

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]

The Seventh Beatitude

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.— Matthew 5:9

Throughout the history of humanity, peace has always been highly prized—though there are differing opinions as to how peace is gained and maintained.

There is no doubt that the peace that Jesus is talking about is an absence of conflict, violence, hatred and murder. There is no doubt that the gospel of Jesus Christ leads us to love our enemies, and leads to peace rather than war. However, this beatitude is concerned with far more than simply a physical, political definition of peace.

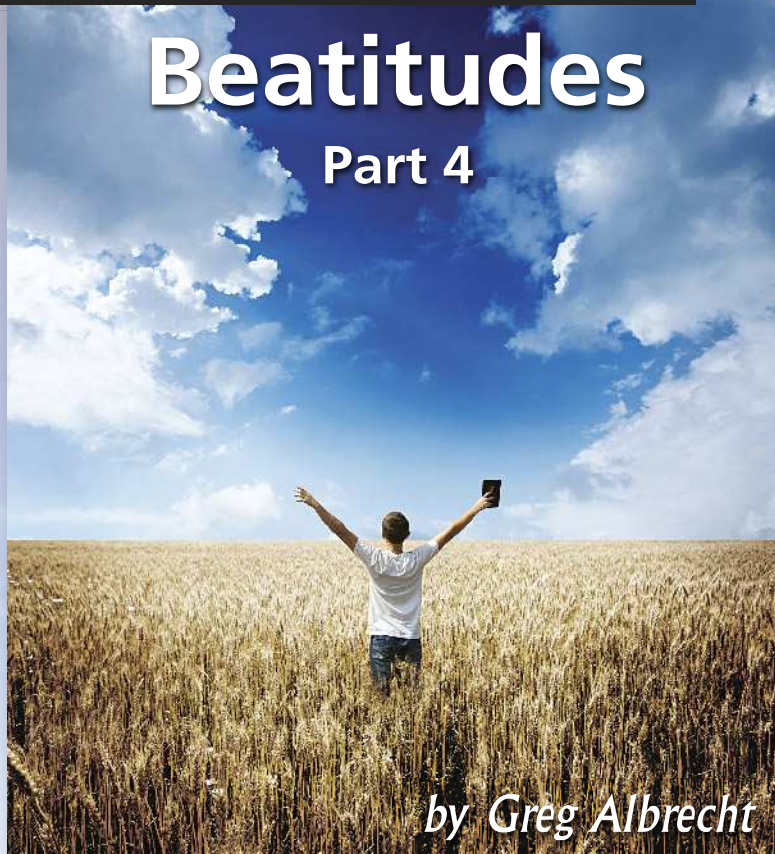
This peace is a gift of God, not of a political or diplomatic process. This peace is the *shalom* of God—the *presence* of God rather than

Civilizations have traditionally trusted in their weapons and their military force to grant them peace—that's been the lesson of history. That's the reason for the well-known name of a sidearm called the "Colt 45 Peacemaker."

simply the absence of physical hostilities.

Peace as simply the absence of violence and hostilities is often thought of as the peace that the threat of greater and superior violence brings about. This kind of peace is motivated by the fear of violence. Civilizations have traditionally trusted in their

Beatitudes Part 4



by Greg Albrecht

weapons and their military force to grant them peace—that's been the lesson of history. That's the reason for the well-known name of a sidearm called the "Colt 45 Peacemaker."

The peacemaker Jesus is describing is one who is blessed by God's *presence*, and this role is so much more than arbitration or arranging compromises between two parties who disagree.

This peacemaker is a child of God in that God's *presence* enables them to proclaim and embody God's peace—that is, Jesus, who is the

Prince of peace. A peacemaker is not someone who has, by strength of character, obliterated all sin in his/her life so sin is *absent*—a peacemaker is someone in whose life God is absolutely *present*.

