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Integrity

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make yourselves right with God. But it is only through Christ, and Christ alone, that the veil can be removed and your hearts can be softened by the light, wonder, and joy of God's grace and love.

May we all turn away from the letter of the law, and turn to the Lord who is Spirit, who will remove the veil and bring us with him to freedom, as we all behold the glory of the Lord reflected in the face of Christ and find ourselves being transformed from our cravings, presuppositions, sinful nature, and dead legal hearts to life from one degree of glory to another.

With thanks to Paul for his letter to the Corinthians which we call his second, and with hope for us, grace and peace,

J. Bruce Kilmer, Co-editor

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The Letter Kills, but the Spirit Gives Life

When it comes to accepting God's grace, many things can hinder us, such as: past teaching which emphasized "getting it right" and our human inclinations to have clear answers, do it on our own, and to get everyone to agree with us.

Sometimes I wonder, if Paul were here today, what would he write to us in the Churches of Christ? Would he ask us, as he did the churches of Galatia, "Who has bewitched you?" (Galatians 3:3).

Though it is not true of all of us, and many of our greatest teachers have tried to steer us away from our tendencies toward legalism, much of what has come through as Church of Christ doctrine or at least culture has been that "getting it right" makes us right with God — "it" being the plan of salvation, church organization, worship, etc.

Too often we heard what should have been the good news of God's grace in a context where its power was being displaced by our own human system of works. In this human system, salvation is obtained through a combination of Jesus' death, our correct understanding, taking the right steps, and implementing the correct church pattern.

For many of us, the New Testament became the "new law," not unlike the "old law" with its legal demands, over which Christ has already triumphed (Colossians 2:8-15). Why does this legalism continue, even when we know it is wrong, and even when we know it means death? ("For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" —II Corinthians 3:6.)

(continued on page 39)

True Sabbath is the Kingdom of God

DANIEL C. MASSEY

He was more coat than man. Huddled and bundled into the corner of a small synagogue on the Sabbath, he was praying alone. A crowd entered the room, Jesus at the center. Some were reaching out to touch Jesus, others were waiting to be touched, still others had given up hope of ever feeling his healing touch. This is how one man tells of that Sabbath day of healing (Matthew 12:9-14).

I was minding my own business, listening to the teacher called Jesus in the synagogue one Sabbath. I really wanted nothing to do with anybody. That shriveled hand had always embarrassed me. Can you blame me? I was used to the bad hand. Used to eating and drinking with the other one. Writing what I had to, sending the rest to my sons. Wearing coats with overly long sleeves to hide the disgusting thing. Fit for no work but picking up trash for the rich, and only half good at that. God had turned his face from me. Isn't that what the prophets say? At least that day was Sabbath and no one could make me do anything!

Who was the Sabbath day for? The poor, the slave, the alien, even the animals (Exodus 23:10-12). The Sabbath marked out a legal margin of recovery for those at the margin of society. It institutionalized the mercy of God by forcing the rich to give their laborers rest. Without it, God knew rest would be sacrificed to profit. Sabbath healed the inevitable wounds of society: poverty, illness, displacement. Sabbath forced the Israelites to remember they were once slaves and aliens in Egypt with chains of their own.

Sabbath restored balance. It set apart food for the disconnected people. The poor

and the alien like Ruth could glean scraps from the fields because Sabbath law required that crops not be harvested to the edge, nor every grape picked from the vine.

Jesus' bold statement that "The last shall be first" was not entirely new but was born out of Sabbath law. You see, all God's creation deserves healing.

God had turned his face from me, right? I had committed some sin that offended the Holy One and he caused my hand to shrivel. Who knows which sin! I try to keep the law but who's perfect? This was my lot and I held no grudge. He is the Lord, after all. He gives, he takes away. But this teacher Jesus—the things he said! I followed him around the packed synagogue, keeping to the outside edge.

