Christian idea that grace, love, joy, that being motivated by those emotions is the good thing. And by the way, when you have an argument with your spouse or your good friend, ask yourself the question am I arguing from a place of fear, or a place of love. I promise, if you get in a knock down drag out fight from a place of love, it's going to go a lot better.

You can ask the question when I discipline my children, is it from a place of fear or a place of love? Be driven by love in everything you do and turn your back on fear. You're not a scared person. You're a brave person. Courage means even though you feel fear, you don't act from it. You act from a place of courage, from a place of love. Amen?

See love and fear are completely at odds because in order to experience love in life, you have to be vulnerable. You have to allow people to see you deeply. You have to be allowed to show people your

flaws, your sins, your fears, your doubts, even your doubts about religion, your doubts about others. You have to be able to show yourself, and that's scary because there's a lot of judges out there, a lot of people who also are feeling shame, that will be quick to reject you and judge you and man is that painful. So say goodbye to that character, kill it.

Because in the end there's a quiet desperation that happens in all of our hearts because we know they don't really love us, they love the image. So say goodbye to that because you are worth love and affection and belonging just as you are, not as you should be, warts and all. That's why the most flawed people in the world sometimes are the most lovable. Sometimes it's easier to be around sinners than it is around saints. Can I get an amen? Cause sinners, in all their sin don't tend to judge as much.

So, shame is the great problem. Shame itself is the enemy. There is a difference between guilt and shame and its worth repeating. Guilt is the feeling you have when you do something that you know is foreign to you and you reject it because that's not you. Guilt's actually a good thing. And you do something bad, and you go that's not me, I shouldn't have done that, I'm going to apologize, I'm going to change my ways. Shame is the feeling that I didn't make a mistake, I am a mistake. Shame says of course I did that. That's who I am. The number one word that most describes shame is hiddenness. Shame is the part of our life that we are terrified to allow people to see. If people only knew this about me, they would reject me.

So shame is the hidden part of our life, and shame is the number one thing, and this is psychology now, that gets in the way between us and connecting deeply with others, and I believe with God because the bible tells us that Jesus came not only to remove us of our sin, but also to remove us of our shame.

So I'm going to ask this question. This accusation has been lobbed at the church. Has the church instituted shame as a virtue? It sure can feel that way. Not all preachers are gracious. It sure feels like some church services you go to that their goal is to get you to leave feeling super guilty. I don't do that because I already believe people come in church feeling a little guilty. You don't need to make them feel more that way.

And the question is has the church instituted shame as a virtue and the answer is no because what is very often seen as shame being practiced in the church is actually shame dying. It is people being honest and vulnerable because the number one thing that kills shame is showing what you're ashamed of to others and to God. And there's nothing more renewing, more refreshing than saying here's all my skeletons, here's all my stuff, here's my depression, here's all the medications I'm on, here's the sickness that I've been hiding, here's my fears, here's my loss, here's my worries about not being educated enough or experienced enough or smart enough. Here are all of the things that I regret. Now what? And loving people come to you and wrap their arms

around you and they say we love you even more now that we see the real you.

Friends, you don't need to pretend because you're a terrific person. All of us struggle with shame. All of us do. But God wants to remove that shame from your life so you can connect deeply with him and with others. And let me tell you, it's so good to be that way; to just be you and stop pretending. That's you. You're not afraid. You're not a scared person. You never have been and you never will be. God's going to help you take that mask off and keep reaching out to others and to him and reinforce this deep, great relationship.

So Hannah read from Luke chapter 18, which is a famous passage about the tax collector and the Pharisee, and this is one of the most amazing passages. I love it because.. let me read it to you. If you have your bibles, you can follow along. Luke 18, chapter 9: "To some who are confident of their own righteousness and look down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed 'God I thank you that I am not like other people.'" What do you mean? "Robbers and evil doers and adulterers, or even like this tax collector over here." The laugh is not in this scripture. "I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. I tithe!"

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said 'God have mercy on me, a

sinner. God have mercy on me, a sinner. God have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted." This is a very powerful passage easily misinterpreted by our western eyes.

