

*INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.*

## Integrity

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# Integrity

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## LETTERS

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### A QUESTION OF PRIORITY

Systems don't change people; love changes people.

In recent issues of *Integrity* a debate has been taking place between George Cooper and Norman Parks. Brother Parks feels that the present system of governing churches, the "eldership," is not working. He clearly documents specific instances, and no one would disagree with him in the fact that the system is not perfect. He shows many examples of elders and congregations showing a lack of love towards one another.

He proposes an organic system, which he contends is more Biblical than the one we have now. I am not a Bible historian and do not consider myself in any way capable of disputing that claim; I will leave that to others.

Brother Parks' organic system will accomplish the transfer of power from a chosen few to the whole church. Without love (which the organic system in itself cannot create or provide) dissension, bickering, cliques, and other prob-

lems which are unforeseeable can still arise as easily as in any other system. No mechanism except the dispersion of power has been created to induce a loving atmosphere; that will not accomplish the goal.

The love will not grow because the system changes; the system will change as the love grows. It's like faith and good works. We aren't saved by good works but by faith; however, if we really have faith we will often feel compelled to do good works. If the elders felt a real deep love for their congregation, they would try to set a good example, teach, preach, and help the members; they would not be tyrants. Love cannot be artificially induced by the environment.

It may sound naive, but what we need is a change in attitude; we need more love. We should all adopt the *Integrity* motto: to lovingly "strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and deed . . . toward all men."

SCOTT WEIDNER  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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### THE MAGNETIC CHURCH

In listening to committed Christians affiliated with dynamic churches, I have noticed how often they exclaim with delight, "We are always doing something—there is much more to it than an hour on Sunday!" No doubt that is the secret of their attachment. The opposite is also true: when involvement in church life does not usually reach beyond Sunday, there is neither much commitment nor much joy. The amount of time we feel our church requires of us is a key to its worth to us.

There is a critical dearth of values in our society, and the church has a great opportunity to provide this generation with the certainty they crave. For the simple reason that they are famishing in indecisiveness, our people will be charmed by someone who will spell it out for them in black and white. It is not certainty that turns them off, but arrogance and insensitivity. There was nothing tentative about the convictions of the early saints who turned the world upside down, nor did they speak in muted tones.

A church guided by people who obviously know that the meaning of life is found only in something beyond themselves, and who not only themselves are strongly committed to the practical implementation of that belief in church life but also insist that their fellow Christians share their commitment, will have a magnetic effect on our contemporaries.

Some churches of my acquaintance, trying to recover from the mistakes of the past, have placed a great premium on tolerance. Unfortunately, they have been perceived—and perhaps perceive themselves—as uncertain and indifferent. Religious tyranny we all rightly deplore, but Christian fellowship still entails some demands that must be recognized and communicated. The pain of tolerance we must lovingly bear, but churches which are timid about stressing the requirements of fellowship are bound for oblivion.

—HL

### The Microcosmic Congregation

HOY LEDBETTER

The hungry wolf spots his prey and quietly moves toward it with cautious determination. When the defenseless lamb, suddenly aware of its danger, dashes for safety, the wolf plunges forward. There is a brief cloud of dust, the sound of killing and dying as fang tears flesh, and once again the unredeemed creation groans as creature victimizes creature. Elsewhere one may be suddenly drowning in a flood or perishing in a collision, or slowly starving in famine or losing a battle with disease, or merely suffering the pain of broken relationships.

The possibilities of disaster in this evil world are virtually endless, but there is also the promise that God's peace will eventually prevail, that all of the wrong relationships will be made right. Isaiah foresaw a peaceful kingdom in which "wolves and sheep will live together in peace, and leopards will lie down with young goats." And Christians, according to Peter, not only wait for "new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home," but do their best to make it come soon.

Since we are vital participants in God's plan to redeem the world from all disharmony, we must never neglect our peacemaking potential, no matter how feeble it may seem at a given moment. When God called us into his reconciling community, the church, he qualified us to help him make all things right with each other. However, righteousness is not always perfectly "at home" even in the church, and we are sometimes as much a part of the problem as we are a part of the solution. This is why the New Testa-

ment stresses the ever-present need to maintain the unity of the congregation and urges us to "be at peace among yourselves."