We are children of God because God the Son came to us, becoming one of us, for our peace. When Jesus was born a great company of angels praised God saying, as Luke 2:14 says, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

We become children of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, not our own efforts. John 1:12-13 tells us, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

All of these beatitudes are describing spiritual joy and peace, blessings given to those "on whom his favor rests"—to those who live by God's grace, who trust God and

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I Fought the Law

In 1966 the Bobby Fuller Four recorded a top ten hit called “I Fought the Law”—here are the lyrics in the first verse:

*I'm breakin' rocks in the hot sun
I fought the law and the law won.*

The physical image that *breakin' rocks in the hot sun* brings to mind is of the endless, soul destroying labor performed by prison inmates—back in the day, soul destroying labor often included breaking rocks with sledgehammers on the proverbial hard rock pile. Prisoners broke the law and now the law returned the favor.

Breaking rocks on the hard rock pile is, of course, an intentionally meaningless exercise—and **“meaningless exercise” is a superb definition of the spiritual ramifications of fighting the law.**

Consider two ways to relate to and know God:

1) The most-popular-by-far method involves pleasing and appeasing God by virtue of obedience and the performance of works and deeds.

For simplicity sake we might call this first way *performance-based righteousness*. We could also call this first way *religion*—because religion in general is the idea that one can earn a relationship with God, or enhance an already existing relationship with God, on the basis of one’s efforts.

This first way essentially insists that God and his laws are one and the same and that God is best defined by his laws.

2) The second way of relating to and knowing God is Jesus—the second way is, as Romans 3:21 says, “a righteousness from God, apart from law...”

This second way believes that God and his love are one and the same and that God is best revealed in Jesus and best defined by his love.

Think about Jesus’ teachings, most notably those contained in the Sermon on the Mount. In the fifth chapter of Matthew Jesus gives six antithetical statements, each beginning with a repeated introduction like “You have heard that it has been said” and he follows with something like “you shall not murder, or commit adultery,” or he speaks of the old covenant principle of justice, “an eye for an eye,” and then he contrasts the past with a statement like “But I say unto you...”

Many within Christendom at large twist these words of Jesus, so if we believe what these interpreters teach, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is actually insisting on a stricter observance of the law.

So, for the followers of works righteousness, those who are forever breaking rocks on a religious rock pile—the first way of having a relationship with God—Jesus is actually saying that the rock pile of the new covenant is harder and more difficult than the old covenant.

According to those who believe Jesus was introducing even more difficult standards to please and appease God, he is essentially saying “You think it was tough in the past? You break my law and I will break you!”

But of course what Jesus is actually saying in Matthew 5 is that the law is impossible to fulfill. Jesus is saying that the law is a stern taskmaster, and **you can never win if you**

believe God wants you to please and appease him by your obedience to the law. The law will always win.

If you attempt to please and appease God on the basis of religious performances, ceremonies and rituals, you will forever be fighting the law—the law will always win, and you will remain a prisoner condemned to endlessly and meaninglessly breaking rocks on the hard rock pile.

In the fifth chapter of Matthew, Jesus is saying: There is a better way to please God (the only way) because pleasing God by observing the law is impossible. There is only One Way to please God and Jesus is essentially saying, “I’m it. I will fulfill the law and introduce a new covenant whereby by God’s grace you might live in me and I in you.”

The new covenant announces the new standard of relationship between humanity and God is Jesus and God’s grace, not the law.

When anyone is deceived into thinking that God is primarily defined by his laws, rather than his love, they will eventually find themselves endlessly “pounding sand”—forever engaged in meaningless exercises in a religious penitentiary. The law will always win when one believes that salvation depends on law keeping.

The Jesus Way is the One and Only Way to fight the law without having the law win and exact its painful consequences in one’s life. □

Join us for the complete message “I Fought the Law” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of July 31, 2016.

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rest in him, putting aside their own vain pursuits to please God on the basis of their deeds, and fully embracing the favor and grace God alone can give.

We become peacemakers by God's grace, through the cross of Christ. As Paul tells us in Colossians 1:20, that the Father has, through Christ, reconciled "to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Jesus absorbed and accepted all human violence and hatred in his body, on his cross, and transformed hatred and bitterness into reconciliation and peace. He is the Prince of peace.

