

GETTING A GRIP ON GRACE



When humans encounter the bold and audacious claims of God's grace, we discover our scales and yardsticks to be inadequate. God's dimensions overwhelm our limited minds.

We simply cannot imagine "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18) any more than we can comprehend how many swimming pools it would take to fill the ocean. Paul spoke of futile human attempts to fully understand God's love as seeing "through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV).

When we come to God's grace, the one word that best describes God's attitude and actions toward us, we stagger. God's grace seems too good to be true. *Scandalous. Outrageous. Impossible. Shameless.* Some even use the root word, redefined by human standards, to explain why they believe God's grace to be *disgraceful*.

Because religious legalism is an ever-present spiritual virus, we must continuously celebrate and magnify the glories of grace. Grace is at war with religious legalism. Because humans are constantly tempted to accept convenient and

plausible religious legalisms, freedom in Christ must be relentlessly proclaimed.

Religion is deeply disturbed by God's grace, and thus criticism is often heard when biblical grace is taught. The authentic proclamation of the gospel inevitably produces predictable, knee-jerk protests and outcries branding God's grace as permissive and "liberal."

Apart from God, we cannot humanly perceive grace. We cannot "see" it. It doesn't make sense. God's grace is like the wind, always blowing, always ready to transform us (John 3:8)—as many have said, we only need to hoist our sails.

God's grace is his economy—it's the way he works. Humans (and even some animals) naturally function on a *quid pro quo, you-do-something-for-me-and-I-will-do-something-for-you*, basis. Humans speak of receiving and earning what they deserve—God speaks of giving what cannot be deserved.

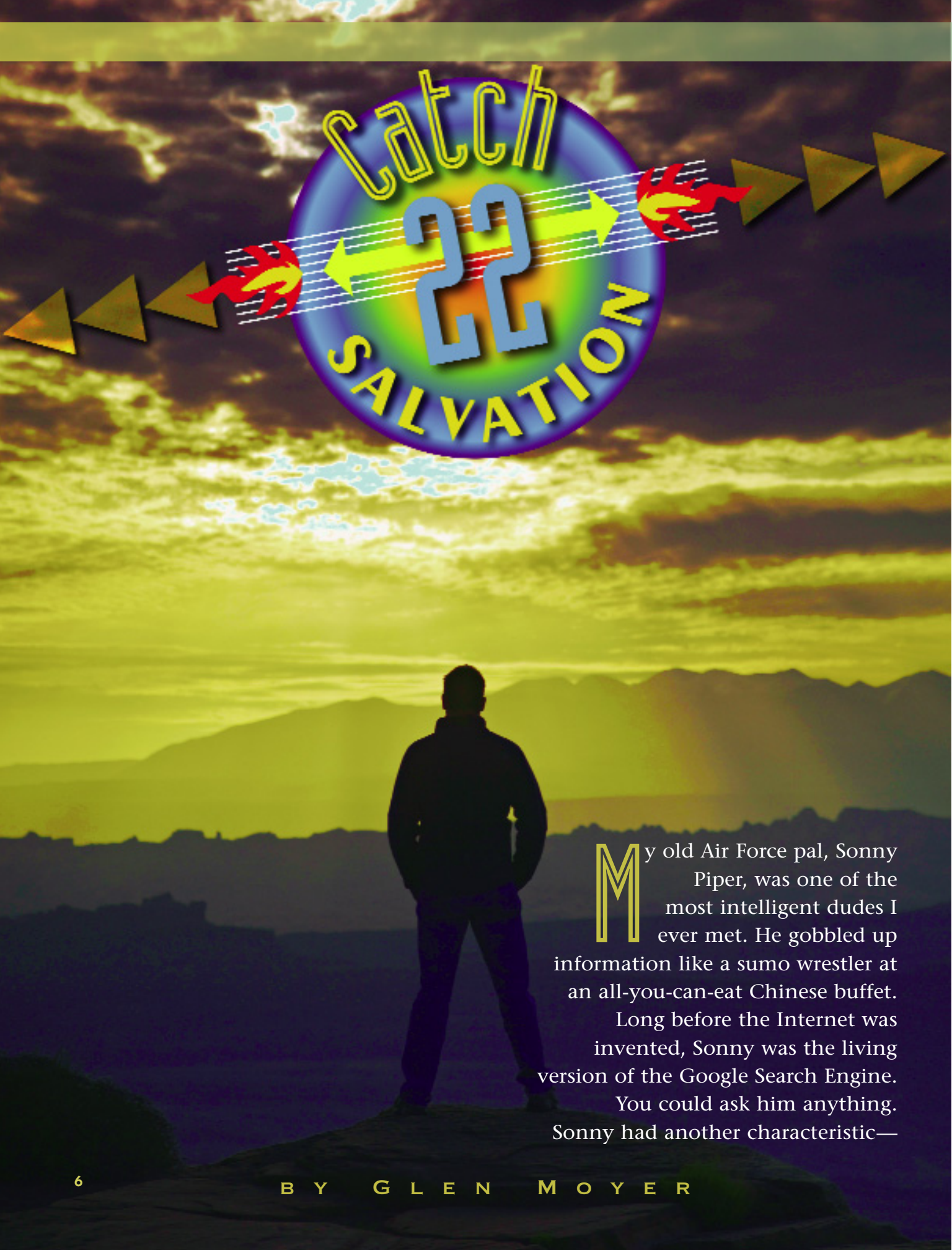
Martin Luther said that "grace is given to heal the spiritually sick, not to decorate spiritual heroes."

