

Real Faith for Real People
“If Everybody’s Okay, What’s the Problem?”
I John 1:5-2:2

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*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses,
And all the king’s men,
Couldn’t put Humpty together again!*

Like Humpty Dumpty, **WE HAVE A PROBLEM**. The Bible calls that problem sin. *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves”* (I John 1:8). Forty years ago, Dr. Tom Harris wrote a best seller entitled I’m OK, You’re OK. As a tool for analyzing interpersonal transactions, the book was immensely helpful. As a philosophical statement of the human condition, the book is flawed. If everybody’s okay, who’s causing the problem?

Sin lurks in our genes. While we bear the image of God, we also reflect the sin of Adam.

We are baptizing six children this weekend. At each baptism we pray for a child’s sins to be washed away, and that God will clothe them in righteousness for the rest of their lives. Then we will sprinkle some water on that child’s head, remembering the power of water to drown us and to regenerate us. Some say we shouldn’t be doing that to these innocent little angels. But parents know that somewhere around the age of two, these innocent little angels are quite capable of being mischievous little devils.

Our two-year-old granddaughter fell down the steps, knocking out her two front teeth. A few weeks later her three-year-old sister confessed to pushing Carrie down the steps. When you are three, it’s all about me. There’s really not room for anybody else, certainly not pesky little sisters.

Sin creeps into our lives. There has been great debate about posting the Ten Commandments in public places. I’m concerned about practicing them in life. Adultery is still in the top ten. So is lying to get out of trouble, cheating to appear better than we are, stealing to keep up with the Joneses, and coveting what belongs to other people. However, proponents of civil religion want to deny it—the first five Commandments define faithfulness to the Almighty.

The unfaithfulness that disturbed God even more than marital unfaithfulness was spiritual unfaithfulness. *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* *“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”* Do we who profess the faith, practice the faith we profess?

Sin destroys dreams. The word most used in the New Testament for sin is

harmartia. It means to miss the mark. We not only break God's laws, we break God's heart. We scratch in the dirt with the chickens when we were made to soar in the skies with the eagles. We settle for pleasure when we were made for purity. We live for the moment instead of considering the light of eternity. Like Humpty Dumpty, we have a problem.

GOD HAS A SOLUTION. It is called **GRACE**. Wesley defined the moments of grace to be prevenient, preventing, and preparing grace.

The story of the Bible is God's gigantic manhunt for humanity. When Adam and Eve hid in the Garden of Eden, God came searching for them in the cool of the day. When Moses escaped to Midian, God finds him at the burning bush. When Elijah hid in a cave, God shows up for a visit. When Peter hovered around the fire, Jesus caught his eye. Ain't no mountain high enough, ain't no valley low enough, ain't no trouble deep enough, ain't no sin serious enough to separate you from the love of God.

The grace of God is **SAVING GRACE**. It justifies. It pardons. It pays the debt. It sets the prisoner free.

Both Sandy and I have been stopped for speeding in front of the church. The violation cost me \$118.00. She got off free. Some say she is better looking than I and deserved the pardon. I contend she got a gift. She was guilty as she could be. Nevertheless she was set free.

Has anybody ever said it any better than John Newton, who wrote:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.*

There was a time in my life when I cringed at that word wretch. How dare anybody refer to themselves as a wretch? Then I read how slaves were treated on Newton's slave ships. I went to see the movie Amazing Grace and I concluded that even the word wretch was too kind.

So, whether you are an innocent looking lady in a mink coat, or an ornery old sinner treating people like slaves, the mercy and grace of God is available to you.

The grace of God is **SANCTIFYING GRACE**.

There are about two million people behind bars in this country. Sixty-seven percent of those who are released will be back in jail within three years. While the saving grace of God can set our imprisoned souls free, most, if not all of us, will suffer a relapse unless something more takes place. As John Wesley put it, "Methodists not only preach backsliding, they practice it. The recidivism rate of Wesley's converts troubled Wesley greatly. That's why he talked about sanctifying grace, the continual work of God in the human heart making us strong in the Lord and Christ-like in life.

We have a problem. It's called SIN. God has a solution. It's called GRACE.

WE HAVE A CHOICE. IT'S CALLED FREE WILL.

"If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The choice is ours. God respects us so much that he will not force his grace upon us even when it is best for us. So, salvation has an "if" right in the heart of it. The "if" is up to us.

It's time to get real. If we confess...

If confessions were the same as blabbing secrets, Americans would be on a confessional binge. One click on the Internet puts you in touch with the confessions of a window cleaner, a car salesman, a politician, a Washington madam, a dangerous mind, a drama queen.

Confession is radically different than bragging about our sins for the sake of making money. Confession is coming out of denial, becoming honest about our behavior, and facing the hurtfulness of our actions. Confession is King David praying, *"I know my transgressions. My sin is always before me. Against You and You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight."*

Decide to turn around. That's what we mean by repentance.

For three decades Anne Rice wrote dark novels about vampires, witches, and sexual perversions. Her novels sold over a hundred million copies and inspired movies, TV series' and theatrical productions. Then in November of 2005 Anne Rice shocked her publisher and the public with a new book entitled Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt.

Anne explained her spiritual turnaround this way: "For all those years I struggled to find answers to all the questions the Catholic church of my youth failed to answer. Then one day I decided just to go back to God and let him handle the rest. That's what I did."

What would a spiritual turnaround mean for you?

Decide to move on with assurance. Walk in the light. Stay in fellowship. Rejoice in the knowledge that you are a child of God. Enjoy the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We have a problem. It's called sin. God has a remedy. It's called grace. We have a choice. It's called free will. Wouldn't you really like to find peace with God? Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. What all the king's horses and all the king's men could not do, God did through Jesus Christ. He CAN put us together again.