

BREAKING THE HEX

life with God after the cross **KILLED** religion

THE FIELDS BROTHERS

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life with God after
the cross killed religion

Roger Fields and Jeff Fields



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This book is dedicated
to the memory of our dad.

Tom Fields

He consistently demonstrated God's
love and grace throughout our lives.

He made an eternal mark on us
and all of his grandchildren.

We think he would like this book.

what people are saying about this book

In this book, the Holy Spirit has led in articulating an old truth in unorthodox ways that will appeal to both the older and younger generations. However, the experienced cross (Gal.2:20) is little taught in today's church which, too, tends to obscure it to both!

CHARLES R. SOLOMON, Ed.D. author of Handbook to Happiness (Tyndale)

The Fields Brothers have crafted a unique tool to remind you not to fall for the lies of religious performance but to continue to rest in God's provision of grace and relationship. You'll enjoy the simplicity, the humor, and the wisdom in these pages.

WAYNE JACOBSEN, author of *He Loves Me, Finding Church*. Co-author of *The Shack*

Gee whiz, I really liked this book. It covers a lot of ground in a friendly, accessible way and unpacked a lot of baggage for me as a Christian with a serious "dead works" problem. Funny in places, like being given the straight dope by your smarter, cooler brother in others, it's a genuinely solid read. Typography and layout keep it light and fun while still delivering the intended message.

TROY DEVOLLD, TV Producer

My growth as a Christian began when I received an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This book affirms that. Acting and being religious left me empty, obligated and unfulfilled. Thanks, Jeff and Roger, for helping me get back on track.

DOUG FLYNN, 2-time World Series Champion (1975,76 Cincinnati Reds) 1980 Gold Glove Award winner

Fabulous book! Almost every Christian believes that we are saved by grace but everything else is hard work...and this book exposes the danger of that theology. The book will be offensive to some who have spent their life and energy in the religious world. But the beauty is that every word is backed up by the Bible.

HON. TIM PHILPOT, Family Court Judge

This book will free your mind, heart and spirit.

MINDI THORE

Fantastic book! I see so many, many applications for its usage. First, for young people in the age levels from about 5th grade through community college age! Second, for new believers in their Small Group Study as it will lead to deeper sharing from scripture. But, what it does so very well is start from the “simple” and then allow for deeper investigation. Third, for people, regardless of age, who are struggling with grasping the “real truth” of who Christ is in them, and who they are in Christ, it will lead them to that understanding of their true identity.

LARRY COLEMAN, Bible Teacher, Teacher-Trainer, Speaker, Writer

My husband, Mark, is reading it, and he never reads books! He likes the short chapters and large print!

CARLA LAYTON

Just received it today and can not put it down!! Well I did have to go mow but came right back and picked it up again and again! See that is the thing, you don't have to read it straight through, but there is no rule to saying you can't, that is what I'm talking about! Religion, rules, list, rituals etc. etc. etc. This book I believe can help you find true freedom! Take a chance and take a look, I promise you will not be disappointed!! And then Pass it on!

KAYRENE LEWIS, Officer Manager

WOW! I am loving this book.

DIANNE BROOKS

Love this book! It is easy to read (great for people who do not like to read). It is fun to read. (You will find yourself laughing many times as you turn the pages!) But moreover, you will come to understand the deep and profound truth of what was accomplished when Jesus died on the Cross. Many believers actually are under a hex as I was for many years of my life, not understanding the “before” and “after” the Cross. I thought it was up to me to improve my life, to strive to be like Jesus! And I was so wrong! Guilt feelings of not “measuring up” and not “doing enough” disappear as you come to understand the true reality of God's love for you. “Breaking the Hex” is based on Gal. 3:1 and is truly a life-changing read.

CLARA FIELDS, Fields Brothers mom

(Thanks, mom!)

acknowledgments

Roger says, “THANKS!”

Thank you to my amazing wife, Lori, for having the vision for this book. Your passion for this project motivated me to do it. Your input gave me clarity. It would not have happened without your encouragement and prayers. I love you.

Thank you to my mom, Clara Fields, for always believing in me.

Thank you to my fabulous daughters: Terra Harrison, Mica Sims, Shannon Fields and Morgan Fields for making life so wonderful.

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Thank you to Ken Dovey for your insight and passion. Thank you Bruce Chrouser for your spiritual wisdom that always challenges me.

Jeff says, “THANKS!”

Thanks to Mom for your love and support through the years. Thanks for encouraging us to know Christ as our life.

Thanks to our dear friends at Stanton Christian Church in Stanton, KY for your kindness and patience to a 21 year-old “pastor” and his wife many years ago.

Thanks to Landry, Jonathan, Angela, Troy, Josiah and Dawson. I love being your Dad.

Thanks to Nelson Akafuah, Jeff Bailey, and Casey Billings for your friendship and authentic conversations.

Thanks to Wayne Jacobsen and Brad Cummings for letting many of us listen in on your conversations through The God Journey podcasts.

Most of all, thanks to my incredible wife, Teresa, for your love and friendship for almost 35 years. I love you.

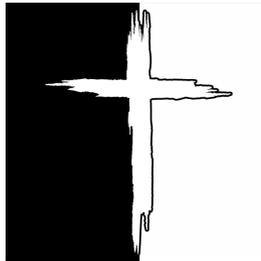
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obituary

Jerusalem – RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION, age 4,000+ years, died A.D. 30 on Golgotha Hill. “Religion” died of wounds while being publicly nailed to a cross with Jesus of Nazareth. Sadly and unnecessarily, survivors include performance, guilt, shame, pressure, fear and condemnation. Religion was a well-known and demanding taskmaster that led to pride and/or frustration. He was preceded in death by generations of well-intended, but self-righteous, people.

Memorial services will be held whenever those in Christ gather to remember the death of Jesus Christ. Supper will be served. Burial will be in the past, once and for all. Arrangements by Grace and Freedom.

Donations may be made (but are not recommended) to the First Church of Try-A-Little-Harder-Do-A-Little-More on Dead-End Street in Never-Enoughville.

so what's this hex?

***You CRAZY Galatians!
Did someone put a HEX on you?***

Galatians 3:1 (MSG)

Everything I thought I knew about
how to live the Christian life
turned out to be wrong.

(Everything. Wrong.)

I was clear about my eternal destiny.
Heaven is my home.
I understood I was forgiven
through faith in Jesus.
And I knew the Bible is inspired by God.
I got that down.

But I misunderstood "the Christian life,"
what it is and how to live it.

I thought I was saved by GRACE
but had to grow by EFFORT.

I thought I was supposed to MAKE it happen.

You know,
to be a follower of Jesus.
Disciple.
Mature Christian.

After receiving God's free gift of salvation
through Jesus, I thought
I was now obligated to do all the stuff
it seemed God expected of me.
And the list of stuff I thought I was
required to do kept growing.
Soon, my obligations as a Christian became a problem.

They crowded out everything
the Bible said I should be experiencing.

God's grace
Freedom
Love of God
Joy
Peace
Relationship with Jesus

Something was missing.
Something was wrong.
Really wrong.

The pressure of trying hard to live the Christian life began to suck
the life out of me. What was once joyful and energizing turned
into an obligation.
A big obligation.
An unsustainable obligation.

I focused on my own spiritual development.
I looked at diagrams that others said would help.
I followed principles I read in books.

After all, isn't that what I was
supposed to do?
Aren't we supposed to try hard to be like Jesus?
Aren't we supposed to follow Him?
Aren't we supposed to be a disciple?

Aren't we supposed to...?
Pray a lot
Read our Bible every day
Share our faith
Tithe regularly
Show up at some/most/all church services
Join a life group
Serve my local church
Listen to Christian music
Support world missions

Is this it? Is this why Jesus came?

Did Jesus leave Heaven,
come to this earth,
live a perfect life,
endure a horrible crucifixion
and rise from the dead
so that we could live a life of
never-ending Christian obligations?
(Really?)

Did I misunderstand how this works? (YES.)
THAT is what this book is about.

It turns out I was under a **HEX**
and didn't know it.

And there is no freedom under the hex.
(HEAVENS TO BETSY!)

what Paul tells the Galatians...

*How foolish can you be?
After starting your new lives in the
Spirit, why are you now
trying to become perfect by
YOUR OWN HUMAN EFFORT?*

Galatians 3:3 (NLT)

THE GALATIAN COUNTY LINE

Welcome to Galatia County.

Galatia County is a nice place to visit but you would NOT want to live there.

Galatia is a big county with numerous cities and towns. It's doing well financially. Lots of hustle bustle.

There are lots of Christians here. Several notable congregations.

(But there is a **BIG PROBLEM** here.)

You will find that the people here are religious.

They believe in Jesus. They know He is the Son of God. They understand that Jesus was crucified for their sins. They know He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven.

The Christians in this county are under...well...a spell.
Some would call it a "curse." Others would call it a "hex."
No matter what you call it, it's not good.

It is odd, because the people here are not practicing the occult.
There are no psychics. No witchcraft. No fortune-telling. No crystal balls.
And yet...the Bible says they are under a hex.

How is that possible?

It turns out that the Christians in Galatia County are not doing anything weird. In fact, they are doing something almost every Christian does on a regular basis.

They are trying to add to the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

They don't know Jesus killed the way of religion on the cross.
They never saw the obituary.

**They think if they
try a little harder,
do a little more,
then God will notice and bless
their extra commitment/dedication.**

We call it the TRY-A-LITTLE-HARDER-DO-A-LITTLE-MORE SYNDROME.
Or as the book of Galatians calls it: "the hex."

They just think they can use their religious efforts to complete what Jesus started. They want to do stuff to get closer to God.
No big deal.

(Scratch that!)

It's a **VERY BIG DEAL!!!**

Actually, they lived in the first century Roman empire so we don't know exactly how they were trying to do this. But we can easily speculate about how they would do it if they lived in our day.

They would have discipleship programs.
Christian life principles.
Bible reading plans.
Charts and diagrams to learn.
Services and schools to attend.
Ministry strategies to master.

And anything else to...
make them more like Jesus,
help them be better Christians,
grow them into spiritual maturity.

You see how this works?
Add-ons.
Do more stuff.
Press in.
Try harder.

Do NOT make your home in Galatia County.
This place will beat the joy out of you.
Suck the life out of you.
Drain your enthusiasm for living.

Don't get dragged into the whole
**the-cross-is-not-enough-for-me-
so-I-have -to-add-more-to-it HEX.**

This book is about
hightailin' it out of Galatia County
to enjoy life with
God your FATHER.

You **CRAZY** Galatians!

Did someone put a **HEX** on you?

Have you taken leave of your senses?

Something **CRAZY** has happened,
for it's obvious that **YOU NO LONGER HAVE**
THE CRUCIFIED JESUS IN CLEAR FOCUS

in your lives. His sacrifice
on the cross was certainly set before
you clearly enough.

Galatians 3:1 (The Message Bible)

Read it again.
(S-L-O-W-L-Y...please!)

here

we

go

I.

How The Cross Disrupted Everything



*"For I decided to know nothing among you
except Jesus Christ and him **CRUCIFIED.**"*

1 Corinthians 2:2

BEFORE the cross

AFTER the cross



The cross changed everything...
and still changes everything.



I was tryin' hard

I was trying hard to be a good Christian. Really.

But it seemed I was getting nowhere.

I was doing everything I was told I should do.

I was...

praying

reading my Bible

serving in church

avoiding most sins (at least the major ones)

sharing my faith when I got the opportunity

tithing and giving

fighting Satan

Then it dawned on me. Jews in the Old Testament under the Law of Moses had it easier than I did.

How did they get off so easy?

What did they have to do that was so tough?

The Jews had to take the day off on Saturday.

(No problem.)

They had to attend six feasts (parties) every year.

(Sounds good to me.)

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the **LAMB OF GOD**, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

John 1:29

They could not eat bacon.
(Not happy about this one, but OK.)

And one more thing.

Every year they had to bring their best lamb to the high priest to have it sacrificed for their sins. Not just any lamb would do. This had to be a perfect lamb. You couldn't drag some lame, blind in one eye, sickly lamb to the high priest.

That's the way it worked. The only remedy for sin was the blood of innocent life. Innocent life had to be taken to pay for the sin. Nothing else would do.

And what could be more innocent than a small, cuddly lamb. So you had to bring a lamb to the priest. It had to be a perfect lamb because the priest was going to inspect it...carefully.

Guess what the priest did NOT do.
He didn't inspect YOU.
If your lamb was good then you were good to go.

He wouldn't say, "Well, your lamb looks great. Now let's talk about your prayer life and Bible reading plan."

Or "Your lamb is good, now how about your service in the temple? It looks like you have been slacking off a bit."

**IF YOUR SACRIFICE WAS GOOD,
YOU WERE GOOD. PERIOD.**

Flash forward a few thousand years. It's still the same.

Today, we have a lamb.
A perfect lamb.
No spots.

*knowing that
you were
ransomed
from the futile
ways inherited
from your
forefathers,
not with
perishable
things such as
silver or gold,
but with the
**PRECIOUS
BLOOD OF
CHRIST,**
like that of
a **LAMB**
without
blemish or
spot.*

1 Peter 1:18,19

No blemishes.
No sickness.
PERFECT.

His name is Jesus.

[God doesn't inspect you.
He inspects your sacrifice.]

Your sacrifice is Jesus, the Lamb of God.
You're good.

You can go now.

*Then they said to him,
"What must we do, to be
doing the **WORKS OF GOD?"**
Jesus answered them, "This is
the **WORK OF GOD**, that you
BELIEVE in him whom
he has sent."*

John 6:28-29

*But far be
it from me
to boast
except in
the **CROSS**
of our
Lord Jesus
Christ,*

Galatians 6:14



so what day is it?

The Jews knew a special day was coming.

They referred to it in Psalm 112-118, known as the "Hallel." They recited it frequently at their celebrations and festivals.

They knew it as a mighty statement about God taking action on their behalf, the day He would **BECOME** their salvation.

It was the day a rejected stone would become the cornerstone.

But they did not know it referred to the crucifixion of the Messiah.

The day Jesus died on a cross.
The day He gave us His life.
The day He ended religion.
The day He **BECAME** our salvation.
The day...everything changed forever.

THAT is the day the Lord made.

*I thank you
that you have
answered me
and have
**BECOME MY
SALVATION.**
The stone that
the builders
rejected has
become the
CORNERSTONE.
This is the
LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in
our eyes.
**THIS IS THE
DAY THAT THE
LORD HAS
MADE;**
let us rejoice and
be glad in it.*

Psalm 118:21-24

Although it was a painful day for Jesus,
it is a happy day for us.

That was the day
the crucifixion of Jesus
became the cornerstone
of our life.

Now THAT is a day you can rejoice in.
THAT is a day you can be glad about.

You can't fully experience a relationship with
God until you grasp the significance of what
Jesus accomplished on the cross...THAT DAY.

Because of THAT DAY...

You are free from paying for your own sins.
You are free from religious obligations.
You are made new.
You are secure in what God did for you.

And it's not because of what you did, or didn't do,
today,
or yesterday,
or the day before that.

And it is not about what you
promise to do tomorrow.

It is because of what happened on THAT DAY,
the day Jesus gave His life for you on the cross.

*let it be known
to all of you and
to all the people
of Israel that
by the name of
Jesus Christ of
Nazareth, whom
you **CRUCIFIED**,
whom God
raised from
the dead—by
him this man is
standing before
you well. This
Jesus is the
stone that was
rejected by you,
the builders,
which has
become the
CORNERSTONE.*

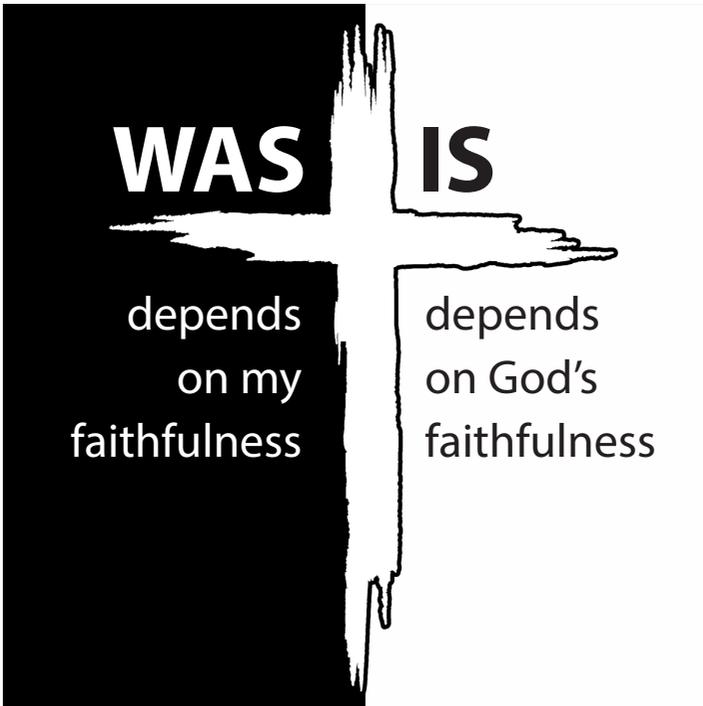
Acts 4:10-11

“

*Christianity is not the
sacrifice we make,
but the sacrifice
we trust.¹*

--P.T. Forsyth--

”





spray painting your new ferrari

I just bought you a brand new Ferrari 488 Spider.

3.9 liter.

8 cylinder turbo.

7 speed automatic transmission.

Red.

Cost: \$272,700.

It's my GIFT to you. You're welcome.

Then I watch in horror as you do something
unthinkable.

Unimagineable.

Crazy beyond words!

You take out a can of spray paint
and declare, "It needs a little touch
up right here," as you begin to spray
red paint on the front hood.

I am mortified as I blurt out, "WHAT are you doing?
This Ferrari does not need you to touch it up!"
Right.

When

Jesus had

received the sour

wine, he said,

"IT IS

FINISHED,"

and he bowed

his head and

gave up his

spirit.

John 19:30

And neither do you. Jesus did the work on the cross.

Your rescue is complete.

Your new life is complete.

Your acceptance by God is complete.

You are complete.

[It is priceless.
It is paid off.
It is finished.
It is free to you.]

You do NOT need to touch it up.
Put your religious spray paint away!

The last words Jesus spoke just before He died were these:

“It is finished.”

He was not referring to His life. He resurrected three days later.

He used a business term in that day: “tetelestai.”

It meant the account was paid in full.

It was a word that meant there is nothing left to pay.

So why are you still trying to complete your salvation?

Why are you trying to earn your way to Heaven?

Why are you trying to do stuff to make God like/accept/love you?

It is done. Over. Complete.

Jesus did NOT say...

It is almost done so you have to complete what I started by living right, keeping the rules, following Jesus, changing the world and whatever else your brand of Christianity tells you to do.

No. He said, “It is finished.”



the day that killed religion

It was a day like no other.
It was the day the REVOLUTION began!

The sky went dark.
An earthquake shook the ground.
Dead folks came out of their tombs
and strolled around town.
The massive temple veil was
ripped in half from top to bottom.

It sounds like a sci-fi movie but it was real. It
happened on the day Jesus was crucified. That was
the day everything changed forever.

A rattled Roman soldier observed the strange
occurrences surrounding the crucifixion and
proclaimed, "This truly was the Son of God."

That was the day religion died.

(Everything changed...forever.)

Until then personal effort
to please God was the norm.
Religious ceremonies were required.
Sin loomed overhead.

*And Jesus cried
out again with
a loud voice and
yielded up his
spirit.*

*And behold,
the curtain of
the temple was
TORN IN TWO,
from top to
bottom. And the
EARTH SHOOK,
and the **ROCKS**
WERE SPLIT.*

*The tombs also
were opened.
And many
bodies of the
saints who had
fallen asleep
were **RAISED,**
and coming
OUT OF THE
TOMBS after
his resurrection
they went into
the holy city and
appeared to
many.*

God seemed distant.

After the crucifixion
Jesus resurrected from the dead.

Then the message of God's love and generosity
spread like wildfire.

Religion was over.
The rule-system was gone.

**[BUT...unfortunately...
not everyone saw the obituary.]**

(Shout "R.I.P." to religion!)

Something BIG is happening.
This is a new day.

Jesus not only paid the full price for your sin,
He did something else.
Something amazing.

**HE NAILED THE OLD WAY OF
RELIGIOUS DEMANDS TO THE CROSS.**

The Roman soldiers thought they were only nailing
Jesus to the cross, but it turns out Jesus was doing
His own nailing. He nailed religion to the cross.

Not only did He die for your sins...
He killed the system that
condemned you.

He killed the old system of rules

*When the
centurion and
those who
were with
him, keeping
watch over
Jesus, saw the
EARTHQUAKE
and what took
place, they
were filled with
AWE and said,
**"TRULY THIS
WAS THE SON
OF GOD!"***

Matthew 27:50-54

and regulations that obligated you.

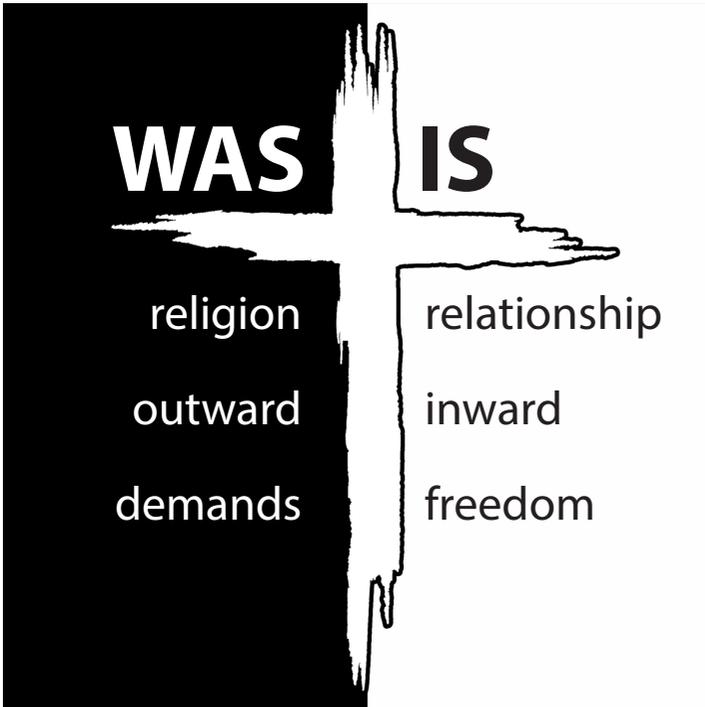
You are free from religion.

There are no more to-do lists to reach God.

Jesus nailed religious
DEMANDS to the cross.

**NO.
MORE.
DEMANDS.**

(And don't pry out the nails!)



by
**CANCELING
THE
RECORD
OF DEBT**
*that stood
against us
with its
LEGAL
DEMANDS.*

*This He
set aside,*
**NAILING
IT TO THE
CROSS.**

Colossians 2:14

“

*“Jesus fired the
Karma police with
the cross.”*

Jeremiah Johnson
@gracepoint555

”



the big oops!

Oopsy. The devil made a little mistake.

If the devil and his gang had realized the power of the cross, they would never have had Jesus crucified.

Big mistake.

Because Jesus died for you,
God was able to
prepare great things for you.

[Satan didn't expect the cross to
set you free,
pay for your sins,
connect you with God your Father.]

He thought he was stopping Jesus.
He thought he was stopping God's plan.

Oops!

Instead, the cross ignited God's plan to bring you
into the amazing benefits of His family.

The devil NEVER saw that coming.

Surprise!

*None of the
rulers of this age
understood this,
for if they had,
they **WOULD**
NOT HAVE
CRUCIFIED the
Lord of glory.
But, as it is
written,*

*"What no eye
has seen,
nor ear heard,
nor the heart of
man imagined,
what God has
prepared for
those who love
him"*

1 Corinthians 2:8,9

“

*The wages of
sin is death.
Jesus died.
Do the math
and celebrate.*

--Dr. Andrew Farley--
@drandrewfarley

”



it's a wonderful death

"It's a Wonderful Life" is a movie classic. The main character, George Bailey, is allowed to see what life would have been like for his family and hometown if he had never been born. I want to take an odd twist on that story.

Imagine what it would be like if
Jesus had never been CRUCIFIED.

Imagine if:

Jesus came to Earth
Lived a perfect life
Told us about the Father and the Kingdom
Chose His disciples and sent them out,
But then just went back to Heaven without being
crucified – without being raised from the dead.

Imagine what that would be like.
Imagine trying to "live the Christian life"
if Jesus had NEVER been crucified.

Unfortunately, it is not hard to imagine at all.
It is not hard to imagine because that is the way we live.

We lose sight of the cross,
but still try to "live the Christian life."

*For the
word of
the **CROSS**
is folly
to those
who are
perishing,
but to us
who are
being
saved
it is the
POWER
OF GOD.*

1 Corinthians 1:18

We do not live that way intentionally.
We do not realize we are living that way.

Living under the hex is when we try to do life
with God
as if Jesus lived and taught,
but never died for us.

The great news in Bedford Falls and every other place is that Jesus Christ
did not JUST:
come to Earth,
live a perfect life,
teach us about the Father and go back to Heaven.

[He was also crucified for us.
He took our weakness and sin and shame to the cross.
He took the old way of religious effort to the cross.]

Jesus Christ rose again and opened a **NEW WAY**
of life with God!
Christ now lives in us.
On **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**,
He is our Christian life!

We do not live with God by rules and obligations on the outside.
That was nailed with Christ to the Cross.
NOW, CHRIST LIVES IN US.