Carol Harper, Susan Reedy, Glen Moyer and Richard Kidd share insights about God's amazing grace—a topic we can never hear too much of, for it is the heart and the core of our relationship with God. □

—Greg Albrecht



...OUR SCALES AND YARDSTICKS [ARE] INADEQUATE. GOD'S DIMENSIONS OVERWHELM OUR LIMITED MINDS.



Catch 22 SALVATION

My old Air Force pal, Sonny Piper, was one of the most intelligent dudes I ever met. He gobbled up information like a sumo wrestler at an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet. Long before the Internet was invented, Sonny was the living version of the Google Search Engine. You could ask him anything. Sonny had another characteristic—



he did whatever he had a hankering to do—a scary thing back in the drug crazed, free-sex era of the 1970's. If Sonny wanted to try some psychedelic drug, he would. If he wanted to jump off a high bridge, he would. If he wanted to sleep with a woman, he would. He even went AWOL one time because he didn't want to return from leave yet. If anyone was free, it was Sonny.

As a new Christian in a legalistic church, Sonny's freedom confused the heck out of me. Why didn't he worry about what God—and what religious people like me—thought? When I asked my mentors about this, they told me Sonny was actually deceived by, and enslaved to, the evil one, Satan. His so-called freedom, they said, was a veneer covering his inner evil, loneliness and deep despair.

Okay, but what about Sonny's good characteristics? If Sonny saw someone in need he didn't hesitate to give her or him everything he had. More than once I saw Sonny empty his wallet into the hand of some person he had never met before and never saw again. He rarely said an unkind word to, or about anyone. He smiled a lot more than

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I or my mentors, didn't gossip and seldom swore.

Was Sonny's master, Satan, responsible for these good works, too? I thought my mentors had said it was impossible for the prince of darkness to produce goodness, kindness and love. I was bewildered—but even more so, I was jealous.

By all religious measures Sonny was a lost sinner—he should be a miserable, depressed wreck. Yet he was free and I was the miserable, depressed wreck. While Sonny didn't worry a wink about God, hell or the turned-up noses of those who occupied the holy ranks of the redeemed, those things were

all I could think about. I was constantly doing good works to please God and others, wondering if they were ever enough. I frequently got the heebie-jeebies over whether or not I was going to roast in hell.

This glaring contradiction between me and Sonny tweaked me like a pinched nerve. The simple truth was, Sonny the *lost sinner* was freer than Glen the *saved saint*. It would be many years before I began to realize that much of my

AS A NEW CHRISTIAN IN A LEGALISTIC CHURCH, SONNY'S FREEDOM CONFUSED THE HECK OUT OF ME. WHY DIDN'T HE WORRY ABOUT WHAT GOD—AND WHAT RELIGIOUS PEOPLE LIKE ME—THOUGHT?

confusion could be traced back to my understanding of salvation.

There is a teaching of salvation that is guaranteed to result in tyranny, not freedom. This teaching brings people to the altar over and over again to recite a "sinner's prayer." It leads one to expend their life and energy trying to earn the acceptance of their angry and distant heavenly Father.

