Plain Geometry

I first heard the truth about Christ in an unlikely place: a high school math class.

For years, I had believed that Jesus died to prevent a war between Israel and Rome—at least that's what a Sunday school teacher told me when I was eight or nine. Yes, it's absurd—but I didn't know any better!

I thank God for my tenth-grade geometry teacher, who would sometimes take the final minutes of class to talk firmly but calmly about the gospel. I still remember a Christmas picture on his calendar, in which the infant savior was bathed in light from a hole in the stable roof—but the light was shaped like a cross. Mr. Bowman said that this showed Jesus was born to die, and he explained how Christ had paid the penalty for our sins.

I believed this instantly, and without reservation. Unfortunately, I was heavily involved in the wild-and-crazy lifestyle of the mid-seventies (c.f. "Dazed and Confused"), and my fondness for good times and parties always seemed to defeat my intentions of serving the Lord and living out the gospel. Whether I was "saved" at that time, I do not know—but I sure wasn't living like it.

The next several years of my life, through high school and into college, were a constant see-saw: Once a year or so, I'd recommit myself to Christ and try to walk the straight-and-narrow; but I never succeeded. Usually when I returned to my old ways, I was worse than ever. If you want to know some of the terrible things I did in those days, you'll have to ask me personally, because I don't care to put any of them on paper.

Two things, however, are worth noting:

First, God kept sending Christians into my life who pleaded with me to walk the walk; I can't imagine the grief they must have felt as they watched me go from bad to worse.

Second, I was not a happy man. At the time, it seemed I was having a blast. But in retrospect those were gloomy, hopeless, half-dead days. Folks will tell you college is the happiest time of your life—but I don't think I could go through it again.

In my junior year, I was home for spring break visiting some high school chums, and we'd been out partying half the night. Stopped at a traffic light while heading home alone at 3 a.m., I contemplated the wreck of my life—particularly my utter inability to control my bad habits—and I determined once again to commit my life to God.

In a sense, this was the weakest and most hopeless of the many tries I'd made; I said something like, "Well, God, we'll try it again—if You want to." Apparently, He did.

I remember as if it were yesterday getting up the next morning and casually opening my grandfather's New Testament, which was in my room at home. I came upon the verse, *"We are unworthy slaves; we have only done that which we ought to have done"* (Luke 17:10)—and it really hit home; I'd just given up smoking, and I could almost hear God telling me, "Don't get too cocky—you shouldn't have taken up cigarettes in the first place!" Perhaps for the first time, a Bible verse came home to me in a deep and personal way—a sure sign that the Holy Spirit had made me alive in Christ.

The time between my most important geometry lesson and my brief sojourn at the traffic light was six years—and I don't care to point to any spot in those years where I got "saved." Instead, I point to God, who pursued me like a love-struck bridegroom; I thank Him almost daily that he never gave up working to save me from my own worst self. The way I was headed, if He hadn't saved me I'd be dead by now.

Unshackling myself from years of high living did not prove easy; even now, I still struggle with a badly addictive personality. But God is faithful, and to paraphrase the Apostle Paul, "He who began a good work in me will perfect until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

Paul says elsewhere, *"If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* (Romans 5:10)

That's the hope I hold to now, as I live out a much happier life than the one I was living when God came to get me.