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Integrity

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Saved and Serving by the Goodness of God**

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cares for you, and the result of his salvation is that your burden must no longer be borne! The pain of the heart which swells within my breast is keener still to the one who dwells within, for my insecurity over a life abandoned to God makes his grief that much sharper. "The yoke is easy," he whispers, "the burden, light." Will I believe it? My accuser loads me with doubts, knowing unbelief is his only weapon. Will my gaze remain steadfastly upward, my shoulders unbowed because today the Lord has borne my burden?

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All-Sufficient Grace

Legalism is our fallen nature's attempt to live right. We lack the ability to naturally live the way we should. So from the Pharisaism of Paul's time to the "Church of Christism" of our own movement, we continue to construct a system of works in an attempt to justify ourselves. Even as we come to intellectually understand the concept of grace, a more subtle form of legalism tends to creep in. This legalism tells us that our "correct understanding of grace" saves us, or our "biblical stances" make us "true" Christians. We may even be able to teach those who come to us about grace, while for ourselves grace remains a philosophical concept but not a personal reality.

How can we stand before God and know that he accepts and loves us? Paul, who taught grace so completely that he was accused of teaching that Christians should sin so that grace would abound (Romans 6), still seemed to struggle with sin (Romans 7). But the light of God's grace on the road to Damascus continued to shine through Paul's legalism so that he could say: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" (Romans 8:1). And despite his struggle with a "thorn in the flesh," he learned to trust God's grace as sufficient (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

**Years of dotting i's and crossing t's
cramp our hands and narrow
our vision. Hearts grow heavier
even as they grow smaller.**

Many things work against our realization of grace in our everyday lives. Our human nature, even when struggling to overcome the sin in our lives and to do right, retreats to legalism as a method of control

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Transforming Grace: Saved and Serving By the Goodness of God

JOSEPH F. JONES

Many believers want to really live the Christian life to the fullest, yet find this an awesome and burdensome task. Many want to experience joy and enthusiasm in their daily walk with the Lord, but, instead, find their lives vexed with a sense of failure and guilt. Most Christians want to rejoice in an hour of exhilarating and inspirational worship, yet often leave the house of worship with mixed feelings of frustration, guilt, failure, even anger, and perhaps a small dose of joy thrown in! Why do many of us experience this pervading sense of inadequacy in living the Christian life instead of thrilling to the indescribable joy and praise lifted to our God and Father? Why do some feel a depressive lack of assurance in the state of one's salvation and relationship with the Lord?

The answer to all such questions may well be in our failure to understand the marvelous grace of God and his amazing goodness to his children, and to appropriate this grace into our daily walk with him. While affirming our belief in this message of redemptive grace through sermon and song, we often struggle mightily with a legalistic sense of works and law, never feeling that we have done adequately to be saved. When we fail to understand and appreciate God's unending grace in forgiving and accepting each of us, we continue to be critical of others and find great difficulty in loving and accepting those with whom we differ.

What Is Grace?

Divine grace is not just an intriguing theological concept to theorize about in seminary courses and Sunday morning classes. Rather, it is God's very nature poured out in the sacrificial love of a Man who lived,

touched, taught, and died on our behalf, and who wants to share that love with us in every dimension of our daily walk.

Grace is nothing less than our awareness of Christ's presence with us and our claiming that precious presence to support and sustain our efforts to enjoy our salvation and to serve every Christian venture with confidence. So the biblical doctrine of divine grace is a very practical, relevant reality upon which we can feast our souls daily. In divine grace we find assurance of our relationship with the Lord; we know that we are now saved and serving through the undeserved yet ever-present goodness of God our Savior (Titus 2:11-14).

When reflecting upon those ministries and achievements we were involved in this past year, we may joyfully attribute them to the motivating power of God's grace. When we sadly remind ourselves of failures and sins, we may take heart that his forgiving grace and restoring Spirit have long since righted every wrong and forgotten every failure. When reminded of our human frailty and mortality,

**When the challenges of new
tasks or ministries confront
us . . . God's grace will
assure success and victory.**

we are reassured that God's grace is all-sufficient to bear us up under life and to be sustained in the hour of death. We hear and must appropriate to our own personal hurt God's message to a great saint who also felt grievous pain: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in (your) weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).

When challenges of new tasks or ministries confront us in the immediate or distant future, God's grace will assure success and victory. When he calls us to serve, we must also hear his reassuring voice, "I will go with you, I will never leave nor forsake you; lo, I am with you always to the end." When we contribute money to the church and its ministries, we must remind ourselves that we give because he first gave to us. "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"

Walk Ahead in Grace

Now in the light of his infinite, marvelous, transforming, and empowering grace, let us take hold of the present calls and demands upon us, and address confidently the future before us. Let us thrill to every remembrance of healing and hope, worship and work, forgiveness and restoration which all flood our hearts with joy, since they are the benefits of his transforming grace. It is not easy to acknowledge our complete dependence on God in an age that has made education and affluence new gods before whom many prostrate themselves. We must not allow our human pride and sense of self-sufficiency to prevent us from readily recognizing and accepting all the benefits of God's grace.

Paul wrote to his younger colleague, Titus, of the practical effects of living in God's grace:

For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of all mankind. That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, as we wait for the blessed day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ will

appear. He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good.

Titus 2:11-14, *Good News Bible, Today's English Version*

God's grace has indeed appeared, and we can experience its transforming and empowering presence. In that experience of grace we find forgiveness of all our sins, peace which replaces haunting guilt, reconciliation that drives out enmity and hostility.