#### The Typical Church

Let us assume that you are a typical member of a typical congregation. You are part of a collection of "brothers" who are charged to "be at peace." The brotherhood to which you belong is quite diverse, and the virtues of some may seem to be nullified by the weaknesses of others. On the one hand, there are the hard-working church workers, who make various provisions for your spiritual furtherance and who exert a corrective influence upon you when you fail to be what you should be.

On the other hand, there are the undisciplined members who neglect their duties to the brotherhood. There are the despondent who are in need of constant encouragement. And there are the weak whose convictions are so tentative that they require continuous help. As a peacemaker among such faulty saints, you will need to be patient and to avoid repaying wrong with wrong.

You may have recognized that the foregoing sketch, while it may adequately describe your own congregation, is actually based upon Paul's well-known exhortation to the Thessalonians: "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working so hard among you by caring for you in the Lord and admonishing you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of the work they do. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers:

admonish the undisciplined, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays wrong with wrong, but always strive for what is good for one another and for all people" (1 Thess. 5:12-15).

Since this whole passage has the unity of the congregation as its goal, it is very appropriate for the exhortation to "be at peace among yourselves" to fall between the allusions to the constructive and disturbing elements in the church, for this is where the "brothers," upon whom the maintenance of right relationships within the fellowship depends, stand.

### Hard-working Church Workers

The first reference in the passage is to a single group of hard workers, whose work consists of "caring for" and "admonishing." Since there is no indication in the text that they "held office" or were specially appointed (we must be careful about reading into this text hierarchical structures of a later time), and since they very well may have been volunteers—the sort of people who usually keep churches going—they may be properly designated by the general term "church workers." But Paul's original word for them implies a considerable effort on their part (they bear "a severe and exhausting burden"), and so they warrant the fuller description of "hard-working church workers."

### Laborious Care

The kind of work these hard-working church workers do is specified both positively and negatively. Positively, they "care for" the brethren. The Greek verb (which is literally "to stand before") can mean either "care for" or "lead," but there is no sharp distinction between these meanings in the New Testament. The Revised Standard Version translates it in Romans 12:8 as "he who gives aid," while Today's English Version renders the plural form as "leaders" in 1 Timothy 5:17: "The elders who do good work as

leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double pay, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." (The word "rule" is correctly abandoned in the latter passage, since it has connotations which are in conflict with express teaching of Jesus.)

The same Greek word is used twice of elders (1 Tim. 3:4-5) and once of deacons (1 Tim. 3:12) in reference to their duty to "manage" their households. "If a man [as a father] does not know how to *manage* his own family," it is asked, "how can he [as an elder] *take care of* the church of God?" It is sometimes assumed that elders (deacons are somehow overlooked in this regard) are to manage the church in the same way they manage their children, i.e., by exercising strict authority over them. But in Paul's question the elder's corresponding duty to the church is indicated by a different Greek word. It means "to take care of," and the other two occurrences of this word in the New Testament are very helpful in determining how an elder "takes care of" the church, and also how his pastoral duty may differ from his duty as a father.

When the good Samaritan assisted the man who had fallen among robbers, "he took him to an inn, where he *took care of* him." And when he left, he told the innkeeper, "*Take care of* him, and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him." This is precisely the way hard-working church workers, including elders, take care of the church: not by exercising authority over others, but by humble and helpful service.

One should not assume from the references in 1 Timothy that elders are the only ones who take care of the church or that they are exclusively in view in the Thessalonian text. To do so would rob the text of much of its meaning. Since the parallel obligation to "admonish" falls on the "brothers" in general, there is no reason to restrict caring for the church to a special group of leaders.

This caring for the church may include

various acts of charity, such as those performed by the good Samaritan, but it also includes much more. We are constantly in debt to hard-working church workers, and although the Bible gives special consideration to "those who work hard at preaching and teaching," there are other areas of service which are not to be overlooked. Take, for instance, what happens every time we go to church. The meeting place is made ready, the service is planned, the lessons and readings are selected and presented, the music is arranged, the Lord's supper is prepared—all of the chores necessary to the conducting of services are done by those who "care for" us. We must never take for granted anything that hard-working church workers do to contribute to our spiritual welfare.

