

THE CONTRADICTION OF GOD

WHY EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT
YOU KNEW ABOUT GOD IS WRONG

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The Contradiction of God
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All scripture quotations taken from the King James version of the Bible.

All Greek definitions taken from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.

Bible verses are typeset in block-quote format:

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD,
THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON,
THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH,
BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE. (John 3:16)

And also in inline format like so: *he gave his only begotten Son.*

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THE CONTRADICTION OF GOD

WHY EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT
YOU KNEW ABOUT GOD IS WRONG

God doesn't think like you.

And you don't think like God.

And to hear *God* tell it – the difference – is not even close.

FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS,
NEITHER ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS, SAITH THE LORD.
FOR AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH,
SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS,
AND MY THOUGHTS HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS.

(Isaiah 55:8–9)

Mine aren't yours.

Yours aren't mine.

And ours aren't even close.

That pretty much sums up the way God tells it.

In fact, to hear *God* tell it, God Himself thinks that God Himself is the only *real* authority on the subject of God Himself. And if that's true, then of course, that means absolutely nobody else is. Not even you.

And to hear *God* tell it, God fancies Himself to be the only “real expert on God” in the room.

Which room? To hear *God* tell it – *every room*.

And to hear *God* tell it, as difficult as it might be for some people to believe, *God* actually thinks He knows some things about Himself that the other smart guys in the room don't.

Go figure. Real experts are just quirky like that sometimes.

In fact, to hear *God* tell it, He has this one particular and peculiar notion about Himself that none of the other "experts" even seem to be aware of:

God thinks it's impossible to overestimate the difference between the way He thinks and the way you think.

No, not the *likeness* between His thoughts and your thoughts – but the completely unimaginable and utterly inestimable *difference*.

But then again, that's just how *God* tells it. *You*, of course, may disagree. Apparently, most people do. Especially the other experts in the room.

But even if you *do* disagree, you'll have to admit, His authoritative "opinion" in this case is based on what appears at first glance to be a couple of fairly sound premises:

Number one, that *He's* God.

And number two, that *you're* not.

And according to His very own expert opinion, His thoughts are actually those not closest to your own as the other experts would likely tell you, but rather, those that lie at the absolute greatest possible distance. Further away from your own thoughts than you could ever have possibly imagined.

Imagine that.

No, on second thought, the only real Expert in the room insists that you *can't* imagine that. Even if you try.

In fact, by *God's* very own expert calculation, His thoughts and your thoughts are so *completely* un-alike, that even the most remote similarity between them could *only* exist in your imagination. And absolutely nowhere else.

In what may be the most shocking and understated revelation ever made, the prophet Isaiah declares on behalf of *God* what you could never possibly have known before he told you. And what you are likely not to believe, even *after* he's told you: that the deepest and most unspannable divide that has *ever* existed between *any* two things lies precisely between *God's* thoughts

and your thoughts, permanently fixed in place by the two simple words **are not**: God's very own unimpeachable Self-Expert testimony that, as long as *the heavens* remain *higher than the earth*, His thoughts will *never* be your thoughts – and your thoughts will *never* be His.

In six of the simplest words ever spoken, God makes it perfectly clear to even the simplest among us that He actually thinks the very thought about you that, ironically, you could never possibly have thought about Him:

My thoughts – are not – your thoughts.

And if that thought doesn't completely astonish you beyond thought, it's because you're failing to grasp the magnitude of what the only real Expert in the room is actually saying.

It would be one thing if God were simply making the statement that between His thoughts and your thoughts, the *likeness* is *limited*. That claim would be one with which almost everyone would likely agree. But unfortunately, that's not even remotely close to what He's saying.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God is making an altogether different and unimaginably larger claim concerning His thoughts and your thoughts. He is not merely asserting that the likeness between them is limited. On the contrary.

He is very matter-of-factly stating that the *difference* between them is *infinite*.

And *that* claim – of an unchangeably infinite difference between every thought that God thinks and every thought that you think – is one with which almost no one is likely to agree. *Especially* not the other experts in the room.

And that's why it's probably not even close to what your pastor thinks.

Or what your favorite TV preacher thinks.

Or what any of your church friends think.

Or even what you yourself think.

But that doesn't seem to bother Isaiah in the least. Because according to him – that's still – exactly and only – what God *Himself* thinks.

And here's what you always want to keep in mind whenever *you* think about what *God* thinks:

It doesn't matter how much you differ with what God thinks.

Or how brilliantly you argue against what God thinks.

Or even if, when all is said and done, you and the whole wide world – *and* the TV preacher – stand unitedly opposed to what God thinks.

Because *He's* God and *you're* not – in the end – the only thing that counts is what God thinks.

So without even bothering to ask what you *or* the TV preacher thinks, the prophet Isaiah announces to the whole wide world what *God Himself* really thinks – about what you and everybody else thinks:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares the only *real* Expert in the room.

And the difference is not even close.

Part I
The Difference

Chapter 1

The Declaration of the Difference

The way God thinks is so inconceivably different than the way you think that, according to God Himself, in order to come even remotely close to comprehending it, you would need to compare that difference with a particularly large distance. In this case, the distance between *the earth* and *the heavens*.

No, not the distance between the earth and the clouds. That's not the heavens He's referring to. Think farther. And not even the distance between the earth and the most distant star you can see on a clear dark night. That's still not far enough.

Instead, to accurately understand the difference between the way He thinks and the way you think, *God the Expert Himself* says that you would need to measure the distance between where you stand right now – and the absolute end of the universe.

According to its definition, the Hebrew word for “heavens,” *shamayim*, includes not just the clouds and the planets and the stars, but the whole universe, from stem to stern, stretching all the way to where God Himself dwells in His Heaven.

Because it is, without question, the most foreign of any thought that has ever even attempted to cross your mind, it is impossible to appreciate the grandness of the scope with which Isaiah declares the mind of God concerning the difference in the way that He thinks.

In an object lesson so big that only a measurement of all existing matter and space could provide an adequate point of comparison, God juxtaposes the way He thinks with the way you think, and formally announces His astonishing conclusion:

My thoughts are not your thoughts. None of them. Not one of them. Not at any time. Never. There is no overlap between the way you think and the way I think. You don't miss thinking like Me by just a little, here and there, now and again. You miss it everywhere. Every time. By precisely an entire universe.

If you had asked Isaiah the question, "How does God think?" his unblinking answer would have been, "The way you *don't* think." Or, he might have said, "If God's thinking it... *you're* not." Or, "If *you're* thinking it... God's not."

It simply couldn't be more plain. And it plainly couldn't be more simple:

My thoughts, declares God, *are not your thoughts. Not even close.*

That means that, if God doesn't tell you His thoughts, you *cannot* know them. And no amount of effort on your part will ever allow you to figure them out. Neither will you ever randomly or accidentally stumble across them.

You cannot and will not, on your own, ever rise to His level of thinking. And because He doesn't think like anybody else you know, forget about asking them. Your friends can't tell you what He's thinking either.

Your thoughts contain no premises from which any of God's conclusions would ever logically follow. And because of that, when He does tell you something, if it doesn't surprise you and astonish you and cause you to exclaim, "No way that can possibly be true!" – then you either misunderstood what He said – or it wasn't Him Who said it.

For it to be otherwise, He would have to think like you, and you like Him. And He doesn't. And you don't. Not by an entire universe.

Admittedly, that's not only a hard concept to grasp, but an even harder one to believe. Because that's nothing at all like what you've ever been told. In fact, all your life you've been instructed to believe exactly the opposite: that if you listen to the voice inside of you, if you plumb the depths of your own dreams and desires, if you will only stay true to your own vision, then in the end, it will have been God's voice you were hearing and obeying.

Nothing – and I mean nothing in the entire universe – could be further from the truth.

God's thoughts are, by His very own definition, "not-your-thoughts."

And your thoughts are, by that very same definition, "not-His-thoughts."

Between His thoughts and your thoughts lies a vast and unbridgeable gulf of absolute and mutual exclusion.

And here's the real mind-bender for your consideration:

The very thought that says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts* – is not your thought. It's His thought. You didn't think of that. He did.

And because it's His thought and not your thought, it's not just that you *wouldn't* be thinking it right now – you actually *couldn't* be thinking it right now – or *ever* for that matter – if He hadn't just now told you.

And as you think the thought, "His thoughts are not my thoughts," in what has to be the strangest and most astonishing irony of all, you will actually be thinking, finally, for certain, perhaps for the very first time ever in your entire life, the very thought that God Himself is thinking.

And that's why, until you've thought that *particular* thought – or some equivalent form of that particular thought – everything else you think you know about God is guaranteed to be wrong. By precisely an entire universe.

At least, that's the way *God* tells it. *You*, of course, may disagree.

Apparently, most people do.

Chapter 2

The Doubt of the Difference

To some, it may seem an implausible notion that God's thoughts are somehow altogether unknowably different than their own. That even in a thousand lifetimes of thinking, apart from His Self-revelation, not even one of His thoughts would ever, or even *could* ever, come within an entire universe of their own thoughts.

But for those of you who might doubt that it could possibly be so, try considering it as a simple matter of logic.

If God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts* – and He does say that – and you on the other hand say, “Oh yes they are!” – what did you just prove beyond a doubt?

That's right: you just proved that His thoughts are *not* your thoughts.

Because if God says one thing, and you say the opposite, it's called a disagreement. And since disagreements are always about *not* thinking the same thoughts, the fact that you have one with God over this is proof that His thoughts are indeed not your thoughts. And that seems logical enough.

But if, on the other hand, when God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, you reply instead, “That's exactly what I've always thought, and I agree with God” – now what did you just prove beyond a doubt?

That's right: you just proved again, even more plainly, that His thoughts are *not* your thoughts.

Only this time, surprisingly, it's your agreement with God that proves your disagreement with God. Because in order to agree with God, your thoughts would have to be the same as His thoughts. And while He's insisting "they're not" – at the very same time – you're insisting "they are." And that's just the same disagreement as above, disguised now as an agreement. So again, His thoughts are still not your thoughts. And that's also logical enough.

But if, on the other hand, when God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, you say, "After hearing what God says, of course, I agree with Him now. And because I agree with Him now, *now* His thoughts *are* my thoughts" – now what did you just prove beyond a doubt?

That's right: you actually just offered the strongest proof yet that His thoughts are *not* your thoughts.

First, because *receiving* a thought from someone else is not the same as *conceiving* that thought yourself. And if you had to change your mind *after* hearing His thoughts in order to agree with Him, then obviously, your thoughts and His thoughts were not the same *before* you changed your mind.

And second, simply *agreeing* with what someone says, *after* they say it to you, doesn't mean that you think like them either.

Even if you do agree with Einstein's theory of relativity *after* you hear it, that still doesn't mean you think like Einstein. Because you didn't think it up. Einstein did. You don't get credit for that theory. Einstein does.

That's why we call it "Einstein's theory" and not "Bob's theory."

And that's why, even after you *do* agree with it, we never change and start calling it, "Einstein's *and* Bob's theory." Even if you really want us to. Don't get confused. It's still, always and only, just "Einstein's theory," and you're still, always and only, just borrowing Einstein's theory from Einstein.

Same thing with God.

Even if you *do* agree with God's thoughts *after* you hear them, that still doesn't mean you think like God. Because you didn't think them up. God did. You don't get credit for those thoughts. God does.

That's why we call them "God's thoughts" and not "Bob's thoughts."

And that's why, even after you *do* agree with them, we never change and

start calling them “God’s *and* Bob’s thoughts.” Even if you really want us to. Don’t get confused. They’re still, always and only, just “God’s thoughts,” and you’re still, always and only, just borrowing God’s thoughts from God.

And just in case you forgot, God’s thoughts are even more different from your own than Einstein’s are. Different by an entire universe. And even more surprisingly, God’s thoughts are different from Einstein’s thoughts by exactly the same amount. And if you think you’d look foolish if you tried to claim the thoughts you borrowed from Einstein as your very own, what do you think you look like when you try to claim the thoughts you borrowed from God?

And if you really stop and think about it, even *obeying* God’s thoughts doesn’t mean that you think like God. Your dog obeys your thoughts, for goodness’ sake, and he doesn’t think like you. And if he does, that probably says more about you than it does about your dog.

And if you keep those things firmly in mind, you’ll never forget, like some people apparently do, that you’re not really an Einstein. And if you keep those things firmly in mind, you’ll also never forget, like some people apparently do, that you’re not really God.

And that’s a very good thing to remember. Because when you *do* forget, that really irritates Einstein. And you don’t have to be an Einstein to figure out that it also really irritates God. And that’s altogether logical as well.

But if on the other hand, when God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, you say, “Well it’s quite obvious to me, as a studious student of the Bible, that anyone who would say that I don’t think like God really doesn’t know his scriptures quite as well as he thinks he does. If he did, he’d know that the apostle Paul says, *We have the mind of Christ* (1 Corinthians 2:16). So you see, we actually *do* think like God after all. *Isaiah* might not have had the mind of Christ, but *I* certainly do” – now what did you just prove beyond a doubt?

That’s right: you just gave the strongest proof yet that, at least in *Isaiah*’s mind, you actually *might* be the biggest moron on the entire planet.

Because if you really *do* have the mind of Christ like you say you do, then tell us quickly – what is Christ thinking right now? *At this very moment?* Tell us *everything* He’s thinking. Right now. At this very moment. Not just *one* thought. Tell us *all* His thoughts. In order. From beginning to

end. And not just on *this* subject, but on *all* subjects. And not just for the *present* time, but for *all* time. Tell us *all* the past, *all* the present, and *all* the future. Especially all the future. I can't wait to hear that. I've got so many questions.

And while you're at it, since you say you have the very mind of Christ Himself, just go ahead and tell us *absolutely* everything about *absolutely* everything. And don't leave out next week's winning lotto numbers. Since Christ knows everything, and you have His mind, then obviously, you know everything too. Right?

And since you have the all-knowing mind of Christ, tell me quickly: where *did* I lose my favorite pair of red socks? You remember. When I was nine. Christ knows, and obviously now that you have His mind, you do too. I thought I was going to have to wait and ask Him personally, but now I can ask you instead. This is great!

But wait. Before you get started telling us the entire mind of Christ that you insist you have – do us all a big favor. Please make sure when you're finished that we, and especially Isaiah, don't wind up thinking that *He* is as much of an idiot as we're almost certain to think that you are. OK? Christ and all the rest of us will appreciate that so much. And that's absolutely, categorically, 100% logical.

But, on the other hand, when God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, you might just break down and say, "To heck with all this logic. This just doesn't *feel* right. And what does Isaiah know anyway? Who made him the big Know-It-All-Of-Everything about what God thinks and what I think?

"After all, there are plenty of other preachers out there, more successful than Isaiah ever dreamed of being, who totally disagree with him.

"They say that I *do* think like God. And they say that God *does* think like me.

"In fact, week after wonderful week, they give me their own personal assurances that God's thoughts and my thoughts are virtually indistinguishable from each other.

"They tell me that my biggest big dreams are actually God's biggest big dreams inside of me. And that His biggest and best thoughts about me are actually tucked right inside my biggest and best thoughts about myself,

so that He can give me my biggest and best life now. And I like that way of thinking *way* better than Isaiah's way of thinking.

"And besides that, millions of people listen to these guys every week. And you don't get to be that successful by being wrong, do you? According to them, maybe Isaiah should have just dreamed a little bigger!

"Why shouldn't I believe them instead of that stodgy old, small-minded Isaiah, who keeps insisting that God and I *never* think alike?"

Well... if you had mentioned to Isaiah in passing that some incredibly credible sources had assured you that, contrary to his own *mistaken* notion, you and God actually *do* think alike – here's how he might have suggested you test that idea – because after all, if you really do "think" just like God, then obviously, you'll also "act" just like God. Right?

So here's what you need to do:

On some clear dark night – when you're deep in the throes of one of those *Ain't-it-great-that-God-and-me-always-think-just-alike* ecstasies – look straight up into the heavens, point your finger right at the most distant group of stars you can see, and say out loud:

"Oh, by the way God... I was just about to create that cute little cluster right up there myself... but I can see now that You already beat me to it... *I'll get the next one.*"

If you can say *that* to God – and make *Him* believe it – then all those other preachers must be right!

Congratulations!

You really *do* think "just like God"!

Otherwise... *you don't.*

And by the way: logic may not be an absolute requirement to really understand this stuff... *but sanity is.*

Chapter 3

The Distance of the Difference

Notwithstanding what any other “prophet” may have told you to the contrary, Isaiah insists that the way God thinks *really is* totally, radically, and categorically different than the way you think. Different as in *higher*. And higher by a universe.

And it follows right along that, if by God’s own Expert reckoning there exists an entire universe of difference between all of His thinking and yours – then the same universe of difference must exist between all of your thinking and His. This highway runs in both directions, day and night:

He doesn’t think anything like you. Ever. And you don’t think anything like Him. Ever.

And just as the measurement from where you now stand to the very end of the universe represents the absolute largest *distance* that can possibly exist between any two *physical* objects, so also, Isaiah informs us, the measurement between the way God thinks and the way you think represents the absolute largest *difference* that can possibly exist between any two *spiritual* objects.

As is the distance, so is the difference.

So... with that in mind, exactly how far *is* it from where you stand right now, to the absolute end of the universe?

Get out your ruler and let’s measure it.

Recently, through the Hubble telescope, astronomers gave us our deepest look into space to date, some 13 billion light-years away. That's an astonishing distance! Take light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, or 671 million miles per hour, and multiply that by one year of travel time. At that speed, one year of seconds will put us well over five *trillion* miles down the road!

But don't stop there. We're just getting started. Multiply that number again times a staggering 13 *billion* years of seconds. Now we're really getting somewhere!

And if you're in the process of stretching your tape to the very end of the universe like I asked you to, after 13 billion light-years of measuring, you will certainly have earned the right to ask, "Are we there yet?"

But unfortunately, the answer will be, "Nope. Sorry. We're not even close." I hope you brought your lunch, because this could take a while. We've barely even begun to measure the distance. And consequently, we've barely even begun to appreciate the difference.

And actually, if you really stop and think about it, when it comes to measuring all the way to the very end of the universe – 13 billion light-years really doesn't take you that far.

In fact, if you really stop and think about it, by comparison to your ultimate goal, it really doesn't take you anywhere at all.

In fact, if you really stop and think about it, it's actually such a *small* distance when compared to the whole, that it basically leaves you still parked in your driveway, just thinking about *thinking about* measuring to the very end of the universe.

At a *mere* 13 billion light-years of measuring, if you *really* stop and think about it – you haven't even left your house yet!

So, instead of measuring any further, just go ahead and hit the retract button on your ruler, and let's quit right here. No need to go on.

Because even as technologically and scientifically sophisticated as we are today, thousands of years after Isaiah first uttered his proclamation, the distance from here to the very end of the universe still cannot be calculated. It's just not possible. They don't make rulers that long. And they never will.

And so we are left to describe it in the same unsophisticated and unscientific way that all those Hubble-less men of old did, as they gazed up into the heavens and pondered the prophets words:

The distance from here to there is, quite simply, *immeasurable*.

And that's God's whole point: as the distance is immeasurable, so is the difference.

There is not just a *world* of difference between His thinking and yours.

There is an entire *immeasurable universe* of difference.

And that entire immeasurable universe of difference lies directly between *every* thought that He thinks and *every* thought that you think.

Every single thought. Every single time. Without one single exception.

FOR AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH,
SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS,
AND MY THOUGHTS HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS.

Every thought. Every time. Without exception.

And that fact, if you really understood it, would astonish *you* beyond measure!

Chapter 4

The Determination of the Difference

Just recently, a work was discovered in a Swiss vault that may be a 500-year-old lost masterpiece of Leonardo da Vinci. And what did the finders do? Why, they called in the experts to authenticate it, of course; to search for those particular characteristics that will determine, without a doubt, whether or not it's genuine.

And though most people would have no idea what the marks of authenticity in a Da Vinci painting might be, it's safe to assume that the experts *do*. We trust their conclusions because they know what to look for and will recognize it when they see it. That's why they're the experts.

But suppose we called in the experts not on Da Vinci paintings, but on something far more valuable: the very thoughts of God Himself.

How would our experts on the thoughts of God go about establishing whether or not a particular interpretation that we had found tucked away in some Swiss vault was really a 500 year old lost masterpiece of God? What would be the special and unique characteristics that would confirm beyond a doubt that our understanding of His thoughts was authentic?

Let me pause right here to note that experts on the thoughts of God seem to abound these days. There's one on every corner. And ten on every cable

channel. They constantly assure you of their own expertise as they carefully make their examinations, declaring this thought to be authentically God's, and that thought to be an obvious fraud. "Trust me," they say. "I know what to look for and I'll recognize it when I see it."

But one word of warning: if your chosen expert on the thoughts of God doesn't start right here, exactly where the prophet Isaiah instructs him to, searching diligently to find not the *likenesses* between God's thoughts and your thoughts, but the *immeasurable-by-a-universe differences*, then beware:

That masterpiece you have hanging in your spiritual gallery – might turn out to be nothing more than a cheap forgery.

The process of determining authenticity in anything of value is always a search for similarities based on some accepted standard of comparison. To make their determination, our experts would need something already known to be authentic with which to compare the thoughts of God.

But therein lies the problem.

Da Vinci expressed his thoughts in *many* paintings. God expressed His, so to speak, in only *One*. To authenticate a Da Vinci, you just need another Da Vinci. To authenticate God, you just need another... well, you see the problem. It's a little more complicated than that with God.

Why? Because, God informs us through Isaiah, in no uncertain terms, that there simply *is* nothing 'like' His thoughts – anywhere. Nowhere in the entire universe is there anything authentically-like God's thoughts, *outside* of God's thoughts themselves.

Remember? *My thoughts are not your thoughts. Not once. Not ever. No exceptions.*

And that's a real problem. In order for our experts to give an accurate confirmation, there must be a separate standard, because for reasons that are obvious, you cannot compare a thing to itself in order to authenticate it.

Unfortunately however, there isn't one single original thought of anyone else, at any time, or any place, in all of human history, *like* God's thoughts but still separate, with which we might compare His to find the needed similarities for our own authentication.

Nope. Sorry. Your thoughts, no matter how lofty they may be, still don't

quite measure up.

My thoughts, says God, *are not your thoughts*. They aren't *now* your thoughts, nor have they *ever been* your thoughts. Not a single one. Not a single time. Not a single exception.

There just isn't any outside, independent, stand-alone comparison anywhere to be found. So... what would our experts do?

In this unique *one-in-a-universe* kind of situation, with the tool of *comparison* rendered completely useless, our experts would be left with only one choice: they would be forced to authenticate our understanding of God's thoughts using only the tool of *contrast*.

And here's how that would work: imagine a universe where *all* of the paintings in *all* of existence were *all* Da Vincis – except for *One*.

All of the Da Vinci paintings would share in common *all* of the exact same characteristics with *all* of the other Da Vincis – but *no* resemblance whatsoever to the *One* that was different. *All* of the Da Vincis would be easily recognized and easily authenticated by their comparative likenesses and similarities to *all* of the other Da Vincis.

However, in our search for the *One*, we would know that *It* could only be authenticated by *Its* unique quality of un-likeness and dissimilarity to *all* of the others. Every one that looked like *all* the others would automatically, without a second thought, be rejected as *not-the-One*.

So it is with God's thoughts. Listen very carefully:

Isaiah tells us that, of *all* the thoughts that have ever been thought by *all* the men who have ever lived – and of *all* the thoughts that *will* ever be thought by *all* the men who are *yet* to live – *none* of them – *not one single one of them* – will ever be found to be *like* His thoughts.

Because, *My thoughts*, says God, *are not your thoughts*. *Not one. Not ever. No exceptions.*

In a world filled with uncertainty, this is the one single thing of which you may be absolutely sure beyond any doubt: God guarantees, through Isaiah, by His very own unalterable utterance, an "un-changing un-likeness" between His thoughts and your thoughts.

And because of that guarantee, *here* is the most astonishing conclusion you could *never* have even imagined apart from Isaiah's revelation:

Even if you don't know for certain what God thinks, you can always know for certain what God does *not* think:

God does *not* think – never *has* thought and never *could* think – what *you* think He thinks.

Because, God says, *My thoughts – are not – your thoughts. Not one. Not ever. No exceptions.*

And *that* thought changes absolutely every other thought. Because that means any thoughts 'like' your thoughts could *never* be any of His thoughts.

And that means every one of God's thoughts, when laid beside every one of your thoughts – even your best thoughts – *especially* your best thoughts – must evidence a *difference* from your own *before* they can be authenticated as genuinely His.

Not a likeness to your own thoughts, but a difference. And that difference must be a big difference. An exceedingly *enormous* difference.

And just how big must that difference be? Listen very carefully:

It must be a difference big enough to justify the fact that, in God's very own Expert 'opinion,' the only thing big enough in the entire universe to accurately represent the difference between His thinking and yours – *is the entire universe itself!*

That means, if you can't find the difference between God's thoughts and your thoughts, when God *Himself* could find nothing smaller than the entire universe with which to fittingly compare that difference... then there are only two possibilities left:

Either God is wrong – in which case, there really *is* no immeasurable difference between His thoughts and yours – or – you haven't even been *looking* for a difference!

Personally... I'd bet on door number two, myself. Every time.

I'd bet, every time, without exception, you've been looking for a "measurable likeness" between God's thoughts and your thoughts, instead of an "immeasurable difference."

Because *if* the difference between the way God thinks and the way you think *really is* as big as God Himself says it is, then you ought to be able to find that difference – with one eye tied behind your back.

You do remember, of course, that God *Himself* is the One and Only Expert on God *Himself*. Right?

And God *Himself* says that your search to authenticate His thoughts must *always* be a search for the difference – and *only the difference* – an entire immeasurable universe of difference – between every one of His thoughts and every one of yours.

Do you remember why it could never be a search for the *likeness* between His thoughts and your thoughts?

That's right! Because the Expert says there isn't any!

Because, ***My. Thoughts. Are. Not. Your. Thoughts.*** *Not one. Not ever. No exceptions. End of story.*

That's why a real expert on the thoughts of God would always apply the "Isaiah test" first – *before* he did anything else.

And if a rightly conducted test on a thought that possibly belonged to God produced a positive result, that positive result would always be the same: "Wow! I'm astonished! That's not what I would have thought... not by an entire universe!"

But on the other hand, if the test produced a result of, "Well, of course! That makes perfect sense to me! That's exactly what I've *always* thought, and God and I are in complete agreement," then a real expert would know, without even thinking twice, that *that* could not possibly be what God was really thinking.

That thought might be *my* thought or *your* thought – it might even be an *angel's* thought – but it could never, never under any circumstance, be *God's* thought.

Because, ***My thoughts are not your thoughts,*** says God. *Not once. Not ever. No exceptions.*

Simply said:

God thinks nothing like you think He thinks.

That's what Isaiah thinks.

And if you don't think like Isaiah thinks, Isaiah thinks you don't think like God thinks.

And if you don't think like God thinks, you need to change the way you think.

Because neither God *nor* Isaiah, at this point, is very likely to change the way they think.

Chapter 5

The Dialogue of the Difference

In the perfect example of just *how* different God's thoughts are from your own, Jesus gave a parable of two men who went up to the temple to pray.

One was a very religious Pharisee and the other a not-so-religious publican.

The Pharisee was like many you probably know. He believed that authentic spirituality was simply a matter of making sure that God never forgot all of the things he had in common with Him. And when he went up to the temple to pray, he got straight down to the serious business of reminding Him:

He *stood*, said Jesus, *and prayed thus with himself. God I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* (Luke 18:12)

How commendable. His long list of self-congratulatory likenesses to God would have made Isaiah *blush*. The very idea that God didn't think like him and he didn't think like God simply never crossed his self-admiring mind.

It wasn't that he had *completely* failed to find Isaiah's universe of difference. He just hadn't found it between himself and God. He had found it instead, like many you probably know, between himself and a world fairly brimming with insufferable sinners. *Like this awful publican.*

The publican, on the other hand, was the very antithesis of the Pharisee. A

tax collector for the occupying Romans, he was hated, despised, and reviled by everyone who knew him. And rightly so.

Unlike the Pharisee however, he, *standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner* (Luke 18:13).

No laudatory self-congratulations here. No winsome comparisons to lesser men, even more sinful than himself. Only a painful outpouring of just how wretchedly wicked he was in his own sight. To his own great shame, he was in full agreement with Isaiah already.

His very prayer was his confession of acknowledgement that, in his own eyes, he had nothing whatsoever in common with God. He smote his breast repeatedly as if to say, “The problem lies in here, with this heart of mine, that is nothing like Yours.”

Jesus spoke this parable to certain ones who, according to His own description, *trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*.

And when He had finished, He proceeded to utter the single most astonishing example of *My-thoughts-are-not-your-thoughts* that has ever been found anywhere, before or since:

I tell you, Jesus said, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:4).

According to Jesus, it was not the self-sacrificing-twice-a-week faster, not the “of-all-that-I-possess” tither, not the non-adulterer, not the non-extortionist, not the non-publican, not the just one – *but the sinner* – who went down to his house justified.

And to add astonishment on top of astonishment, according to the words of Jesus, it wasn't even the “former sinner” or the “repentant sinner.”

It was simply the *God-be-merciful-to-me-a-sinner* sinner.

Can you imagine those in Jesus' audience howling in utter shock and disbelief?

“Did He just say that the unchanged-unrepentant-still-a-sinner *sinner* goes home justified before God? Impossible!”

That was precisely a universe away from what they had expected Him to say. And unless you're *God* – and last time I checked you're *not* – that's precisely a universe away from what you would have expected Him to say as well. And if you say it isn't, you just made God a liar.

Because, God says, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*. And these are definitely God's thoughts. So that means they can't possibly have *ever* been your thoughts *before* you heard them from Jesus.

You may not recognize it, but Jesus just said *exactly* the opposite of what you expected Him to say. In fact, He just said exactly the opposite of what everyone, *except God Himself*, expected Him to say.

This is not the way you think. This is not the way you have *ever* thought. This is the way God thinks. And God's thoughts are never your thoughts. Not this time. And not any time. Not this thought. And not any thought.

And if you think that, in ten thousand lifetimes of thinking, you would ever have come to the same conclusion that He just did, it's because Isaiah has failed to convince you that there is an immeasurable-by-a-universe difference that *always* lies, without exception, between every one of His thoughts and every one of yours. And in failing to believe Isaiah, you have made both Isaiah and God liars.

You could never conclude what Jesus just concluded. Because you never start from where He starts. Not once. Not ever. No exceptions.

Stop thinking that when Jesus speaks, it will *ever* confirm something you *already* knew and *already* believed. That's impossible.

Because My thoughts are not your thoughts. Not once. Not ever. No exceptions.

If you think Jesus just said exactly what you would have said in this situation, that just proves beyond any doubt that you don't really understand what Jesus just said! Not by an entire universe! Because He just said what you *still* can't imagine saying: He just said that God *always* chooses the sinner over the righteous!

And even after hearing Him say it right here – clearly and plainly and unambiguously – your mind still can't accept that that's what He *really* means.

Surely He'll qualify His statement later. Because that just doesn't make any

sense at all. Everyone *already* knows, just by virtue of their own common sense, that God would never *really* choose the sinner over the righteous. Never. Not once. Not ever. No exceptions. Everyone knows that without even having to think about it. Right?

But this is what you haven't yet fully grasped. In your entire lifetime, there will *only* be two things that you can ever mark down as absolute certainties without even having to think about them:

God doesn't think like you. Ever. And you don't think like God. Ever.

Without these two ideas constantly acting like the powerful corrective lenses in a pair of glasses, not only will it be impossible for you to see your way clearly to even a *single* correct conclusion, but without them, you will blindly, ignorantly, and arrogantly succeed beyond your wildest dreams – at exactly what you never intended:

Exactly like the Pharisee, every time without a single exception, you will take up the position that is precisely the opposite of God's. And exactly like the Pharisee, every time without a single exception, *you will never even know it.*

Co-mingling God's thoughts with your own by imagining that even *one* of His thoughts is somehow within even a universe of likeness to even one of yours invariably produces *this* particular unexpected and contradictory outcome: wrong will always appear to be exactly right, and right will always appear to be exactly wrong. Every time. Without exception.

Here, like the Pharisee, if you begin wrong, you are guaranteed to end wrong. There are not a hundred, or fifty, or even five correct places to start on your journey to truth. There is only one. And this is it:

God doesn't think like you. And you don't think like God. Period.

So put your glasses on.

And keep your glasses on.

Because if you don't, you will *never* see what God sees, like God *really* sees it.

And the blind will continue to lead the blind until they both fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:14).

Chapter 6

The Divide of the Difference

Thoughts are always delivered to us in the form of words.

And because words are nothing more than the containers in which thoughts are transported from one mind to another, as long as they preserve the content of the original thought without leakage or spillage along the way, *any* words in *any* language would serve equally as well as *any* other to transport *any* thought that *any* thinker thinks. Even God's thoughts.

However, in the special case of transporting God's thoughts, we could only be certain that the particular words used had successfully preserved their content if, and *only* if, His thoughts arrived to us with their original immeasurable difference from our own thoughts still intact.

The words would have to pass the "Isaiah test," exactly like the thoughts did. Send His thoughts in any size, shape, or color of word-container that you will, but make sure they arrive to us still containing the same immeasurable difference from our own with which He originally thought them.

Otherwise, if the truth of His words, upon their arrival to us, was what we already thought it would be *before* we heard them – then we would know for certain that something had been leaked and lost along the way.

That would be the critical test: between the content of His words and the content of our words, there would have to remain, intact, the same gigantic, universe-crossing, immeasurable measure of difference that always distin-

guishes His thoughts from our thoughts.

Thoughts or words, it wouldn't matter. If on arrival to us, His were not enormously different than our own – different by an entire universe than our own – then they could not possibly be His.

Send that word-package back. It could not have come from God.

And very quickly, while we're on the subject of sending packages back: the next time some especially spiritual type – *any* especially spiritual type – tries to convince you that God sent him to bring you the real straight skinny on all-things-spiritual, ask him – before he even gets started – Isaiah's "test question."

Ask him if he really understands that there is an entire immeasurable universe of difference between everything God thinks and everything he thinks. And wait for an answer. If he gives you a blank stare in return – and he probably will – tell him you left the shower running and you'll get back with him later. *Much later.*

He may want you to think that he's a college graduate in spiritual matters, but you'll know, because Isaiah told you right here, this guy isn't even out of grade school. Don't let him waste one minute of your time *pretending* he's an expert. He'll have nothing to say to you of any value whatsoever.

All of his paintings may be extraordinary, remarkable, and beautiful Da Vincis. But they won't be the one priceless *One* that you're really looking for. Send that word-package back as well. It also could not have come from God.

Every characteristic, without exception, that appears in God's thoughts, must of necessity appear in His words as well. As are His thoughts, so are His words. There is no difference between them whatsoever.

Therefore, if God's thoughts are not your thoughts, not by an entire universe, then likewise, His words will not be your words, *also*, not by an entire universe. If He doesn't *think* anything like you, then there's no way he *talks* anything like you. No way around that simple and logical conclusion.

And because of that, rather than saying, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, God could just as easily and just as truthfully have said through the prophet Isaiah, *My words are not your words*. But he didn't.

He said *that*, instead, through *Paul*.

In response to the question of whether the unbelief of *some* men in regard to any of God's words invalidates the faithfulness of God Himself to any of His own words, the apostle Paul cries out in protest:

GOD FORBID; YEA, LET GOD BE TRUE,
BUT EVERY MAN A LIAR. (Romans 3:4)

Your thoughts, declares Isaiah, are *immeasurably* different than God's. Your words, declares Paul, are *incompatibly* different with God's. Both for precisely the same astonishing reason:

God's thoughts and words are not your thoughts and words, says Paul, because His are true – and yours are not.

According to the apostle, all of those immeasurable differences that exist between our thoughts and God's thoughts – those that we ignore as unimportant or view as simply benign – are in fact, when voiced, categorical, absolute, and unmitigated lies. They are the dreadful and telling tokens of an unseen and evil-intentioned estrangement from God.

For God, it has never been about *some* men's unbelief, declares Paul. It has always been about *all* men's unbelief:

FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF,
THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL. (Romans 11:32)

Not that *some men are liars*, but rather that *every man is a liar*.

There is none righteous, says Paul, *no, not one* (Romans 3:10). And there are none that are not liars; *no, not one*.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, he declares (Romans 3:23). And all are liars and come short of the truth of God.

Every throat is an open sepulchre. And under every mans lips, is the poison of asps, he proclaims (Romans 3:13). And every man is a liar, and none are not liars. Every man. Every word. Every time. Without exception.

The immeasurable difference between God's thinking and our own is finally unmasked for what it really is: it is the lie.

Stripped of all its pretense and posture, the foundation of man's real and only relationship with God is finally revealed: His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His words are not our words, because God is true, but every man is a liar.

And the distance between the truth that He speaks and the lies that we speak places God and us as far apart as any two things in existence can possibly be:

Precisely an entire immeasurable universe apart.

And astonishingly, this very idea, that God is true but every man a liar, is, by Paul's declaration, the bedrock of all *right* thinking about God and man. This is square one. This is ground zero. And according to the apostle, if you get this wrong, you get everything after this wrong.

This is where you rightly divide and correctly order an entire immeasurable universe of thought with only one single stroke. With one single line of division, drawn precisely down the middle between God and man, you place God on one far side of the universe – and man on the other far side of the universe – and make sure they never touch anywhere in the middle.

God is *always* true – and man is *never* true.

And God is *never* a liar – and man is *always* a liar.

And *that* is the real immeasurable difference, says Paul, that currently and continually exists between God and every man.

This command by the apostle Paul, to **let God be true but every man a liar**, is alone the single and solitary thought among all other thoughts which divides all those who *will* find the truth, from all those who will not.

This is the thought which divides the **strait gate** from the **wide gate** and the **narrow way** from the **broad way**. *This* is the division which requires that which every man finds most difficult, foreign, and antagonistic to his own natural mind. And because of that, **few there be that find it** (Matthew 7:13–14).

Listen very carefully: *this* is the very place where every publican who goes home justified smites his own breast and says, "God be merciful to *me* a sinner."

And *this* is very same place where every Pharisee, who goes home condemned, *also* smites the breast of every publican and says, “God be merciful to *him* a sinner.”

This is where we finally lay bare the real stone of stumbling and the real rock of offense for every Pharisee and his kind:

Every Pharisee would most gladly let God be true – and even *more* gladly, let every man be a liar – *except for one*.

And *that* one exception is the razor edge of divide that sends the sinful publican home justified, and the righteous Pharisee home condemned.

This is that which guarantees both the humility and the ultimate exaltation of all who receive it, and the self-exaltation and the ultimate abasement of all who reject it.

Paul’s words are nothing less than sight to the blind. *This* is the only vantage point from which you will ever be able to see the real immeasurable difference that lies between every one of God’s thoughts and words, and every one of yours.

Without the conscious decision on your part to be *a liar*, you may very well **let God be true**, but you will make the fateful mistake, like the Pharisee always does, of letting *yourself* be true as well.

And because you know your own thoughts, but are totally ignorant of the immeasurable differences that lie between every one of your’s and every one of God’s, unless you allow yourself to be made *a liar*, you will, without fail and without even knowing it, change His thoughts and words when you hear them to conform to your own, instead of changing your own to conform to His.

And consequently, yours will become the joyous search to discover all the *likenesses* between God’s thoughts and your own. And you, along with every other Pharisee, will find them in abundance.

Let God be true, but every man a liar, you will hear the apostle Paul demand. “Every man,” you will whisper to God, “except for me.”

And when you go up to the temple to pray, unlike the sinful publican, your only idea of a humble and heartfelt prayer will be, **God I thank thee that I am not as other men are.**

Far from wanting this dividing difference to disappear, Paul would call heaven and earth to record a witness against it. "Don't blot this out!" he would protest. "Build a monument to it!"

This is the immeasurable difference, finally revealed.

Paul would cement this divide permanently into the divine narrative, once and for all, forever more. *This*, he declares, is the true measurement of the distance, and nothing short of it, that lies between God and every man.

Paul casts his words into the riveting delivery of a divine imperative: *You*, he demands, **Let God be true**, and *You, but every man a liar*.

Let God be true. The word "let" in this verse is the Greek word *genomai*. It's an active verb that means "to cause to be," "to create," or "to bring into being." It's that from which we derive the words "generate" and "genesis," and describes the very act of creating something out of absolutely nothing.

And here, with that one imperative word, Paul directs *you* to assume the role of creator.

Here, it is *you*, not God, who are responsible "to cause to be," or "to bring into being," not in the cosmos at large as God once did, but in your own heart and mind, that which establishes God's thoughts and words to be absolutely and categorically true, at all times, under every circumstance. Every word. Every time. No exceptions. *You*, he demands, **let God be true**.

Paul is not requiring that you somehow create reality. Only God can do that. You are instead charged here with creating *conformity* to reality. It is not that you will somehow make God true in some larger sense of the word. He is already true in every sense of the word.

Here, you are simply required to reconstruct the truth of your own perspective in conformity to the truth of His. To bring your own "not-like-His" thoughts and words back into agreement with His own "not-like-yours" thoughts and words. A conscious agreement that has, according to the apostle, never existed in you before.

The fact that Paul commands *you* to create it means that it does not now exist, and would never occur, neither naturally nor accidentally, apart from your own effort. Even God will not create this agreement for you, nor in you.

This is your work, not God's work. This will be your creation, not His creation. In you, it does not exist, and cannot exist, until you make it so.

So, Paul says, make it so: *you let God be true.*

But that's only half the work. And by no means the harder.

But every man a liar. This second part is the more troubling to our natural way of thinking.

The only way to make ***every man a liar*** is to conclude that everything you naturally say about spiritual things – and everything every other man naturally says about spiritual things as well – *everything, without exception* – is in direct and willful disagreement with everything God says about those same things.

The only way to make ***every man a liar*** is to concede that there is an entire universe of difference between everything you say and everything that God says. And that everything He says is right. And that everything you say is wrong.

If that is not the case, then every man is not *really* a liar. And in that case, God becomes one, for falsely accusing you of being one. Don't miss the apostle's point. There is a great deal of difference between simply being wrong, and being a liar. That difference is the difference of intent.

Paul is not requiring that you count every man *wrong*.

Paul is requiring that you count every man ***a liar***.

Men are already liars. No need for you to make them so. You are simply instructed to create a world in which you agree that they are – and that you are as well – indeed, *already* liars.

You are instructed by the apostle to create a world where you may readily confess that you and God are currently in an ongoing relationship which is *accurately* characterized by the absolute maximum amount of disagreement that could possibly exist anywhere in the entire universe; a world in which you and God sit on polar opposite ends of agreement about truth, in both thought *and* word; a world where the disagreement is continually so sharp and so substantial that it *justifiably* warrants your permanent assignment to a very special category of existence before God – one which, prior to this, you would never even have imagined designating for yourself.

That is, from now on, you are to number yourself among the liars.

Here, you are not allowed to regard yourself, or any other man, as intrinsically good but somehow simply misguided, or the tragic victim of circumstances somehow beyond your control.

No. Here, you are simply a liar.

God already counts you one. But here, you are directed by the apostle to count yourself one as well; to create a place where you, for the very first time, may concur with God's accurate assessment of all that you think and say.

Here, you are directed by the apostle to *genomai* a world in which you will willingly agree with Him to *always* count yourself a liar.

Imagine that: the one time in your life you are allowed, nay, *commanded*, to create a world like God once did, and in *your* new garden the only role that is appropriate for you to play – is that of the serpent.

Why must it be so?

Going all the way back to the first garden of Eden, God's words have always vied with the words of others for believability. In the competition for your belief, there are only two contenders: God and everyone else. Ultimately, you will judge God to be believable *only* to the extent that you judge yourself and everyone else to be unbelievable.

And unfortunately, there in the beginning, God was *not* the one you judged to be believable. In that first garden, with someone other than God, in Adam, all of mankind made a much different agreement. In that agreement, every man would be true, but God would be the liar. According to the apostle, you must now break that first agreement by making a new one.

So that you won't even be tempted, ever again, to even try to believe someone other than God, the apostle directs you to assign yourself, and every other man, to a position of permanent un-believability:

Every man – a liar. Permanently.

From now on, for God only will be reserved the position of permanent and irrevocable believability. According to Paul, when it comes to all matters spiritual, you must never again count yourself as true.

That status will be reserved for God alone. **Let God be true.** Always and alone. **But every man a liar.** Always and alone. God will be the sole source of truth. He will not share that position with you, nor anyone else.

And any truth that you, the liar – or any other men, the liars – speak from this moment on will be strictly accredited to God's account and to no one else's. Particularly not your own.

Any truth that you will ever have in your mind or in your mouth, after this, will only be truth, on loan, from Him: truth from the One Who thinks nothing like you; the One Who has *never* thought anything like you. Truth from the One Who speaks nothing like you; the One Who has *never* spoken anything like you.

My thoughts are not your thoughts. Not one. Not ever. No exceptions.

Why must *every man* be labeled a *liar*?

From the very first moment a person is labeled a liar, we begin to examine his every subsequent statement in light of that label. His every word is scrutinized to find not the truth, but the lie.

Liars lie. That's what they do. That's why they are liars.

Paul says you must *genomai* the spiritual world in which every man, without exception, including yourself, is a liar; that is, one whose *own* word in spiritual matters is never trustworthy again, simply because of who he is: he is a liar. Every word. Every time. Without exception.

So here's what I suggest you do: make your line of liars. Make it long. Include every man. And install yourself at the head of the line.

You will now be authorized to scrutinize every word of your own, and every word of every other man as well, to find not the truth in those words – there is none – but the lie. And the truth of God's word will be that which becomes glaringly apparent by its contrasting universe of difference to every other word not like it.

His thoughts are not your thoughts. Ever. And His words are not your words. Ever. His words are true. Your words are not. And His are only those which are *not* like yours. Not by an entire immeasurable universe of difference.

Therefore, outside His word, trust no one else's.

Most especially, not your own.

From now on, you will be the liar. And *God* will be the True.

And here, in your new-found world of agreement with God, for the very first time ever, as strange as it may sound, it will *only* be the willingly self-labeled liars – that ever speak the truth again.

And those who will not willingly label themselves as such will continue, by default, to make God the liar, and by default, to make themselves the true. Just like the Pharisee.

Let God be true, but every man a liar.

Every man. Every word. Every time. Without exception.

Chapter 7

The Domain of the Difference

In the beginning, according to the apostle Paul, man lied because man chose to lie. These are they *who changed the truth into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator...* (Romans 1:25)

The word “changed,” *metallasso* in the Greek, means “to exchange.” They exchanged His truth for their own “truth,” so that their “truth” might now be sourced not in God the Creator, but in man the creature.

The purpose of that exchange was to allow man or his appointees to be *worshipped and served* in place of God. However, man could hardly claim the right to be worshiped and served unless he was lord and keeper of his own truth. *Ye shall be as gods* had been the exchange’s promised result (Genesis 3:5). And it is incumbent upon a god to have his “own” truth. A god without the ability to define the substance of his own truth would hardly be a god at all.

Therefore, the substance of our thoughts and words is now immeasurably different, different by an entire universe from God’s, because, according to Paul, that is the fruit of our willing exchange and its resultant need to re-define truth in our very own terms. The exchange of the truth for the lie left man with only the thoughts and words that *appeared*, to his newly-opened eyes, to be the truth.

His thoughts are not our thoughts and His words are not our words, because our thoughts and our words are the leftover lies of that fateful and

willful exchange.

However – and this is critically important to understand – our words are not lies, first and foremost, because of their immeasurable difference in *substance* to God’s truth.

Our words are lies, first and foremost, because of their immeasurable difference in *source* to God’s truth.

Or to say it another way, what ‘first’ makes *every man a liar* is, surprisingly, *not* his wrong answer to the question of “What is truth?”

What ‘first’ makes *every man a liar* is his wrong answer to the question of “Where is truth?”

Not “What is truth?” but “Where is truth?”

That is the original point of disputation between God and man – and the continuing point of disputation to this very day. That is the original reason for the immeasurable differences between God’s thoughts and man’s – and the continuing reason for the immeasurable differences to this very day. And that is the origin of the very first lie ever told – and the continuing origin of all lies told thereafter to this very day.

In the garden, the serpent did *not* ask Eve, *Hath God ‘said’?* His was not a question of the substance or content of ‘what’ God had said. Eve was neither deaf, nor did she have a bad memory. She knew *exactly* ‘what’ God had said, and proves it when she replies, *of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.* No, the serpent asked instead, *Hath ‘God’ said?*

It was never a question about whether or not God had actually spoken. Of course He had!

Nor was it a ever a question of whether or not Eve really understood what God had said. Of course she did!

It was not a question about the *substance* of the words themselves, but a much bigger question about the very *source* of the words, *Himself.*

Where was truth? That was the question. Was the truth *in* God alone? Or could it be found, just as well, somewhere else *outside* of God? Would one be forced to depend on God’s words alone as the only source for truth, or was there yet another source? Another source, perhaps, according to the

serpent, in the new words of new gods. New gods, with new eyes, whose new words would be more fully informed of the truth than the old God's ever were.

The real question was never about whether or not God had the *first say* about *where* truth was. Both the serpent and man knew the answer to that question already.

The real question was always about which 'god' would have the 'final say' about *where* truth was. And only man could answer that.

And in one fateful moment of time, man answered the real question. And in that instant, God's word ceased to be the sole and only *where* of truth, and another's word took its place.

Now, man had a new answer to the question of "Where is truth?"

Now, *where* is truth? Wherever *man*, the new god, says it is.

And now, *what* is truth? Whatever *man*, the new god, says it is.

The idea of a separate, private, and personal domain of 'truth,' apart from God's, was not original with man. Neither was the desire to be *worshipped and served* as God, in the place of God. Both were authored by another and man simply borrowed them (Isaiah 14:13–14).

And both ideas had always been found together. The ideas of worship and truth are so intrinsically bound together that Jesus says, ... *the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him* (John 4:23).

He Who is the source of truth is He Who rightly deserves to be worshiped. There is another who had always believed that as well.

Jesus explains, *He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it* (John 8:44).

The devil *abode not*, or "stood not," in the truth. He departed from God as the only Source of truth, and by that departure, now stands in another place, the new source of 'truth,' the new *where*. And from this new source, in this new place, man now draws his own new substance for his very own new 'truth.' And where is that new *where* in which man now stands?

When the devil speaks a lie, said Jesus, the place from which he speaks is **of his own**. That's the new *where*. The Greek word for "own" is the word *idios*, meaning "pertaining to self, one's own; by implication, private or separate." It's that from which we derive the word "idiom," a phrase whose meaning is *separate* from the literal meaning of the constituent words: a "change of words" – or, in this case, an *exchange* of words.

Lies are nothing more and nothing less than *separate* words. *Idios* words. From the beginning, says Jesus, the devil **abode not in the truth**, but had his "own" separate words, the very first separate words from God's words. According to Jesus, man's own separate words were birthed in him by his new father, the father of all separate words.

Said the serpent to Eve, *Precisely to the contrary of what that Source told you, **Ye shall not surely die**. Allow me to give you another word from another source*, he said to her: *A private word, a personal word, a word of your very 'own.' An 'idios' word. Your own word, separate from God's word. A word so special and so different that, when you act on this word, it will cause you to 'see' exactly like God Himself sees. And when you have your very own eyes to see like God sees, you'll finally decide for your very own self, like real gods always do, what is really good and what is really evil.* (Genesis 3:4)

Unlike the serpent, Jesus was very careful to describe His manner of speaking as being anything but *idios*. Anything but private, personal, or separate from God's. According to Jesus, He Himself had none of His 'own' words. Not one single word. He, unlike the serpent, was satisfied not only to faithfully deliver the words of Another, but in reality, to be the very Word of Another:

- ◇ *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* (John 7:16)
- ◇ *For I have not spoken of myself; but the father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak.* (John 12:49)
- ◇ *The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself.* (John 14:10)
- ◇ *... and the word which ye hear is not mine but the Father's which sent me.* (John 14:24)
- ◇ *I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.* (John 16:13–16)

◇ *I have given them thy word.* (John 17:4)

◇ *I have given them the words which thou gavest me...* (John 17:8)

Unlike the first man, the Second man answers the question exactly to the contrary. *Hath 'God' said?* the devil, in effect, asks of Jesus in the wilderness temptation. Yes, Jesus answers. *'God' hath said: It is written..., It is written..., and It is written...* (Matthew 4:1–11).

According to Jesus, the 'where' of truth can be found in only one place. And not to find truth in *this* place is not to find truth at all. According to Him, there is one, and only one, Source of truth.

Jesus prayed to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane, *Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth* (John 17:17).

That's where truth is, says Jesus: *only in Thy word.*

To "sanctify" is simply "to separate unto God." The serpent's 'truth' had separated as well. But not unto God.

Jesus declares that the truth that "separates unto God" can be found nowhere except in His Father's word. And the power of this word to separate unto God lies in the fact that this word is itself separate unto God. It separates unto God because it is the *only* word *already* separate unto God.

This separated truth, found only in His separated word, in turn separates all those who believe that word from all those who do not. And more than that, His separated word separates men away from their 'own' separate words, their *idios* words, back unto God and His word.

According to Jesus, those who are not separated from their 'own' words by *this* word are not themselves truly separated unto God.

Simply said: if *Thy word is truth*, as Jesus declared it is, then that which is *not Thy word* is *not* truth.

"What is truth?" is the age-old question of philosophy. Always asked, and never satisfyingly answered.

At His trial, that's exactly what Pilate had asked Jesus: *What is truth?* (John 18:37)

But Jesus gives Pilate no answer to his question, because Pilate has asked the wrong question *first*. "What is truth?" has always been the wrong *first*

question to ask God.

That question, when asked first, has far too many answers, about far too many subjects, from far too many sources.

The only right *first* question to ask God concerning truth is not “What is truth?” but “Where is truth?”

That question has only one answer. And that answer comes from only one Source.

The only right answer to the only right *first* question to ever ask God about truth is the one that Jesus would have given to Pilate, had he asked it:

“Where is truth?”

Exactly where you would never have imagined to look:

Standing right in front of you.

Chapter 8

The Discipline of the Difference

Jesus said, ... *ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32).

And if you *shall* know the truth, then obviously you don't know it *now*. And if you *shall* be free, then obviously you are not free *now*.

Jesus declares in no uncertain terms that, *before* you meet Him, Who is His Father's Word (John 1:14), you neither *know the truth*, nor are you *free*. You may know many things, but *truth* is not among them. And you may be many things, but *free* is not one of them.

But if this verse is simply left as it is quoted here, the hearer always wrongly infers that this is a "What is truth?" statement from Jesus; that 'whatever' truth may happen to be, it *will* be known, in time, with certainty, always, by some inevitable means, no matter what. As if Jesus were saying, *Just hang around long enough, and sooner or later, 'whatever' the truth happens to be, will always show up. Because, after all, Ye shall know the truth.*

But that's really only the second half of Jesus' actual quote. And that makes this half-quote a very misleading misquote. It's the little-known first half that qualifies the oft-quoted second half with a specific condition which changes its meaning entirely from a "What is truth?" statement into a "Where is truth?" statement.

If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed, Jesus says

first, *then* adds in the very same breath, ***and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*** (John 8:31–32).

Where is truth? *Only*, says Jesus, ***in my word***.

But in the very same breath in which He assures us that His word is the only ‘where’ in which truth can be found, He also informs us that, apart from a concentrated and disciplined effort on our part, the ‘what’ of truth that *can* only be found in His word will *never* be found.

According to Jesus, even if you do know where to find the correct ‘source’ of truth, there is no guarantee you will ever find the correct ‘substance’ of truth. Astonishingly, finding the truth is not a foregone and inevitable conclusion even if you *do* come to Jesus to find it. It’s strictly an if-then proposition. And if there is no *if*, then there will be no *then*.

If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Only ***if you continue*** until you become ***my disciples***. Mere casual inquiries will never uncover this truth of which Jesus speaks. And that fact tells us something we never knew before we heard these words: the truth that Jesus promises is “hidden” truth. Hidden from all who are not willing to continue in His word until they become His disciples.

This truth, if it is to be found, will be certain to be a ‘non-intuitive’ truth. And because His thoughts are not our thoughts by an entire universe, this truth, if it is found, is very likely to be an utterly ‘counter-intuitive’ truth.

Intuitive truth, by its very definition, never requires any kind of continuance-onto-discipline to uncover. It’s simply never necessary. Its apprehension is, instead, immediate. I look at the sun, I close my eyes immediately. My hand touches the hot stove, I remove it immediately.

Intuitive truth is both instinctive and immediate. No need for three day seminars or long tutorials on the nature of light or heat before I close my eyes or withdraw my hand. No need for a continuance-onto-discipleship.

Intuitive truth is instant truth. Easy truth.

But the truth of which Jesus speaks is neither instant nor easy. The fact that it requires discipleship to find, tells us that this is a different kind of truth than any other. A truth not readily apparent and not easily seen. A truth

that will forever remain hidden from non-disciples.

And therein lies the immeasurable difference which identifies it exclusively as His truth.

If I take you to the fourteenth floor of a downtown building and say to you, "Don't jump out this window and you shall know the truth," you will immediately apprehend the meaning of my words.

You will *not* come back a week from now and say, "What an undisciplined moron I am. I've jumped out that fourteenth floor window six times already since you told me not to. I know I need to discipline myself in that 'don't-jump' way of thinking because I really do want to know the truth, but that 'don't jump out the fourteenth floor window' is such an unnatural way of thinking to me that I'm finding it really difficult to wrap my mind around such an abstract and obscure concept."

No, you'll take one look out that window, fourteen floors down, give me the two thumbs-up, and say, "I got it!" There'll be no need for any long-term continuance-unto-discipline as you jump out the window over and over again until the truth slowly and finally emerges from the shadows of non-intuitiveness. No. You'll get it instantly. First time you look down.

But that's exactly how it *doesn't* work with Jesus' truth. This is truth unlike any you have ever seen before.

These are the words of that One Whose thoughts you've never even thought, nor *could* have ever thought. These are the words that are immeasurably different than your own by precisely an entire universe.

You will not understand the truth of these words the first time you look down at them. Or the second time. Or the third. To find this truth, you'll have to jump out this window, over and over and over again.

If the first time you hear the words of Jesus, you say, "I got it!" then the only thing we can know with absolute certainty is, "you don't got it!" To know this truth, discipleship is required. And that is why so few will ever know it.

The root of the Greek word for "disciples" is the word *methe*, from which we derive the word "mathematics." No one is born intuitively knowing mathematics. It must be taught. And learning it requires strenuous, difficult, and tiring effort.

Imagine your calculus teacher announcing on the first day of class, “Just do whatever comes naturally and you’ll get it. You can figure this out without one word of instruction from me. No discipline is required because you’ll intuit it correctly the very first time you try.”

God’s thoughts are not your thoughts and never have been. They are completely and utterly ‘unknown-to-you’ thoughts. And His ‘unknown-to-you’ thoughts are not even from the same side of the universe as your own ‘already-known-to-you’ thoughts.

If you find His words easy to understand, that simply proves beyond any doubt that you’re misunderstanding them by precisely an entire universe.

Jesus says, in effect, that you will find the truth of His words to be so non-intuitive, so counter-intuitive, so un-recognizable as truth, so un-like what you would ever have expected truth to be and to look like, that only a continuance in those words to the point of discipline, like that required to learn higher mathematics, will ever reveal the truth that is in them.

To know this truth will require a calculus-like effort.

But unless you’re convinced beforehand that this is the only ‘where’ in which truth can ever *really* be found, you’ll just skip this class. It’s just way too hard.

And in real life, who needs calculus anyway?

The real problem is, you cannot find what you cannot recognize. And in your search for truth, if you are unaware that truth can be found only in the immeasurable *difference* between His thoughts and yours, you will search for the truth, but fail to recognize it even if you do see it.

You will make the fateful mistake of looking for something familiar. And like Mary Magdalene on resurrection morning, everybody in the garden – including the resurrected Christ – will still just look like a gardener.

Because His thoughts are not your thoughts and His words are not your words, His truth is also not ‘your truth.’ His truth is immeasurably different, different precisely by an entire universe, than yours. And His truth can *only* be recognized in its immeasurable contrast to your own.