In genuine humility and integrity we can join in the refrain of the apostle, self-characterized as the "least of the apostles" because of his past life, in proclaiming, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." Claiming to have

Let us thrill to every remembrance of healing and hope, worship and work, forgiveness and restoration which flood our hearts with joy, since they are the benefits of His transforming grace.

worked harder than all of the other apostles, Paul makes an immediate confession, "Yet it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (I Corinthians 15:9,10). Here is the ultimate Christian motivation: a new and personal awareness of God's transforming grace. We are saved and serving by the goodness of God.

Journal Entries: Temptation, Spirit, and Grace

NAME WITHHELD*

Monday, July 16

We went to church yesterday morning.

Well, several weeks ago, in my journal, I mentioned my concerns about pornography (I noticed an "Adult" bookstore on the interstate). I seemed to have gained victory over that—the same old "secret:" live one day at a time. For several days it seemed to be the only thing I could think of when I was driving, but I never visited it and slowly the interest wore off and has, at this point, pretty well passed away. It is hard to believe that a strong desire or yearning will really wear off, but a day at a time, it does. This is part of the idea of walking by faith: "I say to God, I believe you today—I won't worry about how I will continue the fight into tomorrow."

So I seemed to have found another yearning. Three years ago, I began noticing that I was finding several women very attractive and was wishing I was not married. I was tired and frustrated with my marriage and Jennifer had just been born. Mary and I began getting counseling and things improved considerably; I began to enjoy our marriage again. Church helped, also. I still noticed a (young) woman from time to time; noticed in the sense that I discovered an emotional "infatuation" with a student or friend, but I usually just ignored it; I don't think the woman ever noticed.

Well, it has happened again, and this time I really am happily married! But I want the attention and awe this woman seems to give and I am temporarily isolated from friends like Tom or Dick to whom I might turn for help. I haven't committed adultery; I haven't even made a pass. (I have *never* made a pass at a woman.) But I have removed some of the "hedges" as Jerry Jenkins call them** and there is a considerable war going on in my mind.

I have finally figured out what I really want here, what really motivates me. Deep down, I want an indication from the woman that I am attractive and that she would like to have an affair with me. Then I would like to be able to say, "No" and go on my righteous way, still having my ego smoothed and stroked.

But, of course, that is not the way things work and, thus, the removal of hedges and the war in my mind. I decide at least once a day that I want Jesus in control. But I break that commitment with a word or thought 15 minutes later. I have never written more personal and "incriminating" words in this journal.

Tuesday, July 17

I put up the "hedges" yesterday; it at least had an effect on me. And I'm trying to pray for my friend.

Despite that, yesterday was a depressing day. I had to keep telling myself that things would get better.

The math I am working on is difficult for me; ideas I have break down in a morass of calculations.

Wednesday, July 18

Surviving.

Thursday, July 19

God, please change my heart.

Last Friday and yesterday were very hard; I was depressed leaving work. Yesterday I finally began praying out loud in the car and that made me begin to cry. The hurt inside was similar to the despair I felt long ago when Mary left for college. I told God that I had played enough, that it was my fault and I had been asking for the confusion and pain—he was right. I also told him that I was incapable of any good. If he did not do something soon,

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. . . I knew I was giving him an ultimatum; I had walked into trouble and then said "God, get me out!" But I had no choice now. I decided to call Tom, my minister, when I got home. I tried to explain why I wanted to call Tom when I got home and Mary didn't understand (I said "spiritual conflict;" she finally said, "Well, can't you tell me?" I said "No.") Later I suggested a walk in the park; we went.

Sunday, July 22

Well, last Wednesday was rough because of the pain and confusion I read in Mary when we talked in the park. I didn't get to call Tom because I didn't want to do it when Mary was at home or close to the phone.

Thursday was the day Jim and Sally were to come over for supper to meet Mary. (On Thursday I also invited another co-worker, Joe.) I left work early to cook.

Each day begins with a decision to protect my marriage and my thoughts, to not "dabble." By the late afternoon all I can think of is Sally and how much I want her, not merely physical intimacy, but genuine intimacy, to go for long walks and hear her talk about herself and to see how she thinks and what makes her tick, to comfort her; Thursday was no exception except that I was inviting her to meet my wife. I think the day probably went better than others, but the drive home included the usual hurt; attempting to conform my feelings and actions at work with reality, that I am a Christian, a husband, and a father.

On Washington Road I am an expert mathematician who hopes a bright young graduate student is in love with him. Further south on the interstate I watch big jets move majestically overhead off the runway, and I am a confused mathematician and father thinking about adultery. By the time I see the Springfield water tower further south, reality has begun to cascade upon me and I am definitely married, a father, a defeated and demoralized Christian contemplating divorce, suicide,

adultery, and trying to convince myself that Jesus can really help me. I turn onto Pine Road, where the trees close in the road, and in those last three miles, in the hot summer heat, I am begging God to provide victory so I can become a good husband and father and live the remainder of my life with Mary; all the time the marriage alternative seems to be oppressively boring and stale. I tell Jesus (one more time) that I do want him to be victorious and to be in control. I talk to Mary and the children and play with them and collapse in fatigue on the couch. I read for awhile, walk the dog, look at the stars, and pray some more. Then I come home and go to bed. About 5 a.m. I am awake, tossing and trying to get back to sleep without waking Mary. Several mornings I have gone downstairs and taken the sleeping bag and stretched out on the floor. I am finally deep asleep when the alarm goes off.

