LAW AND GRACE

All men are born with a moral consiousness--even the most corrupt group has certain standards of right and wrong that reflect their value system (e.g. the Mafia, and Manson's hippie commune). And every man who ever lived in the world falls short of his own value system even. This is God's revelation of conscience which is given to every man and is the first of his three revelations of law.

The second revelation is the law of Moses which was given to the nation of Israel, and the third revelation is the law of the New Testament, which was given in the Sermon on the Mount ~~and in the teachings of~~ Jesus, where he set forth the righteous requirements of God.

Every man who ever lived makes a response to these revelations of God's law, because, either consecously or unconciously, he sees that it is impossible for him to come up to God's standards. His responses can be put in one of two categories which we will call Plan A and Plan B.

Plan A has three options for man. The first is when he goes into open moral rebellion, declaring that there is no God and if there is one--no one can know Him; there is no judgment, no hell, nothing. This is one reason why so may intellectuals so mishandle the Bible. ~~You can bring~~ Present a new fact of history to an intellectual and he will look at it with objectivity because if it is true it will have no particular effect on him, But, if the Bible is true, a man has to humble himself, receive Christ into his life, and make a whole new way of life. What is his way out? TO MAKE SURE THAT THE BIBLE IS NOT TRUE.

The second option in Plan A is for man to head into human righteousness. He concentrates on the idea that he is better than most of the people around him and reasons that, on this basis, he is a good and moral person. His creed; "Never look at God". This type of a man only looks around himself for his own standards. Many of our churches are headed into this option. Their whole creed is good works, social involvement, and no basis for their theology except the society in which they operate. (An example of this is Situation Ethics, resulting in the "New Morality".)

The third option in Plan A is religious righteousness which begins with man de-

ciding that he is not really totally sinful, and that he can do something for God. This leads to legalism where man says he can keep the laws of God and base his approach to God, not on faith, but on his own works and his own efforts. This moves him into traditionalism which is realizing that he can't keep God's rules completely, so he selects the keepable laws and adds his own religious tradition to them. This leads to exclusiveness or "religious righteousness", like the Pharisees. (In other words, "This is our church; here are the rules--if you keep all our rules, you are God's man." GOD DID NOT SAY THAT!) These are the three options of Plan A, and the tragedy is that as long as man responds that way, it's a "bum-trip", and he ends up in hell.

Plan B is the response that is God's plan for man. God is perfect, and man is imperfect; God says that only the perfect can be in his kingdom, so he condemns ALL the sins of man through ONE Perfect Sacrifice, JesusChrist. Plan B begins with the righteous condemnation, not of a sinner, but of a Saviour. God cannot perform an unrighteous act; What made this a righteous act was not that Christ had sinned (because he really didn't) but Christ received all of our sins at the cross, and at that time God judged our sins on Him. Therefore, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is God's revelation of Grace, and the way of forgiveness for man.

The response of the one who believes God's revelation of that sacrifice is twofold: first, He trusts God, believing in the effeciency (complete truth) of the sacrifice, and second, he accepts it. As a result, he is "born again" , or, to rephrase it, he is seen perfect in God's eyes, and has eternal life with Him. The apostle John puts it simply when he said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life". (John 3:16) Plan B's only rule: believe the Father, and accept what God the Son did.

When you really see how much God loves you, you'll want to respond to His love, but you cannot love God without faith. Faith is believing that God and His word is trustworthy. So faith in Christ's sacrifice brings us to salvation and eternal life; it makes God loveable because He is no longer our judge. Through faith in His word (or Plan B) we respond to

God's love as we see ourselves loved and accepted by him, and, in turn, we have love for the rest of the members of the Body of Christ, and love for the whole human race. It is Christ's love which begins to operate in our lives. If we have love without faith in Christ we produce a self-righteous love, limited by man's imperfections and leading to chaos and destruction. Faith, which doesn't produce love is also worthless. It results in self-righteousness, legalism or dead orthodoxy.

What are the results of Plan B besides complete acceptance by God?

1. Absolute righteousness which is perfect: it is the perfection of Christ which everyone must have to come to God.
2. Christian perfection which believers can have in their own lives, not their own perfect righteousness but ~~where they~~ by allowing the Holy Spirit to work through them.
3. This is how God Works: He created a perfect man who chose to live separate from Him. God then took the necessary step to reestablish a personal relationship with man. This relationship restored the perfect communication between God and man. In other words, He does <u>all</u> for man, and man is free to believe, or not to believe. That's what life is all about:Plan A or Plan B.

P.S.In the next issue, Bill will lay on why plan B is the "right-on" way of life.