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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®



The Narrow Way of Grace

By Greg Albrecht

Those who realize and surrender themselves and their pride to the grace of God are on a narrow, less traveled road. Those who surrender themselves and voluntarily die to the way they once lived (which includes former allegiances to the laws of Christ-less religion) are now alive in Christ, a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) in whom Jesus lives (Galatians 2:19-21).

Those who follow Jesus on *The Narrow Way of Grace* know they surrender and die to their love affair with Christ-less religion.

The vast majority of the world at large, whether its religion is called Christian or otherwise, *chooses the wide gate and travels on a broad boulevard of Christ-less religion*. The wide gate and broad road is an attempt to please and appease God as a result of dedication to ceremonies, rituals, observances, holy days and times.

The wide and narrow road is a choice to prioritize the value of human achievement and abilities over against the grace of God.

Billions of people, via their religion and its systems, restrictions and regulations are, according to Jesus, on the way to destruction—because anything that is opposed to the grace of God leads to destruction.

The difficult, narrow gate and road of God's grace is the way of self-sacrifice and service to others, in the name of Jesus. Jesus is telling us that neither he, nor we, if we are

As we enter through the gates of a New Year, and as we continue to follow Christ, let's take a moment to remember—The Narrow Way of Grace is the road less travelled.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

These words of Jesus are not only well-known and often-cited, they are also widely misunderstood.

Here's what Christ-less religion says: *the difficult, narrow gate and road* to which Jesus invites us is the path of earning God's love by our obedience. Legalistic Christianity

says that the narrow gate and road is our blood, sweat and tears that earn us God's favor, blessings and the final reward of entrance into his kingdom.

BUT that is a completely upside-down interpretation of what Jesus is saying.

The entire context of the Sermon on the Mount, in which we find this passage, and for that matter the gospel of Jesus Christ, and beyond that the new covenant at large, is about God inviting us to receive the very righteousness of Jesus by his grace, which he gives to us when we accept and embrace that grace.

Grace is not forced. Grace is offered, without price. Acceptance and participation is the only "price to be paid" on our part.

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actually his followers, can avoid the cross. It was true for Jesus and it is true for us as well.

Here's how Eugene Peterson, in *The Message Bible*, translates Matthew 7:13-14:

Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.

You can't order God like pizza, guaranteed to be delivered to your home in 30 minutes or less. God cannot be ordered online and delivered to your home through Amazon Prime or UPS. God is not for sale.

God is in your life on his terms, by his grace, or he is not. You accept him on his terms or you do not. You are either dead to religion, something you must earn, or you are alive in Christ, a relationship no money can buy because it is by God's grace.

God, in and through Jesus Christ, offers us everything. By his grace we are made heirs of his kingdom. But grace is no easy road—grace

is no primrose lane. If it were, then the vast majority would take this so-called "easy way."

Those who feel they may purchase God's love and favor via the currency of their hard work are barking up the wrong tree.

Only Three-Dollars-Worth of God?

Wilbur Elton Rees (1925-2018) wrote "Three-Dollars-Worth of God" in 1971. Fifty-one years later 1) consider its wise and prophetic message while 2) understanding his usage of "black" and "migrant" in the context of that era.

I would like three-dollars-worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,

But just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.

I don't want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant.

I want ecstasy, not transformation.

I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth.

I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack.

I would like to buy three-dollars-worth of God, please.

If the gospel of Jesus Christ is based on a transaction, then we would be justified in trying to purchase a limited amount of God at the local religious supermarket. Of course, many do go to religious supermarkets for their "God fix" and attempt to purchase three-dollars-worth of God—not too much, so that he doesn't become a burden to their lives, but just enough to be there if and when they need him. "*Just three-dollars-worth of God please.*"

Many fear law and the wrath of God, so they choose the broad road that leads to destruction and continue trying to purchase three-dollars-worth of God because they fear what they have been told God will do to them and where he will "send" them if they don't.