How different is your ‘truth’ from His truth?

Your truth chooses only the strong and the wise and the noble in this world.

His truth chooses only the weak and the foolish and the despised in this world. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

Your truth prays, "O Lord, make me strong."

His truth answers, *My strength is made perfect in your weakness.* (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Your truth bids you, "Take up your crown and live."

His truth bids you, "Take up your cross and die" (Mark 8:34).

You must see what God sees like God sees it, because God sees *nothing* like you see it. His thoughts are never your thoughts. And your thoughts are never His thoughts. And unless you know in your search for truth, to look only for those things which are immeasurably different from that which you would naturally expect, it wouldn't matter even if God dispatched a heavenly star in all its heavenly glory, with its celestial spotlight illuminating ten thousand-thousands of wildly worshipping angels, right before your very eyes:

It still wouldn't be enough to convince you that truth really smells like a barn.

Consequently, you must submit yourself to the discipline of His non-intuitive, counter-intuitive, backwards-and-upside-down-from-yours, always-smells-like-a-stable-instead-of-a-palace kind of truth.

In a world filled to the brim with nothing but your own thoughts and those of others exactly like them, successfully identifying His thoughts among all the rest requires an against-nature, alien, and thoroughly other-worldly point of view.

The untrained and the untutored in that search mistakenly believe that truth will be found in the familiar and the friendly, and in the native and in the known, and in the easily accepted and the easily acceptable.

They believe truth has always been one of the family. Something they already knew. Something they grew up knowing. That truth can always be found hiding somewhere among all the thoughts that they already think every day.

They imagine truth to be, at worst, like the prodigal son, perhaps wayward for a season, but now eager to return home. That all they need do is throw

open their arms and embrace it – and truth will be right back where it always belonged.

Nothing – and I mean nothing in the entire universe – could be further from the truth about the truth.

Truth is not of this world. And never has been. Truth is a foreigner. A stranger in a strange land. Truth is a pilgrim. And an alien. Truth is hostile to earthly surroundings. And they are hostile to truth in return. Truth is never familiar and never friendly. Never native and never known. Truth speaks a language never uttered here before, with words hidden from the foundation of the world.

Truth shocks and amazes, bewilders and astonishes, distresses and offends with its unexpected and altogether immeasurable differences. In this world, truth is never crowned. Truth is always crucified.

Truth is precisely, exactly, and only what you never imagined, or *could* imagine, truth to be. And in the end, truth can *only* be recognized by its immeasurable difference to what you always thought it was.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares God. *Not once. Not ever. No exceptions.*

One final word here about difference:

Don't let anyone convince you, no matter who they are, that truth's real immeasurable differences – the ones that really matter most to your life and your future – are somehow measurements between an 'us' and a 'them.'

Every day, countless people devote their unceasing and seemingly tireless efforts to measuring and remeasuring, ad nauseam, the distances and differences between 'us' and 'them.' Between the conservatives and the liberals, between the blacks and the whites, between the Wall Streets and the Main Streets, between all the haves and all the have nots – and between a thousand other things, equally and exactly as meaningless in the end.

These, they assure you, represent the very bottomless abysses of divide, the very largest and most important, unspannable distances and differences that have ever existed in the whole of the human experience.

Poppycock. Balderdash.

Those are nothing. Those are children squabbling over toys on the playground. Those distances and those differences are *nothing* by comparison to this distance and this difference.

This isn't some measurement between us and them. This is *the* measurement between *us* and *Him*.

And because *He's* God and *you're* not, in the end, *this* will be the only measurement that counts.

Chapter 9

The Disguise of the Difference

When Christian writers, pastors, theologians and scholars want to illuminate certain key ideas found in the Bible, they go back to the original languages in which it was written. From those original words they look to get a clearer sense of the authors' meanings. Here is how some of the most important concepts found in the New Testament might be listed:

<i>agape</i>	love of God
<i>kurios</i>	Lord
<i>ergo</i>	work; ergonomic
<i>veritas</i>	truth; verification
<i>logos</i>	word
<i>charis</i>	gift or favor; charismatic

And even though New Testament scholars would all agree that each of the words on this list properly and accurately conveys an important New Testament idea, there's just one problem: one of these words is not like the others.

It's the word for *truth* – *veritas*.

You are more familiar with the word *veritas* than you probably know. It's the word from which we get "verify," to demonstrate that something is true; "verity," a true principle or belief; "verisimilitude," the appearance of being true or real; and "verdict," the decision of who is right on a disputed subject.

The idea of *veritas*, with its many variations, permeates our thinking and our language, and has done so for thousands of years.

In 1080 A.D., Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, produced for the Church the first medieval work on the subject of truth in a book entitled “De Veritate.” In it, he wrote, “I do not recall ever having found a definition of truth; but if you wish, let us inquire as to what truth is, by going through the various things in which we say there is truth.”

Over a thousand years had passed since the resurrection of Christ, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, by his own admission, had still not found a definition of truth with which he was satisfied. So, he provided one. Not only for himself, but for the whole Church which followed after him – right down to this very day. And so he defined the word *veritas*.

After a thorough examination, Anselm concluded that the correct definition of *veritas*, or “truth,” is “rightness perceptible only to the mind.” Perception is, of course, “the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses.” Thus, Anselm’s definition of truth clearly excludes anything which cannot be perceived through the senses. That is to say, anything that cannot be observed and thereby “verified” by the senses cannot be called truth under his definition of *veritas*.

Then, some two hundred years after Anselm’s definition, Thomas Aquinas, considered to be the Catholic Church’s greatest theologian and philosopher, weighed in on the subject by saying, “A judgment is said to be true [*veritas*] when it conforms to external reality.”

Veritas, truth, would be, in this case, a kind of “correctness of vision,” according to Aquinas. External reality, that to which a judgment must conform in order to be true according to this definition, can only be identified by direct observation. *Veritas*, then, according to both Anselm and Aquinas, is a conformation to external reality perceived through the senses.

But both of these definitions of truth are really little more than an expanded restatement of what had already been held to be correct for more than a thousand years before that.

Aristotle, the famous Athenian philosopher, pupil of Plato, teacher of Alexander the Great, had given his own definition of truth some 1,300 years before, around 300 B.C. “To say what is, that it is, and to say what is not, that it is not, is true,” declared Aristotle.

And that sounds remarkably like Anselm's and Aquinas' definitions. In fact, Aquinas' own stated goal was to synthesize Aristotle's ideas with the principles of Christianity. What more logical place to start than with the very concept of truth itself?

In Aristotle's definition of *veritas*, if truth is *saying* what is *is*, then obviously, one must *see* what *is* before one may *say* what *is*. So, Anselm and Aquinas and Aristotle all agree: truth is simply making my statements agree with my observations of an external reality. In other words, my statements must *correspond* with an observed reality in order to be declared true.

And that, very simply said, is the concept of *veritas*. *Veritas* says that what I cannot *see*, I cannot *say* is truth. Truth must be *verified* by direct observation.

And that's an altogether reasonable requirement. In fact, that is the entire basis for what is called the "scientific method," which is, by definition, knowledge acquired solely by systematic observation, measurement, and experiment. And that very process of scientific method provides the basis for absolutely *everything* that we call truth today.

So important was this idea of *veritas* that Harvard University, the oldest university in the United States, originally established in 1636 to train clergymen for the ministry, chose as its very own motto, "*Veritas*."

At the school's inception, the motto was "*Veritas Christos et Ecclesiae*," meaning "Truth for Christ and the Church," but it was later shortened to what it is today, simply "*Veritas*." In a word, at Harvard, from the beginning and still to this day, a proper education was, and is, nothing less than the seeking and finding of *veritas*: truth.

And today, there are literally thousands of *Veritas* Churches, both Catholic and Protestant. There are *Veritas* Ministries, *Veritas* church schools, *Veritas* church choirs and clubs, and *Veritas* youth meetings.

There are *Veritas* marriage encounter groups, *Veritas* church cafes, *Veritas* church bookstores, *Veritas* church television and radio shows, and on and on and on – all an indisputable testimony to the fact that the Church also comfortably embraces the word *veritas* as its very own embodiment of the ideal of truth, just like everybody else does.

So... if everybody agrees that *veritas* is both the proper and most fitting

word to convey the idea of truth, and if it was good enough for Aristotle and Anselm and Aquinas, and good enough for the brightest and the best at Harvard, and still good enough for the entire Church today... then what's the problem?

The problem is – *it's the wrong word.*

One would imagine that God, in His infinite wisdom and power, in order to make certain that His message was communicated most clearly and faithfully, could have chosen to do so in any language He wanted. After all, *He's God.* He could have chosen Swahili if He'd wanted. But He didn't.

He chose, instead, Hebrew for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament. One would think – perhaps – most probably – He did so with some Expert forethought on His part concerning the matter. But the word *veritas* is neither Hebrew *nor* Greek. It's Latin. And that should trouble you for a couple of reasons.

First, because the word *veritas* is nowhere found in the New Testament. There are no Latin words in the original New Testament writing. That means, as good as *veritas* may be at conveying what Aristotle, Anselm, Aquinas, Harvard and the Church define as truth, it is *not* the original container that *God* chose to transport *His* idea of truth.

But perhaps, one might propose, this new container is also a faithful container with no leaks or loss along the way.

Nope. It's not. And that's the second reason it should trouble you.

The word *aletheia*, the Greek word that actually does appear in the New Testament for truth – means exactly the *opposite* of what the word *veritas* means.

Veritas is not just a *different* word for truth. It's precisely the *opposite* word for truth.

Aletheia, pronounced *al-ay'-the-a*, means "truth, as in 'not concealing.'" It is a combination of the prefix *a*, which negates what follows, and the word *lanthano*, meaning "to lie hid." So "truth" is, by its original Greek definition, "not to lie hid," or "to un-hide," or "to unconceal."

Its usage can be traced all the way back to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* around 850 BC. But where scholars have studied the original usage of *aletheia*, they

are puzzled by what they find. Or rather, by what they do not find. Hiddenness and its opposite, unconcealedness, are conditions which should attach to 'things' as well as to the content of statements. Yet it is almost exclusively to the latter that *aletheia* refers in its first two and a half centuries of attestation. *Aletheia* in its earliest usage is never applied to 'things,' but is used only in connection with 'verbs of saying.' In its original usage, someone always 'tells' the truth to another. *Aletheia* had to do with the reliability of what is reported by one person to another.¹

The only prerequisite for truth to be "that which is unconcealed," is that it must first have been, of course, concealed. The word "concealed" means "to hide or to withdraw or remove from observation; to cover or keep from sight; to keep secret; to prevent or avoid disclosing or divulging."

And therein lies the difference between *veritas* and *aletheia*, by precisely an entire immeasurable universe:

Veritas says truth is 'unknown' and, therefore, must be discovered.

Aletheia says truth is 'intentionally hidden' and, therefore, *cannot* be discovered.

Veritas says that truth is only that which can be discovered by man through direct observation.

Aletheia says that truth is only that which *cannot* be discovered by man through direct observation.

In fact, *aletheia* says that only that which has been altogether withdrawn or removed from observation, intentionally covered and kept from sight, hidden and concealed away from direct view, and then "told" to me by another whose word is reliable, can ever be called the truth. And *that's* God's idea of truth.

The apostle Paul explains it like this:

BUT WE SPEAK THE WISDOM OF GOD IN A MYSTERY,
EVEN THE HIDDEN WISDOM,
WHICH GOD ORDAINED BEFORE THE WORLD UNTO OUR GLORY:

¹Thomas Cole, *Archaic Truth* (1983)

WHICH NONE OF THE PRINCES OF THIS WORLD KNEW...

(1 Corinthians 2:7–8)

The word “mystery,” *mysterion* in the Greek, doesn’t simply mean “that which is unknown,” but rather “to shut the mouth,” through the idea of a purposeful “silence imposed by initiation into religious rites;” in other words, a *mystery* is that secret which can only be known if one who *already* knows the secret willingly passes it on to one who does not.

Paul says this *wisdom of God* is intentionally *hidden*, *apokrupto*, “concealed away, kept secret.” These are secrets *hidden* away on purpose, *ordained before the world* was even created, Paul says, that none of the *princes of this world knew*. And that means not even the smartest guys from Harvard knew them.

Paul continues in the same passage:

BUT AS IT IS WRITTEN, EYE HATH NOT SEEN,
NOR EAR HEARD, NEITHER HAVE ENTERED INTO THE
HEART OF MAN, THE THINGS WHICH GOD HATH PREPARED
FOR THEM THAT LOVE HIM. BUT GOD HATH REVEALED
THEM UNTO US BY HIS SPIRIT...

(1 Corinthians 2:9–10)

That is *aletheia*. That which is hidden. On purpose. And revealed. On purpose. Not found by investigation. *Never* found by investigation. Hidden so that it *cannot* be found by investigation.

Your eyes have never even seen these things before, says Paul: *Eye hath not seen*. Your ears have never even heard these things before: *nor ear heard*. And none of these things has ever even crossed your mind before: *neither have entered into the heart of man*.

With “unconcealment,” *aletheia*, as truth, you have no prior idea of what you’re even looking for when you begin your search for truth.

AND HE SAID, UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN TO KNOW
THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD:
BUT TO OTHERS IN PARABLES; THAT SEEING
THEY MIGHT NOT SEE, AND HEARING
THEY MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND.

(Luke 8:10)

Jesus says that these things are purposely hidden so that they cannot be found.

I tell you, declared Jesus to His disciples, *many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see and have not seen them, and to hear those things that you hear, and have not heard them* (Luke 10:24).

If prophets and kings, the most spiritual men in the world and the most powerful men in the world, could not, even with their greatest efforts, find these things by investigation, by *veritas*, what are your chances of finding them apart from His revelation of them to you?

It's not just that these things are simply 'unknown.' *Veritas* deals with unknowns every day. That's *veritas*' very own speciality. Every scientific inquiry that *veritas* has ever made was made into the unknown.

But on the contrary, declares the apostle, these things have been intentionally *hidden*, purposely concealed away, by God Himself, since *before the world*, specifically so that they *cannot* be found. And you have no idea how good God is at hiding things.

These things can *only* be known if He has *revealed* them, *apokalupto*, "taken off the cover, disclosed, and unconcealed" them by His Spirit. And if He doesn't unconceal them, they cannot be known at all. Never. No *veritas* can ever discover this. *This* is *aletheia*.

IN THAT HOUR JESUS REJOICED IN SPIRIT, AND SAID,
I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,
THAT THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE
AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES:
EVEN SO, FATHER; FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT.
(Luke 10:21)

The word *rejoiced* used above to describe Jesus as He prays to His Father has been woefully understated in its translation from the original Greek. *Agalliao* is a combination of two words: *agan*, which means "much," and *ballomai*, which means "to jump, to leap, to spring up." In the original Greek the word literally means to "much jump for joy."

What was Jesus so excited about that the gospel writer reports that He was *agalliao*, "much jumping for joy"?

Jesus was beside Himself with joy as He contemplated the fact that God, not man, controlled the truth, by hiding it from some and revealing it to others.

You have *hid these things*, *apokrupto*, “concealed away,” from the *wise and prudent*, Jesus joyfully declares. **And You have revealed them**, *apokalupto*, “taken off the cover,” unto *babes*. The word “babe” is the word *nepios*, which is a combination of two parts; one meaning “no,” and the other meaning “word.” A babe is one who has no words of his own. *That is aletheia*.

Veritas says, “To call it truth, you must see it for yourself.”

Aletheia says, “To call it truth, another, whose word you trust, must see it for you.”

The unconcealment of *aletheia* guarantees the “un-discoverability” of truth apart from God’s very own revelation of it.

According to the prophet David, it was Jesus Who would say of Himself, *I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world*.

Don’t tell me that what Jesus said is what you expected Him to say. Don’t tell me that Moses already told you in advance what Jesus would say. Don’t tell me that anybody, ever, in the entire history of the entire world, *ever* said what Jesus said. Until Jesus spoke, His words had been kept secret from everyone. Even from Moses.

FOR MOSES TRULY SAID UNTO THE FATHERS,
A PROPHET SHALL THE LORD YOUR GOD RAISE UP
UNTO YOU OF YOUR BRETHREN, LIKE UNTO ME;
HIM SHALL YE HEAR IN ALL THINGS
WHATSOEVER HE SHALL SAY UNTO YOU.
AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT EVERY SOUL,
WHICH WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET,
SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.

(Acts 3:22–23)

If Moses had already said what Jesus would later say, why would Moses himself say, “If you don’t listen to the One who comes after me, you’ll be destroyed”? Otherwise, he would have simply said, “Listen to me because the One coming after me will be saying the same thing I’m saying.”

What Jesus says has never been said before. In fact, what Jesus says has never even been *thought* before!

These things have been purposely hidden from the foundation of the world so that they could not be found. Not even by Moses. Or anyone else for that matter. And it's impossible that the things Jesus and His apostles tell you could be anything other than astonishingly unfamiliar to you. *If* you're really listening for the immeasurable difference.

On the mountain of transfiguration, after Jesus finishes talking with Moses and Elijah, Peter suggests to Jesus that they build three shrines, one to Moses, one to Elijah, and one to Jesus.

WHILE HE YET SPAKE, BEHOLD,
 A BRIGHT CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THEM;
 AND BEHOLD A VOICE OUT OF THE CLOUD, WHICH SAID,
 THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED;
 HEAR YE HIM. (Matthew 17:5)

Don't get confused. Jesus isn't saying what Moses said. Jesus isn't saying what Elijah said. There is no equality of words here. There is no equality of anything here. Why would God say *Hear ye Him*, if all that Jesus would say had already been said by Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets?

It's not "Hear ye *them*." It's *Hear ye Him*.

When Peter says to Jesus, *Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God*, Jesus replies, *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is heaven* (Matthew 16:7).

It's not just that flesh and blood *did not* reveal it to Peter: it is rather that flesh and blood *could not* reveal it to Peter. Aletheia cannot be found apart from God's revelation of it.

Jesus said, *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him* (Matthew 11:27).

Jesus says, No man *knoweth*, *epiginosko*, "recognizes" the Son, but the Father; neither *knoweth*, *epiginosko*, "recognizes" any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will *reveal*, *apokalupto*, "take off the cover, and unconceal," Him. *That* is aletheia: truth that is undiscoverable

apart from Christ's revelation of it.

You will *not* "recognize" the Father. And neither will you "recognize" the Son, apart from the revelation of the aletheia that comes only through the words of Jesus. And that's incredibly important to understand.

Jesus' words are different by an entire universe from anything that Moses, or Elijah, or you, or anyone else, ever even imagined they would be.

And that means, what the Father and the Son look like when you *do* recognize them *must also* be different by an entire universe from what Moses, or Elijah, or you, or anyone else would ever have imagined it to be as well.

And if it's not, then what you have "recognized" is *not* the Father or the Son at all.

If it is not different by an entire universe from what you had expected, then what you have "recognized" is what someone other than the Son has revealed to you. Perhaps Moses. Or Elijah. Or the TV preacher. But certainly not Jesus.

No man recognizes the Father except the one to whom I reveal Him, declares Jesus. Until you hear the Son speak, you only *think* you recognize the Father. Until you hear the Son speak, you cannot *possibly* recognize the Father. *That is aletheia.*

Paul assures his hearers that the truth he is communicating to them is aletheia, not veritas.

BUT I CERTIFY YOU, BRETHREN, THAT THE GOSPEL
WHICH WAS PREACHED OF ME IS NOT AFTER MAN.
FOR I NEITHER RECEIVED IT OF MAN, NEITHER WAS I
TAUGHT IT, BUT BY THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.
(Galatians 1:11–12)

The sum and substance of veritas is its total reliance on "observation." Observation is its singular and strict requirement. What it cannot *see*, it cannot call truth.

But no one even seems to remember that Jesus said, *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation* (Luke 17:20).

Listen carefully: the Greek word for "observation" is *parateresis*, meaning

“ocular evidence.” And obviously, ocular evidence is evidence that you can see with your eyes.

Astonishingly, Jesus declares that the kingdom of God comes with *no* ocular evidence. No evidence that can be seen. None whatsoever. That automatically excludes any true knowledge of the kingdom from ever being discovered or “recognized” by means of *veritas*.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying?

For the last thousand years, thanks to Anselm and Aquinas and their altogether erroneous Aristotelian definition of Biblical truth as *veritas*, the Church has been running around attempting to produce for a skeptical world ocular evidence that Jesus declares *does not even exist*.

“Can’t you see the kingdom in the DNA? Can’t you see it by observing the mathematical precision of the planets and the stars? Can’t you see the divinely Intelligent Design all around you?” the Church asks the world, in utter exasperation.

“No,” is the answer. They can’t see it. And neither can you.

They’re not *supposed* to see it. And neither are you.

Why? Because it does not exist.

You’re trying to give them an ocular evidence that God Himself doesn’t offer them *or* you.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away, said Jesus (Luke 21:33).

You’re trying to provide a proof for what ***shall not pass away*** with that very thing which ***shall pass away***. You’re trying to verify ***heaven*** with ***earth***. You’re trying to accomplish with *veritas* what God designed to *only* be accomplished with *aletheia*. And it cannot be done.

Jesus already told you. It *cannot* be done. You’ll extract *no* convincing evidence for the eternal out of the merely temporary. None. It isn’t there. It doesn’t exist. You’ve got it exactly backwards. The totally *changeable* cannot possibly contain the confirmation for the totally *unchangeable*.

See those heavens? Temporary. See that DNA? Temporary. Hear that word of God? Permanent.

Everything except the word of God is temporary. No exceptions.

And the temporary *cannot* confirm the permanent. Ever.

There is an entire booming industry that has grown up around attempting to provide an ocular evidence that doesn't even exist. But like the emperor's new clothes, it cannot be seen for the very best reason of all:

It isn't really there.

Listen carefully: you can never prove aletheia with veritas. Because veritas cannot see it. Do you not understand? What veritas cannot see, it cannot call truth.

The distinction between veritas and aletheia is nothing less than the difference between *seeing* and *hearing*.

Veritas must see. On the other hand, aletheia must hear.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit* (John 3:8).

The word *tell*, in *cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth*, is the Greek word *eido*, "to see." Jesus says you cannot "see" where the wind comes from or where it goes. You can only "hear" the *sound*, in the Greek, literally the "voice" of the wind. Jesus says that's the way everything of the Spirit is. By design, on purpose, in order to hide it from *the wise and prudent*, you can "hear" spiritual things, but you cannot "see" them. Ever.

Just like the wind, says Jesus.

That's God's real Intelligent Design. With the new eyes that you bargained for in the garden when you chose the lie that you could "see" and verify with your own eyes rather than the truth that you could only "hear," you will never "see" His truth in this world again. He has hidden these things away, concealed them from your sight. You may "hear" them, but you cannot "see" them. They are hidden from the *wise and prudent*. Because the *wise and prudent* trust only their eyes.

"Can't you see the wind?" the Church asks the world in utter exasperation.

"No, we can't!" says the world to the Church.

And Jesus says to the Church, *Neither can you*.

Listen to Jesus. Stop trying to make the world 'see' the wind. Stop trying to make the world see what isn't even there.

Do you not understand the problem? If you could 'see' it, there could be no hiding it. If you could see it, everyone would get it. You would accomplish the very thing that God Himself refuses to do: you would 'unconceal' to the wise and the prudent the very thing that God is hiding from them! And Jesus wouldn't be jumping for joy over that.

That's exactly what those who talk of Intelligent Design have been trying to do: they've been trying to unconceal to the *wise and prudent* the very thing that God is concealing from them. Good luck with that. As soon as they can get them to see the wind, I'm sure they'll 'see' the rest of what they're trying to show them as well.

Veritas is about that which can be apprehended only by *sight*. Aletheia is about that which can be apprehended only by *sound*. Veritas is totally dependent on the eyes. Aletheia, by contrast, is totally dependent on the ears.

Jesus explains that in the kingdom of God, the 'ears' must take the place of the 'eyes.' You must close your eyes and open your ears. Jesus explains, there is a *sight that comes only from hearing*.

AND HE SAID UNTO THEM,
 IS A CANDLE BROUGHT TO BE PUT UNDER A BUSHEL,
 OR UNDER A BED? AND NOT TO BE SET ON A CANDLESTICK?
 FOR THERE IS NOTHING HID,
 WHICH SHALL NOT BE MANIFESTED;
 NEITHER WAS ANY THING KEPT SECRET,
 BUT THAT IT SHOULD COME ABROAD.
 IF ANY MAN HAVE EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.
 AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR:
 WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE,
 IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU:
 AND UNTO YOU THAT HEAR SHALL MORE BE GIVEN.
 FOR HE THAT HATH, TO HIM SHALL BE GIVEN:
 AND HE THAT HATH NOT, FROM HIM SHALL BE TAKEN
 EVEN THAT WHICH HE HATH. (Mark 4:21–25)

The subject here is the secret things that are hidden and how they are to

be found. The kingdom of God is the place where the search is to be conducted. Jesus says that a candle is put not under a bushel, but on a candlestick, so that those things which are *hid* (*kruptos*) in the darkness may be *manifested* by the light (*phaneroo*); and that those things which are *secret* (*apokruphos*), will come abroad (*eis phaneros*).

Then He says, *Take heed what ye hear.*

Most read *Take heed what ye hear* and think Jesus is saying “beware” or “be cautious” of what you hear, as though He were giving an admonition of some impending danger. But the proper Greek word for such a warning would have been *prosecho*, meaning to “pay attention to” or “be cautious about.” For example:

Take heed [prosecho] that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise [the object of taking heed] ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 6:1).

But above in the example of the candlestick and its secrets-revealing light, the phrase translated *take heed* is not the word *prosecho* at all. It is the single word *blepo*, a primary verb which simply means “to see.”

So what Jesus is actually saying here is quite different than what you might have thought. He says: *Blepo tis akouo*. *Blepo* is the word “see.” *Tis* is the word “what.” *Akouo* is the word “hear,” from which we get “acoustic.”

Jesus is not saying “Be careful what you hear.”

Jesus is saying, “See what you hear.”

See with your ears, not with your eyes.

As the candle is lit to ‘unconceal’ what has been secretly hidden in the darkness, likewise, My words will unconceal to whoever has ears to hear, what has been hidden from the wise and prudent, who insist on ‘seeing the truth with their eyes’ rather than ‘seeing the truth with their ears.’

Those who ‘hear,’ says Jesus, will ‘see.’ Those who do not ‘hear’ will not ‘see.’

And unto you that hear shall more be given. He who ‘hears’ more will ‘see’ more. And he who ‘hears’ not at all will have that which he ‘sees apart from hearing it in My words’ taken away altogether. *From him shall be taken even that which he hath.*

Heaven and earth, which you can ‘see,’ *shall pass away*. *But My words*, which you can only ‘hear,’ *shall not pass away*. That which you can ‘see’ is temporary. That which you can only ‘hear’ is permanent.

The light that lights the kingdom is in my words, declares Jesus. *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear*. The *wise and prudent* insist on seeing before they will believe. *Babes*, on the other hand, just need to hear.

King David knew that already: *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple* (Psalm 119:130).

The word *entrance*, *pethatch* in the Hebrew, means “disclosure.” The “disclosure,” or “unconcealment” of your words, gives *light*. The *simple* are the *babes*. “I see by what I hear,” declares David. “Not by what I see.”

And if you think about it, that idea might not actually sound totally unfamiliar to you. Because there is a scriptural word for the “sight that comes only from hearing:” it’s the word “faith.”

Faith cometh by hearing. *And hearing by the word of God*, says the apostle Paul (Romans 10:17). Faith comes by *akoe*, from *akouo*, “hearing.” Faith never comes by ‘seeing.’

Stop trying to make faith come by seeing. God gives no ocular evidence of the kingdom. Stop telling the world that He does. Instead, ‘see’ what you ‘hear.’ Just like Jesus said to.

FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.

(2 Corinthians 5:7)

We walk by faith; that is, we walk by those words that we “hear,” *akouo*, *not by sight*, not by *eidōs*, from *eido*, to “see.”

We walk by what we “hear,” not by what we “see.”

Stop inviting the world to walk by sight. God gives them no such invitation. Who authorized you to? The more you attempt to convince by sight, by *veritas*, the farther from faith, from *aletheia*, you actually distance them. And the farther you distance them, the farther you distance yourself in the process as well.

Jesus says you have a problem with your eyes. They’re still open!

When you attempt to produce evidence for the world to ‘see,’ you’re putting

the candle under the bushel. And nobody sees when you do that. Everybody is left in the dark. Including you. The light is His word. It's the *only* light that there is. And this light, His word, is not for your eyes. This light, His word, is only for your ears. The 'hearing' is the 'seeing.'

Blepo tis akouo. Unlike the wise and prudent, see only what you hear.

THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH,
 NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES,
 BUT HAVING SEEN THEM AFAR OFF,
 AND WERE PERSUADED OF THEM,
 AND EMBRACED THEM, AND CONFESSED
 THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON THE EARTH.

(Hebrews 11:13)

They 'saw' the promises that they actually only heard.

These all died in faith, faith which they got only by *hearing by the word of God*, having *seen, eido, the promises afar off*. They saw what they heard. Even at a great distance. And they were persuaded, and embraced what they saw through hearing, and confessed that they, like the promises they had heard, were not of this world.

The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17). And what is faith?

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

Paul says, *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?* (Romans 8:24)

Hope, the very substance of faith, must retain its 'unseen' quality, or it ceases to be hope, for why would you hope for that which you already 'see'? reasons the apostle.

What a man seeth, the word *blepo* again, declares Paul, can never be that which saves you.

Faith is *not* the evidence of 'things seen,' insists the apostle. Faith is only the *evidence of things not seen*.

Not seen. Never seen. Always hidden. Only talked about, never shown.

Stop trying to make faith the evidence of ‘things seen.’

Faith is a wholly ‘non-seeing’ experience. It is an ‘hearing-only’ experience. Stop trying to make it something that it cannot possibly be.

Veritas says, “Show me and I’ll believe it.”

Aletheia says, “Just tell me and I’ll believe it.”

God gives the world only one thing to ‘see’ to prove His case: *you*.

AND WHEN HE WAS DEMANDED OF THE PHARISEES,
WHEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHOULD COME,
HE ANSWERED THEM AND SAID,
THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMETH NOT WITH OBSERVATION:
NEITHER SHALL THEY SAY, LO HERE! OR, LO THERE!
FOR, BEHOLD, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU.

(Luke 17:20–21)

Guess what the word *Lo* means in the Greek. It’s the word *idoo*, just another derivative of the same word *eido*. It means “to see or behold.” The kingdom cannot be “seen.”

Jesus said, *the true messengers of the kingdom will never run around saying “See here,” or “see there.” Never! Don’t go around looking for visual evidence of the kingdom over here or over there. There is none. Behold, eidou, “see,” the kingdom of God is on display only within you.*

You are the only ocular evidence of the kingdom of God that God will ever give the world. By God’s very own Intelligent Design, you’ll never find anything, anywhere else to prove it. Not in the stars. And not in the strands. You’re it. You’re all they get to ‘see.’

“But with no ocular evidence, and only His word to offer them,” you may protest, “will I not look utterly foolish in their eyes? And amazingly weak? And possibly base, and maybe even despised?”

I certainly hope so! Because that’s the actual stated goal!

FOR AFTER THAT IN THE WISDOM OF GOD
THE WORLD BY WISDOM KNEW NOT GOD,
IT PLEASD GOD BY THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING
TO SAVE THEM THAT BELIEVE. (2 Corinthians 1:21)

In your wisdom, you've been trying to make the gospel look wise.

Do you not understand? By the very wisdom of God, it is now the *foolishness* of preaching that saves men. If the gospel is not offered as foolishness, but rather as wisdom, then you've violated the very spirit of its delivery intended by God. If you attempt to make the gospel seem wise and reasonable, it's only because you're wanting the wise and reasonable to see it. And if you're attempting to do exactly what God Himself has sworn not to do, then stop!

It's *supposed* to be ridiculous. He *designed* it to be ridiculous. You're not authorized to make it look anything other than ridiculous.

After all, what could be more foolish than to ask someone to stake their eternal destiny strictly on the unseen and unverifiable word of an unseen and unverifiable God?

The only time that the eternally wise gospel of Jesus Christ ever really works is when it is presented as one foolish man's foolish words about foolish things, foolishly spoken to another fool.

Otherwise, you just get the wisdom of men. And there's no salvation in that.

It's sound, not sight. It's faith, not fact. It's foolishness, not wisdom. And it's *aletheia*, not *veritas*.

Veritas is non-faith. *Veritas* is un-faith. *Veritas* is anti-faith. *Veritas* is only 'the evidence of things seen,' and therefore cannot possibly also be the *evidence of things not seen*.

Veritas is devil's-faith. "If you're really the Son of God, show me," says Satan to Jesus in the wilderness.

AND WHEN THE TEMPTER CAME TO HIM, HE SAID,
 IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD,
 COMMAND THAT THESE STONES BE MADE BREAD.
 BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID,
 IT IS WRITTEN, MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE,
 BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDETH
 OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD. (Matthew 4:3-4)

No, says Jesus. *I will not 'show' you. I don't need to 'see.' I live only by the words that I 'hear' proceeding from the mouth of God.*

A man lives not by the bread that he sees, but rather by the words that he hears. Not by what goes into his mouth, but rather by what comes out of God's mouth. Not by what goes into his mouth, but what goes into his ear. By every unseen word that is now proceeding out of the mouth of an unseen God into his ear, the just shall live by an unseen faith.

How serious is God about this 'non-seeing,' 'non-ocular,' 'hearing-only,' 'no-observation' way of relating to Him?

God says, *I swear in my wrath they shall not enter my rest* (Hebrews 3:11). And ... *they could not enter in because of unbelief* (Hebrews 3:19).

Rest is that particular word that God chooses to describe the relationship with Him that a man may only enter into by *faith*, where he rests on what He only 'hears' from God without the need to verify it for himself. It's that restful relationship which comes only by *hearing* and never by *sight*.

Do your homework. Read the history. The affliction of the children of Israel was that they always believed what they saw instead of what they heard. They continually walked by sight and not by faith.

Want to make God so mad that He swears? Just keep doing it your wise and prudent and 'ocular' way.

God is so serious about providing an exclusively 'non-ocular-evidence relationship' with man that He swears, *If any man draws back* from this posture of faith, from this *evidence of things not seen, my soul shall have no pleasure in him* (Hebrews 10:38).

And according to God, when you draw back from faith, *aletheia*, you draw back unto sight, *veritas*. And when you draw back unto sight, God says, you draw back *unto perdition, apoleia*, "utter destruction" (Hebrews 10:39).

With *aletheia*, finding the truth becomes the simple process of God's 'unconcealment' of His word to my ear. It is strictly the Source of the 'unconcealment' to which I must now have respect, not the substance of the 'unconcealment' itself. I must declare His word to be truth, even before the 'content' of the uncovering is examined. *Before* I measure it with my own eyes to see if it corresponds to my reality.

That is called faith. And faith allows God to do something astonishing with me:

Trust is the implicit requirement of aletheia. Another, Whose word I deem reliable, must see the truth *for* me, and then tell the truth *to* me. And in order to preserve the trust required in aletheia, faith allows me to do something absolutely remarkable: by faith, I can now allow God to give me truth that is impossible to verify! And God really likes that!

THAT WE SHOULD BE TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY,
WHO FIRST TRUSTED IN CHRIST.
IN WHOM YE ALSO TRUSTED, AFTER THAT YE HEARD
THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION:
IN WHOM ALSO AFTER THAT YE BELIEVED,
YE WERE SEALED WITH THAT HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE.

(Ephesians 1:12–13)

The phrase *we who first trusted* sounds like Paul is saying ‘we’ trusted before ‘you,’ but that’s not what he’s saying at all. *First trusted* is one word in the Greek, *proelpizo*, which means “to hope in advance of other confirmation.”

The apostle says he trusted the word that he heard in advance of any confirmation. And you, he says to the Ephesians, did the same. After you heard the word of truth, you *trusted* without veritas, just like me.

That is the extraordinary power of aletheia.

With aletheia as truth, like the centurion who came to Jesus on behalf of his sick servant, I can now say to Jesus what I could never say before:

THE CENTURION ANSWERED AND SAID,
LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY THAT THOU SHOULDEST
COME UNDER MY ROOF: BUT SPEAK THE WORD ONLY,
AND MY SERVANT SHALL BE HEALED.
FOR I AM A MAN UNDER AUTHORITY,
HAVING SOLDIERS UNDER ME: AND I SAY TO THIS MAN,
GO, AND HE GOETH; AND TO ANOTHER,
COME, AND HE COMETH; AND TO MY SERVANT,
DO THIS, AND HE DOETH IT. (Matthew 8:8–9)

With aletheia as truth, I can now say, *Speak the word only*. Only with

aletheia is His word alone enough.

And with aletheia, Jesus can now say back to me what He could never say before:

WHEN JESUS HEARD IT, HE MARVELLED,
AND SAID TO THEM THAT FOLLOWED,
VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, I HAVE NOT FOUND
SO GREAT FAITH, NO, NOT IN ISRAEL. (Matthew 8:10)

Want to surprise Jesus? Amaze Him? Cause Him to stop and marvel?

Then close your eyes. And open your ears. And 'see' what you 'hear.' And believe it.

To attempt to verify aletheia is to draw back from faith and to make myself again the final arbiter of truth. To attempt to verify 'by sight' that which has been 'unconcealed' to me 'by hearing' is to 'conceal again the unconcealing.' The very thing the serpent did in the garden with Eve. To see is to die. To hear is to live.

FOR JUDGMENT I AM COME INTO THIS WORLD,
THAT THEY WHICH SEE NOT MIGHT SEE;
AND THAT THEY WHICH SEE MIGHT BE MADE BLIND.
AND SOME OF THE PHARISEES WHICH WERE
WITH HIM HEARD THESE WORDS,
AND SAID UNTO HIM, ARE WE BLIND ALSO?
JESUS SAID UNTO THEM, IF YE WERE BLIND,
YE SHOULD HAVE NO SIN: BUT NOW YE SAY,
WE SEE; THEREFORE YOUR SIN REMAINETH.
(John 9:39–41)

Let Jesus make you blind so that you can really see.

The difference between veritas and aletheia is nothing less than the difference between death and life. To walk by sight is *not* to walk by faith. And *not* to walk by faith, according to God Himself, is to perish.

Veritas is the kind of truth that men got in the garden exchange, when their eyes were opened, and they could finally see for themselves. And open eyes, according to Jesus, are blind eyes. *But now ye say, We see; therefore your*

sin remaineth. Veritas always demands observable proof.

Aletheia, on the other hand, is the kind of truth Adam and Eve had *before* the exchange, when simply hearing God's word was enough all by itself. And aletheia always demands that there be absolutely *no* observable proof.

Stop trying to find observable proof for the kingdom of God. By God's own Intelligent Design, there is none. Do you not understand? If you continue to insist that they 'see' your 'evidence' that's not even really there, you will damn souls, not save them.

Close your eyes and simply listen. And bid them do the same. Then you'll *really* 'see' the kingdom.

Jesus said, *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein* (Luke 18:7).

If you don't receive the kingdom like a little child, you can't come in at all, declares Jesus. Little children always believe exactly what you *tell* them. Just say it and they believe it. It's always as simple as that. They always 'see' exactly what they 'hear.' It's called imagination. And children always have imagination in abundance.

But Jesus says the ability to 'see what you hear' is more than mere imagination. He says it's 'kingdom sight.'

Real faith, when it's *hearing by the word of God* and not just a man's made-up word, is simply God's grown-up version of imagination for all the *babes* in His kingdom.

If I say it, says Jesus, see it. And don't see it if I don't say it.

IT IS WRITTEN IN THE PROPHETS,
AND THEY SHALL BE ALL TAUGHT OF GOD.
EVERY MAN THEREFORE THAT HATH HEARD,
AND HATH LEARNED OF THE FATHER,
COMETH UNTO ME.
NOT THAT ANY MAN HATH SEEN THE FATHER,
SAVE HE WHICH IS OF GOD,
HE HATH SEEN THE FATHER. (John 6:45–46)

If you 'hear,' and learn of the Father, you'll come to Me. Nobody 'sees' the Father

but Me. Trust Me when I 'tell' you what I've 'seen.' I'll 'declare' unto you what I've seen, so that you can 'see' what I see.

That's the way it works. And that's the only way it works. It's always *aletheia*. It's never *veritas*. It's always 'hear and see.' It's never 'see and see.'

For those of you who are already students of the scripture, "truth as unconcealment," rather than "verification by observation," causes all of the 'truth' scriptures to read much differently now. For example:

THE LAW WAS GIVEN BY MOSES, BUT
GRACE AND TRUTH CAME BY JESUS CHRIST.

(John 1:17)

Now it can be understood that John is actually saying, "The law was given by Moses, but grace and *unconcealment* came by Jesus Christ." Then the very next verse becomes the explanation for why there needed to be an unconcealment in the first place.

NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME;
THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON,
WHICH IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER,
HE HATH DECLARED HIM.

(John 1:18)

No man has *seen God at any time* before, because He has been 'concealed.' But Christ, Who is in the very bosom of the Father, and therefore the only One Who is in the unique position to do so, 'unconceals' God accurately for the very first time *in Himself*.

The word *declared* means "to consider out (aloud), to rehearse or unfold." That's the language of unconcealment. That's the 'hearing that gives sight.' Those are the very words that create the sight of faith. The Father is *declared* so that you can *see* for the first time what you now *hear* from Jesus for the first time.

With truth as unconcealment, the implication of John 1:17 is also now astonishingly changed. It can now be understood in a wholly different way:

John says that Moses has *given, didomai*, the law, whereas grace and truth *came by, genomai*, "were brought into being," by Jesus Christ.

And here is what now can be understood for the very first time:

Everyone agrees that there is no grace in the law. Law and grace are the very antithesis of one another. Paul clearly states that the law excludes faith, and that faith is the direct result of grace.

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them (Galatians 3:12) and ***Therefore it*** [the promise of God to Abraham] ***is of faith, that it might be by grace*** (Romans 4:16).

By the law, righteousness is earned. By grace, righteousness is given freely as a gift. The law of Moses does not contain the grace brought into being by Jesus Christ. There is no grace in the law. That's easy to understand and agree with.

But, according to John 1:17, it's not just ***grace*** that is excluded from the ***law***. Astonishingly, ***truth*** is also excluded from the law.

There is no truth in the law.

If the law was given by Moses first, and grace and truth were brought into being by Jesus Christ afterwards, then there is no grace in the law, and there also is no truth in the law. There couldn't be.

That thought is astonishing, only until you remember that the word for truth, here and *everywhere* in the New Testament, is *aletheia*, not *veritas*.

John is simply saying that neither the grace – the unmerited favor of the Father – nor the 'unconcealment' of the Father are anywhere to be found in the law. If it could have been found there, there would have been no need for Christ to have "brought grace and truth into being" *after* Moses had given the law. But now, apart from the law of Moses, Jesus brings the grace *and* unconcealment of the Father into being for the very first time. In Himself.

Nowhere in the New Testament scripture is 'truth' said to be 'in the law.' In fact, Paul declares to the Jews that they only have the ***form of knowledge and of the truth in the law*** (Romans 2:20). The ***form***, *morphosis*, "formation, i.e. (by implication), appearance (semblance or (concretely) formula); form." The law contains only the appearance of the truth, the ***shadow***, as the writer of Hebrews calls it. The substance of truth, that which fills up the shadow, is Christ Himself.

According to Paul, the law never unconceals God. On the contrary, it actually conceals Him:

AND NOT AS MOSES, WHICH PUT A VAIL OVER HIS FACE,
 THAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL COULD NOT STEDFASTLY
 LOOK TO THE END OF THAT WHICH IS ABOLISHED:
 BUT THEIR MINDS WERE BLINDED: FOR UNTIL THIS DAY
 REMAINETH THE SAME VAIL UNTAKEN AWAY
 IN THE READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT;
 WHICH VAIL IS DONE AWAY IN CHRIST. BUT EVEN UNTO
 THIS DAY, WHEN MOSES IS READ, THE VAIL IS
 UPON THEIR HEART. (2 Corinthians 3:13–15)

Even to this very day, says Paul, when the law is read, God is concealed from the hearer. There is no truth, no *aletheia*, no unconcealment of God, in the law. The only unconcealment in the law is the unconcealment of man, not the unconcealment of God. The law *only* unconceals the sin of man.

THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW
 THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:
 FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.
 (Romans 3:19–20)

By the law is the *knowledge of sin*. Not the knowledge of righteousness. The word *knowledge*, in this verse, is *epignosis*, from *epiginosko*, “to know upon some mark, i.e. recognize; by implication, to become fully acquainted with, to acknowledge.”

I recognize sin, not righteousness, by the law.

On the other hand, the gospel of grace and truth in Jesus Christ unconceals the righteousness of God even as it conceals the sin of man.

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
 WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED,
 BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS;
 EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
 WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL
 AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE:
 FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE:
 FOR ALL HAVE SINNED,
 AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD;

BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE
 THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS:
 WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A PROPITIATION
 THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD,
 TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION
 OF SINS THAT ARE PAST,
 THROUGH THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD;
 TO DECLARE, I SAY,
 AT THIS TIME HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS:
 THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST,
 AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS.
 (Romans 3:21–26)

In the garden, God and man both began as unconcealed. When man, because of sin, covered himself with fig leaves, God covered Himself as well. On mount Sinai, God came to man covered and concealed in thick clouds and darkness and delivered to man His instrument, the law, for the uncovering of sin in man. When a man's sin is now unconcealed and uncovered by the law, God in turn unconceals and uncovers Himself in grace by Jesus Christ. To those who refuse to have their sins uncovered by the law, God and His righteousness remain covered as well.

The law conceals the righteousness of God and reveals the unrighteousness of man. The gospel unconceals the righteousness of God and conceals the sin of man.

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW
 IS MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE
 PROPHETS; EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHICH IS
 BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL
 THEM THAT BELIEVE: FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE.
 (Romans 3:21)

Is there *veritas* in the law? Yes. Absolutely. It's obedience is *strictly* based on 'verification by observation.' The man who verifiably does these things shall live. The doing of the law is strictly a 'seen' doing.

Is there *aletheia* in the law? No. Absolutely not. There is no unconcealment of the Father in the law.

Despite what the Pharisee says, when a man looks into the law, he never sees God. The clouds are far too thick. And the veil is always upon his heart.

Jesus didn't say to Philip, *If you've seen the law you've seen the Father.*

He said instead, *If you've seen Me you've seen the Father. I am the Truth, the Aletheia. For the very first time ever, you can see what God is really like by looking at Me. I am the only Unconcealment of God that has ever been seen or will ever be seen.*

JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM,
 HAVE I BEEN SO LONG TIME WITH YOU,
 AND YET HAST THOU NOT KNOWN ME, PHILIP?
 HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER;
 AND HOW SAYEST THOU THEN,
 SHEW US THE FATHER? (John 14:9)

When Jesus said, *Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,* He spoke with those who already had the law. If there was truth in the law, He could not have said, *Ye shall know the truth.* He would have said instead, *Ye already know the truth.*

Truth as 'unconcealment' completely changes how the relationship of 'grace and truth' has been perceived heretofore. Now grace and truth can no longer be foolishly pitted against each other as though they were equal and counterbalancing notions. As though grace and truth were paradoxical to one another. Truth is no longer seen as 'verification,' veritas. It is now seen for what God always intended it to be: 'unconcealing,' aletheia.

The ridiculous notion has been proffered that too much grace makes you liberal and too much truth makes you legalistic. How absurd! That's veritas' version of truth.

Veritas as truth floats the preposterous notion that authentic discipleship is always a delicate balance between too much grace or too much truth. But defining truth as aletheia changes all that nonsense. If truth is 'unconcealment,' how would you ever get too much of that? How could you ever 'hear' too much and 'see' too much of what Jesus Himself 'declares' about the Father?

To see truth as a counter-balance to grace is to render other verses in scrip-

ture equally absurd:

Do you think that when Paul declares, *By grace are ye saved*, that he should have added, "But not *too* much grace, lest you become liberal in your savedness"? "Don't forget an equal amount of truth!"

And great grace was upon them all, but a balancing counterweight of great truth, you would need to quickly declare, lest your hearers be led into imbalance and error.

Thy word is truth. But not so much truth that you would become legalistic of course. *Thy word*, you would always need to remind your hearers, is an equal amount of grace.

And why did John say *of his grace have all we received, and grace for grace*? What happened to the truth? What a terrible imbalance John offers here! He should have said, "of his grace and truth have all we received, and grace and truth for grace and truth." Come on, John! Get it right!

I am the way the truth and the life, declares Jesus. But not *too* much truth! *I am an equal amount of grace*, Jesus would have quickly added.

Ridiculous. Nonsense.

The word for truth is not veritas. The word for truth was never veritas. That's Aristotle's word. That's Aquinas' and Anselm's word. That's Harvard's word and the Church's word. But it's not God's word.

Aletheia is God's word.

Veritas as truth leads to nothing but scriptural error and dunder-headed absurdity. And veritas leads to nothing but unbelief and death. Aletheia is the word that God chose to convey His idea of truth. And it's the only word He chose for truth. And aletheia is "unconcealment." And "unconcealment" is what God *really* means when He says the word "truth." And He never means anything else.

Veritas proudly says, "I will call nothing true that I *cannot* see and verify." And all the Christians scramble around with eyes wide open, convinced that they can surely find somewhere, somehow, that which God the Expert Himself says does not even exist.

But aletheia humbly says, "I will call nothing true that I *can* see and verify. I will only call true that which I hear, and only that which I hear from Him

Whose word I trust.”

And aletheia never ‘draws back’ and acts like it’s the teller at the First Worldly Bank of Faith by saying, “Yes, I can see here by Your word that it *says* You’re God. But do You have a second form of ID?”

Listen closely: never again ask God for a second ID. He may just decide to take His banking elsewhere.

God has intelligently designed His truth, aletheia, so that the only justifiable basis for believing it is the simple childlike consideration of Who said it.

Thy word is truth. Thy word is unconcealment, aletheia. And Thy word, without one additional ounce of veritas on my part or anyone else’s, is always precisely enough.

His thoughts are never your thoughts. And His words are never your words. And His truth is never your truth. And veritas is never aletheia.

Not by an entire universe.

Chapter 10

The Death of the Difference

FROM THAT TIME FORTH BEGAN JESUS
TO SHEW UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
HOW THAT HE MUST GO UNTO JERUSALEM,
AND SUFFER MANY THINGS OF THE ELDERS
AND CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES, AND BE KILLED,
AND BE RAISED AGAIN THE THIRD DAY.
THEN PETER TOOK HIM, AND BEGAN TO REBUKE HIM,
SAYING, BE IT FAR FROM THEE, LORD:
THIS SHALL NOT BE UNTO THEE.
BUT HE TURNED, AND SAID UNTO PETER,
GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN:
THOU ART AN OFFENCE UNTO ME:
FOR THOU SAVOUREST NOT THE THINGS
THAT BE OF GOD, BUT THOSE THAT BE OF MEN.
THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS,
AND FOLLOW ME.
FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL
LOSE IT: AND WHOSOEVER WILL LOSE HIS LIFE
FOR MY SAKE SHALL FIND IT. (Matthew 16:21)

Jesus has finally come to the end of His time here on earth with His disciples and He begins to speak very openly. *I am going up to Jerusalem to suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, to be killed and then to be raised again on the third day.*

Peter's reaction to this distressing news is to take Jesus and begin to set Him straight:

Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee, says Peter.

The ***this*** to which Peter takes such great exception is the suffering and death of which Jesus has just now plainly spoken for the first time ever.

But Jesus' reaction to Peter's words shocks everyone. He looks Peter straight in the eye and says, ***Get thee behind me, Satan.***

That is an astonishing thing for Jesus to say. What was the great offense in the words of Peter? Had he not simply articulated that which every man wants most for himself and those that he loves? To live and not die?

What more noble and universally accepted desire could any man ever express for himself or another? Wherein was Peter's great sin? What could possibly have caused Jesus to react in such a violent way so as to address Peter as though he were speaking directly to Satan himself?

Would it not have been more appropriate for the kind and caring Jesus to have said something like, *Peter, I can see that among all the disciples that follow me, you are the one who loves me the most. No one else comes even close to showing such a great and caring concern for me as you. And though I appreciate the ardent expression of love contained in these words you've spoken to me, I've got a job to do, and I must be about my Father's business. But I can't tell you how much I appreciate your obvious love and concern.*

Instead, Jesus turns to Peter and hurls His words directly into his teeth: ***Thou art an offence unto me.***

The word ***offence***, *skandalon* in the Greek, described a "hunter's bent-stick snare," used for trapping his prey.

You have set a baited hunter's snare, says Jesus to Peter, *to entrap Me.*

What a strange thing to say. In what way were Peter's words a "hunter's snare" for Jesus Himself?

Peter's *offence*, his trap, according to Jesus, lies in the fact that he *savourest* the things of man and not the *things that be of God*. "To savour," *phroneo*, is "to set the affection upon, or to desire and approve of something or someone."

And on one level, Jesus' rebuke of Peter makes perfect sense. Unless Jesus dies, the world is forever lost in its sin. And that's altogether understandable.

But the telling moment in this passage occurs immediately *after* the rebuke, when Jesus turns to his disciples and explains the real and shocking reason why He has rebuked Peter at all.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

That was the real shocking revelation: *it's not just Me that has a cross*, declares Jesus. *You have a cross, as well. And it's not just Me that has to die. If you would come after me, you must die as well.* And *that* news would have left every disciple utterly astonished!

Jesus' cross might have been anticipated. *Your* cross could not possibly have been. The idea that Christ must die for the sins of the world, though tragic in the disciples' eyes at that moment, will at least later be, in light of the greater good, understandable, acceptable, and even desirable.

The idea that *you* must die with Him is neither understandable nor acceptable. And not in the least bit desirable. Not now. Not later. Not ever.

Nevertheless, according to the words of Jesus Himself, the cross is the one single *inescapable* requirement for every man, any man, and all men who would desire to come after Him. No cross, no following Christ; the cross is the *only* place to which Jesus is going.

Moses had once stood on the mountain and cried, ***Choose life.***

But now, astonishingly, in an entire universe away from what we would ever have expected, Jesus stands in the desert and cries, ***Choose death.***

But because we have not prepared ourselves to anticipate and embrace the immeasurable-by-an-entire-universe of difference that lies between every thought of His and every thought of ours, we *still* hear Moses – even in the plainly spoken words of Jesus – and we *mistakenly* assume that Jesus must

also be saying what Moses said: *Choose life*.

But *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, says God. Not one. Not ever. Not even close. No exceptions.

Choose death, says Jesus. *Not life*.

But that's probably not even close to what your pastor tells you to choose.

Or what your favorite TV preacher tells you to choose.

Or what any of your church friends tell you to choose.

Or even what you tell yourself to choose.

But that doesn't seem to bother Jesus in the least.

Because according to Him – that's still – exactly and only – what God *Himself* tells you to choose.

There has never been another place, anywhere or anytime, where God's thoughts actually appear farther away from your own thoughts than right here. Right here, in *these* very words of Jesus.

Nothing – and I mean nothing in the entire universe – could be further from what you would have expected or desired Jesus to say.

But in responding to the call of Christ to take up your cross and follow Him, the very idea that you would somehow, someday, hear anything other than Jesus saying *Choose death* is difficult to imagine.

Moses' call to "choose life" is nowhere to be found in these words of Jesus. That call is for another people, at another time, in another place, under another contract, through another prophet, for another purpose altogether. An entire universe away from these words:

FOR MOSES TRULY SAID UNTO THE FATHERS,
 A PROPHET SHALL THE LORD YOUR GOD
 RAISE UP UNTO YOU OF YOUR BRETHREN,
 LIKE UNTO ME; HIM SHALL YE HEAR IN ALL THINGS
 WHATSOEVER HE SHALL SAY UNTO YOU.
 AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT EVERY SOUL,
 WHICH WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET,

SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.

(Acts 3:22)

This prophet, the One of Whom Moses himself prophesied, the One which every soul must now hear or be destroyed, declares with *no* uncertainty whatsoever that if you would follow Him, you must *choose death*.

The invitation to take up your cross and die with Him simply could not be more clear.

And even the mere suggestion, even the very smallest hint, that out of this clear call of Jesus to *choose death*, you would somehow instead hear Him calling you to choose “your best life now” – is so utterly unimaginable, so far from the correct side of the universe, as to be beyond comprehension.

When you attempt to overlay the unambiguously clear call of Jesus to follow Him to suffering and death with the utterly contradictory notion of comfort and prosperity, the only word that comes to mind is “surreal:” the totally irrational juxtaposition of images.

Jesus says, *If you choose to follow me, not only will you not find “your best life now,” you will find instead, “no life now.”*

In this world, the call to follow Jesus is never a call to life. It is, always and only, a call to death.

The so-called prosperity gospel, with its “your best life now” message, is the *choose life* message of Moses. It’s not even from the same side of the universe as the *choose death* message of Jesus. That’s why its promises are all found in the words of Moses, and none are found in the words of Jesus. But last time I checked, it was Jesus, by Moses’ own insistence, Who was presently speaking for God in *all* things. Jesus *is* that prophet, not Moses, Whom you must hear or be *destroyed from among the people*.

Part of the confusion of the prosperity movement can be traced to the fact that its proponents give equal weight to the words of Moses and the words of Jesus. And oftentimes they give even greater weight to those of Moses.

But the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that’s an unimaginably big mistake.

He says that God *did indeed* speak in past times to the fathers by prophets like Moses, but *now*, He speaks exclusively by His Son. And then he begins

to detail the résumé of the only One through Whom God is now speaking, to set what the Son says distinctly apart from what anyone else has ever said before.

This One, he says, is *unimaginably* different than any other. And therefore His words are *unimaginably* different than any other's words. And from the very first verse, he begins to lay out his case for comparison:

- ◇ This One has been appointed heir of all things. Moses hasn't.
- ◇ This One is He by Whom God made the worlds. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One is the very brightness of the glory of God. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One is the express image of God's person. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One upholds all things by His own word. Moses doesn't.
- ◇ This One Himself purged our sins. Moses didn't.
- ◇ This One is seated at the right hand of God. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One is the only begotten of God Himself. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One is worshiped by all the angels. Moses isn't.
- ◇ This One sits on the eternal throne of God. Moses doesn't.
- ◇ This One laid the very foundation of the world. Moses didn't.
- ◇ This One made the heavens as well. Moses didn't.
- ◇ This One will have all things put in subjection under His very feet. And no one else will. Not even Moses. (Hebrews 1–2)

There is no comparison, not by an entire universe of difference, between what this One says and what anyone else has ever said before. Not even Moses.

GOD, WHO AT SUNDRY TIMES AND IN DIVERS MANNERS
 SPAKE IN TIME PAST UNTO THE FATHERS
 BY THE PROPHETS, HATH IN THESE LAST DAYS
 SPOKEN UNTO US BY HIS SON... (Hebrews 1:1–2)

THEREFORE WE OUGHT TO GIVE THE MORE EARNEST
 HEED TO THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE HEARD,

LEST AT ANY TIME WE SHOULD LET THEM SLIP.
 FOR IF THE WORD SPOKEN BY ANGELS WAS STEDFAST,
 AND EVERY TRANSGRESSION AND DISOBEDIENCE
 RECEIVED A JUST RECOMPENCE OF REWARD;
 HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE, IF WE NEGLECT SO
 GREAT SALVATION; WHICH AT THE FIRST BEGAN
 TO BE SPOKEN BY THE LORD, AND WAS CONFIRMED
 UNTO US BY THEM THAT HEARD HIM?

(Hebrews 2:1–3)

Don't tell me you already knew what Jesus would say before He said it. Don't tell me you already agreed with what Jesus would say before He spoke. Don't tell me Jesus just restated the same things others had said, or simply deepened them a little in their meaning. Don't tell me the old has equal weight with the new. Don't tell me that one should listen to the prophets and kings of old, who attempted to hear and see these things but failed, with the same carefulness that one listens to Jesus and His apostles.