I'm talking about the futuristic, anger-driven, wrath-based "Good News" that often masquerades as

cross to pay the price for our sin. As a result, God's great wrath against sin was poured out on the innocent Jesus so we could be saved from hell and have eternal life in heaven. *Well, sort of...*

There is an enormous "Catch 22" to this version of salvation—it only takes effect when a person correctly confesses with their mouth and believes in their heart that Jesus Christ is their personal Lord and Savior. If they do this,

they are instantly saved from hell. If they don't, they're still going to hell, despite Jesus' sacrifice. Can you already see the limitations to freedom beginning to take shape?

I should probably point out that some Christians think that God chooses both those who go to heaven and those who go to hell (predestination). Others think that each person has free will and chooses for himself or herself whether they go to heaven or to hell (free will). Both views inevitably fan the flames of fear and doubt as one tries to determine what their eternal standing with God might be.

I was also taught that "getting saved" is not a guarantee of being saved. The Christian life is an ongoing process of staying saved. We called this "sanctification" or "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." I had to be very careful how I lived and what I believed lest I "backslide" right out of my salvation and end up back in hell again. Or as some would say, I was never saved in the first place.

Finally, a futuristic nature of salvation was harped at me almost daily. We were infatuated with the second coming of Christ; much to the neglect of his incarnation and work on the cross. Salvation was something I was to eagerly look forward to, not something I could daily experience. As a result I was

Christianity. See if this form of salvation, which was delivered to me as a new Christian, sounds at all familiar to you.

"Catch 22" Salvation

As the result of Adam's big "screw-up" in the Garden of Eden, every human is by nature a sinner. Every human thought and action is at its core, evil. God, on the other hand, by nature is absolutely holy and just. He hates sin and has thus assigned every human, by default, to hell for all eternity. However, God in his mercy and grace prepared a way out of this imminent, eternal doom for all humanity. He sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the

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always looking ahead to see if this or that event would bring the world one step closer to the imminent return of Christ. In my anticipation, I looked past the purpose and joy of my salvation that was right before my eyes.

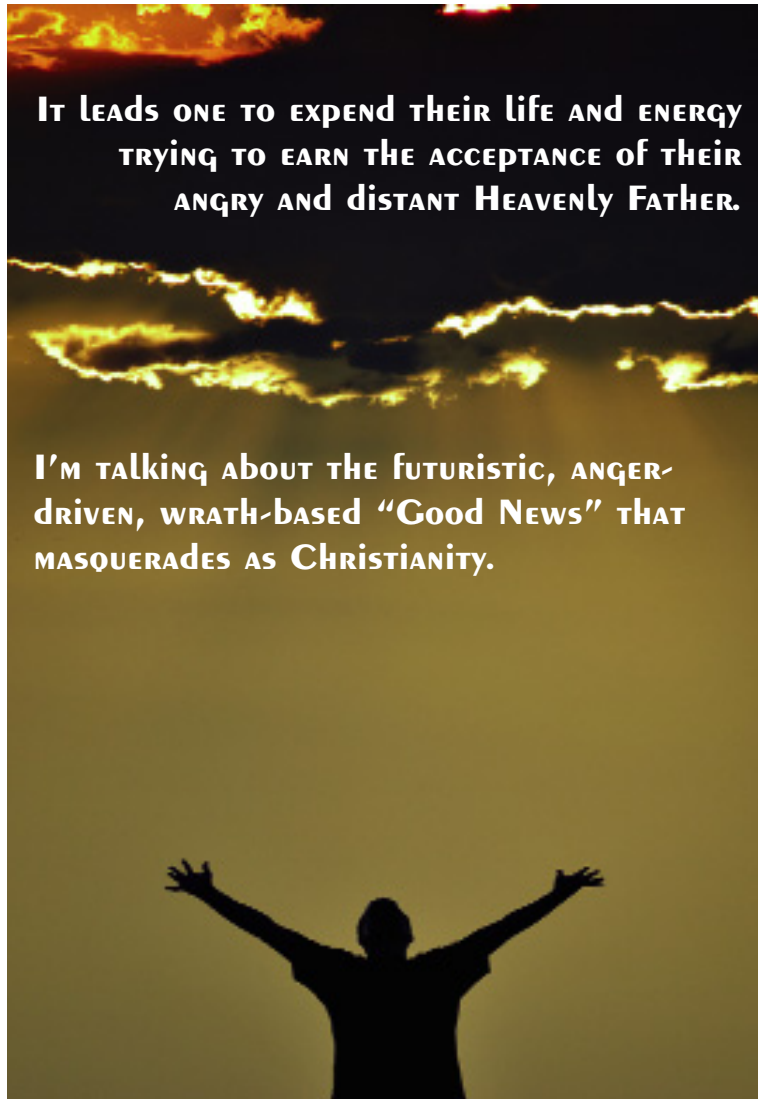
God—In Need of Anger Management?