Then, all of a sudden, these Pharisees grabbed me and pushed me to the center. One of them took that hideous hand of mine and held it up before them all! He shouted, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Oh, how embarrassed I was. Jesus started telling them something about pulling sheep out of ditches but I couldn't listen. My heart was pounding and I was looking for a quick exit.

So what could possibly stop that flow of Sabbath healing from God to man and woman? From Jesus to the crippled of Galilee?

In the world Jesus entered, the Pharisees and their power over religious customs could stop that flow. They made the Sabbath so holy, one could not be holy on it. "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They asked a trick question from the start and made Jesus seethe with anger. In one version of this tale, Jesus retorted using blunt

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verbs: Which is lawful? To *do* good? *Do* evil? *Save* life? *Kill* life? (Mark 3:4) You were always *doing something* on the Sabbath, so taken to the extreme you were always wrong. Saving a sheep was legal, but saving a man was not.

The Pharisees used Sabbath as a tool for dominance over those beneath them, the poor, the powerless, the “obvious sinner people” easily convicted by their many rules. The secret to the Pharisees’ power was that *no one could get it all right*. In the strong hands of the Pharisees, Sabbath law became handcuffs to the hopeless masses.

They were still debating the sheep question when the Pharisee loosened his grip on my hand. I stuck it in my coat and was turning away when I heard Jesus say it. He said it right to my face.

“Stretch out your hand!”

The room was suddenly silent. All eyes were on me, the freak. I winced and did it.

And there it was. My old hand, all new again. Strong, beautiful, just like the other. The Pharisees began howling and arguing but I didn’t care. That Sabbath day was mine. No one could ever take it away again.

Jesus deliberately took an action that liberated an *oppressed* man on the Sabbath “in front of everyone.” Jesus was aiming straight to destroy the Pharisees’ power.

As part of the kingdom of God we have a role in bringing God’s Sabbath to earth.

Power over the oppressed is power worth defending, and the Pharisees ended the day plotting with the Romans to kill this liberal Jesus.

By calling out for a restored concept of Sabbath, Jesus turned the social structure on its head. True Sabbath is the kingdom of God. As part of the kingdom of God we have a role in bringing God’s Sabbath to earth. We channel wealth and healing from the top of society to the bottom by simple acts of kindness. But for the community to be brought into balance and healed by the gift of Sabbath, Sabbath must be both *given* and *received*. Clearly a problem lies with those that fail to *give* it, like the Pharisees building cages of rules around people: outlawing healing on a day of healing. These people Jesus fought against, and so should we.

But we must also *receive* the Sabbath given by God. Many of us are daily crushed and oppressed by sin, guilt, nagging unworthiness. Hopelessly connecting our acts of good will to our value as a child of God. That deficit becomes our own withered hand, our source of shame. In order to receive the Sabbath forgiveness we must first admit we are sinners in a state of need.

The Sabbath and the Cross are parent and child.

Only if you receive forgiveness can you give it back. If we are to be the body of Christ, we must give Sabbath without restraint, without being asked, and in spite of the opposition. We must give Sabbath not just to the sick, the laborer, the oppressed, the poor homeless woman, the AIDS patient. These we think of easily. But also every slave to a low-wage job, criminals, illegal aliens. People whose social class you despise, whether it be high or low. Include your children, wife, or husband.

The man with the once withered hand no doubt told his story over and over. That day he was following, listening, no doubt quiet yet eager. Christ without warning

reached into his life and healed him. The man was healed without even asking for it, without reaching out to touch Jesus as many people do in the gospels. He had faith like those who asked, but some people are so in need they cannot reach out.

That is the kind of God that can turn the world on its head. Who can turn you inside out. Sabbath healing comes today not through law, but through us the redeemed children of God. Do not give up hope, and do not stop giving it.

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Living Without All the Answers

CRAIG M. WATTS

One of the most sensitive and insightful authors in our time is Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel. He spent his early teen years in concentration camps where he watched his father die. In his novel *The Accident* he tells the story of a dream a twelve year old boy had when he was asleep during an operation to remove his tonsils.