The words of Christ supersede all others. The words of the New Covenant supersede the words of the Old. Don't trot out the prophets or the kings and think their words are as weighty as the Lord's and His apostles'. God has now, not then, *spoken unto us by his Son*. And the Son is unlike any other.

God says His thoughts are not your thoughts. But they *are* Christ's thoughts. And how shall we escape, the writer of Hebrews asks, if we fail to hear this One Who now not only speaks *for* God, but speaks *as* God?

If failing to heed the word spoken through Moses in the law brought utter destruction at that time, then how much worse will it be if you fail to heed the word of this unimaginably superior One Who is speaking now?

"Listen closer," he says, to the things that this One says. Not the same. And certainly, God forbid, not less.

Don't weigh Christ's words in the balance with anyone else's words and find them to be of equal weight. And don't let anyone else do that for you either. They're not equal. They were never equal. All the other words were merely the shadow. This is the very Son that casts the shadow.

Give the *more earnest heed, pissoteros*, "more superabundantly," to the words

of Christ and His apostles than to the words that God spoke before through *anyone* else. Including Moses.

SEE THAT YE REFUSE NOT HIM THAT SPEAKETH.
 FOR IF THEY ESCAPED NOT WHO REFUSED HIM
 THAT SPAKE ON EARTH, MUCH MORE SHALL NOT
 WE ESCAPE, IF WE TURN AWAY FROM HIM THAT
 SPEAKETH FROM HEAVEN:
 WHOSE VOICE THEN SHOOK THE EARTH:
 BUT NOW HE HATH PROMISED, SAYING,
 YET ONCE MORE I SHAKE NOT THE EARTH ONLY,
 BUT ALSO HEAVEN. (Hebrews 12:25–26)

The one who spoke from earth is Moses. He speaks only from the Old Contract. He speaks only of this life and the prosperity and blessings of this world. His promised land is here. Now. In this life and in this world. That word shook the earth.

The One Who speaks from heaven is Jesus. He speaks only from the New Contract. He also speaks about life and prosperity and blessings as well, but only for the next life. His promised land is not here. And it's not now. His promised land is heaven. And it is yet to come. This word shakes both the earth and the heaven.

The message about living and life is only from Moses. The message about suffering and death is only from Jesus. And the message of suffering and death is precisely an entire immeasurable universe away from the message of "your best life now."

But, no matter what you might think about the prosperity gospel of "your best life now," in my opinion, it's not really what you think it is at all. In fact, I don't think you could possibly, as yet, fully appreciate what it really is.

If you think it's great, as multiplied hundreds of millions of people around the world obviously do, it's not what you think it is at all. If you think it's terrible, like a few might (I think there were about four last time I counted) it's still not what you think it is at all.

Personally, I think the "your best life now" message is really what you would never have imagined that it is. And personally, I think it's absolutely beyond

brilliant.

But before I tell you what I think the “your best life now” message really *is*, let me tell you what I think it’s *not*.

First of all, I think it’s not a new idea. In fact, I think it’s a really old idea. In fact, among ideas of this particular kind, I think it’s actually the very oldest of them all.

Second, I think it’s not funny. As in, “not to be laughed at.” Not to be joked about. And not to be *not* taken seriously. Not even in the least. Most of its other critics (all two of them) consider it to be so theologically naïve and spiritually lightweight that it has become an easy target for those who consider themselves to be the more ‘spiritually enlightened’ among us.

And third, I think it’s not going away. I think it will only get bigger. Because it works. Better than you could ever imagine.

So what is it?

First of all, no matter how spiritually astute you think you are, I think the “your best life now” message is more theologically sophisticated than anything you have ever seen before. Anything. Ever. Without exception.

Second, I think it’s about as far from being spiritually lightweight as you are from the absolute end of the universe.

And third, I think it’s the only idea, in the entire history of all ideas, that ever made God *Himself* sweat.

Let me explain: in the garden of Eden, when the serpent said to Eve, *Ye shall not surely die*, we who ‘listened’ heard it as though the serpent were making a full-frontal assault on God and His word.

We ‘heard’ in its content that what he said was an utter and absolute contradiction to exactly what God had just said.

And we assumed, mistakenly so, I think, that Eve heard it the same way we did. But what we didn’t realize was just how subtle the serpent really was.

I believe that we accurately heard *what* he said, but missed entirely *how* he said it.

Listen carefully: the serpent crafted his approach to Eve so wisely and so wonderfully that the words *Ye shall not surely die* came out of his mouth

not as an affront to God – not even as an utter contradiction to what God had just said – but rather as the very warmest, most heartfelt, and most uplifting words of encouragement that one who had feared that *she might just die* had ever heard before.

To Eve, these words weren't *against* anybody. These words were *for* somebody. These words were *for* Eve herself. And to her, these words were the very words of life.

These were the most uplifting and encouraging words that Eve had ever heard before: Eve, ***Ye shall not surely die.*** Like the patient who has been told that he is terminally ill, having the smiling doctor stand beside his bed and warmly say, "I've got some great news: ***Ye shall not surely die.***"

No, Peter did *not* say to Jesus, ***Ye shall not surely die,*** as the serpent had said to Eve in the garden.

He just said the very same thing in different words: ***Be it*** [that is, death and its attendant sufferings] ***far from thee. This shall not be unto thee.***

In other words, ***Ye shall not surely die.***

And can you 'hear' Peter as he says those words to Jesus? He's not saying them to contradict Jesus. He's saying those words to comfort Jesus. And when he speaks, his eyes are full of the most loving care, and his voice is full of the deepest concern that you could ever have even imagined. Peter says those words to console and to encourage Jesus.

For Peter, these are the most loving words he has ever spoken to anyone in his life.

And that's exactly the message of the prosperity gospel.

Same message, different messenger. Once in the mouth of the serpent, then in the mouth of Peter, and now in the mouths of the smiling prosperity prophets.

All bringing the same exciting, warm and wonderful, soul-consoling and encouraging news. All speaking with the very same care and concern of those who have only your very best interest at heart:

"Great news. ***Ye shall not surely die*** as you feared you might. Put away all those negative thoughts of suffering and death. Don't even think about them any more. You can have your best life now and don't let anybody

tell you you can't. God doesn't want you to suffer. Not even a little bit. Suffering, poverty, sickness, discomfort, lack of any kind, ***Be it far from thee.*** Don't even think about that cross and all its pain. ***This shall not be unto thee. Ye shall not surely die.***"

And *that's* what Peter said to Jesus.

And that message touches me, and touches you – and here's the most astonishing thing of all – *it even touches Jesus* – at precisely our deepest level of concern about life. And it answers all our fears with exactly the words that we desperately wanted to hear God to say to us:

"That old cross is *against* you," says "your best life now." "Life and prosperity are *for* you. Everything bad that you've ever imagined might come to pass? ***Be it far from thee. This shall not be unto thee. Ye shall not surely die.***"

Does God want you to live? "Of course He does," they answer with a warm and assuring smile. "In this life, God doesn't want you to bear a cross. He wants you to wear the most wonderful crown."

And we wonder why the people who hear that gracious message rejoice and glorify God for such wondrous words of consolation.

Ye shall not surely die. Now *that's* great news.

But Jesus didn't even hear Peter speaking. He heard someone else speaking *through* Peter. Jesus was the only One Who recognized who was *really* making that gracious offer. And Jesus was the only One Who recognized that this offer was the 'baited bent-stick snare,' set to entrap His soul and the souls of all those disciples who were trying to decide if they would follow Him.

Because Jesus was the only One Who recognized that, in this life, you *cannot* have "your best life now" and *also* die on a cross.

You cannot live *and* die.

It is an ***offence***, a trapper's baited snare, declares Jesus to Peter, to savor and love the things ***that be of men***, instead of savoring and loving ***the things that be of God***.

And here, Jesus has explained *openly* to His disciples for the very first time what ***the things that be of God really*** look like.

And unfortunately, what they look *least* like is the *choose life* blessings of “your best life now.”

According to Jesus, *the things that be of God* not only don't look like life and its blessings, they look like the precise opposite, an entire universe away from life and its blessings. *The things that be of God* look only like suffering and death.

There is no comfort awaiting Jesus in Jerusalem. There is no prosperity awaiting Him. There is not even any life itself awaiting Him. There is only the promise of suffering. And the promise of death. And the promise of a resurrection that lies *only* on the other side of the first two promises.

And according to Jesus, most astonishingly of all, there is *only* the same promise awaiting all those who would decide to follow Him.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, Satan was aware that time was running out on eternity's most cataclysmic spiritual event, the crucifixion of the Christ. God had cursed the serpent with those prophetic words:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

This was the woman's seed. And this was the moment of the prophetic bruise. And this was Satan's very last chance to stop Jesus.

Knowing that subtlety has always been the very essence of his nature, do you think that Satan held in reserve for this final moment his weakest argument, or his most persuasive?

The evidence that this is his very strongest argument against Christ can be seen in the very reaction of Jesus to the words spoken by Peter. The swiftness and strength of the rebuttal of Jesus is proportional to the force of the temptation that lies within the snare of Satan's argument.

Never, never in the history of the world, have such words emanated from the mouth of God. This was simultaneously a rebuke and an utterly astonishing confession:

Thou art an offence, a snare, a hunters baited trap, unto Me, confesses Jesus.

Even *unto Me*.

There had been no other snare for Jesus. Not the temptation in the wilderness after forty days of fasting, not the angry mobs that He had faced in his own home town, and not the scribes and elders who were even then plotting His very death. None had been even remotely close to being a snare.

But *this* was indeed a snare: *Thou art an offence unto me*.

These words of Satan, spoken through the concerned and caring Peter, were those that Jesus took with Him into the garden of Gethsemane.

And unless you had stayed awake with Him through those awful hours – and unless you had heard the agonizing prayer like none ever before or after – once, twice, and yet an astonishing third time – from One who would do *anything* to live except disobey His Father's will – and unless you had seen the very drops of blood that He had sweat over *this* snare – then you could not possibly understand the power, the near-overwhelming power of temptation even for God *Himself* in the flesh – that is here, in *this* word.

AND BEING IN AN AGONY HE PRAYED MORE EARNESTLY:
AND HIS SWEAT WAS AS IT WERE GREAT DROPS OF BLOOD
FALLING DOWN TO THE GROUND. (Luke 22:44)

This is the snare. The agonizing snare. And there is none other beside it.

This awful cup of suffering and death that God is offering You, Be it far from thee. This shall not be unto thee. Thou shalt not surely die.

Peter's words – Satan's words – echoed in Jesus' mind as He wrestled in the garden. *This* was the hunter's snare. And if God Himself in the flesh sweat great drops of blood to keep from being taken in this snare, why would we wonder that mere men succumb so easily to the ensnaring power of "your best life now"?

The only call of the Father to Jesus was the call to suffer and die. There was no other call. Jesus had never been called to live. He had been born to die:

WHEREFORE WHEN HE COMETH INTO THE WORLD,
HE SAITH, SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU WOULDST NOT,
BUT A BODY HAST THOU PREPARED ME. IN BURNT
OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES FOR SIN THOU HAST

HAD NO PLEASURE. THEN SAID I, LO, I COME
 (IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME,)
 TO DO THY WILL, O GOD. (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Jesus had been born to die. It was the will of God that He die. And you, as His disciple, have astonishingly been 're-born' to die with Him as well. That is the will of God for you. In this world, just as there is no other will for Him, there is no other will for you.

Christ's only escape from the baited snare is our only escape from the baited snare: to suffer and to die. Not my will to live, but *Thy will be done*, said Jesus to the Father. And we must echo the same. *I come to do thy will O God*, declares Jesus. And we must declare the same.

FOR UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN IN THE BEHALF OF CHRIST,
 NOT ONLY TO BELIEVE ON HIM,
 BUT ALSO TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE. (Philemon 1:29)

Is His the gift of life and prosperity or the gift of suffering and death?

IN THE WORLD YE SHALL HAVE TRIBULATION...
 (John 16:33)

...WE MUST THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION
 ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD. (Acts 14:22)

In entering the kingdom, does He promise us pleasure or pain?

FOR AS THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ABOUND IN US,
 SO OUR CONSOLATION ALSO ABOUNDETH BY CHRIST.
 (2 Corinthians 1:5)

AND IF CHILDREN, THEN HEIRS; HEIRS OF GOD,
 AND JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST; IF SO BE THAT
 WE SUFFER WITH HIM, THAT WE MAY BE
 ALSO GLORIFIED TOGETHER. FOR I RECKON
 THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME
 ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY
 WHICH SHALL BE REVEALED IN US. (Romans 8:17-18)

If we suffer, we will also be glorified together with Him.

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us (2 Timothy 2:12). If we suffer with Him and only if we suffer with Him shall we also reign with Him.

I die daily (1 Corinthians 15:31). Not “I live daily.”

And to all of those wonderful “snare-escaping” promises of suffering and tribulation and death for both Christ and his disciples, the prophets of prosperity smile and say, *Be it far from thee. This shall not be unto thee.* “Those awful things are not the will of God for your life,” they assure you. *Thou shalt not surely die.*

And in so saying, they utterly contradict God Himself. “Your best life now” is the original, never-had-to-change-it-because-it-works-so-well baited snare for both Christ and every man who would follow Him to die.

That, however, is not even within an entire universe of what you’ve been told to believe.

And it’s probably not even close to what your pastor believes.

Or what your favorite TV evangelist believes.

Or what any of your church friends believe.

Or even what you yourself believe.

But it’s still, *exactly and only*, what God Himself believes.

You’ve been told that, in this world, God wants you to live. And to live well. And to live long. And to live large. You’ve been told that you can bring the greatest glory to God by “wearing your blessings well.” That you’ll bring God the greatest glory by rising to the top of life through the favor that He will give you with men, as He raises you to ever increasing heights of power and influence in this world.

But is that how God did it with your Master? The One that you say you would ‘follow’?

Do you not think that God favored Jesus even more highly than you? Did God not get through Jesus the greatest glory for Himself that was divinely possible? Did He not bless Jesus more in this world than He could ever bless anyone else? To Whom has God given the name that is above every other name in the world to come?

Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

That's a big request. Do you not think that God answered that prayer and, with His very own Self, glorified Christ?

Of course He did.

And exactly how did He do that? In what manner? In what fashion did the Great God of the universe, in His infinite wisdom and power, choose to glorify Himself in Christ?

Did God bless Jesus in this world with a crown like the one that they promise you, or did He bless Him instead with a cross, like the one they insist God would never want for you?

Did He glorify Himself through Jesus with His "best life now," like they promise you, or with His most unimaginable "worst death now," like the one they insist God would never want for you?

In this world, did God lift Jesus to ever increasing heights of worldly power and influence on the wings of the generous favor of men? Or did He instead lift Him no higher than the height of the cross, not on the favor of men, but on their unprecedented hatreds and murderous cruelties?

And did not God give the Son, Whom He loved most dearly, the very One in Whom He was so well pleased, the greatest gift of all, by allowing Him to cruelly suffer and finally to die for a world that didn't even care? Exactly how much power and influence do you have when you're nailed to a cross?

By God's very own design, was there ever a place, any place, *meant* to be a place of any *greater weakness* or *less influence* than that which is found on a cross? Is a cross not the ultimate place of weakness? Is that not how He blessed and glorified Jesus? Blessed Him, not with power, but instead, with weakness?

FOR THOUGH HE WAS CRUCIFIED THROUGH WEAKNESS,
YET HE LIVETH BY THE POWER OF GOD.

FOR WE ALSO ARE WEAK IN HIM,

BUT WE SHALL LIVE WITH HIM BY THE POWER OF GOD

TOWARD YOU.

(2 Corinthians 13:4)

On the cross, in weakness, God *Himself* was slain. Do you think that on your cross – the one He says you must take up if you would follow Him – you won't be slain? That you shouldn't be slain? That on your cross, you should live and prosper instead? That thought is *surreal*.

If God made the cross to be the place of ultimate weakness for Christ, will He now make it to be the place of ultimate power for you? If the cross was ordained for the suffering and death of God *Himself*, how will your cross be anything other than that?

The prophets of prosperity would have you rule in power here on earth. Exactly like Jesus never did. Jesus would have you serve in weakness here on earth. Exactly like He did. They would have you live and prosper here on earth. Exactly like Jesus never did. Jesus would have you die and prosper in the world to come. Exactly like He did.

If you would follow Him, you don't get a different cross. You don't get a special cross. You don't get an easy cross. A painless, free-from-suffering, comfortable-and-prosperous cross. All who would follow Him just get the same cross that He got. His cross was for dying. And so is yours.

And if it was *only* the cross whereby the Father favored and blessed His only begotten Son, and if it was *only* the cross whereby the Father glorified Himself with Himself in His only begotten Son, why would you think that He now would bless and favor you and glorify Himself in you by employing precisely and exactly the *opposite* means?

THOUGH HE WERE A SON, YET LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE
 BY THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED;
 AND BEING MADE PERFECT, HE BECAME
 THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION UNTO
 ALL THEM THAT OBEY HIM. (Hebrews 5:8–9)

If the perfect, only-begotten Son of God learned obedience by the things that He suffered, will you, unlike your Master, learn your obedience by the things that comfort and delight you instead?

You've been called to follow. Not to lead. You don't get to discover a new path. You get to follow Him on the same path that He walks, or you don't get to follow Him at all. If you're not pointed in the direction of Golgotha, you're not following on the same path that He walked. Because in this

world, that's the only direction Jesus ever went.

The very definition of following is to go where another goes. Not to go where another does *not* go.

Jesus says, *Follow me. Go where I go. Do as I do. I am taking up my cross to die. And if you would come after Me, take up yours, and die with me.*

Be it far from thee, said Peter to Jesus. ***Far*** from thee.

The only thing that is farther from death than life itself – is the good life itself, the comfortable life itself, and the prosperous life itself. It is exactly, precisely, an entire universe away from the suffering and death of the cross.

Silver and gold have I none, said Peter. “Well that’s a problem you need to remedy,” say the prosperity preachers. “How can you have your ‘best life now’ without any silver and gold?”

Thy money perish with thee, said Peter to Simon the sorcerer. “Better for his money to perish with me than with he,” they quip.

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you, says James. “I’d rather be weeping as a rich man than weeping as a poor man,” they would all happily agree.

But in truth, it is only as Paul says it is: ***They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare***. They fall into *the* snare.

When God *Himself* has called you to die, the call to live becomes the chiefest snare, *scandalon*, that hell ever invented.

And why is “your best life now” the greatest snare that hell has ever created?

Jesus had said, ***If any man would come after me...***

Come after literally means, “to walk behind in the same way.” *I’ll go first*, says Jesus, *and you follow wherever I go*.

Listen carefully: if you insist that you, as a follower of Christ, should live and prosper, then that is nothing more than the veiled insistence – the very same one that Peter made openly – that Jesus Himself should *also* have lived and prospered.

After all, yours is the call to follow Him. And as His follower, you are not allowed to go anywhere that He doesn’t go first. That’s the very definition

of following.

Jesus said, *The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master* (Luke 6:40).

The goal of discipleship is to simply do what your master does. Not to do differently, but to do the same. To profess that you are a disciple of Christ while you live differently than your Master did is to betray the very idea of discipleship altogether. And the only way you can follow this Master to live and prosper in this world is if this Master *Himself* also lives and prospers in this world. You may *only* go where He goes.

Did He live and prosper? Then you may live and prosper. Did He suffer and die? Then you must suffer and die.

The cross is an instrument of death – not an instrument of life. Not an instrument of comfort or prosperity. Exactly how does one prosper on a cross? Where is the comfort, in any measure, whatsoever, to be found in the excruciating experience promised in a cross?

Do you imagine that when Jesus said, *Take up your cross and follow me*, that He really meant, *Take up as much of the riches of this world as you possibly can, enjoy your 'best life now,' and we'll just call that 'being crucified'?*

If you're looking for that kind of experience, you're following the wrong Master. To Jesus, that kind of talk about living and life, about avoiding suffering and death, is Peter's kind of talk. And Peter's kind of talk is nothing less than Satan's kind of talk.

Any 'Peter' who would say to you as a follower of Christ that you should live and prosper in this world would inarguably be saying that your leader – the one that you are following – should also have Himself lived and prospered in this world. That's the only logical extension of that argument.

Jesus' greatest temptation is also our greatest temptation. And to tempt the followers of Christ to live and prosper is to tempt Christ Himself to live and prosper. If you would tempt Christ, you have already tempted his disciples. And if you would tempt His disciples, you have already tempted Christ. Exactly like Peter did.

Satan, through Peter, lays the baited snare for both Jesus and His disciples with the very same utterance. And that's why Jesus turns quickly and addresses the rest of His disciples, to make sure they know that the reason

they cannot live is the same reason that *He* cannot live.

Because we both, says Jesus, have crosses to willingly take up, and we both have lives to willingly lay down.

You cannot follow Jesus where Jesus does not go. That's a delusion.

And if you would follow Him to comfort and prosperity and life, then He, of necessity, will have to have been there first, *before you*. Otherwise, you can't really be following Him at all. To get to "your best life now," you'd be doing something, but that something could never be called "following."

And those who would attempt to convince you to the contrary, to *tempt* you to the contrary, have forgotten that the call to a cross is never a call to life. It is always and only a call to death.

They savor the things that be of men: life and all its comforts and its prosperity. And they are not even ashamed to tell you so. In fact, that is their very boast. "Wear your blessings well," they encourage you. "Glory in the uncrucified life." Precisely like Jesus didn't. Their glory is in their shame.

Theirs is a crown theology. Not a cross theology. It's a theology of life. Not a theology of death. They glory in the crown of Christ and not in the cross of Christ. And that is the very contradiction of Christ Himself.

BUT GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY,
 SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
 BY WHOM THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED UNTO ME,
 AND I UNTO THE WORLD. (Galatians 6:14)

The only invitation that Jesus ever extends in this life is the invitation to die. *Choose death*, He says. And the invitation to do the opposite is Hell's greatest snare to both Jesus and every man who would follow Him.

The sheer evil genius of the "your best life now" message is that it is not against God *directly*. It doesn't have to be.

The logic goes like this: God is *for* man, therefore God is *against* whatever is *against* man. That's logical. And since suffering and death are obviously *against* man, then God is obviously *against* suffering and death. And that's also logical. And since God is *for* man, and since life and prosperity are *for* man, then God is obviously *for* life and prosperity. And that's absolutely logical as well. Simple logic. Complex lie.

The subtlety of the prosperity message is this: it is 'for' man directly, in a particular way that man cannot easily be convinced is, in and of itself, against God directly. Because man has never been easily convinced that being rich is 'against God directly.'

The prosperity preachers have told their eager audience that Isaiah is wrong. According to them, God really *does* think just like them. And instead of a universe of difference existing continually between every one of God's thoughts and their thoughts, there is really a universe of likeness. And, according to them, if you want to be rich, it's because God, Who is thinking His very thoughts right inside you, wants you to be rich as well.

And consequently, they don't even seem to hear the contradiction to what they're thinking when Jesus says, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!*

But the disciples who listened to Jesus that day heard *exactly* what He said. And they were astonished out of measure!

HOW HARDLY SHALL THEY THAT HAVE RICHES
 ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD!
 AND THE DISCIPLES WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS WORDS.
 BUT JESUS ANSWERETH AGAIN, AND SAITH UNTO THEM,
 CHILDREN, HOW HARD IS IT FOR THEM THAT
 TRUST IN RICHES TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD!
 IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH THE
 EYE OF A NEEDLE, THAN FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER
 INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.
 AND THEY WERE ASTONISHED OUT OF MEASURE,
 SAYING AMONG THEMSELVES, WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?
 AND JESUS LOOKING UPON THEM SAITH,
 WITH MEN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT NOT WITH GOD:
 FOR WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

(Mark 10:24–27)

Uncharacteristically, Jesus even repeats Himself for added emphasis. As riches increase, He warns them, so does the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God increase.

That's precisely the opposite of what the baited trap of the prosperity mes-

sage teaches.

Here's what the disciples *actually* heard that day, that astonished them:

Jesus said in effect, Forget about healing the lepers. Forget about opening the eyes of the blind and forget about even raising the dead. There is no comparison of miraculous difficulty anywhere else to be found that compares with this one: the most difficult thing to do in all the world is to get a rich man into heaven.

Getting a rich man into heaven is only possible with God because 'all' things are possible with God. But it is not in the least bit 'probable,' not even with God. Don't be deceived. When it comes to doing miracles, getting a rich man into heaven is at the very top of God's list in its degree of improbability.

But nobody even seems to even hear what Jesus says. In their prosperous ignorance, they're too busy celebrating their "financial breakthroughs." But you need to be very careful of exactly where that breakthrough might take you:

AND HE SPAKE A PARABLE UNTO THEM, SAYING,
 THE GROUND OF A CERTAIN RICH MAN BROUGHT
 FORTH PLENTIFULLY: AND HE THOUGHT WITHIN HIMSELF,
 SAYING, WHAT SHALL I DO, BECAUSE I HAVE
 NO ROOM WHERE TO BESTOW MY FRUITS?
 AND HE SAID, THIS WILL I DO: I WILL PULL DOWN
 MY BARN, AND BUILD GREATER; AND THERE WILL I BESTOW
 ALL MY FRUITS AND MY GOODS. AND I WILL
 SAY TO MY SOUL, SOUL, THOU HAST MUCH GOODS
 LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS;
 TAKE THINE EASE, EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY.
 BUT GOD SAID UNTO HIM, THOU FOOL,
 THIS NIGHT THY SOUL SHALL BE REQUIRED OF THEE:
 THEN WHOSE SHALL THOSE THINGS BE,
 WHICH THOU HAST PROVIDED?
 SO IS HE THAT LAYETH UP TREASURE FOR HIMSELF,
 AND IS NOT RICH TOWARD GOD.
 AND HE SAID UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
 THEREFORE I SAY UNTO YOU,
 TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE,

WHAT YE SHALL EAT; NEITHER FOR THE BODY,
WHAT YE SHALL PUT ON. THE LIFE IS MORE
THAN MEAT, AND THE BODY IS MORE THAN RAIMENT.
CONSIDER THE RAVENS: FOR THEY NEITHER
SOW NOR REAP; WHICH NEITHER HAVE STOREHOUSE
NOR BARN; AND GOD FEEDETH THEM: HOW MUCH
MORE ARE YE BETTER THAN THE FOWLS?
AND WHICH OF YOU WITH TAKING THOUGHT
CAN ADD TO HIS STATURE ONE CUBIT?
IF YE THEN BE NOT ABLE TO DO THAT THING
WHICH IS LEAST, WHY TAKE YE THOUGHT FOR THE REST?
CONSIDER THE LILIES HOW THEY GROW:
THEY TOIL NOT, THEY SPIN NOT; AND YET I SAY UNTO YOU,
THAT SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY
WAS NOT ARRAYED LIKE ONE OF THESE.
IF THEN GOD SO CLOTHE THE GRASS,
WHICH IS TO DAY IN THE FIELD,
AND TO MORROW IS CAST INTO THE OVEN;
HOW MUCH MORE WILL HE CLOTHE YOU,
O YE OF LITTLE FAITH?
AND SEEK NOT YE WHAT YE SHALL EAT,
OR WHAT YE SHALL DRINK, NEITHER BE YE
OF DOUBTFUL MIND. FOR ALL THESE THINGS DO
THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD SEEK AFTER:
AND YOUR FATHER KNOWETH THAT
YE HAVE NEED OF THESE THINGS.
BUT RATHER SEEK YE THE KINGDOM OF GOD;
AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU.
FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK; FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER'S
GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM.
SELL THAT YE HAVE, AND GIVE ALMS;
PROVIDE YOURSELVES BAGS WHICH WAX NOT OLD,
A TREASURE IN THE HEAVENS THAT FAILETH NOT,
WHERE NO THIEF APPROACHETH,
NEITHER MOTH CORRUPTETH.

FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS,
THERE WILL YOUR HEART BE ALSO. (Luke 12:16–34)

The prophets of prosperity never cease to remind their followers that Jesus said, *It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* But they somehow forget to tell them that His very next sentence was *Sell that ye have, and give alms.*

Obviously the kingdom that the Father is pleased to give you has nothing to do with riches in this world. Otherwise, you would be selling the very kingdom that He had just been so pleased to give you. Your friends never give you Christmas presents and then turn around and encourage you to sell them afterwards. Neither does God.

They also conveniently forget to provide Jesus' definition of the treasure of the kingdom which is *your Father's good pleasure to give you*, that He speaks in the same breath: *a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.* The treasure is in *heaven.* Do thieves approach the wealth here on earth? Yes. Do moths corrupt the wealth here on earth? Yes. Then the treasure of the kingdom He gives us cannot be those things.

"Your best life now" teaches that it's actually easier, not harder, for a rich man to enter the kingdom than any other. Riches, they declare, are themselves the very evidence of his favor and pleasure with you. The more of His favor you acquire, the more riches you will acquire as its evidence. "Wear your blessings well," they encourage you. "For they are the very adornment of God."

To these, anything that would contradict that principle of worldly prosperity is automatically rejected as a lie. And conversely, anything that would promote worldly prosperity is automatically received as the truth. From this point of view, the true measure of a man's godliness is strictly evidenced in his material gain. Those who say that is not the message just haven't been listening well.

But listen as Paul describes these prophets of prosperity:

PERVERSE DISPUTINGS OF MEN OF CORRUPT MINDS,
AND DESTITUTE OF THE TRUTH,
SUPPOSING THAT GAIN IS GODLINESS:

FROM SUCH WITHDRAW THYSELF.
 BUT GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN.
 FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THIS WORLD, AND IT
 IS CERTAIN WE CAN CARRY NOTHING OUT. AND HAVING
 FOOD AND RAIMENT LET US BE THEREWITH CONTENT.
 FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL:
 WHICH WHILE SOME COVETED AFTER,
 THEY HAVE ERRED FROM THE FAITH,
 AND PIERCED THEMSELVES THROUGH WITH MANY
 SORROWS. BUT THOU, O MAN OF GOD, FLEE THESE THINGS;
 AND FOLLOW AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS,
 FAITH, LOVE, PATIENCE, MEEKNESS.

(1 Timothy 6:5–7)

Paul had a different take on the idea of seeking to be rich. Far from fulfilling you, he promised it would utterly destroy you. It will drown you in destruction and perdition, he declares. That's the real payoff for the baited snare of "your best life now."

"Contentment"? That's a curse word to the prosperity movement. Contentment is the very essence of a lack of faith in their theology: "Dream bigger. Desire more. Don't settle for the little life. God wants to make you big in this life. You simply can't out-dream God."

Where godliness is equated with worldly gain, Paul declares that that mind is corrupt and destitute of the truth. The word "destitute," *apostereo*, means "to be kept back by fraud." The "gain is godliness" idea defrauds the disciple of Christ of any real gain. It is the baited bent-stick snare of "your best life now."

From such withdraw thyself. But thou, O man of God, flee these things.

"Let me tell you what real gain is," says Paul:

FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN.

(Philemon 1:21)

To die is gain. I never hear that message in "your best life now." I do however, hear its oxymoronic contradiction: "To live is gain."

NO SERVANT CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS:

FOR EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE,
 AND LOVE THE OTHER; OR ELSE HE WILL
 HOLD TO THE ONE, AND DESPISE THE OTHER.
 YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON.
 AND THE PHARISEES ALSO, WHO WERE COVETOUS,
 HEARD ALL THESE THINGS: AND THEY DERIDED HIM.
 AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, YE ARE THEY
 WHICH JUSTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE MEN;
 BUT GOD KNOWETH YOUR HEARTS:
 FOR THAT WHICH IS HIGHLY ESTEEMED AMONG MEN
 IS ABOMINATION IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

(Luke 16:13–15)

Jesus says the attempt to serve two masters, God and money, will always require a convoluted justification of yourself before men.

There is an entire industry that has grown up around imagining that the teachings of Jesus are really about economic and free enterprise ideas to help His disciples achieve worldly success. Myriad scriptures are wrenched from their intended heavenly context and made to serve totally earthly ends. Men serve themselves while pretending to serve God. And the justifications always follow.

“We are simply heeding our Master’s advice on the accumulation of wealth,” they assure you. “Come with us and, for a price of course, we’ll teach you how He would have you lay up treasures here on earth.”

And if you ask them if they’re sure that they’re really doing it “just like Jesus did,” they always bristle with indignation and answer “Yes, of course we are!”

But here is what is evident to anyone with at least two functional brain cells:

Unless they appoint as treasurer of their earthly economic enterprise one who first steals all their money and then proceeds to successfully betray them unto death for even more money, they’re definitely not treating their enterprise the way Jesus treated His:

THEN SAITH ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES, JUDAS ISCARIOT,
 SIMON’S SON, WHICH SHOULD BETRAY HIM,

WHY WAS NOT THIS OINTMENT SOLD FOR
 THREE HUNDRED PENCE, AND GIVEN TO THE POOR?
 THIS HE SAID, NOT THAT HE CARED FOR THE POOR;
 BUT BECAUSE HE WAS A THIEF, AND HAD THE BAG,
 AND BARE WHAT WAS PUT THEREIN. (John 12:4–6)

As soon as you appoint Judas to be the treasurer of your free enterprise endeavor, just like Jesus did with His, then I'll know that you're treating your money with the very same regard that Jesus treated His. Until then, we'll all know you're really just trying to make the real Master serve your real master.

NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS:
 FOR EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE,
 AND LOVE THE OTHER; OR ELSE HE WILL
 HOLD TO THE ONE, AND DESPISE THE OTHER.
 YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON.
 YE ARE THEY WHICH JUSTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE MEN;
 BUT GOD KNOWETH YOUR HEARTS:
 FOR THAT WHICH IS HIGHLY ESTEEMED AMONG MEN
 IS ABOMINATION IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

There is nothing that men esteem more highly than the accumulation of wealth in this world. And whatever men highly esteem, Jesus says, God finds "abominable." The word is *bdelugma*, "a rotting stench." Employing Jesus' words about the world to come in order to gather money for yourself and your followers in this world is a rotten stench in the nostrils of God.

What Jesus says about money is astonishing in both its clarity and simplicity. There are, according to Him, simply and only two masters available to serve. There is God on the one hand, and there is money on the other hand. And that's it. You will either serve God or you will serve money.

If you *love* the one master, according to the clear and unambiguous words of Jesus Himself, you will *hate* the other. And if you *bold to* the one master, you will *despise* the other.

Think about what Jesus *did not* say.

He *did not* say that if you *love* and *bold to* the one master, you will tol-

erate, condone, accept, countenance, or live in harmonious and peaceful co-existence with the other master. Instead, Jesus said that if you **love** and **hold to** the one master, you will **hate** and **despise** the other master. The word **hate** is the Greek word *miseo*, “to detest, especially to persecute.” To detest is “to abhor, hate, loathe, shrink from, be unable to bear, to find intolerable.” The word **despise** is the Greek word *kataphroneo*, “to think against or to disesteem.” To disesteem is “to insult or to show contempt for.”

That’s what He said. Don’t be confused.

Jesus didn’t say, “You cannot **love** God *and also love* money at the same time.” That’s only what you *think* He said.

On the contrary, Jesus said that if you **love** and **hold to** God, you will **hate** and **despise** money. And as astonishing as it may seem, that means that if you do not **hate** and **despise** money, you do not **love** and **hold to** God.

That’s what He said. Don’t be confused.

Simply said: if you **love** the one master (God), you will **hate** the other master (money). And if you **hold to** the one master (money), you will **despise** the other master (God).

But that’s probably not even close to how your pastor tells it.

Or how your favorite TV preacher tells it.

Or how your church friends tell it.

Or even how you yourself tell it.

But that doesn’t seem to bother Jesus in the least. Because according to Him, that’s still – exactly and only – how God Himself tells it.

Yes, I know. Jesus isn’t saying what Moses said about money. Not even close. And Jesus isn’t saying what Solomon said about money. Also not even close. Jesus isn’t saying what *anyone else* is saying about money. Not by an entire universe.

But then again, Jesus isn’t saying *anything about anything* that anyone else is saying. He alone speaks for God. Because He *is* the Word. And there is no other.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares God. *Not one. Not ever. Not even close. No exceptions.*

Don't listen to what men say about riches. Listen to what Jesus says about riches. Here are His thoughts, and they are utterly terrifying:

THERE WAS A CERTAIN RICH MAN,
WHICH WAS CLOTHED IN PURPLE AND FINE LINEN,
AND FARED SUMPTUOUSLY EVERY DAY:
AND THERE WAS A CERTAIN BEGGAR NAMED LAZARUS,
WHICH WAS LAID AT HIS GATE, FULL OF SORES,
AND DESIRING TO BE FED WITH THE CRUMBS
WHICH FELL FROM THE RICH MAN'S TABLE:
MOREOVER THE DOGS CAME AND LICKED HIS SORES.
AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT THE BEGGAR DIED,
AND WAS CARRIED BY THE ANGELS INTO ABRAHAM'S
BOSOM: THE RICH MAN ALSO DIED, AND WAS BURIED;
AND IN HELL HE LIFT UP HIS EYES,
BEING IN TORMENTS, AND SEETH ABRAHAM AFAR OFF,
AND LAZARUS IN HIS BOSOM.
AND HE CRIED AND SAID, FATHER ABRAHAM,
HAVE MERCY ON ME, AND SEND LAZARUS,
THAT HE MAY DIP THE TIP OF HIS FINGER IN WATER,
AND COOL MY TONGUE;
FOR I AM TORMENTED IN THIS FLAME.
BUT ABRAHAM SAID, SON, REMEMBER THAT THOU
IN THY LIFETIME RECEIVEDST THY GOOD THINGS,
AND LIKEWISE LAZARUS EVIL THINGS: BUT NOW
HE IS COMFORTED, AND THOU ART TORMENTED.
AND BESIDE ALL THIS, BETWEEN US AND YOU
THERE IS A GREAT GULF FIXED: SO THAT
THEY WHICH WOULD PASS FROM HENCE TO YOU CANNOT;
NEITHER CAN THEY PASS TO US,
THAT WOULD COME FROM THENCE.
THEN HE SAID, I PRAY THEE THEREFORE, FATHER,
THAT THOU WOULDST SEND HIM TO MY FATHER'S HOUSE:
FOR I HAVE FIVE BRETHREN; THAT HE MAY TESTIFY UNTO
THEM, LEST THEY ALSO COME INTO THIS PLACE OF

TORMENT. ABRAHAM SAITH UNTO HIM, THEY HAVE MOSES
 AND THE PROPHETS; LET THEM HEAR THEM.
 AND HE SAID, NAY, FATHER ABRAHAM:
 BUT IF ONE WENT UNTO THEM FROM THE DEAD,
 THEY WILL REPENT. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM,
 IF THEY HEAR NOT MOSES AND THE PROPHETS,
 NEITHER WILL THEY BE PERSUADED,
 THOUGH ONE ROSE FROM THE DEAD. (Luke 16:20–31)

In the most frightening word-picture Jesus ever drew, He actually depicts a man in the very torments of hell. And most astonishingly, it's not the homosexual that you were so sure it would be; it's not the prostitute or the sinful publican, and not even the abortionist. It's the one you never imagined it would be: it's the rich man.

Why? Because, *Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things*, Abraham tells the rich man.

Sorry. You already had "your best life now."

To live *sumptuously* and luxuriously every day is the actual stated goal of the prosperity message. Do you not find that astonishing?

"Well what about what Proverbs says about money?" the preachers of prosperity protest. "What about what Moses said in Deuteronomy about creating wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18)? We must 'rightly divide the word' (2 Timothy 2:15)," they insist.

Listen carefully: Solomon doesn't speak for God about money. Moses doesn't speak for God about money. Jesus alone speaks for God about money.

And Jesus speaks for God not only about money, He speaks for God about everything! Out of the cloud, God looked at Moses and at Elijah, the law and prophets. Then He looked and Jesus. And He said, with an audible voice so that Peter, James and John would be sure to get it straight, *Hear ye Him*.

Do you think that He really meant *Hear ye Him* on every subject *except* money? This is the Son! Hear ye Him! Do you not know that His word is preeminent in everything? He doesn't just bring the word. He *is* the

Word! There is no dividing the word of Christ with someone else's word. You divide everyone else's word by His. You divide His by no one else's.

Do you think that He really meant that you should trot out Moses and Solomon with whatever they say about money and balance what Jesus says about money?

Do you not understand? With an audible voice, God instituted, once and forevermore, the *HYH* rule: *Hear ye Him*. On everything!

There is no way you can take the words of Jesus on money and come up with "your best life now." You would have to give equal weight to Moses and imagine that his words are just as valid as the words of Jesus that contradict them.

Jesus isn't saying about money what Moses is saying about money. He's not saying what *anyone* else is saying about money. He's saying precisely the opposite of what everyone else is saying about money:

WOE UNTO YOU THAT ARE RICH!

FOR YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR CONSOLATION.

(Luke 6:24)

That is Jesus' word about riches. And no one even seems to take notice that the word "consolation" that Jesus uses here is the Greek word *paraklesis*. That's from the very word that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos*, "the Comforter" (John 15:16).

"Your best life now" already has its very own "holy spirit," says Jesus. It is the spirit of mammon. And that spirit leads and guides and comforts the prosperous and the would-be prosperous in this world exactly like God's Holy Spirit leads and guides and comforts believers in this world.

Jesus warns, you cannot have both the Comforter of God and the consolation of money. You will hate the one, He declares, and love the other, or hold to the one, and despise the other. Every time. No exceptions. You cannot serve God and mammon.

If you have the comfort of one, why would you ever seek the comfort of the other? You won't. And you can't.

Instead of, *Woe unto you that are rich! For you have received your consolation*, astonishingly, "your best life now" transforms Jesus words into "Wel-

come unto you that are rich! For you have received *His* consolation.”

Jesus has a special word for the rich of this world: “woe.”

In the Greek, “woe” is “a primary exclamation of grief.” “Grief” is not the word the prosperity preachers ever associate with money. They use words like “joy” and “happiness” and “fulfillment” instead. And especially they use the word “blessing.” But never *woe*.

Do you not find that telling? *Woe* is exactly one entire universe away from any words that they ever use to describe riches. But it’s the only word that Jesus uses.

The preachers of prosperity are quick to tell you that Jesus talked more about money than He talked about heaven and hell. They just forget to tell you that He never said one good thing about it.

Woe pretty well sums up in one word everything that Jesus said about money.

With Moses as chief negotiator, God entered into a contract with the Jews at Mount Sinai to bring them into a promised land. The contract was called the Law. If they would just keep ten simple terms of that contract, God had agreed to bless them.

The law was filled with wonderful promises of the most wonderful blessings and wonderful benefits imaginable. And those blessings were to be the actual evidence, the very sign, that they were succeeding in the terms of the contract. And every one of them was a blessing to be enjoyed in this world.

And this promised benefits-and-blessings package of the law is the very same one promised week after wonderful week by all the smiling prosperity preachers. But this is the one thing they have kept absolutely secret from their audience:

You know all those wonderful blessings of the law that Moses enumerated as he stood on the mountain and cried, **Choose life?** Their bestowal was 100% conditional on keeping the law. Every single one of them. Without one exception.

And do you know exactly how many benefits were actually paid out over the entire life of that contract? Do you know, of all those blessings that Moses listed, how many of them were ever actually bestowed on anyone?

The answer might surprise you: not a single one. Not ever. Not one time.

Not on one single person and not on one single occasion. Because no one ever qualified for one single blessing under that contract. Because not one single person ever kept the law. And neither do you.

“But,” those prophets will protest, “*Christ* kept the law on our behalf. *Christ* has procured all of those blessings of the Old Contract for us now to enjoy under the New.

“Have you not read,” they will say, “*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*”? (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Are you sure about that? Are you really sure it’s *all the promises* of God? After all, God promised Abraham all the land between the Nile and the Euphrates. Are you saying all of that prime real estate really belongs to you now? I suggest you go tell the people living there now that God promised you that land and they need to start packing. Plus, don’t forget that all those curses Moses proclaimed from mount Sinai were promises too. You might want to rethink that *all the promises* idea. I’m not sure you really want *any* of those, much less *all* of them.

But actually, if you read it again, more carefully this time, you’ll see that the only promises that are *yea* and *Amen* are the ones *in Him*. That is, in Christ. That’s the qualifier. And only those things which are “of faith” are in Him.

And unfortunately, according to the apostle Paul, the law is not “of faith:”

AND THE LAW IS NOT OF FAITH:

BUT, THE MAN THAT DOETH THEM SHALL LIVE IN THEM.

(Galatians 3:12)

The law is not *in Him*. And, therefore, the promises of the law, which is not in Him, are also themselves not *in Him*.

The writer of Hebrews says the New Contract had to have brand new promises. And the brand new promises, unfortunately for them, have made void the very promises that “your best life now” keeps promising everyone.

It’s sort of like to trying to pay your bills in Confederate money. The promise that made that a legal currency was voided long ago.

BUT NOW HATH HE OBTAINED A MORE EXCELLENT
MINISTRY, BY HOW MUCH ALSO HE IS THE MEDIATOR

OF A BETTER COVENANT, WHICH WAS
ESTABLISHED UPON BETTER PROMISES. (Hebrews 8:6)

According to this, the new contract is established on *better* promises. And *better* always means different. *Better* never means the same.

If someone tells you they like chocolate *better* than strawberry, you don't go away thinking they like chocolate and strawberry the same. *Better* automatically assumes different. You never say of two cars, "Which color is better? The white one or the white one?" *Better* never means the same. The definition of "better" is "of superior quality." And "superior" quality never means the "same" quality.

And these *better* promises, offered exclusively in the benefits package of the New and *better* Contract, are only about the *better* world to come. None of them is about this world, here and now.

And because the New Contract itself is *better* than the Old Contract, and because the Negotiator of the New Contract is also *better* than the negotiator of the Old, and because the Priest of the New Contract is also *better* than the priest of the Old, and because the sacrifice that sealed the New Contract is *better* than the sacrifices that sealed the Old, so *also* are its promises and blessings *better* than the promises and blessings of the Old. So declares the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 1:4–12:24).

The New is *better* and different than the Old by precisely an entire universe.

In fact, these better-different promises and blessings are the very foundation upon which *everything* in the new contract is built:

... A BETTER COVENANT,
WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED UPON BETTER PROMISES.
(Hebrews 8:6)

If you keep the old promises, you have to keep the Old Contract. Remove the *better* promises, and you invalidate the *better* Contract. Keep the Old promises, sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats, and you invalidate the promises sprinkled with the blood of Christ:

FOR WHEN MOSES HAD SPOKEN EVERY PRECEPT
TO ALL THE PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THE LAW,
HE TOOK THE BLOOD OF CALVES AND OF GOATS,

WITH WATER, AND SCARLET WOOL, AND HYSSOP,
 AND SPRINKLED BOTH THE BOOK, AND ALL THE PEOPLE,
 SAYING, THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE TESTAMENT
 WHICH GOD HATH ENJOINED UNTO YOU.

(Hebrews 9:19–20)

The old promises are sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats. But the *better* Contract with its *better* promises was sprinkled by a *better* blood. A different blood:

IT WAS THEREFORE NECESSARY THAT THE PATTERNS
 OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS SHOULD BE
 PURIFIED WITH THESE; BUT THE HEAVENLY THINGS
 THEMSELVES WITH BETTER SACRIFICES THAN THESE.
 FOR CHRIST IS NOT ENTERED INTO THE HOLY PLACES
 MADE WITH HANDS, WHICH ARE THE FIGURES
 OF THE TRUE; BUT INTO HEAVEN ITSELF, NOW TO
 APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR US:
 NOR YET THAT HE SHOULD OFFER HIMSELF OFTEN,
 AS THE HIGH PRIEST ENTERETH INTO THE HOLY PLACE
 EVERY YEAR WITH BLOOD OF OTHERS;
 FOR THEN MUST HE OFTEN HAVE SUFFERED SINCE
 THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD: BUT NOW ONCE
 IN THE END OF THE WORLD HATH HE APPEARED
 TO PUT AWAY SIN BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF.

(Hebrews 9:23–26)

Christ never entered into the holy places made with hands. And His blood was never sprinkled on the promises in the book in Moses' hand.

Listen closely: the blood of the first Contract is what made its promises effectual. No blood, no death of the testator, no promises in effect. The blood of the second Contract is also what makes its promises effectual. No blood, no death of the Testator, no promises in effect.

But the New Contract is a different contract. A *better* contract. And the New Contract has a different blood. A *better* blood. And the New Contract contains different promises. *Better* promises. And in order to keep the old promises along with the new promises, you'd have to keep the old

blood along with the new blood. And that would be an abominable mixture in the sight of God.

The blood of bulls and goats, declares the writer of Hebrews, never truly sanctified a single person. And the blood of bulls and goats never truly sanctified a single promise:

FOR IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT THE BLOOD OF
BULLS AND OF GOATS SHOULD TAKE AWAY SINS.
WHEREFORE WHEN HE COMETH INTO THE WORLD,
HE SAITH, SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU
WOULDEST NOT, BUT A BODY HAST THOU PREPARED ME:
IN BURNT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES FOR SIN THOU
HAST HAD NO PLEASURE. THEN SAID I, LO, I COME
(IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME,)
TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.
ABOVE WHEN HE SAID, SACRIFICE AND OFFERING
AND BURNT OFFERINGS AND OFFERING FOR SIN
THOU WOULDEST NOT, NEITHER HADST PLEASURE
THEREIN; WHICH ARE OFFERED BY THE LAW;
THEN SAID HE, LO, I COME TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.
HE TAKETH AWAY THE FIRST,
THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH THE SECOND.
BY THE WHICH WILL WE ARE SANCTIFIED THROUGH
THE OFFERING OF THE BODY OF
JESUS CHRIST ONCE FOR ALL. (Hebrews 10:3–10)

That which was sanctified by the sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin was *not* the will of God. *Thou wouldst not*, He says of the Old. But I come *to do thy will, O God*. In so saying, He takes away the first will, replete with its bull and goat blood-sprinkled promises, in order to establish the second will, replete with its Christ's blood-sprinkled promises. The second, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, cannot be established without the removal of the first, sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats.

The first promises and blessings were not the will of God. Ever. They were not the will of God then, and they are *still* not the will of God now. They

brought Him no pleasure. Ever. They were not His pleasure then and they are not His pleasure now.

SACRIFICE AND OFFERING AND BURNT OFFERINGS AND
 OFFERING FOR SIN THOU WOULDST NOT,
 NEITHER HADST PLEASURE THEREIN;
 WHICH ARE OFFERED BY THE LAW;
 THEN SAID HE, LO, I COME TO DO THY WILL.

If the promises and blessings of the Old Contract are the eternal will of God, then so must the priesthood of Aaron and the tabernacle in the wilderness be the eternal will of God. And any man who insists that the promises of the Old Contract are still in effect must, by that same word, insist that the blood of the bulls and goats that sanctified those promises, and sanctified Aaron, and sanctified the tabernacle, and brought them into effect, is itself still in effect.

And if the blood of the bulls and goats that sanctified the old promises is still in effect, then the blood of Jesus is not.

To mix the blood of bulls and goats with the blood of Christ in order to acquire the promises that were only made effective by that very blood of bulls and goats is to mix the one thing that sanctifies with something that doesn't:

HE THAT DESPISED MOSES' LAW DIED WITHOUT MERCY
 UNDER TWO OR THREE WITNESSES:
 OF HOW MUCH SORER PUNISHMENT, SUPPOSE YE,
 SHALL HE BE THOUGHT WORTHY, WHO HATH TRODDEN
 UNDER FOOT THE SON OF GOD, AND HATH
 COUNTED THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHEREWITH
 HE WAS SANCTIFIED, AN UNHOLY THING, AND HATH
 DONE DESPITE UNTO THE SPIRIT OF GRACE?

(Hebrews 10:28–29)

The new blood sanctifies the new promises. It *cannot* sanctify the old ones. They were *already* sanctified by another blood. And He does not sprinkle the new on top of the old. Christ never entered that tabernacle to activate those promises.

The New Contract actually had to remove all of the old promises because they were only temporary, and replace them with **better** promises that were eternal.

Some will receive it as bad news, but you're stuck with only the new and **better** promises of Christ. And even though His promises are **better** by an entire universe of difference, you may not find them **better** if your goal is strictly earthbound.

The promises of the Old Contract were meant to prepare a people to inhabit this world. That's why they are only, each and every one, about *this* world. The **better** promises of the new and **better** contract are meant to prepare a people to inhabit a **better** country, *an heavenly country, where God is not ashamed to be called their God*. A country that is **better** because it is eternal (Hebrews 11:16).

The prophets of prosperity would have you believe that you may have both the promises of the Old and the New Contract. Both the temporary and the eternal. That you may be outfitted and prepared to live in both this world and the next simultaneously. But unfortunately, that would require that you listen equally to both Moses *and* Jesus simultaneously. And even Moses himself says, **him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. Hear him, not me.**

And you might even be able to have both, if the two sets of promises weren't at exact odds with each other in their goals. But they are. Exactly by an entire universe.

Moses said from the mountain, *Take up your crown and follow Me to the promised land by choosing life.*

And Jesus said, *Take up your cross and follow Me to heaven by choosing death.*

Moses says, "Live."

Jesus says, "Die."

I HAVE GIVEN THEM THY WORD; AND THE
WORLD HATH HATED THEM, BECAUSE THEY
ARE NOT OF THE WORLD,
EVEN AS I AM NOT OF THE WORLD.

(John 17:14)

His word is the separator. ***Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth,***

prayed Jesus. If you're not separated unto God by His separated word, then you're not really separated unto God at all. The very thing that makes you *not of the world, even as I am not of the world*, is His word. If they hate you, it's because they hate His word in you.

And if Jesus said they would hate you because of His word, then His word must not contain a very popular message. Do you really think the world hates the "your best life now" message?

Do you imagine that when people hear that "gospel" they say, "God wants to make me rich? I just hate that idea. What doesn't He just leave me alone. I've got way too much money already."

Even the self-righteous who despise sinners love the word of "your best life now." And even the sinners, who despise the self-righteous in return, love that word as well. It's a word for everybody. It's a uniting word. It's an empowering word. It's a liberating word. Everybody loves that word.

Everybody but Jesus. And the disciple who has taken up his cross to follow Him. They hate that word.

The words that Jesus gives you will make the world hate you. Because the only words that Jesus gives you will be the hated and despised words of suffering and death. They will never be the beloved words of prosperity and life. Do you imagine when people hear the word of suffering and death, they say, "Yes sir! That's just the kind of life I've always dreamed of!?"

My highest desire, says Paul, is *that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death* (Philippians 3:10).

The fellowship of His sufferings? Being made conformable to His death?

I must have missed the Sunday morning when they preached that. No. *Be it far from thee. This shall not be unto thee. Thou shalt not surely die.* That's the Sunday message I hear. Every Sunday. And the world never grows weary of it. Watching the audience as the preacher promises now-defunct Old Covenant blessings about God wanting to make them *the head and not the tail* is like watching a class of third graders as the teacher announces an ice cream party. They are giddy with excitement, beside themselves in the deliriously joyful thought of it (Deuteronomy 28:44).

But Paul was beside himself for something quite different. In truth, he

declares, you will only know Christ and the power of His resurrection if you share in the fellowship of His sufferings and are made conformable unto His death. That's the only way you can get to know Him. The suffering and death precede the knowing and the resurrection. Death always precedes resurrection. Every time. Without exception.

IF WE SUFFER, WE SHALL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM:

IF WE DENY HIM, HE ALSO WILL DENY US.

(2 Timothy 2:12)

The word "if" actually means, "inasmuch as." To the degree that we suffer with Him in this world, we will reign with Him. No more, no less. No exceptions.

Absent the suffering and death, you cannot really know Him at all. You'll only *think* you know Him.

Because a non-suffering and a non-dying Christ is no Christ at all. And a non-suffering and a non-dying disciple of Christ is no disciple of Christ at all.

And he who would imagine that he is the recipient of the promises from a now-void Contract will on judgment day find out that he only had imaginary promises from an imaginary God.

And he who would imagine that he follows a non-suffering Christ through a non-suffering life will on judgment day find out that he only had an imaginary relationship with an imaginary Christ.

And I greatly fear that the *real* Christ will say to him on that day, as he desperately attempts to convince Him that his imaginary relationship with Him was real, ***Depart from me, you worker of iniquity; I never knew you.***

In this world, there is no life wish. There is only a death wish. And in this world, there is no prospering Christ. There is only a suffering and dying Christ.

There is no "best life now" for the disciple of Christ.

And anyone who tells you differently has been listening to Peter. And anyone who has been listening to Peter has been listening to Satan. And if anyone, *anyone at all*, even an apostle of Peter's stature, says to you concerning the suffering and death of the cross, ***Be it far from thee: this shall***

not be unto thee, thou shalt not surely die, the only right answer is heaven's answer.

Borrow Christ's thoughts, those that are by nature an entire universe away from your own, and deliver with the very same feeling that He did, the very same message that He did:

Get thee behind me, Satan.

Chapter 11

The Denial of the Difference

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM DENY HIMSELF,
AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS,
AND FOLLOW ME. (Matthew 16:24)

Before you choose death, says Jesus, you must first choose denial.

Everything that I have written so far has been to bring you to this very point concerning what is contained in Jesus' idea of denial.

This is the real contradiction of God. This is why everything you thought you knew about God is wrong. The contradiction of God is not you contradicting *God*; it is God's requirement that you contradict *yourself*.

In my opinion, if you fail to understand and embrace what I am about to tell you, the consequences will be far beyond any you could yet possibly imagine.

Let him deny himself, said Jesus. The translation of the original Greek word *aparneomai* into the English word "deny" is a most unfortunate one for modern readers.

The Greek word is actually a combination of two words. The first is *apo*, meaning "off, or away from something near," and in this particular case it

means, “to the farthest extent, or utterly.” The second word is *arneomai*, and it means simply, “to contradict.” So a correct rendering of the word translated “deny” would be, “to utterly contradict.”

That means Jesus actually said: “If any man would come after me, let him *utterly contradict* himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Peter contradicts Christ; Christ then turns to His disciples and says, *unlike Peter, you must contradict yourself, not Me.*

The notion of a required self-contradiction in following Jesus is by far the most difficult thing for most people to grasp and to believe and to implement. But it is the very key to understanding everything that Jesus says. If you fail to comprehend this single notion, in my opinion, you cannot but fail in following Christ.

No self-contradiction, no following Christ.

His thoughts are not your thoughts because they are a contradiction of your thoughts. His words are not your words because they are a contradiction of your words.

Everything about you is a contradiction of everything about Him. You want Him to give you the wisdom and the strength and the righteousness of this world. He wants to give you the very opposites. His goals and His purposes lie an entire universe away from your own, in an exact and precise utter contradiction.

You want to go up. He wants you to go down. You want to rule. He wants you to serve. You want to be first. He wants you to be last. You want to live. He wants you to die. Everything you want is an utter contradiction of everything He wants.

Therefore, every word that Jesus speaks to you as His disciple will, by necessity, be an utter contradiction to everything you presently believe. Every single word. Every single time. Without one single exception.

And listen carefully: He has designed it so that you can only know for certain that you are *really* understanding what He says if you find in what He says an utter contradiction to what you believed *before* He said it to you.

Do you understand? No contradiction of your word, no real comprehension of what He is saying.

Why must it be so?

In the garden of Eden, the first lie ever told was the serpent's contradiction of God. God had said, *In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*. The serpent said in simple and utter contradiction, *Ye shall not surely die*.

You shall, said God; *you shall not*, said Satan. And that simple contradiction worked so well there that day that he's never had to change the substance of his lies one bit.

Jesus said, *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise* (Matthew 21:16). Out of the mouth of babes you also get perfect contradiction. Ever hear kids argue? "Did too!" "Did not!" "Did too!" "Did not!" On and on they go until you force them to stop.

Who taught them that?

To a child's mind, simple contradiction is the perfect argument. Because the source of the argument – themselves – is always deemed to be unquestionably right. There is no need to marshal any greater logic than that; they are simply considering the source. That's the way gods always talk. They're always right when they speak. That's the very reason why they're gods! *Ye shall be as gods*, said the serpent.

When Satan uttered his first contradiction in the garden, he assumed the new role as the source of truth. His words were spoken as one who was unquestionably right. He spoke his utter contradiction with the exact authority that he had heard God speak with before.