Do not try to do life with God as if the cross never happened,
as if Jesus never died.
Do not lose sight of the Cross today.

It's a Wonderful Death!

BC

(Before Cross)



AC

(After Cross)

FORGIVENESS

BC: God forgave you after you forgave others.

AC: He forgives you first so you can forgive others.

GOD'S PRESENCE

BC: It was about seeking God in the temple or through worship.

AC: Now about receiving presence of the Holy Spirit

GOD'S HOUSE

BC: Go to God's house

AC: Now we are God's house wherever we are.

PERSONAL REALITY

BC: Mere servant of God.

AC: Beloved son of God.

SPIRITUAL THIRST

BC: People thirsted for God.

AC: People are satisfied with living water flowing from within.

JUDGMENT

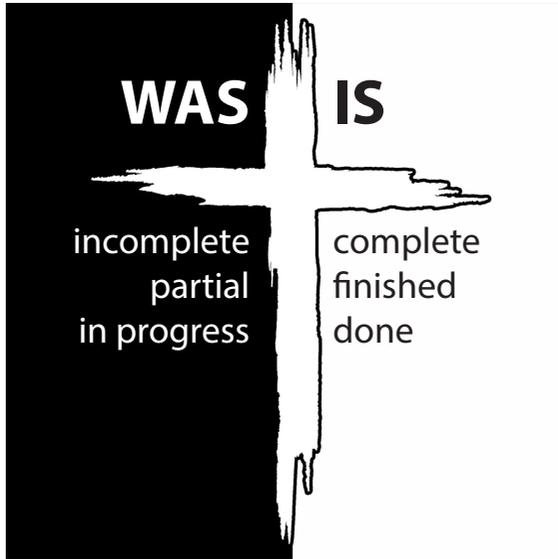
BC: God judges us.

AC: Jesus took our judgment.

GOD AS FATHER

BC: God was not known as Father.

AC: Jesus revealed God as caring Father.



have I been a good boy?

The point of the Lord's Supper is to remind us to trust the crucifixion of Jesus. It is a time to examine our FAITH, not our behavior. It's a time to ask, "Am I trusting in what Jesus did for me on the cross?" It is not the time to ask, "Have I been a good boy?"

Read the ONLY time the disciples quoted Jesus directly from the Gospels...

*...“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my **BLOOD**. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you **PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH** until he comes.
--Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)*



our nike swoosh

The cross today has become the logo for Christianity.
It's like the Nike swoosh for Christians.

For many, the cross is merely our trademark.

You can see a cross on top of church buildings.

Over Christian schools.

On necklaces.

On the cover of books.

On grave stones.

Crosses are everywhere.

The cross has become a
symbol of religion.

(HOW IRONIC!)

Actually, it is the symbol of
Jesus' crucifixion
that **ENDED** religion and
its merit-based approach to God.

*For I decided
to know*

NOTHING

among you

except

Jesus Christ

and him

CRUCIFIED.

1 Corinthians 2:2

It's OK to wear a cross (no big deal).
Just realize it was never meant to be a religious
symbol.

In reality, wearing a cross is a
symbol...that you are NOT religious.
(as it should be)

[NOTE: religious people killed Jesus.]

The cross ended the need for religion.

No longer do we need to
strive to please God.
Jesus pleased God for us.

[Living on this side of the cross
means living with an understanding
of all that Jesus accomplished
for us in His crucifixion.]

Now we can make a distinction between reality
before the cross and reality after the cross.

It is no wonder Paul said the cross was his message.

We live in the joy and freedom of knowing that what
Jesus did for us is all we need. We experience the
transforming power of grace.

The cross means you are
DONE with religion.
(now breathe!)

*but we
preach Christ
CRUCIFIED,
a stumbling
block
to Jews
and folly to
Gentiles,*

1 Corinthians 1:23

yoa head all jam up?

In case you're wondering how the
Pidgin Bible Translates Galatians 3:1-5
(we know you are)

You guys from Galatia, yoa head all jam up! Befo time we wen tell you guys **strait out da Good Stuff** bout how odda guys wen kill Jesus Christ on top da cross an he wen mahke fo us. But now you guys no lissen to da true stuff. Somebody wen **put kahuna on top you guys**, o wat? Ony one ting I like you guys tell me: How you guys wen get God's Spirit? Cuz you guys wen do wat da Rules say? O cuz you guys wen trus da Good Stuff From God dat you guys wen hear? Fo shua, cuz you guys wen **trus da Good Stuff From God!** You guys not tinkin, o wat? You guys wen trus God's Spirit in da beginning. **But now in da end you guys goin try fo do everyting wit yoa own power?** All da stuff dat wen happen to you guys -- fo notting? O good fo someting? God stay give you guys his Spirit, an he do awesome stuff fo you guys wit his power. **You tink he do um cuz you guys do wat da Rules say, o cuz you guys trus da stuff you guys wen hear?**

Galatians 3:1-5

Pidgin Bible Translation by the Pidgin Bible Translation Group
(actual translation from a Hawaiian dialect)



snake on a stick

Jesus pointed to one
--and only one--
Old Testament story to explain His crucifixion.
ONE story.

(And it was a strange story.)

The Jewish people were suffering
from snake bites that were killing them.

God told Moses to make a bronze snake
and lift it up on a pole.

Moses did it.

When the people LOOKED at the snake
lifted up on the pole,
they were cured.

(BOOM)

Cured.

That's all they did: LOOK.

Simply looking at the uplifted snake cured them.
Think about that.
All they did was...look.

*And as Moses
lifted up the
serpent in the
wilderness,
so must the
Son of Man be
LIFTED UP,
that whoever
believes in
him may have
eternal life.*

John 3:14-15

They didn't fast,
pray hard,
attend meetings
or memorize scripture.
They looked at the bronze snake.

That's all.

Jesus said He was like
that bronze snake.

He said He would be lifted up.
That was a term He used to refer
to His upcoming crucifixion.

In the same way,
looking at Jesus' crucifixion
is the CURE for sin.

Among other things,
sin is a spiritual disease.
It needs a cure.

The cross cures us of sin.

Stop working to earn your
salvation/redemption/forgiveness.

Fixate on the truth that
Jesus died for YOU on the cross.

Just look.
Soooooo simple.

*He himself
bore our sins
in his body
on the **TREE**,
that we might
die to sin
and live to
righteousness.
By his wounds
you have been
HEALED.*

1 Peter 2:24

*My sin—
oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross,
and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord,
O my soul!*

from "It Is Well With My Soul"
Horatio G. Spafford
1873

*In speaking of a **NEW** covenant,
he makes the first one **OBSOLETE**.
And what is becoming **OBSOLETE** and
GROWING OLD is ready to **VANISH AWAY**.*

Hebrews 8:13



timing is everything

Jesus died and left you an inheritance.

You can't get an inheritance until somebody dies and leaves you something. That's the way it works.

Death first. Then inheritance.

That's why the inheritance Jesus left to us did not take effect until AFTER He died.

[It was NOT in effect in the Old Testament.
It was NOT even in effect when
Jesus roamed around in the Gospels.]

Keep that in mind when you read the Gospels or the Old Testament.

There was no inheritance until Jesus died. That's when it started.

But now
by faith in Him,
you have an inheritance.
A big one.

an
INHERITANCE
that is
imperishable,
undefiled, and
unfading, kept in
heaven for you,

1 Peter 1:4

*For a will takes
effect only at
DEATH,
since it is not
in force as long
as the one who
made it is alive.*

Hebrews 9:17

OLD

deadly religion

rule-keeping

doing stuff
for God

effort

guilt

shame

fear

God loves everybody
in general

hard

God is mad at you

press into God

obligation

NEW

vibrant relationship

trust

God doing stuff
through you

rest

peace

acceptance

peace

God is wild about YOU
individually

easy

God is mad about you

God always with me

freedom



gimme a k.i.s.s.

The old acronym (not the rock band) says it well.
Keep. It. Simple. Stupid.

The good news of Jesus Christ
is NOT that complicated.

Because God loves you, He came to Earth in Christ.
Jesus Christ took all of your sin AND your old sinful
nature with Him to the cross.

It was all nailed to the cross,
crucified once and for all.
Then, he came back to life
and gave us His Spirit to live in us.
Christ now lives in you and is your life.
He lives in you so you can supernaturally experience
His love and, in turn, love others.
He lives in you so you can be free from the self-
centered corruption of this world.

Doing life with God
through Jesus Christ
does NOT require a high IQ.
(THANKFULLY!!!)

*we
should
NOT
MAKE IT
DIFFICULT
for the
Gentiles
who are
turning to
God.*

Acts 15:19
(NIV)

Hearing the voice of the Spirit is more important than figuring out all the right facts. The religious leaders in Jesus' day knew all the right facts, but they completely missed what God was doing.

Life in Christ is about getting to know a living person, Jesus Christ. It is not about figuring out all the right theology.

Can I get off target at times with bad theology? Maybe, but if I have learned to recognize the voice of the Shepherd, I can trust Him to bring me (and other sheep) back in line.

It is better to know Christ and have a little "heresy" than to not know Christ at all. (And please do not tell me you understand all aspects of the Trinity.)

Jesus attracted the common folks of His day. The believers in the book of Acts tended to be fairly uneducated. Paul said that God chose the foolish of this world to shame the wise.

We relate to God primarily with our spirit, not our BRAIN.

Ask God's Spirit to be your teacher. He is really good at it.

There is no need to make it more complicated.

*But God
chose
what is
FOOLISH
in the
world to
shame the
wise;*

1 Corinthians 1:27

“

*“Grace gets me in but it’s
up to me to finish what
Christ began.”*

*This is the Kool-Aid
of DIY religion.*

Paul Ellis
@paul_ellis

”



bait & switch

So I receive Jesus by faith.
Salvation is a free gift.
But NOW I need to do stuff to grow.
Really? (Well, that's what people tell us.)

Saved by grace, grown by effort.
(DOUBLE YIKES!)

[Salvation is free. Jesus paid for it.
But NOW I need to work my head off
to get anywhere in this Christian life?]

Bible reading program
prayer journal
small group
giving
serving
mission trips
doing / doing & doing / more doing

Just STOP it already! Stop the bait and switch!

It turns out that I grow
the SAME WAY I received Christ.
Doing nothing but trusting Him
keeps you rooted
and growing in Him.

*Therefore,
**AS YOU
RECEIVED**
Christ Jesus
the Lord,
SO WALK in
him, rooted
and built up
in him and
established in
the faith,*

Colossians 2:6



ripped by God

It was once hard to
get close to God.

When the Jews built the temple, God instructed them to construct an inner room. It was a cube: 30 feet high, 30 feet wide, 30 feet deep.

It was the place where the Jews believed that God dwelt.

Separating that room from the rest of the temple was a massive, thick curtain made with layers of heavy animal skins. It was solid. History tells us that it took four men to lift it up for the high priest to enter.

Only one man could enter, the high priest. And he could only enter once a year.

[The curtain kept people from
direct access to God's presence.]

By going to the temple with their sacrifice, they could get in the general vicinity of God's presence, but not IN God's presence. Even then they had to go through the priest.

*And behold, the **CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO**, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.*

Matthew 27:51

*And the **CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO**, from top to bottom.*

Mark 15:38

*while the sun's light failed. And the **CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO**.*

Luke 23:45

The curtain stopped them.
It divided them from God.

The **MOMENT** Jesus died something extraordinary happened: the curtain in the temple was ripped from top to bottom. That massive curtain got torn in half.

[It was as if God reached down and grabbed it with both hands and tore it in two.]

Boom!
Just like that, NO MORE CURTAIN!

And a few years later in 70 A.D. the Romans destroyed the temple and it has never been rebuilt.

Now **ANYONE** can have a close, personal encounter/relationship with God through Jesus. **ANYONE.**

The curtain is gone.
You can draw near to God.

SO DO NOT TRY TO SEW THE CURTAIN BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. LEAVE IT ALONE.

You no longer need to go through a priest to get close to God.

You no longer need to bring something to God to get close to Him.

You don't need to press into God's presence.
Jesus did that for you.
He paid the price and paved the way.

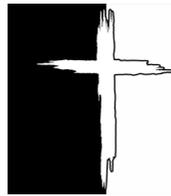
In Christ you are **NOW** close to God.
Really close.

*since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the **NEW AND LIVING WAY** that he opened for us through the **CURTAIN**, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **LET US DRAW NEAR WITH A TRUE HEART IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Hebrews 10:19-22

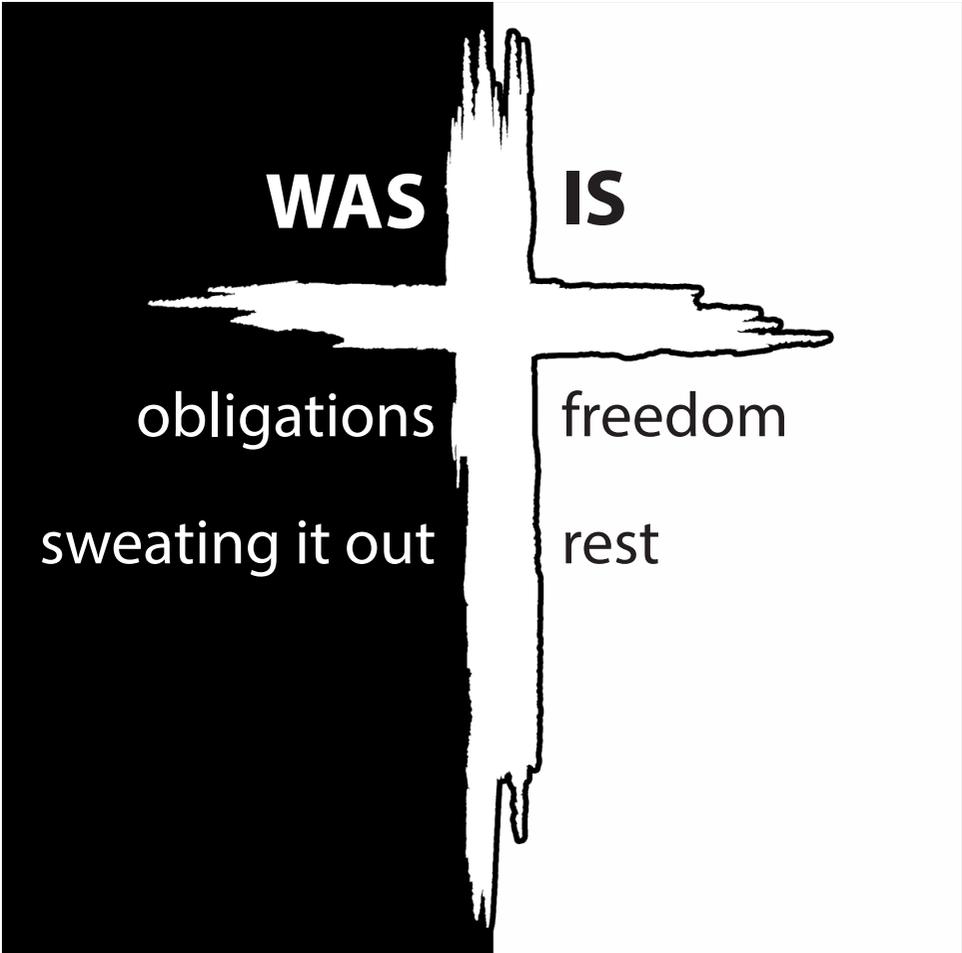
II.

How Religion Tricks Us



by **CANCELING THE RECORD OF DEBT** that
stood against us with its **LEGAL DEMANDS**.
This he set aside, **NAILING IT TO THE CROSS**.

Colossians 2:14



The cross killed religious obligations by allowing us to rest in the work of Jesus.



doing the splits (ouch!)

Imagine you own two boats.
You want to row away from the shore.
Now you have a decision to make.
Which boat should you use?

One of your boats is in tiptop condition.
The other is full of holes and needs major repair.
Which boat are you going to choose?

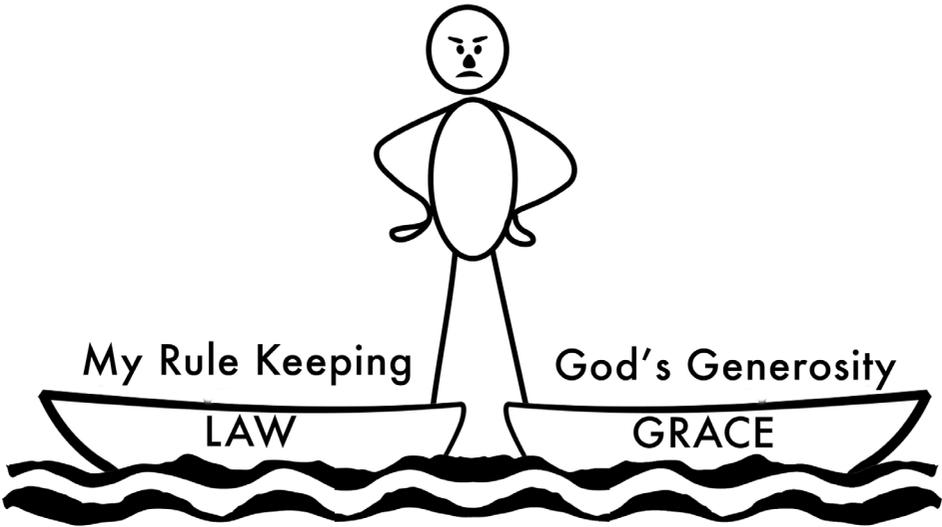
Of course, you are going to
choose the good boat.
It floats.
The other one won't.

That's how faith works. Jesus lived a perfect life.
You can trust Him. However, your life is already messed up.
You can choose to trust your life, the messed up life.
His life floats.
Yours will sink.
Choose one.

But not so fast.

**RELIGION PUTS PEOPLE WITH
ONE FOOT IN EACH BOAT!**

Under the Hex



They put one foot
in the Jesus Life Boat
and one foot in the
Do-A-Little-More-Try-A-Little-Harder Boat.

They trust in Jesus AND their own efforts.
What happens?
Splash!

The only sane solution is to
trust Jesus (the good boat) totally.
Both feet in His boat.

Give up on your efforts, your goodness.

That's faith (without the religion).
No splits.
No ouch.
No splash.



christian big foot

Somewhere in the midwest
there's a man who is
actually living the Christian life.
(So we heard.)

Rumors indicates his name is Ernie.
We don't yet know his last name.

The word on the street is that he is a model Christian,
the primo example for us all.

The hearsay is that he reads his Bible everyday,
even when he doesn't feel like it.
He prays several times a day and never leaves anyone
out as he works through his long prayer list.

He not only attends his local congregation regularly
but serves tirelessly in two departments.
Co-workers are so impressed by his continuous joy
that they ask him about his faith at work.

He shares daily.
He tithes and gives to other ministries above his tithe.
His wife and kids are happy,
well-adjusted and serving the Lord with gladness.

Ernie never breaks any laws including the speed limit

*for
ALL have
sinned
and FALL
SHORT of
the glory
of God,*

Romans 3:23

and as far we can tell,
he even loves his mother-in-law.

We haven't been able to find anyone who has actually seen Ernie, or spoken with him. But we think he lives in a small town in Missouri. Ernie sightings are rare but we know he must exist because Christians everywhere compare themselves to this elusive Christian example.

He does what very few believers have been able to do. He lives the Christian life.

There's only one small problem.
Further research indicates Ernie doesn't exist.

Notice that this scripture says that not only have all sinned (past tense) but all FALL short (present tense). They still fall short in their own ability.

**No one has ever
lived the Christian life...
except Jesus.**

We have all sinned and
we all still fail to live up to the glory of God.

[That means there are no ideal Christians
running around out there.]

So instead of wearing yourself out trying to live up to an elusive ideal of what the Christian life is supposed to be, trust Jesus.

He lived the Christian life.
He will do more through you
than you can ever do on your own.

So take a deep breath and relax.
Ernie, like Big Foot, doesn't exist.

...But when they

MEASURE

themselves by

one another and

COMPARE

themselves with

one another,

*they are **WITHOUT***

UNDERSTANDING.

2 Corinthians 10:12



religion freak, control freak

The New Testament says, “The righteous will live by faith.” Living by faith is the opposite of living by “works of law” or thinking that everything depends on what we do.

Scripture says that if you want to live with God, it is not going to happen by trying to keep the right rules and by trying to do the right things. Religion is when we try to do the right things to be right with God. We think it depends on us and our effort.

Religious effort focuses on what WE are DOING.

The reason that religious effort seems so natural can be summed up in one word: **CONTROL.**

[Religion is all about control
and THAT is the problem.]

Apart from Christ, we want to be in control of our lives – even our spiritual lives. If I want to be closer to God, religion says I need to try harder, be better, pray more, stop sinning, read the Bible more, “go to church” more, do this more, do that more, etc. All of

...DOING THINGS FOR GOD IS THE OPPOSITE OF ENTERING INTO WHAT GOD DOES FOR YOU. *Habakkuk had it right: “The person who believes God, is set right by God—and that’s the real life.” Rule-keeping does not naturally evolve into living by faith, but only perpetuates itself in more and more rule-keeping, a fact observed in Scripture: “The one who does these things [rule-keeping] continues to live by them.*

Galatians 3:11-12
(MSG)

those things are under our control. We can do those things. The problem is that those are not the things that draw a person closer to God.

The very first temptation in the Garden of Eden was to take control and be "like God." That temptation is still hanging around. That is what tempts the immoral rebel, but it is also what tempts the outwardly moral, religious person.

I want to be what God wants me to be!
I want to do great things for God and,
doggone it,
I will do whatever it takes to make it happen!
CONTROL.

Those who are right with God
do not try to control their
relationship with God.
They trust HIM to control it.
That is living by faith.

[Before you ever made the
slightest move toward God,
Jesus Christ loved you.]

He took your old, self-centered nature to the cross.
He died and rose again and gave His Spirit to make
you brand new on the inside where it really counts.
God did all that for you before you ever did anything
for Him.

The truth is that you and I cannot
do anything for God anyway.

We can quit trying to do the right things
in order to get closer to God.

*This Good
News tells
us how God
makes us
right in his
sight. This is
accomplished
from **START**
TO FINISH BY
FAITH. As the
Scriptures say,
"It is through
faith that a
righteous
person has
life."*

Romans 1:17
(NLT)

On **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**, you can trust God to finish His work in you.

He is the Giver.

You are on the receiving end of this deal.
Look to Him to make the next move.
Ask Him to make Himself known to you.
Know that you are loved by God.
You can trust Him.

Unwind.

He is in control and that is a good thing.

ROGER'S RANT!

Trying HARDER will never
(as in...NEVER)
draw us closer to God,
build us up spiritually,
bring us peace,
or make us happy.
(NOT going to happen.)
The sooner we stop it,
the better.
(It's crazy!!!)
Give it up.
(please)

*And I am
sure of this,
that he who
began a good
work in you
will bring it to
COMPLETION
at the day of
Jesus Christ.*

Philippians 1:6

“

*Religion is
not the solution;
religion is the problem.
Jesus is the end of
religion.*

Paul Ellis
@paul_ellis

”



stop squirming

Jesus began to wash the disciple's feet and Peter freaked out.

Peter wanted to wash Jesus' feet.

He wanted to be the one to serve.

He could not conceive of Jesus serving him.

You need Jesus to serve you more than He needs you to serve Him.

[Jesus did not come for you to serve Him;
He came to serve you. You are the one who
needs it. He doesn't need anything.]

HUMILITY starts with admitting that you need what Jesus can do for you.

Peter didn't like that. He squirmed at the thought of Jesus serving him. Peter was shocked.

He thought he was there to serve Jesus when it turned out that Jesus was there to serve him.

If we don't allow Jesus to wash us,

Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him, "IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU HAVE NO PART WITH ME."

John 13:8
(NIV)

then we have no part with Him.

Just like it was Peter's job to sit still and let Jesus wash his feet, it is our job to sit still and let Jesus wash us.

Stop squirming, that's all.

***NOR IS HE SERVED
BY HUMAN HANDS,
as though he needed
anything, since he
himself gives to all
mankind life and
breath and everything.***

Acts 17:25

*For even
the Son
of Man
came **NOT
TO BE
SERVED**
but **TO
SERVE**,
and to give
his life as a
ransom for
many.*

Mark 10:45



all inclusive guilt trip

Do not let anyone use
the parting words of Jesus
to lay a guilt trip on you.

[The passage, commonly known as
“the great commission”, is used (misused),
as much as any other passage today,
to guilt God’s children into action.]

It is a modern day example of the hex.
The speech goes something like this:

**Jesus said ALL authority
has been given to Him.**

(You better do what He says
or you are in big trouble).

It was the LAST words of Jesus.

(Don’t you dare disobey His LAST words).

Jesus COMMANDED us to make disciples.

(It’s the law, buddy,
and not just a suggestion).

**If you do NOT have a group of disciples
around you, SHAME on you!**

(Wipe that smile off your guilty face).

*And Jesus
came and
said to
them, “All
authority
in heaven
and on
earth has
been given
to me. Go
therefore
and make
disciples
of all
nations,...*

Matthew 28:18-19

That is pretty much how it goes.

Add some music in the background and/or the right voice inflections, and you have just effectively unloaded a boatload of guilt on an entire congregation. They will feel an enormous weight of obligation. 99% of them will not change how they live, but now they will at least feel condemned about not doing enough. The 1% may try to do something in their own effort for a while so they will not feel so guilty.

It is full-blown hex mode.