### Laborious Admonition

On the negative side, the hard-working church workers "admonish" us. They impart understanding to us, set us right, have a corrective influence upon us. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, "*Admonish* stresses the act of advising or warning so that a fault may be rectified or a danger avoided." Those who admonish us show us what we are and what we should be. They exhort us to correct our mistakes and amend our lives whenever such is necessary. We need those who, when we fail to be what we should be, will show us what is wrong, will warn us of the consequences of our present life, and will urge us in the right direction. In doing this often thankless work, the hard-working church workers render a vital service.

What should be our attitude toward such valuable people? Not only are we to "respect" them, but we are also to "esteem them very highly in love because of the work they do." We can hardly over-emphasize their importance to us, so we should *esteem* them . . . esteem them *highly* . . . esteem them *very* highly.

The motive for such esteem is "love." Nothing else will do. If the reason for

our respect is less than love—if it is because we are afraid of them or hope to gain some promotion or recognition for ourselves—then we are what James called "judges with evil thoughts."

Moreover, this esteem is "because of the work they do," not (to quote Ernest Best) "because of their official appointment (and the Thessalonian leaders had probably not been officially appointed) nor because they hold a particular office nor even because they exercise a necessary function for the ongoing life of the church, but because of the way they carry out the function which they exercise."

And why this strong exhortation? The unity of the church demands it, because tension so frequently arises between those who take the lead in church work and those with whom they work. No congregation can properly function as God's reconciling community when its members assume a negative or even an indifferent attitude toward their leaders.

### The Undisciplined

Unfortunately, we rarely, if ever, find ourselves in a church that is made up entirely of hard workers. There are usually other Christians whose influence may be quite negative, and who may severely tax the spiritual resources of the brethren in general, but with whom we must deal redemptively. Paul directs our attention to some of these in 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

The first group consists of the "undisciplined." In view of the Thessalonian situation, wherein some were "not busy but busybodies," there is much to be said for rendering the original word in this context as "the idle." But the word (*ataktos*) basically means "not in proper order" and is used in secular literature of a soldier not at his post. It is also used in reference to "one who sets himself outside the necessary and given order." When it is used in regard to work, the stress is on "an irresponsible attitude toward the obligation to work."

As some churches have learned in the



## Playing It Safe

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

*St. Louis, Missouri*

The unity of all believers in Christ has been hindered and postponed by many things. It is time for all men of goodwill to examine their thinking. Regardless of the party into which they have been maneuvered by circumstances, they will never be able to contribute to the oneness of the saints until they rid themselves of some common fallacies which act as impediments to the answer of the prayer of our precious Lord.

One such fallacy is the "playing it safe" syndrome. Many keep aloof from others on this basis. Where scripture has not spoken and the mind of God has not been revealed, the argument is frequently made, "Would it not be safer to do thus and so?" Out of this is born the cults of conformity and the parties of perpetuation. Would it not be safer not to have Sunday schools? Would it not be safer to use one container in the Lord's Supper? Or unleavened bread? Or fermented wine? Would it not be safer to segregate ourselves from others who differ with us about the millennium? The things adopted today merely because they are safer become the dogmas of tomorrow. Sanctified by usage and familiarity they are transferred into the pattern.

The whole attitude assumes that God thinks more of legalistic consistency and correctness of opinion than He does of unity within His family. Yet He has not spoken about these other matters but has repeatedly condemned schism. What we need is not men who "play it safe" but those who make themselves vulnerable. Jesus did this when He left heaven. If He

had subscribed to our thinking He would never have come to earth.

We tend to confuse sameness with saneness. But the sane thinking recall that Jesus not only took the most dangerous step possible, but commanded us to live dangerously. He plainly told us to take up our cross daily and follow Him. He said the only way to find life is by losing it, and losing life is the opposite of playing it safe. We are on the cutting-edge rather than on the dulled and blunted side of life. To promote unity among all believers is not a task for a cowardly and fainthearted person who weighs the results against his own safety and chooses the latter.