Ye shall not surely die, he declared to Eve. And there was not a molecule of ambiguity in his words. Not a trace of doubt. They rang with the authenticity of the words of a god. And Eve received them just as though they were.

Satan would be the un-God. The opposite god. And these would be the un-God words. The opposite words. His utterly contradictory words to God's words. Satan hates God. And to be as un-like God as possible is to place your own thoughts as far away from His as you possibly can. And what is it that lies precisely an entire universe away from truth?

Why, of course, it's the contradiction of truth.

And what did man get when he chose Satan as his new source of truth? He got the only “What is truth?” that Satan had in his new “Where is truth?”: nothing less than the utter contradiction of the truth.

And that’s why God’s thoughts are not your thoughts. Not by an entire universe. And that’s why His words are not your words. Not by an entire universe. That’s why His words are true and your words are not. And that’s why He hides the truth from the wise and prudent, who insist on keeping their contradictory words, and why He reveals it only to babes, who have abandoned theirs:

Because yours words are to His words exactly what Satan’s words are to His words: an exact and utter contradiction.

In order to follow Jesus, He says, you must utterly contradict the original contradictor, whose contradictions you now think and speak exclusively.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* (John 3:12)

According to Jesus, there are *earthly things* and there are *heavenly things*. The self-contradiction that Jesus requires from His followers is not found in the realm of math or science. Those are the *earthly things*.

Jesus is not saying that two and two will ever be anything other than four. And He’s not saying that the sun revolves around the earth. All those *earthly* distinctions will pass away presently, and only the *heavenly* ones will remain. In the end, those *earthly things* will never have been the point at all.

Those things which must be utterly contradicted are in the category of what Jesus calls the *heavenly things*, or *the things that be of God*. All of your ideas about those things lie in direct contradictory opposition to God’s.

Peter savors the life and the living, the *things that be of men*. He does not savor the suffering and death awaiting at Jerusalem, the *things that be of God*. And consequently, instead of contradicting himself, Peter contradicts Jesus:

BE IT FAR FROM THEE LORD: THIS SHALL NOT BE UNTO THEE.

And by contradicting Jesus, Peter becomes the example of exactly what every man who would follow Christ must *never* do.

Jesus turns to those who would consider following Him and says in effect: *If you don't utterly contradict yourself, here and now, before we even begin this journey, then five steps down this road, you'll be utterly contradicting Me. Exactly like Peter just did. Like Peter, you want to live. And it will take nothing less than an utter contradiction of yourself before you'll ever embrace the utter contradiction of taking up your cross and following me to die.*

That's why it's so critically important to decide, *before* you accept the invitation to follow Jesus, that His words are the one and only source for truth. That His words alone are the only "Where" in which truth will ever really be found. That's why a continuation all the way to discipleship in His word is needed to find the truth that is really there. You will need to continue in His words, because if you listen to them carefully, you will find that His every utterance is a precise, different-by-an-entire-universe, utter contradiction to everything you say.

Every word He will say to you from the moment you begin to follow Him will appear, to your natural way of thinking, to be upside-down, backwards, and just plain wrong. It will appear to be an utter contradiction. Because it is.

And if you're unaware that with every word that He speaks to you, He is requiring an utter contradiction of every word that you speak, like the Pharisee in the temple, you will, without fail and without even knowing it, synthesize His words with your own to make His agree and confirm your own.

Instead of a contradiction of your words, you'll find a confirmation of your words. And like the Pharisee, you will only *think* you know the truth. And you will only *think* you're following Christ. Until that fateful day when Jesus contradicts you before the Father and His angels.

The immeasurable difference in the way that He thinks is the utter contradiction of the way that you think. Therefore, *nothing* that He will say to you from this point forward will ever sound like anything you would ever recognize as truth again.

And here's what that means for you. Listen carefully:

As His disciple, if anything that you hear Jesus say agrees with the thoughts you already had on that given subject *before* He spoke to you, then you misunderstood what He really said, by precisely an entire universe.

And as His disciple, if anything you hear Jesus say requires no utter contradiction on your part to accept as truth and believe, then you misunderstood what He really said, by precisely an entire universe.

And as His disciple, if anything you hear Jesus say doesn't shock you, and amaze you, and cause you to say "No way that can possibly be true!" then you misunderstood what He really said, by precisely an entire universe.

You missed the contradiction. By precisely an entire universe.

And if you would follow Christ, you *must* not miss the contradiction.

If Christ's is the call to utterly contradict yourself, then everything that He says to you from this point forward must, of logical necessity, be a contradiction to what you now believe.

If He asks you to utterly contradict yourself in everything you are currently thinking, then everything you are currently thinking must be an utter contradiction to everything He is currently thinking.

And these are the eternal consequences if you fail to understand what Jesus is saying about contradiction:

WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL CONFESS ME BEFORE MEN,
HIM WILL I CONFESS ALSO BEFORE MY FATHER
WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. BUT WHOSOEVER SHALL
DENY ME BEFORE MEN, HIM WILL I ALSO DENY
BEFORE MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.

(Matthew 10:32)

The word *deny* that Jesus uses here is the same Greek word *arneomai*, to "contradict."

Jesus warns that whoever "contradicts" Him before men, He will also "contradict" before His Father on judgment day. But whoever "confesses" Him before men, him will Jesus "confess" before His Father on judgment day.

And just like the word *deny* was an unfortunate translation from the Greek into the English, so also is the word *confess* equally unfortunate. And this is the second word that you really *must* understand.

The Greek word for "confess" is *homologeō*. It's composed of two words: *homo*, "the same," and *logos*, "word." In other words, to "confess" is to say

the “same word.” It means nothing more than that, and it means nothing less than that.

To *confess* Christ before men is not simply to say that Jesus is the Christ. The devils say that Jesus is the Christ. And tremble when they do. (James 2:9)

To *confess* Christ before men is not simply to go to church either. Unbelievers faithfully fill all kinds of churches every Sunday. A few devils have even been known to show up in church on a Sunday morning (Luke 4:33).

To *confess* Christ before men is not even to be baptized or to sing in the choir or to give your tithes. The Pharisee in Jesus’ story who went home condemned would have shamed you in every one of those areas.

Sing in the choir all you want. Unless you’re woefully flat, no one will care to contradict you there. Be baptized. Twice if you want to. Give all your money. I promise you, absolutely *no one* will contradict you there.

But if you begin to say the “same words” that Jesus said, your world will turn upside down faster than you can say the word “contradiction.”

Again: to *confess* Christ before men is to say the very “same words” that He said before men. It’s nothing more than that, and it’s nothing less than that.

And that may seem an easy enough requirement to get a clean bill of health on judgment day until you realize that everything single thought that Jesus has is one that you never had before.

And on top of that, every single word with which He expresses those thoughts is a complete and utter contradiction to every single word that you have ever said before. And more than that – and this is where the real danger lies – His every word is also an utter contradiction to every word that everyone else around you has ever said as well.

The words that Jesus says are so foreign, so strange, so alien and so contradictory in this world that if you begin to say the “same words” that He does, you will be instantly marked as also being foreign, strange, alien, and contradictory.

Do you understand why they crucified Jesus?

It wasn’t because He was a bad carpenter. It wasn’t because they didn’t like those guys from Nazareth. It wasn’t because He went to the synagogue or

because He got baptized by John.

He got crucified because of what He said.

It was His words and *only* His words that got Jesus crucified.

And His words in your mouth will produce the same result for you. Every single time. Without exception.

Try saying the words *Love your enemies* at your local anti-Taliban rally. You'll see pretty quickly how people feel about Jesus' words. Even the self-named Christians at that event will likely have missed the utter contradiction to what they are naturally thinking. His words in your mouth will get the same thing for you that His words in His mouth got for Him. They will get you crucified.

In this world, that's what His words *always* do. In this world, that's what His words are *supposed* to do. That's exactly why Jesus said you must take up *your* cross. *Prepare yourself, not only for My crucifixion, says Jesus, but if you say what I say, prepare for your own crucifixion as well.*

The interesting thing about crucifixion is that a man cannot crucify himself. Jesus didn't instruct you to crucify yourself. You just need to take up your cross. If you confess Him before men, that is, if you say the same words that He said before men, you won't need to crucify yourself. You'll get lots of help from plenty of very enthusiastic people, eager to help you with the job. Just like He did.

The world celebrates the words of "your best life now." They are the words of life and prosperity and joy and happiness. And they are also the bait of the bent-stick snare. And the bait is incredibly sweet to the taste.

But the world crucifies the words of Christ. And they crucify the Christ who says the words. And they crucify anyone else who says those words as well.

An entire universe away from life and prosperity, Christ's words are the words of suffering and of death. And if that cup, even in the mouth of Jesus, was an incredibly bitter one, how much more bitter will it be in the mouths of those who in their own garden of Gethsemane have contradicted Jesus by saying, "Not Thy will, but mine be done"?

To say the same words as Jesus, you have to know the same words as Jesus.

And to know the words of Jesus you have to continue in His words unto discipleship. And unless you've discovered the immeasurable differences that lie between His words and yours, and unless you've utterly contradicted yourself in every one of them, just like He told you to, then there's simply no way that you can *confess* Jesus before men. And that's a real problem.

Because if you're not saying the "same words" that He says, you're automatically, by default, saying "different words" than He says. And the definition of saying different words is "to contradict." And if you're saying different words than Jesus is saying, like Peter, instead of contradicting yourself, you're still contradicting Him. And that's not good at all.

Because Jesus says, *If you say the "same words" before men that I say, on judgment day, I'll say the "same words" that you say, before my Father which is in heaven. But, if you contradict me before men, I'll also contradict you before my Father which is in heaven.*

If you say what He says, and only what He says, He can't help but say what you say, because he isn't going to change his mind when you do.

IF WE BELIEVE NOT, YET HE ABIDETH FAITHFUL;
HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF. (2 Timothy 2:13)

Deny here is the same word "to contradict." You need to contradict *yourself*. He cannot contradict Himself. You're wrong. He's right. Contradict yourself, not Him.

Jesus said,

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD,
SHALL ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN;
BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN
HEAVEN. MANY WILL SAY TO ME IN THAT DAY, LORD, LORD,
HAVE WE NOT PROPHESED IN THY NAME?
AND IN THY NAME HAVE CAST OUT DEVILS?
AND IN THY NAME DONE MANY WONDERFUL WORKS?
AND THEN WILL I PROFESS UNTO THEM,
I NEVER KNEW YOU: DEPART FROM ME,
YE THAT WORK INIQUITY.
THEREFORE WHOSOEVER HEARETH THESE SAYINGS

OF MINE, AND DOETH THEM, I WILL LIKEN HIM
 UNTO A WISE MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON A ROCK:
 AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME,
 AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT UPON THAT HOUSE;
 AND IT FELL NOT: FOR IT WAS FOUNDED UPON A ROCK.
 AND EVERY ONE THAT HEARETH THESE SAYINGS OF MINE,
 AND DOETH THEM NOT, SHALL BE LIKENED UNTO A
 FOOLISH MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON THE SAND:
 AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME,
 AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT UPON THAT HOUSE;
 AND IT FELL: AND GREAT WAS THE FALL OF IT.
 AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN JESUS HAD ENDED THESE
 SAYINGS, THE PEOPLE WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS DOCTRINE.

(Matthew 7:21–29)

It's about *these sayings of mine*. You'll never 'do' what I say until you first 'say' what I say. Do you understand? On judgment day, many will have 'confessed' that Jesus is Lord. Many will have done works, not in their own name or the name of another, but in the very name of Jesus Himself. Many will have been more than willing to confess their own thoughts about the words of Jesus, but unwilling to confess the words of Jesus about their own thoughts. And on judgment day, your own thoughts about His words will not have been enough. You must have been willing to say exactly what He says. To confess, *homologeō*, is to say the same words.

All of His words are utter contradictions to all of your words. Every word. Every time. No exceptions. If you recognize that, then you'll begin to search for them, and in them you will hear all of the immeasurable differences that are really there. And if you hear them, you can say them. If you don't, you can't.

Your eternal future depends on it.

And from now on, after hearing Jesus speak, if you're really listening for the contradiction that is in every word that He says, your response will be same as Nicodemus: *How can these things be?* That's the language of a man who is hearing contradiction.

When Jesus finished giving the sermon on the Mount, those who heard

Him were *astonished at His doctrine*. That's the attitude of people who are hearing contradiction.

If you understand that His words are always an utter contradiction to yours, you'll be astonished too. And if you're not astonished after you hear Him speak, either you weren't listening, or it wasn't really Him speaking (Matthew 7:28, 22:23; Mark 1:22, 11:18; Luke 4:32).

Jesus requires us to contradict ourselves, utterly, completely, to the farthest extent, not because we are right in what we now believe, but because we are wrong. Not because we *do* know the truth, but because we absolutely and categorically *do not*.

Not by an entire universe.

Part II
The Contradiction

In following Christ, you are searching for the contradictions, and only the contradictions, between His words and yours. They are the immeasurable differences between the way God thinks and the way you think. They are the truth to your lies. They are the hidden to your knowns. They are the *aletheia* to your *veritas*.

Jesus said, *By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* (Matthew 12:37).

The justifying words are His words. The condemning words are your own contradictory words. The goal is to make His words to be your words. That necessitates an utter self-contradiction. If you don't utterly contradict your own words, you can never have His. And if you don't have His, you'll never confess Him before men. And instead of being justified, on judgment day, He will contradict you, and you'll be utterly condemned.

Because His thoughts are not your thoughts, not by an entire universe, you cannot even begin to imagine how different His words are from your own. And that's important to understand before you begin to hear what He says.

Because if, somehow, you think that His words will express ideas even remotely like your own, you will miss their true meaning entirely.

Jesus said,

UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN TO KNOW THE MYSTERY
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD: BUT UNTO THEM
THAT ARE WITHOUT, ALL THESE THINGS ARE DONE IN
PARABLES: THAT SEEING THEY MAY SEE, AND NOT
PERCEIVE; AND HEARING THEY MAY HEAR, AND NOT
UNDERSTAND; LEST AT ANY TIME THEY SHOULD BE
CONVERTED, AND THEIR SINS SHOULD BE FORGIVEN THEM.

(Mark 4:11–12)

It is entirely possible to see and not see, to hear and not hear, and to *think* that you understand what Jesus says, and not really understand it at all.

At various places along the inner-city loop where I sometimes drive, there are real-time electronic signs that give traffic updates and apprise of various road conditions ahead in order to promote safer driving. Not long ago the sign above the highway was flashing the warning: EXPECT CONGES-

TION AHEAD.

Every New Testament Bible should come with one of those road-condition-ahead signs permanently attached to it. A really big sign. One that you couldn't remove even if you tried. One that you would have to drag around with you wherever you took your Bible. An obnoxious and irritating one that you couldn't turn off, even at night. And it would ceaselessly flash its message of warning in big, bold, bright, attention-demanding letters: EXPECT CONTRADICTION AHEAD.

Here's the problem with the way we normally listen: our default mindset is one in which we always want to be right. We were born that way. And that innate desire to be right in every situation is the greatest aid we could possibly have in navigating our way through the difficulties of life.

But, that same desire that serves us so well everywhere else is the absolute greatest impediment that we could possibly bring with us when we come to hear the word of God. It creates in us what might be called a *non-contradiction* bias. We simply never want to be wrong.

Nobody ever wakes up in the morning and says, "My greatest desire for this day is to be absolutely wrong in everything I do. I want to make every wrong turn on my way to work and make sure that I stick my fork in my eye instead of my mouth."

No. We want to be right. All the time. Every time. And that's great. *Except* for here. Here, we want to be wrong. Here we need to be wrong. Here we must be wrong. Because here – according to Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus Himself – we really *are* wrong!

When we come to God's word, we must bring not a non-contradiction bias, but rather its very opposite. We must bring, on purpose, every time, without exception, a contradiction bias.

We must come to the word of God saying, "I already know that I am wrong. So wrong, in fact, that everything I think, before You tell me anything that You think, will be an utter contradiction to everything You think. And I understand that in advance. So, with my EXPECT CONTRADICTION AHEAD sign flashing its warning, I'm ready to hear what You have to say."

Chapter 12

The Contradiction of Life

When God gives you His thoughts, there is no way, not by a entire universe of difference, that they can be anywhere close to your own thoughts. That's impossible. His thoughts are not your thoughts, and they never have been your thoughts. Not even close.

But, there is a certain group in this world whom God calls *the wise and the prudent* who believe differently. The wise and the prudent are those who insist that they really *do* know the truth in advance of hearing it from Jesus' words. They cannot imagine, much less seriously entertain, *any* contradiction to their own way of thinking. Not even from Jesus Himself.

And consequently, when they hear the words of Jesus, they *mis-hear* them. They bring their own non-contradiction bias to His word. And instead of contradiction, they find in His every word the confirmation of everything they already knew and everything they had always believed. Self-contradiction is, to them, an utterly ridiculous notion.

Their opinions, most often based on the words of Moses, always hold an equal weight with the 'opinion' of Christ. And if it comes down to any significant difference between what they think and what Jesus says, they will be the true and God will be the liar.

But they are totally unaware of what an incredibly bad attitude God has towards anyone, no matter how wise they are, who thinks that they already know what He knows before He 'unconceals' it.

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent, declares God (1 Corinthians 1:19).

God is the only Expert in the room. And He doesn't abide pretenders well. To *not* confess Christ, that is, to *not* say the same words as Christ, is to contradict Christ. And to contradict Christ is to be *wise and prudent*.

And God has promised to utterly destroy the wisdom of the *wise and prudent* who do *not* say the same words as His Christ.

The word used here for "destroy," *apollumi* in the Greek, is also a combination of two words. Recall that the word *apo* means "to the farthest extent," or "utterly". That's the same first word used here, to express the most forceful application possible of the second word.

The second word, *olethros*, means "ruin, death and destruction." *I will bring the wisdom of the wise to utter ruin, death, and destruction*, declares God.

Can you even try to imagine what God's feelings must be towards anything that he declares He wants to utterly destroy? This is God Himself speaking. And this He hates with all His heart. And if God wants to utterly destroy the wisdom of the wise who declare that they already know truth *before* they hear it from Him, you *probably* should feel the very same way about such worldly wisdom too.

Why would you try to make the truth of the gospel wise and smart and logical and acceptable and reasonable by this world's thinking, when you know in advance that God hates those very qualities already?

Astonishingly, God's own contradiction to the wisdom of the wise is foolishness. When you attempt to offer the truth of the gospel as anything other than the foolish contradiction in which God has offered it, you bring yourself into direct opposition to His stated intentions. You find yourself standing on the exact wrong side of this very dangerous equation.

You are absolutely unauthorized to offer anything to the world that is not utterly foolish, lest, in your own 'wisdom,' you strengthen the very things that God Himself has promised to destroy. And lest in your own 'wisdom,' you wind up contradicting Christ as well.

There are those who might object to the idea that God would hide anything of benefit, much less the very truth about eternal life itself, from anyone at all, even from the wise and prudent. Any God Who would hide those

things, they insist, would be a deceitful God. And a mean God.

But is it deceitful or mean for the shepherd to hide the sheep from the wolf that would eat them? The shepherd would argue that it isn't. And so would the sheep. Is it deceitful or mean for the businessman to hide his money from the thief who would steal it? The businessman would argue that it isn't. And so would his dear wife. Is it deceitful or mean for the loving father to hide his children from the destroyer? The father would argue that it isn't. And so would his safe children.

Listen very carefully: God thinks that the wise and prudent *are* the wolves, the thieves, and the destroyers.

Jesus said,

I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,
THAT THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE
AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES:
EVEN SO, FATHER; FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT.

(Matthew 11:25)

If it seems good in God's sight that He hides it, and good in Jesus sight that He hides it, it probably also needs to seem good in your sight that He hides it. Even if you don't understand why. Especially if you don't understand why. Because what you especially don't want to be in God's estimation is *wise and prudent*.

So, if you were God, and you wanted to hide your wisdom from the *wise and the prudent* of this world so that they would *never* find it, where would you hide it?

If you were God, you would simply hide your wisdom in foolishness.

That would be the *only* place where the already-wise would never even think to look for it. Because that's the only place the already-wise never go. The fact that they never go to foolishness is, by their own definition, exactly what makes them wise.

And if you were God, and you wanted to hide your strength from the strong of this world, where would you hide it so that it couldn't be found?

If you were God, you would hide your strength in weakness, of course.

That's the only place where the already-strong would never even think to look for it. Because that's the only place the already-strong never go. The fact that they never go to weakness is, by their own definition, exactly what makes them strong.

And if you wanted to hide Your righteousness from those who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others*, where would you hide it so it would never be found?

Why, of course, if you were God, you would hide your righteousness in the greatest sinfulness you could find. Perhaps in a publican. Or even a harlot. (Matthew 21:31)

That's the only place the already-righteous would never even think to look for it. Because that's the only place the already-righteous never go. The fact that they never go to sin is, by their own definition, exactly what makes them the righteous.

And that's the brilliance of God.

God hides the things that He never wants to be found in this world right inside their utter contradiction. And they remain hidden from all those who would never see the need to contradict themselves. Because they are, in their own estimation, already-wise and already-strong and already-righteous. And who in his right mind would ever want to contradict those things in this world?

So, if you were God, where would you hide *life*, if you wanted to make absolutely certain that those who sought life in this world would never find it?

Why, of course, if you were God, you would hide it right inside *death*.

And those who sought life in this world through their own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, would never even think to look for it there. They would *already* know that life could *never* be found in death. How absurd! To believe that life was hidden in death would require an utter contradiction of both themselves and everything that is perfectly obvious to them by their very own observations.

And consequently, in God's very own wisdom, the cross, which *looks* exactly like death to the *wise and prudent*, would actually become His very own contradictory 'cover-up' for eternal life.

And, if you were God, where would you hide death if you didn't want the wise and the strong and the righteous of this world to even see death coming?

Why, of course, if you were God, you would hide death right inside their biggest and best life now.

And those who sought to avoid death through their own wisdom, strength, and righteousness would never even think to look for death there. They would *already* know that death could never be found in life. How absurd! To believe that death was hidden in life would require an utter contradiction of both themselves and everything that is perfectly obvious to them by their very own observations.

And consequently, in God's very own wisdom, their best life now, which looks exactly like life to the wise and prudent, would actually become His very own contradictory 'cover-up' for eternal death.

By the world-contradicting wisdom of God Himself, life would be hidden inside death. And death would be hidden inside life.

And that's exactly the utter contradiction that Jesus declares to His followers:

FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT:
AND WHOSOEVER WILL LOSE HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE
SHALL FIND IT. (Matthew 16:21)

That's the very contradiction of life, hidden from the wise and prudent, who already have their own words, and revealed only to the babes, who have none of their own words: *Choose life*, says Jesus, and you'll die. *Choose death*, says Jesus, and you'll live. And when He thinks about that utter contradiction, Jesus jumps for joy. And if you take up your cross and follow Him, so will you.

How marvelous is it that God, in *His* wisdom, has chosen the very contradiction of what man in *his* wisdom has chosen:

GOD HATH CHOSEN THE FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD
TO CONFOUND THE WISE; AND GOD HATH CHOSEN
THE WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD TO CONFOUND THE
THINGS WHICH ARE MIGHTY;

AND BASE THINGS OF THE WORLD, AND THINGS WHICH
 ARE DESPISED, HATH GOD CHOSEN, YEA,
 AND THINGS WHICH ARE NOT,
 TO BRING TO NOUGHT THINGS THAT ARE:
 THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE.

(1 Corinthians 1:27–29)

It's not the things that *God* finds foolish that He chooses to confound the wise. It's the very things that the *wise* themselves find foolish. It is *the foolish things of the world*, says Paul. And it's not the things that *God* finds weak that He chooses to confound the things which are mighty. It's the very things that the *mighty themselves* find weak. It is *the weak things of the world*.

That's why everything *He* chooses is always the very contradiction of everything *you* would naturally choose.

In God's contradictory wisdom, the foolish and the weak and the sinful of this world are actually the wise and the strong and the righteous. And the wise and the strong and the righteous of this world are actually the foolish and weak and the sinful. And consequently, the *wise and prudent* miss the thoughts of God by precisely an entire immeasurable universe.

The wise always choose the best of this world. In utter contradiction, God always chooses the worst. The wise always choose the strongest of this world. In utter contradiction, He always chooses the weakest. The wise always choose the righteous of this world. And in utter and astonishing contradiction, He always chooses the sinful.

And apart from a willful contradiction on your part, you'll *never* choose what He chooses. And apart from a willful contradiction on your part, you'll remain wise in the eyes of this world, but ever so foolish in His. It's simply not in you, apart from obeying the utterly contradictory directive of Christ, to ever contradict yourself naturally.

Why does God always choose exactly the opposite of what the wise and prudent of this world choose? He does so, says Paul, so *that no flesh should glory in His presence*.

The wise of this world always glory in the wise and in the strong and in the righteous of this world. That's their nature. They never glory in the foolish

or the weak or the sinful of this world. That would be an utterly foolish, weak, and sinful contradiction.

But here's what they don't get, and *can't* get, unless He "unconceals" it: compared to Him – there *are* no wise. And compared to Him, there *are* no strong. And compared to Him – there are no righteous. **No, not one.**

BUT OF HIM ARE YE IN CHRIST JESUS,
WHO OF GOD IS MADE UNTO US WISDOM,
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND SANCTIFICATION,
AND REDEMPTION: THAT, ACCORDING AS IT IS WRITTEN,
HE THAT GLORIETH, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD.

(1 Corinthians 1:30–31)

If He is our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, then we are authorized to be none of those things to ourselves.

HE THAT GLORIETH, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD.

If you still glory in the things which you can see instead of in those things that you cannot see, then you don't yet understand Who He is, and you cannot possibly glory in Him.

If you don't yet understand, by the word of utter contradiction, that when you see His wisdom and strength and righteousness, they will always look exactly like their contradictory opposites in this world, then you don't yet understand Who He is and you can't possibly glorify Him.

The apostle Paul says, *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world* (Galatians 6:14).

We glory in the cross. What an unimaginable contradiction. The cruel cross on which He was crucified, the one that guarantees both the world's crucifixion to me and my crucifixion to the world, is the only place where I can really glory in Him.

I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST: NEVERTHELESS I LIVE;
YET NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVETH IN ME:
AND 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)

All of His wisdom that looks like foolishness, and all of His strength that looks like weakness, and all of His righteousness that looks like sin, is found in the cross.

And only by glorying in the contradictions of foolishness and weakness and sinfulness – to the absolute and utter exclusion of their worldly uncrucified opposites – do we repudiate the glory of everything else in this world that is *not* foolish and weak and sinful.

And only in so doing do we give Him the glory that He alone deserves.

God chooses the foolish and the weak and the base and the despised and the sinful of this world. Do you?

If you don't contradict yourself, you won't. And if you don't take up your cross and follow Him, you won't. And if you don't choose death over life in this world – you won't.

If God chooses the foolish and the weak and the despised, why would you spend your entire life trying to become, and encouraging others to become, the very things that would guarantee that God would never choose you? Why would you strive to become wise and strong and righteous when those are the very qualities that God utterly rejects?

Imagine bringing your new-born baby to your pastor so that he could lay his hands on him and bestow on him the blessing of God. Imagine your pastor taking your child in his arms and lovingly beginning to pray:

“O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, bless this child. May he be, among all the other children of the world, the most foolish of them all. May his weakness greatly exceed all his peers and may he be despised and rejected by all who meet him. May he, like Paul, always see himself as Chief among sinners...”

After about the second sentence out of his mouth, you'd be slapping that pastor right upside his head.

“How dare you prophesy those awful curses over my baby!” you would cry.

Unless you knew what few know: those are the *only* qualities that God ever chooses in anyone. If He does not find those very qualities in whomever He

examines in this world, He categorically rejects them, with extreme prejudice, as worldly-wise and not heavenly-wise.

And if you knew that – and if you were living the very life of self-contradiction to which Christ has called you – and if you were glorying in nothing but the cross and its crucified life rather than the crown and its uncrucified life – then you would know that your loving pastor had actually blessed your child to be at the very head of heaven's class by blessing him to be at the very back of the world's class.

But if you were woefully ignorant, and if you didn't know that Christ had called you to a walk of contradiction, and if you were glorying in life instead of death, then you would have your equally ignorant pastor bestow the exact 'blessing' on your child that would guarantee that God would never choose Him under any circumstance. Not by an entire universe.

And if God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, can the foolish things of the world *remain* chosen if they do not *remain* foolish?

And if God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, can the weak things of the world *remain* chosen if they do not *remain* weak?

And most astonishingly, if God chooses the sinful of this world, the publican, to confound the righteous of this world, the Pharisee, can the sinful remain chosen if, in his own eyes, he does not remain sinful?

The idea that God chooses the foolish and the weak and the sinful in this world so that He can transform them into the wise and the strong and the righteous in this world, is certainly not what He did with His only begotten Son.

If God had wanted to show His wisdom and power and righteousness in this world, then having Jesus crucified in utter foolishness and shamefully criminal weakness was exactly the one thing He would never have done.

The wisdom and strength and righteousness of Christ have never been seen in this present world. And until He returns in power and glory, they will continue to remain hidden.

FOR IT IS WRITTEN, AS I LIVE, SAITH THE LORD,

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL CONFESS TO GOD.

(Romans 14:11)

In the present time, only a *few* knees will bow and a *few* tongues will confess. *Few there be that find it*, said Jesus. But then, *every knee* and *every tongue*.

In this world, here and now, His real wisdom will continue to look like foolishness, and His real strength will continue to look like weakness. And His real righteousness will continue to look like sin. And so will yours if it's real.

Those who think that the world will see His glory in their own glory have precisely the opposite definition of "glory" that God has. They think wisdom and strength and righteousness are glorious. He thinks just the opposite.

The real wisdom of God can only be found in the foolish. And the real strength of God can only be found in a weak. And the real righteousness of God can only be found in the sinful. Only in the publican. Never in the Pharisee.

Through the cross. Not the crown. Through foolishness. Not wisdom. Through weakness. Not strength. In this world, by this world's measure, through sinfulness, not righteousness. In this world, His glory will always be inglorious. And if it's not, it's not His glory or His wisdom or His strength or His righteousness. It's just yours.

When Paul prayed *three times* for God to remove his most troubling affliction, Jesus answered with an astonishing word of utter contradiction:

AND HE SAID UNTO ME, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE:
FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.
MOST GLADLY THEREFORE WILL I RATHER GLORY IN MY
INFIRMITIES, THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST
UPON ME. THEREFORE I TAKE PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES,
IN REPROACHES, IN NECESSITIES, IN PERSECUTIONS,
IN DISTRESSES FOR CHRIST'S SAKE: FOR WHEN I AM WEAK,
THEN AM I STRONG. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

Paul says that he glories in his infirmities *so that* the power of Christ may

rest upon him. No infirmities, no reproaches, no necessities – *no power of Christ resting upon him*. “Your best life now” never confesses pleasure in necessities, infirmities, and distresses. That word is, to them, *anathema*, the very curse of God. According to them, that’s Satan and his doing. “Your best life now” confesses its pleasure only in the utter contradiction of all those things. And in so doing, “your best life now” utterly contradicts God Himself.

Jesus did not say to Paul, *As soon as you get past that problem, as soon as you get the victory over that terrible situation, as soon as you get that financial breakthrough you’ve been praying for, then finally I’ll get some glory out of you and your situation*. No, He gave Paul the absolute and utter contradiction of that.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. Perfect. That’s how I’d describe your awful, weak, foolish and distressing situation. Perfect. Not perfect for you, but perfect for Me and my eternal plans for you.

And here’s Paul’s contradiction out of that word from Christ: ***Only when I am weak, then am I strong.***

Now that’s a contradiction!

For we preach not ourselves, declares Paul, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

FOR GOD, WHO COMMANDED THE LIGHT TO SHINE
OUT OF DARKNESS, HATH SHINED IN OUR HEARTS,
TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY
OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.
BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS,
THAT THE EXCELLENCY OF THE POWER MAY BE OF GOD,
AND NOT OF US. WE ARE TROUBLED ON EVERY SIDE,
YET NOT DISTRESSED; WE ARE PERPLEXED,
BUT NOT IN DESPAIR; PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN;
CAST DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED;
ALWAYS BEARING ABOUT IN THE BODY THE DYING OF
THE LORD JESUS, THAT THE LIFE ALSO OF JESUS MIGHT
BE MADE MANIFEST IN OUR BODY.

(2 Corinthians 4:5–10)

This is the language of contradiction. Paul says that our message to those around us is not about us at all. It's only about Christ. And contrary to what you've been told, His glory, says Paul, can be seen through us only in the contrast of what He really is to what we really are. His glory can only be seen by way of contradiction.

The light that shines out of the darkness is made to appear all the brighter by its *contrast* to that darkness, declares the apostle.

If I light a match in the light of the noonday sun, you can hardly see it at all. But if it's dark enough, when I light the match, its light will actually blind you. Ours is the darkness. His is the light. The greater the darkness in our present circumstance, the more visible His light becomes.

This treasure is displayed, Paul explains, in a plain and ordinary earthen vessel, so that the treasure, by its brilliant *contrast* to its plain backdrop, will be manifestly all the more excellent. God doesn't put His treasure in a beautiful box. He puts it in an ugly one. And the treasure looks beautiful. He puts it in a weak one. And the treasure looks strong. He puts it in a sinful one. And by contradiction, the treasure looks righteous.

God wants the treasure to look excellent. Not the box. He's the treasure. You're the box. If you want to keep the treasure in a ornate gold box, the excellence of the treasure will always be lost in the excellence of the box. This is the message of "your best life now": the goal is that you should become a most beautiful box. A beautiful, empty box. No contrast. No contradiction. You'll look excellent. But God won't.

It should be your greatest desire that God paint your life with the blackest and darkest background possible, so that men may see His brilliant excellence by contrast.

AND OTHERS WERE TORTURED, NOT ACCEPTING
DELIVERANCE; THAT THEY MIGHT OBTAIN A BETTER
RESURRECTION: AND OTHERS HAD TRIAL OF CRUEL
MOCKINGS AND SCOURGINGS, YEA, MOREOVER OF BONDS
AND IMPRISONMENT: THEY WERE STONED,
THEY WERE SAWN ASUNDER,
WERE TEMPTED, WERE SLAIN WITH THE SWORD:
THEY WANDERED ABOUT IN SHEEPSKINS AND GOATSKINS;

BEING DESTITUTE, AFFLICTED, TORMENTED;
 (OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY:)
 THEY WANDERED IN DESERTS, AND IN MOUNTAINS,
 AND IN DENS AND CAVES OF THE EARTH.
 AND THESE ALL, HAVING OBTAINED A GOOD REPORT
 THROUGH FAITH, RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE.

(Hebrews 11:35–39)

Who do you know that is concerned even in the least with a *better resurrection*? No. Just a better life now. Or, more precisely, your best life now.

It's by contradiction and by contrast. Not His wisdom in *your* wisdom. But His wisdom in *your foolishness*. Not His strength in *your* strength, but His strength in *your weakness*. And not even His righteousness in *your* righteousness, but His righteousness in *your sinfulness*. Then men won't ever get confused as to who is really wise and who is really strong and who is really righteous. They'll always know for certain that it isn't you.

Men don't see God's excellence in your excellence. According to Paul, they just see your excellence in your excellence. And men don't see His glory in your glory. And, astonishingly, men don't even see His righteousness in your righteousness. Even if you want them to. They just see your righteousness in your righteousness.

We are, in this world, says Paul, *always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus*, so that by utter contradiction His life might also be manifest.

We bear the dying. We do not bear the life. He bears the life, because He has *already* borne the dying. Now it's our turn. If we do not bear His death in us, He cannot bear His life in us. He commands the light to shine out of the darkness. He never commands the light to shine out of the light.

IF ANY MAN WOULD COME AFTER ME,
 LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS,
 AND FOLLOW ME.

The first contradiction is the contradiction of life itself. *If any man would come after me*, Jesus says, he must *Choose death*. *And only by choosing death in this world will he choose life in the world to come.*

Chapter 13

The Contradiction of Blessing

What does the blessing of God really look like?

Why of course, it looks precisely the opposite of what you would ever have expected. And if you're really listening for it now, you'll be able to hear, from the very first words that Jesus speaks in the sermon on the Mount, the utter contradiction to everything you've always believed about the word "blessed."

But before you listen to Jesus speak, remind yourself that His thoughts are not your thoughts. Not one. Not ever. And not even close. In fact, Jesus describes His goal for your relationship with Him in a most contradictory manner:

AND WHOSOEVER SHALL FALL ON THIS STONE
SHALL BE BROKEN: BUT ON WHOMSOEVER IT SHALL FALL,
IT WILL GRIND HIM TO POWDER. (Matthew 21:44)

Jesus says there are only two choices in your relationship with Him. If you don't choose to be broken, you will be ground to powder. There is no door number three.

The Greek word for "broken" is *sunthlao*, "to be broken together." Broken together with what? Broken together with Him. To fall on Him is to partake of what He partakes. And what He partakes of is brokenness.

But obviously, whatever pain there might be in brokenness couldn't possibly compare to the pain of being ground to dust. Hold foremost in your mind now the thought of brokenness as His goal for you, as you listen to Jesus describe who He thinks is really blessed:

AND SEEING THE MULTITUDES,
HE WENT UP INTO A MOUNTAIN:
AND WHEN HE WAS SET, HIS DISCIPLES CAME UNTO HIM:
AND HE OPENED HIS MOUTH, AND TAUGHT THEM, SAYING,
BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT:
FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.
BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN:
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.
BLESSED ARE THE MEEK:
FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.
BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST
AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.
BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL: FOR THEY SHALL
OBTAIN MERCY. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART:
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.
BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: FOR THEY
SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.
BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR
RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE: FOR THEIRS IS THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YE,
WHEN MEN SHALL REVILE YOU,
AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND SHALL SAY ALL MANNER OF EVIL
AGAINST YOU FALSELY, FOR MY SAKE.
REJOICE, AND BE EXCEEDING GLAD: FOR GREAT IS YOUR
REWARD IN HEAVEN: FOR SO PERSECUTED THEY THE
PROPHETS WHICH WERE BEFORE YOU.

(Matthew 5:1-12)

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares God. Not by an entire immeasurable universe. Not one. Not ever. Not even close.

If what Jesus speaks is really heavenly, and if He calls us to utterly contradict

ourselves concerning all *heavenly things*, then the first public words out of His mouth should themselves be an utter contradiction to all that we now believe.

And they are. An absolute, thorough, and utter contradiction.

And it's not just the first words that He speaks here publicly in the sermon on the Mount that are a contradiction. Over and over throughout this particular discourse, Jesus says, *You have heard it said by them of old time... But I say unto you...*

That's the language of contradiction. And remember, when Jesus was finished with the sermon on the Mount, all the people who heard Him had a singularly noteworthy reaction: they were *astonished at His doctrine*.

The degree to which we are astonished at something is always proportional to the difference between what we had expected and what we actually experience. And the people who heard Jesus that day never expected these words. Not a by an entire universe. The Greek word here for "astonished" actually means to "flatten with a hammer." These words absolutely flattened them.

Moses had stood on the mountain and enumerated the blessings of the Old Contract. Those blessings were to serve as the hearer's very motivation to *choose life*.

Jesus now sits on the Mount and enumerates the blessings of the New Contract. These blessings, by an entire immeasurable universe of difference in purpose, are to now serve as the hearer's very motivation to *choose death*.

Do you understand the contradiction in purpose by an entire universe of difference? The blessings of Moses were given to prepare those who heard them to live in this world. The blessings of Jesus are given to prepare those who hear them to die in this world.

Blessed are the broken: the blessing comes to break you upon the rock.

Jesus opens His mouth, and with the first six amazingly simple words, He turns the whole universe upside down in utter contradiction. He draws back the curtain to give us our first-ever glimpse into how things *really* look in the coming kingdom of God.

Who are the blessed? The blessed are, of course, precisely the opposite of

who you would ever have thought: *Blessed are the poor in spirit.*

It's only the poor in spirit who are the blessed ones, He declares. And that is beyond astonishing.

The word "poor," *ptochos*, means "to crouch as a cringing beggar, a pauper, strictly denoting absolute or public mendicancy." A mendicant is one who has been reduced to a total dependency on someone else for his very living.

"Poor" is the very last word they would ever have expected Him to conjoin with the word "blessed"! Listen carefully to the preachers of "your best life now." The word "poor" is exactly an entire universe away from what they say is "blessed."

And because we are unaware that His thoughts are not even remotely close to our own, when we hear the words of Jesus, we automatically pass them through our non-contradiction bias filter. And instead of hearing *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, we transform the words into *God really feels sorry for the poor.*

And when we hear that, we're awfully glad that He is confirming what we already feel for the poor as well. Because now we know that we really do think just like God does on the subject of blessings. Because Jesus just told us so. Or so we think.

But that's not what Jesus is saying at all.

That's not the incredibly amazing, absolutely astonishing, shockingly different by an entire universe, never heard of before, never even imagined before, hidden from the very foundation of the world, utter contradiction that Jesus is declaring at all.

Jesus is saying precisely the opposite, the very *one* thing about blessings that you could never have imagined *before* He opened His mouth and told you. Not that God feels sorry for the poor. But rather that, when God blesses someone, he actually blesses them *with* poverty of spirit!

Poverty of spirit *is* the blessing of God! All by itself!

He does not say the poor in spirit "will" be the blessed when their situation is remedied. He does not say that the poor in spirit "will have" the kingdom of God some day.

He says, they *are* the blessed. Right now. Because *theirs is the kingdom of God*.

And here's the astonishing truth that you could never have known before: every circumstance that God has ever allowed into your life, from the time you were born until this very moment, has been with only one goal in mind: to bring you to poverty of spirit.

Why? Why would God want to make you poor in spirit? Because, according to Jesus, *only* the poor in spirit will ever have the kingdom of God!

Why? Because only the poor in spirit are able to contradict themselves. Poverty of spirit provides the only state of mind, and the only perspective, from which self-contradiction actually appears desirable.

And if you never find self-contradiction to be desirable, you'll never contradict yourself. And if you never contradict yourself, you'll *never* take up your cross and follow Him to die. Instead, you'll contradict Him. And you'll take up your crown and live. And when you choose life, you'll actually be choosing death.

And that's what you never even came within a universe of thinking, not even once in your entire life: all of the blessings of God are an attempt to *reduce* you to the place where you will willingly contradict yourself. Therefore, Jesus defines the word "blessed" precisely as you could never have even imagined.

As you already know, definitions connect one idea with another idea by what is sometimes called in English a "linking verb." Instead of showing action, linking verbs serve to connect *some* information about a subject to *more* information about that subject. In a definition, two separate things are not *made* equal, they are simply shown to *already* be equal.

You can always recognize a definition because it can be turned backwards or forwards without changing its meaning. Both sides are always equal. For example, "man is a rational animal" and "a rational animal is man" mean the very same thing.

Blessed are the poor in spirit means the same thing as "the poor in spirit are blessed." Turning it backwards helps circumvent the perception filter we have on our minds.

Think of a definition as a fence. It fences in one thing, and in so doing it

fences out everything that is incompatible with it, including the most incompatible of all, its contradiction.

Jesus is doing nothing more and nothing less than redefining reality for us as only God can see it. He is simply fencing in what is really *blessed* and fencing out what is not really *blessed* from God's singularly contradictory point of view.

And because *He's* God and *you're* not, He gets to define all the words and you don't. His definitions are true. And yours, if they disagree with His, are not true. And here's the crux of what Isaiah has already told us: because His thoughts are not your thoughts – not by an entire universe – your definitions of *heavenly things* and His *never* agree. Not once. Not ever. No exceptions. And if you find that your definitions do agree with His, you can always know with absolute certainty, it's not really His definition at all.

In God's kingdom, where God rules as God sees it and as Jesus alone unconceals it, He gets to define *all* the words. You don't get to define *any*. That idea is critical to accept if you want to walk with Him. Otherwise, instead of contradicting yourself as He directs you to, you'll wind up contradicting Him with every word He gives you.

Whether you agree with it or not, according to Jesus, inside the definition-fence of the word *blessed* are the words *poor in spirit*. There may be other things inside this fence as well, but *none* of them is allowed to be incompatible with, or contradictory to, the quality of *poor in spirit*. The blessing of God will always be recognized in its effect of making the recipient poor in spirit. Every time. Without exception.

In words *never* spoken before, Jesus begins to unconceal what is *really* fenced in with the word *blessed*. And astonishingly, it's all of the very notions that have always *precisely* contradicted your own definition of that same word. Hidden from the foundation of the world, He finally draws back the curtain and reveals to us who are really the *blessed*. And it's exactly what we would never have guessed. Not by an entire universe.

Who are the blessed? Jesus pushes us past the brink of absolute astonishment with His choices of what He places inside the fence: along with *the poor in spirit*, those that *mourn* are the blessed; as are those that *hunger and thirst* for an absent righteousness; and the *meeek* are here, the *peacemakers* are here, the *pure in heart*, and perhaps most amazingly of all, the

persecuted and the *reviled* are here, inside the fence of blessing.

What does the blessing of God really look like? It looks *only* exactly like what you never imagined. And most astonishingly, by *His* definition, you've been doing your very best to avoid His blessings your entire life.

Why would all of these contradictory circumstances actually be the very blessings of God rather than their opposites as we have always been told?

Because in this world, God's goal is exactly the opposite of your goal:

You're trying to add as much of this world to yourself as you can before He removes you from this world. He is trying to remove as much of this world from you as He can before He removes you from this world.

Contradictorily to anything we might ever have imagined, His blessings diminish us in this world. They do not increase us. They weaken us. They do not strengthen us. They remove our wisdom. They do not sustain it or increase it. And most astonishingly, they remove our righteousness. They never add to it. And His blessings, the real ones, always create a longing for the world to come. Never for this one.

And if His blessings don't diminish you, weaken you, remove your righteousness, and create a longing for the world to come, they're not His blessings at all. What enlarges you, strengthens you, adds to your righteousness, and creates a longing for this world, is not a blessing at all. It's a curse.

LOVE NOT THE WORLD, NEITHER THE THINGS THAT ARE
IN THE WORLD. IF ANY MAN LOVE THE WORLD, THE LOVE
OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM.
FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH,
AND THE LUST OF THE EYES, AND THE PRIDE OF LIFE,
IS NOT OF THE FATHER, BUT IS OF THE WORLD;
AND THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY, AND THE LUST THEREOF:
BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF GOD ABIDETH FOR EVER.
(1 John 2:15)

That's exactly why riches are never a blessing. Riches confirm a man's judgment about *the things that are in the world*. They never contradict it.

No one ever says, "That guy is so stupid. Look at all that money he's making." They *never* say that. They never even *think* that.

They always say instead, "That guy is so smart. Look at all that money he's making."

No man ever comes home to his wife and says, "Honey, I'm so smart. I lost everything we own today." And his wife never says in return, "Well, come over here and kiss me quick before it wears off."

Instead he says, "Honey, I'm so stupid. I lost everything today." And she says, "You're right. You are. My mother told me not to marry you."

Money always confirms a man's judgment. It never contradicts it. When the money is flowing, a man never says, "What the heck am I doing wrong?" And neither does his wife. And unfortunately, neither does his pastor.

Instead, the man says, "I *must* be right." And his wife says, "Of course you are, you handsome thing." And his pastor says, "Of course you are, you mighty man of God. And don't forget to tithe!"

Money confirms a man. Every time. Without exception.

On the other hand, Jesus is in the business of strictly contradicting a man's judgment. He never confirms it. Not even once. He says you're wrong. Before you even open your mouth. No matter how much money you make.

Money and Jesus are constantly at odds with each other; the money always seeking to confirm the man in this world, and Jesus always seeking to contradict the man in this world.

And that's the real and astonishing problem with being rich: even God Himself cannot contradict money.

Unless you're living the contradicted life, the money will always convince you that you're doing the right thing. Even if God *Himself* is standing right in front of you, telling you that you're not:

AND, BEHOLD, ONE CAME AND SAID UNTO HIM,
 GOOD MASTER, WHAT GOOD THING SHALL I DO,
 THAT I MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?
 AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, WHY CALLEST THOU ME
 GOOD? THERE IS NONE GOOD BUT ONE, THAT IS, GOD:
 BUT IF THOU WILT ENTER INTO LIFE, KEEP THE
 COMMANDMENTS. HE SAITH UNTO HIM, WHICH? JESUS

SAID, THOU SHALT DO NO MURDER, THOU SHALT NOT
 COMMIT ADULTERY, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL,
 THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,
 HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER:
 AND, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.
 THE YOUNG MAN SAITH UNTO HIM,
 ALL THESE THINGS HAVE I KEPT FROM MY YOUTH UP:
 WHAT LACK I YET?

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, IF THOU WILT
 BE PERFECT, GO AND SELL THAT THOU HAST,
 AND GIVE TO THE POOR, AND THOU SHALT
 HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN: AND COME
 AND FOLLOW ME. BUT WHEN THE YOUNG MAN
 HEARD THAT SAYING, HE WENT AWAY SORROWFUL:
 FOR HE HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
 VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT A RICH MAN SHALL
 HARDLY ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

(Matthew 19:16–23)

When a man has an abundance of money, he *cannot* be contradicted. Not even when it comes to inheriting eternal life. Not even by Christ Jesus Himself. That's the incredibly deceitful power of money.

AND THE CARES OF THIS WORLD, AND THE DECEITFULNESS
 OF RICHES, AND THE LUSTS OF OTHER THINGS ENTERING IN,
 CHOKE THE WORD, AND IT BECOMETH UNFRUITFUL.

(Mark 4:19)

“Deceitfulness” is the Greek word *apate*, “delusion,” from the word *apatao*, meaning “to cheat.” A rich man deludes himself, and swindles himself in the end, out of the real riches of heaven.

“Your best life now” teaches that whatever brings you wealth is the sure and certain will of God. That prosperity is the very evidence of the will of God. And conversely, that whatever takes away wealth is categorically not the will of God.

The rich young ruler would have been glad to hear that. According to “your best life now,” he could have kept his money and followed Jesus too. Now that’s the kind of cross a man wouldn’t mind bearing.

If the rich young ruler could have simply laid his cross right up on top of his Lexus (carefully of course), backed out of the driveway of his luxury home, and affixed a sign to the side that said, “Golgotha or bust,” then he would have given two thumbs to the Savior. If that’s what it meant to “take up your cross and follow Jesus,” then he would have gladly suffered the shame. Now that’s the kind of death a man could live with!

But unfortunately, Jesus didn’t even give him that option. Astonishingly, Jesus counseled the rich young ruler to do the unthinkable: to turn his back on his “best life now” and instead, follow Him to his “best life later.” *Forget about the earthly riches, says Jesus. They’re nothing. Come and get the real riches, the heavenly ones.*

But sadly, he went away greatly grieved, *for he had great possessions*. He simply could not contradict the money.

The preachers of “your best life now” approach today’s rich young rulers a little differently than Jesus did. But hey, that’s what you call spiritual progress. To them, it’s a little harder to motivate their followers with the promise of mere *treasure in heaven* like He did. That’s a little too much pie in the sky in the sweet by and by.

Especially when you’ve just told everybody that the rich young ruler *already* has the treasure of heaven right there in his bank account. But, they do at least get half of it right. They do want him to give it all away. Maybe just not to the same people.

But in utter contradiction, when a man is brought low, when the money flow dries up, when the circumstances crowd in to push him down, when the inside of his life begins to harmonize with the outside and he finally becomes poor in spirit, then it becomes altogether easy for him to acknowledge that something is wrong. Money no longer confirms him.

Rather, by it’s very absence, it loudly contradicts him. And because he no longer has the right words to explain his way out of his confusing situation, he is now, for the very first time, open for some new words. Maybe even some utterly contradictory words. And at last, by the blessing of God, he becomes a babe with no words of his own.

That's what the real blessings of God do. They bring you, most of the time kicking and screaming, to contradiction.

The only way you will ever desire the kingdom of heaven that *cannot* be seen, is to cease to desire the kingdoms of this earth that *can* be seen. His blessings close your eyes to this world and its treasures, and open your eyes to the next world and its treasures. They *never* do the opposite.

LAY NOT UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES UPON EARTH,
 WHERE MOTH AND RUST DOTH CORRUPT,
 AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK THROUGH AND STEAL:
 BUT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN,
 WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DOTH CORRUPT,
 AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK THROUGH NOR STEAL:
 FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS,
 THERE WILL YOUR HEART BE ALSO.

(Matthew 6:19–21)

What's the real problem with defining the blessings of God as an increase of riches in this world? Just this: where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

God doesn't want your heart to be here, even if your body still is. When your body finally leaves this world, as it will shortly, He wants your heart to have gone on ahead, as far in advance as it possibly can.

IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST,
 SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE,
 WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.
 SET YOUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE,
 NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH. (Colossians 3:1–2)

"Your best life now" is a total confusion of terminology: it's all about setting your affection on *things on the earth* "as though they are" the *things which are above*. If you're seeking those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, then unless He's totally refurbished the place without telling the rest of us, you're probably not going to find the treasures of Egypt there in His throne room.

Jesus was tempted of Satan in the wilderness:

AND THE DEVIL, TAKING HIM UP INTO AN HIGH MOUNTAIN,
 SHEWED UNTO HIM ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD
 IN A MOMENT OF TIME. AND THE DEVIL SAID UNTO HIM,
 ALL THIS POWER WILL I GIVE THEE, AND THE
 GLORY OF THEM: FOR THAT IS DELIVERED UNTO ME;
 AND TO WHOMSOEVER I WILL I GIVE IT. (Luke 4:6)

Not *every* word the devil speaks is a lie, because in this same temptation, the devil had actually quoted the scripture. And the scripture, even in the mouth of the devil, doesn't somehow transform itself into a lie. Rather, it is the devil's inferences from the scriptures that always contain the lies.

Factual errors are easy to spot and to counter. Inferential errors are more difficult. Errors of inference are based on many facts, not just one.

Interestingly, when the devil declares to Jesus that it is he, the devil, who has the authority to bestow the power and glory of all the kingdoms of this world on *whomsoever I will*, Jesus does not say, *No you don't*.

Apparently, that fact was, and is, inarguable. The devil told Jesus that his power of bestowal had been *delivered unto me*, "surrendered, transmitted, and entrusted" unto him. Think about it: unless that was true, it wouldn't really have been much of a temptation for Jesus, would it?

And if the blessings of God are really the same riches as the 'bestowals' of the devil, how could you ever really tell who was 'blessing' you? The gifts would look the same no matter who they came from.

And if the blessings of God looked no different than the bestowals of the devil, it would be a very difficult task just trying to figure out to whom you should address the thank-you card.

Did Jesus really lay up treasures for Himself in this world like some actually teach that He did? Was Jesus actually rich? Do you think that Jesus had a big bank account somewhere that He just didn't tell the disciples about?

If He did, then when He said, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God*, He would have been talking about Himself as well as all the other rich men. Imagine Jesus having a hard time getting into heaven. That's bizarre.

AND A CERTAIN SCRIBE CAME, AND SAID UNTO HIM,

MASTER, I WILL FOLLOW THEE WHITHERSOEVER THOU
GOEST. AND JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, THE FOXES HAVE
HOLES, AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE NESTS;
BUT THE SON OF MAN HATH NOT WHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD.
(Matthew 8:19–20)

Rich guys usually at least have a place to sleep. But not Jesus.

When it was demanded of Jesus and Peter that they pay their taxes, Jesus sent Peter to find a coin in a fish's mouth. That certainly doesn't sound like a man who has a lot of ready cash on hand. (Matthew 17:27)

One of the favorite scriptures of “your best life now” is the one where the disciples ask Jesus exactly what they will get if they follow Him:

THEN PETER BEGAN TO SAY UNTO HIM,
LO, WE HAVE LEFT ALL, AND HAVE FOLLOWED THEE.
AND JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID, VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU,
THERE IS NO MAN THAT HATH LEFT HOUSE, OR BRETHREN,
OR SISTERS, OR FATHER, OR MOTHER, OR WIFE,
OR CHILDREN, OR LANDS, FOR MY SAKE, AND THE
GOSPEL'S, BUT HE SHALL RECEIVE AN HUNDREDFOLD
NOW IN THIS TIME, HOUSES, AND BRETHREN, AND
SISTERS, AND MOTHERS, AND CHILDREN, AND LANDS,
WITH PERSECUTIONS; AND IN THE WORLD TO COME
ETERNAL LIFE.
(Mark 10:28–30)

This is what the prophets of prosperity call the “hundred-fold blessing.” It's one of their favorites. According to “your best life now” you can hold Jesus point-blank to this promise. A hundred times back for whatever you give. And it's for now, in this lifetime, not the next one, they are quick to point out. Jesus said so.

Well let's break this down and see how it would actually work. Since he was the one who asked, let's start with Peter.

According to “your best life now,” Peter would have died owning no less than one hundred homes and one hundred lands. In this lifetime. That's the promise. And actually if you want to get technical about it, according to the words of Jesus, *exactly* one hundred. No more, no less. I'm not sure that

we could verify historically that Peter really did have his hundred when he died, but according to their interpretation of these words of Jesus, he must have. So, good for Peter. That puts him well up in the one tenth of one percent, living life large. Obviously, just like His Master did.

But that's just the start of the amazing things that are in store for Peter, who undoubtedly would have been the very first to capitalize on this fantastic hundred-fold promise from Jesus.

It just gets more exciting from here: according to the "your best life now" interpretation of Jesus' words, his mother would have had to have borne two hundred more children, exactly half boys and half girls, to provide Peter with that hundred-fold return on the brother and sister that he would have left. Yep. One hundred boys and one hundred girls. *Exactly*. And if he left more than just one brother or sister, there would have to have been hundreds more. Sure Peter is being blessed, but I'm not so sure about Mom.

Oh, and also, Mom and Dad both would have had to have gotten married exactly one hundred more times to provide Peter with that hundred-fold return of mothers and fathers that Jesus promised him here if he left his own mother and father. And we know from the gospel narrative that Peter did indeed leave his father back at the boat the day that Jesus called him. And of course, that would have meant leaving Mom as well. But again, this might spell more trouble for Mom than Dad.

Do you know how hard it would have been, around number forty or fifty, to keep convincing all those eligible Jewish bachelors to enter into that kind of multiple-marriage arrangement with Mom? Talk about miraculous! This promise is really paying off for Peter! Maybe not so much for Mom.

And then of course, because a hundred-fold return of wives and children are promised for the wife and children he would leave, Peter would need to hunt down a hundred more willing wives and raise two hundred children. There's likely to be very little time left over for any preaching.

So did we cover all the bases? There were a hundred-fold of houses and lands that Peter would need to have. Check and check. A hundred-fold of mothers and fathers. Check and check. A hundred-fold brothers and sisters. Check and check. And a hundred-fold wives and children split evenly between boys and girls. Check, check and check. I think we got it all.

For Peter, that is.

Now let's start on disciple number two.

But do you see the problem developing here already? If this hundred-fold blessing is really for *all* the disciples, then right about disciple number 2,437, if my calculations are correct, we're going to completely run out of real estate!

No wonder Jesus said, *Go ye into all the world.*

What He really must have meant was, *We're going to need more land!*

Then of course, Peter goes out and immediately complicates the situation beyond reason by increasing the number of disciples by three thousand the very first time he opens his mouth to preach! We either need to get Peter to shut up, or we're going to need a *lot* more land!

In fact, by the time Saul gets converted and becomes the apostle Paul, Jesus would have been promising him real estate somewhere in Cleveland. And how much of a blessing could that have been?

Do you understand? Here's the way it has to work: if it's a hundred-fold for *anyone*, it's a hundred-fold for *everyone*. You can't have it any other way.

If Jesus meant what "your best life now" says He meant, then everybody in the kingdom has to get a hundred-fold of everything. And here's the problem: the guys who keep promising you a hundred-fold – don't even have a hundred-fold themselves! That ought to tell you everything you need to know right there. Never believe the word of the guy who is promising you something that *he himself* doesn't even have.

Don't get me wrong. I know the prophets of prosperity are working hard to get their hundred-fold. And if you'll just pass along that hundred you've got folded there in your pocket, they'll be a little closer to their goal.