We are—as we are united in and through him, as he lives his risen life in us—his peacemakers, sharing his peace with the world at large, as he chooses to use us. And we are enabled to be peacemakers because, as Romans 5:1 tells us, "... since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Eighth Beatitude

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

Notice that the phrase "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" follows the first beatitude, in verse 3, and now it follows the eighth and last beatitude, here in vs. 10.

Poverty of spirit, the first beatitude, and persecution, the eighth and last beatitude, are the bookends of joy and inner happiness that a Christ-follower experiences.

This eighth beatitude is stated differently than the others—one "blessed" statement is given in verse ten and then it's followed by

another in verse 11. However, when we carefully read these three verses they all seem to offer further description and illustration of the one beatitude given in verse 10.

Why would anyone be persecuted for "righteousness sake"? If you do good, then why would people get upset with you? Of course, the answer is found in the life of Jesus, isn't it?

Jesus said in John 3:19, "*Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*"

The very nature of the righteousness of Jesus, who is the Light of the world, provokes the evil and nefarious deeds of darkness. That happened to Jesus, when he walked this earth doing good, and it happens now as he lives within his followers.

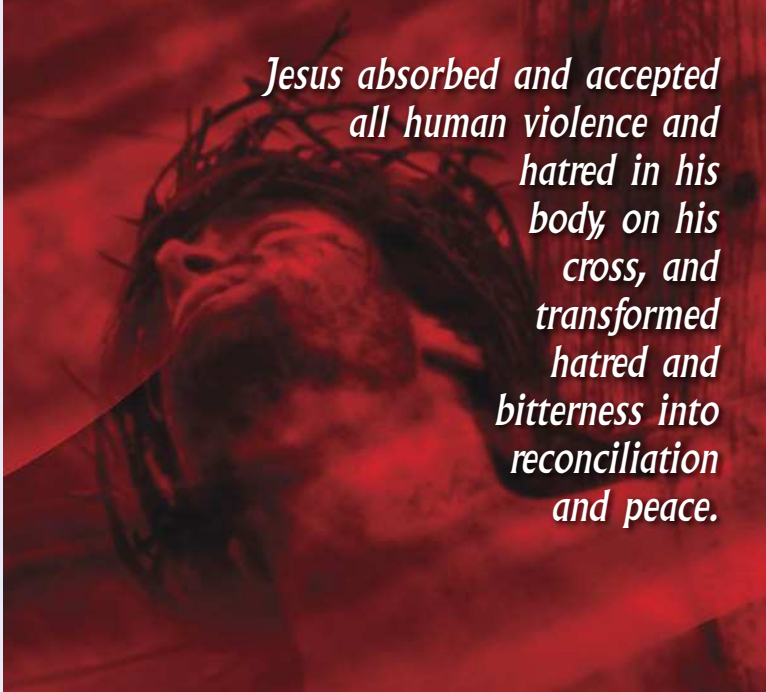
Darkness considers light an invasion—darkness considers light inconveniently illuminating practices and behaviors it would rather keep hidden.

As the Light of the world Jesus came to reveal, not to conceal—and the knee-jerk human response to the revelation of Jesus Christ is hostility.

We are blessed because we are persecuted for righteousness' sake—and again, what righteousness, or more correctly, **whose** righteousness?

Not our own—for there is nothing that we can produce or contribute to God that can remotely be defined as righteous. The righteousness that this blessing is based on is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God the Father credits to us because of his grace.

So once again, this is not persecution that we cause or that we invite—this is persecution that



Jesus absorbed and accepted all human violence and hatred in his body, on his cross, and transformed hatred and bitterness into reconciliation and peace.

is the natural reaction of a culture and society enshrouded in darkness to the light of Christ shining in the lives of those in whom he lives.

As a further distinction and illustration of the persecution we will (as Christ-followers) experience, people will insult us and lie about us. No one enjoys being insulted. No one appreciates lies being told about them.

Jesus is not suggesting that we should take some perverted or twisted pleasure when we are persecuted—but he is also suggesting that we should not be shocked when we are persecuted, because following Christ means that we will be disliked, made fun of, denied membership or employment, discriminated against, ostracized and lied about.