If the task of making disciples is THE ONE, BIG thing we are supposed to be focusing on, why is it never mentioned in any of the letters to the believers?

[We never see Paul or Peter or John quoting the words of Jesus about making disciples.]

What DID the letters to the earliest believers deal with? Among other things, they did talk much about getting along with ONE ANOTHER in the Body of Christ.

That reminds us of something else Jesus said about being disciples. He said His new commandment was for us to love each other the way He loves us.

Then, he said the way the world will know we are connected to Him is by our love for each other.

When we turn the “great commission” into the “great guilt trip”, we get off track.

We contradict the rest of what the New Testament says about grace. We use law to motivate instead of trusting the Spirit.

We cause others to lose sight of the Father's affection for them.
We encourage dead works.

Sadly, we put the hex on people.

When Jesus prayed for us the night before He died, He did not pray that we would all go out and "make disciples." His prayer for us was that we would all be one. He said that our oneness in Him and in the Father would lead the world to believe that Jesus was sent from God.

Jesus did not intend for his words to the eleven to be used as a guilt trip.

As we experience the reality of the crucified and risen Christ in our lives, it is normal/good/fantastic to tell others about what He has done.

However...

If you NEVER lead someone else to Jesus, it's OK.
Don't feel guilty/condemned.
You still belong to God through Jesus.
You do NOT have to share your faith to be acceptable to God.

“

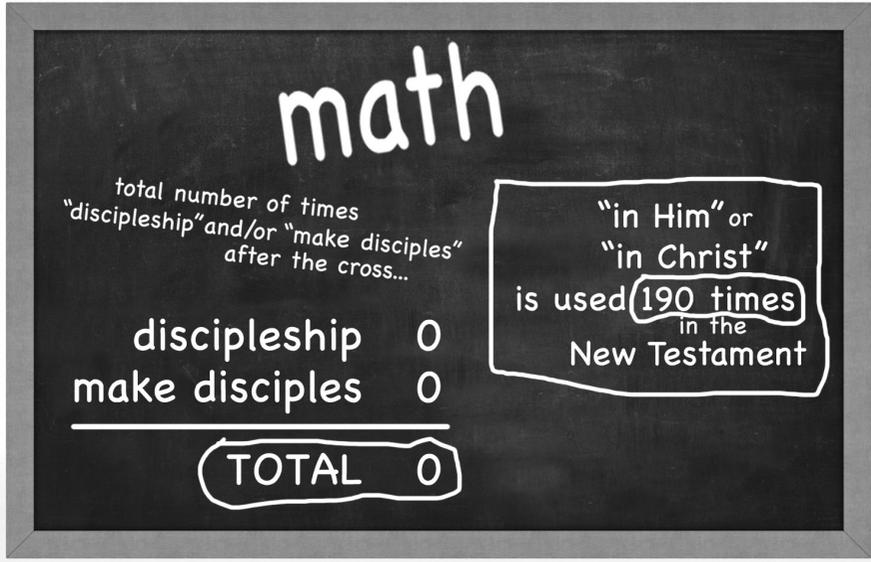
Religion says, "make every effort to work perfectly." God says, "make every effort to rest in My perfect work."

Nathan Houtsma
@nathanhoutsma

”

do the math

Sometimes it's helpful to know if something is emphasized in the New Testament writings. So here's a breakdown.



Paul the Apostle never mentioned discipleship in the New Testament. (HINT: every believer in Acts was called a disciple.)

He never even told anyone to "follow" Christ. That was never his emphasis. He simply told people to put their faith in Jesus, to trust Him. Then he explained that they were IN CHRIST.

HERE'S THE POINT! Your personal reality IN CHRIST is more important than the stuff you do for God.

So how are you doing spiritually?

If you are IN CHRIST then you are doing well because Jesus is doing very well spiritually.



how rules backfire

If you want to cause someone to be more likely to sin, I know exactly how to do it. If you want someone to be overwhelmed by a wrong desire, there is an easy way to make it happen.

The Bible tells us how.

The answer? Make a rule against it.

One sure-fire way to make the urge to sin stronger is to make a law that commands you NOT to do it.

The New Testament says that “the law gives sin it’s power.”

It says, “For apart from the law, sin lies dead.”

It says that our sinful passions are “aroused by the law.”

(Wow! Think about that!)

*For sin is the sting that results in death, and the **LAW** gives sin its **POWER**.*

1 Corinthians 15:56 (NLT)

*For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions **AROUSSED BY THE LAW** were at work in us*

Romans 7:5

Not only do rules not keep us from doing wrong, they actually CAUSE us to do wrong. When you know you are not supposed to do something, you want to do it even more.

Laws and rules make sin stronger!

Many people are afraid of grace because they think it promotes sin. Actually, the opposite is true. Sin is definitely destructive, but every well-intended system of rules eventually increases sin.

[Rules and laws do NOTHING
to change someone's heart.
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.]

At the very best, rules can force some outward behavior for a little while as the heart grows cold. When we say God's grace is free, but then also try to depend on obligation to rules, we are living under the hex.

When we realize that God is not putting us under obligation, the power of sin is dissolved.

When we get out from underneath rules and threat of punishment, the desire to rebel starts to fade.

[It is the LOVE and GRACE of God through
His Spirit that transforms the human heart
from the INSIDE.]

THAT is good news!

*But sin, seizing
an opportunity
through the
commandment,
PRODUCED
in me all kinds
of covetousness.
For apart from
the law, sin lies
dead.*

Romans 7:8

“

*The ultimate freedom
is in knowing the
love of God. The
ultimate bondage is
in trying to earn it.*

Dr. Eric Skidmore
@gracectrhouston

”



hamster wheelin' it

At 6 years old I got my first real pet, a hamster. I named him (or her, not sure which) "Brownie." Brownie lived in a standard sized hamster cage with a water dispenser, and food cup and a metal wheel. For some unknown reason Brownie ran on that wheel for hours at a time, normally all night long.

Maybe he needed the exercise, but I don't think so. I took him out of the cage and played with him plenty. And since the wheel was fastened to the cage he certainly didn't go anywhere.

So what was the point to all that activity?

I'm certainly glad we Christians don't do anything like that. You won't catch us engaged in pointless activity.

Hmmm.

I'm not so sure.

Recently, I was listening to a group discuss their walk with Christ. They explained how they earnestly desired to live a life pleasing to God. They were all striving to figure out what areas of their lives needed

SEARCH ME,
O GOD, and
know my
heart: try me,
and know my
thoughts:
And see if
there be any
WICKED
way in me,
and lead me
in the way
everlasting.

Psalm 139:23-24
(KJV)

the most work.

They were self-focused to the max.

They constantly asked the question of each other,
"How is your walk with the Lord doing?"

They put every area of their lives under the microscope.

Psalm 139:23-24 was the scripture they most often appealed to?

These are great verses...

IF you were Jewish and lived under the Law of Moses.

IF you lived before Jesus died and gave you His own righteousness.

[Today, however, thanks to Jesus and what He did for us,
you do NOT have to spend your days asking God
to dig up every failure in your life.]

You can get off that hamster wheel.

It's not going anywhere anyway.

Five...ten...twenty years from now

you will still be praying the same prayer.

And who wants to hang out with a God who
focuses on scrutinizing your every weakness, failure
and sin? Most of us avoid people like that.

[Do we really think Jesus came to earth, died for us
and rose again so we could spend our lives
stressing over every weakness?]

Live on THIS SIDE of the cross.

Accept His forgiveness, grace and love.

And relax.



all 'bout me

Religion is all about me.

It's about what I do and don't do.
It sounds like it's about God but not so much.

Religion is all about my obligations...

MY church attendance
MY righteousness
MY Bible reading plan
MY prayer life
MY virtues/values
MY goodness
MY obedience
MY efforts
MY service

Faith, real faith, is all about Jesus.

It's about who He is,
what He did,
what He does.
He's the Savior.
Not me.
Or you.
It's about Him, Jesus.

(You got this! Right?)

Are you tired? Worn out?

BURNED OUT ON RELIGION?

Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the

UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF GRACE.

I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. --Jesus

Matthew 11:28-30
(MSG)



spitting on the sabbath

Jesus was NOT religious.

Jesus was constantly at odds with the religious leaders of His day. He was attacked because He wasn't religious enough for them.

Jesus broke their religious rules.
He criticized the religious leaders.
Constantly.

He hung around people
who didn't meet their approval.

He made statements that
violated their religious doctrine.

Jesus disrupted religion.
(BIG TIME)

The Jewish leaders didn't plot to execute Jesus because He talked about love. They plotted against Him because He disrupted everything religious. They even accused Jesus of being possessed by a demon.

Religion is about imposing rules on people to gain God's favor. Jesus brought a message about God's

*When the
Pharisees saw
this, they asked
his disciples,
"Why does your
teacher (Jesus)
eat with tax
collectors and
sinners?"*

Matthew 9:11

favor already being available through His grace.

Because religion is devoid of life, it has to fill the void with symbols, rules, decor, pageantry.

The life that Jesus gives is real and authentic. It does NOT need all of that.

Religion is NOT alive. It is empty and fake.

You do NOT have to be religious to receive what Jesus did for you. You just have to be a little humble.

Just realize your need for a Savior. Trust Him.

That's all. He'll do the rest. Is it that simple? (Yep.)

It's about relationship, not religion. Love, not rules.

Apparently some traditions need to be broken.

Jesus once healed a blind man by spitting. That's right, with SPIT!

Having said these things, he
SPIT ON THE GROUND
and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" So he went and washed and came back seeing.

John 9:6-7

A blind man comes to Jesus and wants to be healed. Jesus spits on the ground, makes some mud and wipes it on the man's eyes. He then tells the man something he would not have had to tell me, "Go wash that off." This is what the Bible says Jesus did. It worked. The man was healed. Now the question. Why?

Why did Jesus need to spit to get the man healed? Was that really necessary? He could have just touched the man's eyes. Or spoke over him. Why spit?

[It turns out the Pharisees had a real problem with spitting on the Sabbath.]

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

Jesus purposely tweaked the religious power brokers.

He violated the Pharisees' rules about the Sabbath. Jesus ruthlessly confronted the stuffy religious people who cared more about their rules than about people.

Jesus was more about people than religious traditions.

Go ahead.
Don't be afraid.
Spit on the Sabbath.

*And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."
Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for **HE DOES NOT KEEP THE SABBATH.**"*

John 9:15-16

“

*When I tell you that Jesus
hung out with sinners
and you respond with
“I need to do more of that,”
then you do not know who you
are in that story.*

unknown

”



this is your crummy, miserable life

I was taught in church growing up that one day I would stand before God and He would replay my entire life on a massive, high-resolution screen. I would stand there as the whole world would watch every good/bad deed I ever did. At the conclusion of my life story God would make a determination as to whether I made it into Heaven or not.

My only chance was that my good deeds would outweigh my bad deeds.

If that is the way it works then
WHAT IS THE POINT IN HAVING A SAVIOR?

Jesus is your Savior.
You will NOT be judged.
He took your judgment.
You were found guilty and He took the penalty.
That's what He did for you on the cross.
It's done.

Since you PASSED from death to life
you will not be judged.

*"Truly, truly,
I say to you,
whoever hears
my word
and believes
him who
sent me has
eternal life. He
**DOES NOT
COME INTO
JUDGMENT,**
but has
passed from
death to
LIFE." --Jesus*

John 5:24

In Revelation 20:12 only the DEAD get judged!

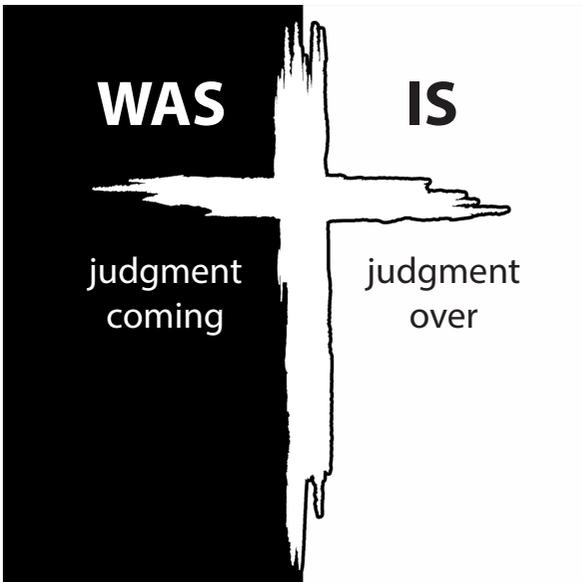
HINT: Since Jesus made you alive,
you're not dead anymore.
This judgment is **NOT** for you.

You're alive in Him...forever.

If your name is in the **BOOK**,
you will not be judged by the **BOOKS**.
(The books record every action,
good and bad, of the spiritually dead.)

But the only book that matters is the Book of Life.

If your name is in the Book of Life,
you are good.
Jesus took your judgment.
There is no judgment
left for you to take.



*And I saw the
dead, great
and small,
standing before
the throne, and
books were
opened. Then
another book
was opened,
which is the
BOOK OF LIFE.
And the **DEAD**
were judged
by what was
written in
the **BOOKS**,
according to
what they had
done.*

Revelation 20:12



whack-a-mole religion

Many live in whack-a-mole religion.

We get obsessed with sin
and neglect relationship with Jesus.

Conquering sin.
Avoiding sin.
Preaching about sin.
Identifying sin.
Confessing sin.
Repenting of sin.

We spent our effort focused on
tamping down sin.
Anytime a sin would raise its ugly head
--which is quite often--
we would work to smash it back down.

I understand that.
I am totally against sin.
Sin is bad.
No question.

The problem is that the whack-a-mole technique is never-ending.

No matter how many times we attempted to knock a sin back down it would always come back. Always.

Just about the time we were able to knock selfishness back into its hole, unforgiveness would pop up. Then by the time we knocked unforgiveness back into its hole, bitterness and lust would pop up. It was a never ending cycle of failure. **But worst of all it would take our focus off of the love and acceptance of our Father God.**

What started as a relationship with Jesus unraveled into a system of INDEPENDENT effort, frustration and futility. That is not the life Jesus carved out for you when He died, resurrected and gave you His life.

There is a better way.

A Jesus-focused life produces freedom.

A sin-focused life produces frustration.

A Jesus-focused life produces good results.

A sin-focused life produces...more sin.

Living on this side of the cross means daily trusting in the life that Jesus lives in you and through you.

Let Him whack the moles.
He's better at it.



hot grace, cold self

What do you get when you mix hot with cold?

Lukewarm.

(NOT GOOD.)

I like hot tea.

I like cold tea.

Lukewarm tea? No thanks!

Room temperature tea? YUCK!

In the book of Revelation, Jesus brings this up to a church in a town called “Laodicea.” He lets them know that He is upset with them for being “lukewarm.” He comes down hard on them.

But what does it mean
to be “lukewarm?”

I was taught that “lukewarm” meant I wasn’t working hard enough to serve the Lord. I got the impression I needed to do more for God to keep from being lukewarm.

Try harder!

Do more!

(SMOKIN’ HOT YIKES!)

*So, because
you are
LUKEWARM,
and **NEITHER
HOT NOR
COLD,** I will
spit you out
of my mouth.
**FOR YOU
SAY, I AM
RICH, I HAVE
PROSPERED,
AND I NEED
NOTHING,
NOT
REALIZING
THAT
YOU ARE
WRETCHED,
PITIABLE,
POOR,
BLIND, AND
NAKED. I
counsel you
to buy from
me gold
refined by fire,
so that you
may be rich,
and white
garments so
that you may
clothe yourself***

Jesus does NOT tell them to:
work harder,
be better disciples,
or obey more commandments.
They didn't need more effort.

It turns out that the lukewarm people in Laodicea were a bit self-absorbed. They thought they had come to the point where they didn't need Jesus.

[They were so confident in their own ability and accomplishments that they left Jesus standing outside of His own church. Picture that.]

Jesus pointed out that they were NOT rich. In fact, He tells them they are pitiful, poor, blind and naked. They just didn't know it. They felt like they were doing just fine on their own.

That's what religion does.

Religion blinds you to your own need for Jesus and leaves you consumed with your own ability. Then Jesus gets locked outside.

In reality, they were doing the same thing the folks in Galatia were doing, mixing God's grace with their own efforts.

[God's grace is red hot.
Self-sufficiency is stone cold.
Mix the two and you have lukewarm.]

Jesus NEVER asked them to work harder. He just wanted them to open the door so He could come in and have dinner.

He just wanted to hang out with them.

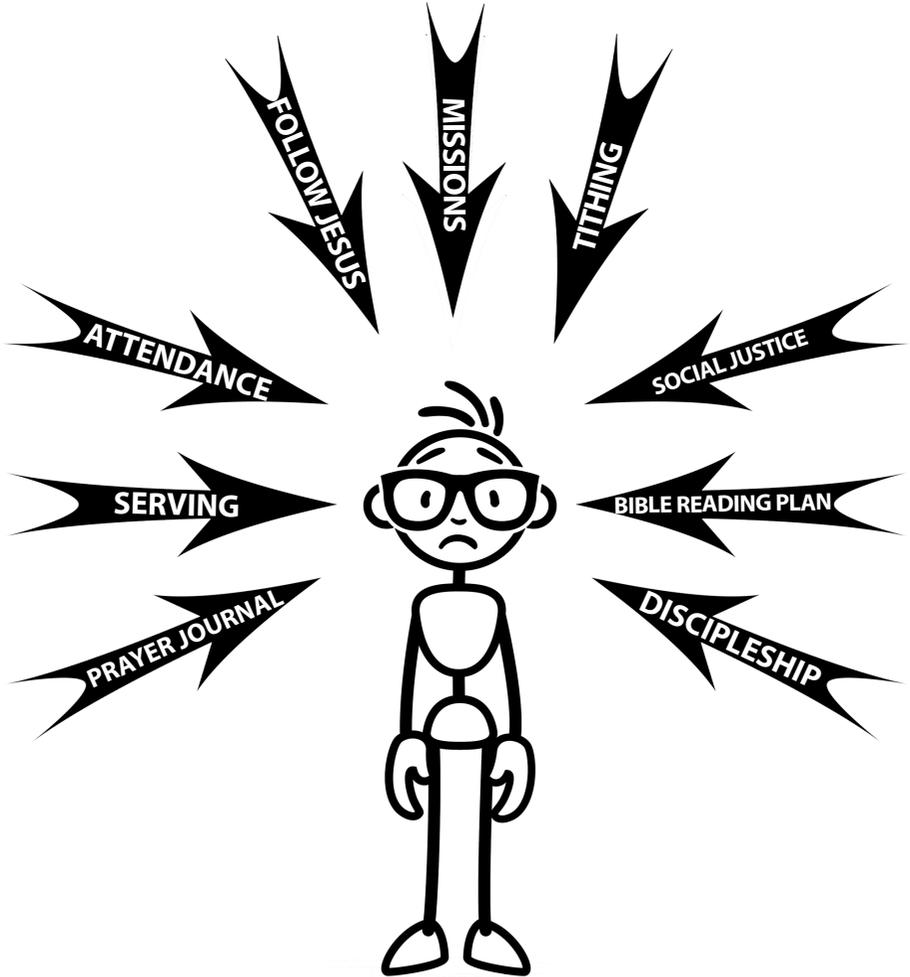
*and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. **BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK.** If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

Revelation 3:16-20

saved by grace



perfected by doing?





moses & the dead cat bounce

One of the more well-known Wall Street terms is "DEAD CAT BOUNCE."

It is used to describe a TEMPORARY bump in a stock that is in a longer term downtrend.

With apologies to animal lovers everywhere, the term comes from the idea that even a dead cat will bounce a little if dropped from a high enough level.

Stock prices can fool you.
Even bad stocks can go up for a short while before they start back down.
(causing you to lose \$\$\$.)

Meet the religious dead cat bounce!

The deception that was affecting the Galatians was the notion that they could just try harder and be more committed in order to please God and be more righteous.

*We are not
like Moses,
who put
a veil over
his face so
the people
of Israel
would not
see the
glory, even
though
it was
**DESTINED
TO FADE
AWAY.***

2 Corinthians 3:13
(NLT)

It is soooo easy to feel that I could be a “better Christian” if I were just more committed or if I followed the right principles or if I learned more Bible verses.

[We sense the struggle.
We feel the downward trend
of our self-effort.]

THEN, we hear a great sermon or go to a moving concert or attend an inspirational conference or read a good book!
We feel spiritually strong!
We feel close to God!
We are ready to make some real progress!

Then, SOMETHING HAPPENS.

The new strength does not last.
The glory fades.
The old weakness returns.
The downtrend continues.

What happened? It was a dead cat bounce.

Then we look forward to the next service or conference. Some believers are constantly on the move looking for the next great video or song to pump them up. The “Christian” culture of our day is filled with all kinds of methods that are well-intended, but do little more than prop up the flesh for a short time.

Religious obligation can be so misleading because it can seem so right. Our independent effort will never

*...And the Lord—
who is the Spirit—
makes us
**MORE
AND
MORE
LIKE HIM**
as we are
changed
into his
glorious
image.*

2 Corinthians 3:18
(NLT)

be able to produce the genuine life of the Spirit.

It can generate a temporary result,
but not a LASTING transformation.

[The face of Moses SHINED when he brought the
Ten Commandments down from the mountain.
The glory, though, did not last. It faded.
THAT is life before the cross.]

In the same way, the motivation of religious performance shines for a little while. Soon enough, though, it fades. Today, much of what takes place in the name of Christian ministry is really just Old Testament methods that have been re-packaged with new terms like principles, commitment, accountability, etc.

The good news of Jesus is that He came to put an end to those old methods.

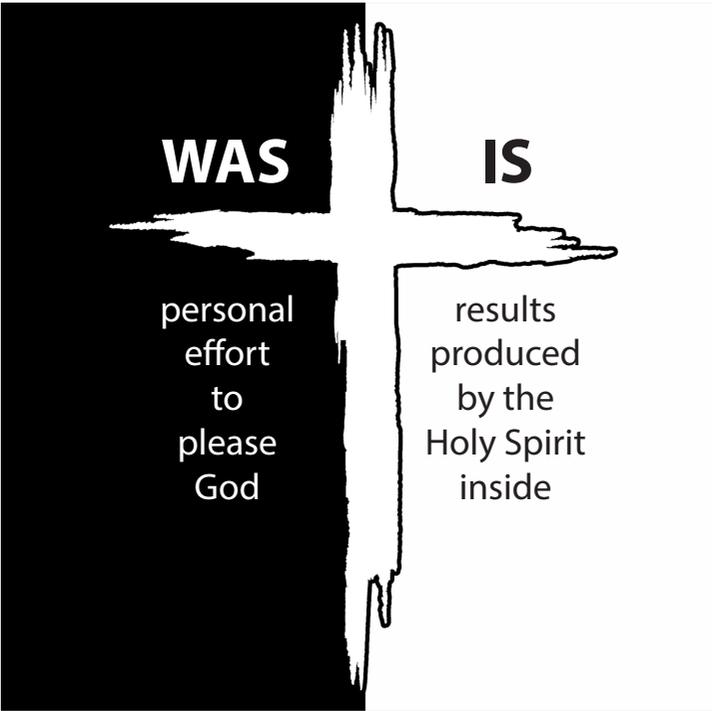
His finished work put an
end to dead cat bounces.

Through His death, resurrection and Spirit living in us,
He produces His life from within.
We know that no amount of intellectual stimulation
or emotional pumping can bring lasting fruit.

Only the Spirit can do that.

On **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**,
we look to Christ knowing that
He will fulfill His promises.

Now, we can rest and quit chasing
the next flashy, short-term "Christian" fad.





talkin' bout dead stuff

Have you repented of doing stuff FOR God?
The Bible calls it "dead works."

What?

I thought I only had to repent of bad works. You know, sin and stuff. Now I find out I need to repent of DEAD WORKS. What's that?

Dead means non-responsive.
Anything that's dead just lies there.
It does nothing, produces nothing.

Dead is well...dead.

[Much of what we think we are
doing for God is like that. It is dead.]

We think our efforts please Him.
We try to earn our way to Him.
But He's not looking for us to work hard to please Him. He wants us to rest in Him, to trust Him.

So what do we do about our tendency to do stuff to attain God's favor? We repent.

It means I can stop doing stuff to earn from God what I already have.

not
laying
again a
foundation of
repentance
from
**DEAD
WORKS**
and of faith
toward God

Hebrews 6:1

“

*Thus saith the
Lord: “Lighten up.
I got this.”*

—Steve McVey--
@drstevemcvey

”

*and you are
~~much improved~~
~~doing better~~
COMPLETE
in Him,...*

Colossians 2:10 NKJV



with friends like these...

"IT" is toxic.
But what is "IT?"

"IT" often seems innocent,
but it is deceptive.

"IT" may come through a spoken word
from someone close to you.

"IT" may come through a Sunday morning
sermon or in a small group.

"IT" may come through something you read on-line.

"IT" seems to motivate you,
but the motivation does not last.

So what is "IT?"

"IT" is CONTAGIOUS
religious requirements.

In the letter to the Galatians,
Paul rebukes them about religious obligation.
Interestingly, throughout Galatians,
we see that this tendency is not
something we think up on our own.

*not that there
is another
one, but
there are
**SOME WHO
TROUBLE
YOU**
and want to
distort the
gospel of
Christ.*

Galatians 1:7

We get some “help.”

Other people try to drag us into this demoralizing system.

EVERY chapter in the book of Galatians includes a verse that illustrates how others “encourage” us in this drift toward religious obligation.

[Religious requirements are viruses spread by human contact.]