When he woke up, he was crying. The doctor asked, “Are you crying because it hurts?” “No,” he replied. “I’m crying because I just saw God.” In the dream, he had been taken to heaven. God was on a throne with angels all around. God motioned the boy forward but no matter how hard he walked, he made no progress. Finally, two angels picked him up and brought him face to face with God.

“At last!” he thought. “I can ask God questions that have plagued the wisest people throughout the centuries.” Questions paraded through his mind. What is the meaning of suffering? When will evil be destroyed? When will those who are oppressed be set free? The boy found he couldn’t move his lips. Still God talked to him. All the questions he had and more

were answered. Then the angels picked him up again and took him back to where he began. One angel said, “He has become heavier.” The other replied, “He is carrying an important answer.” It was then that the boy woke up crying. “It doesn’t hurt,” he told the doctor. “I’m crying because I just saw God. He talked to me and I forgot what he said.”

It can be painful not to have answers to heart-felt questions. Answers can satisfy more than just our curiosity; they satisfy our need to believe the world makes sense, and our longing to know there is moral order in the universe. We want to know the truth that will help us cope with reality and enable us to live our lives with confidence.

The author of Ecclesiastes presents himself as a diligent seeker for truth. His questions plagued him day and night. “I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth,” he wrote. But in the end, he found that his wisdom was inadequate for understanding “the logic which governs God’s actions.” (R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989), p. 139). He wrote,

“Humans cannot find out the work [of God] that is done under the sun. However much humans may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though a wise one claims to know, he cannot find it out” (8:17). Despite his best efforts, the author of Ecclesiastes was forced to conclude that he must live without all the answers.

Living without answers can be tremendously unsettling. We long for explanations that help us feel secure. We want to know why things are the way they are. It helps us to feel that we know the rules of reality. Then we can be assured that we have a rightful place in the scheme of things. Answers can enable us to feel confident that the cosmos won't collapse around our ears while we stand helpless. Answers often leave us with the sense that we have some control.

What Is the Truth?

Sometimes in our passion for answers, almost any answer will do to fill the void of uncertainty. I recall a “Calvin and Hobbes” cartoon from several years back. Calvin and his dad are shown watching the sun sink into the horizon. “Why does the sun set?” asks Calvin. His dad replies, “It's because hot air rises. The sun's hot in the middle of the day, so it rises high in the sky.” In the next frame he continues, “In the evening then, it cools down and sets.” In response, Calvin asks, “Why does it go from East to West?” His dad answers, “Solar wind.” Even bad answers are more satisfying than no answer at all.

As I was growing up, I always enjoyed being around Mr. Orwin. He was the father of one of my friends. Whenever I had a question, I could ask him and he would always give me an answer. “Why does the moon look bigger on some nights than it does on other nights?” “What causes freckles?” “When dogs have puppies, why do

some litters have eight puppies and others only have two?” “When do you think we'll have interplanetary travel?” It didn't matter what the question was, he always had an answer. I'd ask my own dad some of these same questions, and he'd often say, “I don't know.” What kind of answer is that? I'll tell you one thing for sure, it's a very unsatisfying answer. But sometimes it's the more truthful answer.

In a turmoil-ridden world like ours, there is great comfort believing there is an absolute truth for every occasion.

Much has been said in the last several years about absolute truth. Absolute truth is truth that is not altered or falsified by the passing of time or change of location or shift of perspective. Absolute truth is unchangeable, universal truth. It is not just a matter of taste or personal inclination, the truth “for me.” Absolute truth is truth for everyone, everywhere, all the time. “My beard is black,” was a true statement ten years ago. But evidently that was not an absolute truth. “My mom is the best mom in the world,” may be the truth for me, but I suspect many of you would not see that conviction as an absolute truth.