So the first thing I want to point out is the tax collector. First of all, where are these guys in the story? Anybody pay attention? I'll give you the answer – they're in the temple. Okay, it's really important. They're in the temple. The temple is the place.. it doesn't exist anymore, it was destroyed, but the temple is at the heart of priestly Judaism, meaning the way in which Jews get atonement for their sins. It was happening there at the temple and it was the heart of Jewish life and it was gigantic. It was one of the wonders of the world. Humungous. And thousands of people would go there and they would meet there.

And so both the Pharisee; remember a Pharisee back in those days was a really good thing. A Pharisee would be like saying a pastor, a mega church pastor was standing there and just thanking.. I love how the prayer said, and the Pharisee prayed a prayer about himself. It's a great line. And the prayer was I thank you God. I thank you God that you've made me so good. It's terrific! And I'm just going to keep on fasting twice a week, and I'm going to tithe, and thanks that I'm not like that robber, and I'm not like that adulterer, and I'm especially not like that tax collector. Whew! That's a close one. Okay, and everybody's like yes, he's

really good. He does those things. It's terrific. So everybody's lauding the Pharisee and he's received his reward which is an audience applauding him.

And then you have this tax collector. The first thing I want to say about the tax collector is that the tax collector really was a bad guy. He wasn't like a misunderstood person like say the Samaritan. The tax collectors of those days were really rotten. They were employed by the Roman government and the government would have them just go around and collect taxes from their fellow Jews who were being occupied by this foreign force that they hated. And then the way that the tax collectors made money was they got to charge their own personal interest rate, and they never told anybody what was what. So in other words, there's no documentation or anything, tax collector shows up at your door and he's like today its going to be.. 13.. 15%. And so imagine sheriff of Nottingham from Disney's Robin hood like going around, like hitting the guy with the broken leg with the cast to get his hidden coins and like stealing from widows. So he's a terrible person, right?

And this tax collector comes into the temple and he shows his heart to God. What I think you're seeing in this story is not a tax collector who's experiencing shame, you're seeing a man who's letting go of his shame. This tax collector, imagine he would wake up every single day and he'd be like all right, I've got to go collect more money from orphans and widows and old people and poor people, but I've got to do it,

how else am I going to feed my own kids. How am I going to pay my rent? So every single day for years on end, he does this evil thing, but he does it from a place of utilitarianism. I've got to do it and if I didn't do it, somebody else would do it. And the same way that we all think when we do what's wrong and not right.

And so this man walks around every single day with this looming sense of shame. He's rejected by his community, by his friends because of what he does, but he continues to trudge on with no energy, no life and no joy because well, he has to do it because who else would do it. And every day this man walks and this big burden of shame everywhere he goes, and finally one day he goes up to the temple to say I'm done, and he just totally exposes his life. It's not like he does it in secret, he does it around thousands of people and they all know him. He's their tax collector, he's their IRS agent. And here he is beating his chest saying God have mercy on me, a sinner. What you are seeing is not shame, you are seeing vulnerability. What you are seeing is not shame, you are seeing honesty. You're seeing a man who is finally coming to grips with what he's done and he's saying Lord, help me. I can't do it without you.

And when he says I'm a rotten sinner, he's not giving birth to shame, he's killing it. See when our shame dies, it dies in a place of vulnerability and repentance. And it's messy. He's giving birth to new life. When a Christian is reborn, it's messy. When a baby is born, it's not like pretty, like it's a mess. But out of that place comes new life. So many of

us, we carry all of these burdens around, these secret things, these feelings, these emotions, we just feel so isolated because we only put our best foot forward. And though people accept our best foot, we're like well what happens if they reject our worst foot? And that's not what God has for you. The real you is a lot better than you think because warts and all, you're still a terrific person.

Here's the secret about this passage. Again, I'm going to ask you, where were they? The temple. Okay. Now here's a part of the.. the Pharisees were in on something. When you go to the temple back in those days, it's the holiest place in Judaism. And one of the rules in Judaism, there's no idols, no graven images. And so the way that's interpreted is, you've got Roman coins on you, denari. And they have pagan images on them, satanic symbols, Cesar, right? All that stuff. And so they say no, no, no, no, no, you can't bring that money in here. If you want to come in the temple, you have to exchange your Roman denarius for Jewish shekels, which are kosher. So what happened is you'd have all these Pharisees, or their people along the entrance of the temple, and you'd have to exchange your evil money for religiously appropriate money for the temple. You follow me?