MEGA YIKES!!!

When we are trying to do things for God in order to measure up, we will often end up trying to persuade others to do the same.

Somehow,
IT FEEDS MY SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT
if I can get others to perform like I perform.

It also comes from a sense of bitterness about having to follow the rules.
If I have to follow a bunch of rules in order to win God’s favor, you better have to do the same.
It’s not fair for you to live freely while I am busting it trying to please God.
Misery loves company.

In the Body of Christ today, there is no shortage of well-meaning folks who are eager to tell you all the things you “should” be doing. Many times that word “should” is a clue. It is usually an indication of religious obligation.

*Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our **FREEDOM** that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into **SLAVERY***

Galatians 2:4

**THE PROBLEM IS THAT DOING STUFF OUT OF
RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENT DOES ABSOLUTELY
NOTHING TO TRANSFORM THE HEART.**

At best, it only produces some level of outward conformity for a season.

It is deceptive.

It is part of the hex.

Be careful about letting others drag you over to the other side of the cross.

ROGER'S RANT!

Just because somebody talks religious, knows Bible verses, attends church services, and listens to Christian radio,

does NOT mean they know what the heck they are talking about.

(BEWARE!)

They might have ZERO understanding of what Jesus did for you on the cross.

ZERO (zilch)

“WATCH OUT!” Jesus warned them. *“Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*

Matthew 16:6
(NLT)

*Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about the yeast in bread, but about the **DECEPTIVE TEACHING** of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

Matthew 16:12
(NLT)

“

*Jesus
condemned the
condemnors, not
the sinners.*

Jeremiah Johnson
@gracepoint555

”



chutes & ladders

Have you ever played the board game, Chutes and Ladders? (come on now, fess up.)

The goal is to progress from square one at the bottom of the board to square 100 at the top before your competitors. The game is complicated by the chutes and ladders that are included on the board.

Land on the bottom of a ladder and you instantly advance a number of squares. If you land on the top of a chute, you are tragically required to slide down a number of squares.

Undoubtedly, the most AGONIZING move is landing on the top of the chute at square 87. The player who lands on square 87, HORROR OF HORRORS, has no choice but to slide down 63 spaces to square 24! The adrenaline rush, though, comes when you land at the bottom of the ladder on square 28 and you proudly move all the way up to square 84! This is done while ARROGANTLY looking down on your distraught competitors.

*We know very well that we are not set right with God by **RULE-KEEPING** but only through **PERSONAL FAITH** in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it—and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen!*

Galatians 2:16a

(MSG)

Many of us tend to view our spiritual lives like a game of religious chutes and ladders.

We often feel like we are trying to climb to square 100 at the top. At Square 100, we will be:

- Completely spiritually mature,
- Free of guilt,
- Able to overcome all sin,
- Totally pleasing to God.

Like the board game, we try to avoid the spiritual chutes and we try to hit the spiritual ladders.

We live in fear of the “big” sins that will set us back several squares. Different denominations have their own interpretations as to what sin is comparable to the dreaded square 87. We also strive to land on the bottom of a big ladder that will instantly move us up closer to square 100. Again, different denominations have their interpretations about how to launch up the big ladders.

We try endlessly to control our spiritual growth, one square at a time, with:

- Regular Bible reading,
- Prayer,
- “Going to church”
- Doing good things.

Then, if we can just read the right book or attend the right conference or have the right spiritual experience, we will land on a big Christian ladder and advance much closer to the top all in one move. That is how we think when we are under the hex.

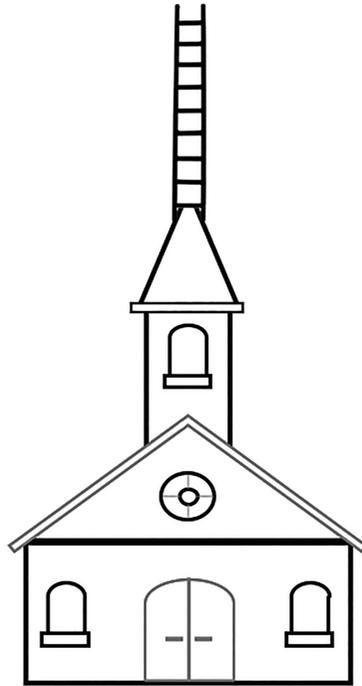
*Convinced that no human being can please God by **SELF-IMPROVEMENT**, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good.*

Galatians 2:16
(MSG)

The good news of Jesus Christ is that we are not playing the game at all. In Christ, we have already reached square 100!

Whenever we sense anxiety about not performing well enough for God, we are UNDER THE HEX.

We are trying to win a game that we have already won in Christ.



*If Christianity were about your spiritual progress then the symbol would have been a **LADDER** instead of a **CROSS**.*



navel gazer

You don't need to be OBSESSED with your sin.
Sin is not the issue.

NAVEL GAZERS are Christians
who are constantly obsessed
with their own spirituality.

Before the cross everything was about sin.
Sacrifices were about sin.
Priests were about sin.

[In the book of Hebrews the writer makes the point
that being conscious of your sin is an indicator
you're still living under the OLD SYSTEM.]

The clear implication is that if a
sacrifice is working then you will
not be conscious (obsessed)
of your sin.

You will be obsessed with the One who
freed you from sin but not the sin itself.

Now, of course, sin will hurt you. There is a natural
reaping that comes from sowing wrong actions into
your life. But you were never meant to be focused on
what you did/do wrong. If so, that's all we would ever
do.

Otherwise, would

they not have

ceased to be

offered, since

the worshipers,

having once been

cleansed, would no

longer have any

CONSCIOUSNESS

OF SINS?

But in these

sacrifices there is a

REMINDER OF SINS

every year.

Hebrews 10:2-3

Come to think of it, that's all some people ever do.
But it's not what God intended for you.

FLASH: it's not about you anymore!

Religion is all about sin management.

It focuses on reminding you of your sin.
It is always discovering a new sin to bring shame.

The result is that you will take your eyes off Jesus.
You will become obsessed with yourself.

That is NOT what Jesus wanted for you
when He died for you.

*There is therefore now
~~some condemnation~~
~~just a little condemnation~~
NO CONDEMNATION
for those who are
in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:1

“

*I am not forgiven
because I apologize
and remember each
sin. I am forgiven
because Jesus died
and shed His blood
for each sin.*

Dr. Andrew Farley
@drandrewfarley

”



the lost commandment

Uh-oh.

A commandment has turned up missing.
We need to find out what happened to it.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day asked Him what the greatest commandment was. He said it was to love God. Then, He also said that loving each other was a close second. In the letters to the New Testament believers, the command to love each other is mentioned a few different times.

The command to love God, though, is missing!

What happened to it?
Why is the "greatest commandment,"
nowhere mentioned after the cross?

[If this command is so great,
why are we never instructed
to love God in the rest of the New Testament?]

Our love for God is mentioned,
but it is not commanded.

Let's back up a little.

*"Teacher, which is the **GREAT** commandment in the **LAW**?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.**"*

Matthew 22:36-40

When Jesus made his comments about the two greatest commandments, He was NOT saying that those two commandments should be the focus for God's people from there on out. He was answering a question from the religious leaders about the law. He said that those two commandments summed up THE LAW and the prophets.

He gave His answer to religious people BEFORE the cross and BEFORE His Spirit came to live inside of us.

On this side of the cross, our relationship with God is sealed and delivered. The emphasis is on HIS LOVE for us, not OUR LOVE for Him.

Do we love God? Yes, of course. However, our love for God is not based on a command or law.

[Our love for Him is the natural response to experiencing His love for us.]

The night before He was crucified, Jesus gave His disciples a NEW command. That command was to love one another as He had loved them. THAT is the focus on this side of the cross.

If you want to try living on the other side of the cross, you can try to love God and love others. That is living under the law.

If you want to live on THIS SIDE of the cross, you look to Jesus Christ and His love for us. As we know more and more of Christ's love for us, we can let the Spirit of God lead us to love one another in the Body of Christ.

*A new
commandment
I give to you,
that you love
one another: just
as I have loved
you, you also are
to **LOVE ONE
ANOTHER.** By
this all people
will know that
you are my
disciples, if you
have **LOVE FOR
ONE ANOTHER.**"*

John 13:34-35



martha gone wild

We have made this so-called “Christian life” thing WAY...too...complicated.

This is illustrated by the story of what happened one day when Jesus visited the home of Mary and Martha. Martha was busy and bothered with many things, but Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His word.

Both knew Jesus.
Both were sincere.
Martha made it complicated.
Mary kept it simple.

[Martha is an illustration of the way things
were on the other side of the cross.]

She was focused on all the things
that SHE NEEDED TO DO.

Mary simply “heard His word.” Martha was distracted by many things, but Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good part, the one thing that was needed. We “hear” the Spirit of God in our spirit.

*And she had
a sister called
Mary, who
sat at the
Lord's feet and
listened to his
teaching. But
Martha was
**DISTRACTED
WITH MUCH
SERVING.***

Luke 10:39-40

Walking with God is simply hearing His voice within and responding to Him.

Paul told the believers at Corinth that he was concerned that their minds were being corrupted from the SIMPLICITY in Christ. He compared it to how Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Walking with God is simple.

While Scripture is inspired by God,
LIFE IN CHRIST IS A RELATIONSHIP
WITH A REAL PERSON,
NOT WITH A BOOK.

You can trust Him to lead. You can trust in His Spirit to teach you. You can trust in Him to bring you back on course like a GPS when you take a wrong turn.

Sadly, when someone first comes to know Christ, we have a tendency to load them up with a mountain of expectations and obligations and information. Intentional or not, we do them NO FAVOR when we get new believers to be more in tune with our voice than with the voice of their shepherd.

Jesus is the shepherd. He is the shepherd who can both rescue His sheep AND then lead them.

The best thing we can do for a new believer is simply to encourage them to listen to the voice of the One who drew them in the first place.

*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the **SIMPLICITY** that is in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 11:3
(NKJV)

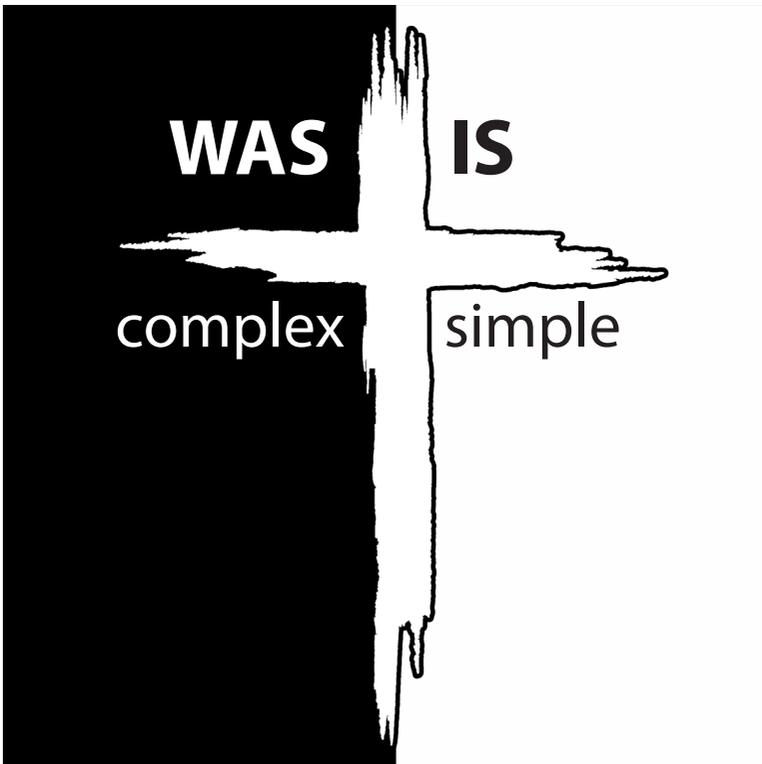
Yes, more experienced brothers and sisters can help others sort out the daily walk and help a new believer recognize the voice of Jesus.

The problem comes when a so-called “leader” tries to REPLACE the voice of the Spirit in someone’s life with THE LEADER’S VOICE.

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS, it is really not that complicated.

[Trust the One who is your life.
Trust the One who lives within you.
Trust the One who loves you more than you know.]

He will lead you. He will.





you don't owe God nuttin'

Heresy!

How can I say we do NOT owe God anything?
Am I crazy?
Don't I know who God is?
And what He did for me?

Ask the average believer if they owe God anything and they will look at you like you are crazy. Who, in their right theological mind, would suggest we do not owe God anything? Well...the apostle Paul for one. He said that God cancelled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

If the record of debt has been cancelled by God, that means you...do...not...OWE...God... anything! (STUNNING!)

If you believe you owe God anything, it means you do not really believe that He cancelled the debt on the cross. Did the death of Jesus on the cross cancel your debt or didn't it?

"Yeah, but isn't God worthy of all glory?" Yes.
"But isn't God our Creator and Savior?" Yes.

by

CANCELING

THE RECORD

OF DEBT

that stood

against us

with its legal

demands. This

he set aside,

NAILING

IT TO THE

CROSS.

Colossians 2:14

“But isn’t God deserving of complete submission?” Yes.
“Then, don’t we owe Him everything?” No. No. No.

God Himself cancelled the record of debt that was against us. You cannot believe, on the one hand, that Jesus paid your debt in full on the cross, and also believe that you owe God something. If we owe God anything, then Jesus did not pay our debt in full.

Way too many preachers try to pile the debt onto the backs of believers to make them feel guilty about not doing enough for God. THAT, my friends, is a denial of the work of Christ on the Cross.

When I realize that Jesus paid
ALL of my debt on the cross,
When I realize that God
cancelled the debt once and for all,
When I realize that I do not owe God anything,
All of a sudden,
I realize how fantastic God is!

No one likes to hang around someone
when you owe them something.
Nothing ruins a family reunion
like borrowing money from your relatives.

No wonder your Cousin Eddie gets nervous at Thanksgiving,
then leaves early.

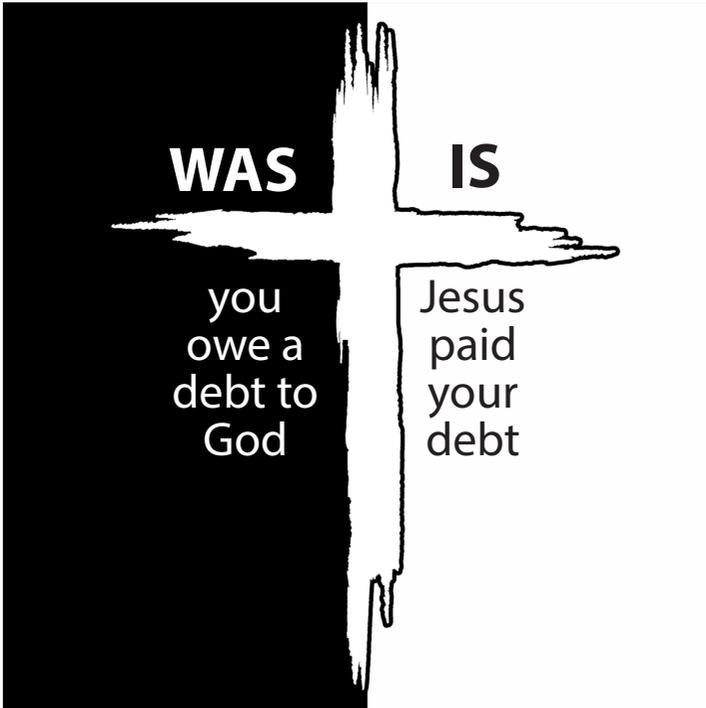
[We tend to avoid our creditors. If you do not feel endeared to God,
maybe it is because you still think you are in debt to Him.]

It is no wonder that many people do not want to do life with God. They have been told they owe Him everything. They do not realize that, on **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**, the debt has been cancelled.

That is great news!

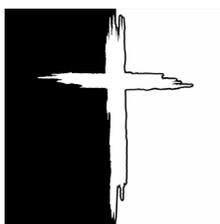
God longs for you to know how much he loves you.
He wants you to do life with Him because you actually want to do so, not
because you are making a payment on a huge debt.

He wants you to know that
you do not owe Him anything.
Look at the cross.
The debt has been paid.



III.

How God Made You New



*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **NEW CREATION**.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

2 Corinthians 5:17



Faith in Jesus and His crucifixion doesn't merely improve us...but makes us new.



kickball

In my elementary school kickball was king.
And I was a horrible kickball player.

The game is simple enough: someone rolls the ball in your direction, you kick it as hard as you can and then run like you're on fire to first base. You try to get there before some other kid grabs the ball and hurls it at you.

Before the game started, two captains chose kids one by one to be on their team. The problem with that was my past performance in kickball was less than impressive. Therefore, the captains regularly--and reluctantly--chose me last or close to it.

That's not a great feeling.

Obviously, neither captain was pumped about picking me for their team. So even after I finally got picked, it was an afterthought, not something that the captains planned. "OK, I'll take Roger," was what I heard most days.

Thankfully, God is not a kickball captain looking for the best players.

He is a Father.
Your DAD.

*He
CHOSE
us in him
before the
foundation
of the
world,*

Ephesians 1:4

He picked YOU.

Not because of what you can do for Him.

Don't let the doctrinal ramifications rob you.
Don't get bogged down with trying to unravel the
time line. You don't have to understand all the details
to accept the fact that God chose you.

He picked you because
He wanted YOU.
Not reluctantly.
Not by accident.
On purpose.
He chose you.
Yes, YOU.

(Let that sink in.)

*For we
know,
brothers
loved by
God, that
he has
CHOSEN
you,*

1 Thessalonians 1:4



don't let this go to your head, but...

Jesus said that John the Baptist was greater than anyone born up until that time.

Wow! That means Johnny B was the superstar of the Bible before the cross. (Of course, not counting Jesus) That means he ranked above Abraham, Moses, King David, Elijah and the rest of the Biblical heroes. That's quite an endorsement coming from Jesus.

But here's the kicker.

Jesus said one more thing.
He said there is someone even greater than Johnny B.
Wanna guess who?
YOU.

How is that possible?

Jesus said that anyone--even the least---in the Kingdom of Heaven (any believer) is greater than John the Baptist!

THAT IS AMAZING!

*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one **GREATER** than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is **GREATER** than he.*

Matthew- 11:11

Did you catch THAT?

(REWIND THAT AND PLAY IT AGAIN)

Jesus said the least of believers in the Kingdom on this side of the cross is greater than John the Baptist who lived before the cross.

Soooooooo.

Even if you do not FEEL strong,
Even if you do not FEEL spiritual,
Jesus says you are greater than any of those giant-killing, sea-splitting, ark-building, furnace-defying, lion-stopping hot shots.

Whoa! (Remember, do NOT let this go to your head.)

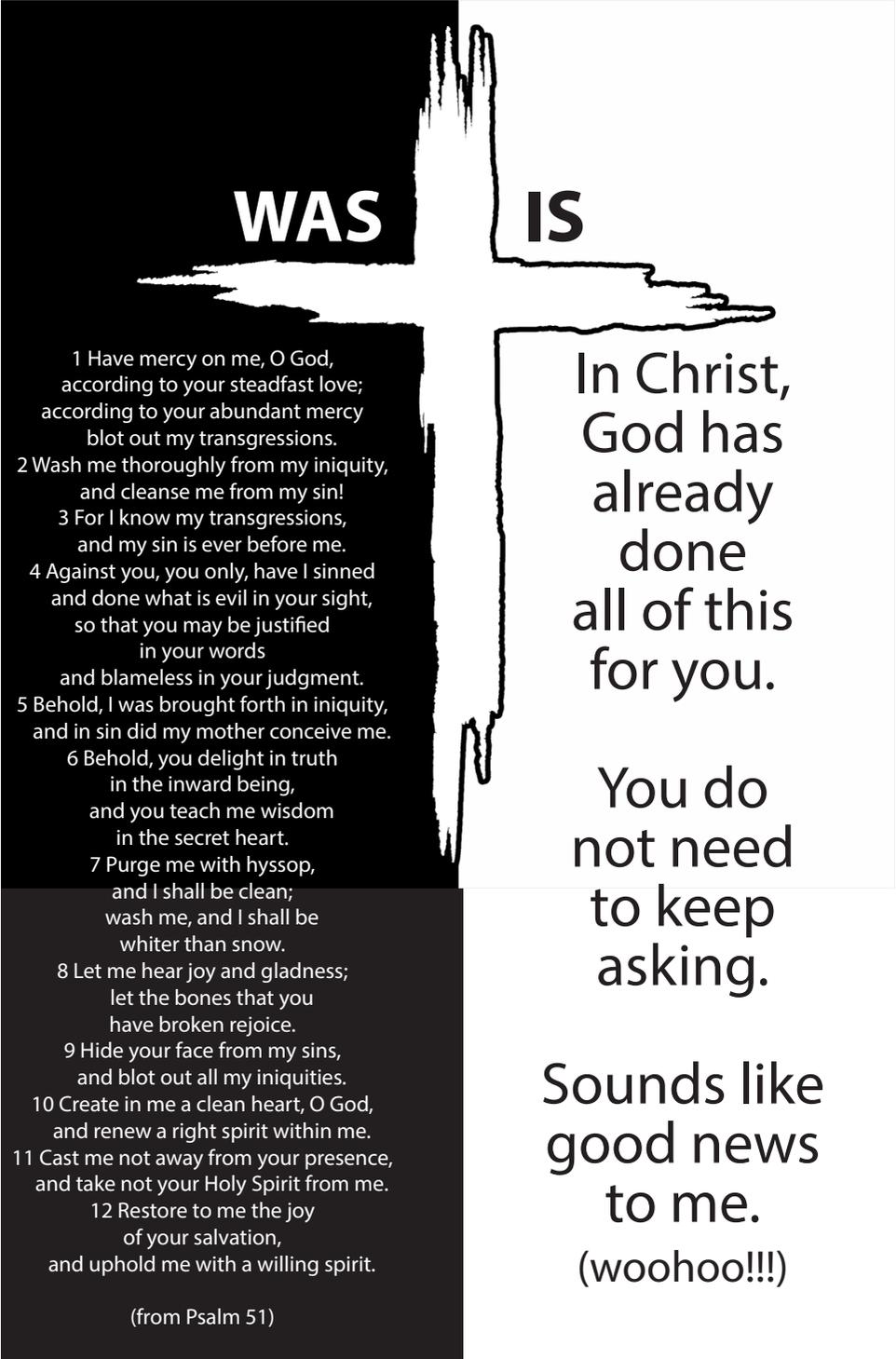
In Christ you are greater than anyone who lived before the cross.

Through Christ living in us, we have what those old dudes before the cross could only dream of.

Today, as members of the Body of Christ, you and I have more going for us than any of those who lived before the Cross.

Don't sell yourself short.
The God who created the universe says
He has placed the life of His Son inside you.
You and Christ are now one.
You are in Him and He is in you.
That is who you are!

Don't let this to go to your head (in an arrogant way)...
but DO let it go to your heart.



WAS

IS

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified
in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6 Behold, you delight in truth
in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom
in the secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop,
and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be
whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you
have broken rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy
of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

(from Psalm 51)

In Christ,
God has
already
done
all of this
for you.

You do
not need
to keep
asking.

Sounds like
good news
to me.
(woohoo!!!)



the doctor will see you now

On Sept. 10, 2001, our dad had major surgery.

It was to diagnose and, hopefully, to remove the mass that had shown up in the MRI. With a range of possible outcomes, I will never forget the sense of relief and joy we experienced when one of the surgeons came into the waiting room, smiling, to tell us the news.

THERE WAS NO CANCER!

We took him at his word and thanked God.

My brother and I had not seen what was in his abdomen. Even if we had, we would not have known how to diagnose it. However, because an experienced surgical oncologist gave us a good report, we immediately knew the truth about Dad's condition.

We took the surgeon at his word. Dad was on his way to getting better. God gave us another wonderful 13 years with him.

*as we look not
to the things
that are seen
but to the
things that
are **UNSEEN**.*

*For the things
that are seen
are transient,
but the things
that are*

**UNSEEN ARE
ETERNAL.**

2 Corinthians 4:18

Just as we depend on a doctor to diagnose our physical condition, we can depend on God, the Great Physician, to diagnose our true spiritual condition.

God has done the MRI on you.

The spiritual blood work and surgery is complete.

He sees what you cannot see and He has a great report.

Because of what God in Christ did for you on the cross, you have been made completely new!

God's Spirit now lives in you.

You have a new personal reality.

On the inside, you have been joined with Christ.

You may not feel like it or act like it at times, but that is who God says you are!

The truest thing about you is what God says about you.

His testimony is the final word.

In your spirit, you are one with Christ.

Believe Him.

He is not just saying that to make you feel better.

It really is true.

It is ours to believe as God reveals this

incredible good news to your heart through His Spirit.

**QUIT TRYING TO BECOME
WHO YOU ALREADY ARE!**

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS,

your reliable test result from

the Great Physician is fantastic news.



the idol of spiritual growth

"Now wait just a cotton-pickin' minute.
Every Christian knows that
growth is the ultimate goal!"

HOW CAN SPIRITUAL GROWTH POSSIBLY BE AN IDOL?

When I was growing up, I was anxious to grow taller. Like many kids, I would stand against the back of my bedroom door and have someone mark the door at the top of my head. A few months later, I would repeat the process to see if I could place a new mark a little higher.

We often do something similar with our spiritual height. While my preoccupation with my physical height only lasted maybe 6 or 8 years, I was preoccupied with my spiritual height for many more years.