Many of those on the religious right have a very long and comprehensive list of things they argue are absolute truths. In a turmoil-ridden world like ours, there is great comfort believing there is an absolute truth for every occasion. Ambiguity and uncertainty are burdensome. To be assured that there is a definite right and wrong for every decision and that there is an indisputable, unchangeable answer for every question can be comforting. I remember a woman who for long decades taught adult Bible study classes. She was frequently heard saying, “In the Bible we can find God's true

answer for all of the world's false teaching.” She firmly believed the definitive answer to every question was available in scripture.

I'm not so sure the Bible was ever intended to be a comprehensive answer book. It is a record that bears witness to the active love God has for us. And, yes, there are truths proclaimed on the pages of the Bible, even some absolute truths. But all the questions we bring cannot be answered by a quote or two from scripture. “Why do the good die young?” “Why do the wicked prosper?” “When does life begin?” “When does life end?” “When will the Lord return?” Some may claim to know the absolute truth that answers questions like these. They delude themselves.

The kind of answers that many of us often want are answers that are beyond dispute. Answers that leave the door open to uncertainty don't provide all the security we would like to enjoy. Explanations that can't pack up all our questions in a neat box may leave too many dangling strings over which we might trip. We want certainty and precision. My son, Jonathan, is filled with questions. On a recent trip he asked how much longer it would be before we would reach our destination. Cindi answered, “About two hours.” “About!” he responded, “I hate that word.” As we ask the big questions of life, we want answers that leave no room for inaccuracy or error. The fact is that neither human reason nor divine revelation gives us all the answers.

Waiting For God

All the searching and study possible won't resolve some of our most meaningful questions. For some of the answers we want, the only thing we can do is wait—wait for God's time. The apostle Paul wrote, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall understand fully” (I Corinthians 13:12).

Having faith is something very different from having all the answers. In fact, faith requires us to live boldly despite a lack of answers. When Abraham was called by God to leave his home and travel to a distant land of promise, Abraham had more questions than answers. But he obeyed God. When Moses was called by God to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, he too acted without all the answers. When Jesus approached Peter, Andrew, James, John and the others and said, “Follow me,” they left their homes and jobs without all the answers.

The seventeenth century mathematician and Christian philosopher Pascal wrote, “If we must not act save on a certainty . . . then we must do nothing at all, for nothing is certain.” When we live by faith we live without certainty and without all the answers. Still we can live with spiritual confidence, based not on the adequacy of *what* we know, but upon the sufficiency of *who* we know, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Craig W. Watts is minister to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky. He has written for *Integrity* since its earliest years.

[Craig and some of his Disciples colleagues have just recently begun a new journal called *Common Ground* which is open forum style, issue-oriented. The first issue, entitled “Must We Hate?” included excellent articles on unity. Upcoming issues will discuss the topics of worship, church and politics, women in ministry, evangelism, war and peace, and revelation. Published four times a year; cost is \$18 “for the gainfully employed, \$12/year for students and others on the brink of starvation.” Write: *Common Ground*, 695 Craigs Creek Rd., Versailles, KY 40383-8909 for a subscription.]

Straight Paths — A Parable

LARRY CLUFF

On a world far away there was a large valley about three hundred miles across. In the middle of the valley was a large monument. It was five miles in circumference and two miles high. It was huge, and it was divinely constructed. That is, it was constructed by divine forces. It was the duty and honor of each person on that world to make a pilgrimage to the sacred monument when they reached fifty years of age. When they finally got to the monument they were taken inside and transformed into wiser, happier, people. It was *the* experience of life for the people of the planet.

To facilitate the pilgrims' journey there were signs and maps literally all over the valley, and even in the mountains surrounding the valley. The maps and signs might say something like, "Go west to the house with the green gate, turn north for exactly seven hundred and fifty yards to the large elm tree. From the tree, follow the winding path until you come to a big rock, then look for another map."

Honestly, it was all very confusing. You couldn't ask someone who had already made the trip because they were instructed not to tell anyone how they had got to the monument. People spent years in the valley following all the maps and signs, seemingly hopelessly lost but unable to leave the valley because of their duty and their desire to reach the monument and a transformed life.

