

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

inside

All Jesus, All the Time p2

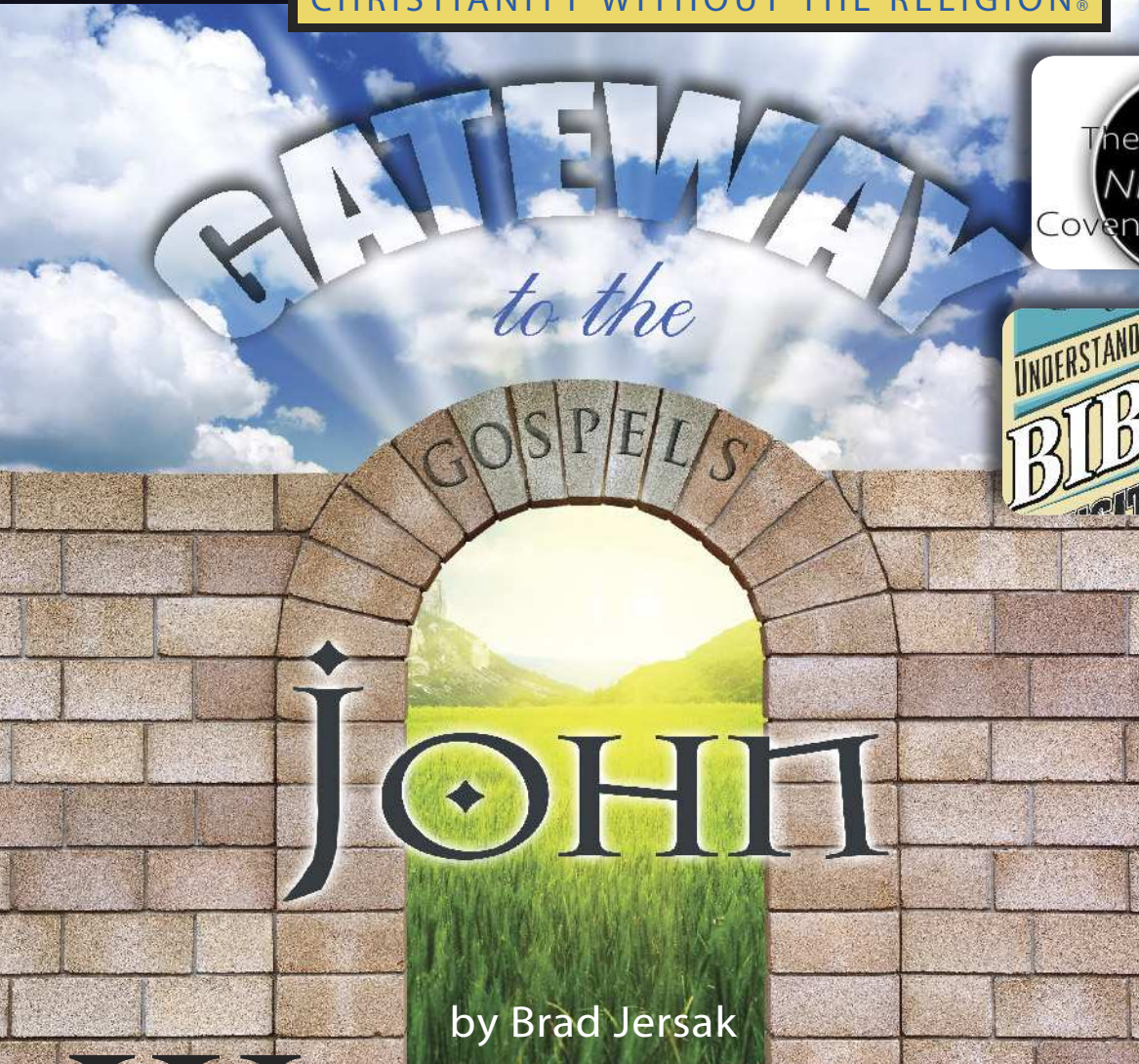
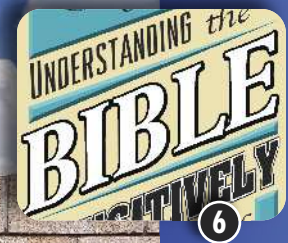
The New Covenant—Part 3 p4

Reading and Understanding the Bible—Sensitively and Sensibly p6

Tender Mercies p7

Quotes & Connections p8

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]



by Brad Jersak

We square off our four-part gallery of the Gospels with John's masterpiece. While the three "Synoptic Gospels" were obviously interdependent (in their overlapping and often identical material), John's work is unique. Its date, language and composition make it stand out from the earlier Gospels.

John the Beloved

Tradition regards the apostle John as the author, though some believe another individual, John the Presbyter, may have composed it. If so, he was a

protege of "the beloved disciple," a faithful steward of the "Johannine" tradition and community. Regardless of who held the quill, in the fourth Gospel we hear the eye-witness testimony of the disciple who said, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched...this we proclaim" (1 John 1:1).

