

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

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Religion: Where Is the Love?

By Greg Albrecht



The message on a T-shirt worn by a man walking past us in our local shopping mall intrigued my wife and me: *Religion—Giving Hope to a World Torn Apart by...Religion.*

I suspect the man wearing that T-shirt and I might come to different conclusions about the solution, but we absolutely agree about the problem.

Religion is a contradiction—it promises hope but delivers fear. Religion promises peace but delivers violence and bloodshed. Religion promises faith, but delivers authoritarian legalism.

- How can we put our primary hope in religious institutions that wind up condemning and hating each other—and sometimes going to war with each other?

- How can institutions that promote and produce injury and destruction (spiritual, and even in some cases physical abuse of their own members) bring about hope? Spiritual pollution is pouring from the smokestacks of religious institutions. Religious factories are belching out noxious, toxic hatred and condemnation.

- You've heard the old definition of insanity, no doubt? *Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again hoping for a different result.* How can institutions that continue to follow the same prescriptions and procedures, the same ceremonies and customs, the same rituals and regulations which time and time again produce endless heartache, misery and suffering bring us any hope?

Religious Professionals Doing Battle

Samuel de Champlain was a French explorer who lived in the 17th century. Champlain often reported back to the old world in Europe about many of the sights he experienced while exploring North America—particularly Canada.

In his writings he told one story about a community in Nova Scotia that was served by a Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor. Champlain did not detail the exact nature of the doctrinal disputes between these two religious professionals, but he did explain how they resolved their difficulties. At regular

intervals these two men would engage in a public fist-fight. Apparently big crowds of people would gather at the center of the village or town to cheer on their favorite combatant.

We don't know what the pastor and priest were fighting about, but we do know they fought regularly. This story is an example, in a nutshell, of the irrelevance of religion on the one hand and the hatred, fighting and destruction which inevitably follows in its wake.

If religion is our only hope, then we have no hope—because religion either starts or winds up deeply involved in bloodshed and carnage around this world. The soil of this good earth is soaked in blood, in the name of God.

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Not *That Kind* of Christian

When I tell new friends or acquaintances that I am a Christian, a frequent response goes something like this: “Well, exactly *what kind* of Christian are you?” My answer includes specific distinctions about common assumptions. Here are a few:

- I am a Christ-follower. I do not follow or believe or trust in religion. I follow, believe and trust in Jesus. I believe God loves us in spite of religion, not because of any efforts or deeds we perform to convince him to love us.

- I do not believe that God is a God of wrath. I do not believe that God the Father was so upset with the sin of humanity that he could only be appeased through divine punishment and violence carried out on God the Son on his cross. I do not believe the cross of Christ is all about penal substitution inflicted on God the Son by God the Father.

- As a Christ-follower I believe the popular idea of hell as a place of eternal torture is a detestable religious fabrication. Hell, as popularly understood and proclaimed by religion at large, is completely inconsistent with the nature of God revealed in the Bible. I am not *that kind of Christian* because I believe God loves the entire world. I do not believe God sends people to hell because he loves them!

- I believe that God really does love the whole world. I do not believe in a God who shuts people out of his kingdom because they didn’t belong to the right church or even if they didn’t use the word “Christian” to define themselves. Jesus works with whomever he wants to work. In the book of

Revelation we read that he is standing outside of a church that will not let him in—he is knocking on the door, but the image is that members inside think Jesus is already on “their team.”

- I do not believe that God asks me to make judgments and decisions about everyone (“true” Christians) who loves and accepts him and conversely everyone who, in my opinion, despises and rejects God’s love and grace. Making such assessments is none of my business and is way above my pay grade.

- I am *the kind of Christian* who does not feel any need to “witness” and give a personal “testimony” to every person I meet for the first time or to those who already know me. I do not feel people whom I fail to “convert” or “save” or “lead to Jesus” will burn in hell for all eternity. I believe God does and will fully reveal his love and grace to all.