Jesus is simply saying the kingdoms of this world react negatively to the kingdom of heaven—so you should not be surprised when such negative and painful experiences happen, and you can count them as blessings in the sense that *they may well be proof* that Christ is living in you.

I said "*may well be proof*" because the fact that someone might insult you, persecute you and lie about you is not one and the same as proving that you are in Christ and that he is in you.

It is possible—entirely possible, in fact it is probable—that human



beings, of and by themselves, will cause other human beings to hate them, to insult them, to persecute them and lie about them.

For example: Pride and arrogance cause negative reactions—and sometimes people who go to church and think they are Christians act in a haughty and superior manner towards others, and then they are persecuted—and

We are revolutionaries of God's grace. C.S. Lewis compared the mission of Christians as somewhat like that of Allied soldiers in World War 2 who parachuted behind enemy lines for the good of the Allied cause.

then, hey presto, they think that other people don't like them because they are Christians!

No, **the only thing such behaviors prove is that when you are an obnoxious jerk towards other people many will treat you as an obnoxious jerk.** Some people actually believe that they are truly Christians because of the way people treat them, when in fact all such negative reactions to them prove is that they have mistreated and abused other individuals.

The persecution that Jesus is talking about as a beatitude—as a blessing—is the persecution that happens when Jesus himself and his righteousness that lives within us by God's grace empowers us to love others, pray for them, serve them and care for them—and still, at the end of the day, we might be insulted and persecuted and lied about.

Perhaps we shouldn't say that persecution is *proof* that a person is a Christ-follower. Persecution is not so much a *proof* of being a Christ-follower as it is a *result* of Christ living in you.

We might say, for example, that law enforcement officers suffer because of the nature of their profession. Not everyone likes law enforcement officers, and not everyone appreciates them.

But suffering is not a *proof* that someone is a law enforcement officer—many people who work in other professions suffer as well. But suffering, living a hard

life, can often be the *result* of being a law enforcement officer.

And, some police officers are “persecuted” because they, under color of their authority and uniform, abuse those they are sworn to “protect and serve.”

Another aspect of this beatitude we should consider: Jesus is not urging us, his followers and disciples, to seek persecution or provoke it by strange and weird behavior.

But he is saying that as he lives his life within the lives of those of us who receive him, others will persecute, revile and belittle us—and when such a thing happens it will give us inner joy, for when it truly comes “because of righteousness” it is evidence that we are God's very own children.

When persecution for righteousness sake happens, then we may rejoice and be glad.

We are revolutionaries of God's grace. C.S. Lewis compared the mission of Christians as somewhat like that of Allied soldiers in World War 2 who parachuted behind enemy lines for the good of the Allied cause.

As Christ-followers, as the children of God, we are now spiritually reborn—we embody and live out the life of Christ. We are living out that life having been parachuted behind enemy lines. We are part of the invasion force of the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, Christ-followers are revolutionaries of God's grace and mean no harm—we are peace-loving. We renounce violence. We worship the Prince of peace.

We, as Christ empowers us, love our enemies. Christ-followers do no harm, but at the same time we boldly stand for the values of the kingdom of heaven

We love the Prince of peace, and we are his peace-loving activists. We obey and follow the King of the revolutionary kingdom of heaven—so we are revolutionaries of his kingdom... We do not look to the kingdoms of this world for our ultimate security...

and we courageously follow Jesus, the King of the kingdom of heaven.

We love the Prince of peace, and we are his peace-loving activists. We obey and follow the King of the revolutionary kingdom of heaven—so we are revolutionaries of his kingdom.

We proclaim the values of another kingdom. We do not look to the kingdoms of this world for our ultimate security, and we do not trust them implicitly. We have only one King, and his name is Jesus. We trust him, we follow him, and we rely on him for our security.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. □

Obedience Is DANGEROUS

B Y S T E V E B R O W N

Let me give you a truth that may shock you: the most dangerous threat to your walk with God is your obedience ...when you're aware of it.

I know, I know. You want some scriptural proof.

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Add to that Jesus' story about the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee brought his goodness to God and the tax collector brought his sin—"God be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that the tax collector went away justified before God.