Thursday was a little different. I parked the car where "normal" people do (more of a statement to my ego) and as the day was shorter, I had probably reached the weak defeated Christian stage by the time I passed the airport runway. I had hopes that the supper would put things right, but while preparing supper, I finally decided to call Tom, our minister. (Mary, had gone out to buy more vegetable oil for the chicken cashew dinner I was fixing and I began to realize this was an ideal time to call him.) I called Tom and he said, "How are you, sir." I said, "OK, I guess" which is a slight drop from the traditional "Fine" and should be interpreted as "Really lousy!" I said, "Tom, I have a problem." He made some noise that indicated he was listening and I should go ahead. "I haven't done anything physically wrong but I am in love with a woman who is not my wife. I can't seem to do anything about it." Tom was very supportive and aggressively to the point. He asked if there was anything in our marriage that might have precipitated this and

I said, "No, not really. Mary and I got some counseling several years ago but, really, our marriage is probably better now than it has been in some time." Tom told me that he would try to call me; he also got my work number and said, "I'll call you at work some time; but you won't know when. In the Spirit's leading, maybe the phone call will sort of be like the cavalry coming over the hill." I told him I wouldn't mind. Tom said I need to recognize that the job is not worth it. I need to be prepared to give up the job if the alternative was the breakup (or serious damage) to our marriage. I said I knew that. He also told me I may need to bring Mary in on this; I said I thought it would hurt her too much.

At times it was hard to hear Tom; eventually we ended with him praying for me. Little Johnny began to come in the door and so I interrupted to tell Tom that Mary was home; then quickly, "The woman I'm talking about probably doesn't know how I feel and I don't know if she feels for me or anything. This may all be in my head," to which Tom responded, "You don't want to find out."

I felt good after the phone conversation; I even wondered if I was being too premature and silly to call Tom about a trivial thing. The supper went well and Jim, Sally, and Joe (who all came in Sally's car) stayed till after nine. I was sorry to see them go. Later that night I was glad I had talked to Tom; the phone call was itself a statement of commitment to my marriage and of willingness to be embarrassed if that was what it took to fix things. Mary and I made love that evening and the next morning; I did not get into work until 9 a.m. I felt better about things than I had for some time.

I kept watch on my mind and even managed to work for awhile without Sally. I talked to Jim a bit about mathematics and also about philosophy, his belief in absolutes. I found out that there was a discrete math group

going to lunch and I told Sally (she had already indicated an intention in going). I drove Sally, Jim, and Eric to lunch; on the way Sally sat in front. At lunch I talked to the guys; deliberately sat some distance from Sally. I ordered root beer, not beer, with the meal. After the meal I ordered a Spaten beer. Jim took a sip and so did Sally (expressing a distaste for it) and we teased Sally about what beers she liked or didn't like. (Sally is almost always the center of attention of the primarily male crowd at the office.) Lunch took 2 1/2 hours. I finally suggested that I would like to return to work.

Back at the office I tried to concentrate. I suggested some work for Sally. Then I went back to my cubicle. And could not study.

Looking back on this, I see that throughout the day, without seeing them as decisions, I had made choices that slowly swept away my resolutions. From being the communicator to Sally of lunch plans to, in her hearing, asking Jim if he wanted a taste of my beer, I had brought down the barriers I had erected. And finally I made a decision, sitting in my office, which was not a decision based on careful, rational thought; the playing field was so slanted by this time it is hard to conceive of a different choice. I decided to do no more mathematics. I decided to talk to Sally about philosophy. About her beliefs. About absolutes (or lack of them, as I correctly guessed). Above all, I would sit next to Sally and talk. Deep down, in all this talk about absolutes, I wondered about her views on adultery.

So we talked. I was "rational" and philosophical, and alluded to my Christian beliefs when it was necessary for the conversation. I claimed Jim believed in absolutes so we went to go find Jim. The three of us talked till 5 p.m. I mentioned or alluded to my beliefs as a Christian several times because I had to. In that sense I stood up for Christ, but ultimately I was a hypocrite. I talked like a Christian and

expressed Christian beliefs and watched Sally's eyes and her hair and her expressions, all the time desiring a long, delirious affair with her.

The ride home was hell.

On Pine Road I had it down to three choices. Suicide, adultery, or a desperate attempt to end the problem by telling Mary about it. I quickly ruled out suicide. (At least with adultery and divorce, you may still one day be around to explain to the children why you did what you did. And maybe to apologize. There is no recovery from suicide.)

Adultery would lead to divorce. I don't think Sally would begin a relationship with me without being told that my marriage was "in trouble" (or over). And, of course, Mary would not put up with adultery; we had talked about tough love with a thoroughness that would make my unfaithfulness a time of misery. For just a moment I thought of separation; but tough love would mean I would be alone in some apartment, without access to much money, no support, few chances to visit the children. And a chilling, painful time with the woman who was and has long been my best friend.

On Pine Road, I had it down to three choices. Suicide, adultery, or a desperate attempt to end the problem by telling Mary about it.

I asked Mary if she would like me to tell her more about my "spiritual conflict" and she responded "that's between you and God." I went upstairs and lay down. By the time she had come upstairs to see if I was OK, I had decided, out of desperation, that I had to tell her. She said "OK" and lay down next to me. It took me awhile and finally I said, "I am infatuated with a woman at work and I can't seem to shake it." She asked, "Is it Sally?" I

said "Yes." Mary nodded. "She makes a lot of eye contact with you . . ." Mary said, and then I could feel her heart suddenly beating very rapidly in her chest, against my rib cage.

I told Mary I was sorry. We talked and Mary was supportive throughout. She mentioned an infatuation she once had and said, "If I had had to work with him, it would have been hell."

If we win this battle—and today I believe we really will—the victory began that evening. Mary was aggressive at times in her accountability; she began with "You *have* to flee. It may cost you, but Joseph went to jail. You have to flee."

How could I? By the time we had talked a bit I had some ideas, some costly ideas in terms of my self-image and my image at work, but a commitment to working without being around Sally. (Painful! Every good experience at work to date seems to have Sally in the background somewhere.) "And no more Friday lunches." By the time evening came, layers of little dreams and ideas had been stripped away.