- I believe the Bible is an inspired compilation of 66 books—useful for teaching, edification and encouragement—but I do not believe that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. The Bible itself tells me that Jesus is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

- I do not absolutely believe that God created the entire universe in six literal 24-hour periods of time 6,000 years ago. What difference does it make? Some want to “prove” the earth is “young” because they think the Bible says so. When science irrefutably proves the earth to be much older than 6,000 years, some die-hard “young-earthers” say God created the earth to “seem” old! As a Christ-follower I see no reason to believe that

science inevitably produces atheists and agnostics—science and faith are compatible.

- I do not believe that women are inferior to men and that religion has any business “keeping them in submission and silence.” Nor do I believe women should be required to cover their bodies in such a way to protect men from having to overcome “natural passions that might be unleashed” if too much of a woman’s body is showing.

- I believe eternal life with God, after the experience of death following human life, is a more likely eternal outcome for many, if not most. I believe in *hopeful inclusiveness*.

- I am hopeful that more will be a part of God’s kingdom of heaven than less, and I am thankful that God has not given any individual human or any group of humans, including church authorities, the right to reserve space in a fictional, fabricated hell for those people who do not meet their standards.

- However, I am not a “universalist” in the sense of believing all humans will live forever with God, regardless of the choices they make on earth. I believe God allows humans to reject his love and embrace, and that some have, some do and some may.

You may agree or disagree with my thoughts...so what about you? Give some thought to the kind of Christ-follower you are, by the grace of God. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for Not “That Kind” of Christian at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of May 19, 2019.

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If Jesus tried to attend a church, or a synagogue or a mosque, would they let him in? If Jesus ran for president, would he win? And if he won, how long do you think it would be before a political/religious machine would have him assassinated?

Authentic, pure, uncorrupted and unadulterated Christianity is a spiritual way of life—a lifestyle Jesus lives in and produces through the lives of those who trust him and follow him.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35

Love is the most beautiful, most profound illustration of what God produces in the life of a Christ-follower. For centuries religion has been assuring us that it is all about love and peace. For centuries Christ-less religion has been telling us that it is the world's best and perhaps last hope.

Religion is bringing us hope? The reality is lampooned as that message on the t-shirt I mentioned earlier: *Religion—Giving Hope to a World Torn Apart by...Religion.*

Just Any Old Kind of Water Won't Do

Christless religion at large is bankrupt, its message is counterfeit because it insists that human performance of the right rules and rituals will gain a higher standing with God than one would have otherwise enjoyed. Religion is without spiritual value because its foundational teaching is completely at odds with the gospel of Christ. The gospel insists that God's love is *in-spite-of love, not because-of love.*

Don't fall for the idea that some religion is better than no religion at all. The distinction between Christ-less religion and Christ-centered faith is like the difference between pure and polluted water. Water can bring life or it can bring misery, suffering and ultimately death. When water is like the rivers of living water Jesus spoke of, water can refresh, it can be life-giving and

it can cause plants to grow—or water can be a flood or a tsunami, or a toxic river that brings death and destruction.

Jesus spent much of his earthly ministry helping people to discern healthy faith from toxic faith. He lovingly revealed the Father, because people of that day had such a horribly contorted idea of who God is—and people still do!

Jesus tells us that *he is the way and the truth and the life* (John 14:6). He alone is the way, the life and the truth. And Jesus tells us clearly that if he is living his life in us, we and others will see the love of God.

What does Christ-less religion say and what does religion produce? Religion says that it (the religion) is the highest value. Religion insists that its followers go into the world and make more followers of that particular religion.

Sure, within Christendom the name of Jesus will often be used, but what Jesus are they talking about? Many have so redefined, reinvented and perverted the name of Jesus that little of Jesus is left when his name is used.

Where Is The Love?

By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35

Religion says that all those who do not follow its dictates will burn in hell, forever, even while being eternally conscious. Christ-less religion says that God will send people to hell to be tormented and tortured forever because he loves them!? **Where is the love?**

Religion says that the world must be made over in its image—so that the whole world will, one way or another, through violence if necessary, become part of its teachings and beliefs. **Where is the love?**

Religion teaches its followers to be skeptical and suspicious about all outsiders—and through its



When water is like the rivers of living water Jesus spoke of, water can refresh, it can be life-giving and cause plants to grow...

passionate preaching religion urges condemnation and judgment on all outsiders. **Where is the love?**

The historic inquisitions of Christendom were founded on the premise that virtually any act, even of violence and torture, was permissible if the final end was the conversion of an unbelieving outsider. The end justifies the means, says religion. **Where is the love?**

The world of religion at large so quickly moves away from expressions of love as primary goals and objectives and soon is wallowing in a sea of swill, a pig pen of trivialities that are meaningless and irrelevant—but apparently worth abusing, torturing and killing others.