I now see enormous inconsistencies and problems with the perspective of salvation that was passed on to me. It is a literal mine field of theological bombs that blow the Bible and common sense completely out of the water. It portrays God as inept at dealing with sin as he is at managing his own anger. Instead of conquering sin he can apparently only quarantine it. This salvation ultimately rests on the works of the individual and not God—for unless one says and does the right things, Jesus' life, death and resurrection were all for naught. And in the end, God is not the Lord of all—he's the Lord of a few. Satan has a much larger entourage that follow him into hell's eternal torment than God has singing with him in heaven.

Holy anxiety! No wonder Sonny was freer than I.

I've since adopted a radically different perspective of salvation. I now see God as a loving heavenly Father who is both willing and able to completely conquer sin and death. My salvation no longer depends upon what I say and do but

on what God says and does. I believe the sacrificial work of Jesus does not need my assistance to make it actually work. Best of all I see salvation as something I can



enjoy right now and not merely something to look forward to after I die off.

One time after I tried my best to "get Sonny saved" and go to church with me he declined saying: "I'm cool if you want to talk about God, but I don't buy that religious stuff you're feeding me. All religion does is set people against each other and make you have to

work like crazy to appease some angry god who is just the product of some wild imaginations."

Sonny was more right than I realized. My religion did contain a lot of divisive doctrines and wild imaginations (like thinking I could actually "get Sonny saved" by my efforts). Fear and works-based religion does not save, it makes one

fearful and puts you on the never ending treadmill of works in order to try to earn one's salvation.

I saw Sonny a few years after I abandoned my legalistic religion. He was still a free spirit but somehow subdued. I think he was beginning to tire of his endless pursuit of freedom. Freedom for freedom's sake is not freedom—it is a deep longing that is never satisfied.

Though very much a work in progress, I feel like I have actually found a greater freedom than Sonny. Freedom is no longer something I seek—it is something I have. It is a natural by-product of my salvation that I enjoy almost every day of my life. I'm finally starting to understand Paul's comment that it was for freedom that Christ has set us free. And if I ever have a chance to talk with Sonny again, I

think this might be a freedom he'll be interested in. □

Glen Moyer is a pastor and author—a gifted communicator of the gospel, a storyteller whose insights illuminate the depths of God's mercy and grace. Clothman is the name under which Glen writes his often humorous columns. Read more of Glen's work at www.Clothman.com.

SAVED BY GRACE...AFTER ALL WE CAN DO?

by Carol Harper

One morning I walked into the kitchen and noticed a line of tiny black specs crawling along the edge of the counter towards a loosely capped jar of honey. *Drat*, I thought...ants. They had busily congregated around the jar lid, and then, in an almost parallel line, were making their way back to wherever it was they came from.

"Ant traps" went on the grocery list, and I sprayed the parade with Windex (a pest control guy gave me this tip). Then I placed the jar in the kitchen sink, ants and all, turned on the water, and watched them swirl down the drain.

They were working so hard, I thought, as I realized that I had just played "god" to an entire micro-colony of living organisms. How could I? They're just ants, doing what they were supposed to do. I thought of what specks we are as human beings, crawling all over this earth, working so hard, consuming our own honey jar lids—unaware of the time of our own inevitable deaths. Yet I had not one bit of saving grace for the ants that attacked my honey jar.

In my "former life," I didn't know what grace was, as it is not the focus of the average Mormon. I was taught *The Book of Mormon* quote in 2nd Nephi 25:23: "...for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, **after all we can do**" (emphasis added). This doctrine sum-



marizes grace as thus: Do everything you can *first*, then God will make up the difference. Problem is, this diminishes everything Jesus did when he uttered the words upon the cross: "It is finished." It invalidates the miracle of the Word made flesh, nullifies the purpose of Jesus' life, and renders his sacrifice completely useless.

How much is enough, "after all we can do"? When the Jews did

and the apostles preach the slavery of religious law? Did the father of the returning prodigal son say: "Now, prove that you're not going to be an idiot again. Get to work, boy. Prove to me you're worthy to live under my roof. Then maybe, **after all you can do**, I'll forgive you and throw you a party." I suppose the other son working in the field would have loved

that scenario!

