

why it is so critical to accept God's invitation to be rescued from the counterfeit religion of legalism and oppression and embrace the God of grace.

The Master Heals a Troubled and Oppressed Prince

There's an old parable about a prince who became convinced, through some mental aberration, that he was a chicken. He took off all his clothing and crawled under the royal dining table and lived off scraps and crumbs. The king and queen called in the best doctors in the kingdom, but no one seemed to be able to cure the prince.

One day a man who had heard of the prince's emotional duress arrived at the castle. The uninvited visitor offered his services to the royal family. The king and queen were at the end of their rope, and even though the stranger lacked professional qualifications they decided they had nothing to lose. They welcomed the services of the stranger, a man they later came to know as the master.

The master went into the royal dining room, took off all his clothing, and sat under the table with the prince. The prince looked at him and said, "I am a chicken." The master responded, "Well then, I am a chicken too."

The two sat under the table for some time, eating and sleeping, until one day the master said, "You know, I think I can be a chicken and still wear a shirt. I think you can too."

So they both put their shirts on. A few days later the master said the same thing about wearing trousers, until finally the master coaxed the prince to put on all his clothing, and then, some time after that, to sit and eat at the table. In the end, the prince was cured of his fixation.

The parable has some remarkable similarities with The Master, The Great Physician, coming into our world. He comes to where we are—our own private places of torment and pain. He doesn't come into our world to condemn us (John 3:17) but to save us (John 3:16). When Jesus, the God-man, came into our world to be one of us, he laid aside his regal vestments, making himself nothing (Philippians 2:7) by comparison with the glory of the heavenly kingdom. Now incarnated as one of us, Jesus crawls under the table with us and just sits there with us. No sermons, no lectures, no

haranguing about how bad and evil and sinful we are. No threats of hell fire. He just sits there with us, as one of us.

There are many compulsions and obsessions that can cause us to disconnect from God. There is no doubt that our sin is a root cause—our lust, envy, jealousy, and vanity. But there are many institutions that aid and abet our sinful condition, causing us to become spiritually unstable and even deranged. I believe the big business of religion is culpable for much of the alienation from God in our world today. I believe much of our shame and guilt, that drives us under the table, is caused by religion.

I will always remember one of the scenes in the movie *Forrest Gump*. In spite of Forrest's low score on IQ tests (his IQ was 75) the movie continuously depicts Forrest's simple and sincere wisdom, far beyond intelligence as calculated by society. Forrest is usually judged as completely stupid by those who first meet him, but those who come to know him realize he has discernment beyond many of his peers. You probably recall some of the lines from the script, down-home bromides such as "Stupid is, as stupid does" and "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get." Forrest is a man who remains child-like in his attitude.

Jenny is the love of Forrest's life, a girl he first meets on the school bus the first day of school. While all the other children on the bus make fun of Forrest and don't want him to sit next to them, Jenny invites him to sit next to her. It's the beginning of a lifelong love story. It's a love story somewhat like "the Prodigal Son," in that Jenny is the wild child, the child of the 1960's, living a wasteful and permissive life. She always has other men who have more to offer than the seemingly dysfunctional Forrest. When she finally comes home—used, abused, tired and worn out—Forrest is there for her.

One day Forrest and Jenny take a walk through the country roads of their childhood. They happen upon an abandoned house. Jenny instantly recognizes the house as the place of her abusive childhood, and, enraged, starts to throw rocks at her former residence. But try as she might she can't demolish the house with her rock throwing—she can't remove the ugly memories of her past that haunt her and to a degree, control her. Her shame and guilt are wrapped up in that old house.

When Jenny collapses into a sobbing, emotional heap on the dirt road Forrest sits down, cross-legged, beside her, trying to comfort her. The narrative voice-over, the voice of Forrest as he remembers the incident in his later life explains, "Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks." Forrest sits there with Jenny as she relives the pain of her past. Forrest continues to be there for Jenny, even when she contracts what we are led to believe is AIDS. After Jenny dies Forrest buys that house and has it bulldozed—a symbolic gesture to wipe away that pain from Jenny's life.

When we *connect with God* we come to know Jesus, who came to be with us. We come to know that he is still with us, forever and ever. He sits next to us, under the table of our compulsions and addictions, or on an old country road where we have collapsed, exhausted from trying to purge and expunge our shame and guilt. Jesus knows that we have fixations and addictions that overpower us. He knows that we are overwhelmed by sin and evil. At such times he is there for us, next to us, calling us to his rest and his peace. At such times he invites us to *unplug* from all of our earthly connections, including our religion, and *connect* with him. As the Lamb of God, the Chief Shepherd of our souls, he calls to us, inviting us to let him bear our burdens, and live in his house, *by God's grace*.

The Greek Passion

Nikos Kazantzakis wrote a novel called *The Greek Passion*. It's a story based upon the experiences Kazantzakis had early in life. When he was a young boy the Turks came into many small villages on Crete, murdering and butchering Greeks in bloody atrocities. After a massacre in their village, his father took young Nikos out and made him touch the corpses of the dead men. His father did not want him to forget.

In Kazantzakis's novel the word *passion* has two meanings: The Passion of Christ and the Greek passion for freedom. Kazantzakis marries the two concepts in his novel, painting a rich picture of the freedom Christ gives his people (Galatians 5:1).

The story is centered in a small Greek village where the people dramatically reenact the Easter celebration every year. Those who are chosen to act in the passion play are