So many times I had decided not to "dabble" in my thoughts about Sally and here Mary was sketching what that really meant. It was all or nothing; I could not hope for success if I slowly withdrew.

I agreed.

By Saturday afternoon I had the image to compare with the experience. It was Eustace transformed into a dragon,*** taking off a layer of skin at a time. Each time I took off a layer, I thought I was done, but I looked as much like a dragon as before. Now Mary, like Aslan, was insisting that if the skin was to come off, the lion's claw had to reach deep and take it *all* off, every thought, every little evil thing I cling to.

Please God. Take the skin off completely, one last time, and be done with it!

Every plan I have has a counter-trap. Staying in the library tomorrow all day invites a

chance to explain to Sally why I am hiding. I see in my motives wheels within wheels.

Mary has been so clearly supportive that I have been awed. No human ever loved me like this.

But she has been my wife for 14 years and her love does not completely quench the thrill of flirting with a 24-year-old woman.

Monday, July 23, 1990

A considerable measure of victory today.

I picked Jim up at 7 a.m. at the corner of Pine Road and Lake and we got in by 7:30. I had already told Jim of my plans to work on some projects; I xeroxed some materials for Jim and Sally, and finally ran into Sally. I was prepared; I had talked to God about it and decided to keep fixed to the game plan—to not deviate from it—and I quickly gave her the copies, told her that Mary would bring pop to the picnic, and said something I forget. I had encouraged Eric to pass a problem on to her and I believe she spent the day on it. I spent the morning, *fruitfully*, in the library.

Just before I left the house this morning, Mary slipped me a letter, to be opened "when needed." I felt that gave me considerable leeway and so I opened it soon after arriving. I read it and ate my yogurt. (This is *before* the above conversation with Sally.)

In the letter Mary recalled friends of ours in the past and her praying for them. She remembered close Christian couples from our college days. She shared her thoughts with me and her personality and flavor, her aura, could be felt in the paper. I thoroughly enjoyed it, this was intimacy, intimacy I wanted and needed. I read the letter twice. It was not dramatic or erotic or romantic. It was simply Mary and it was *very* encouraging. Later, in the library, while working through formulas, my mind slid over to the letter and it was some time before I woke to what I was doing. I was daydreaming about Mary. In my

fantasy we were lying on the upstairs bed and she was telling me some of the things in the letter. I was listening and caressing her, aroused by the physical and emotional intimacy between us. As I returned to my surroundings in the library, I ached just to talk to Mary, to look into her eyes and see her reactions.

In the letter, Mary . . . shared her thoughts with me and her personality and flavor, her aura, could be felt in the paper.

And it struck me forcefully that I was daydreaming about my *wife*, emotionally infatuated with the idea of seeing her again. What a gift. A gift of "erotica" by the Holy Spirit! I was grateful and felt we could *really* win this battle!

I didn't win every battle today, but I won most of them and I won the big ones. At one point Sally suggested that we continue our discussion on philosophy at the picnic; she felt she had a better answer. I awkwardly said, "That would be good; that would give Mary a chance to hear your answer. Mary might have some insight or response." My comment was sort of pointed and almost rude. And it was *not* what I really wanted to say. But I said it.

Sally also pays for my actions. I have at times encouraged her and "led her on;" I have not really made it easier for her to get over her breakup with her boyfriend. I started the conversation on philosophy out of a desire for intimacy, not conversation, and then I act cold when she brings it up later. I have hurt her; I have certainly hurt Mary, and I have been through hell! And I haven't even had a (physical) affair.

I left work with Eric at 7 p.m. In all, a good day. We have tied a record for victorious days in a row—at *one*.

Monday, July 30, 1990

Five days in a row; although not easy. I like Sally quite a lot; I can keep a fairly

tight rein on my thoughts if I don't see her very often.

I am working on p-groups and their extensions. And I am trying to leave work at 2 p.m. to be with Mary and the children. (Mary and I spent Thursday and Friday at the Quality Inn.)

*All proper names plus a few other facts have been changed to protect the journalist's privacy. We believe that the journalist's excellent description of wrestling with temptation and day-by-day, step-by-step resistance could provide encouragement to those of us fighting temptation—sexual or otherwise. We are grateful that this *Integrity* reader volunteered these journal entries for the purpose of encouraging other *Integrity* readers.

**Refers to article written by Jerry B. Jenkins entitled "Men Who Guard Their Marriages" which was printed in the June 1990 *Moody Monthly* publication, and was adapted from his book *Hedges*, published by Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers.

***From Book 3 of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles Of Narnia*, "The Voyage of The Dawn Treader."

Is Baptism Necessary For Salvation?

JOHN W. LOFTUS

When someone asks me what they should do to be saved, I usually say they can do nothing. Salvation is free in Christ Jesus, I continue. God in Christ has provided the sacrifice that alone offers us salvation. What God has done we could not do. Our responsibility is to lovingly respond to God's personal gift in Christ. We do this by a faith that compels us to repent, confess, and be immersed in baptism.

Nothing of what follows is meant to undercut this basic message. I am not of the opinion that we should change the message we have been commissioned to preach. If the message includes baptism, then we should teach and preach it, even if we don't quite understand why.

But we who wish to preach this message of salvation are presented with a particularly unique problem. The problem is that such a message is not widely shared among those who claim to be Christians. This fact must be recognized and dealt with honestly. Are we the only Christians, or are we Christians only?