We need to get out of our feathered nests and go where the people are. We have quaintly imagined they would all come to us, beating a path to our door to associate with us. Not only have they not done so, but our losses are almost as much as our gains in some places. If a congregation really wants to affect the world for good let it have the courage to go by twos and fours to attend other places—Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Reformed, or whatever. Let them go, not to debate, but to see and understand how people propose to worship God, and why. Let them form friendships and encourage mutual study across lines, preferably in homes.

Are we afraid we will lose some of our members? Perhaps we deserve to lose them! If we must keep people locked up to keep them with us, we do not really

have them at all. It is only free people who can freely associate without fear. We can never grow together while standing aloof from one another. It is only by exchange of thoughts and ideas that mutual

respect for one another can ever be achieved. Playing it safe, as a philosophy of life, would never have allowed Jesus to leave heaven and will never allow us to enter it! □

## Administrative Integrity

NORMAN L. PARKS

*Murfreesboro, Tennessee*

The shocking financial crisis at David Lipscomb College, resulting a year ago in a sudden change of administration, highlights the problem of responsibility-accountability facing the newly arrived middle-class Church of Christ, confronted as it is by a mounting number of church-related institutions.

These institutions—colleges, seminaries, schools of preaching, "Christian academies," elementary schools, elaborate mission structures, radio and TV broadcast programs, child placement institutions, orphanages, senior citizen retirement corporations, and nursing homes, to name some—are constantly pressuring for admission to church budgets and are bombarding members with pleas for contributions, inclusion in wills, and purchase of bonds.

One may concede that their varied institutional goals may be admirable and deserving. But certainly they create a problem of accountability of a most serious nature, when contrasted with that of the leading Protestant denominations, which have overall structures with leashes on their institutions.

One may dismiss the problem of accountability by pleading that fiscal mismanagement, or worse, must occasionally be expected as a part of the universal problem of human nature, and that there

is really nothing which can be done about it except to trust and pray for the leaders of these church-related institutions. How can accountability to the whole brotherhood be demanded, it is asked, when we are composed of some millions of isolated individuals and some thousands of autonomous churches? Certainly the creation of a national structure to shepherd these multiplying institutions is out of the question. But there are means to subject them to the control of public opinion and exercise restraint on the leaders and officials to force a more responsible conduct and effect better housekeeping.

As an alumnus and former dean of David Lipscomb College, I have before me an earnest, tender, and heart-stirring plea from the current president to help meet a financial crisis maturing only a few days away. I taught him when I served as dean there and his very capable wife was my secretary. I hold both of them in esteem. Yet I feel compelled to ask myself what should be the response to the situation in which the unbelievable lack of accountability of the administration to the faculty, the alumni, the churches which include the college in their budgets, and the thousands of supporters of Christian education created a crisis of the first magnitude.

It would probably be impossible to obtain any official confirmation of the facts

of the case, but certain unchallenged claims about the fiscal picture of the college appear to be at least close to the truth. It was claimed and even declared on the witness stand in federal court that Lipscomb was operating "in the black," yet the precipitous resignation of the president in 1977 revealed an operating debt of approximately \$3¼ millions owed to a Nashville bank. Though difficult to believe, it is reported that the board of the college was unaware of this huge deficit until a confrontation was forced by one member. However, since the president was also a member of the board and held

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*We are being very careful not to stir up any complaints about the way we handle this generous gift. Our purpose is to do what is right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of man.*

—1 Corinthians 8:20-21, TEV

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the decisive offices of secretary and treasurer, it certainly seems possible. Equally astounding are the claimed facts that the president was drawing an annual income of \$60,000 in salary and fees, and was paid \$200,000 to resign (an amount equal to \$50,000 a year for the four years he lacked before retirement).

If these widely believed reports are true, we have a case of gross irresponsibility and unaccountability. As to salary, Lipscomb is a small college of 2,100 enrollment and simple administrative structure. In contrast, Middle Tennessee State University is a complex institution of 11,000 enrollment with numerous schools and programs extending through the doctorate. Yet its president's salary is only \$38,000. Moreover, the gap between his salary and that of tenured professors without administrative duties is modest. The gap between the faculty salaries and the

pay of the president at Lipscomb was in-  
defensively wide. His claim of voluntary  
retirement should have meant the end of  
any kind of pay until eligible for retire-  
ment benefits. If a forced resignation, the  
alternative should have been a teaching  
role with a teacher's pay. What apparently  
transpired is utterly without precedent in  
respected academic circles, much less  
within the framework of Christian educa-  
tion in which the principle of monetary  
sacrifice has always been held to be  
fundamental.