The Book of Mormon claims that grace only kicks in "after all we can do." That means the world is still under the burden of religious rule. So, where's the good news in that? Sounds to me like the love of the Mormon god is conditional:

"Sorry, false alarm, everyone. You're not saved by grace after all; you're still under the condemnation of the law. What, you think just anyone can

I thought of what specks we are as human beings, crawling all over this earth, working so hard, consuming our own honey jar lids—unaware of the time of our own inevitable deaths.

"all they could do" under their Law, was it enough? Did Jesus require the blind, lame, lepers and the sick to do "all they could do" before he miraculously healed them? Did the eunuch go on his way rejoicing because he had a whole lot of work ahead of him? (Acts 8:26-40, KJV used here and throughout article). Did Peter, Paul

*approach the throne of God? (Romans 8:15) Think again! Temple veil torn in two? (Matthew 27:51). Not a chance! Who do you think you are? Get back to work! Prove to me you're worthy. Then maybe, **after all you can do**, I'll forgive you for your sins and give you eternal life."*

Almost by default, Mormonism's pseudo-grace puts self and religious

fear first, rather than God (Exodus 20:1-3). And who determines when you're done doing "all you can do"? *The Book of Mormon*? Joseph Smith? Church leaders? A chart and graph showing all your good deeds? If you're working so hard to save yourself—then, besides a little



where it should have been all along...*on God*.

Remember the story of Moses and the bronze serpent (Numbers 21)? All the people had to do was look at it, and they were saved. Yet still, there were those who refused to look and perished. What part of "look" did they not understand? See, too simple.

Today, the bronze serpent symbol is used by the American Medical Association. I think about all the medicines, such as penicillin—an antibiotic derived from something as simple as mold—that have saved millions of lives. Yet still, there are those who refuse to be treated and perish. See, too simple. Refusal to believe in something doesn't take away the truth of its existence or purpose.

About being born again, Jesus told a confused Nicodemus:

"I have spoken to you of earthly

It's not "after all you can do"—it's after nothing you can do! The entire message of the Bible is about Jesus Christ and his grace...Why does religion put such a damper on this good news? It's too simple.

spare change, what use is a Savior, and therefore, God? It sounds like Mormonism is a religion atheists could really get into.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that *not of yourselves*: it is the gift of God: *Not of works*, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added).

It's not "after *all* you can do"—it's after *nothing* you can do! The entire message of the Bible is about Jesus Christ and his grace. Paul wrote these words in Ephesians long before *The Book of Mormon*, Joseph Smith or the LDS church ever existed. Why does religion put

such a damper on this good news?

It's too simple. God's gift of grace through his one and only Son is too easy. What, so grace gets you off the hook to do whatever you want?

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will

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show you my *faith* by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?" (James 2:18-20 KJV, emphasis added).

James didn't say "I will show you my *worthiness* by what I do." James said, "I'll show you my *faith* by what I do." A Christian's faith and belief is in God. The miracle of Jesus Christ is that, instead of *religious fear*, or the *human self* put first, the focus is finally put back

things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as *Moses lifted up the snake in the desert*, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:11-15, emphasis added).

Faith and belief are all it takes for Jesus to heal and save us. He didn't ask the lame man to *first* walk as far as he could, didn't ask the blind man to *first* take an eye test, didn't ask the leper how many skin treatments he tried *first*, or tell the Roman centurion to *first* perform a ritual or chant for his dying servant. All Jesus asks is for us to

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The miracle of Jesus Christ is that, instead of religious fear, or the human self put first, the focus is finally put back where it should have been all along...on God.





Here we are, like ants in an infinite universe, busily crawling around, vulnerable to destruction at a moment's notice... why is God so mindful of this solar system, this galaxy, this planet?

Apparently, we are worth saving.

believe in him. His grace is sufficient. He did not fail. The Bible tells the entire story of that victory. Who dares take that victory away from the Son of God?

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? *And in thy name done many wonderful works?* And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-23, emphasis added).

Ever wonder why you don't see a cross on a Mormon church? The cross, and its meaning, is not the

focus of those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18-19). Some people are afraid of it. Others scoff at it. Still others prefer not to focus on the blood of the Lamb, but would rather pick apart God's amazing grace so it suits their own doctrines and purposes until there is no meaning, there is no miracle, no grace, no cure...just the focus upon "all you can do."