The Development of Legalism

When the Restoration Movement began in the 1830s, many different churches united into one body of believers. The peoples of these various churches claimed no other name but Christ's, no other book but the Bible, no other creed but Christ. Our movement brought Christians together under the lordship of Christ even though many of them didn't agree about everything important. And herein lies some irony. In our zeal to restore a biblical view of baptism in the salvific process, somewhere along the line we developed a legalistic view of baptism, demanding its necessity before someone can be saved. Hence, rather than uniting all believers in Christ as we did in the past, we now exclude them from our fellowship because of their views on baptism. A movement that began to unite people under Christ now separates them.

The legalistic view of baptism in its extreme form maintains that unless someone is baptized that person will be in hell throughout all eternity; an unbaptized person is a lost

person regardless of his or her faith in Christ and should not expect to have eternal salvation. A Christian who holds to this view of baptism probably could not worship with an unbaptized person, and would certainly not want to be a part of worship experience where an unbaptized person is the worship leader or preacher. "What fellowship has a believer with an unbeliever?" they might ask (II Corinthians 6:15).

Have We Forgotten Unity?

In the interest of helping us regain our role in uniting people who seek to follow Christ, let me ask some questions and offer some criticisms of the legalistic view of baptism. In doing this I know there will be Christians who will respond quite negatively. A sacred cow is, after all, something which does not come down easily. But it's one that must tumble if we want to be honest with God's word and his interests in the world.

Some of my questions will be based upon reason as well as Scripture. There is little that should alarm a Christian at such an admission. God created us with the desire for intellectual coherence of all that we believe by faith. It is through our reasoning abilities that we try to make sense of the data of Scripture and our lives into a coherent whole. To deny reason is to deny our faith because ours is a reasonable faith. Of course, reason should not be the judge of Scripture, nor should it be used to deny a clear teaching of Scripture. Faith and reason compliment one another, and they shouldn't come into conflict because we serve a reasonable God.

Having said this, I offer the following ten clusters of questions:

Ten Clusters of Questions

#1

Why is it that the New Testament never states that anyone who has not been baptized

will go to hell? Can we honestly conceive of a loving God who would condemn a person to hell who deeply loved him—except that the person failed to be baptized? It isn't hard to see why many people view us as misguided, legalistic, and cold-hearted. If such a God existed, they would say, he would not be good.

Besides, there is a huge difference between an affirmative statement and a negative one. If I gave someone detailed directions on how to get to my house, I would be telling them the best way to get here. What I would not be telling them is how they can't get here. Telling people how to get here is an entirely different question than telling them how they can't get here. There may be several ways to get to my house. By the same token, by telling us to be baptized God is revealing to us the best way to accept salvation. What he's not doing is revealing that there is no other way to be saved except by being baptized.

#2

Baptism pools (called *mikvehs*) were abundant throughout Israel in John the Baptist's and in Jesus' day. These pools pre-date the preaching of John the Baptist, who baptized Jews in preparation for Jesus' coming. They were used in a ceremonial rite of cleansing in preparation for worship. To these people baptism symbolized purity. Any visitor to Israel today can still see the ruins of these pools at Masada, Qumran, Capernaum, Korazin, and Jerusalem. Is it too hard to suppose such washings were brought into Christianity as a cultural symbol, yet divine requirement, of full commitment? There doesn't seem to be anything transcultural about the act of baptism itself. People from other cultures would not automatically recognize the act of baptism as indicating purity or suggesting full commitment. Perhaps baptism was a divine requirement to a people who understood its meaning. If so, then what

would God think of believers in today's culture who failed to be baptized because baptism was not viewed in the same way?

#3

Isn't it true that throughout the gospels we see a Jesus who is much more interested in heart attitudes than any outward act? While some acts were important (Matthew 23:23), it was the heart that mattered the most to him (Matthew 5-7; 12:33-34). Outward acts of righteousness merely show the inner disposition of the heart.

#4

Paul opposed anything that could be considered a sacred cow in deference to the worship of God himself. The apostle Paul is on record as opposing the rite of circumcision because some Jewish Christians used it to exclude uncircumcised believers from their fellowship. Paul argues against this view in the book of Galatians. Likewise, when the Corinthian believers took undue pride in the person who baptized them, Paul minimized baptism. He wrote: "I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name." He also stated that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach" (I Corinthians 1:14-17). Could Paul really say this if baptism was the exact point of salvation? Even though many Corinthians boasted of who they were baptized by, Paul nowhere commanded them to be rebaptized. He calls them "brothers" (I Corinthians 1:10), indicating Paul thought their baptisms were legitimate ones. If Paul thought they were saved at the point of baptism, shouldn't he rejoice in their baptism, regardless of the mixed motives at work? Paul's response here stands in contrast to his view of those who preached from mixed motives. There he rejoices that the job is getting done regardless (Philippians 1:15-18).

#5

Paul taught baptism as a response to God's grace (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6). But we must ask what Paul might say if he met the legalists among us who border on stressing baptism to the exclusion of grace through faith. His message stressed grace through faith, and surely he would reject anything that would supplant it or displace it. When I have asked students in many of our Sunday Schools what they must do to be saved, most often the answer I hear from them is this: "Be baptized." This is a gross misunderstanding of Paul's message. It leads me to wonder how much Paul would downplay baptism in order to stress Christ. What would Paul say if he saw baptism profaned like the Jews profaned circumcision? Would Paul once again stress "a circumcision of the heart" (Romans 2:29) over the rite itself?

