



by Gordon E. Jackson

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# the missing dimension in TA

Thomas Harris, a popularizer of Transactional Analysis, says that there are four possible life positions:

1. I'm not OK; you're OK.
2. I'm not OK; you're not OK.
3. I'm OK; you're not OK.
4. I'm OK; you're OK.

The gospel says there's a fifth alternative: I'm not OK; you're not OK; and that's OK.

This fifth position is more realistic, more profound, and more freeing than the position "I'm OK; you're OK" toward which TA works. Not that TA and the gospel *have* to be in contradiction or even competition, but TA gives a more limited analysis.

Paul writes plainly to the Romans that we are not OK. In the fifth chapter he says that while we were helpless, Christ died for the ungodly; God showed his love in that while we were sinners Christ died for us; while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

Then Paul says that God made us OK: we are justified by faith; we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; God showed his love to us while we were sinners; we are saved by Christ; and we are reconciled.

While we were not OK, God did something to make us OK. What God has done for us is to accept us as we are. And what are we? Before God we are sinners. That is a rock-hard fact of our existence. Evil is in the world, in us. Although we can be kindly, loving, and just, we are out of plumb when we

are measured against the plumb line of God, as Amos reminds us.

In our idolatrous pretense we want to be God. We fail to grasp the vision God has for our lives. We plainly do not love God with our whole being and our neighbors, including our enemies, as ourselves. We are sinners.

God accepts us as sinners and places his OK upon us. In Christ God has said, "I love you. What you can't do for yourselves I have done for you. You are forgiven. It's as though you had always been faithful. In my sight you're OK." In God's sight.

Remember Paul tells the Romans about his shortcomings: "... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

In the TA formula, the Adult in us struggles against the not-OK feelings of the Child in us and against the prohibitions, judgments, and contradictions of the Parent.

The goal is laudable: to help the Adult in us to be freer, less under duress to the Child and the Parent. The techniques work with some kinds of maladjustment.

But Transactional Analysis is not the gospel. It's not even in the same ball park, though some pastors and a few churches have adopted it as the new panacea. Then it becomes one more modern pretension. It may even give a semblance of psychological health and cloud the deeper illness.

Evil is real and not merely a psychological feeling that I'm not OK. We are estranged. We are sinners. Our sin defines a painful way we are in the world. At bottom we know it's not the Child or the Parent in us that makes us not OK; the Adult within us is not OK! "I'm not OK; you're not OK" is the Adult realization of the gospel's presupposition: we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God.

The gospel position is more profound, for it deals with the depth of a relationship that psychological material is not equipped to handle. That is the task of theology. Theology tells us that we are not OK unless God out of the depths of his love makes us OK.

The goal of Transactional Analysis is freedom. When the Adult does emerge, some psychological freeing takes place. But it's a partial freedom at a relatively superficial level. The gospel frees the whole person when I accept the fact that I am not OK, but thanks to amazing grace that's OK.

The love of God is not a compensation to be earned; it is mine in spite of the fact that I'm not OK. While we were sinners Christ died for us. The result is a steady stream of freedom. His grace flows out of his steadfast love. Our position with God is not our achievement, but his gift with no strings attached. That's freedom. Gospel freedom. A.D.

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