Here we are, like ants in an infinite universe, busily crawling around, vulnerable to destruction at a moment's notice—yet perhaps the worst kind of destruction is the kind we do to each other, to ourselves, to our souls. But why is God

so mindful of this solar system, this galaxy, this planet?

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"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11: 28-30). □

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G.R.A.C.E.



This is my first year out of seminary, and I'm at my first church. I made it a point to go by and introduce myself to all the pastors near the church.

I'm a Lutheran pastor, but I believe we should not put barriers between our brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what label they wear—be it denominational, nondenominational or independent—because by God's grace we are all made one in Christ.

However, I had a rude awakening at an independent church on the corner. I was told that I did not have the Holy Spirit. They also told me that I do not believe like they do so "get lost," as they slammed the door in my face. I was shocked! This response did not come from the nearby Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Orthodox or independent Pentecostal Hispanic churches that welcomed me, but from a church

that claimed to be full of the Spirit and the grace of Jesus. Was this grace? My secretary, who is Roman Catholic, told me that they had called her an idolater to her face!

Religion can kill for sure. The problem is that this religious “holier than thou” spirit is not only in that church, but I’ve seen it in some Lutheran churches and other churches—even some with the name “Grace” on their marquee. It reminds me of the saying, “Just because you work in a garage doesn’t make you a mechanic, and just be-



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cause you are in church doesn’t make you a Christian.”

While majoring in Communications at John Brown University, a Christian university in Arkansas, I was required to take three Bible/theology courses. Some of the other students complained about it because they did not see the need if they were not majoring in Bible or pre-seminary, but I loved reading the Bible, and since I felt this call to ministry that I kept avoiding, I was drawn to it.

I knew there was something wrong with what I was seeing in the churches that I was raised in and attended. Yes, something was radically wrong. Something was missing! I was taught that I was saved by grace, but it seemed like everything depended on what I did

or didn’t do. The focus was on me instead of God. You had to say a prayer and make a decision for Christ, walk an aisle, fill out a card, pray for a second baptism, and then there was a list of do’s and don’ts.

Grace—Isn’t It Free?

I thought grace was supposed to be free, but I felt trapped and condemned. Then I took a class on the history of the Christian Church and read about an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther.

Luther was a devout Catholic, but he could only see an angry God that demanded perfection. Luther could only see Christ as the judge until he read Romans, which says that righteousness comes from God to us as a gift by faith in Christ Jesus. Luther was set free, and I was set free when I realized by God’s grace that I did not have to do anything because Christ has done it all. My baptism into Christ was enough.

The Church in Luther’s day was selling indulgences for people to earn their place in heaven. The money was used for funding Saint Peter’s basilica, which made Luther angry, because this was against the gospel of Christ. Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church to protest against the anti-biblical practices of the Catholic church of his day. Luther protested those, like Tetzel, who preach only human doctrines, saying “As soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.”

Tetzel, the forerunner of the tele-evangelists! You know who I’m talking about—those smiling salesmen on your TV who beg you to send them money or seed faith to get a blessing from God. Modern day indulgences! Those earthly treasures and relics to buy your way into heaven, so they claim.