One day a party of new fifty-year-olds reached the crest of the mountains that surrounded the valley and were resting up before beginning the grand quest. They were quietly picking up some of the many maps lying around, discussing them among themselves, when they noticed a lone woman resting close by. She was obviously ready to begin the same quest as they. They also noticed that she didn't have any maps, so they went over to her and offered her some of their maps to help her get started.

"Thank you," she said, "but I'm not going to use any of the maps or signs."

The little group was amazed. Everybody used the maps. Many of the oldest and most treasured traditions of their world were about the use of the maps.

"How," they asked, "do you expect to find your way to the divine monument if you don't use the maps?"

"Look out over the valley and tell me what you see," she said.

"We see trees, rocks, houses, rivers, fields and barns," they answered.

"And one other thing," said the woman. "Because it's so big, you can also see the divine monument, even though it's 150 miles away. I'm just going to keep looking at the monument and walk towards it. That's all."

The small group quickly left the woman and went back to their maps. She was obviously confused.

Can We Trust in Anything Other Than Jesus for Salvation ?

EDWARD FUDGE

It has been said that a question well asked is already half-answered. A recent *Christian Chronicle* editorial queried, "What conditions must one meet to receive grace initially and to continue receiving it?" According to its author, we must believe and obey God to enjoy his grace—although he affirmed that "Christ does not require perfect obedience." I must respectfully disagree with both the question and the answer.

From the Garden of Eden onward, Scripture makes plain that human fellowship with God requires perfect obedience. Equally clear, none of us can bring God such an unblemished life. We all have sinned, and we all continue to fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). And, since the wages of sin is death, every one of us has also forfeited any right to eternal life based on our own performance record (Romans 6:23).

So how can any sinner be saved? The good news is that God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves (Romans 8:1-4). Jesus came to do the will of God (John 6:38; Heb. 10:5-7). In every thought, word and deed, Jesus flawlessly exemplified God's righteous character. For the first and only time in earthly history, God saw a human life lived precisely according to his will. On the cross, Jesus offered that life of spotless human obedience to God (Heb. 10:10; Romans 5:18-19).

When Jesus died, he also received in himself the penalty for sin. To a Jew familiar with God's standards, it appeared that Jesus was a terrible sinner—why else was he hanging on that cross! (Isa. 53:4; see I Cor. 12:3).

The good news is that Jesus did all this in the place of us sinners. His was the perfect *doing*—by which *we* are made holy (Heb. 10:10). His was the perfect *dying*—by which *our* sins are forgiven (Isa. 53:5-6). The gospel is the story of what God has done for us sinners in Jesus. It is "the good news of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13). The work that sets us right with God is finished

Jesus' was the perfect doing; his was the perfect dying.

forever (John 19:30; Heb. 9:12, 24-28). We cannot contribute to it or subtract from it. We can only *trust* it, confident that God is faithful and his promises are sure. None who trust in him will ever be embarrassed or disappointed (I Pet. 2:6; Nahum 1:7).

Whoever truly trusts in Jesus will want to do what he says. That certainly includes being baptized in Jesus' name as a public, visible declaration of the heart-faith that only God can see (Mark 16:15-16; Col. 2:12). It includes observing all else that Jesus has taught, confident of his empowering presence although we do not see him with physical eyes (Matt. 28:19-20). But our obedience will always be imperfect; even our best efforts will always come up short of God's righteous standards. We can never trust for salvation in anything *we* have done.

Scripture does not encourage us to think of salvation as a commercial transaction (we give God something, in exchange for which he gives us grace), or even as a joint

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**In my integrity you uphold me
and set me in your presence forever.**

Ps. 41:12

venture (accomplished by the sum of God's part and our part). It is a free gift, wholly the product of God's gracious love and mighty deeds on our behalf. The better question is not, "What conditions must one meet to receive grace initially and to

continue receiving it?" It is rather, "Can we trust in anything for salvation other than Jesus?" And, whether we look in the Bible, or look in the mirror, the answer to that question is always a resounding "No!"