Glory to god! Now that's the real hundred-fold!

The problem is, you can't do what they're doing. Do you think God has promised everybody in the kingdom their very own mega-church and their very own television show? Sorry. It's just not duplicatable. And in the kingdom, if it's not duplicatable for the *least among you*, forget about it. It's not really the work of God at all. Never. Not even once.

As per usual, the preachers of prosperity have it exactly backwards: Jesus didn't say, "He that is *greatest* among you all, the same shall be great."

But rather, *He that is least among you all, the same shall be great* (Luke 9:48).

Unfortunately, "your best life now" never once refers their audience back to the real context of the "hundred-fold blessing." Jesus spoke those words to Peter right after He told the rich young ruler to go sell everything he had and give it to the poor. These words are spoken in the context of Jesus' instruction to get rid of earthly possessions, not to accumulate them. And therefore they couldn't possibly be about acquiring the very real estate that Jesus had just instructed the young man to go and sell.

The real hundred-fold promise to Peter and all who would follow Him was really about the same thing that all of Jesus' promises were about: not the seen kingdom of this world, but the unseen kingdom of God.

Here's what Jesus really promised Peter and all His followers:

Jesus promised a community of believers whose love for each other would be so much like a family that, no matter where any disciple went, he would find himself right at home in a hundred different homes just like the home he had left; he would find himself loved by a hundred different mothers and fathers just like the mother and father he had left; he would find himself loved by a hundred different sons and daughters just like the sons and daughters he had left.

Here's how Jesus Himself explained it:

BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM THAT TOLD HIM,
 WHO IS MY MOTHER? AND WHO ARE MY BRETHREN?
 AND HE STRETCHED FORTH HIS HAND TOWARD HIS
 DISCIPLES, AND SAID, BEHOLD MY MOTHER
 AND MY BRETHREN! FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL DO THE
 WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN,
 THE SAME IS MY BROTHER, AND SISTER, AND MOTHER.

(Matthew 12:48)

If you count mothers and brothers and sisters and houses the way Jesus told you to, you'll have you're own hundred-fold in no time. And that's

absolutely duplicatable.

And by the way: don't forget to hold Jesus to his promise of a hundred-fold *persecution* in this lifetime. For some reason, "your best life now" always skips that one. And don't tell me He was referring to a hard-to-get-along-with Homeowners Association giving you grief over your hundred houses.

Another of the favorite promises of the prosperity preachers is in one of the letters of the apostle John:

BELOVED, I WISH ABOVE ALL THINGS THAT THOU MAYEST
PROSPER AND BE IN HEALTH, EVEN AS THY SOUL PROSPERETH.

(3 John 1:2)

"See," says "your best life now." "This is the top of the heap. *Above all things*, God wants you to prosper. How much clearer could it be?"

But one would have to ask, are you sure you're really understanding this correctly? Is your prosperity really the will of God *above all things*?

Do you think, for example, that prosperity is the will of God above even the spreading of the gospel? Do you think that John is somehow insisting that everyone should get rich and healthy even before the gospel is preached? If prosperity is *above all things*, then of course, that's exactly what he's saying.

That would have disqualified the apostle Paul right out of the gate. At least half the time he was both sick *and* poor.

NOT THAT I SPEAK IN RESPECT OF WANT:
FOR I HAVE LEARNED, IN WHATSOEVER STATE I AM,
THEREWITH TO BE CONTENT.
I KNOW BOTH HOW TO BE ABASED,
AND I KNOW HOW TO ABOUND:
EVERY WHERE AND IN ALL THINGS I AM INSTRUCTED
BOTH TO BE FULL AND TO BE HUNGRY, BOTH TO
ABOUND AND TO SUFFER NEED. (Philippians 4:11)

Poor Paul. Oh well, some people just never get it right.

And is prosperity God's priority for you even above your obedience to Him? According to this interpretation, it has to be. Above the work of Christ on the cross? Above the very glory of God? According to this, yes and yes.

If it's *above all things*, then it's above all things. That's plainly simple and simply plain.

In fact, if prosperity really is *above all things* like "your best life now" insists it is, then it would actually be a sin not to seek prosperity first, *above all things*. And of course, that is precisely what they teach.

But read what John says again:

BELOVED, I WISH ABOVE ALL THINGS THAT THOU MAYEST
PROSPER AND BE IN HEALTH, EVEN AS THY SOUL PROSPERETH.

Their first misunderstanding in this verse comes from the phrase *I wish*. "Your best life now" seems to think that John is saying "I will" instead of "I wish." As though John is saying it is God's 'will' that you prosper.

But the phrase *I wish* is the Greek word *euchomai*. A primary verb, it literally means "to wish." It never means "to will." "To will" would be the Greek word *thelema*.

Paul uses the same Greek word when he says to the church at Rome:

I COULD WISH THAT MYSELF WERE ACCURSED FROM CHRIST
FOR MY BRETHREN, MY KINSMEN ACCORDING TO THE FLESH...
(Romans 9:3)

Paul is by no means saying it is the 'will' of God that he be *accursed from Christ*. He is simply 'wishing' that somehow, *anyhow*, even at his own ultimate eternal expense, that those whom he loves could be saved.

And all should share that sentiment. That's the very heart that beats in Christ, Who Himself *was* accursed for those that He loved:

CHRIST HATH REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW,
BEING MADE A CURSE FOR US: FOR IT IS WRITTEN,
CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT HANGETH ON A TREE.
(Galatians 3:13)

But anyone who would interpret John's 'wish' that you should prosper as though John were saying that it is the 'will' of God that you prosper, would also have to interpret Paul's 'wish' that he be *accursed from Christ* for his kinsmen, as also being the 'will' of God that he be accursed.

And since Christ Himself had *already* been accursed from God for each and all of Paul's kinsmen, it's probably safe to assume that Paul really wasn't trying to say that it was the 'will' of God that he be accursed as well. It was just the 'wish' of Paul. It wasn't the 'will' of God.

And likewise, it's just the 'wish' of John that you prosper. It's not the 'will' of God that you prosper. Get your verbs right. They're important.

Here's the important difference: we can always be guaranteed that the 'will' of God will come to pass. But God is not beholden to make Paul's or John's 'wishes' come to pass. Their 'wishes' are just that: wishes. They're not God's will.

John's 'wish' is sort of like saying "Sweet dreams" to your kids at night before they go to sleep. You can't *guarantee* sweet dreams as the will of God, and it would be foolish if you tried. But you're sure 'wishing' your kids will have sweet dreams just the same.

The word "above," as in *above all things*, is the second problem with their interpretation of John's words. Of the 304 times in the New Testament that the Greek word *peri* is used, only this one time is it translated as the word "above." All the other 303 times it is translated as either "through," "about," "around," "concerning," or "of," and in the majority of the verses it is translated as "about" or "around." But the word has absolutely nothing to do with priority or sequence.

And if you try to translate the Greek word *peri* as "above" in any of the other 303 places it is used, you'll wind up with some pretty funny stuff. Instead of John the Baptist wearing his girdle "around" his waist, you'll have him wearing it "above" his waist. And even for a prophet with John's rugged constitution, that might have been a little embarrassing. And you'll have Jesus speaking from down in a hole wherever He goes, as he looks at all those people not sitting "around" him, but sitting "above" Him.

Peri is only translated once in the entire New Testament as "above." And it's here, in this verse. The Greek word for "above" would be the word *hyper*. It means "over," "above," "beyond," or "greater."

But the word used here is *peri*, not *hyper*. Here the word *peri* should be understood to mean "about, or concerning, these things."

And then there is the comparative phrase *even as*. That's the Greek word

kathos. It's made up of two words, *kata*, "down," and *hos*, "in that manner." In other words, "only like this."

So what John is actually saying is, *I wish* [not "God wills"] *that concerning all things* [not "above" all things], *you would prosper and be in health*, just like *your soul is prospering*.

So the real question is this: how does your soul really prosper?

If the blessings that Moses proclaimed from Mount Sinai in the Old Contract are used as the standard of 'soul prosperity,' then "your best life now" can justifiably make the case that as your soul prospers, its evidence will be found in those kind of material blessings.

But if the blessings that Jesus proclaimed from the Mount of Olives in the New Contract are used as the standard, the evidence of 'soul prosperity' becomes different by a universe.

Jesus said, *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation... for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

If "poverty of spirit" is really the blessing, what will be its outward evidence? And if "mourning" is really the blessing, what will be its outward evidence? And if "hunger and thirst for an absent righteousness," and "meekness" and "purity" are really the blessings, what will be their outward evidence?

That's right: nothing you could ever *see*. All of the evidence of the blessings that Jesus brings would only be on the inside. Completely out of sight. Precisely the only place that Jesus said the kingdom can be found.

If the kingdom is built only on the inside, *within you*, then where must all the work of the kingdom happen as well? The real blessings of God are an inside job: *within you*. Christ's real blessings would provide the only kind of evidence that faith allows: an *unseen* one.

NOW FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR,
THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN. (Hebrews 11:1)

The real blessings of God don't fill you up with this world. The real blessings of God empty you out. The "blessings" that would fill you up with this world always empty you of the world to come.

God provides no ocular evidence of His eternity-changing work. It's all

secret. It's all hidden. He hides it so that it *cannot* be seen. He will be glad to *tell* you all about it, of course. In the most foolish and unverifiable words you could never even imagine. But He'll never *show* it to you. And those who say He will show it to you contradict the only real Expert in the room.

Astonishingly, that which you have struggled against all your life is found to be the very blessing of God Himself. And the results of all those circumstances you've spent your whole life trying to avoid are themselves found to have been the very blessings of God Himself.

These blessings that Jesus describes contain the only tools that God uses to fashion you for the world to come. They bring with them the very same tools with which He fashioned His only begotten Son.

Was Christ not poor in spirit?

HE IS DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN;
A MAN OF SORROWS, AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF;
AND WE HID AS IT WERE OUR FACES FROM HIM;
HE WAS DESPISED, AND WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT.

(Isaiah 53:3)

Did Christ not mourn?

JESUS WEPT.

(John 11:35)

Was Christ not meek?

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME;
FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART;
AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS.

(Matthew 11:29)

Did He not hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God?

THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HATED INIQUITY;
THEREFORE GOD, EVEN THY GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE
WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY FELLOWS.

(Hebrews 1:9)

Was Christ not merciful?

NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE,

BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY HE SAVED US,
 BY THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, AND RENEWING
 OF THE HOLY GHOST; WHICH HE SHED ON US
 ABUNDANTLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR.
 (Titus 3:5–6)

Was Christ not pure in heart?

THY WORD IS VERY PURE:
 THEREFORE THY SERVANT LOVETH IT.
 (Psalms 119:140)

Was Christ not a peacemaker?

FOR HE IS OUR PEACE, WHO HATH MADE BOTH ONE,
 AND HATH BROKEN DOWN THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION
 BETWEEN US; HAVING ABOLISHED IN HIS FLESH THE
 ENMITY, EVEN THE LAW OF COMMANDMENTS CONTAINED IN
 ORDINANCES; FOR TO MAKE IN HIMSELF OF TWAIN ONE
 NEW MAN, SO MAKING PEACE;
 AND THAT HE MIGHT RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD
 IN ONE BODY BY THE CROSS, HAVING SLAIN
 THE ENMITY THEREBY:
 AND CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHICH
 WERE AFAR OFF, AND TO THEM THAT WERE NIGH.
 (Ephesians 2:14–17)

Was Christ not reviled and persecuted?

SURELY HE HATH BORNE OUR GRIEFS,
 AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS: YET WE DID ESTEEM HIM
 STRICKEN, SMITTEN OF GOD, AND AFFLICTED.
 BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS,
 HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES: THE
 CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM;
 AND WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED.
 ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY;
 WE HAVE TURNED EVERY ONE TO HIS OWN WAY;

AND THE LORD HATH LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY
 OF US ALL. HE WAS OPPRESSED, AND HE WAS AFFLICTED,
 YET HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH: HE IS BROUGHT
 AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND AS A SHEEP
 BEFORE HER SHEARERS IS DUMB, SO HE
 OPENETH NOT HIS MOUTH. (Isaiah 53:4–7)

Christ's blessings impart to His followers His very own nature. The rich of this world are not the blessed. Don't be deceived! The poor in spirit who are rich in faith are the blessed in this world. As Christ was not of this world, none of His blessings are of this world:

WHEREBY ARE GIVEN UNTO US EXCEEDING GREAT AND
 PRECIOUS PROMISES: THAT BY THESE YE MIGHT BE
 PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, HAVING ESCAPED
 THE CORRUPTION THAT IS IN THE WORLD THROUGH LUST.
 (2 Peter 1:4)

Contradictorily, the blessings of Moses bring nothing of the crucified life. Are the rich poor in spirit? Do the rich mourn? Are they meek? Do they hunger and thirst? Are they reviled? No. Instead, theirs is the un-blessed, the un-crucified, and the un-contradicted life. Are the rich the truly blessed of God? Jesus says no.

BUT WOE UNTO YOU THAT ARE RICH!
 FOR YE HAVE RECEIVED YOUR CONSOLATION.
 WOE UNTO YOU THAT ARE FULL! FOR YE SHALL HUNGER.
 WOE UNTO YOU THAT LAUGH NOW! FOR YE SHALL
 MOURN AND WEEP.
 WOE UNTO YOU, WHEN ALL MEN SHALL SPEAK WELL OF YOU!
 FOR SO DID THEIR FATHERS TO THE FALSE PROPHETS.
 (Luke 6:24–26)

Paul finally gets it right, but only after he hears Jesus Himself speak:

AND HE SAID UNTO ME, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE:
 FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.
 MOST GLADLY THEREFORE WILL I RATHER GLORY
 IN MY INFIRMITIES, THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST

MAY REST UPON ME.

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

What does the blessed life really look like?

Paul finally realizes that God's real blessings look nothing like what he thought they did. They come to accomplish what he never even imagined that God even *wanted* to accomplish.

Think about this: if God chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, then God's blessing could only be that which makes you foolish. The blessing of God could never be that which makes you wise. That which would make you wise would be a curse, because it would leave you un-chosen by God.

And if God chooses the weak in this world to confound the mighty, then God's blessing could only be that which makes you weak. The blessing of God could never be that which makes you strong. That which would make you strong would be a curse, because it would leave you un-chosen by God.

And if the poor in spirit are the blessed, then that which makes you rich in spirit could never be the blessing.

Paul finally arrives at this astounding and utterly contradictory conclusion:

THEREFORE I TAKE PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES,
IN REPROACHES, IN NECESSITIES, IN PERSECUTIONS,
IN DISTRESSES FOR CHRIST'S SAKE:
FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG.

(2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

I take pleasure in what? In infirmities? In reproaches? In necessities? In persecutions? In distresses?

That's not how "your best life now" talks. That's an altogether foreign language. That's strange talk. That's crucified talk. That's not-from-this-world talk. That's from-the-world-to-come talk. That's real-blessings-of-God talk.

Look around you. Who do know who talks like that? That's not the message of "your best life now." That's the message of "your best life later."

FOR OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION, WHICH IS BUT FOR A MOMENT,
WORKETH FOR US A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND
ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY;

WHILE WE LOOK NOT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN,
 BUT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN:
 FOR THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL;
 BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL.

(2 Corinthians 4:17)

The merely temporary never commands my attention, declares Paul. I fix my gaze instead on the eternal. The *things which are seen* are never the real blessing. They are far too transient for God's way of thinking. The *things which are not seen* are the real blessings. They contain the very stuff of eternity.

NOT THAT I SPEAK IN RESPECT OF WANT:
 FOR I HAVE LEARNED, IN WHATSOEVER STATE I AM,
 THEREWITH TO BE CONTENT. (Philippians 4:11)

AND HAVING FOOD AND RAIMENT
 LET US BE THEREWITH CONTENT. (Titus 6:8)

LET YOUR CONVERSATION BE WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS;
 AND BE CONTENT WITH SUCH THINGS AS YE HAVE:
 FOR HE HATH SAID, I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE,
 NOR FORSAKE THEE. (Hebrews 13:5)

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. That's the real blessing.

God blesses you in this world for only one reason: in order to prepare you for an eternity with Him in the next world.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS:
 IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.
 I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU.
 AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU,
 I WILL COME AGAIN, AND RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF;
 THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YE MAY BE ALSO.
 (John 14:2-3)

He didn't say, "I stay to prepare a place for you." He didn't say "You stay and prepare a place for Me." His blessings are the tools whereby He prepares you. While He is preparing the place for you, He is preparing you for the

place. And when you're ready for it, it'll be ready for you.

The place is easy to prepare. You, not so much. And that's what the real blessings are for. The problem is, the blessings of Moses, of the law, will leave you unprepared for that place. By the blessings of Moses, you would never feel at home there. Jesus is preparing a place where only the poor in spirit will feel at home.

By the blessings of Moses, you can only feel at home *here*. In *this* promised land. In *this* world. Just like "your best life now" teaches you to.

And consequently, the heavenly help will always be disguised as earthly hurt. So that they who seek the blessings of this world will never receive it. And the heavenly pleasure will always be disguised as earthly pain. So that they who find their comfort in riches will automatically reject it. Dividing the spirit from the flesh, separating the worldly affections from the heavenly ones, that's the sole business of the real blessings of God. And that's always a distressing process. And the rich of this world spurn all distress. Money removes distress. The rich reject distress with utter disdain and contempt. Their goal is to live sumptuously. Every day.

Did you think that preparing you and your naturally sinful mind for face-to-face fellowship with God Himself would be an enjoyable process? It could only be enjoyable if you left out the cross. And that's exactly what "your best life now" does. Crucifixion is simply never on their fine-dining menu.

Think about it: with what words might you describe the experience of a man who is crucified?

Is he poor in spirit or rich in spirit? Does he mourn or does he laugh? Does he hunger for a different rightness, or is he satisfied with the status quo? Is he meek and lowly or high and mighty? Is he pure or diluted in his focus?

Crucifixion is unimaginably painful. Purposely so. That's the entire point of crucifixion. Not just death. But suffering as well. Listen carefully again:

FOR UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN IN THE BEHALF OF CHRIST,
NOT ONLY TO BELIEVE ON HIM, BUT ALSO TO SUFFER FOR
HIS SAKE; HAVING THE SAME CONFLICT WHICH YE SAW
IN ME, AND NOW HEAR TO BE IN ME.

(Philippians 1:29–30)

FORASMUCH THEN AS CHRIST HATH SUFFERED FOR US
 IN THE FLESH, ARM YOURSELVES LIKEWISE WITH THE
 SAME MIND: FOR HE THAT HATH SUFFERED IN THE FLESH
 HATH CEASED FROM SIN;
 THAT HE NO LONGER SHOULD LIVE THE REST OF HIS TIME
 IN THE FLESH TO THE LUSTS OF MEN,
 BUT TO THE WILL OF GOD. (1 Peter 4:1–2)

The suffering is the gift of God to you. *He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.* The real blessed life follows along the road of suffering. Not along the road of comfort and prosperity. The blessings of Christ create the only appropriate attitude for the crucified life. The blessings of Moses create the only appropriate attitude for the crowned life. But to which does Jesus call you? A crown or a cross?

The blessings of Moses just cannot get the real job done. Because the real job is crucifixion. And that's the problem with "your best life now." It never looks crucified. Because it isn't.

And when you pretend that it is, and try to talk like it is, you wind up making an absurd mockery of the real crucifixion of Christ. You imagine that his cross must have been enjoyable. Because yours certainly is.

You need the *better* blessings to prepare you for that *better* place. And the *better* blessing are the blessings of Jesus. No *better* blessings, no *better* place. That's the only way this deal works.

AND WHEN HE HAD CALLED THE PEOPLE UNTO HIM
 WITH HIS DISCIPLES ALSO, HE SAID UNTO THEM,
 WHOSOEVER WILL COME AFTER ME,
 LET HIM DENY HIMSELF,
 AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.
 FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT;
 BUT WHOSOEVER SHALL LOSE HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE
 AND THE GOSPEL'S, THE SAME SHALL SAVE IT.
 FOR WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN,
 IF HE SHALL GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD,
 AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL?
 OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?

WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL BE ASHAMED OF ME
AND OF MY WORDS IN THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL
GENERATION; OF HIM ALSO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE
ASHAMED, WHEN HE COMETH IN THE GLORY OF HIS
FATHER WITH THE HOLY ANGELS. (Mark 8:34–38)

The true riches are found in the crucified life. The blessings of Moses would defraud you of that. You cannot have both “your best life now” and the cross of Christ. You must choose between the two.

And were you to gain *all* the riches of the entire world, and *all* the blessings of Moses that could possibly be had, on judgment day, they still wouldn’t purchase one ounce of the crucified life you should have chosen instead:

WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?

Do you really think that God wants to make your short stay here in this world as comfortable and enjoyable as He possibly can? If that’s really His plan, He certainly forgot to tell His beloved Son about it. Because Jesus missed out on everything that “your best life now” is promising to His “followers.”

Those who believe that their prosperity in this world is God’s highest goal will never cry “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” They will cry instead, “Take your time, Lord Jesus. It’s nice here. We’re in no hurry for your return. The new house is nice. The Lexus is very cool. We’re enjoying ourselves immensely. In fact, we’re having our best life now. Just be sure to keep on sending those blessings!”

When you’ve been wined and dined and given the keys to the palace, it rings a little hollow when you write to Dad back in Mayberry, “Sure wish I was home.”

With the lobster still stuck between your teeth, and the wine still dripping down your chin, it’s more than a little disingenuous to write, “I sure miss the grits.”

Heaven? Who needs it. I’m having my best life now. Glory to god in the highest.

BUT HE TURNED, AND SAID UNTO PETER,
GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN:

THOU ART AN OFFENCE UNTO ME:
FOR THOU SAVOUREST NOT THE THINGS THAT BE OF GOD,
BUT THOSE THAT BE OF MEN.

Chapter 14

The Contradiction of Repentance

If any man would come after Me, let Him utterly contradict himself...

No doctrine, without exception, has ever been more misunderstood and misapplied to the greater harm of more souls than the doctrine of repentance. Like every other thought that we bring to Christ, our thoughts on repentance are wrong. And not by just a little.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares God. By how much?

For as the heavens are higher than the earth... By precisely an entire immeasurable universe of difference.

Has Isaiah convinced you of that yet? I hope so. Because if you think that somehow, this is the one subject where you and God surely *do* think alike, then you may as well just go ahead and slap Isaiah and call God a liar.

Go ahead and tell God that on *this* particular subject, His thoughts are *not* higher by a heaven than yours. I'm sure He'll be excited to find that out. And while you're at it, be sure to remind Him that *He's* God, and so are *you*.

Recall what it means to be *wise and prudent*. To be wise and prudent is to contradict Christ. To be wise and prudent is to think that you know the truth before Jesus tells it to you. To be wise and prudent is to think that someone other than Jesus has the very same information that He does. To be wise and prudent is to believe that truth has not been hidden. Not from

you. That you have found it with your very own investigative powers in other sources outside the words of Christ and His apostles. Perhaps in the words of one of those Old Testament prophets that also talked a lot about repentance. Like Moses. Or Elijah. Or John the Baptist.

Did you think that John the Baptist was a New Testament prophet? *Think again*, says Jesus:

VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, AMONG THEM THAT ARE BORN
OF WOMEN THERE HATH NOT RISEN A GREATER THAN
JOHN THE BAPTIST: NOTWITHSTANDING HE THAT IS
LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GREATER THAN HE.
AND FROM THE DAYS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST UNTIL NOW
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN SUFFERETH VIOLENCE,
AND THE VIOLENT TAKE IT BY FORCE.
FOR ALL THE PROPHETS AND THE LAW PROPHESED
UNTIL JOHN. AND IF YE WILL RECEIVE IT, THIS IS ELIAS,
WHICH WAS FOR TO COME. (Matthew 11:11–14)

John's was the last voice of the Old Testament. Not the first voice of the New. Jesus' was the first voice of the New. And the *only* voice of the New. In the Old Testament, everybody else's voices were simply dark echoes of His. ***For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*** Now it's Jesus' turn to speak.

John himself warns his followers not to give equal weight to his words and the words of the Christ Who would follow him:

HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE.
HE THAT COMETH FROM ABOVE IS ABOVE ALL:
HE THAT IS OF THE EARTH IS EARTHLY, AND SPEAKETH
OF THE EARTH: HE THAT COMETH FROM HEAVEN IS ABOVE
ALL. AND WHAT HE HATH SEEN AND HEARD,
THAT HE TESTIFIETH; AND NO MAN RECEIVETH HIS
TESTIMONY. HE THAT HATH RECEIVED HIS TESTIMONY
HATH SET TO HIS SEAL THAT GOD IS TRUE.
FOR HE WHOM GOD HATH SENT SPEAKETH THE WORDS
OF GOD: FOR GOD GIVETH NOT THE SPIRIT BY
MEASURE UNTO HIM. (John 3:30)

He that speaketh the words of God is not John's reference to himself. It is his reference to Christ. *Don't compare His word with anyone else's word. Not even to mine*, warns John. Everyone else must decrease. Christ must increase. He alone, uniquely, *speaketh the words of God*.

Christ's words are not to be compared with anyone else's words, because Christ Himself is not to be compared with anyone else. Unlike any who came before Him, God has given Him not just a portion of His Spirit, but the fullness. This is God Himself, come in the flesh.

FOR IN HIM DWELLETH ALL THE
FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY. (Colossians 2:9)

"But," some would protest, "you do err by holding far too low a view of the Old Testament. Remember that Paul said, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16), and because the New Testament had not yet been compiled at the time, Paul was obviously referring *strictly* to the Old Testament. So, the Old is, by this word, equally applicable with the New."

Well, according to Jesus Himself, the Old Testament is divided into the law, the prophets, and the psalms (Luke 24:24); excluding the psalms, let's examine the other two. Do you think that Paul was telling young Timothy that the "ministry of death and condemnation" contained in the law was profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction?

BUT IF THE MINISTRATION OF DEATH, WRITTEN AND
ENGRAVEN IN STONES, WAS GLORIOUS, SO THAT THE
CHILDREN OF ISRAEL COULD NOT STEDFASTLY BEHOLD
THE FACE OF MOSES FOR THE GLORY OF HIS
COUNTENANCE; WHICH GLORY WAS TO BE DONE AWAY:
HOW SHALL NOT THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT
BE RATHER GLORIOUS? (2 Corinthians 3:7)

Apparently, this same Paul is of the belief that the law was the administration of mere angels (Acts 7:53) in the hand of a mere man, but the gospel, by contrast, is the administration of the Holy Spirit Himself:

WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? IT WAS
ADDED BECAUSE OF TRANSGRESSIONS, TILL THE

SEED SHOULD COME TO WHOM THE PROMISE
 WAS MADE; AND IT WAS ORDAINED BY ANGELS
 IN THE HAND OF A MEDIATOR. (Galatians 3:19)

Or do you think the *scripture* that Paul was referring to for correction and instruction was that for which one would be “cursed” if he didn’t “continue” in all of it?

FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE
 LAW ARE UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN,
 CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT
 IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK
 OF THE LAW TO DO THEM. (Galatians 3:10)

Cursing goes a little beyond correction, wouldn’t you say? I correct my sons and daughter, but I’ve never even come close to cursing them. And seeing that *the law entered that the offense might abound* (Romans 5:20) (the *offense*, of course, being sin), you’re likely to find very little *instruction in righteousness* where *sin abounds*. Those two would sort of be at odds with each other, don’t you think? You would undoubtedly find a lot of grace where sin abounds, but that grace would neither be *in* the law nor *of* the law.

And if *all* the scriptures, including the law, are good for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction, then you’ll probably need to quickly find the nearest qualified Levite and start making some major changes.

And how could the law be used for instruction in righteousness when the righteousness of God exists independently of the law?

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT
 THE LAW IS MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED BY
 THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS; (Romans 3:21)

But if the *law* does not work for *instruction in righteousness*, what of the prophets of the Old Testament? Is our doctrine, reproof, and instruction to be found solely in their words? Not according to this same Paul:

IF YE HAVE HEARD OF THE DISPENSATION OF THE
 GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME TO YOU-WARD:
 HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO
 ME THE MYSTERY; (AS I WROTE AFORE IN FEW WORDS,

WHEREBY, WHEN YE READ, YE MAY UNDERSTAND MY KNOWLEDGE IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST) WHICH IN OTHER AGES WAS NOT MADE KNOWN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN, AS IT IS NOW REVEALED UNTO HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND PROPHETS BY THE SPIRIT; THAT THE GENTILES SHOULD BE FELLOWHEIRS, AND OF THE SAME BODY, AND PARTAKERS OF HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST BY THE GOSPEL: WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF THE GRACE OF GOD GIVEN UNTO ME BY THE EFFECTUAL WORKING OF HIS POWER. UNTO ME, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS GRACE GIVEN, THAT I SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST; AND TO MAKE ALL MEN SEE WHAT IS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD HATH BEEN HID IN GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS BY JESUS CHRIST: TO THE INTENT THAT NOW UNTO THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN HEAVENLY PLACES MIGHT BE KNOWN BY THE CHURCH THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD.

(Ephesians 3:2–10)

When you read these things that I am writing, says Paul, you will recognize, for the very first time, a wisdom never before given to the sons of men, hidden in God from the beginning of the world, but now revealed to Christ's *holy apostles and prophets, to the intent that now, not then, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.* The *manifold wisdom of God* is known for the very first time, by the church, through the New Testament gospel. And it has never been known, and *cannot* be known, by anything else or through anything else.

Do you think that Paul was referring to only the Old Testament scriptures when he said to Timothy, *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able*

to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15)?

Do you think he was saying that not just Timothy, but *every* young Jewish boy had, there in the Old Testament writings of the law and the prophets, that which was able to make him *wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*? If that was so, why did Timothy, or the other Jews, or we, or *anybody* need the preaching of the gospel at all?

BUT THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW
IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, IT IS EVIDENT: FOR,
THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH. AND THE LAW
IS NOT OF FAITH: BUT, THE MAN THAT DOETH
THEM SHALL LIVE IN THEM. (Galatians 3:11–12)

There was, and is, *no* understanding of saving faith in Christ to be had in the law alone, apart from the New Testament scriptures. The gospel and its scriptures alone reveal the righteousness of God, for the very first time ever.

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED, BEING
WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.
(Romans 3:21)

Now, and only now, is the righteousness of God, *without the law*, manifested. The law and the prophets are the gospel's intelligible witnesses only *after* the gospel has been declared. Not before. Never before. Even the witnesses themselves, by their own admission, did not understand whereof they witnessed:

OF WHICH SALVATION THE PROPHETS HAVE
ENQUIRED AND SEARCHED DILIGENTLY, WHO
PROPHESIED OF THE GRACE THAT SHOULD
COME UNTO YOU: SEARCHING WHAT, OR WHAT
MANNER OF TIME THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST WHICH
WAS IN THEM DID SIGNIFY, WHEN IT TESTIFIED
BEFOREHAND THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, AND
THE GLORY THAT SHOULD FOLLOW. UNTO WHOM

IT WAS REVEALED, THAT NOT UNTO THEMSELVES,
 BUT UNTO US THEY DID MINISTER THE THINGS,
 WHICH ARE NOW REPORTED UNTO YOU BY THEM
 THAT HAVE PREACHED THE GOSPEL UNTO YOU
 WITH THE HOLY GHOST SENT DOWN FROM
 HEAVEN; WHICH THINGS THE ANGELS
 DESIRE TO LOOK INTO. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

Paul declares:

FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF
 CHRIST: FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO
 SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH;
 TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK.
 FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
 REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH: AS IT IS WRITTEN,
 THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH. (Romans 1:16–17)

Therein, in the *gospel of Christ*, and *nowhere else*, clearly for the first time, is the *righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith*. Again: the law and the prophets are only the clear and intelligible witnesses of the righteousness of God *after* the proclamation of the gospel, not before.

To blanketly say that *all scripture*, without regard to where in the order of revelation it was proclaimed, is equally profitable for instruction, reproof, doctrine and correction, is to make the words of Moses and the law compete with the words of Christ and the gospel. And they *do* compete:

FOR THEY BEING IGNORANT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS,
 AND GOING ABOUT TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN
 RIGHTEOUSNESS, HAVE NOT SUBMITTED THEMSELVES
 UNTO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. FOR CHRIST IS THE
 END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERY ONE
 THAT BELIEVETH. FOR MOSES DESCRIBETH THE
 RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF THE LAW, THAT THE MAN
 WHICH DOETH THOSE THINGS SHALL LIVE BY THEM.
 BUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF FAITH SPEAKETH
 ON THIS WISE, SAY NOT IN THINE HEART, WHO SHALL

ASCEND INTO HEAVEN? (THAT IS, TO BRING CHRIST DOWN FROM ABOVE:) OR, WHO SHALL DESCEND INTO THE DEEP? (THAT IS, TO BRING UP CHRIST AGAIN FROM THE DEAD.) BUT WHAT SAITH IT? THE WORD IS NIGH THEE, EVEN IN THY MOUTH, AND IN THY HEART: THAT IS, THE WORD OF FAITH, WHICH WE PREACH; THAT IF THOU SHALT CONFESS WITH THY MOUTH THE LORD JESUS, AND SHALT BELIEVE IN THINE HEART THAT GOD HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, THOU SHALT BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART MAN BELIEVETH UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS; AND WITH THE MOUTH CONFESSION IS MADE UNTO SALVATION. (Romans 10:3–10)

Compiled or not, Paul is obviously referring to his own writing, and the writings of the other *holy apostles and prophets* that were then circulating. Jesus had already commanded the publishing of the Gospel to all nations (Mark 13:10). There is no way, no how, that Paul is telling us to give equal *heed* to the New and Old Testaments. Holding that erroneous view is how many get themselves and their followers into deep trouble.

THEREFORE WE OUGHT TO GIVE THE MORE EARNEST HEED TO THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE HEARD, LEST AT ANY TIME WE SHOULD LET THEM SLIP. FOR IF THE WORD SPOKEN BY ANGELS WAS STEDFAST, AND EVERY TRANSGRESSION AND DISOBEDIENCE RECEIVED A JUST RECOMPENCE OF REWARD; HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE, IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION; WHICH AT THE FIRST BEGAN TO BE SPOKEN BY THE LORD, AND WAS CONFIRMED UNTO US BY THEM THAT HEARD HIM; GOD ALSO BEARING THEM WITNESS, BOTH WITH SIGNS AND WONDERS, AND WITH DIVERS MIRACLES, AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST, ACCORDING TO HIS OWN WILL? (Hebrews 2:1–4)

Concerning both the law and the prophets, both Moses and Elijah, God Himself would speak to you with an audible voice:

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM

WELL PLEASED; HEAR YE HIM.

(Matthew 17:5)

To be wise and prudent is to trot out your “Moses-said-in-Deuteronomy” verses or your “remember-John-the-Baptist-said” passages to offset and oppose what Jesus and His apostles have clearly said to the contrary. To be wise and prudent is to listen to *anyone* other than Christ and believe that you have found the truth.

Rightly dividing the word of God is not adding Jesus’ words to Moses’ and Elijah’s words, dividing by three, and giving everybody an equal place at the table. Jesus is the one and only Lord. He didn’t just say some words like everybody else. He is the Word! Unlike anybody else! And do you remember what God’s attitude toward the wise and prudent is? From the wise and prudent, God has sworn in his wrath that *aletheia* will remain hidden forever. Don’t be wise and prudent. Not even once.

Be a babe. If you’re a wordless babe when you come to Jesus, having given up your own words that always, by default, contradict His, Jesus promises to ‘unconceal’ to you what He has hidden from everyone else since before the foundation of the world. And in the very words that are by-design-guaranteed to look foolish to all the wise and prudent around you, you will joyfully discover the utterly and always-contradictory wisdom of God Himself.

Hear ye Him, and no one else, commands the Father.

Expect contradiction ahead, and nothing else, says the Son.

Because contradiction is the only kind of word Christ will ever speak to you, fully expect your definition of repentance to be a contradiction to His definition of repentance. If you don’t, you’ll still have yours when you finish, but you’ll miss His altogether.

The word used in the New Testament for “repentance,” *metanoeo*, means to “think differently, or to think afterwards, or to reconsider.” In other words, “to change your mind.”

But change your mind about what? That’s the question. No one changes his mind about *nothing*. If someone says to you, “I changed my mind,” you never simply say, “That’s great. Glad to hear it.” Instead you always ask, “About what?”

And the only answer to that question that you would never get in return

would be, “Nothing. I just changed my mind.” On the contrary, the response to your question would always be a description of what they used to think in contrast to what they now think. A change of mind is always attached to two ways of thinking: the former and the current.

What has been added to that simple Bible-word definition of repentance as “a change of mind” is the assumption that if a man really changes the way he ‘thinks’ on a particular subject, he will also change the way he ‘acts’ in regard to that subject. This added notion of a change of behavior leads to the complete idea currently held about repentance: a change of mind that always results in a change of behavior.

But the question still remains: a change of mind and behavior about what? Reformed theology provides its answer: a change of mind and behavior, it says, about ‘sins.’

‘Sins,’ it insists, must be repented of and forsaken entirely *before* God will forgive you. It’s not enough to simply change your mind about sins. You must change your behavior as well. You cannot remain in sin. The road to hell, preachers of reformed theology assure you, is paved with the good intentions of the merely changed minds who lacked equally changed behaviors.

Sins must be utterly forsaken, they insist, *before* God will ever accept you into His kingdom. *That* is the unbendable, unbreakable prerequisite; the one unchangeable, unalterable requirement, they say, for any acceptance with God. Period. No exceptions. No repentance from sins – no acceptance with God; no repentance from sins – no salvation from Christ.

“Can sinners be saved?” they ask rhetorically. “Of course they can. *If* they repent of their sins. We are sinners as well,” they assure their hearers. “But we have repented and therefore God has forgiven us. If you repent and turn from all your sins like we have, He will forgive you too. But you cannot remain in your sins and be saved.”

And without the slightest deviation from that message, that’s exactly how they always preach it.

And those who hear that message always feel deep in their own hearts that indeed, that must, of necessity, be true. After all, that’s just common sense. God is holy and man is not. God would never allow that which is unholy

into a permanent fellowship with Him, unless there was, beforehand, a total renunciation and forsaking of all sins. And that makes perfect sense.

That is, it makes sense until you see the publican in the temple. Then it gets a little confusing. Because the picture that Jesus shows of the two men who go up to the temple to pray is astonishingly contradictory to what all those preachers of “repentance of sins before forgiveness” are saying.

In Jesus’ story, it is actually the Pharisee, not the publican, who has changed his mind and his behavior about sins. In fact, his repentance from sins is exactly what he is so excited to tell God about. The publican, on the other hand, even as he prays, seems to be very much still in possession of his sins. In fact, that’s exactly what he is so distraught about.

And therein lies the contradiction between what reformed theology says about repentance and what Jesus says about it. According to reformed theology, it is the Pharisee who answers all of the questions about repentance from sins correctly. And according to reformed theology, it is the publican who answers all of them wrong.

Repentance-From-Sins-Before-Forgiveness says to the Pharisee, “You must *not* be like other men.” And the Pharisee answers happily, ***God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.***

“You must *not* be an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer or a publican.”

“I am none of those things,” the Pharisee joyfully assures Repentance-From-Sins.

“You must fast and tithe and frequent the temple as proof of your repentance,” says Repentance-From-Sins to the Pharisee.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess, the Pharisee replies. “And here I am at the temple, reminding you once again that all those things are true.”

“Then welcome to the forgiveness of your Lord. You may now, because of your repentance from sins, go down to your house justified,” says Repentance-From-Sins to the joyful Pharisee.

Repentance-From-Sins-Before-Forgiveness says to the publican, “You must not be like other men.” The publican answers in utter dismay, “I am now, at this very moment, worse than all other men. I am, even as I speak, an ex-

tortioner, unjust, and an adulterer. And I smite my breast because of who I am, not because of who I was.”

“Come back, then, only when you’re willing, like the Pharisee, to utterly forsake all those things,” declares Repentance-from-Sins to the publican. “Until then, because you have not repented and forsaken those things, you may go down to your house condemned. For everyone who repents and forsakes his sins shall be forgiven, and everyone who remains in his sins shall not.”

But amazingly, that’s precisely the opposite of the way Jesus tells it.

The notion of “repentance from sins before forgiveness” seems altogether reasonable to the reasonable mind.

And that’s precisely why it’s perfectly wrong by an entire universe: no contradiction whatsoever is required to believe it. It is exactly what you have always believed. And what you have always believed, without exception, is never right. As is the case with all aletheia, the ‘unconcealing’ concerning repentance is precisely the opposite of what you would ever have imagined it to be. Like all aletheia, this can only be known if Jesus *reveals* it to you.

Here is the astonishingly contradictory truth about repentance: there is not one single place in the entire New Testament where a sinner is ever called to repent of their sins *before* they receive forgiveness. Not one. I know you think there must be, but there isn’t.

There is indeed a New Testament call to repentance, but surprisingly, despite what you’ve been told, it is never a call for the unforgiven sinner to change his mind or his behavior about sins. It is always and only a call for the unforgiven sinner to change his mind about Christ.

Peter’s first chance to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, as the Spirit, sent by the resurrected Christ from the Father, filled him, and for the very first time gave him the anointed words to preach to the sinful world.

BUT PETER, STANDING UP WITH THE ELEVEN,
LIFTED UP HIS VOICE, AND SAID UNTO THEM,
YE MEN OF JUDAEA, AND ALL YE THAT DWELL
AT JERUSALEM, BE THIS KNOWN UNTO YOU,
AND HEarken TO MY WORDS...

(Acts 2:14)

And Peter stands up in their midst and boldly demands, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Now let me ask you a question: do you think that Peter was really saying, “Boys, you have to change your minds and behavior about sins. You can’t continue to believe that adultery, murder, stealing, and child molestation is OK. You must change your minds and your behavior about these sins before God will receive you in Jesus Christ. No repentance from sins, no forgiveness from Christ.”

You would think that since this was the very first opportunity for God to deliver His message through the disciples under the anointing of His Spirit, that He would have been sure to include the very most important part of the gospel message: repentance from sins. After all, according to reformed theology, that’s step number one. Every time! Without exception! No coming to Christ without it!

But astonishingly, as you read what Peter preaches to these men *before* he calls them to *repent*, you will find not a single mention of sins. Not one. No mention of adultery, or stealing, or homosexuality, or abortion, or lying, or pornography, or anything even remotely related to those things that the preachers of repentance from sins tell us are so critically important to God’s message to sinners. Absolutely nothing at all.

Oh, actually I take that back. He does preach against murder. But it’s only one murder in particular: the murder of Christ. Not the murder of Bob.

Now either God had a huge lapse of memory at a very inopportune moment, or repentance from sins wasn’t even in Peter’s talking points.

Which is it? Because repentance from sins, the very thing that all the preachers of reformed theology keep telling you is message number one from God to the world, is conspicuously absent here. The only repentance that Peter seems to be concerned about is a change of mind about Who Jesus is and a change of behavior in light of that.

YE MEN OF ISRAEL, HEAR THESE WORDS;
 JESUS OF NAZARETH, A MAN APPROVED OF GOD
 AMONG YOU BY MIRACLES AND WONDERS AND SIGNS,
 WHICH GOD DID BY HIM IN THE MIDST

OF YOU, AS YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW:
 HIM, BEING DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL
 AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD, YE HAVE TAKEN,
 AND BY WICKED HANDS HAVE CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN:
 WHOM GOD HATH RAISED UP, HAVING LOOSED THE
 PAINS OF DEATH: BECAUSE IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT
 HE SHOULD BE HOLDEN OF IT. (Acts 2:22–24)

In his very first opportunity to preach, the one that would set the precedent for all preaching to follow, Peter seems to want to talk exclusively about Christ.

“By wicked hands you have slain the Savior. I’m here to talk about *that* sin. That one sin. That singular sin in regard to that One single man. You don’t need to change your mind about many sins. You just need to change your mind about that sin.”

THIS JESUS HATH GOD RAISED UP,
 WHEREOF WE ALL ARE WITNESSES.
 THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL
 KNOW ASSUREDLY, THAT GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME
 JESUS, WHOM YE HAVE CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST.
 NOW WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, THEY WERE PRICKED
 IN THEIR HEART, AND SAID UNTO PETER AND TO THE
 REST OF THE APOSTLES, MEN AND BRETHREN,
 WHAT SHALL WE DO? (Acts 2:32,36–37)

Repent, says Peter. “Change your mind about the Savior. About Jesus, Who is the Christ of God.”

And so it is with every other reference in the New Testament concerning the repentance to which God calls sinners. It is always a call to change your mind about Christ. It is never a call for the sinner to change his mind and his behavior concerning sins.

But didn’t Jesus say to the woman caught in the very act of adultery, *Go and sin no more?* Yes, He did. But not first. First, He said, *Neither do I condemn thee.* Last time I checked, if God Himself says to you, *Neither do I condemn thee*, you’re not condemned any more. Instruction to the already-saved is not a call to repentance *before* forgiveness. It’s direction for

the already-forgiven.

AND EARLY IN THE MORNING HE CAME AGAIN INTO
 THE TEMPLE, AND ALL THE PEOPLE CAME UNTO HIM;
 AND HE SAT DOWN, AND TAUGHT THEM.
 AND THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES BROUGHT UNTO HIM
 A WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY; AND WHEN THEY HAD
 SET HER IN THE MIDST, THEY SAY UNTO HIM, MASTER,
 THIS WOMAN WAS TAKEN IN ADULTERY, IN THE VERY ACT.
 NOW MOSES IN THE LAW COMMANDED US, THAT SUCH
 SHOULD BE STONED: BUT WHAT SAYEST THOU?
 THIS THEY SAID, TEMPTING HIM, THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE
 TO ACCUSE HIM. BUT JESUS STOOPED DOWN, AND WITH
 HIS FINGER WROTE ON THE GROUND,
 AS THOUGH HE HEARD THEM NOT.
 WHEN THEY CONTINUED ASKING HIM,
 HE LIFTED UP HIMSELF, AND SAID UNTO THEM,
 HE THAT IS WITHOUT SIN AMONG YOU,
 LET HIM FIRST CAST A STONE AT HER.
 AND AGAIN HE STOOPED DOWN,
 AND WROTE ON THE GROUND.
 AND THEY WHICH HEARD IT,
 BEING CONVICTED BY THEIR OWN
 CONSCIENCE, WENT OUT ONE BY ONE,
 BEGINNING AT THE ELDEST, EVEN UNTO THE LAST:
 AND JESUS WAS LEFT ALONE,
 AND THE WOMAN STANDING IN THE MIDST.
 WHEN JESUS HAD LIFTED UP HIMSELF, AND SAW NONE
 BUT THE WOMAN, HE SAID UNTO HER, WOMAN,
 WHERE ARE THOSE THINE ACCUSERS?
 HATH NO MAN CONDEMNED THEE?
 SHE SAID, NO MAN, LORD. AND JESUS SAID UNTO HER,
 NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE: GO, AND SIN NO MORE.

(John 8:2–11)

Adultery stands in the very presence of Sinlessness. And Sinlessness says,

Neither do I condemn thee. Some have actually suggested that Jesus would have condemned her, wanted to condemn her, wished He could condemn her, but could not, because there were not the two law-required witnesses. But that rationale would mean that every mass murderer whose crimes were unwitnessed would be innocent before God on judgment day.

Did anybody see these secret murders, rapes and child molestations? Well, if I can't get two witnesses, you're free to go.

God doesn't need two witnesses. The Law needs two witnesses. Sin stood in the very presence of God and, without 'repentance,' was forgiven. And then, after she was forgiven, was instructed to **Go, and sin no more.** The preachers of repentance from sins have it exactly backwards. They have Jesus saying, **Go and sin no more.** *And if you'll do that, Neither do I condemn thee.*

God has many instructions and repentances to which He calls the already-forgiven. *Let him who stole, steal no more, and, Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.* And many others just like those.

But no repentance from sins for unsaved sinners. None. Not once. And not ever. *Here is the astonishing contradiction of repentance you could never have imagined before:*

It is only the 'unrepentant' from sins – only the 'unchanged and the still sinful' – whom God ever invites to a justifying relationship with Himself. Who goes down to his house justified before God? According to Jesus, *only the sinner goes home justified.* And according to Jesus, the already-repentant-from-sins Pharisee always goes home condemned.

Jesus looks at sins and sinners totally differently than you would expect:

AND IT CAME TO PASS,
 AS JESUS SAT AT MEAT IN THE HOUSE, BEHOLD,
 MANY PUBLICANS AND SINNERS CAME AND SAT DOWN
 WITH HIM AND HIS DISCIPLES.
 AND WHEN THE PHARISEES SAW IT,
 THEY SAID UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
 WHY EATETH YOUR MASTER
 WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS?
 BUT WHEN JESUS HEARD THAT, HE SAID UNTO THEM,

THEY THAT BE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN, BUT
 THEY THAT ARE SICK. BUT GO YE AND LEARN WHAT THAT
 MEANETH, I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE:
 FOR I AM NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS,
 BUT SINNERS TO REPENTANCE. (Matthew 9:10)

I am come to call only the sinners to repentance, says Jesus. But repentance from what?

Along with all the preachers of reformed theology today, the Pharisees were sure that God demanded ‘repentance from sins’ *before* He would receive a man in justifying forgiveness. And consequently, as they watched Jesus eating with publicans and sinners who obviously had *not* repented of their sins, they were confused. This was definitely not how it was supposed to work.

And when Jesus gave them His answer to their question about this seeming discrepancy, it was not at all what they expected to hear. And unless you’re God, it’s not what you expected to hear either.

Jesus explains to the altogether-astonished Pharisees that, unless you have a ‘physician to patient’ point of view, you don’t really have God’s point of view about sins at all. You just have your own.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, declares God. *Not once. And not ever.*

According to Jesus, God views sins exactly and only like the physician views sickness. And since He’s the only Expert in the room, whether you like it or not, agree with it or not, or think it’s accurate or not is wholly immaterial. God thinks it’s accurate. According to Jesus, that’s God’s one and only point of view on sins and sinners.

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice* [“a primary word; the absolute negative”], “no,” *sacrifice*, declares Jesus. This Doctor charges nothing in advance for His services. You don’t pay for God’s mercy with your sacrifice. *Don’t you understand?* says Jesus. *I pay for God’s mercy with My sacrifice.*

But go ye and learn what that meaneth. Jesus explains that, with God, sin is as a sickness and sinners are as the sick. And the very thing that makes the physician compassionate toward the sick is the same thing that makes God compassionate toward the sinful. The physician knows that men never

choose to be sick. They don't have to. Sickness chooses men. And likewise, God knows that men never choose to be sinners. They don't have to. Sin chooses men.

WHEREFORE, AS BY ONE MAN SIN ENTERED INTO
THE WORLD, AND DEATH BY SIN;
AND SO DEATH PASSED UPON ALL MEN,
FOR THAT ALL HAVE SINNED:
(FOR UNTIL THE LAW SIN WAS IN THE WORLD:
BUT SIN IS NOT IMPUTED WHEN THERE IS NO LAW.
NEVERTHELESS DEATH REIGNED FROM ADAM TO MOSES,
EVEN OVER THEM THAT HAD NOT SINNED AFTER THE
SIMILITUDE OF ADAM'S TRANSGRESSION, WHO IS THE
FIGURE OF HIM THAT WAS TO COME...)

(Romans 5:12–14)

Adam chose sin. *By one man sin entered into the world.*

Now sin chooses Adam. *So death passed upon all men.* Every time. Without exception. Adam had a choice. But absolutely nobody else does.

But the Pharisees who watched Jesus eat with the unrepentant sinners that day believed they were altogether more *wise and prudent* than Jesus. And so do the preachers of “repentance from sins before forgiveness.” Neither of them mind contradicting Jesus at all. Because they both know what Jesus obviously does not know: they both know that sin is *really* just a choice.

And in their collective wisdom, they know that anytime a man *really* decides that he wants to, he can simply quit choosing to do all those awful sins. He can repent from those sins. Turn and forsake those sins. Just like they have. In their minds, they are sure that their own justified relationship with God is the simple product of their own wise choices of non-sinful behavior. And they are very thankful that God has made them so wise. “Imagine someone thinking that sinners have no choice in the matter! Ridiculous!” And they can't wait to get up to the temple to express their heartfelt gratitude: **God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.**

“Repent from your sins,” the Pharisee calls out to the world of sinners around him. “Choose as I have chosen. Do as I have done. Turn from your sins as I have turned from my sins and forsake your sins as I have forsaken mine.

And if you do, God will receive you, exactly as He has received me.”

But Jesus says precisely the opposite.

Like it or not, agree with it or not, according to the unconcealment in Jesus’ words, sin is as sickness and sinners are as the sick. And the sick cannot heal themselves. They need a physician.

Listen carefully: if you really believe that men “choose to sin” and therefore can “choose not to sin” if they *really* want to, then according to these words of Jesus, you would also have to believe that men “choose to be sick” and therefore can “choose not to be sick” if they *really* want to. Because, according to the words of Jesus to the Pharisees, sin is as sickness and sinners are as the sick.

And if you’re really convinced that men “choose to be sinners,” then according to the words of Jesus, you need to march right down to your local Children’s Hospital and demand that all those sweet little children down there who are “choosing” all that cancer and leukemia stop right now.

In fact, you’ll have to demand, in the name of Jesus, that they immediately repent from all their sicknesses and forsake them!

And while you’re there, with your most appropriate “repent from all of your sicknesses” voice and countenance, you can inform all those sweet little children that their doctor is so angry with them for “choosing” to be sick that he can barely restrain himself from coming down there and finishing the very job that their “chosen” disease has only begun.

And while you’re at it, you can read them some excerpts from your very favorite sermon: “The Sick in the Hands of an Angry Physician.”

But if you would never imagine to say that to all those poor “sick children,” then why would you think it perfectly acceptable, and even commendable in the sight of God Himself, to say it to all of those poor “sinful children”?

Do you not understand? Jesus says the whole world is God’s very own Children’s Hospital! And all the sinners in the world are God’s very own poor sick children!

And just as not a single one of those sick children ever “chose” to be sick, but rather sickness chose them, so also He knows that not a single one of His sinful children ever “chose” to be a sinner. They didn’t have to. Sin “chose”

them.

And Jesus declares that the sinful, who are sick with the sin that they never chose, need a compassionate New Testament Physician like Him to heal them.

Not a wanna-be Old Testament prophet like you to condemn them.

Preaching “God will receive a man only *after* repentance from sins” is like telling those sick children at the Hospital that the only time at which the doctor will treat them is after they’re *not* sick any more!

You who preach “repentance from sins before forgiveness” need to either demand that the sick stop “choosing to be sick,” or decide to *never* again demand that the sinners stop “choosing to be sinners.” Be consistent. Either do it with both, or do it with neither.

You know why you keep demanding that others stop “choosing sin”? Because, like the Pharisee, you think that’s what you’ve done.

“Health is simply a choice,” you keep assuring all the sinfully sick around you. “You must choose to be well, like I have.”

And though you have neither the miraculous power of the Great Physician, nor an ounce of His divine compassion, you keep striding the halls of His Hospital, commanding every sick person you meet to ***Rise, take up thy bed and walk.***

And when they don’t, instead of confessing that you’re practicing medicine without a license, you angrily leave them with your expert diagnosis: that they are really dying of cancer simply because they have “chosen to.”

You sir, are a fake and a fraud; you’re not a physician, you’re a patient! The real Doctor is on His way to mend and to heal without demanding payment in advance like you do. He will receive them with no sacrifice on their part, having paid for their treatment in full already.

And of this one thing we may be absolutely certain: the Administrator of this Gracious Hospital, Who loves the sinfully sick so much that He paid their hospital bill with His Son’s very own blood, will very shortly have Hospital Security permanently remove you and your violating ignorance from these premises once and for all.

Do you really know why Jesus came not *to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*?

Because there are no righteous. **No, not one.** And that includes, or rather excludes, even you, sir. (Romans 3:10)

In God's eyes, there are only two kinds of people in this world: sinners, and sinners who lie about being sinners. Sinners who smite their breast and admit it, and sinners who smite the breasts of other sinners, and deny it.

For you who preach that a man must "repent and forsake his sins *before* God will receive him," I have only one question:

Have you repented and forsaken your own sins?

You who preach repentance from sins, do you *ever* still sin yourself?

Because if you *do*, your diagnosis of everyone else around you is seriously flawed.

If we find out that you *do* still sin, then I'll need to ask you on behalf of all the sick sinners of the world, what happened to all that repentance you preached to everyone else?

What happened to all that utter forsaking of sins that you said was an *absolute* requirement before God would receive you?

By the way, that rat of an apostle John has already outed you. He says you definitely *do* sin:

IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NO SIN,
WE DECEIVE OURSELVES,
AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. (1 John 1:8)

And as my dear mother used to remind me frequently, "Son, if you say you have no sin, you may deceive yourself, but you definitely deceive no one else." And if you say you have no sin, John says *the truth* of God is not in you. That's just John's way of saying, "You're a freakin' liar." John's always been nice like that.

I'm not understanding this. Maybe you can explain it to me:

According to your "repentance from sins" message, God won't receive all those sinners out there in the world without an utter forsaking of all their

sins. Right? Do I have that right?

Well that means that, if you who preach that message still have any sins of your own at all, either He hasn't really received you like you say He has, or He's receiving you *while* you still have sins.

Which is it? It has to be one or the other. It can't be both.

You wouldn't be running around telling other people that God requires them to do what you yourself have not really done, would you?

Are you saying that you forsook all those sins *before* He received you, and then you 'un-forsook' them *after* He received you? I'm assuming that any sins you still have aren't new ones that you invented *after* He received you. Right? Any sins that we would find that you have now would be the same old sins that you had before you say He received you. Right?

So, answer the question: do you, or do you not, ever *still* sin?

And if you *do* ever still sin, do you at the same time still go around telling everyone else that God would never, under any circumstance whatsoever, receive them without an utter forsaking of all their sins?

Either your doctrine of "repentance from sins" is erroneous and you were wrong about God's pre-reception requirements, or you yourself are rejected by it because of your remaining sins. Which is it?

Were you wrong *before*, or wrong *now*?

And if you who preach repentance from sins still sin after you have come to Christ, how is it that you could still be thinking about, or, for crying out loud, still *talking* about, anyone else's sins but your own? Shouldn't you be just totally beside yourself with shock and surprise that any of those sins that you thought you forsook before He forgave you are still there?

This wouldn't be an example of that bizarre logic that says, "I don't want to tell sinners that Christians still sin, lest sinners use that as an excuse to keep sinning," would it? God forbid! Because there's a word for those who require one thing from others publicly, but another from themselves privately. And no, it's not the word *Christian*.

"So you're saying that no repentance from sins is necessary for God to forgive me?"

You better hope so, sinner.

You who preach that a man must forsake all his sins before he comes to Christ, do you really think that in God's eyes, one sin is greater than another? That what you count as your well-hidden, insignificant, small and occasional sins, are somehow acceptable with God, but those that you count as someone else's open, significant, big-all-the-time sins are not?

Do you really think that God employs some kind of sliding scale on which He grades sin, from good to bad and from better to worse? That yours are the 'good' sins at the top of the scale and those 'other kind' are the really 'bad' sins at the very bottom?

You who preach "repentance and the forsaking of all sins before God will receive a man," do you not know that if you break the law yourself, in even one tiny part, you're guilty of breaking the whole law?

FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL KEEP THE WHOLE LAW,
AND YET OFFEND IN ONE POINT, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL.

(James 2:10)

You who preach "repentance from sins," do you not know that the singular purpose of everything the law says is to get you, the one who still has *any* sins of his own, to shut up and quit talking about anyone else's sins?

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE LAW
SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW:
THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

(Romans 3:19)

What things soever the law saith. That means everything. Everything the law says, without exception, every jot and every tittle, has only one goal in mind: to produce in you a completely "muted guilt."

It saith to them who are under the law. That's you.

That every mouth may be stopped. That's your mouth.

And all the world may become guilty before God. Again, that's you.

"Not one single word out of you, sinner," says the law.

“Especially about someone else’s sins.”