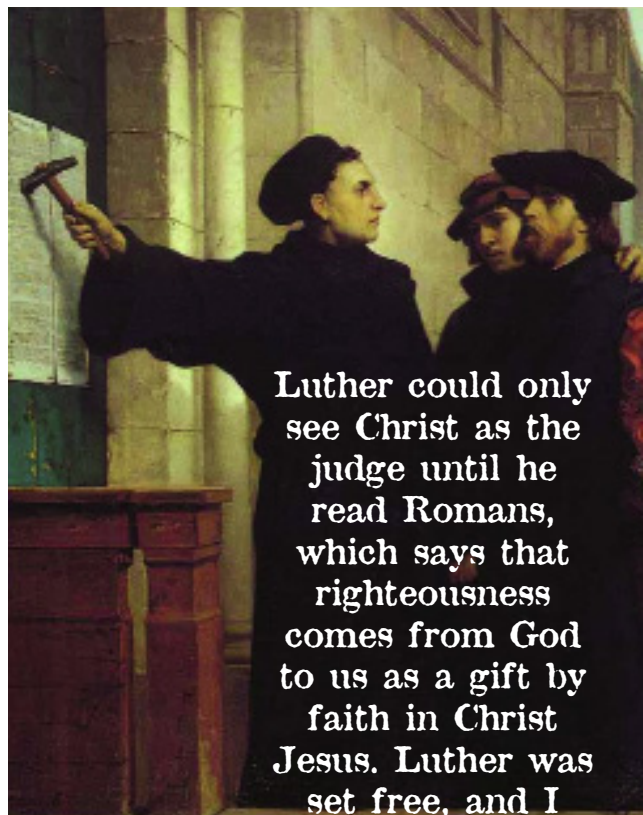
Luther’s 62nd thesis says,

“The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.” God’s gift to us is our Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again and is living through us by faith alone! Faith coming from the source of all truth. I’m not talking about truth as a fact, like “two plus two is four” or the law of gravity. No, I’m talking about truth as a divine person, truth that must be known and experienced—not truth that can be manipulated or controlled or used for somebody’s advantage. Jesus is the living word of truth!

Jesus (the Truth) Sets us Free

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and was God” (John 1:1). The Word became flesh and is living among us. Jesus said those who continue in his words will be his disciples, and they will know the truth and the truth will make them free (John 8:32). Jesus is the truth, and his words create faith and make us free.

The religious leaders thought that because they were Abraham’s children they were slaves to no one. This statement is ironic, be-



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cause at the time these Jewish religious leaders were ruled by Rome. They were also slaves to their religious traditions. They were “good, temple-going” people.

Sound familiar? Before we start pointing fingers at the Jews, we must look at our own history. The religious leaders in Luther’s day thought they were good Christians and their works would get them into heaven.

In our day, how many of us think we are good Christians and look at our works instead of focusing on God’s work alone? What are we ruled by? What are we slaves to?

Reformation means change. Reformation never stops. It’s a life of continual repentance.

Luther got it right, but Luther was fallible, as we all are. Luther had problems with anger and was not always so graceful. Sadly, he used harsh rhetoric against the Jews in his later writings because he could not understand why the majority of Jews could not see Jesus as their Messiah.

Lutherans have rightly condemned these later writings of Luther. One such Lutheran was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who gave his life for standing with the Jews and against Hitler’s death regime in Germany. He knew truth was not the possession of a particular race but truth was encountered in all races and cultures through the work of Christ.

G.R.A.C.E.

Grace has often been used as the acrostic “**G**od’s **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense,” but I suggest a new way of looking at it. Let’s start with the letter **G**: **Grace starts with God!**

Everything begins with God, starting from creation. God still creates and makes all things new! God initiates and always keeps his promises. God, from the beginning of creation, made us all in his image, and it was good! However, something went wrong. The story of Adam and Eve is our story. Adam doubted, disobeyed, turned and hid from God. Eve did so as well. Everyone is guilty, but the

good news is that God does not give up. God seeks us out and says, “Adam, Eve where are you? I love you!” He always has and always will. God promises to make all things new!

The letter R stands for a God who Restores.

God restores the broken relationship with us due to our sin, fear and guilt. God loves us so much that he restores that relationship, but on his terms—not ours.

Abraham and Sarah learned that. You might remember the story where God promised Abraham that he would bless the world through Abraham and Sarah’s offspring. There was a big problem. They were too old to have kids. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, and they both laughed about the idea of them becoming parents. But when God makes a promise, God keeps it. Sarah gave birth to Isaac, and through Isaac God blessed Israel—and in that line comes a Messiah and Savior!

Grace starts with God creating and restoring and continues with the letter **A** **which stands for God’s Acceptance!**

God accepts you just as you are because of Jesus! You are accepted in God’s family! The late Rich Mullins recorded a great song entitled, “Awesome God!” Our God is an awesome God, and his love is so amazing. Grace is awesome and amazing indeed! Through the line of Isaac and David comes God in the flesh. God comes to us in Jesus! All the laws and prophets point to the one who is full of grace and truth. Jesus came to save us from ourselves. Jesus came to show us God’s love and favor. **We are accepted!**

The C in Grace is for Chosen. God created and chose us in God’s image and creation is good, but something went wrong. God chose Jesus to make all things right! God chooses us in Jesus! This gift is for all people!

Now we come to the last **letter E for Exchange.** God not only initiates, restores, accepts and chooses us in Christ—God also exchanges all our sin, pride, self-seeking, guilt

and sorrow for God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus!

Grace is not being enslaved by our works, or patting ourselves on the back for our years of going to church, or obsessing over things like church furniture or the way we always have done things! Grace is the undeserved favor and love of God—his unconditional love! It’s freely given to you with no strings attached!