All those who call themselves Christians should take careful note: Jesus clearly articulated our identity as being the love which he would live in us and would be evident to one and all.

Yet, go to a building with a sign outside that identifies it as a church. Go to a website that sells so-called "Christian" books. Turn on your radio or television and listen to and watch a program that calls itself "Christian."



By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35

What will you hear and see? In many cases you will hear messages about self-help. If you hear all about becoming and remaining rich, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are encouraged to do all you can to get more people to attend that building, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are warned and threatened about hell, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are given instructions about all the things you can do to fix your life and the lives of others so you can have a *breakthrough* in your health, a *breakthrough* in your finances, a *breakthrough* in your relationships, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

Christ-less religion will tell you what to believe and how to think—and in many cases, how *not* to think. Christ-less religion will tell you how to vote. Christ-less religion will tell you how to watch out for outsiders, who may pollute you. Christ-less religion will do its best to control you. But “**Where is the love?**”

God’s Love By Grace = Christianity Without the Religion

In the midst of this upside-down world that is so addicted to religious ideology that it cannot recognize the love of God, people

by the billions—who are confined in religious cages into which they have been placed by Christ-less religion—yearn for the presence of God in their lives.

Billions of people ask, one way or another, many of them silently for fear of what would happen to them if they dare to question their religious leadership, “**Where is the love?**”

It is in this world that Christianity

WITHOUT the religion sounds a clear and unambiguous invitation. It is in a darkened, abused and addicted world that Christianity WITHOUT the religion proclaims the love of God, without apology and without the paralysis of religious limitations and dogma.

Without God’s love we would be nothing. We can spend our entire lives amassing religious deeds, creeds, accomplishments, rituals, ceremonies and performances **but they mean nothing if we do not have God’s love.** In 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul said that all our efforts to please and appease God are meaningless—an annoying sound, like a clanging cymbal. In *The Message Bible*, Eugene Peterson translated “clanging cymbal” as *the creaking of a rusty gate.*

Religious contrivances and manipulations designed to earn his grace and favor come closer to annoying God than they do pleasing or appeasing him! God’s love is given by his grace, not in return for something we do. God’s love is not

about balancing the books so that we pay him what we owe him. God’s love is not given in exact proportion to how well we behave.

If that love is not lived in us through Jesus, by the grace of God, then can we truly call ourselves Christians? Can we assume we are disciples of Jesus, if his love is not present in our lives?

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35

What God’s Love Looks Like

God’s love looks like Jesus. If you are looking for love in religion, you’re looking in all the wrong places. If you’re wondering where the love is, then focus on Jesus. Focus on his teachings. Read the Sermon on the Mount. Read Jesus’ parables. Read how Jesus lived and revealed the love of God the Father.

Where is the love? What does it look like? It looks like Jesus!

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.—1 Corinthians 13:4-7 □

...our efforts to please and appease God are meaningless—an annoying sound, like a clanging cymbal... or the creaking of a rusty gate.





The Power of God's Love

By Laura Urista

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been **born of God** and **knows God**. Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love**.—1 John 4:7-8 (my emphasis)*

In the scripture above, we are admonished to “love one another, for love comes from God.” The word translated into our English word “love” throughout this passage is from the Greek words *agapao* (verb) or *agape* (noun). *Agapao* refers to the supernatural love of God, but that is only part of the meaning. *Agapao* also refers to the love which arises from a “keen sense of the value and worth of the object loved.” When we are commanded to love (*agapao*) one another, part of the meaning is to deeply appreciate the worth and value in others.

Unfortunately, it is not in our human nature to generate this kind of love on our own steam, by making up our minds to do so and trying our best. But **through the power of the Holy Spirit**, God gives us the ability to recognize the value in others and love them with his supernatural love.