#6

Is God narrow-minded enough to condemn people for minor offenses of ignorance if they earnestly seek him? To answer in the affirmative is to misunderstand the holiness of God whereby holiness is equated with legalistic righteousness, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Who do you think is more valuable to God, someone who loves him, prays daily, studies his word, tells others about Christ, or someone who is baptized and just attends church once a month? I find it extremely difficult to think that God, in all of his intelligence, cannot see life in terms of a series of trade-offs, like most of us do all the time. When our kids offer a sincere commitment to help us around the house, should we condemn them when they forget to do something we consider important? Or should we look past what they neglected to do and note their desire to please us? I don't see anywhere in the Bible where sincerity in devotion to God is outright condemned in non-essential matters. In the case of Christian baptism,

aren't our faith and our love the essential things about the act?

#7

Should the experience of all unbaptized people who claim to be Christians be discounted in total? We use universal experience to argue for the existence of God. Most scholars will also admit that we simply cannot interpret the Bible in a vacuum—that personal experience helps to interpret the Bible—and that anyone who says they discount all experience when coming to the Bible is merely naive. Many unbaptized people who claim Christ as Lord and Savior have received manifestations of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). They testify to answered prayer, they are zealously evangelistic, and have an inner strength they claim could only come from the Holy Spirit of God. I myself experienced this three months before I was baptized.

#8

There are many commands in the Bible that we fail to obey on a daily basis, called sins of omission. Why is it that omitting to be baptized is so grievous a sin when compared to the person who fails to evangelize, or who doesn't care for orphans and widows (James 1:27), or fails to visit those in prison or feed the poor (Matthew 25:34-40)? The legalistic view of baptism makes an unbaptized person one who has committed the unpardonable sin. Is this a just God? Is this a merciful God? Is this a proper view of God's holiness?

#9

God is God. He is not in a box of our making. The Pharisees misunderstood God, although they did their exegesis. Can we be humble enough to admit that the legalistic view may be wrong? There are many people in other Christian churches who read their Bibles and who cannot see it any other way

than what their particular denomination teaches. Some of these people are poor, unintelligent, illiterate, downtrodden, and abused. How will God judge these people because they could not see the error of their church leaders, whom they respected and trusted? While in ministry Jesus showed a special love for these very people (Luke 4:18-19). Would God reject them because they could not see the truth on this issue?

#10

Then there is a very practical problem. I baptized both my son and daughter when they were each ten years old. Most all of us will say that my children, at the earliest stages of their lives, were not yet accountable and so were safe in God's hands. But what if my wife and I misjudged their faith and baptized them before they were fully accountable? If this is the case then, like infant baptism, is their baptism null and void? And what if they are never rebaptized, thinking they had already fulfilled their duty to God? Are they now lost? Then, too, what if we put our children's baptism off because we wanted to make sure they knew what they were doing? Would we

If baptism is the exact moment of salvation, then we dare not baptize our children one day early or one day late.

be placing them in danger of eternal condemnation because they may indeed be accountable to God but not yet baptized? What if they died while we waited an extra year or so? To deny them salvation would place an undue burden upon parents who would be required to decide the exact day each child was ready to be baptized. If baptism is the exact moment of salvation, then we dare not baptize our children one day early or one day late.

Conclusions

The result of all this is that there are cases in which baptism is not necessary for salvation in a legalistic fashion. Surely God is not Pharisee-like in his holiness, but instead desires a loving, inter-personal relationship with

his creatures. Yes, he has commanded baptism as a part of the soteriological process, but only as a loving Father and not a legalistic potentate. He is a personal and loving God who responds to us in personal ways.

Notes

1. While my interests are primarily in asking questions, an adequate description of the nature of baptism can be found in Dr. Virgil Warren's writings. His "cluster concept" of salvation and the interpersonal nature of salvation are extremely important additions to the contemporary discussion—additions with which I am in agreement. He wrote: "In Christian baptism we are dealing directly with a personal God, not an impersonal factory, machine, or legal process."
2. The issue here isn't faith itself, but baptism. Universalism is to be rejected.

John W. Loftus teaches in the Leadership Institute for Great Lakes Christian College in Lansing, Michigan.

Serious Teaching

HOY LEDBETTER

We never had Sunday school classes in the small church which I attended as a youngster. Instead, old and young alike assembled in one barren room to study the Bible under one teacher. The teacher whom I remember best, an unlearned man with great endurance, regularly demonstrated his spectacular success in evading the Pentecostal flame.

I usually finished listening a long time before he finished talking, but, since courtesy was enforced in our congregation, I had no choice but to carry on a painful fight against his sleep-inducing monotone. Even worse, in later years I often found myself having to unlearn the errors he taught me.

But as time went on I also came to realize that, even in such fumbling hands, the word of God lives and abides. In what I would now regard as an exegetical desert, I learned lessons that have greatly affected my life since, and I cannot help wondering how much better off I would have been under a more inspiring instructor, or in a physical

arrangement more conducive to the learning experience.

I have come to believe that the most important thing about our Bible school is not how *well* we teach but how *seriously*. When I went to church as a child I knew that my family, as well as my teacher, took the Bible seriously. And that is why the lessons they gave stuck with me.

I do not suggest that excellence in teachers is not preferable to incompetence, or that poor teachers cannot do considerable damage, but it is a comforting fact that good seed can bear fruit even when planted by a bumbling, misinformed instructor who also sows a few weeds along with it.

Small churches must often depend on teachers who are short on experience and are therefore understandably timid about taking on their task. But they may still be trusted to communicate needed, unforgettable truth to our children. Unless, of course, we neutralize their efforts by our own lack of seriousness.

Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrity* for 15 years, has ministered in both a cappella and Disciples of Christ churches. Presently he, with his wife, Jary, ministers to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Albany, Georgia.

Make a Stand for Unity Next Summer!

LORRAINE & LYNDASAY JACOBS

You are invited to make your own stand for unity next summer by attending the 14th World Convention of Churches of Christ from Tuesday, July 30 to Sunday, August 4, 1996 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada—about 50 miles from the Canadian Rockies!

