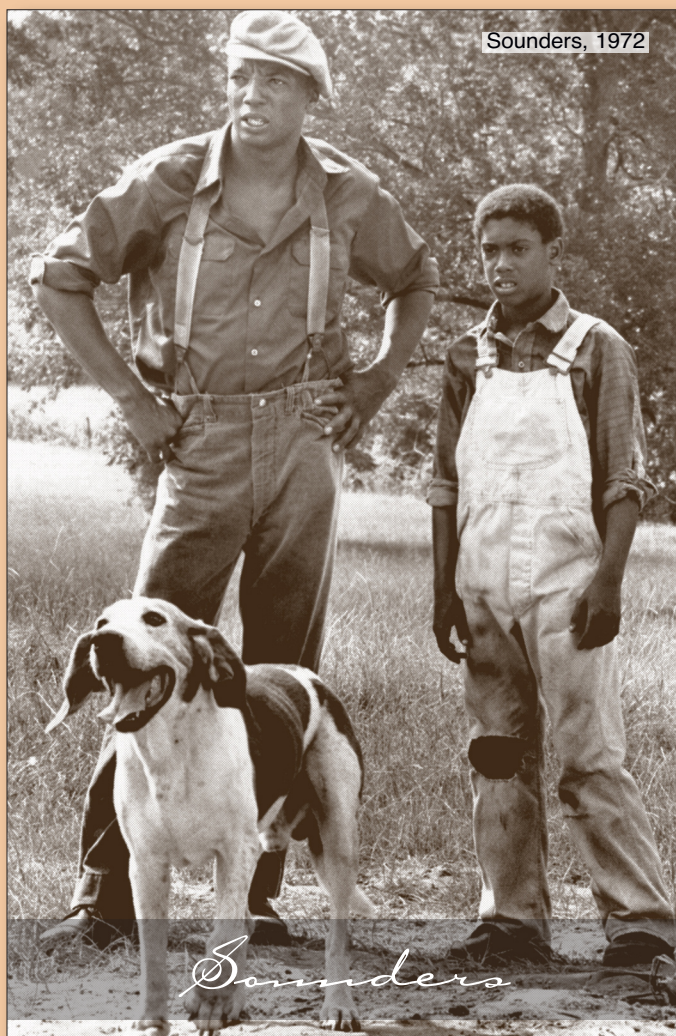


enslaving all those who follow it. Toxic faith is about controlling all who are unfortunate enough to come into contact with it.

In the 1972 movie “Sounder,” a black family is depicted as they lived in 1933 Louisiana—in the middle of the Depression and in the middle of the American South long before civil rights. A black man and his son are walking by a segregated church.

The boy says to his father, “Daddy, I ain’t never been in that church.”

His father replied, “That’s okay, Son. Jesus ain’t never been in there neither.” □



Greg Albrecht is the director of Plain Truth Ministries. You can hear Greg’s weekly sermons on CWR audio online at www.ptm.org/cwr-teaching-ministry.

THE GOSPEL:

KEITH GILES

Knowing God is pretty important. In fact, according to Jesus, knowing God is eternal life.

“Now this is eternal life: to know God and His Son whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

But is this “knowing” a reference to gaining the right information about God? Is it about having knowledge? Or is it something more than that?

The word Jesus uses here for “to know” in the Greek is “ginosko” which maps to the same word used in the Hebrew scriptures for the way a husband “knew” his wife in an intimate, sexual way.

In other words, this “knowing” is less like studying for a test and more like connecting on a physical, spiritual and emotional level with God Almighty.

To “know God and his Son” in this way involves an ongoing, daily relationship with him that many would consider a little bit scandalous.

Nevertheless, we are expected to have an intimacy with God that conceives something within us, and that “something” is new life.

This means that knowing God is more about transformation than information.

Here’s something else about knowing God that you might find interesting:

“No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

So, the best way to know God is to know Jesus, and the best way to know Jesus is to listen to his voice, spend time with him and start putting his words into practice.