The Gospel is usually dated at 90-95 A.D. John the apostle would likely have been in his 90's—an old

washed his disciples' feet (John 13), met Mary Magdalene in the garden after the resurrection (John 20), or

...JOHN'S WORK IS UNIQUE. IT'S DATE, LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION MAKE IT STAND OUT FROM THE EARLIER GOSPELS... WE CAN'T OVERSTATE HOW DIFFERENT JOHN'S GOSPEL IS FROM MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE.

restored Peter by the Sea of Galilee after his three-fold denial (John 21).

In each incident, we see the tenderness of Christ—the kindness that transformed John from a "son

Continued on page 3



Grace A Lot or Grace Alone?

I love to hear you speak and write about grace **a lot** of the time—but grace **alone** frightens me. I get nervous and uncomfortable just hearing grace **alone** teaching. We need some good old fashioned preaching about what will happen if we don't obey God to balance out all this emphasis on grace **alone**. I mean, don't we have to draw the line somewhere?

After this lady voiced her concerns I realized that she was articulating the concerns of tens of millions of people—people who like the sound of God's grace (especially when it applies to them) but really get concerned about hearing *too much grace and not enough law* (especially when law and its penalties apply to someone else).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about God's grace, but it's been hijacked by a Christ-less religion with an obsessive focus on rules, regulations and regimens. The continuing emphasis of *doing more, working harder, fixing others and improving oneself* leads to Christianity being understood as all about good behavior—and by contrast, against bad behavior. Of course, the great commandment of Jesus directs us to love others, rather than fix them.

Reading the Gospels one is struck by the fact that Jesus was always opposed to the moralistic, legalistic religion of his day and the implications and results of its authoritarian, no-nonsense, take-no-prisoners message. Making sure people got what was coming to them and ensuring fairness and justice were not/are not priorities in Jesus' teaching. *Jesus isn't all about accountability or all about keeping score. He isn't all about reciprocity.*

Jesus was and is **all about** God's grace. Grace is **all about** good things you and I don't deserve, but God gives them to us anyway. Law is **all about** what we do and what we earn and what we deserve. Grace is **all about** what Jesus has done and how God gives us what we can never earn.

Christendom today has been infected and corrupted by a religion that is focused on keeping rules, following programs and fixing people (fixing people was not on Jesus' radar when he commanded that we love our neighbor as ourselves). Much of Christendom today has been so watered down and so polluted that it's really nothing more than one big self-help program.

It isn't that preachers don't use the word "grace." It isn't that some don't actually believe in *grace a lot*—they do. But there's a world (a spiritual universe) of difference between *grace a lot* and **grace alone**.

Grace a lot is often simply attaching the title and name of grace to militaristic drills, hard labor and endless repetitions. *Grace a lot* is simply the same old religious stuff, dolled up by those who pick up the grace salt shaker and sprinkle the word "grace" around as if the sprinkling will magically transform the toxic oppression of Christ-less religion.

Those who are infected and indoctrinated by the false gospel of *grace a lot* are blinded to the full implications of what it means to be free in Christ. They are blinded to **grace alone**, which is simply another way of saying being free in Christ—free from religious legalisms, manipulations and devices.

Followers of the *grace a lot* gospel

are convinced they are pleasing and appeasing God—they are transfixed by the smoke and spiritual pollution being belched out by the specific religious dog-and-pony show that has them enthralled. Followers of the *grace a lot* gospel really believe they can please and appease God by (as Nike assures us) JUST DOING IT. Followers of the *grace a lot* gospel absolutely believe that God helps those who help themselves, so their credo, in terms of their relationship with God is "no pain, no gain."

Grace a lot leaves room for human control—for the idea that we control our destiny, which is an enormously popular fallacy. The idea of control is a fallacy on all levels—for there is virtually nothing in life, physically or spiritually, over which we exercise absolute control.

Control is a basic ingredient of Christ-less religion. It exists to control you—its follower or would-be follower. Christ-less religion assures you that if you let it control you, then you are in the driver's seat, the Master of your own destiny. Don't be fooled by this big lie!

We can embrace God's grace only after we surrender all notions and illusions of control. Transcending *grace a lot*, we are transformed into the realm of **grace alone**, which is a spiritual environment and reality where we are free in Christ, without artificially constructed and imposed human manipulation and boundaries. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for the complete message "Grace A Lot or Grace Alone?" at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of July 26, 2015.

Continued from page 1

of thunder” (Mark 3:17) into “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 20:2). Christ loved and trusted John, because on the cross, he bequeathed to John the one gift he had to offer: his own mother (John 19:26-27). In his first epistle, John appears as the “Apostle of Love,” distilling Jesus’ whole message to, “Beloved, love one another” (John

...THROUGHOUT JOHN'S ENTIRE GOSPEL, JESUS CONTINUALLY SHOWS US THE FATHER-HEART OF GOD (JOHN 14:9)—THE ONE IN WHOM GOD HAS ENTERED THE DARKNESS OF THIS WORLD AND SHONE ON US ALL WITH THE LIGHT OF SELF-GIVING LOVE AND RADICAL GRACE.