The World Convention (or "lectureship") is the only global gathering that brings together people from all parts of the "Campbell-Stone" family—Churches of Christ/Christian/Disciples of Christ—from around the world. They gather for fellowship, worship, great preaching, fine music, and significant learning. It is a time of inspiration and encouragement. Children's programs and a youth/young adults convention will run concurrently with the main convention. Everyone is involved in three inter-generational sessions.

Many readers of *Integrity* may not have heard of the "World Convention." The first convention was held in 1930 in Washington, D.C. (Since then it has been held in Australia, Canada, England, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand, Puerto Rico, Scotland, and three additional locations in the USA.) By 1930 the a cappella Churches of Christ were completely separate and support for the convention in the USA came from the Christian churches. With the further division of the Independent Christian Churches and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the major support came from members of Disciples' congregations but always with a strong, loyal minority from those in Independent Christian Churches. A few members of our a cappella churches have always attended and strong leadership has come from people like Leroy and Ouida Garrett. Dr. Garrett is a member of the World Convention Executive Committee.

With the appointment in 1992 of Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs from New Zealand as General Secretaries, the office of the World

Convention was moved to the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville. The Historical Society also seeks to serve the whole "Restoration" family and has two members of the Independent Christian Churches and two a cappella members on its board. Traffic through the archival building in Nashville comes from our whole family.

The international World Convention Executive Committee is making strong efforts to build up fellowship and understanding within the Christian/Churches of Christ/Disciples of Christ family. Our 19th century unity movement has majored in fragmentation in the 20th century. Our movement has become fractured and there is no global picture. In the last three years the World Convention office has located and logged congregations in 159 countries. With our divisions there are about 300 national manifestations of the Campbell-Stone family today. As we move into the third millennium and the third century of our movement, we must ask what we can do about our lack of togetherness.

**Quite simply,
the church cannot preach
the gospel of reconciliation
and practice division.
That is living a lie.**

World Convention is very clear that it is not a union movement. That does not, of course, mean it is against union but that is the business of the churches and congregations. World Convention does—like all of the church must—proclaim the need for unity, and attempts to build up a sense of fellowship, understanding, and common purpose in the body of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. Quite

simply, the church cannot preach the gospel of reconciliation and practice division. That is living a lie.

Next year in Calgary we will have the most representative gathering of our global family that we have had for at least a century. The spirit is moving! Already the number of Independent members that have registered for Calgary is double their attendance at the last three conventions. A cappella attendance will also be very much higher. In Calgary there is an annual convention of all three "streams" of our movement and in 1996 that local convention is merging with World Convention. Very exciting! Rubel Shelly, an a cappella minister from the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, will be preaching on the Thursday evening program.

World Convention provides us all with the opportunity to express our respect for our heritage and provides a means of examining our destiny.

We will meet in Calgary under the theme "A World of Difference," acknowledging that we are a diverse Christian communion, but acknowledging also that Christ does make a world of difference—THE world of difference—to our lives and to the community that bears his name.

Can you plan to be in Calgary and share the unique experience of "World Convention?" Calgary is not too difficult to get to. In the year 2000 we will meet in Australia. Why not make your own stand for the unity of Christ's church by building your 1996 summer vacation around World Convention!

Registration forms and further information about World Convention are available by calling (615) 321-3735, by sending a letter or card to World Convention of Churches of Christ, 1101 19th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212-2196, or by sending an e-mail message to worldconv@aol.com.

Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs are native New Zealanders and the parents of two grown children. In 1992 they were appointed General Secretaries, on a job sharing basis, for the World Convention of Churches of Christ, a global fellowship for members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Church/Churches of Christ (Independent) and the Church of Christ (a cappella) from more than 120 countries. Lyndsay is a retired high school teacher and principal, is a lay preacher, has edited Christian publications, and has been involved in several ecumenical efforts. Lorraine, a retired high school teacher, has served local congregations as a lay minister and preacher, edited Christian publications, and been involved in several world ecumenical projects.

Readers' Response

Every issue of *Integrity* is special to me. I haven't said so for awhile, so here are some comments on the January/February 1995 issue. Bruce Kilmer's "All Things to All People" made me see I've been far too partisan. The views of our national leaders often change, and if we're not independent thinkers with God's word as our base, we find ourselves tossed around by polls and pundits. I agree fully with Bruce's statement that we in churches need not refuse to discuss "issues,"

but we must be careful not to hurt those who don't share our personal views.

Brant Lee Doty puts a face on "Gomer" I've never seen before. Gomer's last statement in brother Doty's story can be mine as well: "All I can say is, God loves me and I am happy. I have learned the meaning of true, unqualified, everlasting love."

Amos Ponder points out our need to study traditions. I vividly remember the large black boards with steps 1-2-3-4-5 to "salvation." I

became a "smart aleck" by condemning my Baptist and Methodist school friends with a glib "thus sayeth the Lord." Over the years I have apologized to them all and confessed my wrong. Now, since our 58th anniversary marking high school graduation, we have sweet, in-depth discussions of faith, God, Jesus, and our great blessings as senior citizens. Thanks, brother Ponder, for "Traditions."

There is much help for me, reviewing Frances Williams' essay on suffering. Her insights bless our discussion group.