I desperately wanted to grow spiritually.
I wanted to be able to overcome temptation.
I wanted to have insights into Scripture.
I wanted to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like a little boy putting marks on the back of the bedroom door, I was constantly trying to measure my spiritual height. I would get frustrated when my spiritual growth seemed to flat-line or even worse,

*But grow
in the
GRACE
and
knowledge
of our Lord
and Savior
Jesus
Christ.*

2 Peter 3:18

back up an inch or two. Looking back,
I was making spiritual growth an idol.

**I was focused more on ME and MY
performance than I was on
JESUS CHRIST and HIS performance.**

Jesus encouraged his listeners not to worry about physical needs and physical growth. He reminds them that their heavenly Father takes care of feeding the birds and clothing the wild flowers. Anxiety over our physical well-being happens when we do not realize that we have a heavenly Father who loves us more than we know.

The same is true spiritually.

Much of my desire to be spiritually mature was really coming from not knowing how much God had already done for me.

When we know we are already completely loved by our heavenly Father, we are free from trying to perform for Him. We are free to enjoy the relationship with Him.

**I cannot make myself grow spiritually any more
than I could make myself grow physically.**

Where there is life, there is growth.

**As we quit worrying about growing spiritually
and as we recognize God's love for us,
a funny thing happens.**

We start to grow...in grace.

On this side of the cross, we can stop measuring ourselves on the back of the spiritual bedroom door.

We can trust Him to bring about the growth in His time.



you are here*

It is fairly common for praise and worship songs to focus on coming into God's presence. They are written and sung as if something still needs to happen to bring us into God's presence.

Too often, they largely ignore the fantastic reality of God's presence that we have--here and now--on this side of the cross.

The good news in Jesus Christ is that we no longer have to strive to come into God's presence! He lives in us through His Spirit all the time!

The notion of coming into God's presence through praise music or prayer or Scripture is what life was like BEFORE the cross.

Jesus promised that when His Spirit would come, we would be in Him and He would be in us. You cannot get any closer than that.

I cannot "come into His presence" any more than I can come into the presence of my own physical heart.

When

Christ

who is

YOUR

LIFE

appears, then

you also will

appear with

him in glory.

Colossians 3:4

We are the Body of Christ.
We are God's temple.
Christ lives in us.

I am not always conscious of Christ in me just as I am not always conscious of my beating heart. So, it is helpful to be reminded who we already are in Christ and who He is in us. That is different, though, than needing to come into His presence.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this. Did He ever "come into the Father's presence"? No. He and the Father were one.

He, at times, went away from the crowds to enjoy the undistracted company of the Father, but He never left the Father's presence. He couldn't! The Father and Jesus were one.

In the same way, Jesus and the believer are one today. It is fantastic to know that Christ and you are one. He lives in you.

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS,
you do not need to
"come into His presence."

He will never leave you nor forsake you. Nothing you can do will separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ.

He is our constant location.

[HINT: You never have to pray, "God, be with me."]

*I have been
crucified with
Christ. It is
NO LONGER
I WHO LIVE,
but **CHRIST**
WHO LIVES
IN ME. And
the life I now
live in the
flesh I live by
faith in the
Son of God,
who loved
me and gave
himself for
me.*

Galatians 2:20



i quit trying to live the christian life

Author Wayne Jacobsen tells the true story about a teenage girl who returned home after attending a Christian youth meeting. When asked by her parents what they talked about, she replied,

***“Same ol’, same ol’.
You know, God’s good.
You’re bad. Try harder.”¹***

For many of us, that sums up how we are trying to live what many call, “the Christian life.”

Looking back, I often tried to perform for God so that He and I would both feel good about how I was doing. I wanted God to be pleased with me. So, the way to get there was to try harder. At least that is what it seemed like.

I became more and more frustrated trying to “live the Christian life.”

The harder I tried, the weaker I felt.
I knew I was still God’s child and forgiven.
I just did not feel very spiritual.

Intellectually, I knew God loved me,
but I felt He was disappointed in me.

I would say it is all by grace,
but God still seemed rather demanding and hard to please.

He was good, but it sure seemed like I was bad.
And TRYING HARDER WAS NOT WORKING.

God is patient.

Somewhere along the way I began to see that
“living the Christian life” is not just difficult.
It...is...impossible.

All the time my heavenly Father was helping me see that He was
not asking me to live the Christian life. He was waiting to live His life
through me.

The difference is NOT just semantics.
Real life comes from the inside.
God is not asking you to live the Christian life.
He loves you and is asking you to trust Him to live His life through you.

Don't worry about the end result.
That will take care of itself in time.
He will be your “Christian Life.”
Relax and expect His Life in you
to grow over time and
displace the old tendencies.



captivated by Jesus

The problem of the Galatian believers was that their focus strayed off of Jesus Christ and His completed work on the cross. They started well, but were trying to finish by helping God through their own effort.

Day to day, they were no longer
CAPTIVATED by Jesus Christ.

The method of the enemy is to get us captivated by any other “good” thing or person or effort instead of by Jesus Christ and His work.

There are many “good” things that can help direct us to Jesus Christ. The problem comes when we allow those things to become more prominent in our lives than Jesus Himself. Those things or people or ideas become a poor substitute for Jesus.

We start to trust in them more than in the living Savior. In this way, they end up replacing Christ in our lives.

Many genuine believers have a half-baked view of all that Jesus Christ won for us. As a result, we try

*You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has happened, for it's obvious that you **NO LONGER HAVE THE CRUCIFIED JESUS IN CLEAR FOCUS** in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough.*

Galatians 3:1
(MSG)

to carry on through human effort what can only be finished through the miracle of Christ living in us.

Focus on Jesus Christ and the incredible work that He did for you.

Freedom comes from being captivated **ONLY** by Him!

BE CAREFUL ABOUT BEING CAPTIVATED BY...

**Any set of principles.
Any teacher/author/minister.
Any style of praise music.
Any Sunday morning gathering.
Bible study groups/series.
Ministry activities/programs.**

There is **NO...**
program/author/principle/
conference/song/teacher/video/
doctrine/liturgy/ministry
that died for you.

None.

I am truly captivated only by Jesus Christ... the One who actually did die for me.

*But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and **PURE DEVOTION TO CHRIST.***

2 Corinthians 11:3



who stole your identity?

Have you been hacked?
There is something worse than
having your credit card number stolen.
Or your SS number ripped off.
Or your Facebook account hijacked.

Even worse is when Satan hacks your emotions.
That's when he steals your understanding
of who you are.

Question.
What's the first thing you think about when someone
asks you the question: "who are you?"

Do you think of your job title?
Do you think of your athletic accomplishments.
Do you think of your skills or appearance?
Or maybe you think of your failures.
Maybe you think about what your dad said about you
when you were growing up.

What you think about yourself will impact your life.

When you received Jesus you got
a new identity and Satan has been
trying to steal it from you ever since.

*The
thief (Satan)
comes only to*

STEAL

and

KILL

and

DESTROY.

--Jesus--

John 10:10

The Bible says that in Jesus you have been recreated into someone new. You are chosen by God and His child forever.

Satan is first and foremost a liar and a thief.

He wants nothing more than to steal your true identity in Christ by lying to you.

He knows he can discourage you by getting you to doubt who God made you.

So I ask you...

**Who.
Are.
You?**

God says you are...

A new creation
His kid
Forgiven
Free
Heir of God
Royal priest
Chosen
In Christ
Alive

**So what do YOU say?
(HINT: Just agree with Him.)**

*You (pharisees) are of your father the **DEVIL**, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does **NOT STAND IN THE TRUTH**, because there is **NO TRUTH** in him. When he **LIES**, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a **LIAR** and the **FATHER OF LIES**.*

John 8:44



fish 'n chips

Sometimes a building is in such bad shape that it cannot be remodeled. It has to be torn down so that a brand new one can be built.

There is a Long John Silvers fast food restaurant near where we grew up. It has been there since the 70's. Many years ago, though, I was driving down the road and noticed the building had been torn down – completely down to the ground.

It was gone!

A few weeks later, I drove down the same road and noticed a new building was going up. To my surprise, I discovered that they were building a new Long John Silvers restaurant that looked just like the first one.

It did not seem to make much sense. Why would you go to the cost of destroying a restaurant in order to turn right around and build another just like it?

What I eventually learned was that the original building had become infested with some type of insects. It was so bad, that the building could not be repaired.

It had to be completely destroyed.

Some things cannot be fixed.
They have to be replaced.

*For neither
circumcision
counts for
anything, nor
uncircumcision,
but a
NEW
CREATION.*

Galatians 6:15

That is what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was all about.

We inherited a sinful nature from
our great, great....great grandpa Adam.

It was in our genes.

The sin problem was not just a surface problem.

It went all the way down to our spiritual roots.

That sinful nature affected everything we tried to do.

We could not be fixed.

We had to be replaced.

When Jesus died on the cross, He not only died for our sins (plural), He also took our old sinful nature to the cross. The old self-centered race of Adam was nailed to the tree and put to death. When He arose, He started a brand new race of people who would have a new nature on the inside. His Spirit would live inside our heart.

The work of Jesus is both one, big demolition project
and one, big construction project.

On the cross, He demolished our old nature.

The empty tomb is the birth of our new nature.

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS,

Christ is not trying to fix the old you.

He has made you new.

*Therefore, if ANYONE
is in Christ,
he is a
~~better person~~
~~religious person~~
~~much-improved person~~
NEW CREATION.
The old has passed away;
behold, the new has come.*

2 Corinthians 5:17



good news: you died!

One of my responsibilities as a basketball dad for my youngest son's team was to keep stats during the games on an iPad. There is a cool app that makes it easy. We keep record of pretty much everything every player does, good or bad. Missed shots, made shots, rebounds, fouls, steals, turnovers, blocks, etc. all get recorded on the iPad for future generations to see. When a player comes out of the game, however, we no longer keep record of anything they do.

They are, in effect,
dead to the game.

God is not keeping stats on us on a cosmic iPad.
We are out of the game entirely.
We got taken out of the game
when Christ took our death for us.
He did not just take my sins to the cross.
He took me, the sinner, to the cross as well.

Many times, when we think about God's grace being free and undeserved, we usually think about it in terms of God not keeping record of the bad things we do.

He does not hold our sins against us.
That is true.

We know that
our old self was
CRUCIFIED with
him

Romans 6:6

So you also
must consider
yourselves **DEAD**
to sin and alive to
God in Christ Jesus

Romans 6:11

Likewise, my
brothers, you also
have **DIED** to the
law through the
body of Christ

Romans 7:4

I have been
CRUCIFIED with
Christ. It is no
longer I who live

Galatians 2:20

For you have **DIED**,
and your life is
hidden with Christ
in God

Colossians 3:3

We all know that Jesus died for us on the cross. That's only part of the good news, though. What is not so well known is that **WE DIED WITH HIM!**

When He died, we died!

Once you are dead, you no longer do good or bad.
A dead person does not do anything – good or bad.

In the days of slavery in the U.S., many of the songs that came out of that tragic condition spoke of heaven and life after this world. Sadly, for many, the only way out of slavery was to die. The same is true spiritually. The only way to be free from slavery to sin is to die.

The good news is that spiritually we already died with Christ on the cross. Through our death with Christ, we have been set free.

Freedom from the destruction of sin does not come by trying harder to be more committed.

Freedom comes through our death with Christ.

Dying with Jesus is NOT something we need to make happen.
It has already been done!
It is a present reality for us to believe.

The good news is:
YOU DIED!

[random]

*“I’m not all that spiritual,
but I have a Savior who is.
And that’s enough.”*



why I'm not a follower of Jesus

I do not describe myself
as a "follower" of Jesus.

Before you brand me a heretic and
burn me at the stake, let me explain.

When Jesus of Nazareth walked physically on the
Earth, the disciples and others followed Him. They
literally followed Him around as He strolled through
Galilee and other places. Jesus had not yet died and
risen from the dead.

He had not yet sent His Holy Spirit
to live in them. Without His Spirit,
the best option was to literally
follow Him around.

AFTER the cross and resurrection, Jesus floated up in
the air and disappeared into the sky. Then, He sent
His Holy Spirit to live inside of us. Believers became
one with Him.

*From now on,
therefore, we
regard no one
according to
the flesh. Even
though we
once regarded
Christ
according to
the flesh, **WE
REGARD HIM
THUS NO
LONGER.***

2 Corinthians 5:16

They no longer followed Him like they did before the cross.

That is why the New Testament says we are members of His body.

The phrase that is constantly used after the death and resurrection is "in Christ."

We are in Christ and He is in us.
That is much better than just following Him.

You follow someone else when you are a separate person.
When you are one with Christ, you do not follow Him.
He lives through you.

In his second letter to the folks at Corinth,
Paul said something amazing about Jesus.

**He said that he used to view Jesus according to "the flesh."
But no longer.**

He was talking about the natural, physical person called Jesus of Nazareth. (You know, the Bearded/Sандаled One.)

Paul goes on to say that he does NOT view Christ that way anymore.
In that same passage, he talks about living by faith and focusing on the things that are spiritual and eternal.

The point is this: Even though Paul lived at the same time as the Bearded/Sандаled One,
He considered it much more important to know the resurrected Christ.

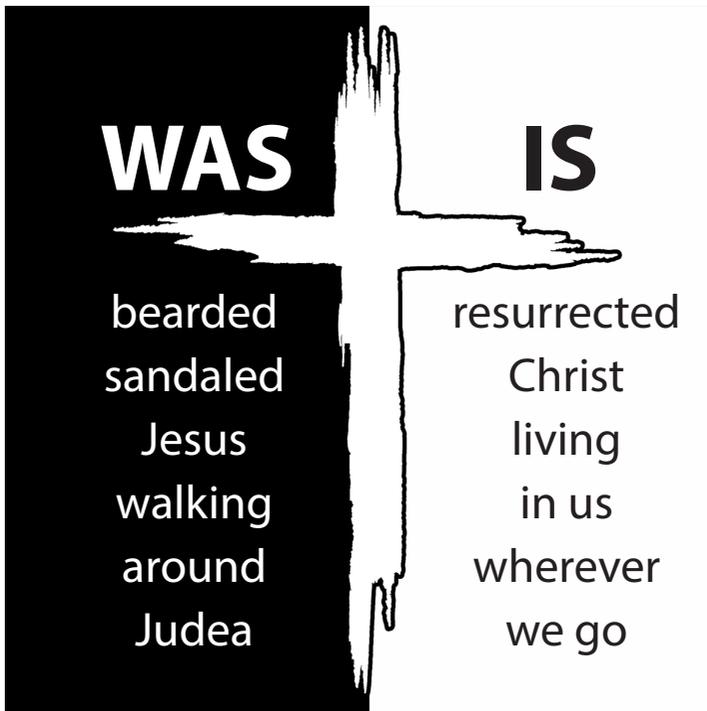
It is good to learn about the Bearded/Sандаled One who was God in human flesh, but there is no life in that intellectual knowledge.

Real life and freedom comes as we know the eternal Son of God who lives today in our heart.

This is NOT a matter of semantics!
It is the difference between living under the hex and living in freedom.

You are in Christ and He is in you.
That is better than just being a follower
of the Bearded/Sандаled One.

Jesus Christ



...Even though we
**ONCE REGARDED CHRIST
ACCORDING TO THE FLESH,
WE REGARD HIM THUS NO LONGER.**

2 Corinthians 5:16

busted by Chloe's people!

Apparently, Chole's bunch didn't appreciate the fussing by some of the believers. They had been arguing over who FOLLOWED who. Paul called them out.

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by CHLOE'S PEOPLE that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "**I FOLLOW CHRIST!**" Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Paul did NOT endorse the group claiming to "follow Christ." He didn't say, "Yeah, you're the group who gets it right."

It seemed Paul was not wild about that phrase. It was not one he ever promoted.

Well, that's interesting.

Way to go, Team Chloe!



swingin' emotions

Emotions are part of being human.
Some days you are up.
Some days are down.
Faith in Jesus stabilizes your emotions somewhat,
but you can/will have mood swings.

Feelings are real.
While we need to accept them,
we shouldn't let them run our lives.

It's like being on a swing set.
Feelings will sway back and forth.
But in Jesus we are still secure and connected at the top,
where the connection stays put.
The top connection of the swing never moves.
It stays attached.

There are days when you FEEL apart from God.
But the connection with Jesus is still attached.

[There are bad days when everything goes wrong.
You FEEL as though God isn't even aware of you.
But the connection with Jesus is still attached.]

Don't let your emotions freak you out.
You will swing back and forth at times.

Any number of things can effect you emotionally...

lack of sleep
sickness
exhaustion

Heck, if your dog runs away from home
you're going to feel a bit down about that.

Feelings go UP.
Feelings go DOWN.

But none of this changes your
connection to God through Jesus.

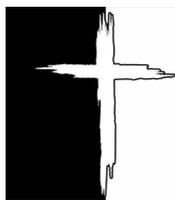
It's just life on this planet.

Remember your connection with God is always intact.
The swing is NOT coming down.
You are still attached through Jesus.



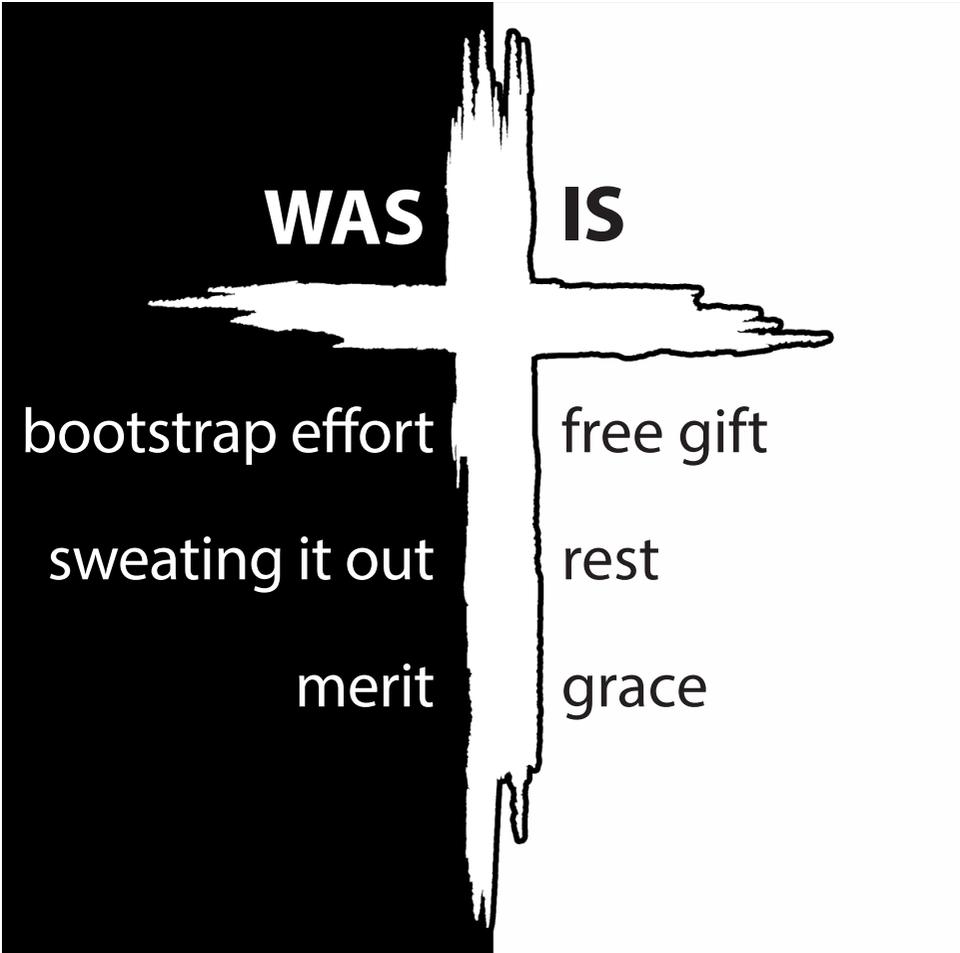
IV.

How Grace Sets You Free



*To him who **LOVES** us and has
FREED us from our sins by his **BLOOD***

Revelation 1:5



The cross released God's grace in a new way.



Jesus plays the game through us

Christianity is unique. It is the only way of living where the One who instructs us is also the power inside of us who carries out the instruction.

Michael Jordan was the greatest basketball player of all time. He later became a coach. He taught. He inspired. He ran the practices. He did everything he could to make his players the best possible.

There was one thing he could NOT do: he could not play the game through them.

But that is EXACTLY what Jesus does.

He plays the game through us.

If we read the teachings of Jesus without keeping the cross in clear focus, we will misunderstand what Jesus meant.

(It happens ALL the time.)

Without the cross in view, the teachings of Jesus are just moral ethics with **NO POWER**.

The ministry of Jesus took place between the old way of keeping laws and the new way of life through Him. His teachings were during a time of transition.

You therefore must be
PERFECT, as
your heavenly Father is
PERFECT.

Matthew 5:48

For by a single offering he has
PERFECTED
for all time those who are being sanctified.

Hebrews 10:14

He gave many commands knowing that there was no way that His listeners could keep them before the cross. He was describing life in the Kingdom of God. He was not laying down a whole new set of rules for us to try to live by out of guilt.

Jesus gave the commands...
then obeyed/fulfilled them for us.

The letters to the early believers explain how He fulfilled what He taught.

Jesus told them to BE perfect.
Later the book of Hebrews says
His sacrifice has MADE us perfect.

Jesus said to deny ourselves and take up our cross.
Paul tells us we are already crucified with Christ.

Jesus talked about hungering for righteousness.
Paul says that Christ Himself is our righteousness.

Jesus talked about rivers for the thirsty.
John said He was talking about the Spirit given later.

Jesus gave commands in the Sermon on the Mount.
Later, we see them fulfilled by the fruit of the Spirit.

Before the cross, the commands of
Jesus are just external rules that are
impossible to obey in our effort.

On **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**,
He enables us to walk in
God's righteousness, peace and joy.

Have you ever noticed that Paul and the other writers

*He who calls
you is faithful;*

HE WILL

SURELY

DO IT.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

looking unto

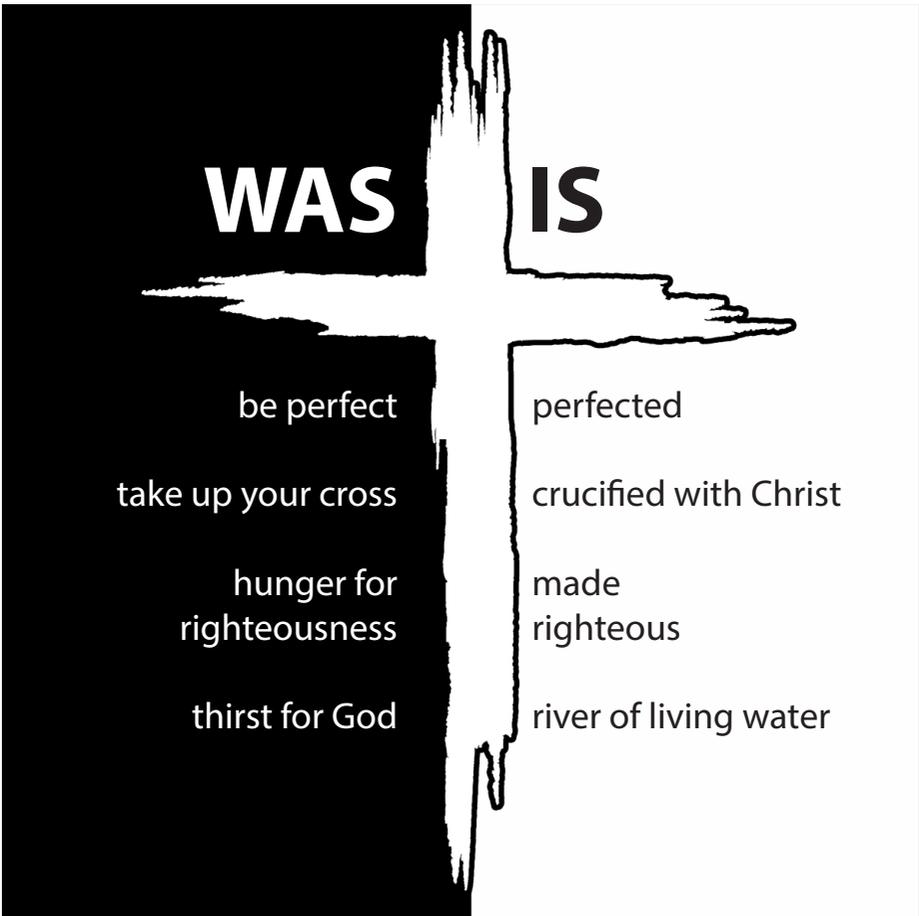
Jesus, the

AUTHOR and

FINISHER

of our faith,

Hebrews 12:2
(NKJV)



of the New Testament letters almost NEVER quote Jesus Himself?

Living in Christ is NOT a matter of trying to live by a bunch of written or spoken rules. That is true even if they were spoken by Jesus Himself.

Life in Christ is trusting Him to supernaturally produce His fruit in me. The apostle Paul did not want us more focused on the teachings of Jesus than we are focused on Christ Himself.

He did not want us to try to follow an external code of ethics.

He encouraged us to look to the crucified Jesus and to be led by His Spirit within us.



a rather personal question

Let me ask you an outright, straightforward, bona-fide, personal question.
(You don't mind do you? Either way, here it comes.)