The administrator of a college is sup-  
posed to be directly responsible to a gov-  
erning board. To make him a member of  
the board and to confer on him the two  
dominant positions of treasurer and secre-  
tary is, in effect, an abandonment of its  
supervisory role by the board. This situa-  
tion recalls the demise of the Nashville  
Christian Institute, a black educational  
venture in the Nashville ghetto. Its end  
came when this president of Lipscomb  
became president of its board, secretary  
of its board, and treasurer of its board  
and his dean a member of its board. With  
the votes in his pocket, the institution  
was closed down and its endowment  
of \$500,000 given to Lipscomb in spite  
of the bitter efforts of its alumni to  
prevent it.

My wife and I and my two children  
spent approximately 40 years in Christian  
educational institutions in the role of  
student and teacher, and therefore I know  
something of its function and its philoso-  
phy. I taught for as little as \$60 a month  
and never for more than \$175. It would  
not be surprising that I would have to ask  
myself why should I contribute to Lips-  
comb to help make up for a princely sum  
paid an executive to quit after he had  
plunged the institution into a deep oper-  
ating debt? Apart from that issue I do  
believe that there are measures which  
should be taken to bring such institutions  
into a more responsible behavior toward  
their clientele.

Alexander Campbell's solution to the

problem of church-related institutions  
was simple, as revealed in the Virginia  
Constitutional Convention of 1830. He  
fought vainly to write into the constitu-  
tion a ban against "any religious incorpo-  
ration." But since we have them today in  
ever mounting numbers, whose existence  
is encouraged by the tax laws, we need  
to look to means to make them responsi-  
ble. That the need exists is demonstrated  
on every hand. Two foundations estab-  
lished to aid churches and promote reli-  
gion—one in Texas and one in Tennessee  
—have been in the toils of the law over  
fiscal mismanagement and violations of  
their governing instruments. Two of our  
colleges, one on the West Coast and one

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**When one lives in  
the glass house of public service,  
he is entitled to no secrets  
involving that service.**

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in Tennessee, have recently been involved  
in financial scandals. The management of  
one home for children in Tennessee  
has been a source of embarrassment to  
thoughtful Christians. There is overt evi-  
dence that the cost of fund-raising for one  
regional mission program of great size is  
shockingly high, and evidence on others  
is lacking. *The Wall Street Journal*, not-  
ing a mounting failure in church bonds,  
has warned that serious losses may lie  
ahead in this area of financing due to  
over-zealous promoters and want of ac-  
countability.

The growth of authoritarianism in the  
Churches of Christ is fertile ground for  
want of accountability. Self-perpetuating  
"elderships" who rule by divine right have  
set the pattern. Colleges, for example,  
should be communities of educators and  
learners. My understanding of the faculty-  
administration relationship at Lipscomb  
was similar to that of elders and pew oc-  
cupants in the authoritarian church, in  
which the members are merely told.

I can offer no fool-proof solution to  
the problem of accountability of these  
varied church-related institutions, but I  
believe that a step of critical importance  
is full, open public accounting by all of  
them, and the refusal of everybody to  
give support when such accounting is  
withheld. If such a policy had been pur-  
sued at Lipscomb, I am confident that a  
huge operating debt would have been  
avoided and the president's salary would  
have been more modest and more in keep-  
ing with those of his faculty.

What are the means of accounting? It  
seems to me that religious institutions  
ought to meet at least the requirements  
of private business corporations and state-  
owned institutions, which have their fi-  
nances gone over with a fine-tooth comb.  
Business corporations publish the salaries  
of their executives, release financial state-  
ments, and submit to independent audits.  
I would recommend the following stand-  
ards: (1) The budgets of all church-related  
institutions should be open to examina-  
tion by their clientele. (2) The salaries of  
their executives should be published. One  
has no right to ask for privacy in such  
matters. When one lives in the glass house  
of public service, he is entitled to no se-  
crets involving that service. (3) There  
should be an annual publication of all  
gifts received and their donors identified  
except in cases where anonymity is re-  
quested. (4) There should be published a  
full financial statement of annual opera-  
tions. (5) For good housekeeping there  
should be internal audit and to deserve  
the confidence of its supporters, there  
should be an annual independent audit  
and report.