Now what happens in that exchange? If you travel, you know exactly what happens. A bunch gets shaved off, right? The last time I came home from Europe with 150 Euros, and it was like here's \$63. I'm like what happened? Well you got your taxes and then the exchange rate

and a bit ask spread and I'm like I don't even know what you just said. You just took a bunch of my money.

So that's what happens. They come in and a little bit gets shaved off the top. And then when you go back out, you can exchange that money back and then they'll shave a little more off the top. So anytime somebody wants to come to the temple, they have to exchange their money because it's unclean. Okay? By the way, this is what Jesus clears out in that famous scene where he's kicking over tables. That's how angry he is about this place.

So another story, Jesus is in the temple where? In the temple, and there a Pharisee says to him, so one of the pastors says to him, cause he's trying to trap him, "Lord, should we pay taxes to Cesar?" Famous story, right? Jesus says to this Pharisee, "Give me a coin." The Pharisee reaches in his pocket, flings him a coin, Jesus catches it because he's awesome, and he holds it up to everybody to see and he says "whose face is on this coin?" Okay where are they? (AUDIENCE – the temple) And what's allowed in the temple? Only Jewish shekels, right? Only Jewish shekels and he holds up this coin in front of the leader of the religious people and he says "whose face is on this?" (AUDIENCE - Cesar) Yes, Cesar. Who's collecting on all those denari at the door? And are the Pharisees following the rules they put on everybody else?

Here's what I want you to hear: the Pharisee is a tax collector, too. The only difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector is

everybody knows the tax collector's a tax collector, and most people don't know the Pharisee is a tax collector. And here he is with the unction to say I thank you I'm not like this tax collector. He is a tax collector but he's secret about it and man, does that make it worse. Man does that make it worse.

Here's what we learn from this story – we're all messed up. Everybody, everybody is messed up a little bit or a lot and the only people that are getting better are the ones that admit it; the ones that are like the tax collector. Not the ones that wallow in shame, but the ones that are vulnerable about their weaknesses and their imperfections because it is only in that place we grow, and that is exactly what Jesus teaches. He who humbles himself will be exalted. What a promise. He who exalts himself, got to be humble. They're both tax collectors. It's just one is honest about it. We're all sinners. Only some of us are honest about it. We're all messed up. Only some of us are honest about it. And the more honest we are about it, the more vulnerable we are, the more we connect with God and with others and that's why I'm thankful for you. Continue to be a real person.

The words Jesus says before he says render under Cesar what is Cesar's? That's the last thing he says. The first thing he says is "you hypocrite" to that Pharisee. Do you know what a hypocrite is? Jesus invented the word in the way we use it today. In his day it wasn't used like it is today. A hypocrite is an actor. And it was not pejorative. It was

not a negative word. Theater was very common in those days, and you'd see a list – hypocrite one, hypocrite two, hypocrite three. In other words, George Clooney is a terrific hypocrite, right? That was not tongue in cheek. It came out wrong. Right? You know, your favorite actor, the word hypocrite in those days, it just meant an actor. And he's saying you are pretending. You are playing a character on a stage for an audience. Stop it. Stop it.

I want to see the real you. God wants to see the real you because the real you is worth seeing. And it's lovely. And if people can't see it, forget about them. They have a lot of shame, too, or else they wouldn't judge you. That's the truth. That's the gospel truth. In fact the more grace we receive in our own imperfections, the better we become at having grace for those who hurt us, or who become vulnerable or messy around us, and that is a good word.

So you are loved. You are loved just as you are, and not as you should be, and today as we Sabbath in this place, I have to remind you, you have nothing to prove. You can just relax. And you can't be vulnerable with everybody then you just become a weirdo. But you can be vulnerable with the people you love; the people you love and with God. That the most important people in your life truly know you. And stop people pleasing. That will totally crush your soul, and your life. Don't do anything to please people. Do everything to please God and you will go far in life. You are loved.