When you think about God and how the two of you relate to each other, do you feel **primarily** like you are **DOING SOMETHING FOR HIM** or **He is DOING SOMETHING FOR YOU?**

(Stop and think about it.)
Be HONEST.

When it comes to you and God, who does it seem like is on the giving end and who is on the receiving end? Does it seem like **YOU** are doing stuff **FOR GOD?** Or does it seem like **GOD** is doing stuff **FOR YOU?**

How you answer that question is the difference between what the Bible calls "law" and "grace."

The New Testament is clear.

We are not under law, but under grace.

Law means I do something for God.

Grace means God does something for me.

Pretty simple.

Read it AGAIN! PLEASE!

Law means I do something for God.

Grace means God does something for me.

You don't need a seminary degree to understand that.

For much of my life, I felt like how well my life went depended mostly on how much I did for God. The ball was always in my court. I was living under law AND grace.

When you live trying to do things for God, life gets frustrating. Super frustrating.

God begins to seem like a demanding boss who is never satisfied. You may look good and sound good for a while, but sadly, NOTHING changes on the INSIDE. Not ONE thing changes in the heart. Trying to do things for God becomes more and more of a struggle.

Trying to live under both law AND grace leads to either arrogance or discouragement.

(Pick one.)

If I manage to grit it out for a while (even decades), I will tend to feel good about myself. I will look down on others who are not doing as much as I do (been there, done that). However, when my own strength finally comes to an end, and it always does, I will feel weak and hopeless (been there, done that, too).

EITHER WAY, IT IS A DEAD-END STREET.

As we see who Christ is and what He has done and

*For sin will
have no
dominion
over you,
since you
are not
under **LAW**
but under
GRACE.*

Romans 6:14

who He is in us, we realize that God is the one at work. We are on the receiving end of the deal as He transforms us from the inside out.

When we live under grace and grace alone,
we look to Him as the doer.

The result is increasing:

Freedom

Rest

Thankfulness.

New life that is real.

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS,

God is the giver and I am the receiver.

Because of that,
I see God as the
most generous and endearing
presence in the universe
and I want to hang around
a God like that.

“

*Law means I do
something for God.
Grace means God does
something for me.¹*

Chinese writer, Watchman Nee

”



and agony on me

Does God want me to be miserable?
One Bible verse used to make me think He did.

The verse reminded me of a song from the old TV show, Hee Haw. Remember the old guys sprawled out on the front porch looking like life had beat them to a pulp? They would sing,

“Gloom, despair and agony on me.”
(moan loudly)

“Deep dark depression, excessive misery.”
(moan louder)

Luke 9:23 sounded to me like Jesus was saying if you want to be a good Christian you better be prepared to live a miserable life.

I imagined “taking up my cross” meant I was never supposed to enjoy life. No fun. No excitement. No adventure. Just mundane Christian service.

Then I learned what this verse really meant. When Jesus said this, He hadn’t died on a cross yet. The disciples probably had no idea what He was talking about.

*And he said to all,
“If anyone would come after me, let him **DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY** and follow me.*

Luke 9:23

But years later, after His death, burial and resurrection, Paul the apostle reveals what Jesus meant. It turns out to be quite different than what I thought. He unravels it for us.

Paul said that he had been crucified WITH Christ and now Christ lives in him.

So Paul defines “taking up the cross” to explain what it means to us after the crucifixion of Jesus.

It does not mean living a miserable Christian existence.

【 “Taking up your cross” means that I have already been crucified so Christ now lives out His life through me. 】

There is no agony in that.

I deny my own ability to please God because... well...I am dead.

So my faith is no longer in my self effort. “Denying self” means rejecting my efforts to please God.

Trying to live the Christian life on my own is agony and misery.

Relaxing in what Jesus did for me on the cross, and allowing Him to live through me is freedom and power.

**MY OLD
SELF HAS
BEEN
CRUCIFIED
WITH
CHRIST.**

It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20
(NLT)



“@#\$, delmar’s been saved!”

- Pete in “O Brother, Where Art Thou?”

All of our lives we have heard about “being saved.” What does that mean? Saved from what? Most people usually think about being saved from eternal punishment - from Hell.

Surprisingly, when the word is used in the New Testament, it is almost never referring to life after death. It refers to life HERE and NOW.

The apostle Paul wrote about how Jesus gave Himself to rescue us. In the book of Acts, Peter told the crowd to be saved.

Rescued from what?

Saved from what?

In neither case does Scripture talk about avoiding Hell or anything related to eternal destiny. In our day, we quickly associate almost everything about Christ’s saving work to a Heaven or Hell issue. We make the gospel all about a “Get Out of Hell Free” card.

While there is eternal significance to what Jesus has done for us, we tend to minimize the “here and now” aspect of His saving work. We minimize it because we don’t believe it. Scripture, though, tells us about salvation here and now.

...our Lord

Jesus Christ,

who gave

Himself for

our sins, that

He might

deliver us

from this

PRESENT

EVIL AGE...

Galatians 1:3-4
(NKJV)

Our salvation and deliverance are
from something HERE and NOW.
Right here.
Right now.

We live in a broken world that is filled with trouble
and pain. We often follow the path that leads to
more of the same.

Jesus came to save us in THIS world...
as well as the next.

His death and resurrection deliver us from the shame
and sin that are so destructive in THIS world.
His life within us through His Spirit enables us to walk
a different path in THIS world.

A path that brings contentment and peace.

When we live under the hex, we
really don't think God has given us
a new heart. We just try to grind
out the obedience until we die.

I am not sure if Delmar really got saved from anything
at all in the movie.

I do know this: "Jesus gave Himself for our sins, that
He might deliver us from this present evil age."

On this side of the cross, the good news is that His
grace brings new life to us for TODAY.

*...he testified
and exhorted
them, saying,
'Be saved
from this*

PERVERSE

GENERATION.

Acts 2:40 (NKJV)

“

*Grace is sufficient even
though we huff and puff
with all our might to
try and find something
or someone that it
cannot cover.
Grace is enough.¹*

Brennan Manning

”



...and no additives

Don't contaminate God's pure grace with your rule-keeping, trying-harder, do-more efforts.

Just leave it alone.

His grace is sufficient.
It is enough.

Anytime we act/think/believe that our relationship with God has anything to do with our goodness we mess up everything.

When you add to God's grace, you only contaminate it.

You know that euphoric feeling on the inside when you realize that God has taken you as His own through nothing you have done to earn it?

That's His grace and love you are feeling.

Pure grace.
Uncontaminated.
No additives.

*Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's **GRACE**. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.*

Galatians 2:21
(MSG)

Pure Grace

INGREDIENTS

No Additives

100% Pure Grace	From God
Good Works	0%
Self-Effort	0%
Religious Service	0%
Striving	0%
Judgment	0%
Self-Righteousness	0%

No Shame Added

No Guilt Added

No Religion Added

*For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
Ephesians 2:8*

“

“In golf, one of the greatest killers I see is when people try to play the golf swing rather than play golf. They’re so wrapped up in doing their golf swing and trying to put all the pieces together that they forget about trusting their swing and enjoying the round. It’s the same basic trap as “doing” religion: people striving so hard to be Christians that they forget that it’s not about what we do for God but about his desire for us to simply walk with him and play the game of life with freedom.”

Wally Armstrong
Former PGA Tour Player

”



license to sin

Some say that too much grace
is a license to sin.

Really?

One thing I have noticed over the years is that people
do NOT need a license to sin.

PEOPLE SIN WELL WITHOUT A LICENSE.

They are not waiting for a sin license.
Grace is not a license to sin.
It's a license to receive God's love.

However, depending on rule-keeping
becomes a license to pretend.

People who mix rule-keeping and grace are often
afraid sin will run amuck if people rely on God's grace.
Grace scares them.

*For the grace
of God has
appeared
that offers
salvation to
all people. It
teaches us to
say "NO" to
ungodliness
and worldly
passions, and
to live self-
controlled,
upright and
godly lives in
this present
age,*

Titus 2:11,12
(NIV)

People who depend on their own goodness pretend
to be holy
to be moral
to be something they are not to impress others.

**[Self-effort produces temporary results on the outside;
grace produces lasting results on the inside.]**

Grace teaches us to
say, “NO” to sin, not “YES.”

People who understand grace may sin,
but grace eventually lets the air out of sin.

In the long run they discover that faith in the finished work of Jesus and relationship with God the Father is far better than sin. You don't need to use rules to hammer away at sin to loosen its grip on your life. Grace will do that. Grace TRAINS us away from sin.

Grace weakens sin's grip
and strengthens God's grip.

The more you become absorbed in God's grace toward you, the more your affections move toward Him and away from destructive actions and attitudes. Sin becomes less enticing.

Thank your Father in heaven each day for His
grace. He is an infinitely gracious Father who is
committed to you.

He loves you.

Experiencing His grace weakens the grip of sin.

It's easier to sin against rules
than to sin against God's love.



that is sooooo 1st century b.c.

There's an old way to serve
and a new way to serve.

The OLD WAY obligated you to serve
because it said so in the scripture.

That's the way we tended to operate.

We told people to evangelize because the Bible says
"go into all the world and preach the Gospel."
Case closed.

The Bible said you should do it,
so you should do it.
Period.

You should tithe because the Bible says
"bring all the tithes into the storehouse."
Case closed.
The Bible commands us to tithe.
Just do it.

That's the way it worked:
it's written down so do it.

[NOT so fast.]

*But now
we are
released
from
the law,
having
died to
that which
held us
captive,
so that we
serve in
the **NEW**
WAY of
the Spirit
and not in
the **OLD**
WAY of
the written
code.*

Romans 7:6

On this side of the cross
we have the Holy Spirit living in us.

He leads.
He guides.

Now we serve,
not under obligation,
because someone can find a verse,
but because the Holy Spirit guides us.

Big difference.

(and it's been this way since the first century A.D.)

OLD

because
it says
so right here,
buddy

NEW

because
the
Spirit of God
leads

*...written
not with ink
but with the
SPIRIT of the
living God,
**NOT ON
TABLETS OF
STONE** but
**ON TABLETS
OF HUMAN
HEARTS....***

*...who has
made us
sufficient to
be ministers
of a new
covenant, not
of the **LETTER**
but of the
SPIRIT. For
the **LETTER
KILLS**, but the
**SPIRIT GIVES
LIFE**.*

2 Corinthians 3:3,6



dripping faucet

Do you ever feel that if you were a “better Christian,” then God would be more ready and willing to bless you and work on your behalf? Sometimes we have a wrong view of God. Actually, much of the time. For some of us, pretty much all of the time.

We think He is waiting to see how committed we are before He really starts to move in our favor.

Many years ago when I was a newlywed, I encountered my very first plumbing problem. The kitchen faucet was dripping. It seemed to be in my job description to fix it. It was frustrating. No matter how I positioned the handle or how hard I pushed it down, the drips of water insisted on coming out. I had never dealt with this before. In that pre-Google era, I honestly did not understand why the water would not stop dripping.

It was a revelation to me that evening when I realized that there was pressure behind the water forcing it out. I had never understood that turning on the faucet did not MAKE the water come out. Turning on the faucet simply opened the path to let it come out.

I also remember thinking, "So, that's why they put water towers way up in the air!"

The point is this: Many of us tend to view God's work in our lives the way I used to view the water in the pipe. We mistakenly think that God is neutral at best and it is up to us to pull out His grace.

**We think God's work
in our lives depends on:**

**OUR commitment
OUR devotion
OUR effort
OUR knowledge
OUR whatever...**

(BIG YIKES!!!)

THAT is the hex!

We don't realize that He has already worked, and is working, in our lives.

We do NOT have to do ANYTHING to get Him on our side and to experience His love. The pressure is already there from His side.

It is our self-effort that stops the flow.

On this side of the cross,
all we do is receive
His love.

The pressure is already there from His side.
It is our self-effort that stops the flow.



zombie zone

Jesus didn't come to
make bad people good,
but to make dead people alive.

(Not sure who originally said this
but I wish it had been me.)

Jesus did not come to merely modify our behavior.
He did NOT come to bring better principles for living,
or religious rules.

He came to give us life, His life.
He came to make us truly alive in Him.

Think of it like this: before receiving Jesus we were
like zombies. We were the walking dead. We went
through the motions of living, but we did not live
deeply.

Jesus is our life.
He is our full and satisfying life.

He has no intention of robbing you of truly living.
He did not die so you could live out a miserable

*even when
we were
DEAD in our
trespasses,
made us
ALIVE
together with
Christ.
Ephesians 2:5*

*Whoever
has the Son
has **LIFE**;
whoever does
not have the
Son of God
does not have
LIFE.
1 John 5:12*

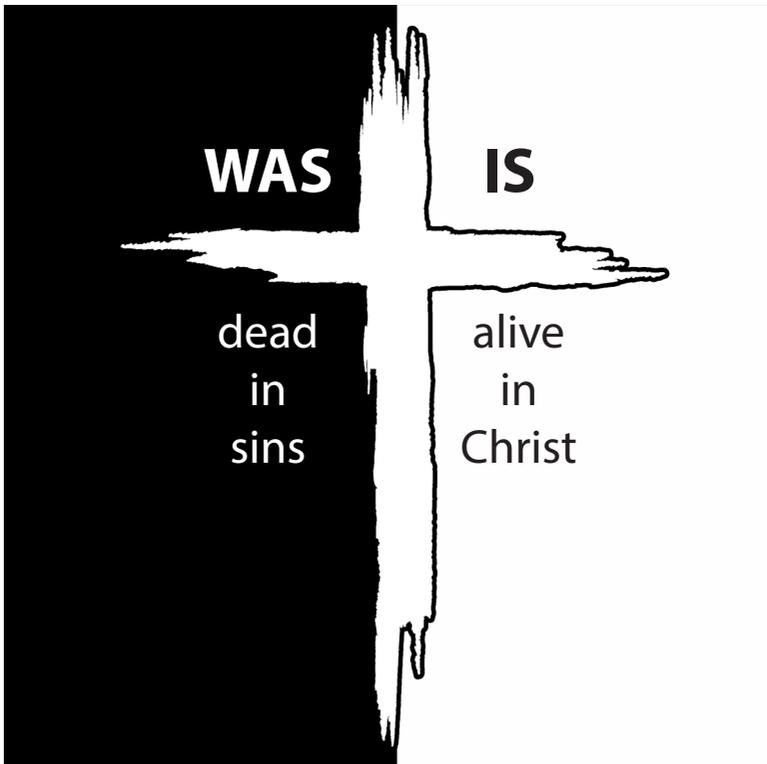
*...My purpose
is to give
them a rich
and satisfying
LIFE. Jesus
John 10:10
NLT*

*just as Christ
was raised
from the
dead by the
glory of the
Father, we too
might walk
in newness of
LIFE.
Romans 6:4*

existence. He did not give His life to you so you could merely make it to the 10:30 service.

And with His life in you, one thing changes immediately: your ability to hear/respond to your Father in heaven.

Your relationship with Him comes alive.
YOU come alive.





which tree you pickin' from?

In God's original object lesson
there were many trees in the Garden of Eden,
but two stood out.

TREE 1: Tree of Life

TREE 2: Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Both trees sound good.
One is a killer.

The Tree of Life represented
the life of God:

His presence, His love.

It is the relationship tree.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good
and Evil is the conduct tree.

It represented man's ability to know the difference
between right and wrong.

even when we were
DEAD in our
trespasses, made us
ALIVE together
with Christ.
Ephesians 2:5

I came that they may
have **LIFE** and
have it abundantly.
--Jesus
John 10:10

We know that we
have passed out of
death into **LIFE**,
1 John 3:14

And this is the
testimony, that God
gave us eternal
LIFE, and this
LIFE is in his Son.
1 John 5:11

Whoever has the Son
has **LIFE**; whoever
does not have the
Son of God does not
have **LIFE**.
1 John 5:12

In today's vernacular
it would be known as
the Tree of Virtues and Values.

Who could argue against that tree?

Doesn't everyone need to know the
difference between right and wrong.

Yet that tree was off limits.

Think about that!

God was saying you can spend your life drawing from
the life He provides or you can spend your life trying
to figure out what is right and what is wrong.

Sooooo...

From which tree art thou picking?

TREE #1: Relationship with your Father God

or

TREE #2: Ability to know the difference between
right and wrong and perform accordingly

Live each day drawing from the life of Jesus. He has
made you alive. Trust Him. He died for you and gave
you His life. He lives inside of you.

*Whoever believes in
the Son has eternal
LIFE; whoever
does not obey the
Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God
remains on him.
John 3:36*

*For the letter kills,
but the Spirit gives
LIFE.
2 Corinthians 3:6*

*Paul, an apostle of
Christ Jesus by the
will of God according
to the promise of
the **LIFE** that is in
Christ Jesus,
2 Timothy 1:1*

*We know that we
have passed out of
death into **LIFE**,
1 John 3:14*



Which tree do you pick from?

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal **LIFE**. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to **LIFE**.*

John 5:24

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of **LIFE**; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

John 6:35

*I give them eternal **LIFE**, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

John 10:28



going under

Many times believers feel they are not strong enough to walk with God as they should.

If you feel that way, you are under the hex. Typically, the problem isn't that we are not strong enough. It is just the opposite.

We are not weak enough!

Watchman Nee (in his book, The Normal Christian Life) tells the story of when he was standing by a river and saw another man who was in the river begin to sink due to a cramp in his leg. The man cried for help as he struggled. Watchman Nee was not able to swim, but he saw another man nearby who he knew to be an expert swimmer. To his astonishment, the expert swimmer made no move to help the one who was drowning.

Watchman Nee became more and more desperate and pleaded, "Don't you see the man is drowning?" Others around them also began to shout at the expert swimmer to help the man who was drowning. Instead, the man who could swim just stood there doing nothing. The voice of the drowning man became weaker. The crowd's hatred for the expert swimmer was growing as they could not understand how he could just stand there and let a friend drown.

*It is the Spirit
who gives life;
the **FLESH** is
NO HELP at
all.*

John 6:63

*put **NO**
CONFIDENCE
in the flesh*

Philippians 3:3

Then, just as the struggling man was about to go completely under, the man who could swim jumped in the water. With a few swift strokes, he was by the side of the drowning man. He quickly brought him safely to the shore. A short time later, Watchman Nee scolded the man for not jumping in sooner to save the one who was drowning. He soon learned, though, that the rescuer knew his business more than the others realized.

The swimmer explained to Watchman Nee, "Had I gone earlier, he would have clutched me so fast that both of us would have gone under. A drowning man cannot be saved until he is utterly exhausted and ceases to make the slightest effort to save himself."¹

Jesus said that the flesh (our little, selfie-effort) is no help at all.
No...help...at...all.
Paul said that he put ZERO CONFIDENCE in the flesh.

Until we realize the absolute futility of trying harder to please God, we will be like the drowning man who is not weak enough to be saved.

If you feel weak and helpless...
if you feel like giving up trying to live right,
praise God!!!
You are in a great place.

The good news on **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS** is that we have a spiritual lifeguard: Jesus Christ. He actually lives inside of us through His Spirit. He has been waiting for you to come to the end of yourself so you can relax and trust Him.

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in **WEAKNESS.**"*
*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my **WEAKNESSES,** so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

<**FLASH!**>

God is NOT Mad at You!

This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth,

**SO I HAVE SWORN THAT
I WILL NOT BE ANGRY WITH YOU,**
and will not rebuke you.

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,"
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Isaiah 54:9-10



shame junkie

Can this whole message of grace really be true?

Did the death of Christ on the cross really take away ALL my sin and shame once and for all?

Is God really THAT loving?

Roger and Jeff, are you sure I can trust the Spirit of God to produce His life in me?

It seems too good to be true. We want to believe the good news of Jesus Christ, but a part of us is scared to live without the pressure of rules. If we start resting in the finished work of the Savior, we are bombarded with condemning thoughts.

[For many of us, our religious past has us wired to constantly feel ashamed.]

We feel guilty if we don't feel guilty.

We are so used to living there and feeling guilty all the time, the peace can be hard to handle.

In short, we are afraid of NOT FEELING GUILTY!

*...May grace and **PEACE** be multiplied to you.*

1 Peter 1:2

*Now may the God of **PEACE** himself sanctify you completely,*

1 Thessalonians 5:23

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and **PEACE** and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:17

*May the God of **PEACE** be with you all. Amen.*

Romans 15:33

We have read about someone who was released from prison after serving many, many years, but could not deal with life outside the walls. He ended up committing another crime for the purpose of being put back in prison. He had lived so long in prison he could not live with freedom.

Some of God's children can be like that spiritually.

We have become so accustomed to the system of religion and rules, we feel nervous without them.

We don't know what it's like to NOT feel guilty.

It may take some time to learn to live in peace without feeling like you deserve a scolding.

Satan has lied to you all of your life.
He continues to lie to you.
He does NOT want you looking to the cross.
He does NOT want you to trust in the new heart that God has placed in you.

Satan wants to break your sense of well-being.

Don't be afraid of life outside the walls.
Don't be afraid to live in peace.

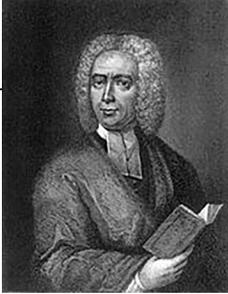
There is no reason to listen to the lies of the enemy.

You can trust Christ to be your shepherd.
HE will keep you and lead you each day.
You are free to trust Him.
He is a God...of...peace.

*...“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the **ACCUSER** of our brothers has been thrown down, who **ACCUSES** them day and night before our God.”*

Revelation 12:10

Isaac Watts caught on to the power of the cross...3 centuries ago



At The Cross

by Isaac Watts

chorus

A musical score for the hymn "At The Cross" by Isaac Watts. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are: "At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled a - way, It was there by faith I re-ceived my sight, And now I am happy all the day!"

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, And the
burden of my heart rolled a - way, It was there by faith
I re-ceived my sight, And now I am happy all the day!

written in 1707

Another Famous Hymn by Isaac Watts
"When I Survey The Wondrous Cross"



big windshield

Many feel that their past keeps them from experiencing God today.

For some, their family life growing up was a wreck.

Some went from foster home to foster home. Maybe you had a horrible event or person in your past that seems too hard to overcome. Sometimes, it is less dramatic on the outside, but there is still something in the past that always seems to drag you down.

Have you ever noticed how much smaller the rear view mirror in a car is compared to the front windshield? When you drive a car, you spend almost all your time looking out the front windshield (I hope) and only occasionally glancing at the rear view mirror.

The same is true in our walk with God.

*but I focus on
this one thing:
FORGETTING
the past
and looking
forward to
what lies
ahead,*

Philippians 3:13
NLT

My message for you is this: When it comes to walking with God in His love today, your past is not the issue!

The devil loves to keep us looking back
in order to keep us from moving forward.

You no longer have to believe his lies.
I'll say it again.
Your past is not the issue.

Jesus talked about being born a second time.
Through Christ, you have been born into God's family.
If you believe in Jesus, you have a whole new past!

You have new DNA in your spirit.
Christ now lives in you.
He is now your life.
His past is now your past.

Life with God is lived from the inside out.
Who you are on the inside is far more important
than who you were, and are, on the outside.

Jesus was guided by the Father who lived in Him, not by who or what was around Him. Inside, He was connected to the Father. Because Jesus gave us His Spirit, we are connected to Christ on the inside.

Jesus Christ, who lives in you, is far more meaningful and powerful than the mess that is behind you or around you.

On **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS**, your past has been cut off.

Keep looking out the front windshield where
Christ is now your past, present and future.



good works are not bad

In this book, we are big on trust and rest.
We are down on religious obligation
and our own independent effort.

Sooooo, how do
good works
fit into all this?

It is amazing how the New Testament has places
where our works are mentioned in a negative way,
but then also has many places where good works are
mentioned in a positive way.

Which is it?

Jesus says that He will reject many who will claim to
have done many wonderful works for Him. Over and
over, the letters in the New Testament say that we are
NOT made right with God by what we do (our works.)

The Bible makes it clear that if we
do incredibly great things, but do
not have love, they are worthless.

*And let us
consider how
to stir up
one another
to love and*
**GOOD
WORKS,**

Hebrews 10:24

*For this I toil,
struggling
with all*
HIS ENERGY
that he
POWERFULLY
WORKS
WITHIN ME.

Colossians 1:29

On the other hand, Jesus talked about others seeing our good works and glorifying our Father in Heaven. The New Testament says we are created for good works. We are to stir each other unto love and good works. Faith without works is dead. Again, which is it?

The difference is this:
There are "DEAD works"
and there are "GOOD works."

Dead works and good works are different from each other in where they start and where they finish.

Dead works start with our own ideas and effort.

Dead works are done for ourselves, even if they appear to be done for others.

Dead works are done in order to get the approval of God or others.

Dead works are done to relieve guilt and make us feel better about ourselves.

Dead works begin and end with ourselves. They require no relationship with a living God.

Good works do not start with us or finish with us.

Good works start with what God is already doing.

Jesus did what He saw the Father doing. Good works are prepared by God ahead of time for us.

*For in Christ
Jesus neither
circumcision nor
uncircumcision
counts for
anything, but
**ONLY FAITH
WORKING
THROUGH
LOVE.***

Galatians 5:6

We cooperate and get in on the flow.

Good works are done to serve others,
not as a means to our own goals.
Good works are motivated
by genuine love for one another.

Paul told the people of Galatia that the ONLY thing that counts for anything is faith (that is the start) working through love (that is the end.)

True faith in Christ will produce love and good works.

Doing, or not doing, good works has nothing to do with our standing in the love of our Heavenly Father.
(Z-I-P.)