We have been given this treasure, this gift of God’s amazing grace. This is not the property of one denomination, person or church. This gift is for the whole world!

Today there are people like the young Luther who do not see a gracious God. The gods that are screaming all around us are the gods of success and the perfect life or the angry you-get-what-you-work-and-pay-for god (the god that tells you to pull yourself up by your own spiritual bootstraps and help yourself). These false gods don’t satisfy. They disappoint. They will eventually bore you or work you to death.

The God of the Bible does not disappoint. God comes down to us! God is the gracious and merciful God who reveals himself in Jesus, our Lord who was crucified and died for you and me. God accepts you unconditionally. He loves you. It’s about a relationship with Jesus and others. Remember G.R.A.C.E. begins with **G**od creating, **R**estoring, **A**cepting, **C**hoosing us in Christ and **E**xchanging our old life with the life of Christ. No slammed doors in your face. □

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Grace on a Sugar Cone



by Susan Reedy

Some people say having kids changes you. But I say that having kids *unveils the real you*. Before I had kids I was patient, kind, magnanimous and upright. After kids I discovered I was selfish, petty and downright ugly. My generous spirit grew weary of well-doing when I actually had to do it well. In fact, I now believe that the concept of *parenting* is God's idea of a good joke. He lets us think we're in the position of guiding vulnerable little beings into all knowledge and wisdom, when in reality he is using them to meticulously unfold the truth of our own brokenness. Without my kids, I might still be under the illusion that I was a *good* person. With them, I recognize how desperately I need God's grace.

But before moving too quickly into my lesson on grace, I would like to first address the law. The law demands penalties, and one of the penalties for impertinence in the Reedy household is "losing dessert." A tragedy on any given day, but made worse one fine Saturday afternoon due to the fact that we were planning a family bike ride to Baskin Robbins for a taste of heaven on a cone.

DJ, my youngest and most recently impertinent child, rode

somberly to the store and stood by the door while Dan, Rachel and I taste tested everything from Perfectly Peachy to Jamocha Almond Fudge. It hurt my Mommy heart to watch DJ gazing down at the floor, sliding the toe of his tennis shoe along the valley of grout between the tiles.

The law stinks, I thought. *Maybe today we should have grace*. So, I bought my ice-cream cone, sat across from DJ and took a few long licks. I finally asked, "DJ, do you know what grace is?" Before he could answer, my vociferous seven-year-old, Rachel, blurted out, "It's when you get love when you shouldn't." DJ nodded in agreement, and I launched into an eloquent speech on how God's grace makes us right with him, taking away the punishment we deserve and offering us a new, blame-free, shame-free life. As the dramatic conclusion to my monologue, I handed over my cone.

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DJ barely even glanced at me. His grubby little paws reached out for that cone, and before I could blink an eye, he was gobbling it up with a look of utmost serenity and satisfaction. I felt resentment surge up like hot lava. Apparently, he had not received grace in what I deemed an appropriate fashion. Yet, what did I expect? For him to reject the offer? Say he didn't deserve it? Maybe I expected him to well up with tears, trembling as he took the cone, pausing after each lick to stare at me with saintly reverence—too ashamed to freely consume this unspeakable gift.

As I sat in judgmental resentment, ice-creamless and dejected, God showed up. He patiently

asked if I thought grace came with contingencies. I replied, *Of course not. Grace is a free gift*. Yet, here I was, expecting obsequious belly-crawling. I resented DJ gobbling up that ice-cream cone because he didn't receive it in a posture of supreme unworthiness. God, however, found nothing wrong with DJ's receiving. DJ saw grace for what it was—a good thing worth grabbing. So he took it. But the story doesn't end there.

The next morning—a "hurry-up-and-get-in-the-car-for-church" morning—found DJ dressed and ready and buckled in his seatbelt before I could even begin to holler at him. Shocked at this drastic turn of events, I poked my head in the back door of the van, looked into those beautiful brown eyes and said, "Hey buddy, what's up? You were so helpful this morning. What's gotten into you?" He looked up at me seriously and said, "Well, Mommy, you gived me your ice-cream." Tears welled up in my

eyes as I nodded in agreement, "Of course. I gave you my ice-cream."

That's how the story ends and begins anew. The story of grace turning lives upside down. So, grab hold of the grace God offers, enjoy the sweet flavor of forgiveness and love him right back in complete surrender. □

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