The Christian adult single man (letter appeared in Readers' Response) is a brave individual to point out our failures in the churches. I agree totally with him that we have skirted around important, complicated issues to "keep it simple." I look forward to a time when people who are tempted to commit adultery can share as he has with us, yet say, "With God's help I'm turning away from it." Or when a couple of young people in love will admit the temptation to "live together" out of wedlock, yet refuse to be led by a promiscuous society to do it. I wish they could all depend on us to pray fervently for them through all these struggles, not feeling so embarrassed to admit feelings. Knowing *for sure* we'd understand and share our own struggles as this brave man has done. To him I say, "I'm so glad you did not leave." No, your faith is not weak because you continue to struggle. One who would say it is weak is not admitting the struggle with Satan that goes on 'til the end of life. Satan can't touch us because Jesus stands between us and his wiles, but if our eyes and hearts forget who we are in Jesus, we

are vulnerable, to say the least. Isn't "Confess your faults one to another" a *command*?

Marguerite McSpadden
Dumas, Texas

I would like to say that I think the January/February 1995 issue is one of your outstanding ones. I have read it almost cover to cover in the first sitting starting with the editorial. Your editorial, Diane, on Matthew 25:40: "... you did it to one of the least. . . you did it to me" is what I have believed and tried to act on.

Bruce's long article about "All Things to All People" covered a subject that has been uppermost in my mind for years regarding the attitude of those "in authority"—usually led by the preacher—about issues especially that concern women. They assume, of course, Christians should believe in certain things politically. And members of the "silent class," of course, believe what the non-silent class, the men, say. I can remember the ERA. This was effectively squelched nationwide during the '60s by the "religious right." Now, when I think back on it, I burn at the brainwashing I accepted. You put the issue of politics and religion in better perspective and summed it up nicely by stating "what is the cause?"—really, what is the real issue here? "Is it a political agenda or winning souls to Christ?"

And in "Readers' Response," "Name Withheld" was right on the money when he/she said the religious world feels the need to keep their theology simple. He/she said it so well.

Joan Morrison
Columbus, Ohio

He who walks in integrity, walks securely.

Proverbs 10:9

Editorial

(Continued from page 66)

and coping. Despite the restoration plea for unity based on no creed but Christ, much of the teaching in the Churches of Christ came to substitute salvation by right doctrine for salvation by grace. Our culture and society emphasize appearances over substance.

Years of dotting i's and crossing t's cramp our hands and narrow our vision. Hearts grow heavier even as they grow smaller. Legalism makes us hard-hearted. It stifles hope. It is always uneasy with change. With legalism we must put up a façade of strength while our heart longs for acceptance. Finally, legalism kills (II Corinthians 3:6-7).

With so many things working against us, how can we overcome this pattern? How can we learn to accept and experience the all-sufficient grace of God?

In II Corinthians 3, Paul wrote that the eyes of those clinging to legalism were veiled and their minds were hardened. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. We must turn to the Lord, so that the veil of legalism may drop from our eyes and mind. When we "turn to the Lord" we quit trying to do it ourselves; we give up our struggling and groping. We see in Christ the light of God's grace.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (II Corinthians 3:17)

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.**

II Corinthians 13:14

Sometimes turning to the Lord is a gradual process as we learn to trust God's grace more and more for everything: our salvation, our daily ministry, and our very lives. Being aware of the evil in our hearts and the brokenness of our lives makes it difficult to believe that God not only loves us, but has saved us. The years of legalistic sermons and the heaping of guilt have taken their toll on our hearts' acceptance of grace, so that we must rely on God's grace in order to accept his grace.

**When we
"turn to the Lord,"
we quit trying to do it
ourselves; we give up
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We see in Christ the
light of God's grace.**

We pray that in the articles in this issue you will see the grace of God at work, but, even more, we pray that you will experience and accept God's all-sufficient grace for you.

J. Bruce Kilmer
Co-editor

Two Meditations on Sin and Grace

PAT OJA

Meditation #1

"And I said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place."

Have I carried all of the filthiness out of the temple of the Lord? Does this body still bow under the tyranny of sin, clinging to the vestiges of perverted pleasure, while the Holy Spirit yearns for an abiding place? Hezekiah informed the priests that their fathers had done evil in the eyes of God, having turned their faces away from the habitation of the Lord. If my eyes are turned away from the temple of God, does that not mean that I have cast all care for my own spiritual welfare to the winds of Satanic fury? In all logic, turning my eyes from the temple of the Lord is to my own devastating detriment, for the neglect of his abiding place is the neglect of my own body—"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?"

Spiritual apathy may equal physical inactivity in the temporal world, but in the spiritual realm, it is as active as a pounding

Meditation #2

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation."

He is always interceding. He has not come alongside simply to encourage as we stumble under the oppressive cares of this world. He has come to dwell within, that it may be *his* strength which causes our weary shoulders no longer to sag. The God who is our salvation saves us daily from the weight of our own shortcomings, his all-sufficient life chasing out the doubts and fears and breathing into us the sweet fragrance of hope.

sledgehammer, battering away at the foundation of righteousness which supports the temple of God.

"Sanctify yourselves," said the king. In what areas of my life am I not set apart, not a stranger and sojourner? In what areas have I, like Lot, staked my tent dangerously near Sodom? Have I entrenched myself so deeply in the lusts of this world that though my soul is vexed day by day, yet I beg to remain, even as the fiery clouds of destruction draw near? O Lord, save me from this madness! "He gives grace for grace"—Lord, empower me with the *desire* to purify the temple, an overwhelming burden weighing so heavily that it crushes underneath it the lecherous voice of the flesh. The temple must remain pure if the God of Holiness is to dwell within. Search me, O Holy Spirit—has all the filthiness been carried forth from your temple?

Today my burden seems to overwhelm me, but today the Lord says he himself will bear it on my behalf. My knees buckle as the weight grows devastating, but it is when I am driven to my knees that the burden is lifted. The peace which God gives to those whose burden he has lifted cannot be explained, nor even understood, but only experienced. O my soul, cast your burden upon the Lord, for he

(Continued on back cover)