And do you not understand that if we can still hear you talking about anyone else’s sins when you still have even the ‘smallest’ sin of your own, then the very law by which you are condemning them obviously still hasn’t done it’s work in *you*?

Because if it had, you’d shut up and be guilty like everybody else.

But if we can still hear you talking about someone else’s sins, then we know with absolute certainty, by the sure testimony of the very law by which you are judging them, that you’re either sinless or you’re a hypocrite.

Which is it? There is no third category for the one whose mouth is still moving.

And John, the rat, has already given you up: we know you’re not sinless.

Do you not know that unless you are exactly, precisely, completely, without one single tiny flaw, as sinless as Christ Himself, you fall short, and you and get lumped right in along with all the rest of the sinners? right along with all those sinners that you couldn’t imagine spending even one minute of your time with? much less, like Jesus, actually inviting to dinner?

Do you not know that Jesus said that there is only one ‘worst kind’ of sinner: the sinner who insists he’s not a sinner at all? (Matthew 23:12–39)

Do you not know that Jesus said it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for that kind of sinner? (Mark 6:11)

Do you not know that *that’s* the only kind of sinner who cannot go down to his house justified? ever?

“Well, are you saying that I can just go out and commit adultery all I want to, and murder as many people as I want to, and God will forgive me without any repentance from sins?”

No, of course that’s not what I’m saying.

I’m saying you *already* commit adultery all you want to, and you *already* murder as many people as you want to. I’m saying you’re *already* a serial adulterer. And you’re *already* a serial murderer. You forget that God counts your lust as adultery and your anger as murder (Matthew 5:22, 5:28).

“Well, grace is not a license to sin!” you may protest.

Really? Then what are all of yours? Unlicensed sins?

Grace may not be a license to sin, but sin is certainly a license to grace.

And if it's not, you're in deeper trouble than you can possibly imagine, sinner.

I'm going to show you that if you preach "repentance from sins before forgiveness," then you have it exactly backwards: that it is the very *presence* of sins, not the *absence* of sins, that attracts God to you in the first place. That sinfulness is actually the only prerequisite for God to receive a man into a loving relationship with Himself.

Do you really think that some sins of the flesh will buy you a seat in hell, but others won't? That *their* large ones will, but *your* small ones won't?

Let's follow that line of thinking to its absolutely absurd and illogical end. May I get just completely ridiculous with you for a moment?

If you're going to condemn anyone to hell over unrepented sins of the flesh, you must condemn not just *some* sins of the flesh, but *all* sins of the flesh. Come on! Be consistent! Don't be a hypocrite by consigning some people to hell because of their sins of the flesh, while at the same time giving others a free pass. Don't just pick on the homosexuals, and the abortionists and the pornographers and the other easy targets. Don't be afraid to call them like you actually see them. If you're going to include *anybody's* sins of the flesh as condemning them to hell, go ahead and include *everybody's* sins of the flesh. Do it right! Do it completely! You'll feel much better if you just get consistent about the whole thing. And it will be far easier than you think. You can just start with the really obvious ones.

In the most absurd scenario I can imagine, using your own logic and your own sliding scale of "repentance from sins before forgiveness," would there be any sight, anywhere, that would beg more for the outright condemnation of hell itself than the overweight preacher who stands in his pulpit and rails on the sins of the flesh in others? Under your definition, the fat preacher is the very poster-child of what he insists cannot even exist in the kingdom of God: that is, one who claims the forgiveness of Christ while at the same time practicing his sin.

Your absurd "repentance from sins before forgiveness" standard could most easily and effectively and un-hypocritically be applied right there. You who

preach “repentance from sins before forgiveness,” it’s time to call a spade a spade. Don’t call it a “a spatulous device for abrading the surface of the soil.” Just call it a spade.

Call a hypocrite a hypocrite. Don’t call a fat preacher who rails on sins of the flesh in others anything other than the hypocrite that he really is. Come on! This is the perfect place to begin being consistent in your condemnation. Just start with all the fat preachers in the world. You know the ones. Those who insist that others must “repent of all their sins of the flesh before God will forgive them,” while at the same time being obvious-to-everyone sinful over-eaters themselves.

These would be the perfect target for a genuinely non-hypocritical approach to your doctrine of “repentance from sins before forgiveness.” And to be perfectly fair, you would need to get just as serious with the fat guys as you do with all those “other kind” of sinners you’ve been picking on.

To follow your “repentance from sins before forgiveness” approach to its absurdly illogical end, you would want to start by telling them that there weren’t any fat preachers in the Bible. According to Paul, **No, not one**. And you could quote an Old Testament scripture to prove your point.

AND HE SHALL TAKE ALL HIS FAT FROM HIM,
AND BURN IT UPON THE ALTAR. (Leviticus 4:19)

Following your illogical logic, you could inform them that being fat is a wickedly unnatural state, and that babies, being born fat, are indeed the verifiable proof of original sin. And you could remind them that, just as surely as God loves the righteously skinny, He at the same time surely hates the sinfully fat.

And pressing your absurd logic even further, you would want to immediately move to get some laws passed against all those corpulent doughboys who preach against the sins of others while obviously still indulging themselves.

You could lobby Congress to pass a law that unless you had 0% bodyfat, it would be illegal for you to preach sermons about anyone else’s sins of the flesh. You could authorize the “pinch-an-inch police” to enforce your new law. And while you were at it, you could get some legislation passed to shut down all those abominable and nefarious Mexican food restaurants

that openly promote such licentious and sinful behavior. Of course, only the righteously skinny Congressmen and Senators would support you, but hey, that's what God raised 'em up for. To turn America from its sins!

"With my own eyes," you could testify before Congress, "I've seen those fat preachers in those restaurants of ill repute, right in front of God and man, eating those chimichangas slathered with guacamole, sometimes two at a time. And enjoying their weighty and wayward wickedness right in front the whole world. Sporting themselves in their feasts, glorying in their shame. And actually praying God's blessing upon themselves and their comisceants before they sinned together!"

WHO KNOWING THE JUDGMENT OF GOD,
 THAT THEY WHICH COMMIT SUCH THINGS ARE
 WORTHY OF DEATH, NOT ONLY DO THE SAME,
 BUT HAVE PLEASURE IN THEM THAT DO THEM.

(Romans 1:32)

And following your absurd line of logic to its most unnatural end, of course, you couldn't stop with just the fat preachers. In order to be consistent, those of you who preach "repentance of sins before forgiveness" would need to include *everybody* over the 0% mark, even if it was your own mother, as strictly consigned to a heavyweight's hell.

AND A MAN'S FOES SHALL BE THEY OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD.

(Matthew 10:36)

In fact, to do it right, you would probably need to start your own First Church of the Sanctified and Skinny. Then you could be unwaveringly non-hypocritical in your message of "repentance from all sins of the flesh before God will forgive you."

An utter forsaking of sins could be an utter forsaking of all junk food. Under penalty of excommunication, no more twinkies for the true disciples. Your repentance message could come complete with a special "God's True Repentance Diet" specializing in only low-carb righteousness.

A calorie count could take the place of confession. And sins could be measured by the pound. Instead of an altar at the front of your church, you could have a scale. As the weight went up, proportionately, the righteousness would go down.

No fat people in your church, you could preach. And definitely no fat people in your heaven.

And the walls of your church could be covered with mirrors so that you and your followers could always admire your own righteousness as you passed by.

Of course, you would do it with the lights off. You always look so much skinnier in the dark.

“God doesn’t accept their kind,” you could assure all the other skinny saints as you pointed to all those outside your church who were so obviously overweight and so obviously unrepentant.

And *that* would be a real and unhypocritical call to “repentance from sins before forgiveness.” Unfortunately, a preposterously absurd one.

I’m going to show you that Jesus *only* invites the publicans and sinners to eat with Him. By His very own admission, His only goal is to hang out with the big fat sinners. And with Jesus, the bigger, the better.

The doctrine of “repentance from sins before forgiveness” causes you to be more concerned about *looks* than you are about *life*. More concerned about appearances than about reality.

Imagine a wife with her children in a hospital waiting room, anxiously awaiting news about her very ill husband. The doctor finally emerges from the emergency room, approaches the nervous family with a broad smile and announces cheerfully, “I’ve got some good news and some bad news.”

The wife, heartened by the doctor’s surprisingly cheerful manner, smiles back and says, “What’s the good news?”

The doctor replies, “I apologize. Actually I have woefully understated myself. It’s not good news. It’s *great* news!”

“You know that crooked nose that your husband had? It’s straight now! Perfectly so! We brought in our top plastic surgeon and got it fixed up beautifully. And that bald spot he had? Gone! Our top hair transplant doctor gave him the finest, fullest, healthiest head of hair you’ve ever seen. And that extra weight that he had around his midsection? Gone as well! Our excellent weight specialist took care of that!”

“That’s wonderful,” beams the wife. “And the bad news?”

“Oh,” replies the doctor. “The bad news is... he’s dead.”

“But,” he says, smiling even more broadly, “He never looked better!”

Sinners are dead. And the dead are not *supposed* to look good. They’re supposed to look dead for goodness’ sake! Why are you trying to make the dead look good?

Why would you want to put braces on the teeth of a cadaver? Sure, he may have straight teeth when you’re done, but you’ll never see him smile. He’s dead!

And unless you’re a mortician, you shouldn’t spend even one minute of time worrying about how the dead look.

You know what they do with people who dress up the dead and pretend they’re alive? They put them in a special place where they can get some help for that problem.

And do you know where they put the people who talk to the dead as though the dead can actually hear them? That’s right. Same place. Next room over.

Stop worrying that somewhere out there, sinners are sinning. Sinners sin. That’s what sinners do. That’s *why* they’re sinners, for goodness’ sake. Let them sin. What do you expect them to do?

God is not in the business of making the dead look better. God is in the business of making the dead alive. You need to be in that business with Him.

It is both a ridiculous waste of time and a psychotically dangerous practice to try to make the dead look better *before* they’re alive. You can make the dead look better later. *After* they’re alive.

Stop marching around with your signs, protesting the sins of *other* sinners.

“Can you believe what these dreadful sinners are doing this time?” you ask your fellow protesters.

“These dead people are acting like they’re actually dead for goodness’ sake! And that’s totally unacceptable!”

Next time you want to protest about some sin that sinners are sinning somewhere, take your signs, go down to your local graveyard and march

around there. That audience will hear you *exactly* as well as the other one does. In case your forgot, the dead are deaf.

“Repentance from sins before forgiveness” turns you into a ‘Martha.’ In the presence of the Resurrection Himself, you’ll still be voicing your concern over how the dead smell.

One minute before Jesus raises her brother Lazarus from the dead, Martha is complaining that he stinks. *Well of course he stinks, Martha. He’s dead for goodness’ sake!* And one minute after Jesus raises him, he *still* stinks. Only now, that terrible smell of death is the wonderful smell of life (John 11:39).

The dead stink. Every time. All the time. Without exception. Let them stink!

That’s what the dead do. Even the newly alive from the dead stink. Even in the very presence of Jesus they stink. Stop worrying about the stink. And stop talking to the dead as though they can hear even a single word you’re saying.

The only word that God ever says to the dead is ***Come forth.*** Before that, He says absolutely nothing. And neither should you. Keep your mouth shut. Keep your “Let’s get you all dressed up and pretend you’re really alive before Jesus gets here” comments to yourself. Even though they can’t hear you, those kind of comments irritate even the dead.

Jesus didn’t command them to ***loose him and let him go*** before He raised Lazarus from the dead. And He’s not saying that to you either. Stop trying to reform and rehabilitate the sinful world around you. Don’t waste one minute of your time trying to get everybody in the graveyard all gussied up to *look* like they’re alive before Jesus makes them so. Let them be dead until He makes them alive.

And remember, it’s Lazarus who gets raised from the dead. Not his clothes. We’ll get him a new suit later. Stop shopping for the dead!

The doctrine that says that “sinners must repent from their sins before God will forgive them” is a confusion of cause and effect. You don’t get clean so that you can take a bath. You take a bath so that you can get clean. You don’t get well so you can go to the doctor. You go to the doctor so you can get well. You don’t get skinny so that you can go on a diet. You diet so that you can get skinny. And you don’t repent because you’ve gotten dirty

with sin. You repent of having ever imagined that you were clean in the first place.

That's real repentance. And that's the only repentance that God ever calls a sinner to. He calls that kind of repentance, *repentance from dead works* (Hebrews 6:1). And astonishingly, *repentance from dead works* is not a repentance from sins at all. It's actually a repentance from righteousness.

The primary argument for "repentance from sins before forgiveness" comes from Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Most people are familiar with it, and thousands upon multiplied thousands of sermons have been given to prove that the wayward son in the parable, who represents sinful man, must forsake the pigpen of his sins *before* his father, who represents God, will ever receive him back in forgiveness.

But let me show you why the one thing this parable could *never* be about is "repentance from sins before God will receive you."

THEN DREW NEAR UNTO HIM ALL THE PUBLICANS AND
SINNERS FOR TO HEAR HIM. AND THE PHARISEES
AND SCRIBES MURMURED, SAYING,
THIS MAN RECEIVETH SINNERS, AND EATETH WITH THEM.
(Luke 15:1–2)

Did you see that? The very first two sentences that introduce us to the parable tell us already, before we even read the parable itself, that what follows could not possibly be about repentance from sins.

And here's the reason why:

When Jesus heard the scribes and Pharisees murmuring, do you think that He would have turned to them and said:

Don't worry boys. Just give me about two minutes, and when I get through with this parable, these sinners will know beyond any doubt that God will never receive them unless they first repent and forsake all their sins.

Do you know why He couldn't possibly have said that?

Because if He had, the Pharisees would have cried out, "Too late!"

"It's too late to tell them 'now' that God will never receive them unless they first repent!"

“Because You’ve *already* received them, *before* they repented!

“That’s why we’re so upset! You’ve ‘already’ received them. You’re ‘already’ eating with them. And they haven’t even repented yet!”

The word “receiveth” in the Greek is a powerful word. It means to “eagerly await, or warmly welcome.” It’s the very word used to describe those who eagerly anticipate the promises of God and those who wait in eager hope of the return of Christ.

Do you not understand that Jesus is God in the flesh? And that if Jesus eagerly receives sinners and eats with them *before* they repent of their sins – like He does right here before the incredulous eyes of the Pharisees – it’s because God the Father eagerly does the same?

Where’s all that “repentance from sins *before* God will receive you” in what Jesus is doing here? Where’s the utter forsaking of sins that you told everyone was absolutely necessary before Christ would receive you? “Repentance from sins before God will receive you” is obviously not Jesus’ message as far as these Pharisees are concerned.

That would have undoubtedly been the Pharisees’ message to these publicans and sinners, but not Jesus’ message.

If God is *already* eating with you, then He’s *already* received you. No question about it. And in that case, the Pharisees have it exactly right: just like these publicans and sinners, you’ve *already* been received *before* you repented of your sins.

Otherwise, if this parable was really about the necessity to repent and forsake your sins before God will receive you, what the heck are the scribes and Pharisees so upset about?

Do you think that when Jesus got through with this parable, the Pharisees said to Him, “Alright, finally! It’s about time! At last, you told these sinners what we’ve been trying to tell them the whole time! That they have to repent and forsake all their sins *before* God will receive them! Good job Jesus!”

Nope. Too late. Too late for the parable to ever mean that. Jesus has already received them *before* they repented. And the Pharisees know it. And they are livid about it.

Most people don’t know that this parable is really about two sons, not just

one. But when you make it about “repentance from sins before forgiveness,” you must make it about only one son. The sinful son. The other son in the story, the stay-at-home obedient son, becomes a meaningless footnote or an afterthought at best.

But when you understand what the parable is really about, you’ll be able to keep both sons directly in your line of sight at all times, exactly like Jesus did when He was telling it.

So here’s what the parable of the prodigal son is really about:

The younger son, the prodigal, does indeed represent sinful man: that’s the publicans and the sinners that Jesus is already eagerly receiving and with whom He is already eating.

The older son, the one who stayed home, represents those *who trusted in themselves that they are righteous and despise others* because of their works: that’s the scribes and Pharisees who are murmuring and complaining about everybody’s sins but their own.

And the real subject of the parable is not the two sons at all. Like all the parables of Jesus, the real subject of the story is the father and his relationship with both sons. And the father in the story represents God.

And because this story is spoken directly to the scribes and Pharisees while in the presence of the publicans and the sinners, the object of the parable is to contrast the grace of God that is being *received* by the sinful publicans with the grace of God that is being *rejected* by the self-righteous Pharisees.

That’s the real point of the parable. It’s not about the need to repent from ‘sins.’ It’s about the need to repent from ‘righteousness.’ The sinful publicans, like the prodigal son, have already repented and forsaken their own righteousness. Their obvious sinfulness makes it easy for them to do so. The Pharisees on the other hand, like the not-prodigal son, still have their own righteousness, and they’re not about to forsake it! Their not-so-obvious sinfulness makes it impossible for them to do so.

This parable is God’s defining word on who *will* receive His grace and who *won’t* receive His grace, even though everyone is offered it. And here’s the *My thoughts are not your thoughts* truth that you never even imagined before:

From the prodigal, we learn the astonishing fact that sin actually *weakens*

resistance to the grace of God and causes sinners to receive it. Just like the publicans and sinners are receiving it right here.

And from the elder son we learn the astonishing fact that self-righteous obedience actually *strengthens* resistance to the grace of God and causes the self-righteous to reject it. Just like the scribes and Pharisees are rejecting it right here.

Simply said: only sinners receive grace. And non-sinners reject grace. That's the message of this parable. Think in those terms now as you read it. Watch the sinful son receive the grace of his father, and watch the non-sinful son reject it:

AND HE SAID, A CERTAIN MAN HAD TWO SONS:
AND THE YOUNGER OF THEM SAID TO HIS FATHER,
FATHER, GIVE ME THE PORTION OF GOODS THAT
FALLETH TO ME. AND HE DIVIDED UNTO THEM HIS LIVING.
AND NOT MANY DAYS AFTER THE YOUNGER SON GATHERED
ALL TOGETHER, AND TOOK HIS JOURNEY INTO A FAR
COUNTRY, AND THERE WASTED HIS SUBSTANCE WITH
RIOTOUS LIVING. AND WHEN HE HAD SPENT ALL, THERE
AROSE A MIGHTY FAMINE IN THAT LAND;
AND HE BEGAN TO BE IN WANT.
AND HE WENT AND JOINED HIMSELF TO A CITIZEN OF THAT
COUNTRY; AND HE SENT HIM INTO HIS FIELDS TO FEED
SWINE. AND HE WOULD FAIN HAVE FILLED HIS BELLY WITH
THE HUSKS THAT THE SWINE DID EAT: AND NO MAN GAVE
UNTO HIM. AND WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF, HE SAID,
HOW MANY HIRED SERVANTS OF MY FATHER'S HAVE BREAD
ENOUGH AND TO SPARE, AND I PERISH WITH HUNGER!
I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER, AND WILL SAY UNTO
HIM, FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN,
AND BEFORE THEE, AND AM NO MORE WORTHY TO BE
CALLED THY SON: MAKE ME AS ONE OF THY HIRED
SERVANTS. AND HE AROSE, AND CAME TO HIS FATHER.
BUT WHEN HE WAS YET A GREAT WAY OFF,
HIS FATHER SAW HIM, AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN,

AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM.
 AND THE SON SAID UNTO HIM, FATHER, I HAVE SINNED
 AGAINST HEAVEN, AND IN THY SIGHT, AND AM NO MORE
 WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON.
 BUT THE FATHER SAID TO HIS SERVANTS, BRING FORTH
 THE BEST ROBE, AND PUT IT ON HIM;
 AND PUT A RING ON HIS HAND, AND SHOES ON HIS FEET:
 AND BRING HITHER THE FATTED CALF, AND KILL IT;
 AND LET US EAT, AND BE MERRY: FOR THIS MY SON WAS
 DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.
 AND THEY BEGAN TO BE MERRY.
 NOW HIS ELDER SON WAS IN THE FIELD: AND AS HE CAME
 AND DREW NIGH TO THE HOUSE, HE HEARD MUSICK
 AND DANCING. AND HE CALLED ONE OF THE SERVANTS,
 AND ASKED WHAT THESE THINGS MEANT.
 AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, THY BROTHER IS COME;
 AND THY FATHER HATH KILLED THE FATTED CALF,
 BECAUSE HE HATH RECEIVED HIM SAFE AND SOUND.
 AND HE WAS ANGRY, AND WOULD NOT GO IN:
 THEREFORE CAME HIS FATHER OUT, AND INTREATED HIM.
 AND HE ANSWERING SAID TO HIS FATHER, LO,
 THESE MANY YEARS DO I SERVE THEE, NEITHER
 TRANSGRESSED I AT ANY TIME THY COMMANDMENT: AND
 YET THOU NEVER GAVEST ME A KID, THAT I MIGHT MAKE
 MERRY WITH MY FRIENDS: BUT AS SOON AS THIS THY SON
 WAS COME, WHICH HATH DEVoured THY LIVING WITH
 HARLOTS, THOU HAST KILLED FOR HIM THE FATTED CALF.
 AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, SON, THOU ART EVER WITH ME,
 AND ALL THAT I HAVE IS THINE. IT WAS MEET THAT WE
 SHOULD MAKE MERRY, AND BE GLAD:
 FOR THIS THY BROTHER WAS DEAD,
 AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; AND WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.

(Luke 15:11–32)

In the preaching of “repentance from sins before forgiveness,” much is al-

ways made about the younger son “coming to himself” in the pigpen, as though that is where the real repentance has occurred. But think about what the younger son actually said when he *came to himself*:

“My life is terrible. The workers back at my father’s house have it better than I do. I know what I’ll do: I’ll go back and tell my father I’ve sinned against both heaven and him and ask him for a job.”

And you call that repentance?

“My life sucks” is not repentance. If it was, every lottery ticket bought would be an act of divine contrition.

“Others have it better than me” is not repentance. Otherwise, envy would be the prerequisite virtue for all repentant acceptance with God.

And a concocted scheme to tell your potential employer exactly what he needs to hear so that he’ll be convinced to give you a job is not repentance either.

Otherwise, the offer of “will work for righteousness” would get the party started in heaven.

Armed with the scheme of trading his works for his father’s benefits, just like all the rest of the hirelings back on the farm, the prodigal begins his journey back home.

BUT WHEN HE WAS YET A GREAT WAY OFF,
HIS FATHER SAW HIM, AND HAD COMPASSION,
AND RAN, AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM.

Don’t even begin to imagine that Jesus tells this story as if the father who is running to the son *already* knows what is in the mind of his son.

If you do, you’ll attribute to the father’s knowledge exactly what Jesus purposely excludes. You’ll have the father looking at the boy as though he already knows what the boy is thinking. And Jesus is careful to let you know that he doesn’t.

The “repentance from sins before God will receive you” viewpoint imagines that the father in the story is responding to some change of mind that he *already* knows about in the son.

But Jesus is careful to have the father's attitude toward the son be totally independent of anything that the son is thinking. His compassion is kindled toward the boy simply at the sight of him while he is still *yet a great way off*. That's a critical element of this story. The father does what he does *before* he knows what the son is thinking. For all the father knows, the son may be coming to ask for more money.

Jesus carefully tells the story in such a way that the father knows nothing of what is in the mind of the son. He doesn't need to. His love was never dependent on what the son ever thought anyway.

And if you want to really screw up your theology and utterly destroy the real intent of the gospel message of Christ, just have the love of God be contingent on, or responsive to, *anything* outside of the love of God itself.

If you make the love of God dependent on anything that man brings to God, you'll screw up the message beyond repair.

Listen carefully: the only thing man *ever* brings to God, just like this son does in Jesus' story, is a "will work for righteousness" bargain. The only thing that man *ever* brings to God, just like this son does, is his best Monty-Hall-like, "Let's make a deal."

And this is the entire point of Jesus' story: it is only the sinner who can ever be convinced that God rejects his offer of works. The self-righteously obedient, as we will see with the elder son, cannot be convinced at all.

You don't somehow, with repentance from sins, 'get' God to love you. He's not waiting at home for you to show up with your proofs of repentance. He's running to you. He already loves you. Just like this father already loved his son, independent of anything the son would ever do or had ever done.

That's how fathers already feel. Every time. Without exception.

FOR WHEN WE WERE YET WITHOUT STRENGTH,
 IN DUE TIME CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY.
 FOR SCARCELY FOR A RIGHTEOUS MAN WILL ONE DIE:
 YET PERADVENTURE FOR A GOOD MAN SOME WOULD
 EVEN DARE TO DIE. BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE
 TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS,

CHRIST DIED FOR US.

(Romans 5:6–8)

For whom did He die? The godly or the ungodly? *Christ died for the ungodly.*

And whom does He receive? The godly, like the Pharisees, or the ungodly, like the publicans? *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die.*

And when does He die? While we are godly or while we are sinners? *While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

The word “commendeth,” *sunistao*, means “to stand together.”

When did God, with His love and compassion, “stand together” with us? When we were sinners or when we were non-sinners? The astonishingly contradictory answer is, *while we were yet sinners.*

Right in the big middle of our big sinful mess. Just like the father in the parable. Not when there was a change in us. Not when there was even a glimmer of hope for a change in us. Not when we were bathed and washed and clean. But while we were still dead and dirty in sins. That’s when He loved us and saved us, says Paul. It’s all and only about His love for us. It’s never about our love for Him.

AND YOU HATH HE QUICKENED,
WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS.

(Ephesians 2:1)

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY,
FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,
EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS, HATH QUICKENED
US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST, (BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED;)
AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER, AND MADE US
SIT TOGETHER IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS:
THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHEW THE
EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS
TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS. FOR BY GRACE
ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF
YOURSELVES: IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD: NOT OF WORKS,
LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST.

(Ephesians 2:4–9)

Who has he made alive together with Christ? *You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

And why did He make us alive together with Christ? *For his great love wherewith he loved us.*

And when did he make us alive together with Christ? *Even when we were dead in sins.*

And for what ultimate purpose did He make us alive together with Christ? *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

The dead don't change. The dead *can't* change. The dead are just dead. Only the living can change. And the dead don't repent from sins. The dead *can't* repent from sins. The dead are just dead. Only the living can repent from sins.

The father runs to the boy, the boy doesn't run to the father. The father falls on the boy's neck. The boy doesn't fall on the father's neck. And the father does all that without knowing one single thing that the boy is thinking, *before* he hears one single word.

Get your sequence right. The father falls on his neck *before* the boy speaks.

This is how the father *already* felt. This is how the father has always felt. He hasn't changed His mind. He didn't have to.

Those who preach a "repentance for sins before forgiveness" would actually have the father repenting in this parable: as though the father is determined to change his mind and his behavior toward his son *if* he hears certain words of repentance from the son, and equally determined *not* to change his mind and his behavior if he doesn't.

Do you understand how backwards that is?

These preachers have the father saying, "I'll receive him if he's repentant, and reject him if he's not." And they have God saying the very same.

But Jesus tells it exactly backwards from that. Before the son says even one word, the father has already fallen on his neck. Before he says a word. Too late to find out what's in the boy's mind. The way Jesus tells it, the father doesn't even care what's in the boy's mind. The way Jesus tells it, the only thing that's important is what is in the father's mind.

The phrase *fell on his neck, and kissed him* ought to tell you everything you need to know about what God thinks about sinners *before* they repent of their sins: the Greek could actually be translated, “fell violently on his neck and kissed him over and over again.”

Do you think that before Jesus began to eat with the publicans and sinners in the presence of the Pharisees that day, He interviewed each one of them to make sure repentance from sins was really on their minds?

Now before we pass the gravy, I need to know what you're thinking. Have you forsaken your sins? Have you turned your back on all your wickedness? Because if you haven't, we need to tell the waiter to take the biscuits back.

From the Pharisee's point of view, it appeared that Jesus didn't even care what was on the sinners minds. It appeared to the Pharisees that Jesus was saying, *Lunch is on me. I'll pick up the tab.*

And the Pharisees were right. That's exactly what Jesus was saying. Like all the physicians in the world who heal the sick, Jesus renders His service with no thought of payment in advance. It's called grace.

That's how God feels about sinners. Before they repent. That's the only way God feels about sinners. Before they repent. He is mad about them. Not mad at them. He is crazy for them. Not crazy against them. He is eager for their company. And eager to tell them so!

The love that God feels for sinners is beyond human comprehension. It's beyond explanation. *For God so loved the world* is the most astonishingly contradictory phrase ever uttered in the history of the world. It is the complete and utter and absolute contradiction of everything you would ever naturally think about God and His attitude toward unrepentant sinners.

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY
BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM
SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.
FOR GOD SENT NOT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO
CONDEMN THE WORLD; BUT THAT THE WORLD
THROUGH HIM MIGHT BE SAVED. (John 3:16–17)

Have you not seen Christ on the cross? Who do you think He was there for? Repentant sinners or unrepentant sinners? That's the price that God paid for the dinner that every sinner is invited to. He paid for it in advance

of the invitation. And He insists that you not even leave the tip.

Do you not understand? When He hung on the cross, there were no repentant sinners! No, not one!

BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT,
WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.

(Romans 5:8)

The cross alone demonstrates how God feels about unrepentant sinners.

And if you portray God as feeling any other way about unrepentant sinners than the way Jesus just portrayed Him here, you have utterly contradicted Christ Himself. And on judgment day, much to your dismay, He will utterly contradict you.

And if you fail to preach a God who falls violently on the necks of even the vilest sinners that you can possibly imagine, and kisses them over and over again, before they repent, then you're not preaching the God that Jesus preached here. And on judgment day, you will find it is only your dirty neck that He has not fallen upon.

And if you're preaching a God Who so loved the world on Friday evening that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their sins, but by Monday morning was so angry with the same world that He could barely restrain His hand of judgment *for the very same sins He died for on Friday*, you're not preaching the Father that Jesus preached. And on judgment day, you'll find out too late that *that* was an unimaginable error in judgment on your part.

If you preach the repentance and forsaking of sins before God will receive a man, where are getting your information? The one who preaches "repentance from sins before forgiveness" is Moses. Not Jesus.

Those who preach "repentance from sins before forgiveness" are disciples of Moses. They are not the disciples of Christ. Unlike Jesus, they are always eager for the company of their fellow Pharisees. Unlike Jesus, they are never eager for the company of unrepentant sinners.

By an entire immeasurable universe of difference from those who preach "repentance from sins before forgiveness," Jesus was always eager for the company of sinners. How can we know that for sure? Because in the world that Jesus was eager to come to, that's all there were. Just sinners. Nobody

else.

Do you not understand? In this world, if Jesus doesn't eat with sinners, He dines alone.

This is the only information that Jesus gives about how God feels towards unrepentant sinners. This is it. Like it or not, this is the only accurate picture that there is. Study the photo. See the Pharisees on the far right? Yeah. See the publicans and sinners on the far left? Yeah. Where is Jesus in the picture? That's right: exactly where you would never have imagined Him to be.

The Father runs to unrepentant sinners, falls violently on their dirty necks, and kisses them. Over and over and over again. Before they say a single word. He simply cannot contain His love. And if you're not telling it like that, you're not telling it like Jesus tells it.

And if you want to go around telling the sick that this Physician wants his payment in advance, you better make sure *you* never get sick. Because you have no earthly idea what this Physician charges for His services. Your repentance from sins is not the price for His services. You don't have the price. You never did and you never will.

As the boy begins his scripted speech, his father cuts him off mid-sentence and commands his servants who have run with him, "Put the best robe on his body, and put the ring on his hand, and put the shoes on his feet."

Put the robe right over his dirty body.

And put the ring right on his dirty hand.

And put the shoes right on his dirty feet.

No need to clean him up *before* we do that. We can clean him up later.

The very thing that the preachers of "repentance from sins before forgiveness" think God wants so desperately to talk to sinners about, is the one thing that Jesus has the father in the parable never even mention to his son: not a single word about his "sins."

Do you not find that remarkable?

Don't you find it remarkable that in a parable that's supposed to be all about repentance from sins, the only thing that the father never even mentions is

the boy's sins? Why, it's as if he doesn't even care about the boys sins. It's as if that's the very thing farthest from his mind.

The absence of any mention of sins from the father in the story undoubtedly left the Pharisees astounded. And probably the publicans and the sinners too.

But that's the only way Jesus intended to tell it: not one word about sins.

It may come as a complete shock to you, but that's always been God's approach to the sinner. God, by the Holy Spirit, never speaks one single word to any sinner about his sins.

Never once does He speak to any sinner about his 'sins.' Not one word. When the Father comes running in His compassion to violently fall on the neck of the vilest of sinners, 'sins' is simply never the subject. And when you make sins the subject, you screw up the message of Christ beyond repair.

Jesus said, when the Spirit is come, *he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

OF SIN, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME...

(John 16:8–9)

Not 'sins,' but "sin."

No matter what your preacher tells you to the contrary, the Holy Spirit never convicts any sinner of his 'sins.' Not once. Not ever. No exceptions. Because any discussion of 'sins' always brings with it condemnation. Always. Without exception, condemnation is the singular subject of sins. Yet God sent His son *not to condemn the world*. Do you think He sent the Holy Spirit to do what Jesus *didn't* do? That would be impossible. The Holy Spirit comes to continue what Jesus started. And if Jesus, at His Father's sending, came *not to condemn the world*, that's precisely and only what the Holy Spirit continues to do. To *not* condemn.

Why does the Spirit never speak to the sinner about sins?

Because that part has already been taken care of. There is one who already speaks to the sinner about his sins. He speaks eloquently and convincingly about the sins of the sinner. His name is Moses. No need for the Holy Spirit to speak about sins, because Moses, through the law, has already done that. Thoroughly and completely. Remember?

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER
 THE LAW SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE
 UNDER THE LAW: THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
 AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

(Romans 3:19)

Everything the law says is about sins. And everything the law says is to convince you that you're already guilty of those sins. In fact, your inability to stop sinning is the very basis on which the law convinces you that you're a sinner in need of the saving grace of Christ:

BUT THE SCRIPTURE HATH CONCLUDED ALL UNDER SIN,
 THAT THE PROMISE BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST MIGHT
 BE GIVEN TO THEM THAT BELIEVE.

BUT BEFORE FAITH CAME, WE WERE KEPT UNDER THE LAW,
 SHUT UP UNTO THE FAITH WHICH SHOULD AFTERWARDS
 BE REVEALED. WHEREFORE THE LAW WAS OUR
 SCHOOLMASTER TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST, THAT WE
 MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

BUT AFTER THAT FAITH IS COME,
 WE ARE NO LONGER UNDER A SCHOOLMASTER.

(Galatians 3:22–25)

The law concludes all under sin in order that grace may be given to all them that believe. Them that believe what? That believe they cannot repent and turn from their sins. That believe that the law has *concluded* them under sin. That believe that only Christ can save them.

Your inability to repent of your sins, to forsake and turn from them *before* you come to Christ, is the only thing that convinces you that you need Christ at all. It's your *failure* at trying to quit sin, not your success, that makes you know you need Christ. If you could turn from your sins *before* you came to Christ, you wouldn't need Christ at all. Just ask the Pharisee.

You need to repent, not from sins, plural, but from only *one* sin, before you come to Christ. And that *one* sin is the one and only subject of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes to *reprove the world* of only *one* sin. It's the only one God ever talks about to the sinner: it's the sin of not believing on Jesus. *Of sin*, says Jesus, *because they believe not on me*.

Why? Because that's the only sin that will keep the sinner out of heaven. Unbelief is the only sin for which God will reject you. And if you want to add any other sin to the list of sins for which God will reject you, be extremely careful. Because I'm going to show you later that, when you do that, the only sin that gets added to the list that keeps people out of heaven is the very one you don't want added under any circumstance: your own.

Repentance from this *one* sin that keeps men out of heaven is called *repentance from dead works* (Hebrews 6:1). And repentance from dead works is the one and only repentance God ever calls the sinner to.

There is only one living work: the work of Christ on the cross. Everything else is a dead work. Even, and especially, "repentance from sins" is a dead work. In fact, "repentance from sins before forgiveness" is the very dearest work of all of all dead works.

Why? Because "repentance from sins before forgiveness" always creates a self-righteous Pharisee. Each time. Every time. Without one single exception. The Pharisees tell you they have repented from their sins, while in reality, they have only hidden them.

WOE UNTO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!
 FOR YE MAKE CLEAN THE OUTSIDE OF THE CUP AND OF THE
 PLATTER, BUT WITHIN THEY ARE FULL OF
 EXTORTION AND EXCESS. THOU BLIND PHARISEE,
 CLEANSE FIRST THAT WHICH IS WITHIN
 THE CUP AND PLATTER, THAT THE OUTSIDE OF THEM
 MAY BE CLEAN ALSO. WOE UNTO YOU, SCRIBES AND
 PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES! FOR YE ARE LIKE UNTO WHITED
 SEPULCHRES, WHICH INDEED APPEAR BEAUTIFUL
 OUTWARD, BUT ARE WITHIN FULL OF DEAD MEN'S BONES,
 AND OF ALL UNCLEANNESS. EVEN SO YE ALSO OUTWARDLY
 APPEAR RIGHTEOUS UNTO MEN,
 BUT WITHIN YE ARE FULL OF HYPOCRISY AND INIQUITY.

(Matthew 23:25–28)

Do you not understand that if repentance from sins is necessary *before* God will receive you, then under that premise, you must never sin again? Not ever. Not even once. Otherwise, where did all your repentance from sins

go?

But if you repent of your unbelief in Christ, you must simply continue believing.

Which of those two repentances do you think you can actually accomplish?

Which of those two repentances would keep you from becoming a hypocrite, like the Pharisee always becomes? The Pharisees declare that they have repented from their sins, but secretly, exactly like all those who preach “repentance from sins before forgiveness,” they are still full of sins. Every time. Without exception.

This is where your understanding has gotten muddled: everybody knows that the law condemns *sinful* works. But what few seem to understand is that grace condemns *all* works. Even righteous works. Most especially it condemns righteous works.

Why? Because God knows there really are no righteous works. **No, not one.** Everybody is a sinner. And all those who pretend they are not sinners merely have ‘pretend’ righteous works. There was only one righteous work and it wasn’t the work you did.

FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF,
THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL.

(Romans 11:32)

All are concluded by God Himself to be unbelievers. “Concluded,” *sunkleio*, “shut up together” *in unbelief*. Unbelief is the *sin*. The one sin.

Everybody is shut up together as sinners. Big sinners with little sinners. ‘Bad’ sinners with ‘good’ sinners. Sweet little old ladies and the muggers who mug sweet little old ladies. All shut up together in *unbelief*. All the chickens, so to speak, in one coop. And in this coop, sins are not the sin. *Unbelief* is the *sin*.

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY,
FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,
EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS,
HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST...
BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED... NOT OF WORKS,
LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST.

(Ephesians 2:4–9)

When you call men to repent of their sins before forgiveness, you create by your calling a self righteous, lying, hypocritical, sin-hiding and boasting Pharisee.

When God quickens you, makes you alive with Christ, you will either be *dead in sins*, right along with everyone else, equally guilty as everyone else, even the very worst kind of sinner you can imagine, or He will not quicken you at all.

You're in the same room with all the rest of the sinners. There is only one room. It's the "sinners room." There is no "righteous room" down the hallway to the right. Check all the Holiday Inns you want. God never booked one.

And everybody in the room is dirty. And the only ones in the room who are dirtier than anyone else are the ones who think they're in the wrong room.

If He does not put the robe and the ring and the shoes over your dirty body, your dirty hands, and dirty feet, He will not put them on you at all. If He has not received you while you are yet *dead in sins*, He has not really received you at all.

So, back to the father's house they go: the father, the servants, and the still-dirty son wearing his new robe and his new ring and his new shoes right over all the dirt. And it's not the father that has somehow changed his mind about the son because the son changed his mind about his sins. It's the son who has now changed his mind about the father, because the father *never* changed his mind about the son because of his sins. And that's repentance.

That's repentance from dead works: changing your mind about the Father, because He never changed His mind about you. Thinking *before* He came and fell on your dirty neck that He would only receive you as a repentant-from-your-sins hireling to work for His favor. But discovering through His astonishingly gracious approach to you, by the kisses you can still feel on your dirty neck, by the robe and the ring and sandals over your dirty body, that He only bestows His favor on you if you *don't* work for it.

If Jesus had portrayed God in the same way the preachers of "repentance from sins before forgiveness" do, He would have had the father stay put instead of running eagerly to meet the son. And the father's arms would have been crossed instead of open. And there would be a scowl on his face instead of a radiant smile. The same scowl they keep assuring you that God

has on His face toward sinners right now.

And the father would have warily listened to the son, with a great reluctance to believe anything that one who had done so much wrong would say. And instead of unashamedly proclaiming his own love for him by falling on his dirty neck, he would have loudly proclaimed his anger over the fact that the boy still had any dirt on his neck at all. Just like the preachers of repentance from sins loudly proclaim God's present anger over all the present sins of sinners.

They tell this story as if the father was pretty upset about his son's sins. And to hear them tell it, the son shouldn't even have thought about coming home unless he could have convinced the father that all of his sins had been left far behind him, way back there in the pigpen.

But here's the confusion that actually lies underneath all that kind of thinking: the preachers of "repentance from sins before forgiveness" think that all of those "pigpen" sins of the flesh are the very worst kind. That those are the ones from which God always calls a man to change his mind and his behavior. They always imagine that the sins of the flesh are the really big sins.

But in a universe of difference away from the way they think, God thinks the big sin is the one that the prodigal was bringing with him *after* he left pigpen: the "will-trade-my-works-for-righteousness" sin.

The pre-pigpen sins are the publican's sins of the flesh.

The post-pigpen sins are the Pharisee's sins of the spirit.

In an utter contradiction to what you've been told, Jesus has no trouble at all with the sins of the publicans – but the sins of the Pharisees will kill Him.

Let me ask you this: who do you think crucified Jesus?

Was it the publican? The harlot? The thief or the murderer? Was it the adulterer? The pornographer? The homosexual? The abortionist?

No, no, no, no, no, no, and no.

None of the above.

It was the self-righteous sinner. Not the unrighteous sinner.

Sinners never bother Jesus. He's actually very excited about their company. He wants to sit down with them in a very intimate way. And actually eat with them. And talk with them. And look them right in the eye and communicate the love of His Father to them in every way that He can.

And if you think He doesn't feel that way, it's only because you think you're not one of those dirty sinners.

And if you think you're not one of those dirty sinners, that's the very thing that makes you self-righteous.

And if you're self-righteous, it's you, not the dirty sinners, who are holding the hammer and nails.

"But what," you may ask the father of the prodigal, "will you do with all the 'sins' of this wayward son?"

"Well, first of all," the father would answer, "we'll just cover them up.

"We'll put the robe and the ring and the shoes right over the dirt."

Because *agape*, "the love of God," *shall cover the multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8).

If there is no multitude of sins, there's no need for the love of God to cover them.

"And second," says the father, "we'll have a party. One like you've never seen before. And we'll invite everybody. We'll even invite the very angels of heaven. The angels are always ready for a party like this one."

I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT LIKEWISE JOY SHALL BE IN HEAVEN
OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH,
MORE THAN OVER NINETY AND NINE JUST PERSONS,
WHICH NEED NO REPENTANCE. (Luke 15:7)

"And how long will the party last, father?" you may ask.

"The party will continue as long it takes for the guest of honor to be convinced that we're celebrating not because he's changed, but because we always loved him even when he wasn't changed.

"And the party will continue until he knows that we loved him when he was still dead in trespasses and sin. That way he'll never fall into that terrible

trap that others do, thinking that we love him *because* he changed.”

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY,
 FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,
 EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS,
 HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST,
 (BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED;)
 AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER, AND
 MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN HEAVENLY PLACES
 IN CHRIST JESUS: THAT IN THE AGES TO COME
 HE MIGHT SHEW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS
 GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH
 CHRIST JESUS. FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH
 FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES: IT IS THE
 GIFT OF GOD: NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST.
 (Ephesians 2:4–9)

“But what of the dirt?” you might inquire.

And the smiling father would answer, “*After* the party, we’ll wash off the pig.”

Being loved while you are still dead in sins, and being found while you are still dead in sins, and being quickened while you are still dead in sins, and acknowledging that it’s all and only because God loved you just like you were *before* you repented of your sins – while you were still dead in those sins – *that*, and that alone, is real repentance.

Do you not understand? If the condition on which God receives you is your repentance from sins, you can never be sure that He will continue to receive you if you ever find another sin in yourself.

And that’s where I find most people today. With most people that I talk to, I find that God never even got a chance to receive a real sinner. They only showed up as a repentant sinner. They showed up cleaned, washed, scrubbed as shiny as they could get by their own “repentance.” They had been told that God rejects real sinners. And when they finally do get real, and discover that they still have sins, they either become a lying sin-hiding hypocrite of a Pharisee, or they simply leave, believing that God rejects them now because they’re really still a sinner.

But here's the truth of it: you never found God. You weren't even looking for God. You were looking for a job. You were looking for bread. "Will trade work for benefits." That was your only scheme. It was all about you. It was never about Him. "Save me. Bless me. Heal me. Help me."

AS IT IS WRITTEN,

THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE:

THERE IS NONE THAT UNDERSTANDETH, THERE IS NONE
THAT SEEKETH AFTER GOD.

THEY ARE ALL GONE OUT OF THE WAY,

THEY ARE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE;

THERE IS NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.

(Romans 3:10–12)

There is none that seeketh after Him. That includes you.

But on the other hand, He did come seeking after you. He didn't want your bread. Or your blessings. Or your healing or your help. And He sure as heck didn't want your repentance from your sins. He cut you off right in mid-sentence of your little well-rehearsed will-trade-works-for-food repentance speech. You didn't even need to convince Him. He was already convinced before He got there. He didn't need to change His mind about you. He was just waiting for you to change your mind about Him.

You wanted what He had. But He just wanted you. Dirt and all.

Listen carefully: you thought your sins had separated you from Him. He thought your *separation* was the sin.

AND ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD, WHO HATH RECONCILED

US TO HIMSELF BY JESUS CHRIST,

AND HATH GIVEN TO US THE MINISTRY OF

RECONCILIATION; TO WIT, THAT GOD WAS IN

CHRIST, RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF,

NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM; AND

HATH COMMITTED UNTO US THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION.

(2 Corinthians 5:18–19)

How was God, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself? Was it by imputing their trespasses unto them or by *not* imputing their trespasses

unto them?

How is it that God was in Christ *not* imputing their trespasses, but now in the Church, He *is* imputing their trespasses to them? In Christ He was reconciling the world even *with* their trespasses. How is it that He is now, in the Church, rejecting the world because of those same trespasses?

Has He committed unto us the *same* word of reconciliation, or a *different* word? The word of “repentance from sins before He will receive you” is a word not of reconciliation, but of rejection.

How is it that the father said *nothing* to his sinful son about his sins and yet that’s *all* you want to talk about to a sinful world?

How is it that you preach, in His name, to the very world that He came not to condemn because of their sins, a message that says He will talk to them about *nothing* else until He first talks to them about their sins?

The law condemns. And that’s good. God does not. And that’s *better*.

In this process of reconciliation that began in Christ when the world was still dead in trespasses and sins, who do you think is really finding whom?

Do the dead find the living or do the living find the dead?

WHAT MAN OF YOU, HAVING AN HUNDRED SHEEP,
IF HE LOSE ONE OF THEM, DOTHT NOT LEAVE THE NINETY
AND NINE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND GO AFTER THAT
WHICH IS LOST, UNTIL HE FIND IT? (Luke 15:4)

If ‘he’ lose one of them, said Jesus. Who lost whom? To hear the shepherd tell it, the sheep didn’t lose the shepherd. The shepherd lost the sheep.

Until ‘he’ find it, said Jesus. And who finds whom? To hear the shepherd tell it, the sheep didn’t find the shepherd. The shepherd found the sheep.

EITHER WHAT WOMAN HAVING TEN PIECES OF SILVER,
IF SHE LOSE ONE PIECE, DOTHT NOT LIGHT A CANDLE,
AND SWEEP THE HOUSE,
AND SEEK DILIGENTLY TILL SHE FIND IT? (Luke 15:8)

If ‘she’ lose one piece, said Jesus. Who lost whom? To hear the woman tell it, the coin didn’t lose the woman. The woman lost the coin.

Till 'she' find it, said Jesus. And who found whom? To hear the woman tell it, the coin didn't find the woman. The woman found the coin.

And do you think in the parable about the lost son that Jesus suddenly reverses that order and has the son finding the father? Although it may be hard for you to understand, to hear the father tell it, the son didn't lose the father. The father lost the son. And likewise, to hear the father tell it, the son doesn't find the father, the father finds the son.

And here is exactly why that must be true:

How could you have possibly lost the Father? Before Jesus came and told you for the very first time *ever*, you didn't even know that there *was* a Father.

You only knew that there was a God. But "Gods" don't come looking for sons.

Only Fathers come looking for sons.

FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COME TO SEEK
AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST. (Luke 19:10)

Who came to seek whom? *There is none that seeketh after Him*. Sent by the Father Himself, Jesus comes to seek the lost.

The father found the son. And *found* is the operative word here:

AND WHEN HE HATH FOUND IT, HE LAYETH
IT ON HIS SHOULDERS, REJOICING. (Luke 15:5)

REJOICE WITH ME; FOR I HAVE FOUND
MY SHEEP WHICH WAS LOST. (Luke 15:6)

AND WHEN SHE HATH FOUND IT, SHE CALLETH
HER FRIENDS AND HER NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER,
SAYING, REJOICE WITH ME; FOR I HAVE FOUND THE
PIECE WHICH I HAD LOST. (Luke 15:9)

FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN;
HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND. AND THEY BEGAN TO BE MERRY.
(Luke 15:24)

IT WAS MEET THAT WE SHOULD MAKE MERRY, AND BE GLAD:

FOR THIS THY BROTHER WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN;
AND WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND. (Luke 15:32)

Real repentance is my change of mind about being found.

Not my change of mind about being lost.

“Repentance from sins before forgiveness” seems to think that it’s a revelation from the Holy Spirit that you’re dirty. But that revelation is from the law, not the Spirit. The revelation from the Spirit is how the Father feels about you in spite of the dirt. And that’s where the real “change of mind” occurs.

I change my mind about God, only after I see that He *never* changed His mind about me. Not even when I was lost in my sins.

We love him, because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). *That* is repentance.

The apostle Paul echoes those words, “that I may *be found*!”

AND BE FOUND IN HIM, NOT HAVING MINE OWN
RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH IS OF THE LAW,
BUT THAT WHICH IS THROUGH THE FAITH OF CHRIST,
THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF GOD BY FAITH...
(Philippians 3:9)

My own righteousness is by the law. And the law demands repentance from sins in order to be reconciled to it. But Paul categorically rejects that kind of repentance. To be found, not having my own rightness *which is of the law*, but to be found robed only in His rightness, given to me as a gracious gift from my Father, *while* I am still the dirty and sinful prodigal.

That is the only repentance to which God ever calls the sinner.

Back at the house, the party is in full swing when the elder brother comes from the field. He hears the music and dancing and inquires of the servants what’s going on inside. When he finds out his brother has returned and his father has thrown him a party, he is angry. The father comes out and entreats him to come in.

And here’s what the older brother, who represents the Pharisees, says in effect: “I never disobeyed you even once in all these years, and yet you never even gave me even a skinny goat to celebrate with. But when your other

son comes back, the one who wasted all your money on harlots, the sinfully sinful sinner, you kill the fatted calf for him. And that's not fair."

And the father says to the son, "Everything I have is yours."

"Here's the problem with that," replies the angry son to the father in effect: "You're giving to my worthless, sinful, harlot-loving brother, for nothing at all, the very same thing that I've already earned from you with all my good works.

"And I'm not coming in to your party. I'll never come in to your party. I don't even want to breathe the same air as that freeloader. If you're going to give it to him because of your grace, and not to me because of my works, I'll pass on your offer altogether. You and your other son, the sinful one, can just keep your 'gift.' I'll pass!"

The very thought of grace angers the self-righteous. To the self-made righteous, grace seems to be a most unjust idea. If you work hard for something, why should those who work not at all receive the same reward as you? That's not fair. And consequently, the self-righteous are continually angry with sinners. And that's the very reason the self-righteous always interpret this parable from Jesus as God's demand for repentance from sins.

The God that they preach, they are happy to say, is very angry with sinners. Just like they are on His behalf. The Old Contract, with Moses on the mountain, with the thick dark clouds and the lightening and the thundered commandments, suits their view of God perfectly.

But this picture that Jesus paints, of a father who falls violently and passionately on the dirty neck of the sinful son, kissing him over and over again, is, in their way of thinking, revolting. It is utterly preposterous. God is nothing like that, they would insist. The very idea that God would give away His love for free to the obviously undeserving is an utter revulsion to their own righteous sensibilities.

Jesus described this kind as those that *trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despise others*.

Listen carefully: those who trust in themselves that they are righteous *always* despise others. That is their very identifying mark. That's how you can spot them. Every time. Despising sinners is their highest calling and their greatest joy. It is the very well-deserved badge of their own hard-worked-

for and hard-earned righteousness.

In their eyes, it is not only the right of the elder brother to despise the sinful younger brother, it is his righteous duty before God to do so. In their minds, it is the righteous indignation of God Himself against sin that they feel whenever they behold the sins of the wicked around them.

Like the Pharisee in the temple praying, all of their own wonderful goodnesses are joyously magnified when compared to all the terrible badnesses of the wretched publicans and sinners around them.

And mark this well: whenever you find someone who despises sinners, you may know without question that they *always* trust in themselves that they are righteous. Always. Even if they deny it, and especially if they deny it. The one always marks the presence of the other. These two go hand in hand, everywhere together.

Whoever trusts in himself that he is righteous always despises others. And whoever despises others always trust in himself that he is righteous. They are the two sides of the one and same coin. One is the root, the other, the fruit. The presence of either proves that the other exists, even if, for social convention or the approval of men, it is well hidden and unseen.

But don't sell them short. For those who trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others, their thankfulness to God that they are *not as other men are* is deeply sincere and heartfelt.

They despise the notion that God would lavish His love on the so obviously undeserving. And like the elder son, they would be more than a little angry with God if they thought that He failed to recognize just how hard they have worked for Him and just how different they are from all the sinners around them.

They are very keen that God should visit his judgment on this sinful world and its abundance of sinfully sinning sinners. They are sure His hand of calamity for the insufferable sinners around them can barely be restrained. And they can hardly wait for God's commendation of their righteous behavior on judgment day. On that day, they are sure they will shine. They are not sinners. And God is justly proud of all their hard work. And so are they. Of that much, they are certain.

But unfortunately for the elder son, and for the Pharisee, and for the preach-

ers of repentance from sins before forgiveness, the fatted calf and the joyful celebration with the father and access to all that the father has will only be obtained by grace. Or it won't be obtained at all.

The parable of the prodigal son for the first time ever lays bare the astonishing truth that only sinners ever receive all that the Savior has for them. Because they are willing to receive it by grace and not by works. The already-righteous would love to receive it as well. Just not by grace. Never by grace.

If they receive anything by grace, it would mean, no matter how hard they had worked, no matter how different they had made themselves by their own sweaty efforts, that in God's eyes, they would be deemed no better than the worst of the worst of the sinners. And for the already-righteous, *that* is an utterly intolerable thought.

"Say anything you want to about me," says the older brother, "but never, never say I'm like your other son. Don't even mention him and me in the same breath. Unlike him, I have always kept the rules. I have gotten my righteousness the old-fashioned way. By my repentance from sins, I have earned it!"

LO, THESE MANY YEARS DO I SERVE THEE, NEITHER
TRANSGRESSED I AT ANY TIME THY COMMANDMENT.

Imagine if it had been the older brother instead of the father who had met the prodigal when he was yet a long way off. He would have had quite a different message for that harlot-loving sinner. For that homosexual. For that pornographer. For that child molester. For that terrorist.

He would have assured his younger brother that his father was unimaginably angry with him for his sins. And that his father had thought many times to come and utterly destroy him right there in the pigpen of sins. And that his father would never receive him unless he stopped at the local Holiday Inn to 'forsake' all his dirt before he met him.

And he would have assured him that, without a doubt, what his father had always really wanted instead of a "sinful harlot-loving son like you" was an "obedient rules-keeping son like me."

"Repentance from sins *before* God will receive the sinner" is the elder brother's kind of theology. The "fall violently on the dirty neck of the sinner and kiss him over and over again *before* he even says a single word" is the father's kind

of theology.

Your Heavenly Father has dirt on His face from kissing all those dirty sinners that He has received *before* they were clean. And here is His question for you:

Do you have any dirt on your face from kissing dirty sinners in his stead?

GOD WAS IN CHRIST,
RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF,
NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM; AND HATH
COMMITTED UNTO US THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION.

(2 Corinthians 5:19)

He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. The word of reconciliation is the “come home, dirt and all” word. It’s the “not imputing their trespasses unto them” word.

But if you don’t have dirt on your face from kissing dirty sinners on His behalf, don’t worry about it. You’ll still have some dirt on your face when you stand before God on judgment day. And it’ll still be the dirt from a pigpen. Only then, it’ll be *your* pigpen. But unfortunately, none of *your* dirt will be on *His* face. Yours, sadly, will only be on your own.

IF ANY MAN WOULD COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM UTTERLY CONTRADICT HIMSELF..

Repent of your righteousness first. We’ll talk about repenting of your sins later.

After the party, we’ll wash off the pig.

And the publicans and sinners rejoiced that day to hear Jesus tell the parable.

And the already-righteous, repentance-from-sins-before-forgiveness Pharisees went away angry. And plotted together how they might crucify Him for it.

Chapter 15

The Contradiction of Sin

IF ANY MAN WOULD COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM UTTERLY CONTRADICT HIMSELF..

What gives sin its “strength”?

Is it a man’s innate, inborn, sinful disposition? Is that what gives sin its strength? Is the strength of sin simply the product of man having been born a sinner? Or is sin’s strength found in where a man goes and with whom he goes, and in what he does when he gets there? Is sin’s strength found in the power of association with other like-minded sinners? Or is the strength of sin found in its repetition – the more a man sins, the stronger sin becomes in that man? Or is it all of the above?

According to the apostle Paul, the answers to all these questions would be a *resounding* “no.”

Paul says the strength of sin is none of those things at all; astonishingly, he says it’s exactly what you would never have imagined: the strength of sin is the law.

THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN;
AND THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW.

(1 Corinthians 15:56)

The word “strength” comes from the Greek word *dunamai*, meaning “to be

able or possible.” It’s from the same word Jesus uses when He promises the disciples “power,” *dunamis*, to be witnesses of Him:

BUT YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER,
AFTER THAT THE HOLY GHOST
IS COME UPON YOU: AND YE SHALL BE WITNESSES
UNTO ME BOTH IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDAEA, AND IN
SAMARIA, AND UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH.
(Acts 1:8)

Contrary to what you’ve been taught, the law is not the *strength* or the *power* of righteousness. The law is the strength and power of sin. The law enables you and gives you the power to sin.

And what exactly is the law? The law is the ten commandments. Plain and simple.

AND MOSES CALLED ALL ISRAEL, AND SAID UNTO THEM,
HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS WHICH
I SPEAK IN YOUR EARS THIS DAY, THAT YE MAY LEARN THEM,
AND KEEP, AND DO THEM. THE LORD OUR GOD MADE A
COVENANT WITH US IN HOREB. THE LORD MADE NOT THIS
COVENANT WITH OUR FATHERS, BUT WITH US, EVEN US,
WHO ARE ALL OF US HERE ALIVE THIS DAY.
(Deuteronomy 5:1–4)

Then in the verses that immediately follow these, Moses enumerated the ten commandments. The ten commands that Moses gives to them are the agreement. And he concludes with these words:

THESE WORDS THE LORD SPAKE UNTO ALL YOUR ASSEMBLY
IN THE MOUNT OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE,
OF THE CLOUD, AND OF THE THICK DARKNESS,
WITH A GREAT VOICE: AND HE ADDED NO MORE.
AND HE WROTE THEM IN TWO TABLES OF STONE,
AND DELIVERED THEM UNTO ME. (Deuteronomy 5:22)

Just ten, said Moses. *And he added no more.*

And then again later, Moses explained to the children of Israel that the two

stones with the ten commandments on them were the actual agreement, the contract and the covenant that God had made with them.