Moving and reaching out is painful and it can be really scary, especially if you have an addiction. And by the way, if you ask any psychologist the number one thing that contributes to compulsive behavior is shame. So what happens is there is this cycle where the addict does the thing they don't want to do. They fight the temptation and they go long enough, but eventually they break. They do the thing they're not supposed to do, they feel shame about it so they hide it and that hiddenness creates a deeper yearning for the very thing they're trying not to have. And that cycle continues over and over. That's why if you go to an AA meeting, the first thing everybody does is they stand up and they say "hi, my name is Bobby, I am an alcoholic." And everybody says (AUDIENCE – hi Bobby) yes, you can see how many alcoholics we have in our church. See that's what I'm saying. That's what I'm saying. I tricked you guys, you fell for it. We got a lot. We got a lot of people. We got a lot of people here.

But see what's happening there is so helpful because the person is being vulnerable about the fact that they're addicted, and the people who are present are accepting them just as they are. That is Christianity. That's what we do. It's not shame. It's not a culture of shame. It's a culture of respect and dignity, and grace, especially grace, and love. God is teaching us that everything we do, do it from a place of love and not fear. When we put up our peacock feathers, we stay fat pretty chickens that will never fly. Yes. No, the bible says he wants you to be like an

eagle, spread your wings and soar. And the only way to do that, man is to be vulnerable; to let him in. To be seen deeply with all your fears, all your doubts, all your struggles, all your emotions, all your messiness, and to not put on a pretty face or try harder, but to let go, just trust God in it all. That's what grace is.

Who's going to be in heaven, by the way? Who's going to be in heaven? I cannot wait to see the look on all those religious people's faces when they see all those people in heaven who are not supposed to be there. That is going to be rich. It's going to be rich. You're going to want to have your camera. See we think we sort it out. We put God in a box, and let me just tell you, that we don't get to heaven by our works, we get to heaven by his grace, by trusting in him. And that prostitute and that drug dealer and that gang banger who said I put my trust in Jesus Christ, I can't do it alone and never really worked it out. They kept carrying that suitcase from one hand to the other, and never were able to really sort out their behavior or become a better person or mend things with the people they hurt, but they still just wanted God and knew the Lord and kept turning to him, they're going to be in heaven.

What are you going to do then? If you put your trust in Jesus, you go to heaven. If you're friends with the Lord, you're going to heaven. We should love what is good and hate what is evil, and hate sin, but to hate sin doesn't mean to hate yourself. It means to hate it so much that you

have the courage to say look, I've got this stuff in my life and I need you, and I need God, and that's okay.

Friends, you are loved. Last thought, Maimonides the Rambam, he's my favorite. He says, "Teach thy tongue to say 'I do not know' and you will progress." Look, you want to learn? You can't be a teacher and a student at the same time, right? You've got to be able to have an empty cup if you want God to fill it. So pour it out. Give it all to him. Pour out your dirty water and he's going to fill it with a fresh cup of new wine.

I think when we get to heaven, and this is what Brennan Manning asked, God's going to ask us did you believe I loved you? Did you believe I longed for you? Did you believe I longed to hear your voice? Or did you think you had to prove it first. Did you think you had to have three weeks of good behavior before you could pray? Or that you had to go serve at a homeless shelter or do something like that before you could really, really be a good believer that I'm proud of. You don't have to do anything to get God to love you because there's nothing you can do to get him to stop loving you, and that's very good news. It's called grace. He loves you just as you are. And I'm so proud of you. You're doing so much better than you think. And when you come out and you be vulnerable about all the things; you're struggling with all the fears and trials. And it doesn't have to be sin, but even things like just depression and all this stuff, we all experience it. When you become vulnerable, you allow others, people to be like oh thank god somebody said something. I'm the

same way, I'm way worse than you. And that's a terrific feeling. You just found your best friend. And that's what happens, and that's how people connect deeply is by being honest about all the stuff we're going through because you don't have to go through it alone, amen? God's with you, and I'm with you, and so is this church. We love you.

Father, thank you for calling us here. We believe in grace, we believe in the gospel, we believe that Christianity is unique because it doesn't call us to do a list of things in order to get to heaven, it calls us to just have faith and then we do those things out of love. Thank you, God that it's not by our power but yours. So we trust you. We hold it to you, in Jesus' name, all God's people said, amen.