“God’s love has been poured out into our hearts **through the Holy Spirit**, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

What does it mean “BORN OF GOD”?

To be born is the beginning of new life, both physically and spiritually. The start of human life begins with the sharing of the deepest, most intimate expression of love between a husband and wife—the way God intended new life to come into the world. Through the beautiful act of husband and wife sharing the ultimate expression of love for each other, a new life can begin as a couple starts a new family.

To be born of God is to become part of HIS family. From the beginning, mankind was meant to join in the deep loving relationship of the family of God. We are born spiritually **through the power of the Holy Spirit** as a NEW Creation because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and his risen life in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean “KNOW GOD”?

The Greek word for “KNOW” used in 1 John 4:7-8 is *ginosko*. That same Greek word for “know” is translated in Matthew 1:25 as “marital relations” or what older commentaries refer to as “carnal knowledge.” Those who know God in this way are in a *deeply intimate* family relationship with God.

This Greek word *ginosko* is also translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “to perceive, to

discern, to be assured or to view with favor.” I often hear younger folks express their delight when they feel their significant other “really GETS” them. In other words, they feel understood and accepted.

What a blessing it is to know that our heavenly Father “really GETS” us. He perceives, discerns and views us with favor. He knows ALL about us and he still loves us more than anyone ever has or ever will.

What does it mean “GOD IS LOVE”?

Love is the essence of God’s nature. God is pure, supernatural love from eternity. Out of God’s loving generosity he invites us to be a part of his family and share his love with others.

We can’t fake, pretend or act out God’s genuine love. But as Christ-followers, God lives in us and HIS love flows out from us **through the power of the Holy Spirit**.

As we enjoy a flourishing relationship with him, we will overflow with genuine concern and love for others. Christ living in us and sharing his love will change the way we value others and therefore how we treat others, recognizing that everyone is a treasured child of God. That’s the power of God’s love! □

Laura Urista is the managing editor of Plain Truth and CWR magazine.



Happy 100th Birthday!

CWR/PTM Partner Bruce Coulson was born on May 25, 1919 in Sea View, Prince Edward Island, where he grew up, attended high school and graduated from college. Unfortunately, World War II interfered with Bruce's plans to attend university and he volunteered for service in September 1939 with the Prince Edward Island Highlanders, a kilted regiment.

He served in Canada until 1943, then went to England and subsequently was assigned as a Corporal to the Princess Louise Fusiliers (PLF), a machine gun support regiment for the 5th Canadian Division in Italy.

After the war, Bruce continued his studies and accepted a position with the Civil Service in Ottawa as a quality assurance officer. During his career he visited various manufacturing plants in Canada, the United States, the British Isles and Europe in order to inspect products and services supplied to the military.

Bruce enjoys spending time at his local Seniors Active Living Centre and attends Grace Baptist Church in Charlottetown, Prince Edward. Among his many hobbies, Bruce has enjoyed making his own wine for over fifty years.

He also collects model trains and is pictured here with his great grandson Tristan in his "Train Room." His daughter Sharon and her husband, Archie, along with their daughter Sarah (mother of Tristan) live close enough to visit often and spend time with Bruce. Bruce's beloved wife, Lila, passed away in 2014.

May God bless you, Bruce, with many more years of health and happiness! □ —*The Editors*

If you have a milestone birthday coming up, please let us know!

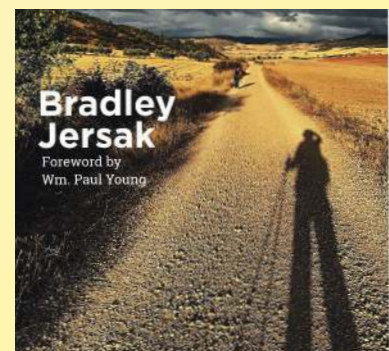


Coming Soon!

A MORE CHRISTLIKE WAY

A CWR Press sequel to Brad Jersak's award-winning book, *A More Christlike God*.

(Audio version of *A More Christlike God* now available on Amazon.com.)