Edward Fudge works as a private practice attorney in Houston, Texas. He is a member of the Bering Drive Church of Christ.

Is It Grace or Works?

GUY W. LACKEY

In the November/December 1995 issue of *Integrity*, the article "Practical Grace" by Jerome Dowdy was published. It was a very fine article. In fact, I thought it would have been exceptional had two paragraphs, the third and the fourth, been deleted. These two paragraphs carry the idea that we can be responsible for a great percentage of our salvation through the works that we do. Some of the statements made in those paragraphs suggest that our works play the greater part, and grace the lesser part, in our salvation, and that sometimes grace may not be necessary:

Grace covers and overlooks her [the Damsel in distress] limitations when necessary and likewise fills the needed gaps...Grace gives us credit for those few extra inches that we lack to reach it, and God rewards the effort we put forth to attain the goal, rather than condemning the lack of stature, as the Law of Moses did.

"Those few extra inches" suggest, as an example, 95% works and 5% grace. We really need to decide whether we are saved by grace, works and grace, or by works.

God chose the right person, Paul, to explain the answer to our question. He was educated in the law at the feet of Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, yet he was saved by grace during his trip to Damascus. He later penned, "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Under the Law of Moses, works was the means of obtaining salvation, but now grace is that means. Paul explained that Christ is the end of (the)¹ law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. In regard to righteousness acquired by law, Moses said that the one who "does these things will live by them." But of the righteousness that is by faith, it is declared:

The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth you confess and are saved.

As scripture says, "He who believes in him will not be put to shame" (Romans 10:5-10).

Paul is saying that Moses said righteousness is acquired by doing the law, but the righteousness that is by faith (grace) is acquired by belief in and confession of Jesus, which justifies and saves us. Paul is making a contrast between salvation by works or by grace; he's not mixing them. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8). If someone accomplishes 95% works and needs 5% grace, there is still room for boasting because someone else may have accomplished far less percentage of works. Someone might think: I deserve a richer reward than you, because I needed far less grace than you." Sounds like the elder brother in the parable, doesn't it? Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. On what principal? On that of faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law (see Romans 3:27-28).

Purpose of the Law

What, then, is the purpose of the law? Paul said that "it was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). Some may understand this metaphor to mean that the law, as a schoolmaster, taught us to observe law so that when Christ came, there was only need for a small amount of grace. But the word for schoolmaster in Greek was *paidagogos*.² Given an English spelling, it became "pedagogue," with a definition from the Greek as follows: attendant (slave), custodian, guide, literally "boy leader;" the man, usually a slave, whose duty was to conduct the boy or youth to and from school and to superintend his conduct generally; he was not a "teacher" (despite the

present meaning of the derivative "pedagogue").

But let Paul explain it: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Galatians 3:24-25). The *paidagogos* is no longer needed. Why? Because it has taught us what sin is and that we cannot overcome sin by keeping law; we are in need of grace.

Was the law then a bad thing? Not according to Paul: "So then the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good" (Romans 7:12). What problem did the law have? "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death" (Romans 7:10). For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by our sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering (Romans 7:14).

The Law of Christ

But aren't we under law to Christ? Didn't Paul say he was? Yes, but we must understand within the context of his teaching. "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under law, I became like one under law, though I myself am not under law, so as to win those under law. To those not having law, I became like one not having law, though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law, so as to win those not having law" (1 Cor. 9:20-21). To better understand this from Paul himself, we need to look at two more passages.

The first is found in Romans 10:4, which reads literally from the Greek text as follows: "For end of law Christ is for righteousness to everyone believing." This means that if there is another law, it is not a

law for righteousness. The other quote is found in Romans 8:2, and literally from the Greek it reads, "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed you from the law of sin and death." This is the law of Christ and that is the reason verse one in this chapter by Paul could read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Yes, this law freed us from the law of sin and death.

Working Out Salvation

But what about works and good deeds? Aren't we supposed to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling? Let's look at this passage in Philippians 2:2-13: "Therefore, my friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." This working out can only be understood by quoting the next verse as well: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." We work out what God works in. This verse literally reads, "For God is the one operating in you both to will and to operate on behalf of his good will."

