Book 7

Sunday July 24, 1977

"I'M NOT O K: YOU'RE NOT O K: BUT THAT'S O K!"

Romas 3:21-26

One of the more popular ways of understanding behavior in our time is through a system called "Transactional Analysis." According to this system, there are three active elements in each person's make-up; the Parent, the Adult, and the Child. The Parent element in each one of us personifies the "Don't" and a few "Do's" implanted in our earliest years and automatically accepted as the truth. The Child in each one of us represents spontaneous emotion. Both Parent and Child must be kept in proper relation to the Adult in each one of us whose function it is to make everyday decisions.

Thus, the Adult in each one of us, according to this theory, is that part of us that can approach the world openly and reasonably. However this Adult is always being influenced by the Parent or the Child that is also within us. The way in which the Parent and the Child continue to influence our lives determines the nature of our transactions; how we handle situations, decisions and personal relationships.

Because of these interactions of the Parent, Adult and Child within each person, Dr. Harris who wrote the book, "I'm OK; You're OK," says there are four possible life positions. (1) I'm not OK; You're OK. People who continually react to situations and people this way are those in which the Child is still dominant in their personality. (2) I'm not OK; You're not OK. People who see the world and others in this way are those who have given-up and are in despair. Nothing is seen as good. (3) I'm OK; you're not OK. Those who see the world and others in this way are in a kind of criminal position which can justify almost any action. (4) This is the preferred status, according to Dr. Harris--I'm OK; you're OK. This is the response of the mature adult who recognizes the Parent and Child within him or her, has them under control and is at peace with himself and others.

Now as you can see, on the surface, Transactional analysis preaches a gospel of salvation that seems to parallel the traditional Christian idea. It offers an analysis of the human condition, a vision of a brighter personal and collective future for persons, a call to individual change,

and a concrete means of effecting that change. That concrete way is coming to understand the Parent and Child within us, being able to recognize them when they appear and being able to keep them in balance so that the mature Adult within us can emerge and be in control.

Until that happens, the human predicament we are all in, according to Transactional Analysis, can be called sin; indeed Dr. Harris is even willing to call it "original sin."

To be sure, Transactional Analysis as a system and a way of understanding ourselves and others has helped many people. And it does have some of the elements of the Christian understanding of the nature of persons.

However, the Christian faith takes sin, the condition in which we all find ourselves, much more seriously than does Transactional Analysis and thus the Gospel points to another alternative and that is, "I'm not OK; you're not Ok; but that's OK!" This position is more profound and more realistic and even more liberating than the preferred position of Transactional Analysis, "I'm OK; you're OK." This does not mean that Transactional Analysis and the Christian faith are in opposition to each other, but simply that the Gospel takes the human situation one step further.

Let's look at this more carefully! In the Bible we are told plainly that we are not OK. The Apostle Paul put it this way in his letter to the church in Rome-- "For there is no distinction. . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Transactional Analysis agrees with this in part. It says, "Sin, or badness or evil, whatever we call the flaw in our species, is apparent in every person. We simply cannot argue with the endemic 'cussedness' of human beings."

But then the Christian Gospel goes on to say that we are saved, or justified, not just by getting free of the Parent and Child within us--that's never enough; but that we are saved, made right, accepted, by God's Grace which is seen most plainly in Jesus Christ. Thus it is God's initiative, God's Grace, God's forgiveness, God's acceptance of us, God's OK, that ultimately saves us.

For many of us modern day Christians, there are probably few words more confusing to us than "sin" and "grace."

Even though they are well-known words, their meaning is often misunderstood. For example, "sin" in its basic meaning does not mean an immoral act, something we do wrong or fail to do right. Yet we hear people called sinners because of their actions which implies that those who do not do such things are not sinners. But that's not the way the Christian faith understands sin.

Perhaps the best way for us to understand what sin is, is to look at the word "separation." Look at it personally. Each one of us has experienced and still experiences separation in our lives. To be in the state or condition of sin, is to be in the state or condition of separation. This kind of separation has at least three aspects: there is separation between persons; separation of a person within himself or herself, and our separation from God. We never overcome these separations completely.

This three-fold separation constitutes the condition of everything that exists. It is a universal fact. It is the fate of every life. And it is our human fate in a very special sense, for we human beings know that we are separated.

Separation is so much a fact of life that in the Bible when the Kingdom of God is fully realized the picture that is used that of the complete harmony of all living things. Isaiah in the Old Testament put it this way--

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den."