Let me ask you: “Do you think of the gospel as being more about having the right information about God? Or do you see it as being more about

INFORMATION OR TRANSFORMATION?



“If Christianity is about following Jesus, then being right is less important than the quality of your relationship with him.”

the transformation we experience as we learn to abide in Christ?”

You might be tempted to think that it's both, or that it really doesn't matter how you think of the Gospel, but I believe it matters a great deal.

SALVATION = RIGHT INFORMATION?

For example, if we think of the gospel as mainly information, then we become lawyers and modern Pharisees who argue semantics and debate doctrine. Salvation is seen as having the right information—the right beliefs and doctrines, in the right order.

Those who have different information than we do are heretics. Those who accept our information are “saved” and those who don't are either not truly Christians or their salvation is in question.

But Jesus speaks of a gospel that is based on an intimate relationship with himself. He talks about the gospel as being primarily about transformation, not mere information.

He proclaims the Good News (gospel) of the Kingdom by urging everyone to “think different” (*metanoia* in the Greek, usually translated as “Repent!”).

He points out that it's impossible for a bad tree to produce good fruit and that if you don't first "make the tree good" you'll never produce good fruit.

Through the Gospel, Jesus makes us good trees who can produce the good fruit of righteousness which is pleasing to God (see Matthew 12:33).

Jesus says that life in the Kingdom comes when we "know God and the Christ whom he has sent" (John 17:3).

But remember: that word translated "know" is not about information. It's the same word used to say that "Adam *knew* Eve" and that involves an intimacy; a way of knowing that conceives new life within.

So, we are called to "know God" and to "know Christ" in an intimate way that conceives a new life within us; the same new life of the Kingdom that comes only as we abide in him and he in us. That's a relationship where we are daily learning to love Him more as we come to "know this love that surpasses knowledge" and become "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19).

INTIMATE RELATION, NOT JUST INFORMATION

Now, *if* the gospel is merely information, then we don't need a relationship with a living person who transforms us. Just give me the information and I'll study it and memorize it and enforce the proper communication of that information.

But if the gospel is about a transforming relationship with a vibrant, fantastic being of light and love, then we will certainly receive information about him, but this will go far beyond mere data and exponentially transcend human knowledge to explode into an intimacy that conceives something new within.

Jesus wants to change us. He wants us to become

more like himself. We should desire that, too. The way we are transformed into his image is to immerse ourselves in him and surrender ourselves completely to him so that he can make us into the good trees that bear good fruit.

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Another problem with thinking of the gospel as having the right information is that it can lead us

to place the importance of being right above the command to love others as Jesus has loved us.

See, if Christianity is about being right then it's easier to justify cutting off those people you don't agree with. Because, if you see Christianity as a quest for "rightness" then being wrong is the greatest sin of all.

However, if you see Christianity as following Jesus, then being right is less important than the quality of your relationship with him.

Relationships are messy.

They're not about correctness or accuracy. No one measures their relationships in such terms. Instead, we gauge the health of our relationships based on how open our communication is, and how honest we can be with one another, and how much time we spend together.

Jesus also connects our obedience to his commands with our love for him. It's all through the Gospel of John, especially in John 14.

LOVING OTHERS AS CHRIST LOVES US

He also equates our love for him with how we love one another. If we love one another as he has loved us—which is one of his commands—then we are loving Him by our obedience, and by being obedient we are loving others, too.

Elsewhere, Jesus connects our horizontal



**"The kingdom comes when we
'know God and the Christ whom
he has sent' (John 17:3)."**

relationships with our vertical one towards God. He tells us that we should go and reconcile with our brother before we return to complete our acts of worship.

And the Apostle John pushes it further by saying that if we claim to love God but don't love our brothers and sisters, we're just liars.

So, what should we learn from this? Perhaps that our interpersonal relationships don't need to hinge on agreement with one another.

I can love someone who has the wrong ideas about doctrine. I can fellowship with a brother who sees things differently than I do. I can extend grace to a sister who calls me a heretic.

