

Trapped by Religion

The word "integrity" comes from a root meaning *whole*, as in the mathematical term "integer," which refers to a *whole* number. A person who hides and splits off from their wounded self is not a person of integrity. They're only half a person. They may know the truth of God's Word, but not the grace of the Father's heart.

The person who misses the importance of God's grace in their spiritual development won't feel safe enough to recognize their true need--nor therefore, the true needs of others. Instead of entering into God's unconditional acceptance through Christ, they set up lofty rules of qualification for themselves and others by requiring impossible behavioral standards. They hide their wounds behind a religious mask--righteously exhorting other people to strive after the "10 principles of a godly woman," to keep the "five standards of biblical masculinity," or to demonstrate the "six marks of a spiritual champion."

Such exhortations often serve to hide the exhorter's shame--and therefore, divert a person from facing their own and taking it to Jesus. That's why the "experts in the law" irritated Jesus the most: "You load people down with burdens that you can hardly carry," He told the Pharisees, "and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46).

The Old Covenant demands obedience and motivates people by shaming them with punishment (1 John 4:18). The New Covenant invites trust and motivates people by promising our acceptance of God as His own children (Gal. 4:6,7). The person who withdraws from their wounds and the Savior it beckons, becomes a slave to the shame of not measuring up. Abandoned by Dad, they look for their identity in work—and often, in women, as in Mom – or men, as in Daddy. Desperate for personhood, and angry for not getting what they need to secure it, they become vulnerable to a host of worldly--and even religious--counterfeits, which promise to silence the voice of shame at last.

New Covenant personhood, on the other hand, requires facing the hard fact that you can't do what God demands, and must cry out to Him for saving power. As Paul confessed, "[E]ven though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it...Who will save me from this body that is taking me to death?" (Rom. 7:18, 24 TEV).

When we don't trust Jesus to bear our shame, we try to cover it with performance. Religiously, we offer sacrifices of time and energy, hoping to compensate for lack of relationship with our earthly parents, others and our heavenly Father (see Matt. 9:13; Ps. 51:17). But we fall short.

People today don't need more performance-based religion; we need a new relationship with our heavenly Father. Yet most Christian teaching for people today simply tells us what we should do--and the terrible consequences of not doing it.

It's basic, Old Covenant religion. On the one hand, it's an appropriate and altogether necessary reminder of God's holy standard to an unprincipled, pagan society. But, like Moses without Jesus, it's eternally deficient. The ultimate purpose of the Law, after all, is to bring us to death and show us just how much we need a Savior (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 3:19-20).

Getting Real

Christianity is not, as "conservatives" presuppose, a moral code. Nor is it, as "liberals" insist, an ideology. Christianity is a relationship with the living Father God. It's God's answer to the deepest longing in a person's heart.

It's time to press on beyond the Law to the fullness of what Jesus died to give people--namely, being a child of God. Herein lies the ultimate " movement," fueled by the central, New Covenant truth:

Jesus did not come to tell us what to do but, rather, to do once and for all what we could not (see Ezek. 36:26-27; Eph. 3:20-21; Phil. 2:13).

We're not saved by *our* promises, but by *God's* promises.

Jesus' saving work in people is prompted, therefore, not by the shame which makes us strive to do right, but by the grace which allows us to be real. It's sustained not by trying to measure up but only by confessing that we can't. It proceeds not from a determination to do the right thing, but from a longing to know the true Father.

This ultimate "movement" is today stirring in the hearts of people everywhere. But it has yet to break forth from the churches, largely because we haven't dared to discover that self-discipline is a fruit of the Spirit--not a natural product of our own efforts, but a supernatural product of the Father's grace (Gal. 5:22-23).

A real person is a person who's *real*. And only real people can lead us into the New Covenant personhood--people who have dared to cry out their own inadequacy and surrendered it to Jesus for Him alone to bear.

In our spiritual journeys, we must progress from the anxious, striving mentality of a slave to the trusting, surrendered heart of a son or daughter. There is the authentic rite of passage into Christian personhood (Gal. 4:1-7). Paul said it well: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received a Spirit of a child of the Father. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

May we be so real.

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