Simple trusting faith should rest on  
solid, concrete evidence. The steps which  
I have outlined, bringing the management  
of these institutions under the searchlight  
of publicity, would act as a major restraint  
on tendencies toward gray or black areas  
and require more responsible behavior.  
If their publics are expected to give, they  
are entitled to know. □

## Grace Frees

TOM LANE

Cincinnati, Ohio

America's judicial system is represented by the famous statue of the woman Justice, blindfolded, weighing the evidence for a conviction. Many Christians see God as being like this Justice: He, too, stands with balance in hand, measuring the evidence of a man's sin-guilt against his extenuating circumstances and good deeds. Trouble is, God, unlike Justice, is not blindfolded. Knowing all things and requiring from each soul a full account of the things done in life, he is a most fearsome Judge.

To citizens of an imperial city famed for its system of law, the apostle Paul wrote of the Christian's salvation in legal language. "By our Lord Jesus Christ," he wrote, "we are justified by faith, and so we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). The key word *justified* is a term borrowed from jurisprudence. It means pardoned, relieved of the sentence for lawlessness. Christians are justified: the God who is Judge sent his own Son to be our Defending Attorney, our Advocate, that God might be just in declaring us free from the penalty due us because of our sins. This, Paul makes clear throughout his writings, God does in view of his own mercy, called *grace*.

God saves us by his grace. He does not expect us to amass good deeds to try to offset the wrong things we have done. But many Christians react toward God as though he does.

What does the Bible say? The New Testament tells us that God, by providing as a gift his own grace as the basis of our salvation, frees us from good works as the means of salvation, and consequently

frees us from the anxiety and guilt which a works-based system of atonement produces.

**GRACE VS. WORKS** Because salvation is a gratuitous gift, we are freed from meritorious works as the means of being justified before God. The New Testament epistles contrast two approaches to salvation. One, which we may call *legalism*—not, strictly, a Biblical term, but a useful one—means dependence on one's own law-keeping or good works for a proper relationship with God. The alternative is salvation by God's mercy, obtained by faith.

Consider the implications of a legalistic approach to salvation. If we are to achieve God's favor on the merit of our own deeds, we must be perfect. Just as a single sin produced the Fall of man according to the Genesis 3 story, so a single sin is enough to mark a person as a sinner. God does not "grade on the curve." We must be flawless in order to enjoy his companionship. "For all who rely on works of the law [i.e., attempted obedience to God's commandments] are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them'" (Gal. 3:10, RSV). No good deeds we may do can compensate for sins we've already committed. One sin, says the Scripture, is sufficient to condemn us.

Fact is, no mere man has ever successfully kept perfect obedience to God's revealed standards of conduct. Nor is it even within man's capacity to do so. The very heart is desperately corrupt (Jer.

17:9). We have, through the bad example and influence of our ancestors and peers from Adam on down, come to harbor a social pressure and psychological predisposition to sin, which we shall inevitably pass on to our offspring. This predilection to sin the New Testament calls our "old nature" (Col. 3:9) which refuses to submit to God's standards and so cannot by its own strength please God (Rom. 8:7-8). We are sinners by nature, and invariably sinners by practice. So no one can be saved by his own goodness: we just can't be good enough.

But Christ has come, bearing a divine lineage and divine nature, to live a perfect life as a man. Now God credits Christ's perfection to the balance sheet of all who place their faith in him. So we, unable to merit salvation by our own efforts, receive God's pardon in virtue of Christ's virtue, as a gift of God's mercy. As the heavens are high above the earth, wrote Isaiah (55:8-9), so God's standards are removed from man's attainments. But, as high as the heavens are above the earth, penned the Psalmist (103:11), so great is God's love: God's grace fills the cosmic gap between our ways and his. There is no other way we could be saved.