The Greek words for "operate" in the above passage are *energon* and *energein*, the root of each you may recognize as our word "energy." So, the word "operate" in the above passage could be translated "energizing" and "to energize." The Greek word for "work out" in the above passage is *katergazesthe*, which is a verb in the middle voice. In English we have active and passive verbs. When the active voice is used, the subject does the acting. When using the passive voice, the subject is acted upon. The Greek of the New Testament had a middle voice. "

The middle voice is that use of the verb which describes the subject as participating in the results

of the action—the subject is acting with a view to participating in the outcome. While the active voice emphasizes the action, the middle stresses the agent. It, in some way, relates the action more intimately to the subject.³

So in our Philippian passage, God is the agent who offers the grace gift of salvation;

God is the agent who offers the grace gift of salvation.

works in us the "to will" and "to act" according to his good purpose; and we participate in the results of the action by letting what he works in us (or salvation and good deeds) flow on through to others, or "work out." Paul expressed this thought in I Corinthians 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Again from II Corinthians 3:5 which reads literally from the Greek: "That we are not from ourselves competent to reckon anything as from ourselves, but the competence of us is from God."

Cheap Grace

At this point we often hear the cry from some quarters of "cheap grace." Do not let it alarm you, for there is no such thing. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our salvation is a gift of grace given by God. The gift of life did not come at a "cheap" price, for his Son gave his life for it so that we could have grace as a gift.

Notes

- 1 I have inserted the word "the" in parentheses in some places for clarity, but please note that the word "the" does not appear in the best Greek texts in those places.
- 2 All Greek references from this point on are from *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2nd Edition, 1979, p. 603.
- 3 From *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* by H. E. Dana, Th.D. and Julius R. Mantey, Th.D., D.D., The MacMillan Company, New York, 1946, p. 157.

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Book Review

The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God

By Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, Basinger.

Published by InterVarsity Press

REVIEWED BY JULIE SHORT

What kind of God created the world? What kind of world did God create?"

Throughout life we may come to times when we realize that our intellectual beliefs conflict with beliefs embedded in childhood. For example, we may honestly *think* of God as a God of grace but *live* our lives in fear. Conversely, our personal experience of a loving, responsive, open God may conflict with our theology of a more restrictive, penalizing or all-controlling God. I have recently been mucking around in one of these periods—at times struggling to sort out what I believe about the nature of God, myself, my relationship with him, etc.; at other times resisting the struggle, trying not to think about it at all. As usual, the torture of stagnation becomes something I no longer want to suffer through and my resistance abates. With time I dig in my heels a little less tenaciously and return to the realm of observing what I truly think and believe, reading scripture and, recently, reading a

book which helped me to think through many of the issues I have struggled with off and on since growing up an adolescent who struggled with the problem of human suffering during the Viet Nam War.

The Openness of God is no small undertaking. In a mere 176 pages the authors, each writing a different chapter, examine the history of various traditional views of God. Many of these traditional views have been heavily influenced and shaped by early Greek philosophers and medieval theologians.

The authors, all of whom are evangelicals who place great emphasis on following the Bible, begin by examining the "Biblical Support for a New Perspective." Through their comprehensive examination of scripture, they demonstrate a loving, dynamic God who interacts with his creatures in a world which he chose to create in the way that he did—a world in which he chose to create creatures who think and make decisions on their own; a world in which all are

invited into a loving relationship with their creator but who are not forced by the creator to open their hearts to him.

The open view of God stresses qualities of generosity, sensitivity and vulnerability more than power and control. It allows us to think of God as taking risks. Instead of locating God above and beyond history, it stresses God's activity in history, responding to events as they happen, in order to accomplish his purposes. Rather than deciding the future all by himself, God made creatures with the capacity to surprise and delight him. Like a loving parent, he rejoices with them when they are happy and suffers with them when they are in pain. In and through everything, God is committed to their welfare and continually works to achieve what is best for them. p. 125.