Our good works are like a gift from Him.

He initiates them.
He is our strength to do them.
He gives us the
joy of being a part of what
He is doing on the Earth.

When the works are good
and not dead,
do them with all of your heart.
(NO PROBLEM.)

*For we are his
WORKMANSHIP,
created in Christ
Jesus for good
works, which
God prepared
beforehand, that
we should walk
in them.*

Ephesians 2:10



mystifying command

We are **COMMANDED** to rest in the finished work of Jesus. That's a real twist.

Normally, we think of disobedience as doing some horrible sin. Or maybe failing to do something good that we think we should have done.

But we don't think of working to serve God as disobedience. But it **CAN BE**.
That seems strange to most Christians.

[And to make it even more curious,
the Bible says we should **STRIVE** to enter **REST**.]

That used to seem strange to me. Now I get that.

As a recovering workaholic I am constantly doing stuff. So it was natural for me to start working hard doing stuff for God. I saw myself as a worker for God.

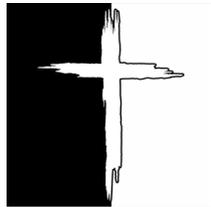
I was beginning to understand what Jesus did for me on the cross. Much of my hard work for God was rooted in my belief that what Jesus did for me was not enough. **I had to STRIVE to rest.**

Or you could say
I had to strive...to **NOT** strive.

*Let us
therefore
STRIVE to
enter that
REST, so that
no one may
fall by the
same sort of
disobedience.*

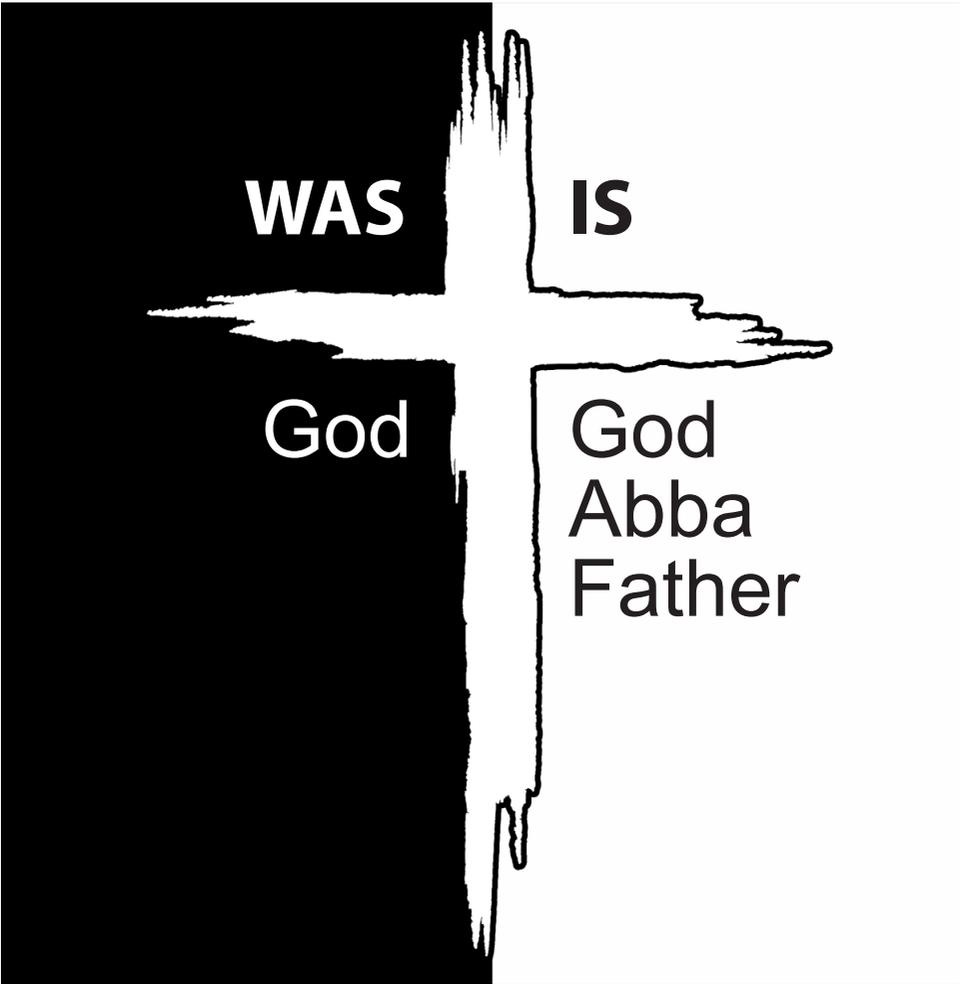
Hebrews 4:11

V.
**How Our
Father
Adores You**



*Consider the kind of **EXTRAVAGANT LOVE**
the **FATHER** has lavished on us—
He calls us **CHILDREN OF GOD!**
It's true; we are His **BELOVED CHILDREN.***

1 John 3:1 (The Voice)



The crucifixion of Jesus opened the way for God to become our personal Father.



a world of orphans

Every one of us desperately longs
to be loved by a father.

None of us, including my children,
have a perfect earthly father.

Apart from Christ, we miss out on the love of our
perfect Heavenly Father. Most Christians do not
experience the reality of God's affection day to day.

We live in a world of orphans.

To one degree or another, we were all orphans.
Just about every problem in the world today can be
traced back to the fact that people are missing the
love of God the Father.

Without the love of Abba Father, we act like orphans.

An orphan can easily feel insecure.

Orphans may feel like no one really cares about them
so they have to watch out for themselves. Often,
an orphan is used to being let down and rejected.
Many orphans do not know where tomorrow's food

*I will not
leave*

you as

ORPHANS;

*I will come
to you.*

John 14:18

is coming from so they live in fear. They may hoard extra food or clothes or money because they have no father to provide for them. They learn to trust no one. They live with the idea that they have to make their own way in life.

Many believers go through life as if they are spiritual orphans.

They live out of fear of not doing enough to get God's blessings. They strive to do better as if it all depends on their own performance. They know little of the generosity of their Heavenly Father.

The night before Jesus was crucified He told His disciples (grown men) that He would not leave them as orphans. Striking!

He went on to say that He would send His Spirit to live in us. Jesus came to show us the Father.

He came to bring us into a relationship with our Heavenly Father.

His Spirit lives within us and cries out, "Abba, Father!"

You are no longer an orphan.

In Christ, you have a Father in Heaven who is absolutely crazy about you. Come to Him each day as your Father. You have a heavenly Father who cares for you and provides for you. It is one thing to know that as a fact in your head. It is something else to actually experience His love in your spirit.

Ask Father to make His love known to you.

Ask Him to release His love in you through His Spirit.

He is a perfect Father who delights in giving good gifts to His children.

“

*Father God is
more pleased with
you than you are
of your self.*

Jeremiah Johnson
@gracepoint555

”



nascar christianity

I am not a NASCAR fan. I do not have anything against it. I have good friends who are really into it. I love sports, but for some reason, auto racing does not interest me.

I know enough about NASCAR, though, to kind of understand how it works. There is a big track that is shaped somewhat like an oval or some similar geometric shape. All the cars lineup, give it the gas, keep turning left and go round and round until someone finally goes around a certain number of times faster than everyone else. I do appreciate its simplicity.

It is a road, however, that leads nowhere. There is no destination. You just go round and round and end up where you started. Technically, I guess, it's not a road. It is a track. An actual road leads to someplace. A road is not an end in and of itself. It is a means to get somewhere.

For many people, their relationship with Jesus is like a NASCAR track. It does not go anywhere. They just go in circles. Many believers know Christ as their eternal Savior, but have not continued on through Christ to have a genuine, intimate relationship with God as their Father.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the **FATHER** except through me.*

John 14:6

Jesus said that He is THE way. A way is a road. If He is the Way, where does He lead?

He said that He is the Way to the Father and that no one comes to the Father any other way other than through Him. Knowing Jesus Christ is not an end in and of itself. He did not come and die for us and rise again just so we would know Him.

Jesus came to bring us to the Father.

He wants you to know the love of the Father just as He knows the love of the Father. He did not just come to deliver you from Hell. I often just saw that verse about Him being “the way” as having to do with how to get to Heaven. That is not primarily what Jesus is talking about. He is the means to come to God, not just as God, but specifically as YOUR FATHER.

Jesus Christ is not a NASCAR track that leads nowhere. He is the road to a destination. That destination is the love of Abba Father.

Our Heavenly Father longs for you to walk with Him as His child.
We come to Father through the Son, Jesus Christ.

Imagine that I load up my car to go on a trip and someone sees me and asks, “Where are you going?” Then, I say “Interstate 75, then Interstate 40.” That would not make sense. We do not go on a road as a destination. We go on a road to get someplace else. Jesus also described Himself as a door. The purpose of a door is to enter into a different place. Jesus is the door to the Father.

The goal of the Christian life is not just to know Jesus more and more. Don't misunderstand me. It is good to know Christ more and more, but that is not the final destination. The heart of the good news of Jesus Christ is that THROUGH HIM, we can know THE FATHER! You were created to experience the affection of your Father in Heaven here and now. Jesus is the only way there.



you do not merely **matter to God**

Imagine on Valentine's Day the love of your life, your sweetheart, gives you a card. You open it up and read, "you matter to me." Would that thrill you? Would that warm your heart? Probably not.

Why do we say things like that and dilute God's love for us? God LOVES you! That goes way beyond our flimsy thoughts about how we think of God's feelings for us.

God is not merely CONCERNED for you.
God is not merely THINKING about you.
You do not merely MATTER to God.
God does not merely CARE about you.
GOD IS CRAZY IN LOVE WITH YOU.

He is obsessed with you!

If the prodigal son "mattered" to his father then his dad would have waited until his son reached the house, opened the door, listened to his son's offer to become a servant and then offered him a job at \$15.00 an hour. He would have said, "OK, then, fix the fence on the back forty and here's the key to the bunk house." Instead, he tackled him with hugs and kisses, then threw a party to celebrate his return.

That is how God feels about YOU.
You more than matter to Him.

*nor height
nor depth, nor
anything else
in all creation,
will be able
to separate
us from the
**LOVE OF
GOD**
in Christ Jesus
our Lord.*

Romans 8:39

“

*The shorter
the prayer, the
greater the faith.
“Help!” is a great
prayer.*

Andrew Wommack
@andrewwommack

”



this time... it's personal

My life (Jeff) forever changed on January 21, 2014 in a very good way.

It was on that day that our daughter gave birth to our first grandchild, Elizabeth. We, of course, had been expecting the happy event for several months, but I had not really expected what it would feel like the first time I saw this precious little person.

When I saw Elizabeth for the first time, there was an immediate feeling of attachment that was absolutely amazing. I felt affection for her that I did not know I could feel. I do not know how many thousands of babies were born into the world that day, but for me, there was only one.

The moment I first laid eyes on this little girl, I knew that I would be more than willing to lay down my life for her if needed.

THAT is how your heavenly Father feels about you RIGHT NOW.

Actually, His feelings for you are even stronger than that.

For as long as I can remember, I have been told God loves me. If asked, I would have said I believed

*the life which
I now live in
the flesh I live
by the faith
of the Son
of God, who
loved **ME** and
gave Himself
for **ME**"*

Galatians 2:20

that. However, there is a big difference between saying you know that God loves you and DEEPLY knowing that God has a unique feeling of affection for YOU.

Looking back, I would describe my view of God's love as a positive class-action suit.

God loves all people.

I am a member of the class known as "people."

Therefore, I get loved along with everyone else in the group.

Class-action love.

It's like getting a love letter addressed to "to whom it may concern."

(whoop-de-do)

That is not a personal relationship.

I guess it is better than not being loved at all. However, that does not come close to describing the attachment and affection that I experienced when I first saw Elizabeth. God does not JUST love us all as one big class.

GOD HAS A PERSONAL, UNIQUE SENSE OF AFFECTION FOR EACH ONE OF US!

That is a game-changer. You and I are limited in how many different people we can uniquely love. God is not limited in that way.

The life-changing truth is that the creator of the universe is absolutely and especially crazy about YOU!

(Let that sink in a minute.)

On this side of the cross, the righteous Judge of the Old Testament has become YOUR Abba Father who is emotionally and uniquely attached to YOU.



reversing the flow

Too easily, we do things that appear to be in service to others, but are actually self-centered. It is not that we are intentionally trying to be deceptive. We don't even realize it ourselves.

Every last one of us was created to be loved and accepted by our Heavenly Father. That is the cry of your heart and my heart. When we don't experience God's affection, we will instinctively try to get it from others. We will try to get it from our spouse, our children, our friends, other people, etc.

That effort to try to GET acceptance from others will often turn religious.

When we miss out on the affection of our Heavenly Father, "living the Christian life" becomes a competitive sport.

We want to be admired by other believers.

We serve on committees and help with programs to feel good about ourselves.

*For you were
called to
freedom,
brothers.*

*Only do not
use your*

*freedom as an
opportunity*

for the

flesh, but

through love

SERVE ONE

ANOTHER.

Galatians 5:13

Without realizing it, we are trying to GET from others what God has already given us.

We will also try to do more stuff FOR God trying to earn His approval.

So, when we fail to experience the free gift of God's love and acceptance, the flow of our lives will look like this:

We will try to GET FROM others and we will try to GIVE TO God.

That explains why we get upset and bitter when others don't appreciate what we do for them. We are not getting from them what we want in return.

That also explains why we get frustrated at God when things go wrong in our lives. We feel like He is never satisfied.

The cross of Jesus Christ reverses the flow of our lives. Instead of trying to GET FROM others and GIVE TO God, we are able to RECEIVE FROM God and GIVE TO others.

Freedom in Christ is not about serving ourselves. That just leads to being a slave to the destructive desires of the flesh. Freedom in Christ is being released from the drive to have to do something for God in order to be accepted.

Through Christ, we freely receive the love and affection that we need from our Heavenly Father. Knowing we are loved by God, our hearts are full.

We no longer have to strive to try to get anything from others.

Then, and only then, are we genuinely free to serve others.



at home in your world

God has always wanted
to be with you.
Just. As. You. Are.

Before the cross, there was a system where you had
to shape up and be cleaned up before you came into
God's presence.

No more!

The cross took care of that once and for all.

God is not disgusted with us when we do wrong.
Because of the cross, our standing with God is the
same as Christ's – even when we mess up.

We are not closer to God
when we do good things.
We are not farther from God
when we do bad things.

God came to Earth in the form of a man to live
among us. God did not wait for us to shape up
before He came as a baby. He came to live right
smack in the middle of us while we were still broken.

*And the
Word
became
flesh and
**DWELT
AMONG
US,***

John 1:14

That is what He does.
God WITH us.
He is still that way.
He is still in the business of coming into our messes.

You see, God is at home in YOUR world.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God was not repelled by their sin.
He came looking for them.
In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was to be in the middle of the camp, not out by itself.
Jesus was quite comfortable hanging out with sinners.
He did not wait for them to repent.

[It is the relationship with Christ living in us that sets us free from destructive attitudes and addictions. He has come to live within our brokenness to bring healing.]

First He comes to our world, THEN comes the healing...in that order.

Do you feel like you have messed up and keep messing up?
Are there areas of your life that you know do not please God?
Do certain temptations seem too strong for you?

Remember, God meets you in YOUR world.

Be honest with God about your mess.
He can handle it.
Bring it into the light.
He is not disgusted with your brokenness.
He just knows that sin hurts you.
He hates the wrong things we do because
He knows how destructive sin is to us and to those around us.

There is no distance between the two of you.
He loves you.
He is with you and He is in you to bring wholeness to you as you do life WITH HIM.



the gospel of gomer pyle

**“Shame, shame, shame!
Shame on you, Sergeant Carter”**

– Pvt. Gomer Pyle

I have to admit that I am more familiar with the Gomer from Mayberry than I am with the Gomer in the Old Testament. The one from Mayberry that joined the Marines used to try to motivate his Sergeant by exposing his faults and shaming him.

Did you ever think about the fact that Jesus never tried to motivate people by exposing their shame?

He never added to their shame.
It was just the opposite.
He took our shame on the cross.

God is not shaming you. On THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS, the shame is gone. There is nothing between you and God. The shame has been taken away.

Shame and guilt are often used to try to motivate people to live for God. It does not work, though. Shame can never bring about a new heart on the inside. We are never really made new on the inside by being told what we SHOULD do. Christ can do what all the shame in the world cannot do. Only Christ Himself can make us new through His life inside of us.

for
whoever
believes in
him will not
be put to
SHAME.

1 Peter 2:6

“

*The gospel is not
an invitation to
accept Jesus; it
is the stunning
announcement
that he accepts
you!*

Dr. Eric Skidmore
@gracectrhouston

”



religious blackjack

I don't gamble.

(The pharisee part of my old nature
is rather proud of that.)

I do remember though, while growing up, some
friends and I would occasionally play blackjack. We
never played for money. We just played for fun and
bragging rights. Of course, the ideal scenario was to
draw a card that landed right on 21.

No wasted numbers.

No going over 21.

No one could do better.

That reminds me of how I used to view life.

Have you ever known someone who always lived
an ungodly life, but then came to know Christ right
before they died? They never had to sit through
boring sermons or deal very much with guilt and
now they seem to escape eternal punishment. To
some people, they seemed to play the perfect
blackjack hand of life. They came really close, but did
not go over.

They landed on 21.

Does that seem unfair?

If a no-good, dirty scoundrel received Christ the day

*We love
because*

*He **FIRST**
loved us.*

1 John 4:19

before he died, many Christians would not be happy. If we are honest, many of us would be thinking, "That's not fair!"

If that is my reaction, then I have misunderstood the nature of God and what it is to walk with Him.

When we come to see God as a Father who genuinely, personally loves us more than we know, a deep thirst in our hearts will begin to be quenched. A yearning will start to be satisfied. When I realize that God is absolutely crazy about me in spite of the fact that He sees and knows the worst about me, my view of God will dramatically change.

I will no longer see Him as a strict boss who does not want me to have much fun. I will begin to see Him as the God of love who meets the deepest need of my heart.

I will want to know Him and do life with Him and talk with Him, not out of obligation but out of a genuine heart desire.

Then, as we come to know Him and experience the reality of His love, the destructive pleasures of this world will begin to lose their appeal. The temptations of this world will be seen as the empty, dead-end roads they really are.

The love of the Father will displace the love of the world.

The good news is that we do not need to play blackjack with our lives before God.

Walking with God is not about figuring out how much we can get away with without going over.

We love him because He first loved us,
NOT because He threatens us
if we do not love Him.

“

*Real salvation is not you
giving your life to Christ,
but Christ giving
His life to you.*

Dr. Andrew Farley

”



God is not a book

One Father's Day, one of my sons lined up a father/sons golf game. My oldest son, though, was not able to join us, which left us without a fourth player.

I sent a text to a friend of mine, Tim, to see if he wanted to join us. While he appreciated the invitation, he was not able to accept. So, we were still one player short.

To solve the problem, my youngest son, Dawson, agreed to come along. He does not play golf at all, but he does enjoy the scenery and he likes to drive a golf cart. We did not need him to actually play. He just drove one of the carts and enjoyed spending time with the rest of us.

Before we went, he mentioned that he would bring a book along.

Dawson likes to read.

We like to play golf.

It worked out very well and a good time was had by all.

(In case you are wondering,

I won the round by two strokes, but I digress.)

What struck me was THE BOOK that my son chose to bring that day.

He had been reading a novel that was written by my

*You search
the Scriptures
because you
think they give
you eternal
life. But the
Scriptures*

**POINT TO
ME! --Jesus**

John 5:39
(NLT)

friend, Tim - the friend I had invited to join our foursome that day. Tim had recently written a book called: Judge Z, Irretrievably Broken.

So, there we were.

Tim could not be there with us in person,
but HIS BOOK was there with us in the golf cart.

Sadly, I believe that illustrates my walk with God for many years.

Rather than being alert to God's presence and relating to Him as a person, our relationship is more with a book.

Sometimes, we replace the Holy Spirit with the Bible.

Don't get me wrong.

I believe the Bible is inspired by God.

The Bible is an invaluable part of my daily life.

However, the Bible directs us to the living God.
It is NOT God.

There is a big difference, though, between knowing the Scripture and knowing the One who inspired the Scripture.

The third person of the Trinity is NOT God the Holy Book.

Jesus made it clear to the Pharisees that even though they knew the Scriptures better than anyone, they did not know God. They refused to come to the living God when He was standing right in front of them (John 5:39). They were like my Father's Day foursome. They replaced a real person with his book.

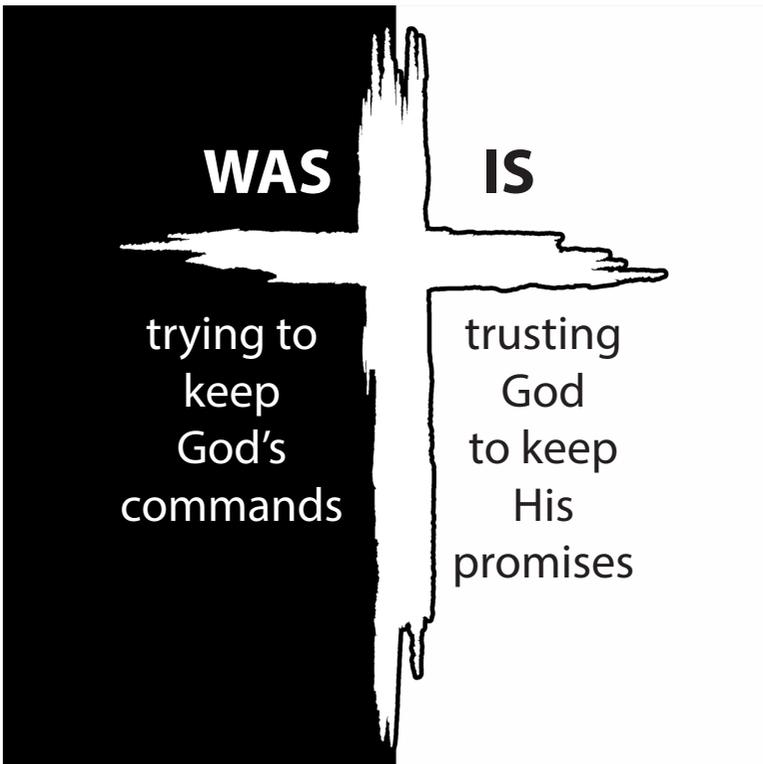
The glory of the new way is that God gives us a new heart.
Jesus sent His Spirit to live inside of us.

ON THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS, we relate each day, not to written rules from long ago, but to Christ who lives within us through His Spirit.

Our relationship is with a living person,
not a book.

For God so loved the world,
He sent His only Son...
(John 3:16)

*“God did not send a book.
He sent a person, His Son.
They already had a book.
We didn’t need more reading
material. We needed a Savior.”*





meeting rick

One of the most beautiful miracles of Jesus is how He builds His church.

Have you ever met another believer at an unexpected time and immediately sensed the connection?

Maybe you were on vacation or out of town on business.

Maybe it was in your neighborhood. You did not plan it, but somehow you ended up meeting another individual or couple and experienced the encouragement that comes from sharing your common faith in Christ.

That is Jesus building His church.

In Spring of 2016, my wife and I were attending a work-related conference I had in Nashville, TN. On opening night of the conference of over 1,000 people, they had an informal event which was spread

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **SERVE ONE ANOTHER** humbly in love*

Galatians 5:13
(NIV)

out over two levels of the resort.

My wife and I got our small plates and went through one of the lines for food. With limited seating at tables, we were pleased to see a small round table open up. Another man, approximately my age, had also headed to the table at the same time. The table seated four, so that was no problem.

We introduced ourselves and proceeded with the usual small talk. We learned that our new acquaintance was from Pennsylvania and was named Rick. I noticed he was by himself, but was wearing a wedding ring. Many at this event bring their spouses. In the course of the first few minutes of conversation, he mentioned his children, but never said anything about a wife. Very soon, we noticed that Rick was kind and easy to talk with. He also referred to his "church" a couple of times so we knew that he was involved in a local congregation of some type.

After talking for maybe 15 or 20 minutes, I decided to take a bit of a chance and ask Rick about his wife. He then mentioned that his wife had passed away about nine months earlier from cancer. Wow! I had not thought of that as a possibility. I then expressed my sorrow at his loss and asked him more about his wife. He proceeded to share about how his wife had battled cancer and how God had been faithful to them through the struggle. We quickly progressed to talking more about Christ and the things in life that really mattered.

For the next hour and a half, we had an amazing conversation as we talked about God, His goodness and His grace in our lives. We laughed with Rick as he told us about the humorous way that God had brought him and his wife together and led them to get married. Rick had endured one of the most painful experiences a person can endure. His words, though, were a beautiful testimony of thankfulness and hope in the midst of it.

With over 1,000 people there that night for a corporate event, our heavenly Dad brought a few of His kids together to encourage one another.

Jesus was building His church.

The rich fellowship becomes a gift to God's family, and a joy to Him.

On THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS,
our source of life is Christ, not one another.

We draw our life from Christ who lives within us.

Then, as He brings us together with other believers and builds His church,
we demonstrate that we are His disciples by loving one another.

We can receive the blessing of fellowship with other believers as a gift.

We can SERVE others in the Body of Christ with
love instead of trying to GET life from them.

“

*You don't go to church,
you are the church—
gathered today,
scattered most days.*

Ed Stetzer
@edstetzer

”



God's happy place

People post on Facebook about a certain place being their "happy place." They often use it to describe a particular restaurant or vacation spot. Typically, it's a place where someone feels especially content and...well... happy.