**A MORE
CHRISTLIKE
WAY**
A More
Beautiful Faith



Crowned with Tender Mercies

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

One winter day when our son Carlton was four, he spent the afternoon playing at his friend Elliot's house. When he arrived home he commented with apparent confusion that Elliot's mother didn't study at all. He had assumed that all mothers spent most of their days "studying." Some years later the two boys were having a dust up that quickly deteriorated into a shouting match—whose dad could beat the other one.

When that proved inconclusive, Elliot brought out his big guns. At least his mother would never sit him on the front steps with a clock and tell him to start walking to preschool when the alarm rang.

Carlton returned home alarmed—and not just because he had no malicious dirt to hurl at Elliot's mother. Had I really done that? Crazy thing is that I didn't actually remember.

But I did admit that it sure sounded like something I'd do. The church with the preschool was only four houses away; and the college where I taught was a block in the other direction. But, truth be told, I did raise a free-range kid.

Carlton is now "retired," overseeing his twelve rental properties; and this past summer he walked his daughter down the aisle at her wedding.

As for me, I've continued teaching—and studying. Most recently my studies have taken me back to Old Wittenberg, where Katharina von Bora raised a half dozen free-range kids, all the while operating a boarding house the size of a small Holiday Inn with adjoining gardens and pastures for her livestock and poultry.

Wife of the famed Reformer, Martin Luther, Katie was the breadwinner of the family. She bought and sold farms, kept a close eye on the hired hands, and somehow managed to keep her overbearing and unstable husband from going off the rails.

The published product of my studies was *Katie Luther: First Lady of the Reformation*. Katie was a very protective mother, more so than her

husband. But it was Martin who expressed himself in what we might term motherly qualities. Here he imagines the words of a celibate theologian:

"Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores?...What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness!"

His own perspective, however, is the opposite: "How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am

How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.—Matthew 27:37

serving Thy creature and Thy most precious will. O how gladly will I do so."

As with most mothers, however, day-in-day-out with the kids can be exasperating. On one occasion when Katie was away managing one of her farms, Martin, home with the kids, remarked, "Christ said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Dear, God, have we got to become such idiots?"

The most painful sorrow the parents endured was the death of their thirteen-year-old daughter Magdalena. "Ah! Sweet Lenchen," Martin whispered as she took her last breath, "you will rise again and you will shine like a star, yes, like the sun! I am happy in the spirit, but my earthly form is very sad."

It is difficult to imagine Katie saying she was "happy in the spirit." She was, in fact, devastated beyond words.

Martin Luther, bombastic to a fault, had an amazing streak of motherly tenderness. The words of Jesus speaking to Jerusalem come to mind: "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." The great Reformer, by God's grace, was crowned with tender mercies. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"Thanks be to God, at the pinnacle of humanity stands Jesus Christ. His nonviolent consent to the Cross—the intersection of humanity's affliction (our freedom-to-violence) and God's radical forgiveness—becomes the occasion whereby supernatural love flows through God's own wounds into the world. God's love, far from being weak or impotent, will eclipse violence, might and force as the relentless catalyst for the renewal of the world.

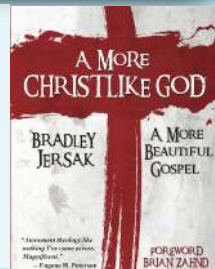
God's Kingdom does not advance through violence, freedom-violating force or law-breaking interventions. God's kingdom reign is the expression of supernatural love in and through those who consent to being indwelt and transformed by Christ."—Brad Jersak (*A More Christlike God*, page 212)

"If being eighty-one makes a person old, I have become an old man, and I must confess...old age is a bit of a disappointment. Growing old has not brought me much closer to God or much wiser in his ways...hasn't happened. I have two feelings about God these days: gratitude and hope."—Lewis Smedes

"You are a son or daughter of the Good and Loving God. The Divine Image is planted inherently and intrinsically within you. You cannot create it, you cannot manufacture it, you cannot earn it, you cannot achieve it, you cannot attain it, you cannot cumulatively work up to it. Do you know why? Because you already have it! That is the core of the gospel." —Richard Rohr

A More Christlike God— A More Beautiful Gospel

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