Although our salvation comes to us gratis, purchased by God since we are helpless to win it ourselves, God does not force his bounty upon us. To say that salvation is a gift is not to say that we need not consciously consent to it. We respond to God's offer, we receive his gift, by having faith. This God asks.

Faith contains two elements. Faith involves belief, or intellectual assent to the apostolic testimony about Christ. Specifically, we must believe those truths that are fundamental to God's program of salvation. We must believe in the very reality of a God who is willing to grant his friendship to those who seek him (Heb. 11:6). We must accept the deity of Christ (1 Jn. 4:15) and his incarnation (1 Jn. 4:2-3). We must acknowledge the historicity of the saving death and

resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Faith also involves trust. "Trust is more than an intellectual judgment. It involves a commitment of the whole self. It is a decision of the will regarding surrender to a person" (Jack Cottrell, *Being Good Isn't Good Enough*). Not only do we believe in Christ as God's Son and our appointed Savior, we also devote ourselves to him as Lord, depending on him to forgive us our sins and give us the inner strength to live up to his will.

**THE FAITH AND WORKS QUESTION** Some Christians are afraid to say we are saved by faith. They confuse faith with mere belief, then point out that the New Testament asks for obedience (specifically in the matter of baptism) as well. True faith includes that disposition of submissiveness to the divine will which issues forth in acts of obedience to his will. The New Testament speaks, in fact, of faith expressing itself in works motivated by love for God (Gal. 5:6).

Those who hesitate to say we are saved by faith stress the active aspect of our response to God in contrast to the doctrine of "faith only." Faith-only people commit the same mistake as faith-plus people: the mistake of confounding faith with passive belief, the mere intellectual assent to revealed truth. The New Testament often uses *faith* and *belief* interchangeably, but always makes clear that *mere* faith is not enough: faith is active.

At first glance, it seems the principal Scripture passages involved in this issue, the Pauline epistles and James' epistle, are in contradiction on this basic question, Are we saved by faith, or by faith plus good works? Paul says we are saved by faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). James states that faith without works is no faith at all, so that we are saved by works as well as by faith (Jas. 2:24, 26). When we see each apostle's assertions in his own context, the apparent contradiction is resolved.

Paul wrote to counter a heretical movement that was spreading throughout the churches. This movement urged conformity to Jewish law as a proper Christian obligation. Paul explained that the Jewish laws were never meant to be an avenue of salvation (Gal. 3:21). The Jews and Judaizing Christians had misunderstood

### The Desert Transformed

(Acts 8:26-40)

After all my search,  
That God should provide  
Both water and light  
In the desert!  
Not in Candace's court,  
Not in Jerusalem,  
Not even in Isaiah's haunting words  
Was the veil pulled aside,  
But in a fleeting ride with one  
Who knew the Slaughtered Lamb.  
I would have given  
All the treasure of my queen  
To know what God had revealed,  
But it came in the midst  
Of my poverty,  
And gave me more  
Than I could even ask!

—Good News that wet  
The wilderness of my mind  
With the gentle rain  
Of One who, dumb in pain,  
Produced the Words of Life.  
The messenger soon was gone,  
But the message transformed  
The desert to a fertile plain,  
And the Water of the Spirit  
That drenched my clothes  
Began a garden in my heart.  
The treasure now I bring,  
Candace never knew.

—ELTON D. HIGGS

this. Old Testament characters were saved by faith, just as we are (Rom. 4:1-3). By "works," Paul meant, particularly, conformity to Jewish law, and, generally, any attempt to establish one's own self-righteousness. Such meritorious works cannot save, Paul said, because no one can be perfect in his good-deed-doing or in his obedience to Mosaic law (Rom. 3:19-20, 23). Rather, we are put right with God through faith, which he described as active, producing good works as a way of showing God our love for him (Gal. 5:6).

James wrote against a type of faith that was mere sentiment, and not real faith at all because it found no fruition in good deeds. Such bogus "faith" he characterized as "dead." True faith, he emphasized, is active. By "works" he meant good deeds that are the fruit of faith, not attempts to please God to win our salvation in the first place. To James, we are saved by works as well as by faith in the sense that good deeds are a natural, spontaneous outcome of faith, showing faith up for what it is.