WHEN I WAS GONE UP INTO THE MOUNT TO RECEIVE
THE TABLES OF STONE, EVEN THE TABLES OF THE
COVENANT WHICH THE LORD MADE WITH YOU, THEN
I ABODE IN THE MOUNT FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS,
I NEITHER DID EAT BREAD NOR DRINK WATER:
AND THE LORD DELIVERED UNTO ME TWO TABLES OF STONE
WRITTEN WITH THE FINGER OF GOD; AND ON THEM WAS
WRITTEN ACCORDING TO ALL THE WORDS, WHICH THE
LORD SPAKE WITH YOU IN THE MOUNT OUT OF THE
MIDST OF THE FIRE IN THE DAY OF THE ASSEMBLY.
AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THE END OF FORTY DAYS AND
FORTY NIGHTS, THAT THE LORD GAVE ME THE TWO TABLES
OF STONE, EVEN THE TABLES OF THE COVENANT.

(Deuteronomy 9:9–11)

And again, a short while later, Moses recounts his time in the mountain with God after having broken the first two tablets in anger:

AT THAT TIME THE LORD SAID UNTO ME,
HEW THEE TWO TABLES OF STONE LIKE UNTO THE FIRST,
AND COME UP UNTO ME INTO THE MOUNT,
AND MAKE THEE AN ARK OF WOOD.
AND I WILL WRITE ON THE TABLES THE WORDS THAT
WERE IN THE FIRST TABLES WHICH THOU BRAKEST,
AND THOU SHALT PUT THEM IN THE ARK.
AND I MADE AN ARK OF SHITTIM WOOD,
AND HEWED TWO TABLES OF STONE LIKE UNTO THE FIRST,
AND WENT UP INTO THE MOUNT, HAVING THE TWO
TABLES IN MINE HAND.
AND HE WROTE ON THE TABLES, ACCORDING TO THE
FIRST WRITING, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, WHICH THE
LORD SPAKE UNTO YOU IN THE MOUNT OUT OF THE
MIDST OF THE FIRE IN THE DAY OF THE ASSEMBLY:
AND THE LORD GAVE THEM UNTO ME.

AND I TURNED MYSELF AND CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNT,
AND PUT THE TABLES IN THE ARK WHICH I HAD MADE;
AND THERE THEY BE, AS THE LORD COMMANDED ME.

(Deuteronomy 10:1–5)

God took His own finger and inscribed the ten commandments on tablets of stone. No once, but twice. This was the covenant. This was the agreement. This was the law.

And why do you think God gave the law in the first place?

Most would incorrectly answer, “So that man, by adhering to the law, might become righteous.” That’s exactly what the Pharisees believed. And that’s what the “repent from sins before forgiveness” preachers believe. They call sinners to a repentance of the law and a consequential righteousness of the law. The law came, they assure you, to inform you of exactly how to be righteous.

And that answer is precisely, by exactly one entire universe of difference, wrong. Listen to Paul explain why the law was really given:

MOREOVER THE LAW ENTERED,
THAT THE OFFENCE MIGHT ABOUND. (Romans 5:20)

The law “entered,” *pareiserchomai*, “come in alongside, i.e. supervene additionally or stealthily; come in privily, enter.” According to Paul, the law entered the room with an ulterior and totally hidden motive in order to accomplish exactly what you would never have imagined: to cause sin to **abound** in you.

“Abound,” *hyperperisseuo*, means “to grow in quality and quantity until it becomes the dominant part; to be in excess, to superabound or excel, to have more than enough.”

The law came so that you might have “more than enough” sin to convince you that you cannot repent and turn from your sins. The law has only one goal. And it’s not your repentance or your righteousness:

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE LAW
SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW:
THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL
NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:
FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.

(Romans 3:19–20)

The law comes to thoroughly convince you. But not about what you thought. By the law is *not* the knowledge of righteousness like you've been told. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The word "knowledge" is the Greek word *epignosis*, "recognition."

Does the law create sin? Of course not. We recognize sin by the law. The light that you turn on in the kitchen doesn't create the cockroaches. It just reveals them. But the law does something that the light in the kitchen can't do: it makes the cockroaches bigger. And it strengthens them until they take over the whole house. And start answering the phone.

The single and solitary goal of the law is to strengthen the sin that is already in you until it becomes the most powerful and dominating force in your life.

Contrary to what the Pharisee tells you, to strengthen the law is to strengthen sin. The Pharisee would have you believe that to strengthen the law is to strengthen righteousness. The astonishing fact is, where the law abounds, sin does much more abound.

That is, in fact, the *only* reason God sent the law. That sin might abound in you. The law is steroids for your sin. So that it can grow as much muscle as it needs to overpower you and subdue you once and for all.

Listen carefully: God has a wonderful plan for your life; He wills that the sin that chose you from birth should, by the law, be strengthened until it becomes the very most dominant trait of your life. He wills that your sin, by its strength which is the law, should abound.

Why? Because *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound* (Romans 5:20).

Grace can *only* abound where sin abounds. Why can grace only abound where sin abounds? Because sin is the necessary condition for grace. Those that say they have no sin can have no grace. No sin, no grace.

Most self-named Christians I meet are dyslexic when it comes to this particular verse. They seem to think it says, "Where grace abounds, sin does

much more abound.”

They think that God’s idea is “the less grace the better.” Their goal for the Christian experience appears to be such that, even though you start with that messy stuff called grace, you should move as far and as fast away from grace as you can as soon as possible. Like they have. The ultimate goal, in their estimation, would be a sinless righteousness that needed no grace at all. Just like the sinless righteousness that they and all their Pharisee friends have right now. You know the kind. That sinless, graceless righteousness that allows you to condemn the sins of others all around you. It’s the only real fun a Pharisee ever has.

But on the contrary, Peter says you actually need to *grow in grace* (2 Peter 3:18).

But how would that be possible? How could you grow in grace, unless you also grew in the only condition that necessitated grace? That is, in the condition of sin?

The preachers of “repentance from sins before forgiveness” entirely miss the point of Jesus’ story of the two men who went up to the temple to pray. They concede that the publican may represent where men *start* in their relationship with God, but their goal is to hurry as quickly as possible away from that confession, to the place where they can actually make the confession of the Pharisee. Their ultimate goal is to be able to say with great conviction, ***God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.***

Listen to them as they speak. That indeed is their very confession. Their goal is to fill their churches with as many people making that confession as possible. But they would bar the door to all publicans with their confessions of present sins.

But I would most heartily disagree that *that* is what Jesus had in mind at all. The publican doesn’t represent the very lowest level of relationship with God.

On the contrary.

He represents the very highest.

God be merciful to me a sinner is not the confession of the least of the justified. It is the height of confession for the very greatest of the justified. Listen to Paul:

THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL
ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE
WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.

(1 Timothy 1:15)

Surely Paul is referring his *former* sinful self... Isn't he?

Nope. "Am" is the present tense Greek word *eimi*, meaning "the first person singular present indicative; a prolonged form of a primary and defective verb; I exist (used only when emphatic)." It's the same word that Jesus uses when He says, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am* (John 8:58).

Jesus isn't saying, *I used to be God*. And Paul isn't saying, *I used to be chief of sinners*.

Jesus is saying, *I am God*. And Paul is saying, *I am, right now, in my own eyes, chief, protos, "foremost," of sinners. I'm number one. Among sinners*.

BUT I SEE ANOTHER LAW IN MY MEMBERS,
WARRING AGAINST THE LAW OF MY MIND,
AND BRINGING ME INTO CAPTIVITY TO THE LAW
OF SIN WHICH IS IN MY MEMBERS.

O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!

WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?

(Romans 7:23–24)

Paul says that there is a war raging between his body and his mind. You preachers of "repentance from sins before forgiveness," do you not have that same war going on in your mind bringing you into captivity?

Paul cries out, ***O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*** Not, *O wretched man that I was, who has already delivered me from what used to be the body of that death?*

You preachers of repentance from sins: do you not cry out with him?

To put these words into a past tense would be to render them absurd. Do you think Paul is saying, *I used to see a law in my members, and it used to war against my mind and it used to bring me into captivity to the law of sin that used to be in my members. O wretched man that I was! Who was it that delivered me from the body of that death that I no longer have?*

Say what?

The preachers of “repentance of sins before forgiveness” are always willing to tell you “I *used* to be chief of sinners,” but never, “I *am* chief of sinners now.” They’re too busy assuring you and their fellow Pharisees that they are chief among the righteous. “O wretched man that I *was*,” they are eager to tell you. “But, thanks be to God, because I have repented, I *am*, thankfully, no more.”

Listen very carefully: when you cease to smite your breast and cry, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” you cease to go down to your house justified. And the moment you begin to say, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,” you go down to your house condemned.

Who’s the biggest sinner you know? Right now. Think hard. If it’s not you, you don’t know what Paul knew. Paul was the biggest sinner that Paul knew. That saying, Paul insists, is faith-filled and worthy of utter welcome and approval.

Christ came into the world to save whom? According to Paul, only sinners.

Do you know who would *most* welcome your confession as a *superior* sinner? Yeah. That’s right: all those *inferior* sinners around you who need the super-abounding grace of God that you got for your abounding sin.

Do you not know that your love for God is totally dependent on your view of yourself as a sinner? Jesus said this:

WHEREFORE I SAY UNTO THEE, HER SINS,
WHICH ARE MANY, ARE FORGIVEN; FOR SHE LOVED MUCH:
BUT TO WHOM LITTLE IS FORGIVEN,
THE SAME LOVETH LITTLE. (Luke 7:47)

Little sins, little forgiveness. Little forgiveness, little love.

“Well, do I need to go out and sin some more to become a great sinner?” you may ask.

God forbid! You are already far more successful than you give yourself credit for! You are far too humble in your many achievements. You are already at the very top of the ladder of success in that particular field. And as soon as you let the law shine its light on you, you’ll see what everybody else is already aware of: when it comes to sin, you’re a real winner! When

it comes to sin, it's like you win the mega-lotto every day!

Growing in grace necessitates a growing sense not of your righteousness, but of your sinfulness. Some people have the strange notion that the closer they stand to Jesus, the more everyone will recognize that they look like Him. As if the goal of God is that they and Christ, standing beside each other, would be virtually indistinguishable.

But if sanctification is the process of separating you unto God by His word, then the closer you stand to Christ, the more you'll see you look nothing like Him. Ask any cleaning lady. The more light, the more visible the dirt becomes, not the less. The goal is to be able, with conviction, to confess that you look nothing like Him at all. The goal is to see yourself as chief of sinners in your world. The goal is your confession of complete and utter unrighteousness. That's real sanctification.

Go up to the temple again. Look at the two men who are praying there. Listen to the one on the right; the one who is enumerating all his righteousnesses, just like the preachers of "repentance before forgiveness" do.

Then look at the one on the left. The one who is enumerating nothing but his sins. If being sanctified is being separated unto His word, and if this is the one that Jesus sends home justified, then you tell me: which of the two is *really* sanctified?

Make it your goal to be able to say with Paul to the sinners around you, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And I exceed you in sin more than you can possibly imagine. And I exceed you in grace *only* because I exceed you in sin." And that very confession, worthy of all acceptance, will change the world.

And before we move on from the subject of sin, let me give you two brief examples of why I am such a stickler for correct definitions, and why you should be as well.

The first concerns the simple word "now." Hebrews 11:1 says, ***Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*** I can't tell you how many sincere and exuberant sermons I've heard through the years, especially by the "word of faith preachers," who have insisted that faith is "in the now," "in the present," not later, but *now*. The problem with that interpretation lies in the fact that the word translated *now* in this passage has nothing to do with time. It's actually the Greek word *deh*, which simply

means “but” or “and.” The Greek word meaning “now,” as in “at this moment in time,” would be the word *nun*. The verse should be read to mean, “And faith is the substance of things hoped for...” Not “now,” but simply “and.” Sorry about that. Those were great sermons, no doubt, but misguided nonetheless.

But the second example has much more bearing on our present subject. Paul declares, *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?* (Romans 6:16)

“See!” say the exuberant preachers of repentance from sins before forgiveness. “If you give in to sin, you’re the servant of sin.” But the problem with that interpretation is that the Greek word translated *yield* in this passage, *paristemi*, doesn’t mean “to capitulate,” to “give in,” as they tell you it does. Rather, it means “to stand beside so as to recommend; to exhibit, to proffer, to substantiate, to assist.” To proffer means “to offer for approval.”

Paul is saying that if you continue to stand beside sin to recommend it to others, you have become sin’s willing servant. Picture the used-car salesman, standing beside the car saying, “Ain’t she a beauty!” The word *obey* in the same verse means “to obey willingly,” not obedience by compulsion. He uses the same word when he says, *Children, obey your parents.*

This is the same Paul who laments:

BUT SIN, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT,
 WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE.
 FOR WITHOUT THE LAW SIN WAS DEAD.
 FOR I WAS ALIVE WITHOUT THE LAW ONCE:
 BUT WHEN THE COMMANDMENT CAME,
 SIN REVIVED, AND I DIED.
 AND THE COMMANDMENT, WHICH WAS ORDAINED
 TO LIFE, I FOUND TO BE UNTO DEATH.
 FOR SIN, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT,
 DECEIVED ME, AND BY IT SLEW ME.
 WHEREFORE THE LAW IS HOLY, AND THE COMMANDMENT
 HOLY, AND JUST, AND GOOD.
 WAS THEN THAT WHICH IS GOOD MADE DEATH

UNTO ME? GOD FORBID. BUT SIN, THAT IT MIGHT
APPEAR SIN, WORKING DEATH IN ME BY THAT
WHICH IS GOOD; THAT SIN BY THE COMMANDMENT
MIGHT BECOME EXCEEDING SINFUL.
FOR WE KNOW THAT THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL:
BUT I AM CARNAL, SOLD UNDER SIN.
FOR THAT WHICH I DO I ALLOW NOT:
FOR WHAT I WOULD, THAT DO I NOT;
BUT WHAT I HATE, THAT DO I.
IF THEN I DO THAT WHICH I WOULD NOT,
I CONSENT UNTO THE LAW THAT IT IS GOOD.
NOW THEN IT IS NO MORE I THAT DO IT,
BUT SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME.
FOR I KNOW THAT IN ME (THAT IS, IN MY FLESH,)
DWELLETH NO GOOD THING: FOR TO WILL IS
PRESENT WITH ME; BUT HOW TO PERFORM
THAT WHICH IS GOOD I FIND NOT.
FOR THE GOOD THAT I WOULD I DO NOT:
BUT THE EVIL WHICH I WOULD NOT, THAT I DO.
NOW IF I DO THAT I WOULD NOT, IT IS NO MORE
I THAT DO IT, BUT SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME.
I FIND THEN A LAW, THAT, WHEN I WOULD DO
GOOD, EVIL IS PRESENT WITH ME.
FOR I DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF GOD
AFTER THE INWARD MAN:
BUT I SEE ANOTHER LAW IN MY MEMBERS,
WARRING AGAINST THE LAW OF MY MIND,
AND BRINGING ME INTO CAPTIVITY TO THE LAW
OF SIN WHICH IS IN MY MEMBERS.
O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO SHALL
DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?
I THANK GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.
SO THEN WITH THE MIND I MYSELF SERVE THE
LAW OF GOD; BUT WITH THE FLESH THE LAW OF SIN.

(Romans 7:8–25)

Unlike the preachers of repentance from sins before forgiveness, Paul allows us to see what his spiritual life is really like. It's a constant *war* with the hated and unwanted *law of sin which is in my members*.

Those who would try to convince you that this is not the normal Christian life are themselves the most despicable of hypocrites. The normal Christian life is one in which I do what I don't want to do, and do not what I do want to do. I am constantly held in the tension of being between two worlds: the one in which I am now, captive in *the body of this death*, and the one to which I am going by the sure promise of Him who loves me even while I am in *the body of this death*.

And while I am here, doing that which is against my will, I cry out, exactly like the publican in the temple, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And like Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

I do not stand beside sin so as to recommend it. I do not proffer sin to others *with* my approval or *for* their approval. I am not sin's "willing servant." I am a man in a prison, not of his own making, and not by his own will. But in a prison, nevertheless.

But freedom is coming. And until it arrives, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. For with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

The very next verse, Romans 8:1, says:

THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION
TO THEM WHICH ARE IN CHRIST JESUS,
WHO WALK NOT AFTER THE FLESH,
BUT AFTER THE SPIRIT.

In this case, the word *now* is not the word *deh*, but the word *nun*. Right now, presently, at this very moment, while I am still in this vile body of sin, doing that which I do not want to do, there is no condemnation. None. In my present wretched and sinful state, He imputes His own righteousness. It is His righteousness, not mine. It is His glory, not mine. It is His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is none of mine.

And that's why Paul declares,

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY,
FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,
EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS,
HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST,
(BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED;)
AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER,
AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN
HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS:
THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT
SHEW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS
GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US
THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.
FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH;
AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES:
IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD: NOT OF WORKS,
LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST. (Ephesians 2:4–9)

Don't let anyone tell you that God rejects you because of your sins.

Those who would tell you that God rejects sinners because of their sins are themselves, like the self-exalting Pharisee in the temple, the only ones who will be rejected in the end, because with what measure they measure, they will be measured again. You who know you are sinners, and hate it, keep smiting your breast. And you who know you are sinners, and hate it, keep saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

And you'll keep going down to your house justified. Just like the publican. And just like Paul.

Chapter 16

The Contradiction of Faith and Righteousness

There is none righteous, no, not one, declares the apostle Paul (Romans 3:10).

At this present moment, says Paul, there is none righteous. Without exception, not a single one. But instead of listening to Paul, many listen instead to the preachers of repentance from sins. They teach that when God forgives you, He also makes you righteous. And because their followers believe they are righteous, they think God is now, on a daily basis, busily searching their lives for evidence of that new righteousness.

But He's not. He couldn't be. Because, unlike some Christians, God never goes searching for what doesn't really exist. And outside of God Himself, righteousness does not exist. Nowhere. Not even in the forgiven Christian.

Paul says there *is* none righteous, not there 'were' none righteous. Present tense, *there is none righteous, no, not one*. You're not righteous. You were never righteous before you came to Christ, and even after you do, you're *still* not righteous. And that's bad news for the Pharisee.

Look back again at the Pharisee and the publican in the temple praying. The Pharisee sincerely believes that the evidence of his righteousness can be found right there in all the righteous works of which he is so eager to re-

mind God. "See," he happily says to God. "No adultery. No extortion. No unjustness. Nothing like this publican. I am righteous," says the Pharisee. "And you can see it in my works."

But the publican declares exactly the opposite. "I am unrighteous," he confesses to God. "And you can see it in my works."

But Jesus says the most astonishing thing. His assessment is, in fact, simply staggering. He says the man who counts himself righteous because of his works is actually counted sinful, and the man who counts himself sinful by his works is actually counted righteous.

That is exactly the contradiction to what you would think that God thinks. How do I know that? Because His thoughts are not your thoughts. And that is definitely His thought.

You think the person who *does right is right*. And you think the person who *does wrong is wrong*. God thinks just the opposite. And if you're not very careful, you'll contradict Jesus right here, and go away, like the Pharisee, never even knowing it.

It would make perfectly logical sense to say that if sin is defined as "the breaking of the law," righteousness must be defined as the opposite of that. That is, righteousness would have to be defined as "the keeping of the law." And that's exactly what the preachers of "repentance from sins before forgiveness" believe and espouse. To turn *from* sin, wherein one has been a *law-breaker*, requires, according to them, a turning *to* the law, where one is now a *law-keeper*. And that makes perfect sense. That is, it makes perfect sense to everyone but God.

By the law, declares Paul, is the recognition of sin. Not the recognition of righteousness. Astonishingly, the apostle insists, there is no righteousness to be found *at all* in the doing of the law. None whatsoever.

THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL
NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE
LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN. (Romans 3:20)

THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS
JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.
(Romans 3:28)

True justification, true righteousness, true acceptance with God, according to Paul, must be *unaccompanied* by the deeds of the law. If you bring the deeds of the law with you when you come to God, your rejection is altogether certain.

Herein lies the problem with the law: the law has only one goal; that is, to condemn. It does not have, never did have, never will have justification and righteousness as its goal. Astonishingly, Paul declares that the fulfilling of the law is not the doing of the law at all, but something altogether different. Something altogether higher. Paul says the fulfilling of the law is nothing less than love.

OWE NO MAN ANY THING, BUT TO LOVE
ONE ANOTHER: FOR HE THAT LOVETH ANOTHER
HATH FULFILLED THE LAW.
FOR THIS, THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,
THOU SHALT NOT KILL, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL,
THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,
THOU SHALT NOT COVET; AND IF THERE BE
ANY OTHER COMMANDMENT, IT IS BRIEFLY
COMPREHENDED IN THIS SAYING, NAMELY,
THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.
LOVE WORKETH NO ILL TO HIS NEIGHBOUR:
THEREFORE LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.

(Romans 13:8–10)

Here's the problem with thinking that the "doing of the law" is "the fulfilling of the law:" a man can *not* steal, and still *not* love. A man can *not* commit adultery, and still *not* love. A man can honor his mother and father, and still *not* love. The doing of the law *never* reaches the lofty goal of love. And the goal is *always* love. Not law.

NOW THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT IS CHARITY
OUT OF A PURE HEART, AND OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE,
AND OF FAITH UNFEIGNED:
FROM WHICH SOME HAVING SWERVED HAVE TURNED
ASIDE UNTO VAIN JANGLING;
DESIRING TO BE TEACHERS OF THE LAW;

UNDERSTANDING NEITHER WHAT THEY SAY,
 NOR WHEREOF THEY AFFIRM. (1 Timothy 1:5–7)

The “end” of the commandment, the *telos* of the commandment, in the Greek “from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state” is love, out of pure heart and a good conscience, and an unpretended faith.

Paul insists that if you make the doing of the law your goal, you have woe-fully missed the mark:

FOR I TESTIFY AGAIN TO EVERY MAN THAT IS
 CIRCUMCISED, THAT HE IS A DEBTOR TO DO THE
 WHOLE LAW. CHRIST IS BECOME OF NO EFFECT
 UNTO YOU, WHOSEVER OF YOU ARE JUSTIFIED
 BY THE LAW; YE ARE FALLEN FROM GRACE.
 FOR WE THROUGH THE SPIRIT WAIT FOR THE HOPE
 OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH.
 FOR IN JESUS CHRIST NEITHER CIRCUMCISION
 AVAILETH ANY THING, NOR UNCIRCUMCISION;
 BUT FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE.

(Galatians 5:3–6)

The goal is not the doing of the law. The goal has never been the doing of the law. Do you understand? You can keep the law without love. And faith is rendered absolutely ineffectual without love. Christ is of no effect to you who are justified by law. You are fallen from grace. For we are waiting still for the hope of our righteousness, that is, Christ Himself, to arrive. And in Christ, it's not *what* you do that is meaningful, but *why* you do what you do that is meaningful.

Don't show me your deeds of the law. Show me your love. Your deeds of the law will damn you.

Faith *worketh* by love. The Greek word is *energeo*, from which we get our word “energy.” Faith without love is dead. The works of faith are never the works of the law. They are strictly and only the works of love.

The preachers of “repentance from sins before forgiveness” seem to think

that all men will know you are disciples of Christ by the law that you keep. But Jesus tells it differently:

BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YE ARE MY
DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.

(John 13:35)

The preachers of “repentance from sins before forgiveness” seem to think that we will know we have passed from death unto life because we keep the law. But John the apostle tells it differently:

WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE PASSED FROM DEATH
UNTO LIFE, BECAUSE WE LOVE THE BRETHREN.
HE THAT LOVETH NOT HIS BROTHER ABIDETH IN DEATH.
WHOSOEVER HATETH HIS BROTHER IS A MURDERER:
AND YE KNOW THAT NO MURDERER HATH ETERNAL
LIFE ABIDING IN HIM. HEREBY PERCEIVE WE THE LOVE
OF GOD, BECAUSE HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US:
AND WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE
BRETHREN. BUT WHOSO HATH THIS WORLD’S GOOD,
AND SEETH HIS BROTHER HAVE NEED, AND SHUTTETH
UP HIS BOWELS OF COMPASSION FROM HIM,
HOW DWELLETH THE LOVE OF GOD IN HIM?
MY LITTLE CHILDREN, LET US NOT LOVE IN WORD,
NEITHER IN TONGUE; BUT IN DEED AND IN TRUTH.
AND HEREBY WE KNOW THAT WE ARE OF THE TRUTH,
AND SHALL ASSURE OUR HEARTS BEFORE HIM.

(1 John 3:14–19)

Don’t be impressed when men keep the law. God isn’t.

Be impressed, rather, when they love. Even God is.

The word “righteous” and the word “just” are the same word in the Greek. Remember that as we go through these scriptures. They are both from the same root word *dike*, meaning “right (as in self-evident),” which is from the word *deiknuo*, meaning “to show (literally or figuratively).” In other words, it means, “that which is shown to be, or is self-evidently, right.”

Are you ready for the contradiction of righteousness?

Ready or not, here it comes: whom do you think God justifies?

Here's the astonishing and utterly contradictory truth: God only justifies – that is, declares to be righteous – the *ungodly*.

Listen to the apostle Paul:

WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN THAT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER,
 AS PERTAINING TO THE FLESH, HATH FOUND?
 FOR IF ABRAHAM WERE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS,
 HE HATH WHEREOF TO GLORY; BUT NOT BEFORE GOD.
 FOR WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE? ABRAHAM BELIEVED
 GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED UNTO HIM FOR
 RIGHTEOUSNESS. NOW TO HIM THAT WORKETH IS THE
 REWARD NOT RECKONED OF GRACE, BUT OF DEBT.
 BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT,
 BUT BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY,
 HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.
 EVEN AS DAVID ALSO DESCRIBETH THE BLESSEDNESS
 OF THE MAN, UNTO WHOM GOD IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS
 WITHOUT WORKS, SAYING, BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE
 INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED.
 BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE
 LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN. (Romans 4:1–6)

For the one who works, that is, believes that his own righteous works are the basis of his right standing with God, his relationship with God is not the product of grace, undeserved merit, but rather of debt. On payday at your job, you don't go to your employer to beg his undeserved kindness and favor to get your paycheck. You stick out your hand and say, "Give me what I'm owed." He doesn't pay you because he's gracious. He pays you because he owes you. It's a *debt*.

But what if you showed up on payday having *not* worked that week and stuck out your hand? If your employer gave you anything, it would strictly be by favor. Not because of your efforts, but because of his goodness. In the scripture, the idea of receiving something from God strictly by favor is called "grace." You don't deserve it and you didn't earn it; nevertheless, strictly out of His kindness, God gives it to you. That's grace.

Paul says that Abraham did nothing to earn his right standing with God. He simply believed what God had said, without confirming and verifying evidence, and his belief *was counted unto him for righteousness*. That's the way God does it. By grace. Through faith.

Now listen very carefully: the relationship that you want to have with God is based on this one single idea of *counted*. You want to have the same kind of righteousness that Abraham had. That's why Paul uses him as the example.

"Counted" is the Greek word *logizomai*. It is an accounting term that means "to take an inventory, to estimate, to account, to suppose, or to reckon."

The word *logizomai* is translated as three different words in the New Testament. They are the words "counted," "reckoned," and "imputed." They all mean the very same thing.

Abraham believed God, and his belief in what God had said was counted, inventoried, estimated or reckoned to him, as righteousness. This is critically important to understand: Abraham was not righteous. His faith was *counted* as his righteousness. If Abraham had been righteous, his faith would not have needed to be *counted* as righteousness.

If you have something already, it makes no sense to impute it to you. Counting, reckoning, and imputing can only be done if you don't have it. A thing can only be "counted," "imputed," or "reckoned" to be a certain way if it isn't that way already. I can reckon my dog to be human only because she isn't. I cannot reckon you to be human. There's no need. You're already human.

In like manner, God can reckon Abraham to be righteous *only* if Abraham in reality is not righteous. If Abraham is already righteous, there is no need to *reckon* him to be so.

BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT,
BUT BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY,
HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Believing is faith. And faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). What is the one thing that must not be seen, must not even exist, but must only be hoped for, in order for God to reckon, impute, or count you to be righteous? That's right: your righteousness.

In the temple, the Pharisee reckoned that he had his own righteousness in abundance. And he had worked hard for every bit of it. And he was very proud of his efforts. And because he had already earned his righteousness by virtue of his works, God could not possibly reckon righteousness to him. He already had his own righteousness by works. He didn't need God's by grace.

Like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal, he had his own hard-earned righteousness. He didn't need any favors, thank you very much.

On the other hand, in a complete and utter contradiction, the prodigal son and the publican had none of their own righteousness. They freely confessed their own sinfulness. In order to have any righteousness at all, God would have to reckon, impute, and count to the prodigal and the publican what they did not have.

That's why the prodigal gets the fatted calf. And the party. And the robe and the ring and the sandals. All by favor. None by works. And that's why the publican went down to his house justified. His was a righteousness given to him, not earned by him. And that's why the Pharisee went down to his house condemned. He didn't have the righteousness that only comes by grace. He had his very own. And he was very proud of it.

EVEN AS DAVID ALSO DESCRIBETH THE BLESSEDNESS
OF THE MAN, UNTO WHOM GOD IMPUTETH
RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS, SAYING,
BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN,
AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN
TO WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN.

(Romans 4:6–8)

God cannot impute righteousness to anyone who already has their own. If you already have any of your own, you cannot have His. God only imputes righteousness to the one who hasn't any of his own. He imputes righteousness without works, by forgiving iniquities and covering sins. If you have no iniquities, how can he forgive them? If you have no sins, how can he cover them? It's not that the prodigal son doesn't have sin. The father, in his graciousness and love simply refuses to impute sin to him.

According to Paul, that's how God does it with us. Not only does He im-

pute righteousness to us when He finds none, but He also refuses to impute sin.

To impute sin would be to un-impute righteousness.

And this is also critical to understand: it's not just any old righteousness that he reckons, counts and imputes to us. It is His very own righteousness. Listen to Paul:

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE LAW
 SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW:
 THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
 AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.
 THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL
 NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:
 FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE
 OF SIN. BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
 GOD WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED,
 BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE
 PROPHETS; EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
 GOD WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST
 UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE:
 FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE:
 FOR ALL HAVE SINNED, AND COME SHORT OF THE
 GLORY OF GOD; BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS
 GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN
 CHRIST JESUS: WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A
 PROPITIATION THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD,
 TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION
 OF SINS THAT ARE PAST, THROUGH THE
 FORBEARANCE OF GOD; TO DECLARE, I SAY,
 AT THIS TIME HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT
 BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH
 BELIEVETH IN JESUS. WHERE IS BOASTING THEN?
 IT IS EXCLUDED. BY WHAT LAW?
 OF WORKS? NAY: BUT BY THE LAW OF FAITH.

(Romans 3:19–27)

Whose righteousness is declared for the remission of sins? *His righteousness*, says Paul.

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED,
BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

Why must it be His righteousness, and not your own by your own repentant works? So that *boasting* may be *excluded*.

WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? IT IS EXCLUDED.
BY WHAT LAW? OF WORKS? NAY: BUT BY THE LAW OF FAITH.

“The just shall live by faith.” Faith excludes boasting. Therefore, there must be no deserving or earning works in faith. The Pharisee, and all who are like him, boast in their own righteous works. Their repentance from sins is the foundation of their boasting. And their boasting is always a comparison between themselves and the greater sinners around them. But Paul says they’re comparing their righteousness to the wrong ones. They should instead be comparing their own righteousness to the only One Who is truly righteous: God Himself.

Those who preach “repentance of sins before forgiveness” bring their own thimble-full of repentance-from-sins righteous works to the ocean of God’s righteousness and pour it in. Then they stand back and wait for the tsunami wave that will surely come crashing in upon all the poor sinners around them. “Behold my righteousness compared to yours,” they cry out. “God receives me because of my repentance and rejects you because of your lack of repentance,” they proudly assure all the poor sinners around them.

But Paul rebukes them in their folly:

THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW
THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:
FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.

The word “knowledge” in the phrase, *by the law is the knowledge of sin*, is the Greek word *epignosis*, meaning, “recognition; to know upon some mark.” Sin is recognized by the law. Righteousness is not.

That’s where the Pharisee makes his fatal mistake. He believes that by the law, righteousness can be recognized. “See me keeping the law?” he calls

out to the sinners around him. “That’s what righteousness looks like. See, no adultery, no extortion, no unjustness, no traits of the publican in me.”

And again Paul rebukes him in his error:

BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW
IS MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW
AND THE PROPHETS; EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS
OF GOD WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO
ALL AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE: FOR
THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE: FOR ALL HAVE SINNED,
AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified. And repentance from sins before forgiveness is definitely a deed of the law.

All have sinned. There are none righteous. There are only those who, in their humble honesty about being sinners, are being reckoned as righteous, and those who, in their proud dishonesty about being sinners, are being counted as what they and everyone else really are: unrighteous.

There are only two postures that can be taken before God: either you will confess that you are a sinner, and like Abraham have God’s own righteousness reckoned to your account without adding your own righteous works to the mix, or you will confess yourself righteous by your own law-keeping works and see how your righteousness compares with His on judgment day. There is no door number three.

CHRIST IS BECOME OF NO EFFECT UNTO YOU,
WHOSOEVER OF YOU ARE JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW;
YE ARE FALLEN FROM GRACE.
FOR WE THROUGH THE SPIRIT WAIT FOR THE
HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH. (Galatians 5:4–5)

Paul says hope that is seen is not hope. For why would a man hope for what he can now see? And righteousness that is seen is not God’s righteousness. For why would a man hope for the righteousness he can now see? But *we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*. We don’t have righteousness yet. But we have the promise of righteousness. Righteousness isn’t here yet. But it’s on it’s way.

BUT OF HIM ARE YE IN CHRIST JESUS,
 WHO OF GOD IS MADE UNTO US WISDOM,
 AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND SANCTIFICATION,
 AND REDEMPTION: THAT, ACCORDING AS
 IT IS WRITTEN, HE THAT GLORIETH,
 LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD. (1 Corinthians 1:30–31)

Christ is our righteousness. In Him alone we glory. If we have even one molecule of our own righteousness, we cannot have any of His. He will impute to us none of His own, as long as we have any of our own.

Faith guarantees the absence of righteousness. And righteousness guarantees the absence of faith.

Do you understand? If you already have righteousness, why would you *wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*? Of course, you wouldn't. And that's the Pharisee's problem. He won't wait for God's own righteousness to arrive in the form of Christ Himself. He must have it now. And it must be his own. Otherwise, there will be no ground to boast. And the Pharisee must boast. That's what he lives for.

Simply said, the just, that is, the righteous, shall live by faith. And faith is believing the promise of God. And the promise of righteousness is only about the future. It is never about the present. If it's about the present, then by definition it is no longer a promise. And if it's no longer a promise, it is no longer faith. So the just, the righteous, shall live by the promise of a future righteousness. Not by the deeds of a present righteousness.

FOR THE PROMISE, THAT HE SHOULD BE THE HEIR
 OF THE WORLD, WAS NOT TO ABRAHAM, OR TO HIS
 SEED, THROUGH THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE
 RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH. FOR IF THEY WHICH
 ARE OF THE LAW BE HEIRS, FAITH IS MADE VOID,
 AND THE PROMISE MADE OF NONE EFFECT:
 BECAUSE THE LAW WORKETH WRATH: FOR WHERE NO
 LAW IS, THERE IS NO TRANSGRESSION.
 THEREFORE IT IS OF FAITH, THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE;
 TO THE END THE PROMISE MIGHT BE SURE TO ALL THE SEED;
 NOT TO THAT ONLY WHICH IS OF THE LAW, BUT TO

THAT ALSO WHICH IS OF THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM;
 WHO IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, (AS IT IS WRITTEN,
 I HAVE MADE THEE A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS,)
 BEFORE HIM WHOM HE BELIEVED, EVEN GOD,
 WHO QUICKENETH THE DEAD, AND CALLETH THOSE
 THINGS WHICH BE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE.
 WHO AGAINST HOPE BELIEVED IN HOPE, THAT HE MIGHT
 BECOME THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS;
 ACCORDING TO THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN,
 SO SHALL THY SEED BE. AND BEING NOT WEAK
 IN FAITH, HE CONSIDERED NOT HIS OWN BODY NOW DEAD,
 WHEN HE WAS ABOUT AN HUNDRED YEARS OLD,
 NEITHER YET THE DEADNESS OF SARA'S WOMB:
 HE STAGGERED NOT AT THE PROMISE
 OF GOD THROUGH UNBELIEF; BUT WAS STRONG IN
 FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD; AND BEING FULLY
 PERSUADED THAT, WHAT HE HAD PROMISED,
 HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM. AND THEREFORE
 IT WAS IMPUTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

(Romans 4:13–22)

Do you understand? The deeds of the law just serve to anger God. Because *the law is not of faith*. And the *law worketh wrath*.

You who say you keep the law: do you not hear the law?

KNOWING THAT A MAN IS NOT JUSTIFIED BY THE WORKS
 OF THE LAW, BUT BY THE FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST, EVEN
 WE HAVE BELIEVED IN JESUS CHRIST, THAT WE MIGHT BE
 JUSTIFIED BY THE FAITH OF CHRIST, AND NOT BY THE
 WORKS OF THE LAW: FOR BY THE WORKS OF THE
 LAW SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED.
 BUT IF, WHILE WE SEEK TO BE JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST,
 WE OURSELVES ALSO ARE FOUND SINNERS, IS
 THEREFORE CHRIST THE MINISTER OF SIN? GOD FORBID.
 FOR IF I BUILD AGAIN THE THINGS WHICH I DESTROYED,
 I MAKE MYSELF A TRANSGRESSOR.

FOR I THROUGH THE LAW AM DEAD TO THE LAW,
 THAT I MIGHT LIVE UNTO GOD.
 I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST: NEVERTHELESS I LIVE;
 YET NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVETH IN ME: AND 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. I DO NOT FRUSTRATE
 THE GRACE OF GOD: FOR IF RIGHTEOUSNESS
 COME BY THE LAW, THEN CHRIST IS DEAD IN VAIN.

(Galatians 2:16–21)

If righteousness is already here, it is by the law and not by promise, and, therefore, not by faith. And if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Righteousness is coming. But it's not here yet.

Think of it like this:

When I was in the third grade, I had a teacher named Mrs. Mobley. She was at least in her late sixties at the time, maybe even in her late seventies. At ten years old, I couldn't tell. I just knew she was really old. Thin as a rail, with an unruly shock of snow white hair, Mrs. Mobley loved torturing our young third-grade minds by making us define words. Every day, all day, day after endless day, nothing but definitions. That was her own joyful tortuous specialty. If it moved, she made us define it. If it didn't move, she made us define it.

There were real definitions and nominal definitions. There were ostensive and stipulative and descriptive definitions. There were definitions by cause and effect, by comparison and contrast, by example and illustration, and by process analysis. There were definitions by usage and by material and by shape and by function. It seemed, to my young mind, there must have been at least a thousand different ways you could define the simple word *chair*. And Mrs. Mobley was passionately convinced that we needed to know them all.

But every once in a while, my classmates and I would come into the classroom and find that dear Mrs. Mobley wasn't there. And sitting in her place on those occasions would be Mr. Smith. And even at ten years of age, we

could tell the difference. Mr. Smith simply looked nothing like Mrs. Mobley. She was old and had short white hair. He was young and had long dark hair. Unlike Mrs. Mobley's high and quavering voice, Mr. Smith had a low and robust voice. She was thin, he was not.

Mr. Smith was, of course, the substitute teacher. He wasn't the permanent teacher. Mrs. Mobley was the permanent teacher. And that was, even for a ten year old, not an extremely difficult concept to grasp.

Mr. Smith's presence guaranteed Mrs. Mobley's absence. And Mrs. Mobley's presence guaranteed Mr. Smith's absence. They were never in class at the same time. They didn't need to be. Ever. One had a temporary function, the other a permanent.

But think about this: even though my classmates and I were only ten years old, we still never got upset when we saw Mr. Smith. Never. Not one time. Not one bit. Because we had already been told, by someone whose word we trusted, that this would happen. And we were, I suppose, fairly mature in our reaction to the circumstance when it would occur.

And in our fairly mature ten year old reaction, here's what we *never* did, never even once: we never confused Mr. Smith with Mrs. Mobley.

And we never made Mr. Smith try to act like he was really Mrs. Mobley.

And we never demanded that Mr. Smith don a white wig, alter his voice, suck in his stomach, and pretend that he was Mrs. Mobley.

Never. Amazingly, not even once.

So it is with faith and righteousness. Faith is the substitute for righteousness. As long as faith is present, righteousness cannot be. And when righteousness finally arrives, faith will no longer be necessary.

That's the way it works. And that's the only way it works.

And until righteousness arrives, don't act less mature than a ten year old and go around trying to pass off your faith as your righteousness.

Don't try to dress faith up and pretend it's real righteousness. Don't have faith hold in it's stomach like real righteousness. And don't have it try to speak in the voice of real righteousness. Faith is not righteousness. Like the substitute teacher, it's just counted, reckoned, and imputed to be righteousness. The substitute teacher is counted as the permanent teacher, but

everybody knows, and it's patently obvious, that he's not the permanent teacher. He looks nothing like her. And when you make him dress up and pretend he's her, you just embarrass them both. And when you make faith dress up and try to pretend that it's really righteousness, you embarrass both faith and righteousness.

Listen carefully: everybody around you already knows that you're not really righteous! Stop pretending that you are!

Nobody will have a problem if you simply confess that you have faith, God's ordained substitute for righteousness. It's OK. This is School Board approved. But stop trying to convince everyone that Mr. Smith is really Mrs. Mobley! You're making a fool of Mrs. Mobley, Mr. Smith, yourself and Christ.

Your permanent Righteousness is on His way here to be sure. But He's not here yet. And no one around you will have problem if you simply tell them that your Righteousness is on His way. But they cannot and will not believe you when you tell them that He's already back and hanging out exclusively at your house.

BUT OF HIM ARE YE IN CHRIST JESUS,
WHO OF GOD IS MADE UNTO US WISDOM,
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND SANCTIFICATION,
AND REDEMPTION.

Faith is here. But righteousness is not. Not yet.

BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT
BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY,
HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Stop working for your righteousness. It's just making God angry. Believe on Him that is justifying the ungodly. That's you. And don't for a minute imagine that He will ever count your righteousness as your righteousness. He will only count your faith as righteousness. And the righteousness He counts as your righteousness will be His righteousness, not yours.

So keep confessing your faith. But for God's sake, stop confessing your righteousness. You don't have any. Not yet.

Most people are at least vaguely aware that the Old Contract is the law, the

ten commandments that God inscribed with His own finger on tablets of stone. That Contract was an agreement of works:

FOR MOSES DESCRIBETH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS
WHICH IS OF THE LAW, THAT THE MAN WHICH DOETH
THOSE THINGS SHALL LIVE BY THEM. (Romans 10:5)

Do the law, get its righteousness. That's what Moses says. The problem, of course, lies in the fact that nobody ever kept the law, and therefore no one was ever righteous under the law, or because of the law.

Have you ever broken the law? Jesus says you have:

DID NOT MOSES GIVE YOU THE LAW, AND YET
NONE OF YOU KEEPETH THE LAW? (John 7:19)

Consequently, because you haven't kept 100% of the law, you're automatically under its curse.

FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE
UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN,
CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT
IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK
OF THE LAW TO DO THEM. (Galatians 3:10)

Paul contrasts the Old Contract with the New Contract by using some different-by-a-universe descriptions of the two:

FORASMUCH AS YE ARE MANIFESTLY DECLARED TO BE THE
EPISTLE OF CHRIST MINISTERED BY US,
WRITTEN NOT WITH INK,
BUT WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD; NOT IN TABLES
OF STONE, BUT IN FLESHY TABLES OF THE HEART.
AND SUCH TRUST HAVE WE THROUGH CHRIST TO
GOD-WARD: NOT THAT WE ARE SUFFICIENT OF OURSELVES
TO THINK ANY THING AS OF OURSELVES;
BUT OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD;
WHO ALSO HATH MADE US ABLE MINISTERS OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT; NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT:
FOR THE LETTER KILLETH, BUT THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE.

BUT IF THE MINISTRATION OF DEATH, WRITTEN
 AND ENGRAVEN IN STONES, WAS GLORIOUS,
 SO THAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL COULD NOT
 STEDFASTLY BEHOLD THE FACE OF MOSES
 FOR THE GLORY OF HIS COUNTENANCE;
 WHICH GLORY WAS TO BE DONE AWAY:
 HOW SHALL NOT THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT
 BE RATHER GLORIOUS?
 FOR IF THE MINISTRATION OF CONDEMNATION BE GLORY,
 MUCH MORE DOTH THE MINISTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
 EXCEED IN GLORY. FOR EVEN THAT WHICH
 WAS MADE GLORIOUS HAD NO GLORY IN THIS RESPECT,
 BY REASON OF THE GLORY THAT EXCELLETH.

(2 Corinthians 3:3–10)

According to the apostle, the ten commandments kill. That's their very goal. That's their one and only job. The ten commandments, written and engraved in stones, are actually a *ministration of condemnation and a ministration of death*.

God has made us, Paul insists, able ministers of the New Contract, not the Old. The word "ministers" is the Greek word for a "table waiter." Think of it like this: those who would preach the law and a repentance unto the law are like table waiters offering to their patrons death in their dishes instead of life. "Would you care for the poison fish or the poison mushrooms?" they cheerily ask. "You will find both to be equally deadly."

"But don't we need to tell the world that the law condemns them?"

Apparently not, according to Paul. He says they already know it. In fact, Paul says, the work of the law is actually written in their hearts already. No need to tell them. God has already done that job:

FOR WHEN THE GENTILES, WHICH HAVE NOT THE LAW,
 DO BY NATURE THE THINGS CONTAINED IN THE LAW,
 THESE, HAVING NOT THE LAW, ARE A LAW UNTO
 THEMSELVES: WHICH SHEW THE WORK OF THE LAW
 WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS, THEIR CONSCIENCE
 ALSO BEARING WITNESS, AND THEIR THOUGHTS THE

MEAN WHILE ACCUSING OR ELSE EXCUSING ONE ANOTHER;)
 IN THE DAY WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF
 MEN BY JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL.

(Romans 2:14–16)

The work of the law is written in their hearts, says Paul. Who taught little Johnny to come running to his mother decrying the fact that little Susie has done him a grave injustice by taking his toy? The answer is, of course, nobody. God wrote it on his heart.

Everyone, in every culture, every creed and religion, has the work of the law written in their heart. It's not the law, but rather *the work of the law* that is written. The work of the law is that very basis by which we excuse ourselves and accuse others, declares the apostle. That work of the law compels every man, from young to old, to agree that there is indeed such a thing as right and wrong.

And it matters not one whit *what* right and wrong. The content of the right and wrong in the work of the law written in every man's heart is not material to its stated goal: condemnation.

There is not a man who ever lived who did not fail by his very own standard. There is not a man who ever lived who has not said, "I should have, and I did not," and, "I should not have, and I did." That's the work of the law. And it's already written in every man's heart. You don't need to go out and re-write what God has already written. Your penmanship isn't nearly as good as His.

Just as surely as the law of Moses was inscribed on the tablets of stone by the finger of God Himself, so also is the *work of the law* inscribed in the heart of every man by the finger of God Himself. And just as surely as the law of Moses condemns every Jew in his failure to continue in it, so also does the *work of the law* inscribed in the heart of every man condemn him in his failure to continue in it.

If any man says he does not believe in the reality of an inwardly written right or wrong, you need only strike him once across the face to make him realize that his real feelings on the subject of whether right and wrong really exist are quite different than his theories.

Those who preach the law or a repentance from the sins of the law are table

waiters of death. They need to be arrested so that their administration of death and condemnation will cease. The law is good. Your preaching of the law is not. Let the law condemn. It does a perfectly fine job without you.

Paul continues in his explanation of the difference between the Old and the New:

SEEING THEN THAT WE HAVE SUCH HOPE,
 WE USE GREAT PLAINNESS OF SPEECH:
 AND NOT AS MOSES, WHICH PUT A VAIL OVER HIS FACE,
 THAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL COULD NOT STEDFASTLY
 LOOK TO THE END OF THAT WHICH IS ABOLISHED:
 BUT THEIR MINDS WERE BLINDED: FOR UNTIL THIS DAY
 REMAINETH THE SAME VAIL UNTAKEN AWAY IN THE
 READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT;
 WHICH VAIL IS DONE AWAY IN CHRIST.
 BUT EVEN UNTO THIS DAY, WHEN MOSES IS READ,
 THE VAIL IS UPON THEIR HEART.
 NEVERTHELESS WHEN IT SHALL TURN TO THE LORD,
 THE VAIL SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY.
 NOW THE LORD IS THAT SPIRIT: AND WHERE THE
 SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY.
 BUT WE ALL, WITH OPEN FACE BEHOLDING AS IN A GLASS
 THE GLORY OF THE LORD, ARE CHANGED INTO THE SAME
 IMAGE FROM GLORY TO GLORY,
 EVEN AS BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.

(2 Corinthians 3:12)

What's the operative phrase for Paul? "Not as Moses."

Even to this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart, says Paul. Nevertheless, if a man turns from Moses to Christ, that is, turns from Moses and the law to where the Spirit of the Lord is, he finds the freedom that he could never find in the law of Moses. Moses brings the law that brings death. Jesus brings the gospel that brings life.

WHO ALSO HATH MADE US ABLE MINISTERS OF THE
 NEW TESTAMENT; NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT:

FOR THE LETTER KILLETH, BUT THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE.

You may think that it's your God-given duty to inform the sinners around you that they've broken the law. But you're wrong. You're incapable of doing that right. You're not qualified. Stop thinking that that's your calling. It isn't. It never was. It couldn't be.

Stop preaching the law. God has not made us "able," *hikanoo*, "qualified and competent," *ministers* of the letter, written and engraven in stones. Stop pretending He has. You're killing with the letter. And that's not your job. That's Moses' job. And the word that Paul instructs you with is *not as Moses*.

Don't do it like Moses. That's not your job. Do it like Jesus. That's your job.

The law, the ten commandments, written and engraven in stone, is the Old Contract. And because of sin, not a single Jew to whom it was offered was ever able to keep it. And consequently, God withdrew Himself from fulfilling His side of the Contract.

FOR IF THAT FIRST COVENANT HAD BEEN FAULTLESS,
 THEN SHOULD NO PLACE HAVE BEEN SOUGHT FOR
 THE SECOND. FOR FINDING FAULT WITH THEM,
 HE SAITH, BEHOLD, THE DAYS COME,
 SAITH THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A
 NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL
 AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH:
 NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH
 THEIR FATHERS IN THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE
 HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT;
 BECAUSE THEY CONTINUED NOT IN MY COVENANT,
 AND I REGARDED THEM NOT, SAITH THE LORD.

(Hebrews 8:7-9)

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, says God. Not like that. The New Contract is not like the Old Contract because the Old Contract could not be kept because of sin. *They continued not in my covenant*, says God. So *I regarded them not*. They breached the contract by not continuing in their side of it. In other words, they failed to keep their

side of the bargain. And what was their side of the bargain? Keep the law. Don't sin. Keep the law and live, said Moses.

The word "continued" is the key to understanding this passage. In the Greek, it's the word *emmeno*, "to stay in the same place." Remember that word when we spell out the conditions of the New Contract. That's what God is after. Continuance. Period.

You will be required in the New Contract, just like they were required in the Old Contract, to continue, "to stay in the same place," in the same condition under which you entered the agreement, or God will find you in breach of the New Contract just like He found the Jews in breach of the Old.

Does that make sense?

The Old Contract said "keep the law." That was its sole binding condition. They failed to keep it. And in failing to continue in it, they breached the agreement.

So what are the conditions of the New Contract?

They are, thankfully, an entire universe away from the Old. Here's the offer to you, from God Himself.

FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE
HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAITH THE LORD;
I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MIND, AND WRITE
THEM IN THEIR HEARTS: AND I WILL BE TO THEM A GOD,
AND THEY SHALL BE TO ME A PEOPLE:
AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERY MAN HIS NEIGHBOUR,
AND EVERY MAN HIS BROTHER, SAYING, KNOW THE LORD:
FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST
TO THE GREATEST. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR
UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR
INIQUITIES WILL I REMEMBER NO MORE. IN THAT HE
SAITH, A NEW COVENANT, HE HATH MADE THE
FIRST OLD. NOW THAT WHICH DECAYETH AND WAXETH
OLD IS READY TO VANISH AWAY. (Hebrews 8:10-13)

This is God's one and only offer to you for a relationship with Him. This is the New Contract. If you do not relate to Him on the basis of this Contract

offering, you cannot relate to Him at all.

Listen very carefully to exactly what is required from you to enter this agreement, because you will be required to continue in the conditions of the Contract. If you fail to continue, you will breach the Contract.

If God says, *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness*, what part of that stipulation is yours to bring to the agreement, and what part of that stipulation is God's? That's right: your part would be to bring your unrighteousness. His part would be to bring His mercy. And if you failed to bring your unrighteousness, He could not possibly bring His mercy. For on what would He lavish His mercy except your unrighteousness?

Do you understand the problem with the Pharisee? The Pharisee brings to the table of agreement his righteousness, not his unrighteousness. And God cannot bring His mercy, because righteousness doesn't require mercy.

The publican, on the other hand, brings nothing to the table but his unrighteousness. And therefore, God can bring His mercy and they can make an agreement.

What's the second part of the New Contract? *And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*. What part of that stipulation is yours and what part of that stipulation is God's? You must bring your sins and iniquities, and God will bring His non-remembrance. If you fail to bring your sins and iniquities, what exactly would God not remember?

Do you understand the problem with the Pharisee? He wants God to remember His righteous deeds. Not forget his sins and iniquities. But that's not the agreement that God is offering. Not even close.

God will only enter the agreement if you bring your unrighteousness, your sins, and your iniquities. That's your side of the bargain. You don't have anything else. Do you understand? God will only agree to be in a relationship with you under those specific conditions. That's the New Contract. There is no other. Take it or leave it.

But there is another consideration concerning the Contract. You must continue in it. And that's where many go wrong. They make the agreement, and then breach it by failing to continue, "to stay in the same place" required to enter the Contract in the first place.

Paul upbraids the Galatians for beginning in the New Covenant but vacat-

ing it by going back to the Old:

O FOOLISH GALATIANS, WHO HATH BEWITCHED YOU,
THAT YE SHOULD NOT OBEY THE TRUTH, BEFORE WHOSE
EYES JESUS CHRIST HATH BEEN EVIDENTLY SET FORTH,
CRUCIFIED AMONG YOU?

THIS ONLY WOULD I LEARN OF YOU, RECEIVED YE THE
SPIRIT BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW, OR BY THE HEARING
OF FAITH? ARE YE SO FOOLISH?

HAVING BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT,
ARE YE NOW MADE PERFECT BY THE FLESH?

(Galatians 3:1–3)

It is witchery, says Paul. You're under an evil spell. You are foolish beyond imagining to think that you could begin in an agreement with God one way, and continue in the exact opposite way. Paul continues:

FOR AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE
UNDER THE CURSE: FOR IT IS WRITTEN, CURSED
IS EVERY ONE THAT CONTINUETH NOT IN ALL THINGS
WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW
TO DO THEM. BUT THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY
THE LAW IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, IT IS EVIDENT:
FOR, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.
AND THE LAW IS NOT OF FAITH:
BUT, THE MAN THAT DOETH THEM SHALL LIVE IN THEM.
CHRIST HATH REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW,
BEING MADE A CURSE FOR US: FOR IT IS WRITTEN,
CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT HANGETH ON A TREE:
THAT THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM MIGHT COME ON THE
GENTILES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST; THAT WE MIGHT
RECEIVE THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH FAITH.
BRETHREN, I SPEAK AFTER THE MANNER OF MEN;
THOUGH IT BE BUT A MAN'S COVENANT, YET IF IT BE
CONFIRMED, NO MAN DISANNULLETH, OR ADDETH
THERETO. NOW TO ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED WERE THE
PROMISES MADE. HE SAITH NOT, AND TO SEEDS,

AS OF MANY; BUT AS OF ONE, AND TO THY SEED,
 WHICH IS CHRIST. AND THIS I SAY, THAT THE COVENANT,
 THAT WAS CONFIRMED BEFORE OF GOD IN CHRIST,
 THE LAW, WHICH WAS FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY
 YEARS AFTER, CANNOT DISANNUL,
 THAT IT SHOULD MAKE THE PROMISE OF NONE EFFECT.
 FOR IF THE INHERITANCE BE OF THE LAW, IT IS NO MORE
 OF PROMISE: BUT GOD GAVE IT TO ABRAHAM BY PROMISE.
 WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? IT WAS
 ADDED BECAUSE OF TRANSGRESSIONS,
 TILL THE SEED SHOULD COME TO WHOM
 THE PROMISE WAS MADE; AND IT WAS ORDAINED BY ANGELS
 IN THE HAND OF A MEDIATOR.
 IS THE LAW THEN AGAINST THE PROMISES OF GOD?
 GOD FORBID: FOR IF THERE HAD BEEN A LAW GIVEN
 WHICH COULD HAVE GIVEN LIFE,
 VERILY RIGHTEOUSNESS SHOULD HAVE BEEN BY THE LAW.
 BUT THE SCRIPTURE HATH CONCLUDED ALL UNDER SIN,
 THAT THE PROMISE BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST
 MIGHT BE GIVEN TO THEM THAT BELIEVE.
 BUT BEFORE FAITH CAME, WE WERE KEPT UNDER THE LAW,
 SHUT UP UNTO THE FAITH WHICH SHOULD AFTERWARDS BE
 REVEALED. WHEREFORE THE LAW WAS OUR
 SCHOOLMASTER TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST,
 THAT WE MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.
 BUT AFTER THAT FAITH IS COME,
 WE ARE NO LONGER UNDER A SCHOOLMASTER.

(Galatians 3:10–25)

Those who would have you obey the works of the law have put you back under Moses' agreement, the very agreement that no man can keep. And if you attempt to keep that agreement and fail to do so, according to Paul, all the curses of that agreement must come upon you.

If the agreement is by law, by works, says Paul, it cannot be by faith. *The law is not of faith.*

We must continue in faith, not in law. The law is the *doing* of righteousness. Faith is only the promise of a future righteousness. If you would have righteousness now, like the Pharisee, it must be by the law. It cannot be by faith.

CHRIST IS BECOME OF NO EFFECT UNTO YOU,
 WHOSEVER OF YOU ARE JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW;
 YE ARE FALLEN FROM GRACE.
 FOR WE THROUGH THE SPIRIT WAIT FOR THE HOPE
 OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH. (Galatians 5:4–5)

When you fall, you always fall down. Never up. You fall from grace, down to the keeping of the law. You fall from God's reckoning, imputing, and counting of the righteousness of grace, down to the earning, deserving, and indebtedness of the righteousness of the law. You fall from having God put His robe of righteousness over your dirty body, to putting your own robe of righteousness over your self-cleaned body. You fall from the kisses of your father on your dirty neck, to the refusal of his kisses on your self-cleaned neck.

In order for God to continue in His side of the New Agreement, you must be willing to continue in your side. His side is mercy and non-remembrance. Your side is unrighteousness and sins and iniquities.

That's why the breast-smiting confession of the publican is the continuing confession of the New Contract. That's why Paul, and every man who would continue in relationship with God, cries out continually, "O wretched man that I am."

O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO SHALL DELIVER ME
 FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH? I THANK GOD
 THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. SO THEN
 WITH THE MIND I MYSELF SERVE THE LAW OF GOD;
 BUT WITH THE FLESH THE LAW OF SIN.
 (Romans 7:24–25)

Those who would confess that they are presently righteous abrogate the New Contract. They cannot abide in relationship with God. The New Contract is only for the unrighteous. It is never for the righteous.