Here is a picture of complete harmony; the opposite of separation. Each one of us has experienced and felt separation in our own lives. We seem to know deep down that we are separated from something to which we really belong and with which we should be united. Who has not, at some time or other been lonely in the midst of a social event? We've all had the feeling at one time or another that what we need most is to be in relationship with another person. And we know what it is to be separated within ourselves. And how often there is the feeling that we are separated from God.

At the same time our deepest desire is to be at-one with someone and to have someone be at-one with us. Much of what we do in life is really an effort to overcome our separation and to find each other and God in fulfilling relationships.

We all know how much a friendly encounter means, especially when we have not expected it; for friendliness means at least a partial overcoming of the separation that produces our sense of loneliness. Such friendliness has something of the quality of salvation within it.

We seek in so many ways to overcome our separation. We seek in marriage an answer to the cold loneliness of separation. Many love affairs are seeking the same thing. Some also seek to overcome the pain of separation by their membership in organizations--civic, social, fraternal and religious, each time hoping to find people with whom they can be close.

People also ~~seek~~ try to overcome their separation by seeking out anyone who will listen to them when they need to talk. And if the listeners have ears to hear, they hear people talk mostly about their loneliness and their sense of separation. This is one reason why counselors are in such great demand. A sign of the state of relation in which we live is seen in the fact that only by paying can some people find someone who will listen to them.

Sometimes our efforts to overcome our separation are made in alienating ways so that we accomplish the opposite of our intention. A person will be mean to get our attention, but that may only drive others further away.

Another sign of the state of separation of life from life can be seen in the struggle for power in which we are all involved and by which we seek to achieve status and control as a way of handling our sense of separation.

We can also see the condition of separation in the attitude of social groups or racial groups within nations and the attitude of nations toward other nations. All race prejudice is part of the condition of separation. Any time we become exclusive and glory in our separateness, then sin is multiplied. Agressive acts, violence, excessive pride--all are products of this condition of separation.

Now the Bible tells us that we can never overcome our state of separation between ourselves and others, within ourselves and with God, on our own power. Friendship helps, depth psychology helps, prayer helps, Transactional Analysis helps, but they are never enough. At times we get fleeting glimpses of the harmony and unity which is the end we all seek and which God desires.

So this morning, think of sin as separation--a condition which exists for all of us. Before sin is ever an act, it is a condition in which we all find ourselves. In that sense, I'm not OK; you're not OK, no one is OK.

But now comes the good news. God says--I accept you anyway. That's OK! What we are now talking about the Christian faith calls "grace." Grace is the harmony of life provided only by God. Grace is that quality in God which seeks to have all things living harmoniously together in unity. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is, when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity," Grace is the reunion of life with life. Grace is the acceptance of that which is rejected, the acceptance of that which is not OK. In God's grace our separations are overcome.

Now we can see how sin and grace are bound to each other. We do not have a knowledge of our separation unless we have to some extent experienced the unity of life; the experience of being at-one with others. Once we have experienced acceptance, rejection is all the more painful.

So in the same sentence that Paul tells us that we have all sinned, that we are all in a state of separation, Paul also gives us the good news that we are saved by God's grace.

What does it mean then to be suddenly or even gradually struck by God's grace? It does not mean that we suddenly believe that God exists, or that Jesus is the Saviour, or that the Bible contains the truth. Nor does grace mean that we are making progress in our moral self-control, in our fight against special faults or weaknesses. Moral progress may be a result of grace; it it is not grace itself; and it can even prevent us from the experience of God's grace because we become too self-righteous.

To experience God's grace means most simply accepting the fact that God accepts you. Such an experience may

come to a person when one is walking through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. Then we are often most open. It might strike us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual. It may strike us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It can strike us when year after year, that longed-for-perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades.

We may experience Grace in a quietness of prayer. It can be like a wave of light breaking into our darkness and it is as though a voice is saying and we know it: You are accepted! You are accepted by that which is greater than you. At that moment we realize, if only momentarily that we are not separated from God, from others or from ourselves. We experience the harmony and unity of all of life and in all creation. We are at-one with it all. I guess there's really no way to adequately describe it. Some call it the experience of being born again when they see all things in a new way. What we know is that even though we are not OK, we are accepted.

When that experience comes, do not try to do anything. Perhaps later you will do something or do much. But grace is not something anyone can earn. That's what makes it grace. Do not seek anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted! You can do that right now where you are sitting--realize and accept the fact that you are accepted, no matter how not OK you might feel. When you accept in your life God's acceptance of you, just as you are, then you are experiencing what the hymn calls--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."

After such an experience you may not be better than before, yet everything is transformed. In that moment that grace conquers sin, it bridges the gulf that separates us from God, from others and from ourselves. Amen.