Are we to be saved by faith alone, or by faith plus works? Harmonized, Paul and James explain: We are not saved by works that are attempts to establish our own self-righteousness. We are saved by faith alone. But this faith is active. It produces good works to glorify God. It produces obedience to God in baptism and a life of dedicated service to him.

We need not fear to say we are saved by faith. We are. God's grace, appropriated by faith of the right sort, is the ground of our salvation.

**GRACE** Yet, many Christians try  
**VS.** to save themselves by good  
**WORRY** deeds. We get tied-up and  
worried-up with seeking after  
a righteousness of our own initiative.  
God, by saving us in view of his own gracious provision of Christ, relieves us from having to do the impossible, namely, be perfect. And so he relieves us of the anxiety that comes from trying to score points

with him. "When we put our trust in Christ," wrote one theologian, "we are confessing that we are *not* able to be good enough for Heaven; but we also cease to worry about it" (Cottrell, *Ibid.*). Because salvation is a gift, we can get out of the good works rat race and enjoy our salvation.

Because our salvation rests upon God's grace and not on our own merit (of which we have none), we are freed from self-seeking motives in serving him. We no longer serve him out of fear of hell or lust for reward of heaven, for none of our service, strictly speaking, makes the difference for us of heaven or hell. Christ makes that difference! We are not saved by our works, nor damned by our failures. When we fail, we have the promise that we will be forgiven if we ask (1 Jn. 1:9).

Instead, we serve God out of gratitude and love for what he has done for us in giving us the gift of salvation. Our works, it has been noted, are not sin-offerings, they are thank-offerings. By our faith-union with Christ, as partakers of his perfection by God's gracious provision, we already have promise of reward of heaven, and release from the threat of punishment of hell (Rom. 8:1, 17). We serve God, then, to thank him that he has saved us.

Some people, from Paul's day to ours, have reasoned that grace is license (cf. Rom. 6). Since we are saved by grace through faith, it is argued, our good works—or lack of them—do not decide our eternal destiny, and so we can indulge in sin and be none the worse off if we maintain our belief in Christ all the while. (Fantastic as it seems, we've actually heard people speak this way.)

Grace properly perceived is no excuse for indulgence. Grace moves us to godliness and service, rather than making good deeds superfluous: "the grace of God has dawned," Titus 2:11-12 tells us, "and by it we are disciplined to renounce godless ways and worldly desires, and to live a life of temperance, honesty and godliness" (NEB). When we come to him by faith,

God equips us with a new nature, the striving of the Holy Spirit within us in conjunction with our own inner strength, to counterbalance our "old nature" and give us increased capacity to serve him (Gal. 5:16-17). The very faith by which we receive God's gift of grace is of such a nature that it produces obedience. And grace itself disciplines us, with the discipline of love. We react to God's gracious gift of salvation with humble heartfelt gratitude, and a life of godliness and service is the appropriate way to tell God, "Thanks."

Restoration folk, by our advocacy of the faith-plus position and our frequent over-emphasis on what man must do in response to God's offer of salvation, have obscured the role of grace in salvation and made salvation in effect a matter of works. Many of us do not experience the joy of service to God, because our service is essentially service to ourselves, aimed at winning for us the favor of God. Notice how rapidly new converts, who begin their Christian lives with a burst of enthusiasm and gratitude toward God, soon lose their zeal and become bogged down in the treadmill of serving God with a view to reward, and little else.

It is not wrong to realize that God will reward us for our labors on his behalf. The New Testament often dangles the hope of glory before us, but to spur us on to a mature frame of mind in which we serve God out of purer motive: the simple loving desire to glorify him. God's grace being the basis of our salvation, we are free from legalism with its attendant anxiety and self-serving motivations. Because salvation is a gift, we can *enjoy* it. Salvation is ours, we may have "blessed assurance" that it is. We serve God, not with furrowed brow as we keep one eye on the scoreboard hoping we have secured enough good works to earn eternal life, but with joy and love and gratefulness, reveling in his mercy toward us. God has made us free; let us not become entangled again in the bondage of law (Gal. 5:1). □