Does God have a happy place?

I think He does.

God does not struggle with discontentment, though.

He never needs a break from the stress.

There is, however, a certain place that brings Him special joy.

God's happy place is not Disneyland or the beach or Cracker Barrel.

(At least I don't THINK it's Cracker Barrel. Roger might disagree.)

So where is God's happy place?

God's happy place is YOU!

It is mind-boggling to realize that God really does want to be close to you. It is not because He needs to use you or fix you for His good. He actually wants to be close to you just because He loves you individually. He is crazy about you and enjoys hanging out with YOU.

God likes to be with you.

Too often, we tend to view God as a STRICT JUDGE who is either mad at us or at least disappointed in us. That is so wrong.

God is LOVE.

He enjoys living daily in YOUR presence.

You are God's happy place.



Father's love

When we know Father's love...
we don't worry about the future.

When we know Father's love...
we don't fear what others think about us.

When we know Father's love...
we don't try to perform for Him.

When we know Father's love...
we are not drawn toward anger and addictions.

When we know Father's love...
we don't seek the attention and approval of others.

When we know Father's love...
we don't need to fill our lives with noise and activity.

When we know Father's love...
we are not as quick to find fault in others.

When we know Father's love...
we can genuinely love others.

You were created to be loved.
Loved. By. Father.

*for the
Father
himself
LOVES
you,...*

John 16:27

“

*The cross shows
us that God
would rather die
than live
without you.¹*

Brennan Manning

”



taco prayers

Bible prayers were usually short and to the point. It's tough to find a long prayer in the Bible.

[The power is NOT in prayer.
The power is in the One who
HEARS the prayer: God.]

Prayer Rule #1...
Just pray with the same
simplicity you would use
to order a taco.

You wouldn't say, "O great Taco Bell employee, I beseech you now. Please bestow on me thou bountiful Taco Supreme.." But some people pray like that.

Jesus mocked the pharisees for praying with "many words."

You don't have to wear God out with your prayers. He hears you.

Remember, He's not only the God of the universe, He's your DAD in Heaven.

"And when you pray, do not

HEAP UP

empty phrases

as the Gentiles

do, for they think

that they will be

heard for their

MANY WORDS."

Matthew 6:7



the crazy dad

Jesus told a story about a boy who ran away from home.

He was a punk who asked his dad for his inheritance because he didn't want to wait until his dad died to get his cash.

The dad gave him the money and he took off to Las Vegas where he squandered it all on partying. He ended up broke working a job slopping hogs. He was hungry and wanted to eat the pig food, but the farm owner would not let him.

So the rude son put a plan together. He decided to go back home to his dad, admit his sin and ask to work on the farm as a servant.

He cut across a field as he got close to home. His dad spotted him in the field. The dad then did something shocking. Something unthinkable in that day.

The dad ran across the field toward his son. (Not good.)

*And he arose
and came to
his father. But
while he was
still a long
way off, his
father saw
him and felt
compassion,
and **RAN** and
EMBRACED
him and
KISSED him.*

Luke 15:20

In that day men didn't run unless they first "girded their loins." In other words, they first put their underwear on. Running with your flapping robe was a shameful thing for a man to do.

You get the picture.

The dad did something in that day that was even more shameful than the son running away from home. The dad trumped his son's shame thereby erasing it.

The dad didn't care.

His son was coming home and that was all that mattered to him.

The dad hugged his son and started toward the house. The son tried to get his speech out, "Dad, I have sinned and I'm not worthy to be called your son and..."

The dad interrupted the boy's speech.

But wait a minute!

What happened to the part about being a servant on the farm?

Didn't the dad have farm work that needed doing?

Apparently, farm work was not the dad's top priority.

He just wanted his son home.

He loved his son.

Period.

He gave his kid new clothes, a new ring, new shoes and organized a party.

The dad didn't need more servants.
He just wanted his son home.

That's still true.

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the BEST ROBE, and put it on him, and put a RING on his hand, and SHOES on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us EAT and CELEBRATE. For this my son was DEAD, and is ALIVE again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:22-24

Who does the dad represent? God.
Who does the stupid kid represent? Us.

POINT OF THE STORY:
God wants YOU, just YOU.
He does not want you for
what you can do for Him.

(Back up! Read that again. PLEASE!)

He just wants us. Farm chores can wait.
We are sons first, not servants.
We can/do serve out of love for our Dad,
but we are NOT primarily servants.
God is NOT our employer. We are sons.

WHY do we think of ourselves primarily as
God's servants instead of royal sons?
Do you really think your service in the church
is what makes you valuable to God?
Is that why you think God keeps you around, to do farm chores?

STOP thinking of yourself as primarily God's servant.

You are not God's farm hand;
you are God's kid.

Everyday I run across the field in my mind.
I see it. I would be happy being a servant for God.
He will have nothing of it.
He runs across the field heading straight at me.

He scoops me up and takes me back to the
house for a celebration. DAD throws a party.

I am His.
Who is the son crossing the meadow?
Who gets scooped up by DAD?
Who gets celebrated without condemnation?
You. (That's who.)

*Your Father is
throwing a party
to celebrate YOU!
You comin'?*

*For you did not receive the spirit of
SLAVERY TO FALL BACK INTO FEAR,
but you have received the
Spirit of adoption as SONS,
by whom we cry,
"ABBA! FATHER!"*

Romans 8:15

"Abba" is Aramaic.

It is an endearing term for "father."

Household servants were not allowed to use the term.
It was reserved exclusively for the children of the father.

*And because you are SONS,
God has sent the Spirit of his Son
into our hearts, crying,
"ABBA! FATHER!"*

Galatians 4:6



search & rescue

I used to think it was
my job to seek God.

But that misses the point of the Good News.

Actually, it is God who seeks us!

God seeks us by sending Jesus to earth as a baby.
He was God's rescue mission.

In three separate parables from Luke 15 Jesus
illustrated how God loves us enough to pursue us.

LOST SHEEP

Jesus said God was like a shepherd who had 100
sheep, lost one and set out to find the lost sheep. The
sheep didn't go out looking for the shepherd.

LOST COIN

Jesus said God was like a woman who had ten coins,
lost one and set out to find the coin that was lost. The
coin didn't seek the woman.

*For
the Son of
Man came
to **SEEK**
and to
SAVE the
lost.*

Luke 19:10

LOST SON

Jesus said God was like a dad who ran across the field to bring home his wayward son. The son did not come home out of love. He needed a job. He was hungry. He wasn't seeking to reestablish the relationship with his dad. Before the son made it all the way back, his DAD ran out to embrace him, kiss him and celebrate him home.

Jesus made the same point in all three parables:
it is God who seeks us, not we who seek Him.
In all three parables there is an intense desire on the part of the shepherd, the woman and the dad to recover what was lost.

That's why the apostles' letters to the churches talk very little--almost none at all--about our seeking God. That's because it is He who seeks us.

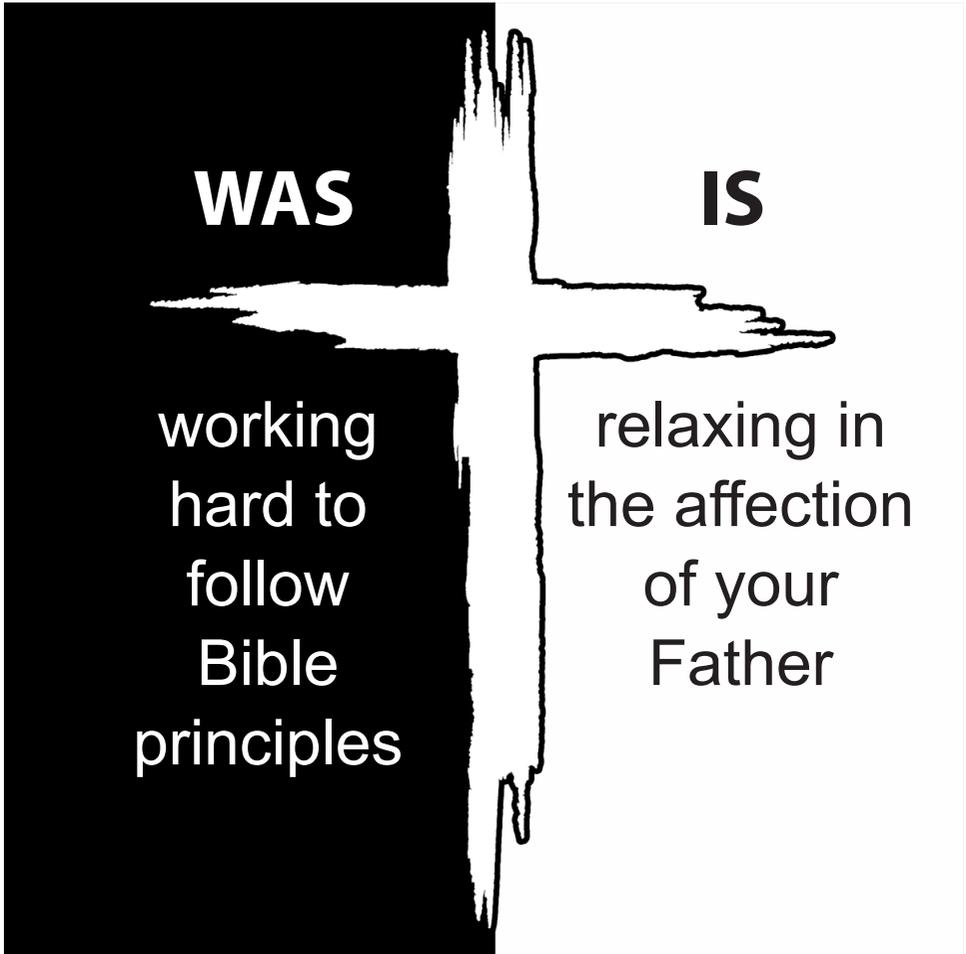
**It is God who is on a
search and rescue mission.**

We simply respond to Him as He pursues us
through the good news of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

God is not sitting around
waiting for us to search Him out.
He already came after us.

**That's the point of the Gospel:
God came after YOU.**

**HEY,
BEFORE
YOU GO...**



"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?

what i'm trying to do here is to get you to RELAX, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.

People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."

Matthew 6:30-33 (MSG)

waking up tomorrow morning

So where do we go from here?
What does life with God look like
when the hex is broken?

What you need to do next is faithfully follow the 12
steps listed on the next page. It is all up to how hard
you work and how committed you are.

JUST KIDDING!!!

We have NO steps.
We have NO lists.
We have NO formulas.

However, we all have a CHOICE each day. We can walk
on this side of the cross trusting in Jesus Christ. Or we
can try to walk on both sides of the cross trusting in
Jesus Christ PLUS our efforts.

We would encourage you to wake up each morning
knowing that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross
was also the death of your religious attempt to do
anything for God.

You are on **THIS SIDE OF THE CROSS.**

You can wake up each morning knowing that Father
in Heaven is absolutely crazy about you just
the way you are.

*And he
said to
him,
"Son,
you are
always
with
me,
and
all that
is mine
is yours."*

Luke 15:31

You do not have to do anything to get on God's good side. There is no A and B for you to do so that God will do C and D. Trust your father to finish the good work He started in you.

There was a time earlier in our lives when we were all fired up for God and felt obligated to do great things for Him. We were sincere at the time, but now we realize that we were more motivated by our own insecurity. We were trying to do something significant so we could feel good about ourselves.

That type of effort can seem to produce some short-term results, but it really does not produce anything that lasts.

There IS activity when you are out from under the hex. This is not, "Couch potatoes for Jesus." Freedom does not mean self-indulgence. The activity, though, is NOT done out of a sense of guilt and obligation. Jesus never did anything out of a sense of guilt or obligation. In the same way that He responded to the love of Father, we respond to His love. As the Father lived in Jesus, so the Spirit of Christ lives in us. Only the Spirit of God can produce genuine fruit that lasts.

An ounce of activity that is prompted by the gentle nudge of your Heavenly Father is infinitely better than a pound of activity that is prompted by your own desire to do something for God.

You can relax each day into Father's love.
He will manage the relationship.
The ball is in His court.

He will make Himself known to you more and more in His time and in His way. Ask Him and expect Him to make Himself known to you, but give up any expectation you have as to what that will look like.

If you are in the midst of pain and disappointment, He is with you and loves you. Even when He does not do what you think He should be doing, He is with you and loves you.

Your circumstances are NOT a reflection of the affection Father feels for you. The cross of Jesus Christ IS a reflection of Father's affection for you.

You are now free to relax.
You are at home with Father.
The hex was broken at the cross.

Playing Catch with God

Brad shared a true story with a group of us about a significant time in his life when he came to value the love of his Heavenly Father more than ever before. He was out of town and staying by himself in a hotel. With time to kill, he decided to watch a movie. At the last moment, God led him to watch Field of Dreams.

Brad was in the midst of a discouraging time that was almost overwhelming. A life-long dream that had started to take shape was now at risk of falling apart. It was a painful and confusing experience. With that as the backdrop, he started the movie.

Spoiler Alert: If you have never seen Field of Dreams, this may spoil it for you. The movie came out in 1989 so you've had quite a while to watch it.

In the movie, the main character, Kevin Costner, puts the family farm at financial risk and uses part of it to build a baseball field in the middle of Iowa. He is prompted by a voice that says, "If you build it, He will come." In the movie, famous baseball players from past generations come out of the corn stalks beyond the outfield to play baseball on his field. Star athletes, long dead, appear as young men and take part in baseball games on the field he built.

*So you
are **NO**
LONGER
A SLAVE,
but a **SON,**
and if a
SON, then
an heir
through
God.*

Galatians 4:7

Kevin Costner's character, named Ray, missed out on a close relationship with his earthly father. His father was a baseball player that Ray barely knew in later years. At the end of the movie, there is an emotional scene as Ray's father appears on the field as a young man in his baseball uniform. Alone, the two of them play catch on the field.

Ray gets to experience the simple joy that he had missed out on as a young boy. He gets to play catch with his dad.

As Brad shared his story with our group, he pointed out how God spoke to him that night in the hotel room. With a life-long dream slipping away, he was reminded that the most important part of life was his relationship with his loving, Heavenly Father. In the midst of the uncertainty, my friend told God that it really did not matter to him if his dream came true or not, he just wanted to play catch with his Heavenly Dad each day. By "playing catch," Brad meant just enjoying the love and presence of God.

**When the hex is broken,
and we keep the crucified Jesus in clear focus,
we are free from having to perform
for a cosmic sin-inspector.**

We are at rest in the home of our Abba Father.
We are free to live in His affection.
We are free to trust Him.

As you go through your day,
keep the cross of Jesus Christ in clear focus.
Enjoy "playing catch" with your Heavenly Dad,
the One who loves us more than we know.

on **THIS SIDE** of the **CROSS**,
I will never again need to...

Ask God to forgive me.

He has already forgiven me for all time.

Ask God to be with me.

He already lives in me.

Try to do stuff for God to get His approval.

He already approves of me through Jesus.

Try to live the Christian life.

Christ lives His life through me.

Try to be a good disciple.

I am in Christ so I am already a disciple.

Make promises to God to get Him to do something.

He is my good Father who already wants to give to me.

Go through someone else to get to God.

God already writes in my heart.

Merely follow Jesus.

I am in Christ 24/7.

notes

Chapter 2

1. P.T. Forsythe, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1908)

Chapter 38

1. Wayne Jacobsen, *He Loves Me!*, (Windblown Media, 2007), 43

Chapter 46

1. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 1977), 156

Chapter 48

1. Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, (Multnomah Books, 2005)

Chapter 55

1. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 1977), 168-169

Chapter 70

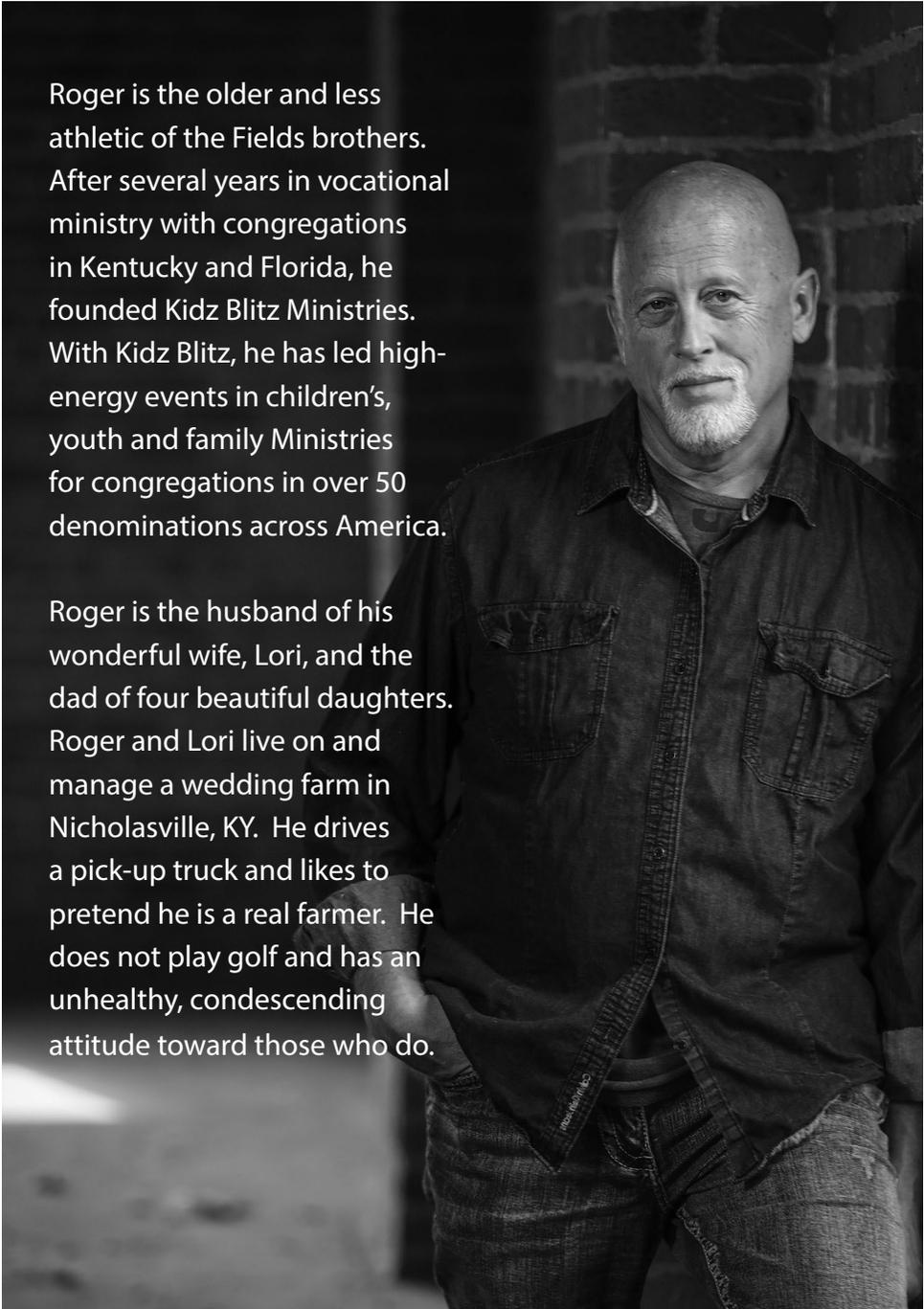
1. Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, (Multnomah Books, 2005)

Roger Fields

by Jeff Fields

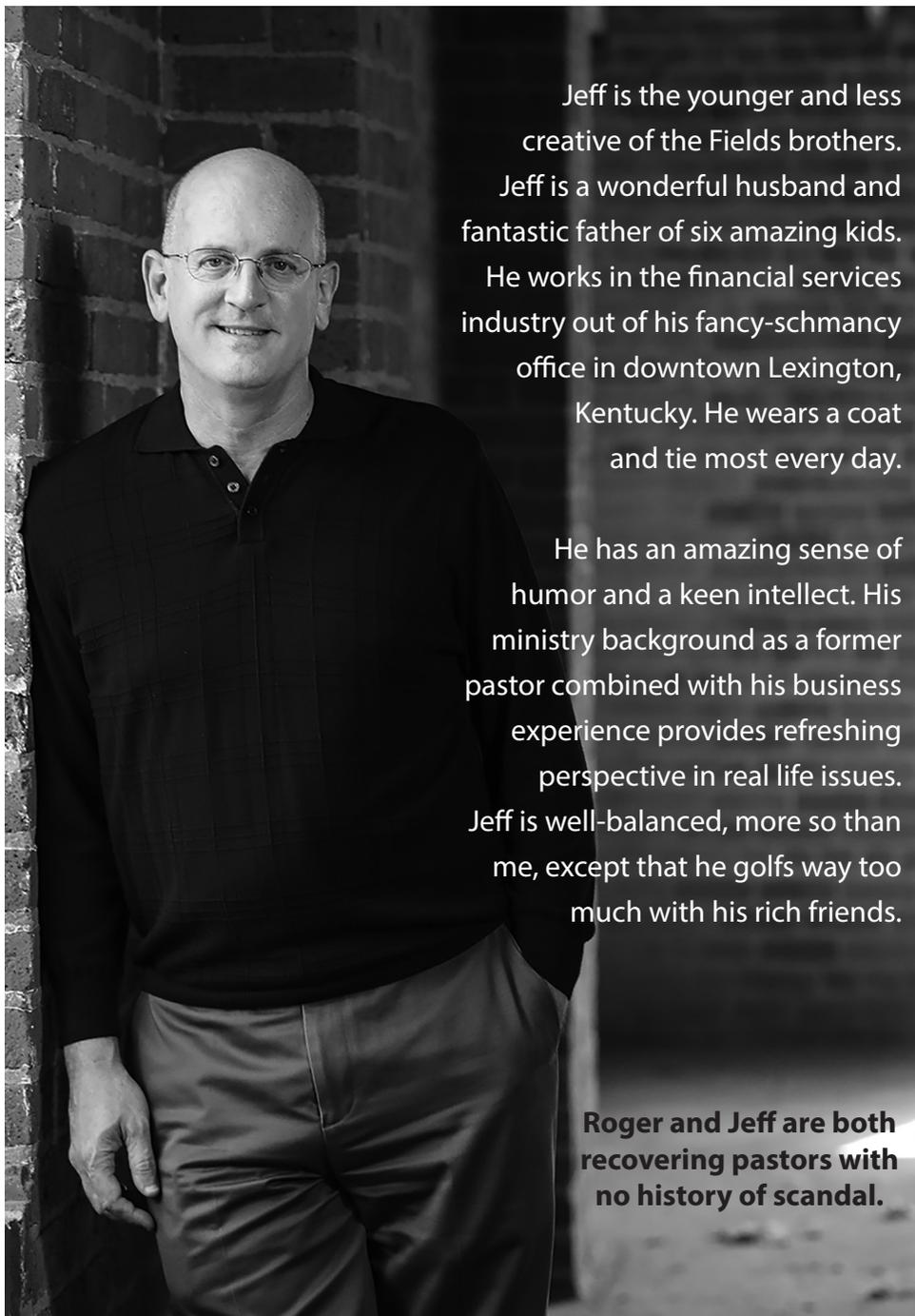
Roger is the older and less athletic of the Fields brothers. After several years in vocational ministry with congregations in Kentucky and Florida, he founded Kidz Blitz Ministries. With Kidz Blitz, he has led high-energy events in children's, youth and family Ministries for congregations in over 50 denominations across America.

Roger is the husband of his wonderful wife, Lori, and the dad of four beautiful daughters. Roger and Lori live on and manage a wedding farm in Nicholasville, KY. He drives a pick-up truck and likes to pretend he is a real farmer. He does not play golf and has an unhealthy, condescending attitude toward those who do.



Jeff Fields

by Roger Fields



Jeff is the younger and less creative of the Fields brothers. Jeff is a wonderful husband and fantastic father of six amazing kids. He works in the financial services industry out of his fancy-schmancy office in downtown Lexington, Kentucky. He wears a coat and tie most every day.

He has an amazing sense of humor and a keen intellect. His ministry background as a former pastor combined with his business experience provides refreshing perspective in real life issues. Jeff is well-balanced, more so than me, except that he golfs way too much with his rich friends.

Roger and Jeff are both recovering pastors with no history of scandal.

once upon a time

Roger's wife, Lori, had been asking him for some time to write a book about Jesus' love for us. She wanted something simple that even non-readers would pick up and enjoy. "I want something edgy," she would say. "It has to catch your eye, draw you in and keep your interest." Roger resisted. "Writing is hard work," he complained. She continued saying, "I know God wants this for His children to help them know that He Loves them. They don't have to work for it or earn it." She wanted this as a written legacy for her children, something they could hold in their hand to remind them of Gods love when things get tough. Finally, God put it on Roger's heart to pursue it on one condition: that his brother, Jeff, would write it with him.

Roger and Jeff had been talking for months about their new understanding of God's love and grace. Coming from different spiritual vantage points and with different life experiences, they had arrived at many of the same conclusions.

So one day Roger called Jeff and said, "I have a project for you. Let's write a book together." Jeff immediately agreed. They began to work. Their big challenge was to keep the book from becoming too theological. "We don't want to write it for people like us," Jeff would say.

Hundreds of hours and conversations later, this book emerged.



Listen to **The Fields Brothers Show** podcast for a light-hearted take on life in Kentucky and their thoughts about enjoying life on this side of the cross.

(Available on iTunes.)

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