And don't forget when the Centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant. He said to Jesus, "Lord I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof" (Matthew 8:8).

Jesus said about him, "Truly I tell you, with no



"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12)

one in Israel have I found such faith" (Matthew 8:10).

Then there is the time when Jesus pointed to the most pure, faithful and obedient religious folks in the nation (the Pharisees) and told his disciples, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Am I suggesting that God doesn't want you to be obedient? Of course not! God forbid. But most of us go about it the wrong way.

Your obedience is beside the point. **Jesus didn't die to make you good...he died to make you his. When you're his, you might get better and probably will.**

But if you focus on the "getting better" part, you'll get worse.

Obsession with getting better

Jesus didn't die to make you good...he died to make you his. When you're his, you might get better and probably will.

is probably the biggest reason we don't get better. **It is only when we are obsessed with Christ's love that we get any better.**

It is only when we know for a fact that, if we don't get better, we're still his and he loves us, we ever get any better.

One other thing.

Not only does the Bible teach that the most dangerous threat to your walk with God is your obedience when you're aware of it, it also teaches that most good people aren't aware of their goodness.

In the parable of the final judgment

OUR PATH:THE JESUS WAY

THE *JESUS WAY*—WHAT JESUS IS ALL ABOUT

The *Jesus Way* is our focus for 2016-17. We continue this theme as we fix our attention on the captivating content of Jesus' teachings—what he taught and what he thought "following him" would look like in practice.





Obsession with getting better is probably the biggest reason we don't get better.

It is only when we are obsessed with Christ's love that we get any better.

crowns. Frankly, I don't believe the people we think are righteous really are.

And sometimes the ones we think of as less than righteous might be the most righteous. But that's another subject.

Did you hear about the Catholic elementary school? At the head table in the cafeteria, one of the nuns had placed a big bowl of bright red, fresh and juicy apples. Beside the bowl, the



Most of us are sure God is watching us to see how good we are... God is watching. But we're so often mistaken about the reason he's watching.

(Matthew 25:31-46), the obedient ones didn't even know they had been obedient: "Lord, when did we...?"

I think the most surprised person in heaven will be the person who gets the most crowns. He or she will be looking around for someone else with the same name or may even think that God made a mistake.

The second most surprised people in heaven will be those who don't get the

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- *Know What You Believe*—Paul Little

And Don't Forget!

- *Rejecting Religion—Embracing Grace*—Greg Albrecht*
- *A More Christlike God*—Brad Jersak*

* Available from CWR/PTM—while supplies last!—www.ptm.org



GOLD MEDAL WINNER!

Author of the award-winning book *A More Christlike God* and CWR Magazine Editor-in-Chief, Brad Jersak, will be speaking at two conferences this summer. Both of these conferences are an opportunity to hear and meet authors speak about the biblical declaration of God's relentless love and plan to reconcile His creation—making all things new by the blood of Jesus Christ—a time to develop new friendships and to

galvanize the growing community of Christians embracing the forgotten gospel. **To order Brad's book go to: www.ptm.org/christlike**

"Light of the World" Conference

Word of Grace Annual Conference—July 25-28, 2016

Location: The Father's House, 2649 E. Mulberry St., Fort Collins, CO

Speakers: Brad Jersak, C. Baxter Kruger, Caleb Miller, Wm. Paul Young

"Forgotten Gospel" Conference

Aug. 5-7, 2016—**Location:** The Sanctuary, 3101 W. 31st Ave., Denver, CO

Speakers: Brad Jersak, Peter Hiett, Robin Parry, Wm. Paul Young

nun put up a note: "Take only one. Remember God is watching."

At the other end of the table was a large dish full of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies still warm from the oven. Beside the dish was a note in a child's handwriting: "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

Most of us are sure God is watching us to see how good we are and that he will, once he knows, reward or punish us based on what he finds.

God is watching.

But we're so often mistaken about the reason he's watching. God is watching you as a father watches a child. He is delighted that you are his, you bear his name, have his righteousness and will someday be as good as you want to be. □



Is Jesus a Protestant?