If the gospel of Jesus Christ amounted to what we work for and deserve then we could buy a small god we could place and display in our living room, a god who would listen to our prayers and be available for an emergency when we need him, but otherwise mind his own business. In fact, many have just such a small god!

But God's grace is not available for purchase. *God's grace is the narrow gate—grace is difficult and hard and not at all as easy as the broad boulevard where bumper to bumper traffic is jammed in a frenetic search for a god of their own size and creation.*

God is not found in shopping expeditions. God's grace is not transactional. It is an undeserved gift. We earn wages—we receive grace as a gift.

However, grace is difficult. Grace is hard. Grace is not the easy way out—serving Jesus in his name is the way of service and sacrifice. It's either God or nothing.

You can't order God like pizza, guaranteed to be delivered to your home in 30 minutes or less.





God offers his love, grace and mercy lavishly, and he asks us to accept his grace on his terms. Embrace his grace...accept the inclusive love of God who loves you right now as much as he ever has or ever will.

It's all too human to be afraid of grace, because grace is out of our control. We humanly prefer predictable laws (or so we would like to assume).

We want life without sacrifice—we are willing to work hard as long as we still have control, or the illusion of it at least. Control is the drug of Christ-less religion, and many are sadly addicted to it.

Most religious people are afraid of grace. They are afraid if they believe and practice grace, they might be compromising with law. ***The Narrow Way of Grace*** is all Jesus all the time or not at all.

It's either living in faith and trust by grace, alive in Christ, following him, or it's being a spiritually dead person walking by laws and commandments and regulations that Christ-less religion promises will earn you God's good pleasure.

God offers his love, grace and mercy lavishly, and he asks us to accept his grace on his terms. He doesn't tell us that we will be good enough after we have done enough. God doesn't tell us he will

give us his grace once we qualify—on the contrary, he gives us his grace because we are unqualified.

God doesn't give us laws that once we obey, achieve and master them, we will have purchased enough of him (three-dollars-worth, if you will) to get by. God's grace is not measured by a scale or a yardstick. God's grace is not counted or recorded as one might deposit and withdraw funds in a checking account.

God's grace is without measurements, limitations, schedules or bookkeeping. The grace of God does not vary—it doesn't increase nor does it decrease depending on our behavior.

The grace of God is not measurable—we can't order a pound or a gallon or three-dollars-worth of it. It's God's grace or nothing.

An Amazing No-Strings-Attached Gift

Of course God's grace seems too good to be true.

Of course God's grace means that he is putting himself "out there"—he is vulnerable, because he loves us first, and we just might not return his love. In human terms, he might get his feelings "hurt."

Of course God's grace is scandalous because it seems like God is a bad businessman, a permissive parent and an indulgent grandparent.

The law makes sense—but God's grace just seems too good to be true. When we reduce God to a bunch of laws and ceremonies and rituals that we believe confine and define him, we have just remade him in our image—and we are then living an idolatrous life as we seek to please and appease God through religious legalisms.

When we seek satisfaction and meaning and a way of life that is pleasing to God in anything and everything but the grace of God, we will constantly wear ourselves out.

We will always fail, and we will find that we live life like a hamster on a wheel—endlessly going around and around and around, but never getting anywhere.

We are then living a spiritual way of life that most people do—***the wide and broad boulevard that leads to destruction.***

When we seek satisfaction and meaning and a way of life based on anything and everything but the grace of God, we are setting our sights on something or someone that is inconsequential and meaningless—we are setting our sights on something or someone that is less than Jesus.

The Way of Grace is All Jesus All the Time!

Embrace his grace—surrender and yield your life to Jesus, who can and will do all that you can never do—accept the inclusive love of God who loves you right now as much as he ever has or ever will.

May we all walk through the Narrow Gates of this New Year, continuing to follow Jesus on ***The Narrow Way of Grace.*** □