Are they wrong? Maybe. But perhaps I'm the one who is off base? Until we know for sure, our main goal should be to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Nowhere in the Bible do we get the idea that the gospel is merely about having the correct information.

Instead, it's about having a

transformational relationship with Jesus.

This relationship involves abiding in Christ as He abides in us. Through this process, our sinful self is daily crucified and our spiritual self—the “new creature”—is brought to life within us.

It's a constant exchange of death for life where the resurrection power of Christ is increasingly revealed in us and transforming us into people who are like him.

So, in summary, if the gospel is about having the right information, then being right is everything.

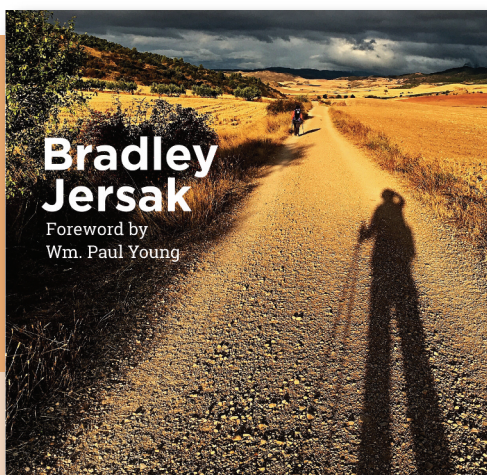
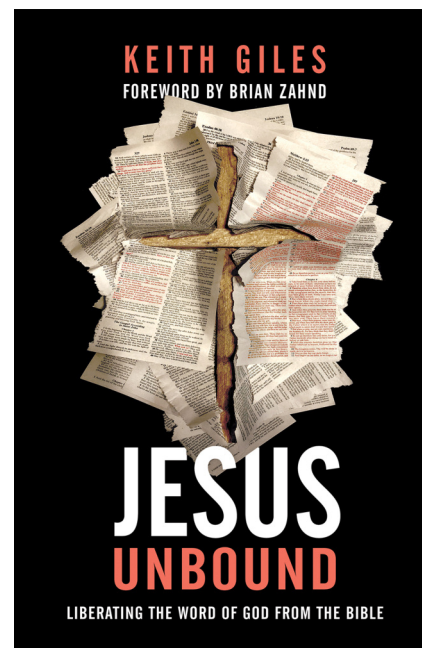
But, if the gospel is about transformation, then being Christlike is everything. Let go of the need to “be right” and begin to embrace the reality of Christ's transformational life in you!

Remember: We're all in process. None of us is right about everything. Thankfully, we don't need to be. We just have to keep abiding in Him. That's where the transformation begins. □

Keith Giles was an ordained minister who walked away from organized church 11 years ago. He started a home fellowship in Southern California that gave away 100% of the offering to the poor in the community.

Today, Keith and his wife help start new faith communities as they await their next adventure.

This article is excerpted from Keith's new book Jesus Unbound: Liberating the Word of God from the Bible (available on Amazon).



Coming Soon!

A MORE CHRISTLIKE WAY

In this sequel to *A More Christlike God*, Brad Jersak explores the *Jesus Way* of cruciform love. After recollecting the Christlike God of triune love and his Way of the Cross, the author offers alternative metaphors to “deconstruction” and critiques four common counterfeits to the *Jesus Way*. He then describes seven facets of a more Christlike Way:

- ❖ Facet 1 – Radical Self-giving
- ❖ Facet 2 – Radical Hospitality
- ❖ Facet 3 – Radical Unity
- ❖ Facet 4 – Radical Recovery
- ❖ Facet 5 – Radical Peacemaking / Radical Forgiveness
- ❖ Facet 6 – Radical Surrender
- ❖ Facet 7 – Radical Compassion / Radical Justice

And finally, Jersak closes with “A More Beautiful Vision: Abba's ‘I have a dream speech’” from the messianic kingdom prophecies of Isaiah.