Additionally, the authors provide a comparative study of various traditional views and an open view on topics such as: the power of God, the knowledge of God, the immutability of God, God's will, and free will of the creature. The final chapter addresses practical implications for an open view of God, leading the reader through an examination of how one's view of God shapes one's view of petitionary prayer, divine guidance, human suffering, social responsibility, and evangelistic responsibility. All the big existential questions are addressed by examining your view of God!

This is a compelling book. It gave me a jump-start on a time of re-evaluation and re-thinking which I had been avoiding. Because of the thoroughness of the book, careful citations, and enormity of the subject matter, it is not a fast read. However, I found it illuminating, thought-provoking,

spiritually freeing, and rejuvenating. As discussed in the book, it is often our very view of God which can keep us from turning to God and having a more meaningful relationship with him. In his chapter on "Systematic Theology," Clark H. Pinnock encourages the reader to reconsider one's view of God and acknowledges the anxiety and discomfort we may experience on this reflective task. He then suggests, "Rather than worry about our discomfort, perhaps we should be concerned about God's reputation. Does it not concern us that God's name is often dishonored because of poor theologies of God? How can we expect Christians to delight in God or outsiders to seek God if we portray God in biblically flawed, rationally suspect and existentially repugnant ways? We cannot expect it." p. 104.

I recommend a thoughtful reading of this carefully written book. Since I finished reading it, I have had a great desire to discuss these ideas with others. It is an excellent book for a small study/discussion group made up of people interested in reading a book of this level and willing to discuss and grapple with their current views of God and the implications of a more open view of God. Pinnock writes:

Many contemporary Christians will not be surprised by the model we call the openness of God or free will theism. They already enjoy a vital personal relationship with God and experience God as dynamically responding to them. Few doubt that what they do in life has an impact on God and calls forth appropriate responses from God. The problem actually lies more in systematic theology than it does in religious experience. For some reason, when we do theology we lose

sight of the openness of God that we experience. There is resistance to conceptualizing it, even though it is existentially familiar (p. 105)."

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Editorial

(continued from page 26)

For one thing, humans crave certainty. We want black and white answers and demand black and white responses. Gray makes us uncertain. Insecure. Uncomfortable.

For another thing, we start with presuppositions that are just plain wrong. The nature of the documents that make up the New Testament does not indicate that the New Testament is (nor does it support later adoption by us that it is) a comprehensive set of bylaws for the church for all circumstances and for all times. Nothing in the New Testament indicates that it was ever intended to provide, or that we should adopt it as providing, a *pattern* for worship, church government, or even salvation. In the New Testament record we see the early church evolving in its understanding about who can be saved (Acts 2; 8; 10; and 19) and what practices are condoned (Acts 15; 16:3; Galatians 2). The New Testament is a reliable record of Jesus and his life and of the life of the early church. But nothing within the documents suggests that they were to become a new law to be used as we have with emphasis on "New Testament authorization." We imposed that after the fact.

Easing the grasp on this resistance can lead to a greater integration of what we say and believe and how we live our lives. *The Openness of God* can help to launch us on this journey.

The purpose of the New Testament letters and treatises was to reveal God and his work in history, not to serve primarily as some kind of church statutes. When we look at the New Testament letters and treatises as statutes and then rely on our ability to understand and keep those statutes in order to be saved, we hold a viewpoint that is actually contrary to the very nature of grace.

The presuppositions about the nature of the New Testament documents being a "new law" fit our desire to have all the answers in black and white and accomplish salvation on our own. Since Adam and Eve, we humans have been tempted to go it alone, to be like God, to substitute our way of death for God's way of life.

So what would Paul say to us today? I imagine he would write something, in the spirit of II Corinthians, similar to this:

Your cravings and presuppositions have combined to bewitch you and create a veil over your minds, hardening them — so that to this day when the New Testament is read, you hear laws and patterns that you think you must understand and keep in order to