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

Is Jesus a Protestant? I smile at the question. Yet as a child I certainly assumed that if Jesus came back he would feel right at home in the little country church my family attended.

We were unsophisticated—so poor our preachers had to moonlight with full-time jobs.

Like Jesus, we lived out our religion through the seasons, not according to a liturgical year, whatever that was.

We sang the songs that Jesus knew—*Savior like a Shepherd Lead us* and *Pass me not O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry*.

Jesus was in the garden *while the dew is still on the roses*. And he walked with us and he talked with us in places just like those in Palestine.

Jesus would have been at home in our humble farmhouses and would have understood planting and harvesting.

This Jesus I came to know as a child still lingers in my subconscious. He's walking the dusty roads, sometimes along the Yellow River where he stops to watch a baptism or talk to someone fishing over the bridge.

Jesus fits right in with my family on a sunny Sunday afternoon, picnic basket and tablecloth spread on the grass along the banks of Oak Lake.

He watches with pleasure as the five of us kids tiptoe into the chilly water to swim.

The Jesus and geography I knew as a child is in many ways the same Jesus and geography that Wendell

Berry so powerfully portrays in his fiction.

Berry's novels are set in a simpler time in rural Henry County Kentucky.

Though the terrain is very different from that of Palestine, Jesus would be very much at home as he would be in rural northern Wisconsin in the 1950s.

And, yes, Jesus is a Protestant. We know that from Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow*.

Jayber is a small town barber and part-time church janitor, a job that requires him to be present on Sunday mornings:

"I still walk up on Fridays to clean, as I have always done, and on Sunday mornings I go up to ring the bell and sit through the service."

The church like all little churches

I am not sectarian or evangelical. I don't want to argue with anybody about religion.

I wouldn't want to argue about it even if I thought it was arguable, or even if I could win.

I'm a literal reader of the Scriptures, and so I see the difficulties.

And yet every Sunday morning I walk up there, over a cobble of quibbles.

I am, I suppose, a difficult man.

I am, maybe, the ultimate Protestant, the man at the end of the Protestant road.

And here we learn from Jayber that Jesus was an ultimate Protestant too.

"Christ did not come to found an organized religion but came instead to found an unorganized one. He seems to have come to carry religion out of the temples into the

"Christ did not come to found an organized religion but came instead to found an unorganized one. He seems to have come to carry religion out of the temples into the fields and sheep pastures, onto the roadsides and the banks of rivers, into the houses of sinners and publicans."

of that era is denominationally affiliated and affirms correct doctrines. Jayber sits in the back row. He's there but he's not an insider. He's not a member.

It was the same with my own family.

We attended regularly but we never joined up, never got baptized, never signed a doctrinal statement.

Jayber speaks our own words as an outsider:

fields and sheep pastures, onto the roadsides and the banks of rivers, into the houses of sinners and publicans."

Jesus—outside the temples, inside the houses of sinners and publicans, bringing with him no organized religion, no creeds and confessions, no doctrinal statements or covenants to sign.

Jesus—bringing with him tender mercies. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"The redemptive value of Jesus' suffering lays not in the suffering itself (for in itself it has no value) but in the love that inspired it."

—Brennan Manning

"The visible church is all the people who get together from time to time in God's name. Anybody can find out who they are by going to look. The invisible church is all the people God uses for his hands and feet in the world. Nobody can find out who they are except God. Think of them as two circles. The optimist says they are concentric. The cynic says they don't even touch. The realist says they occasionally overlap."

—Frederick Buechner

"I do not believe that any of us is good enough to buy a seat in heaven with the small coins of our virtue."—Lewis Smedes

"All religions are the same: religion is basically guilt with different holidays."—Cathy Ladman

"You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."

—Anne Lamott

"In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America where it became an enterprise."

—Richard Halverson

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Coming Soon... THE REMNANT

By award-winning author, Monte Wolverton

In a totalitarian, post-apocalyptic future where religion is forbidden, a band of concentration-camp escapees treks through a lawless wilderness on a quest for authentic Christianity, only to come face-to-face with an unthinkable dilemma.