But many would protest this viewpoint by posing Paul's question to the

Romans: *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* (Romans 6:1) And they do indeed quote his question correctly, but not, I think, with understanding.

Paul's question is framed not as "do we have the inherent capacity for sin?" and "is grace available at all times to super-abundantly meet and overwhelm that sinful capacity?" because his answer to that question would obviously have been "Yes and *more* than yes!" And his question is not "will we sin at any time in the future?" and "will grace super-abound to our forgiveness if we do?" because the answer to that question would also be a resounding "Yes, we will, and yes, it will!"

But rather his question is posed much like if someone were to ask you, "Shall we dance?" They're not asking, "Do you have the ability to dance?" or "Have you ever at any time in the past or will you ever at anytime in the future dance?" They're asking, "Do you want to dance right now?"

Paul is asking whether or not we should make a plan, right now, to continue to sin in order to get the grace that we need and desire from God. And the obvious answer to that question is a resounding 'no.' But the reason for the answer is not as obvious as the answer itself.

Paul asks this question in response to information he has just communicated in the preceding verses of chapter 5, particularly the last three verses of that chapter.

FOR AS BY ONE MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE MANY
WERE MADE SINNERS, SO BY THE OBEDIENCE
OF ONE SHALL MANY BE MADE RIGHTEOUS.
MOREOVER THE LAW ENTERED, THAT THE OFFENCE
MIGHT ABOUND. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED,
GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND:
THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH,
EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH
RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY
JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. (Romans 5:19–21)

By whose *disobedience* were many made sinners? The answer is, according to Paul, by *Adam's* disobedience. His disobedience is purely past-tense. That's a done deal. And by Whose *obedience* shall many be made righteous?

The answer is, of course, by Christ's obedience. And our being made righteous is purely future tense. That is not yet a done deal. The just, that is, the righteous, shall live by faith, says the apostle. And faith is *strictly* a promise of things not yet fulfilled, the substance of things only hoped for and the evidence of things not yet seen. If you're still hoping for it, and if you haven't seen it yet, it's still in the future. That full and present persuasion of a promise not yet fulfilled is the very definition of faith. And nothing else pleases God but that.

But then Paul says the law entered to make a complete mess of things. The law came to make sin abound. But, thanks be to God, grace came in and out-abounded sin, so that even though sin *used* to reign unto death, *now* grace reigns unto eternal life. Sin used to sit on the throne, but now grace does. And here is where the confusion lies:

Paul says grace now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

But whose righteousness is he referring to? Yours or Christ's? Through whose righteousness does grace now reign unto eternal life? Yours or His?

Didn't he just say that because of Adam's disobedience you were made a sinner? Do you think he is now saying that by *your* righteousness grace will reign unto eternal life? He says very plainly that you're the sinner. And very plainly that Christ is the righteous. If he's referring to grace "reigning by *your own* righteousness," then the next sentence in which he asks the question, *shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. But if he's referring to *Christ's* righteousness through which grace is reigning, then it makes perfect sense.

Paul's answer to his own rhetorical question is emphatic. Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid!

But *why* shall we not sin? Shall we not make a plan to sin because we are now righteous? Because we now pull ourselves up by our spiritual bootstraps and decide, "I'm just not going to sin anymore"?

No. Quite the opposite actually. Paul says we shall not continue in sin because we're dead. And the dead do not sin.

In the ten sentences that follow, including the very one where he emphatically asserts that we should *not* make a plan to sin, he uses the words *death*, *dead* or *died* nine times, and in the one sentence where he doesn't use the

word *death*, he uses the two words *crucified* and *destroyed*. Close enough.

We don't make a plan for sin not because we are righteous, Paul insists, but because we are dead.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN? SHALL WE CONTINUE
 IN SIN, THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND?
 GOD FORBID. HOW SHALL WE, THAT ARE DEAD
 TO SIN, LIVE ANY LONGER THEREIN?
 KNOW YE NOT, THAT SO MANY OF US AS WERE
 BAPTIZED INTO JESUS CHRIST WERE
 BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? THEREFORE WE
 ARE BURIED WITH HIM BY BAPTISM INTO DEATH:
 THAT LIKE AS CHRIST WAS RAISED UP FROM THE
 DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, EVEN SO WE
 ALSO SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.
 FOR IF WE HAVE BEEN PLANTED TOGETHER IN
 THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH, WE SHALL BE ALSO
 IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION:
 KNOWING THIS, THAT OUR OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED
 WITH HIM, THAT THE BODY OF SIN MIGHT BE
 DESTROYED, THAT HENCEFORTH WE SHOULD NOT
 SERVE SIN. FOR HE THAT IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN.
 NOW IF WE BE DEAD WITH CHRIST, WE BELIEVE THAT
 WE SHALL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM:
 KNOWING THAT CHRIST BEING RAISED FROM THE
 DEAD DIETH NO MORE; DEATH HATH NO
 MORE DOMINION OVER HIM. FOR IN THAT HE DIED,
 HE DIED UNTO SIN ONCE: BUT IN THAT HE LIVETH,
 HE LIVETH UNTO GOD.
 LIKewise RECKON YE ALSO
 YOURSELVES TO BE DEAD INDEED UNTO SIN, BUT
 ALIVE UNTO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

(Romans 6:1–11)

Why do we not sin? Not because we are alive and reigning through our own righteous behavior. But rather, because we are dead.

HE THAT IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN.

Paul says the law has dominion over a man so long as he lives (Romans 7:1). But when that man is dead, the law's dominion is done. If in the course of a crime, the perpetrator is shot and killed, he never goes to trial afterward. The law is finished with him. It has extracted from him the maximum penalty. There is no more price to pay. So it is with us. Only in our case, the law did not extract from *us* the maximum penalty. It rather extracted it from *Christ* in our stead. He died unto sin once. But being raised, he dies no more. And in that He lives, He now lives unto God, declares Paul.

And then the apostle gets right down to the heart of the reason why we do not plan to sin anymore: likewise, he says, **reckon** yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Christ.

It's not that we're already dead to sin. That's not what he's saying. He is saying that we must **reckon** ourselves dead unto sin. To **reckon** is to count a thing which is not as though it *already* is. A reckoning is a *future* reality, not a *present* one. Count it this way, says Paul.

On the other hand, you are, right now, in reality, at the present, indeed, dead to the *law* by the body of Christ.

WHEREFORE, MY BRETHREN, YE ALSO ARE BECOME
DEAD TO THE LAW BY THE BODY OF CHRIST;
THAT YE SHOULD BE MARRIED TO ANOTHER,
EVEN TO HIM WHO IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD,
THAT WE SHOULD BRING FORTH FRUIT UNTO GOD.

(Romans 7:4)

But you are not dead to *sin*. Not yet. That is why you must **reckon** yourself **dead indeed unto sin**. You reckon it because, at present, it is not so.

And how do we accomplish that? Paul continues in the same passage:

LET NOT SIN THEREFORE REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY,
THAT YE SHOULD OBEY IT IN THE LUSTS THEREOF.
NEITHER YIELD YE YOUR MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS
OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO SIN: BUT YIELD YOURSELVES
UNTO GOD, AS THOSE THAT ARE ALIVE FROM THE DEAD,

AND YOUR MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF
 RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO GOD.
 FOR SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU:
 FOR YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE.
 WHAT THEN? SHALL WE SIN, BECAUSE WE ARE NOT
 UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE? GOD FORBID.
 KNOW YE NOT, THAT TO WHOM YE YIELD YOURSELVES
 SERVANTS TO OBEY, HIS SERVANTS YE ARE TO WHOM
 YE OBEY; WHETHER OF SIN UNTO DEATH, OR OF
 OBEDIENCE UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS? BUT GOD BE
 THANKED, THAT YE WERE THE SERVANTS OF SIN,
 BUT YE HAVE OBEYED FROM THE HEART THAT FORM
 OF DOCTRINE WHICH WAS DELIVERED YOU.
 BEING THEN MADE FREE FROM SIN, YE BECAME
 THE SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. I SPEAK AFTER
 THE MANNER OF MEN BECAUSE OF THE INFIRMITY
 OF YOUR FLESH: FOR AS YE HAVE YIELDED YOUR
 MEMBERS SERVANTS TO UNCLEANNESS AND TO
 INIQUITY UNTO INIQUITY; EVEN SO NOW YIELD YOUR
 MEMBERS SERVANTS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO HOLINESS.
 FOR WHEN YE WERE THE SERVANTS OF SIN, YE WERE FREE
 FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS. WHAT FRUIT HAD YE THEN IN
 THOSE THINGS WHEREOF YE ARE NOW ASHAMED?
 FOR THE END OF THOSE THINGS IS DEATH.
 BUT NOW BEING MADE FREE FROM SIN, AND BECOME
 SERVANTS TO GOD, YE HAVE YOUR FRUIT UNTO HOLINESS,
 AND THE END EVERLASTING LIFE.
 FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH; BUT THE GIFT OF GOD
 IS ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

(Romans 6:12–23)

Sin shall not have dominion over you, not because you now *keep* the law, but rather, because you're not even *under the law*, but *under grace*. How can you be *under the law*, the apostle reasons, if you're dead? The law has no dominion over the dead. And if you're in Christ, then you're dead.

AND IF CHRIST BE IN YOU, THE BODY
IS DEAD BECAUSE OF SIN; BUT THE SPIRIT
IS LIFE BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 8:10)

Dead to the law because of sin, reckoning yourself dead indeed to sin, and simultaneously spiritually alive to God through Christ. Dead and alive at the very same time.

There are two practical aspects of this living-death: first, do not let sin *reign*, “be the king,” that you should *obey* it as your king. The word *obey* is not an obedience by compulsion, but rather a willing obedience. In the Greek, *hupakouo* means “to hear under (as a subordinate), i.e. to listen attentively; by implication, to heed or conform to a command or authority: hearken, be obedient to, obey.” Paul says that the law of sin that is in his members compels him, against his will, to do those things that he does not want to do.

BUT SIN, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT,
WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE.
FOR WITHOUT THE LAW SIN WAS DEAD.
FOR I WAS ALIVE WITHOUT THE LAW ONCE: BUT WHEN
THE COMMANDMENT CAME, SIN REVIVED, AND I DIED.
AND THE COMMANDMENT, WHICH WAS ORDAINED TO LIFE,
I FOUND TO BE UNTO DEATH. FOR SIN, TAKING OCCASION
BY THE COMMANDMENT, DECEIVED ME, AND BY IT SLEW ME.
WHEREFORE THE LAW IS HOLY, AND THE COMMANDMENT
HOLY, AND JUST, AND GOOD. WAS THEN THAT WHICH IS
GOOD MADE DEATH UNTO ME? GOD FORBID. BUT SIN,
THAT IT MIGHT APPEAR SIN, WORKING DEATH IN ME BY
THAT WHICH IS GOOD; THAT SIN BY THE COMMANDMENT
MIGHT BECOME EXCEEDING SINFUL. FOR WE KNOW THAT
THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL: BUT I AM CARNAL, SOLD UNDER
SIN. FOR THAT WHICH I DO I ALLOW NOT: FOR WHAT I
WOULD, THAT DO I NOT; BUT WHAT I HATE, THAT DO I.
IF THEN I DO THAT WHICH I WOULD NOT, I CONSENT UNTO
THE LAW THAT IT IS GOOD. NOW THEN IT IS NO MORE I
THAT DO IT, BUT SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME. FOR I KNOW

THAT IN ME (THAT IS, IN MY FLESH,) DWELLETH NO GOOD THING: FOR TO WILL IS PRESENT WITH ME; BUT HOW TO PERFORM THAT WHICH IS GOOD I FIND NOT. FOR THE GOOD THAT I WOULD I DO NOT: BUT THE EVIL WHICH I WOULD NOT, THAT I DO. NOW IF I DO THAT I WOULD NOT, IT IS NO MORE I THAT DO IT, BUT SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME. I FIND THEN A LAW, THAT, WHEN I WOULD DO GOOD, EVIL IS PRESENT WITH ME. (Romans 7:8–21)

You may still be the reluctant servant of sin, but don't any longer be the willing, attentive, eager servant of sin.

Second, neither *yield* your members to sin and its causes. *Yield*, *paristemi*, is “to stand beside so as to recommend, to proffer,” that is, to offer for approval. No longer willingly serve sin as your master, but rather, yield your members to Christ. Stand beside now “so as to recommend” Christ instead.

Can you reckon yourself dead indeed unto sin? Yes, you can. And you must. And can you reckon yourself alive unto God through Christ Jesus? Yes, you can. And you must. And can you stop “standing beside so as to recommend” sin as its eager and willing servant and instead now recommend Christ? Yes, you can. And you must. And can you acknowledge that it is the righteousness of Christ alone and not your own righteousness that will ultimately bring you to eternal life? Yes you can. And you must.

But can you, or will you, or must you, never sin again in order to be His faithful and pleasing servant? Of course not. And those who would tell you that you must, or imply that you must, or even fail to tell you differently, lie.

Like all Pharisees, they lie.

Faith is righteousness by promise. And the promise is much like a written check. The check is a promise of things to come, but not those very things themselves. If the writer of the check is trustworthy, the check will cause the same rejoicing as the cashing of the check.

God promises righteousness. You have His word on it. And God has never bounced a check. Not once. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His word will never pass away. But until Christ returns and the Permanent replaces the substitute, the check will have to be enough. And if you try to cash that

check drawn on a future righteousness now, by the law, then He will refuse to honor it at His return.

Abraham is our example of faith. Faith, because it is the reckoning, imputing and counting of what is not really there yet, requires a contradiction of circumstance to be activated. Such was the case of Abraham:

FOR THE PROMISE, THAT HE SHOULD BE THE HEIR OF THE WORLD, WAS NOT TO ABRAHAM, OR TO HIS SEED, THROUGH THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH. FOR IF THEY WHICH ARE OF THE LAW BE HEIRS, FAITH IS MADE VOID, AND THE PROMISE MADE OF NONE EFFECT: BECAUSE THE LAW WORKETH WRATH: FOR WHERE NO LAW IS, THERE IS NO TRANSGRESSION. THEREFORE IT IS OF FAITH, THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE; TO THE END THE PROMISE MIGHT BE SURE TO ALL THE SEED; NOT TO THAT ONLY WHICH IS OF THE LAW, BUT TO THAT ALSO WHICH IS OF THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM; WHO IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, (AS IT IS WRITTEN, I HAVE MADE THEE A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS,) BEFORE HIM WHOM HE BELIEVED, EVEN GOD, WHO QUICKENETH THE DEAD, AND CALLETH THOSE THINGS WHICH BE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE. WHO AGAINST HOPE BELIEVED IN HOPE, THAT HE MIGHT BECOME THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS; ACCORDING TO THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN, SO SHALL THY SEED BE. AND BEING NOT WEAK IN FAITH, HE CONSIDERED NOT HIS OWN BODY NOW DEAD, WHEN HE WAS ABOUT AN HUNDRED YEARS OLD, NEITHER YET THE DEADNESS OF SARA'S WOMB: HE STAGGERED NOT AT THE PROMISE OF GOD THROUGH UNBELIEF; BUT WAS STRONG IN FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD; AND BEING FULLY PERSUADED THAT, WHAT HE HAD PROMISED, HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM. AND THEREFORE IT WAS IMPUTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 4:13–22)

God waits until the circumstances of Abraham's life make the fulfillment of his promise impossible in natural terms. Hundred year old men with dead-wombed wives do not become fathers of many nations. That's impossible. And that's exactly the way God wants it: impossible.

But astonishingly, Abraham believes God anyway. And his faith is counted as righteousness. And that's the same offer God makes to you.

Your contradicting circumstance is that you are impossibly unrighteous. And impossibly sinful and iniquitous. And God says to you, right in the big middle of your utterly contradicting impossibility, *For I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more.*

God only makes one offer: you be the sinner, continually, and Christ will be the Righteous. Begin as a sinner. Remain a sinner. And like Abraham, believe what God offers you in the New Contract. And your faith will be counted unto you, just like Abraham's was unto him, as righteousness.

I TELL YOU, THIS MAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED
RATHER THAN THE OTHER: FOR EVERY ONE THAT EXALTETH
HIMSELF SHALL BE ABASED; AND HE THAT HUMBLETH
HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED. (Luke 18:14)

The sinful publican goes home justified. He has the righteousness of God. It is counted, imputed, reckoned, not present, only future, by promise, by faith.

The 'righteous' Pharisee goes home condemned. He only has his own righteousness. It is earned, seen, worked-for, present, not by promise, not by faith.

And *that* righteousness is no righteousness at all.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, says God. *Not one. Not ever.*

Chapter 17

The Contradiction of Judgment

Across the United States, anywhere you go, courtrooms are set up in pretty much the same working fashion. Whether big city or small municipality, inside the courtroom there's always a special place for the two lawyers, the prosecuting attorney and the defense attorney. And there's always a special place for the judge, usually on an elevated dais above the rest of the room. And then, of course, there's always a special place for the accused, right next to his defending attorney.

And let's imagine for a moment that you have been accused of a crime, and into that typical courtroom you walk. And let's imagine that instead of turning left at the end of the aisle to take your appointed seat beside your defense attorney, you march straight ahead, right past the big burly bailiff, up onto the raised platform, and sit down in the judge's seat.

And let's imagine that you pick up the judge's gavel, pound it one hard time, and in a loud voice say, "Let's get this show on the road!"

Can you imagine yourself ever really doing that?

Probably not.

But why not?

Because first of all, if you did, you know you would look like a complete idiot. An absolute, unfettered, moronic buffoon. And you don't want to look like an idiot. And second, you know that that big burly bailiff you

passed on the way up to your bit of elevated folly would show you exactly why he's so big and burly. He would arrest you. Forcefully. Probably with bad intentions as he proceeded to carry out his sworn duty. And you don't want to get arrested. Especially not by that guy. And then of course, you also know that when the real judge took his seat, you would be charged with at least two additional crimes: one for contempt of court and another for impersonating an officer of the court. And you don't want to be charged with any additional crimes.

And on top of looking like a total idiot, being accosted by Big Burly Bob the Bailiff, and charged with more crimes than you came in with, you also know you would immediately become the laughingstock of your whole town.

"I was there and I actually saw that knuckleheaded nincompoop gaveling down the audience from right up there in the judge's chair," they would laugh and hoot and yuk it up as they rehearsed your folly at all the local watering holes that evening. And when your wife heard about it, she would cry. If she had always secretly feared you were a fool, this would be the final and irrefutable proof that she was right. And your kids would have to change schools. Because all the other kids would unmercifully mock them with that old refrain of "Here comes the judge!" every time they saw them.

And the local TV station, and maybe even Fox News, would run a feature piece on you. "Idiot Has His Day in Court" the headline would read. The pictures and the grainy phone video would make you look all the more hilarious in your moment of judicial triumph.

And in your jail cell, you would sit alone and wonder why in the world you ever made such a boneheaded life-changing mistake.

And that's why you would never even imagine doing such a stupid thing.

But the same thing that multiplied millions of self-named Christians would never even imagine doing, even in their local, one-horse municipal court, they do with absolute and brazen impunity every single day in the hallowed Court of God.

And nobody arrests them. And nobody charges them with a crime. And nobody laughs. And Fox News doesn't even think it's newsworthy.

Here's the real contradictory truth on the subject of judgment: God has a Court. And in God's Court, you've already been charged with a crime.

And in God's Court, you really are the defendant. And in God's Court you're already guilty.

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER
THE LAW SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO
ARE UNDER THE LAW: THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY
BE STOPPED, AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME
GUILTY BEFORE GOD. (Romans 3:19)

Everything that the law is saying, *what things soever the law saith*, it is saying to *those who are under the law*. That's *you*.

And everything the law is saying, it is saying to accomplish one singular purpose: *that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*. That is, to make *you* shut up and be guilty.

In the Court of Heaven, everybody is the defendant. That includes you. The arrest warrant has already been issued for *you*. The Court summons is already on record for *you*. And in that Court, just like any other court, *you* have a specially assigned seat.

And no, it's not the one in which the Judge sits.

But nevertheless, in the Court of Heaven, every day, many keep marching right past their assigned seat beside their Lawyer, right past the Holy Spirit-Bailiff, up above everyone else in the Courtroom, and taking the Judge's seat. Day after day after day. And day after day they dispense their judgments, exactly like the real Judge.

But this is what they're probably not aware of: in the United States legal system, if you impersonate an officer of the court, you get anywhere from two to thirty years in prison, depending on how much damage you've done with your impersonation.

So here's my question:

If you get two to thirty years in prison for impersonating an officer in this world's courts, what do you think you get for impersonating God?

How much damage do you think you could accomplish in an entire lifetime of sitting the Judge's seat, judging your fellow defendants?

The apostle Paul actually has an answer to that question. It's found in his

letter to the Romans. Paul ends the first chapter of Romans by giving a long list of all manner of crimes that men are charged with in the Court of God. He runs the gamut from disobedience-to-parents to murder. The list is not exhaustive. It's just a sampling. Paul says that when men exchanged the truth for the lie, here's what they got in its place:

WHO CHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD INTO A LIE, AND
 WORSHIPPED AND SERVED THE CREATURE MORE
 THAN THE CREATOR, WHO IS BLESSED FOR EVER. AMEN.
 FOR THIS CAUSE GOD GAVE THEM UP UNTO VILE
 AFFECTIONS: FOR EVEN THEIR WOMEN DID CHANGE
 THE NATURAL USE INTO THAT WHICH IS AGAINST
 NATURE: AND LIKEWISE ALSO THE MEN,
 LEAVING THE NATURAL USE OF THE WOMAN,
 BURNED IN THEIR LUST ONE TOWARD ANOTHER;
 MEN WITH MEN WORKING THAT WHICH IS UNSEEMLY,
 AND RECEIVING IN THEMSELVES THAT RECOMPENCE
 OF THEIR ERROR WHICH WAS MEET.
 AND EVEN AS THEY DID NOT LIKE TO RETAIN GOD
 IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE, GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO A
 REPROBATE MIND, TO DO THOSE THINGS WHICH
 ARE NOT CONVENIENT; BEING FILLED WITH ALL
 UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, FORNICATION, WICKEDNESS,
 COVETOUSNESS, MALICIOUSNESS; FULL OF ENVY,
 MURDER, DEBATE, DECEIT, MALIGNITY; WHISPERERS,
 BACKBITERS, HATERS OF GOD, DESPITEFUL, PROUD,
 BOASTERS, INVENTORS OF EVIL THINGS,
 DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS, WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING,
 COVENANTBREAKERS, WITHOUT NATURAL AFFECTION,
 IMPLACABLE, UNMERCIFUL: WHO KNOWING THE
 JUDGMENT OF GOD, THAT THEY WHICH
 COMMIT SUCH THINGS ARE WORTHY OF DEATH,
 NOT ONLY DO THE SAME, BUT HAVE PLEASURE
 IN THEM THAT DO THEM. (Romans 1:25–32)

Paul ends chapter one on that happy note. A veritable laundry list of charges,

all worthy of death. And most self-named Christians say “Amen, brother,” because they think they are not on the list. But astonishingly, Paul says all of that to say *this*, in the very first verse of chapter two:

THEREFORE THOU ART INEXCUSABLE, O MAN,
 WHOSOEVER THOU ART THAT JUDGEST:
 FOR WHEREIN THOU JUDGEST ANOTHER,
 THOU CONDEMNEST THYSELF; FOR THOU
 THAT JUDGEST DOEST THE SAME THINGS. BUT WE ARE
 SURE THAT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS ACCORDING TO
 TRUTH AGAINST THEM WHICH COMMIT SUCH THINGS.
 AND THINKEST THOU THIS, O MAN, THAT JUDGEST
 THEM WHICH DO SUCH THINGS, AND DOEST THE SAME,
 THAT THOU SHALT ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?
 OR DESPISEST THOU THE RICHES OF HIS GOODNESS
 AND FORBEARANCE AND LONGSUFFERING; NOT KNOWING
 THAT THE GOODNESS OF GOD LEADETH THEE TO
 REPENTANCE? BUT AFTER THY HARDNESS AND
 IMPENITENT HEART TREASUREST UP UNTO THYSELF
 WRATH AGAINST THE DAY OF WRATH AND
 REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD...

(Romans 2:1–5)

The point of the list is to establish Who is the Judge and who is the defendant. God is the Judge. And you are the defendant. And because you, *O man, whosoever thou art that judgest*, are the defendant, says Paul, you are *inexcusable* when you sit in the Judge’s seat to judge anyone else for their sins.

The word “inexcusable” is the Greek word *anapologetos*, meaning “indefensible.”

Listen carefully: in any courtroom, judgment must emanate from the judge’s seat. Judgment cannot be pronounced from anywhere else in the courtroom. If it is, it is simply not valid.

Do you understand the problem with that?

In Heaven’s Courtroom, if you sit in the Judges seat, you cannot also, si-

multaneously, sit in the defendant's seat. And if you do not sit in the defendant's seat, you cannot be defended. And if you cannot be defended, you are automatically condemned.

In Heaven's courtroom, just like in an earthly courtroom, if you, the defendant, are also acting as judge, you are sitting in an "indefensible" position.

Unlike our courts where you enter under the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, you enter the Court of Heaven already proven guilty.

THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

You're already guilty. Your guilt was never in question.

We have, says the Apostle John, a defense attorney, *an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous* (1 John 2:1). And He wins every case He defends. But He can only defend those who by the law have been brought to muted guilt, and who, upon entering the Court, take their appointed place in the defendant's seat.

Those who would bypass the defendant's seat and sit in the Judge's seat have, by doing so, adjudged themselves to be neither muted nor guilty. And therein lies their certain condemnation. They are in contempt of Heaven's Court. And they are guilty of impersonating God.

And that's exactly what the Pharisees do. Jesus said, *The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat* (Matthew 23:2).

Go figure. It would appear that sitting in Moses' seat of judgment, according to Jesus, is not a good thing to do. According to Jesus, it almost sounds like the only person who should be sitting in Moses' seat is Moses himself. And it certainly doesn't sound like Jesus Himself is sitting in the seat of Moses. Nor does it sound like Jesus is encouraging any of His followers to sit in that seat either.

Nevertheless, the Pharisees sit there day after day, dispensing the judgments of God, just as though they had been empowered by the Court to do so.

They defend their judgments of others by insisting that Paul is really only talking to those who would *hypocritically* judge others. As long as you're not a hypocrite, they insist, it is not only your right to sit in the Judge's seat

and judge the sins of others, it is your very God-given responsibility.

The only ones not allowed to judge, according to their argument, are those who *doest the same things*. In other words, they are allowed to judge because, according to them, they are not on Paul's list of sins at all. We'll see in a moment if that holds up in close inspection.

But before we actually examine the list to see if you're on it, think about this: Paul is laying out an argument that begins in chapter one of Romans and culminates in chapter three. His argument concerns the guilt of absolutely *everyone* in the whole world. No exceptions: the Jew, the Gentile, those who have the law, those who don't have the law, all, according to Paul's argument, are equally guilty before God.

He climaxes his argument that the entire world lies under the damning indictment of the law by charging all of humanity with the following:

AS IT IS WRITTEN, THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS,
 NO, NOT ONE:
 THERE IS NONE THAT UNDERSTANDETH, THERE IS NONE
 THAT SEEKETH AFTER GOD.
 THEY ARE ALL GONE OUT OF THE WAY,
 THEY ARE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE;
 THERE IS NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.
 THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN SEPULCHRE;
 WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY HAVE USED DECEIT;
 THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS:
 WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS:
 THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD:
 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR WAYS:
 AND THE WAY OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN:
 THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.
 NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE LAW
 SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW:
 THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
 AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD.
 THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO
 FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE LAW

IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.

(Romans 3:10–12)

Everyone, without one single exception, is guilty.

Now think about that for a minute: do you really think that, while Paul is on his way to indicting the entire world as being guilty before God, without one single exception, he actually pauses in chapter two to make sure you know that as long as you're not a hypocrite, you can go right ahead and judge your fellow sinners guilty of sin and worthy of death? Would that make any sense at all?

Do you really think Paul is saying, "I know you're not righteous, I know you don't seek God, I know you don't understand anything, you're altogether lost and worthless, you're no good, your throat is an open grave, every word you speak is deceitful and poisonous, I know your mouth is full of nothing but cursing and bitterness, your feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are your only paths, you have no peace with God nor fear of God, but hey, as long as you're not hypocritical when you do it, by all means, go right ahead and judge all the real sinners around you!"

Do you really think he's talking about everyone but you? Do you really think that he is saying that you who are worthy of death have every right to judge others who are also worthy of death? Does one guilty defendant ever get to be the judge of another guilty defendant?

Are you kidding? What kind of Court are you running here?

Listen carefully: unless you sit in the seat of the defendant, *and only the seat of the defendant*, you cannot be defended. Your position in the Judge's seat, Paul insists, is *indefensible*.

And as the defendant, do you think that if your Lawyer secures your pardon, He would suddenly appoint you to the bench to now be the judge? Or would He rather send you out as a sinner-acquitted-by-grace to try to get other guilty sinners to come and sit in the defendant's seat beside Him?

You have no position in this Court except defendant. Shut up. Be guilty. Get grace. And leave. And next time you come to Court, bring another guilty defendant with you so the process can be repeated. Nobody wants to hear your second-hand judgments in your best voice-of-God impersonation. God does a very good job of judging with absolutely no help from you.

But back to the list. First of all, the list of sins that Paul enumerates is not exhaustive. I don't see child molestation on the list. I don't even see lying or adultery on the list.

Read it again:

AND THINKEST THOU THIS, O MAN, THAT JUDGEST THEM
WHICH DO SUCH THINGS, AND DOEST THE SAME,
THAT THOU SHALT ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?

The confusion of the judgmental Pharisee's argument lies in the word "same." They think that God's condemnation for judgment is only upon those who would judge others while at the same time, hypocritically doing the very *same* thing. But the word translated *same* here is the Greek word *autos*, "the reflexive pronoun for self, used of the third person." The Greek word *autos* refers, in this case, to *you*.

So here's what Paul is actually saying: "Do you think, O man, that judgest them which practice sin (*prasso*, 'to perform something repeatedly or habitually'), while you sin even once (*poieo*, 'referring to a single act'), that you will escape the righteous judgment of God?"

And of course, the answer is no. No you can't and no you won't. Paul insists that whatever sin is in you will be judged exactly as the sin in anyone else will be judged. There is no double standard, one for the really bad practicing sinners, and one for you who only sin once.

Do you really think that when they brought the woman caught in the very act of adultery to Jesus that He was saying, "Whoever is without *adultery* among you, let him cast the first stone"? Do you really think that if adultery hadn't been on their own personal résumés that He would have authorized her stoning? Do you really think He was saying, "Only the non-hypocritical, non-adulterers have the right to stone her"? Listen again:

SO WHEN THEY CONTINUED ASKING HIM,
HE LIFTED UP HIMSELF, AND SAID UNTO THEM,
HE THAT IS WITHOUT SIN AMONG YOU,
LET HIM FIRST CAST A STONE AT HER. (John 8:7)

His words are plain. *He that is without sin among you*, *anamartetos*, "having no sin." There's a new standard for judgment in town, says Jesus. It's

sinlessness. And if you're not sinless yourself, shut up about anyone else's sins.

How do we know for certain that if you're not hypocritically guilty of the same sin, it's perfectly alright to go ahead and judge other sinners? Because Jesus Himself was not guilty of adultery and He didn't judge. Jesus wasn't guilty of any sin. And He still didn't judge. If He doesn't, how is it that you do? If the sinless Christ doesn't judge sinners, how is it that you who are not sinless still do?

AND JESUS SAID UNTO HER,
NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE:
GO, AND SIN NO MORE. (John 8:11)

Jesus is saying to the woman, caught in the very act of adultery, *Neither do I condemn thee*. Are you saying the same thing to the sinners around you? If you're not, why are you not? Why are you not saying exactly the same thing that the sinless and non-hypocritical Christ is saying? Do you not understand? If you are condemning others for their sins, He will have to condemn you for your sins. Is that what you really want?

Do you not understand? *You* are the woman caught in adultery. It's *you* who are the sinner. The law has brought *you* before Christ and cast *you* down at His feet. The law is demanding *your* death. It's not just her. It's you as well. It's you lying there at His feet, caught in the very act of your sin, awaiting His pronouncement. Do you not understand? Whatever you pronounce on her, He must also pronounce on you!

FOR WITH WHAT JUDGMENT YE JUDGE,
YE SHALL BE JUDGED:
AND WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE,
IT SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN. (Matthew 7:2)

Do you not understand? With whatever ruler you measure others, God will measure you. If you measure with the law, you will be measured with the law. Is that what you really want? Do you think you can measure people around you with the law and then not be measured with the law yourself? Do you think that if you're measured by the law, you'll actually measure up?

Jesus said, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

Measure with mercy. So you'll be measured with mercy. Equally guilty defendants should extend mercy to other equally guilty defendants in hopes of receiving mercy from the Court themselves.

JUDGE NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE JUDGED:

CONDEMN NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE CONDEMNED:

FORGIVE, AND YE SHALL BE FORGIVEN. (Luke 6:36–37)

Judge and you'll be judged. Condemn and you'll be condemned. Forgive and you'll be forgiven. That's how Jesus tells it. Do you tell it differently?

And again Jesus says, *Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man* (John 8:15).

Jesus judges no man. How is it that you still do?

WHO KNOWING THE JUDGMENT OF GOD,
THAT THEY WHICH COMMIT SUCH THINGS ARE
WORTHY OF DEATH, NOT ONLY DO THE SAME,
BUT HAVE PLEASURE IN THEM THAT DO THEM.

(Romans 1:32)

Whose judgment is it anyway? It's *God's* judgment. It's not Bob's judgment. It will never be Bob's judgment. Bob is not God and Bob will never be God.

And who is worthy of death? Bob is. *All* who do *such things*, "things like these," are *worthy of death*. And who is it that does "things like these"? *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. And *all* means *all*. And *all* includes *you*.

Do you not understand? You're on the list. Don't say you're not. You sin. Don't say you don't. You're guilty. Don't say you're not. By the law, you're guilty. And by the law, you are worthy of death. You cannot exempt yourself. You are the defendant in this courtroom. It's not the adulteress. It's not the homosexual. It's not the abortion doctor or the Taliban. In your courtroom, where you're being tried, no one else is on trial but you. Just you. So shut up and be guilty. Stop talking about anyone else's sins. In this Courtroom you're not even allowed to speak.

And if we can still hear you talking in this Courtroom, we'll know you've taken the wrong seat.

But, some may protest, did not Jesus Himself tell us to judge? Yes, He did.

But not in the way that you think:

JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO THE APPEARANCE,
BUT JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT. (John 7:24)

The Greek word for *appearance* is the word *opsis*. It means “properly, sight (the act), i.e. (by implication) the visage, an external show: appearance, countenance.” It comes from the word *optanomai*, meaning, “to gaze (i.e. with wide-open eyes, as at something remarkable).” Obviously, according to Jesus, a judgment based on what you “see” cannot be a righteous judgment. And conversely, a righteous judgment cannot be based on what simply “appears.”

The context for His statement is a comparison of what can only be “seen” in the law and what He Himself is doing that “appears” to be contrary to the law:

DID NOT MOSES GIVE YOU THE LAW,
AND YET NONE OF YOU KEEPETH THE LAW?
WHY GO YE ABOUT TO KILL ME?
THE PEOPLE ANSWERED AND SAID,
THOU HAST A DEVIL: WHO GOETH ABOUT TO KILL THEE?
JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM,
I HAVE DONE ONE WORK, AND YE ALL MARVEL.
MOSES THEREFORE GAVE UNTO YOU CIRCUMCISION;
(NOT BECAUSE IT IS OF MOSES, BUT OF THE FATHERS;)
AND YE ON THE SABBATH DAY CIRCUMCISE A MAN.
IF A MAN ON THE SABBATH DAY RECEIVE CIRCUMCISION,
THAT THE LAW OF MOSES SHOULD NOT BE BROKEN;
ARE YE ANGRY AT ME, BECAUSE I HAVE MADE
A MAN EVERY WHIT WHOLE ON THE SABBATH DAY?
JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO THE APPEARANCE,
BUT JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT. (John 7:19–24)

The same problem Jesus had with His audience that day is the same problem that remains with some of His audience today: they believed then, and they still believe now, that the righteousness of God can be found in the law. Paul however, says that’s impossible:

NOW WE KNOW THAT WHAT THINGS SOEVER THE
LAW SAITH, IT SAITH TO THEM WHO ARE UNDER
THE LAW: THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED,
AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME
GUILTY BEFORE GOD.

THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE
SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:
FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.
BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT
THE LAW IS MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED
BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS;
EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHICH IS BY
FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL
THEM THAT BELIEVE: FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE:
FOR ALL HAVE SINNED,
AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD;
BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH
THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS:
WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A
PROPITIATION THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD,
TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE
REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST,
THROUGH THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD;
TO DECLARE, I SAY, AT THIS TIME HIS
RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, AND
THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS.
WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? IT IS EXCLUDED.
BY WHAT LAW? OF WORKS?
NAY: BUT BY THE LAW OF FAITH.
THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED
BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.

(Romans 3:19–28)

But now, “just now,” finally, at this present moment, the righteousness of God *without the law* is manifested, declares Paul. *Without* is the Greek

word *choris*, “at a space, i.e. separately or apart from (often as preposition): beside, by itself, without,” from the word *chora*, “through the idea of empty expanse; room, i.e. a space of territory.”

Stop looking for the righteousness of God in the law. It *cannot* be found there. The righteousness of God is found to be an entire immeasurable universe away from where we would expect it to be. The apostle declares that the righteousness of God is *finally* revealed, not in the law, but in the gospel:

FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST:
 FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO
 EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH;
 TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK.
 FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
 REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH:
 AS IT IS WRITTEN, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

(Romans 1:16)

Therein, alone, in the gospel, is the righteousness of God revealed *from faith to faith*. It is not revealed, has never been revealed, and cannot be revealed, from law to law.

Amazingly, the word *is*, from the phrase *therein is the righteousness of God*, is the word *apokalupto*, “to take off the cover, i.e. disclose: reveal.” Paul uses the same word *apokalupto* again when he says it is “revealed” from faith to faith. In other words, in the gospel alone, *without the law*, apart from the law, separate by an entire universe of territory from the law, the righteousness of God is finally “unconcealed.” And it is unconcealed only “from” faith, and only “to” faith.

That means any evidence gathered by sight, by *appearance*, gathered from the law which *does not* manifest the righteousness of God, can never be the basis for a truly righteous judgment. Stop judging by the law. It’s not a righteous judgment. It can *never* be a righteous judgment. Do you think your Lord Jesus judged by the law? If He had, not only would the adulterous woman have been stoned to death, but so would *you* be.

Start judging by faith. If the just shall “live by faith,” and if the just shall “walk by faith,” and if the “word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy

heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach," as the apostle Paul insists it is, then would it also not make sense that the just shall also "judge by faith" and not by sight?

Whatever is not of faith, is sin (Romans 14:23). And *the law is not of faith* (Galatians 3:12). Is the law sin? Of course not. But the doing of the law for righteousness, and the preaching of the law for righteousness, and the judging of the law for righteousness, is. The word "sin" simply means "to miss the mark." And all judgments based on the appearance of those things in the law and not on faith miss the mark entirely.

How different is it to judge by *appearance* rather than to judge a *righteous judgment*?

The one who judges by appearance opens his ignorant mouth to polly-parrot the law and declare, "See the publicans and the harlots over there? They *cannot* go into the kingdom of God."

But astonishingly, the One who judges a righteous judgment says something altogether different. In fact, He speaks an utter contradiction to the one who judges by appearance:

JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM,
VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT THE PUBLICANS
AND THE HARLOTS GO INTO THE KINGDOM
OF GOD BEFORE YOU. (Matthew 21:31)

"But," others will protest, "the same apostle Paul also said:

KNOW YE NOT THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS SHALL NOT
INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD? BE NOT DECEIVED:
NEITHER FORNICATORS, NOR IDOLATERS,
NOR ADULTERERS, NOR EFFEMINATE,
NOR ABUSERS OF THEMSELVES WITH MANKIND,
NOR THIEVES, NOR COVETOUS, NOR DRUNKARDS,
NOR REVILERS, NOR EXTORTIONERS,
SHALL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

(1 Corinthians 6:9–10)

Do you think that Paul has given here an exhaustive list of all those who will not inherit the kingdom? I don't see murder, lying, or stealing on this

list. Do you think that these special ten categories that he mentions are the only ones who *shall not inherit the kingdom*?

Actually, quite to the contrary, he begins his statement with the all encompassing, sweeping and grand generalization, that it is *the unrighteous* that *shall not inherit the kingdom*. Paul has already informed you elsewhere that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. There is *none righteous, no, not one*. Are you actually pointing your finger at someone other than yourself and concluding, “That is the kind of behavior that will keep you out of the kingdom?”

If that’s really what Paul is saying, then when he describes to these same Corinthians one among them who is actually committing adultery with his own father’s wife, then, of course, he would conclude that such an one couldn’t possibly be a Christian. Right? After all, one who would do such a sinful thing, according to your exclusionary interpretation of the words above, could not possibly be one of the heirs to the kingdom. Right?

But that’s not what he says at all:

IT IS REPORTED COMMONLY THAT THERE IS
 FORNICATION AMONG YOU, AND SUCH FORNICATION
 AS IS NOT SO MUCH AS NAMED AMONG THE
 GENTILES, THAT ONE SHOULD HAVE HIS FATHER’S WIFE.
 AND YE ARE PUFFED UP, AND HAVE NOT RATHER
 MOURNED, THAT HE THAT HATH DONE THIS DEED
 MIGHT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM AMONG YOU.
 FOR I VERILY, AS ABSENT IN BODY, BUT PRESENT
 IN SPIRIT, HAVE JUDGED ALREADY, AS THOUGH
 I WERE PRESENT, CONCERNING HIM THAT HATH
 SO DONE THIS DEED, IN THE NAME OF OUR
 LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHEN YE ARE GATHERED
 TOGETHER, AND MY SPIRIT, WITH THE POWER
 OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
 TO DELIVER SUCH AN ONE UNTO SATAN
 FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FLESH,
 THAT THE SPIRIT MAY BE SAVED IN THE
 DAY OF THE LORD JESUS. (1 Corinthians 5:1–5)

Discipline such an one to what end? That his *spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. That's not an instruction Paul could ever have given concerning an unbeliever, already excluded from the kingdom because of his behavior. I thought you said this kind couldn't get through the door. I thought you said He doesn't let this kind in. Well apparently, in spite of what you think, He did, and He does. And apparently, instead of excluding them like you think He does, God lets them in *with* their present sins *and* His ultimate salvation in mind, simultaneously.

Think about it: isn't that how he let you in? with your present sins? Or are you now sinless?

By the apostle's own confession, he found this man's behavior beyond abhorrent. Yet, the man was obviously a Christian, set to inherit the kingdom.

Stop confusing sanctification with justification. Stop telling all the sinners around you that they can't be Christians and sinners at the same time. That's a damnable lie. Under that definition, nobody, including you, can inherit the kingdom. That's the Galatians, having begun in the Spirit, now being made perfect in the flesh. That's the Judaizers, come to bring you back into bondage to the law of Moses which neither they nor their fathers could keep. We wait, says Paul, by the Spirit, for the hope of righteousness. We wait for it because *it is not here yet*. Not even in *you*. Stop telling everyone that the difference between you and the real sinners is what you *don't* do and what they *do* do, or *vice versa*. The only difference between you and the one who is not a Christian is the imputed, reckoned, 'counted' righteousness of Christ. And it's not your righteousness. It's His.

Where sin abounds, and *only* where sin abounds, does grace also abound. Stop telling sinners that God's grace is only sufficient for the *non-sinful* life. Supposedly, like *your* non-sinful life.

Be very careful whom you exclude from the kingdom of God. In truth, you are able to exclude only one person. And that's the very one you don't want to exclude. It is a faithful, faith-filled, saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Do you really understand that? It's sinners He came to save. Real sinners. Not pretend sinners. And He came to save no one else. And it's not only sinners like *them*. It's even worse sinners. Like *you*.

Heaven is only for sinners. No one else will be allowed in.

Let *all* the sinners in. God knows what to do with them once they're inside. He is judging a righteous judgment where even the publicans and harlots come in. Do you understand that the phrase "publicans and harlots" is synonymous for 'really bad sinners'? And astonishingly, Jesus declares that the 'really bad sinners' always come in before the very ones who say "the really bad sinners can't come in." That's the way God does it. Just the contradictory opposite of what seems right to us. He sees sinners by faith. Not by appearance. By the gospel. Not by the law.

You should see sinners the same. He requires it.

It's the only way you'll really know that He sees *you* the same way.

Smite your *own* breast. Not someone else's.

And say "God be merciful to *me*, a sinner."

Now *that* is a righteous judgment.

And according to Paul, what will sitting in the Judge's seat, instead of the defendant's seat, get you?

BUT AFTER THY HARDNESS AND IMPENITENT HEART
TREASUREST UP UNTO THYSELF WRATH AGAINST
THE DAY OF WRATH AND REVELATION OF THE
RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD.

If you judge others, Paul says, you're going to be a very rich man. You will, on judgment day, have treasured up for yourself, *wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. That judgment won't be the spurious judgment you've been issuing, but rather, it will be the righteous judgment of the real Judge. He's saving that judgment especially for all those who would impersonate Him and judge their fellow defendants and make a mockery of His Gracious and Merciful Court. And that kind of riches, just like earthly riches, will not spend well on judgment day.

You are not the judge. You were never the judge. You will never be the judge. You are the defendant. And you cannot be the judge and be the defendant simultaneously. Do you not understand? That would be an insurmountable conflict of interest.

You must sit in the defendant's seat. And no where else. And you must be

very quiet. And let your Lawyer do His work.

Otherwise, *thou art inexcusable*. Thou art indefensible.

And you who are judged are instructed to hold your peace and remember that the one who judges you will one day soon be a very rich man.

Chapter 18

The Contradiction of God

The notion of God as Father is the ultimate contradiction. Over 300 times in the New Testament, the word Father is used to describe God. In the Old Testament, the word Father is not used even once in the same sense. Jesus came for one purpose and one purpose only: to reveal God as Father. All of His words and all of His works served that one grand purpose. Because the law is written in your heart, and not grace, apart from the revelation that comes only through Jesus, you simply cannot conceive of God as Father. Here's how Jesus explained it to His disciples:

THESE THINGS HAVE I SPOKEN UNTO YOU IN PROVERBS:
BUT THE TIME COMETH, WHEN I SHALL NO MORE SPEAK
UNTO YOU IN PROVERBS, BUT I SHALL SHEW YOU
PLAINLY OF THE FATHER. AT THAT DAY YE SHALL ASK
IN MY NAME: AND I SAY NOT UNTO YOU, THAT I WILL
PRAY THE FATHER FOR YOU: FOR THE FATHER HIMSELF
LOVETH YOU, BECAUSE YE HAVE LOVED ME, AND HAVE
BELIEVED THAT I CAME OUT FROM GOD. I CAME FORTH
FROM THE FATHER, AND AM COME INTO THE WORLD: AGAIN,
I LEAVE THE WORLD, AND GO TO THE FATHER. HIS
DISCIPLES SAID UNTO HIM, LO, NOW SPEAKEST THOU
PLAINLY, AND SPEAKEST NO PROVERB.

(John 16:25–29)

No one had ever even imagined God as Father before.

O RIGHTEOUS FATHER, THE WORLD HATH NOT
 KNOWN THEE: BUT I HAVE KNOWN THEE,
 AND THESE HAVE KNOWN THAT THOU HAST SENT ME.
 AND I HAVE DECLARED UNTO THEM THY NAME,
 AND WILL DECLARE IT: THAT THE LOVE WHEREWITH
 THOU HAST LOVED ME MAY BE IN THEM, AND I IN THEM.
 (John 17:25–26)

For the first time ever in the history of the world, Jesus declares the unimaginable aletheia: God is your Father. And what does your Father really look like?

JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH,
 AND THE LIFE: NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER,
 BUT BY ME. IF YE HAD KNOWN ME, YE SHOULD HAVE
 KNOWN MY FATHER ALSO: AND FROM HENCEFORTH YE
 KNOW HIM, AND HAVE SEEN HIM. PHILIP SAITH UNTO
 HIM, LORD, SHEW US THE FATHER, AND IT SUFFICETH
 US. JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, HAVE I BEEN SO LONG
 TIME WITH YOU, AND YET HAST THOU NOT KNOWN ME,
 PHILIP? HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER;
 AND HOW SAYEST THOU THEN, SHEW US THE FATHER?
 (John 14:6–9)

He that hath seen Me, Jesus says, hath seen the Father.

The Father looks like Jesus. The Father does not look like Moses. Study the photo. You need to know the difference. Because according to Jesus, what distinguishes those who have eternal life and those who don't is just one thing: you either know the Father, as only Jesus shows Him, or you don't.

THESE WORDS SPAKE JESUS, AND LIFTED UP HIS
 EYES TO HEAVEN, AND SAID, FATHER, THE HOUR IS
 COME; GLORIFY THY SON, THAT THY SON ALSO MAY
 GLORIFY THEE: AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM POWER
 OVER ALL FLESH, THAT HE SHOULD GIVE ETERNAL

LIFE TO AS MANY AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM.

AND THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL, THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW
THEE THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST,
WHOM THOU HAST SENT. (John 17:1)

The Father doesn't look like Moses. The Father looks like Jesus. *And not as Moses*, says the writer of Hebrews.

AND NOT AS MOSES, WHICH PUT A VAIL OVER HIS FACE,
THAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL COULD NOT STEDFASTLY
LOOK TO THE END OF THAT WHICH IS ABOLISHED:
BUT THEIR MINDS WERE BLINDED: FOR UNTIL THIS DAY
REMAINETH THE SAME VAIL UNTAKEN AWAY IN THE
READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT;
WHICH VAIL IS DONE AWAY IN CHRIST.

(2 Corinthians 3:13–14)

The Father also doesn't sound like Moses. The Father sounds like Jesus.

FOR YE ARE NOT COME UNTO THE MOUNT THAT
MIGHT BE TOUCHED, AND THAT BURNED WITH FIRE,
NOR UNTO BLACKNESS, AND DARKNESS, AND TEMPEST,
AND THE SOUND OF A TRUMPET, AND THE VOICE OF WORDS;
WHICH VOICE THEY THAT HEARD INTREATED THAT THE
WORD SHOULD NOT BE SPOKEN TO THEM ANY MORE:
(FOR THEY COULD NOT ENDURE THAT WHICH WAS
COMMANDED, AND IF SO MUCH AS A BEAST TOUCH
THE MOUNTAIN, IT SHALL BE STONED,
OR THRUST THROUGH WITH A DART:
AND SO TERRIBLE WAS THE SIGHT, THAT MOSES SAID,
I EXCEEDINGLY FEAR AND SHAKE:)
BUT YE ARE COME UNTO MOUNT SION, AND UNTO THE
CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM,
AND TO AN INNUMERABLE COMPANY OF ANGELS,
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CHURCH OF THE
FIRSTBORN, WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN, AND TO
GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL, AND TO THE SPIRITS OF JUST

MEN MADE PERFECT, AND TO JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF
THE NEW COVENANT, AND TO THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING,
THAT SPEAKETH BETTER THINGS THAN THAT OF ABEL.
(Hebrews 12:18)

The Father doesn't condemn sinners like the law of Moses condemns sinners. The Father justifies sinners like Jesus justifies sinners.

BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH ON
HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY, HIS FAITH IS
COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 4:5)

FOR GOD SENT NOT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO
CONDEMN THE WORLD; BUT THAT THE WORLD THROUGH
HIM MIGHT BE SAVED. (John 3:17)

And that's the whole problem. Many who call themselves the Church, who insist that they speak for God, speak not to the sinners of this world with the loving voice of the Father, but rather, with the voice of Moses.

They would have you believe that God condemns sinners for their sins. That God judges sinners for their sins. That God rejects sinners for their sins. The way *they* tell it, God sends the Pharisee home justified and the publican home condemned.

But nothing, nothing in the entire universe, could be further from the truth about the Father.

What is the most miraculous work of God that there is? Is it not the salvation of sinners? Of the very *worst* kinds of sinners? Of the very *vilest* kinds of sinners? Is the miraculous work of God not, above *everything* else, the amazing grace and the astounding mercy extended, without deserving merit, to the most *debauched* of sinners? Did He not *come into the world*, strictly and only, *to save sinners*? (1 Timothy 1:15)

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a *what* like me"?

Don't get confused. God saves *only* wretches. And He saves no one else.

And when you get so confused about the *real* nature of the work of the Holy Spirit, and the *real* eternal goal of God, and the *real* power of His sin-justifying resurrection, that you begin to believe that those who offer His

grace to the very worst among us are actually doing the work of the devil, have you not committed blasphemy?

They assigned His healing work to the devil and Jesus Himself called it blasphemy. Will you now assign His saving work to the devil and think that He won't call it the same? They assigned that which was only temporary to the devil and He called it blasphemy. Will you now assign what is eternal to the devil and think that He won't call it the same?

Stop saying that it is the work of the devil when those who are truly sinful lay claim to Christ's forgiveness. *That is the work of God.* And that is the *only* work of God.

Do you not understand? The *more* sinful you are, not the *less* sinful you are, the more grace you get.

Stop telling people that the more sinful you are, the less grace you get.

Where sin *abounds*, grace does much more abound. *Only* where sin abounds does grace much more abound. Look around you. Where does sin abound? *That's* where you'll find the work of God abounding. And absolutely no where else.

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY,
 FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,
 EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS,
 HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST,
 (BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED;)
 AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER,
 AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN
 HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS:
 THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHEW
 THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS
 KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.
 FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH;
 AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES: IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD:
 NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST.
 FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP,
 CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS,

WHICH GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED
 THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM. (Ephesians 2:4–10)

Whose work is it? His. *For we are his workmanship.*

And whose work is it not? Yours. *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

And what will be the eternal theme of His display? *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.* Are you so confused that you think that in the ages to come the theme on display will be your own sweaty work of righteousness and not His eternal grace and kindness?

BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH
 THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.
 (Romans 3:24)

Do you not understand what the word *freely* means? It means “without a cause.” When you look into your own soul to find sufficient cause for His justification, *you must find none.* Stop telling anyone else that they must find *some.* Stop thinking that *you* provide sufficient cause for your justification by your righteous behaviour, but *someone else*, who is more sinful in your estimation than you are, does not.

The redemption, *your* redemption, is *in Christ Jesus*, not in you. Therefore, *their* redemption, *anyone’s* redemption, *everyone’s* redemption, is also *in Christ Jesus*, and *not* in them. Stop telling them that their redemption must be in them, like you think your redemption is in you.

And how, by what manner and means, through what, are you now saved? *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

It’s not of you. It’s not *in* you. It’s not of your works. It’s not *in* your works. It is a gift and nothing else. It’s *in* Christ. And it’s *of* Christ. Your exclusion of any other sinner from His grace, no matter *what* is their sin, is nothing other than the *boast* on your part that you are deserving of what you got from God because of your works, but they are not, because of theirs.

Your boasting is nothing less than blasphemy.

Either you will extend His grace, as He most certainly does, to the most sinful you can imagine, knowing that in the ages to come, it will be the *most*

sinful by which His grace is *most* gloriously displayed, or you will find that the grace that you needed Him to extend to you is not.

You cannot lock the Door to anyone else, and still go in yourself.

BUT WOE UNTO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES,
HYPOCRITES! FOR YE SHUT UP THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN AGAINST MEN: FOR YE NEITHER GO IN
YOURSELVES, NEITHER SUFFER YE THEM THAT
ARE ENTERING TO GO IN. (Matthew 23:13)

Do you really want to stand before God on judgement day and tell Him how you faithfully guarded the door so that none of those undeserving ones could come in?

Do you really think that He'll say to you on that day, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant? Good job of keeping the truly sinful out?*

My friend, I don't even want to be standing close to you on that day as you lift your voice in the highest praise you can imagine, saying, **God I thank thee that I am not as other men are.**

Don't be confused. If you're confessing *that* to Him *now*, you'll also be confessing *that* to Him *then*.

Repent of your righteousness. Christ, in the cross, has already taken care of your sinfulness.

The Father loves sinners. Sinners who are sick with the sickness of sin. Period. And if you're not sick, the Physician that the Father has sent will do you no good.

JESUS CRIED AND SAID, HE THAT BELIEVETH ON ME,
BELIEVETH NOT ON ME, BUT ON HIM THAT SENT ME.
AND HE THAT SEETH ME SEETH HIM THAT SENT ME.
I AM COME A LIGHT INTO THE WORLD, THAT WHOSOEVER
BELIEVETH ON ME SHOULD NOT ABIDE IN DARKNESS.
AND IF ANY MAN HEAR MY WORDS, AND BELIEVE NOT,
I JUDGE HIM NOT: FOR I CAME NOT TO JUDGE THE WORLD,
BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD.
HE THAT REJECTETH ME, AND RECEIVETH NOT MY WORDS,

HATH ONE THAT JUDGETH HIM: THE WORD THAT I HAVE
 SPOKEN, THE SAME SHALL JUDGE HIM IN THE LAST DAY.
 FOR I HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF MYSELF; BUT THE FATHER
 WHICH SENT ME, HE GAVE ME A COMMANDMENT,
 WHAT I SHOULD SAY, AND WHAT I SHOULD SPEAK.
 AND I KNOW THAT HIS COMMANDMENT IS LIFE
 EVERLASTING: WHATSOEVER I SPEAK THEREFORE,
 EVEN AS THE FATHER SAID UNTO ME, SO I SPEAK.

(John 12:44–50)

Simply said:

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE
 HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH
 IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.
 FOR GOD SENT NOT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO
 CONDEMN THE WORLD; BUT THAT THE WORLD
 THROUGH HIM MIGHT BE SAVED. (John 3:16–17)

It's an utter contradiction to believe that God thinks nothing like you and you think nothing like God. Believe and confess it anyway. And it's an utter contradiction to believe that every man is a liar and only God is true. Believe and confess it anyway. And it's an utter contradiction to believe that truth is only what you hear from Christ and nothing of what you see for yourself. Believe and confess it anyway. And it's an utter contradiction to believe that you're not really righteous and your faith is only counted for righteousness. Believe and confess it anyway. And it's an utter contradiction to believe that God wills for your life in this world a cross and death and not a crown and life. Believe and confess it anyway. And it's an utter contradiction to believe that God receives only sinners and always rejects the righteous. Believe and confess it anyway.

Go back to the temple for one more look. You've been told that the justified one looks like that guy standing over there inventorying his successes. And that your goal should be to look like him, to talk like him, and to act like him. But Jesus says differently. See the one in the corner over there alone, inventorying his failures? Jesus says you should look like him, talk like him, and act like him. There's only one going down to his house justified. And it's not the one *they* think it is.

Who's really failing and who's really succeeding here? See the one reminding God of his righteousness? That's the *real* celebratory failure. He's celebrating the law's *failure* to make him guilty. And though he doesn't know it, the publican, by a entire universe of contradiction, is actually celebrating the law's *success* in making him guilty. That's why the angels in heaven are celebrating with him.

Every man, without exception, is either a Pharisee or a publican. There is no third category. You're either confessing your righteousness, or you're confessing your sin. Which are you confessing?

THEN DREW NEAR UNTO HIM ALL THE PUBLICANS
AND SINNERS FOR TO HEAR HIM.
AND THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES MURMURED, SAYING,
THIS MAN RECEIVETH SINNERS, AND EATETH WITH THEM.
(Luke 15:1–2)

Yes He does.

Let all the publicans and sinners continue to draw near and continue to hear and continue to be received. And let all the scribes and Pharisees continue to judge both the ungodly and the Christ who justifies only the ungodly.

That's the contradiction of God.

God thinks nothing like you think He thinks.

That's what *Isaiah* thinks. And that's what *Paul* thinks. And that's what *Jesus* thinks. And that's what the *Father* thinks.

But then again, that's just how *God* tells it.

You, of course, may disagree.

Apparently, most people do.