3:34; 15:12). In fact, tradition says these were his final words.

John's Strange Composition

We can't overstate how different John's Gospel is from Matthew, Mark and Luke. From the first verse, we see John's love for theology, framing Christ's origins, not in Bethlehem or Nazareth, but “In the Beginning ... with God,” as the Creator of all things—the genesis of the cosmos. And in seven or eight “I AM” sayings throughout his book, John identifies Christ as Yahweh himself, the God of Israel and of the whole world.

This theological agenda influences the way John tells Jesus' story. He isn't satisfied to give us straight historical data—he interprets and retells the facts to reveal the truth. At times, he even sacrifices historical details to help readers see the mystery in the history. This is obvious when he ditches chronology in favor of the message itself. For example, although Jesus cleansed the Temple during Passion Week, John places it in chapter 2 to emphasize the way the Passion brackets and orders Christ's whole ministry. From his first sign (turning water into wine), we are repeatedly reminded that these events are leading us toward “the hour” of Christ's death. John even sets the day of the crucifixion on Passover (not the day after, as in the

Synoptics) to make the point prophesied by John the Forerunner in John 1:29, “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

John's Jesus

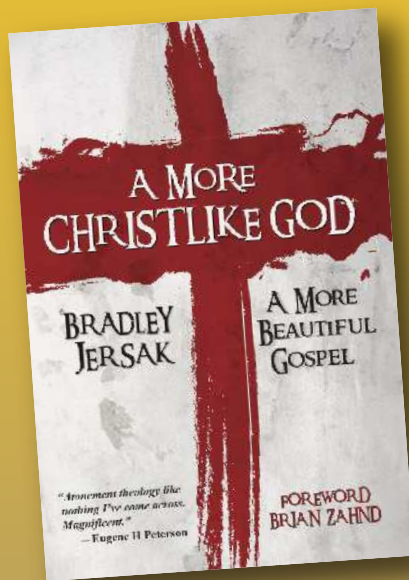
It also seems strange that John's Jesus sounds a lot more like John (in 1 John) than like the Jesus of the Synoptics, where Jesus always

preaches, “The Kingdom of God is here. Repent and believe the good news.” But in John, the kingdom is hardly mentioned. We hear, “Believe in Jesus and you'll have eternal life.” Why is this? Is John just putting

with the Temple establishment. Moreover, a full 50% of John's Gospel is given to the final week of Jesus' life. In fact, five chapters (13-17) are given to one night, the eve of his crucifixion!

In that context, Jesus foretells his glorification. In the Synoptics, Jesus must first suffer and die on the cross, and then be glorified through his resurrection and ascension. But in John, Jesus is already glorified on the cross. He will be “lifted up” (a double entendre), crowned, enthroned and declared king (by Pilate!). On the Cross he sits as judge of the world and of Satan (John 16:11) and announces, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Being lifted up, he will draw all people to himself (John 12:32). We even get a hint of Pentecost when Christ “releases his spirit” (John 19:30).

So, for John, the glory of God is revealed most fully in Christ



NEW FROM CWRpress!

A More Christlike God, written by Senior Editor Brad Jersak. As we prepare to send this issue to the printer, ***A More Christlike God*** is enjoying brisk sales and favorable reviews. Acclaimed author and scholar Eugene H. Peterson (*The Message Bible*) calls it, “Atonement theology like nothing I’ve come across.” This groundbreaking book takes readers beyond the ugly parodies of Christianity into the beautiful gospel of a more Christlike God.

To order:

www.ptm.org/christlike

words in Jesus' mouth? Again, John may be transposing what Jesus literally *said* in order to faithfully share *exactly* what Jesus' words *meant* for a new generation and context.

Along with the odd chronology and language of John, we also have odd locations. While Matthew, Mark and Luke describe Jesus' Galilean outreach, most of John is set in Judea, focused on his conflict

through the Cross. Yet throughout John's entire Gospel, Jesus continually shows us the Father-heart of God (John 14:9)—the One in whom God has entered the darkness of this world and shone on us all with the Light of self-giving love and radical grace. Perhaps this introduction will inspire you to read John's Good News afresh! □

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the May/June issue we printed part 2 of "The New Covenant." In that second installment we discussed how the book of Hebrews compares the old and new covenants, and we discussed the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant.

Paul speaks of Moses putting a veil over his face, because his face was shining with the glory of God, who gave him the old covenant (2 Corinthians 3:13). Paul says Moses put a veil over his face to **prevent the nation of Israel from seeing the end of what was passing away**. Paul believes that Moses' veil was actually *hiding the fact that the glory of the old covenant was short-lived (that it was like a sunburn) and it eventually fades away*. This veil was not an overt deception on Moses' part—because **God didn't plan for the old covenant to last**. God built obsolescence into the very structure of the old covenant. It was a temporary covenant, designed to last for about 1500 more years before God would personally bring the new covenant to the entire world in the person of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:6-18:
He made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing

away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Veil is a key word in this passage in 2 Corinthians—it is repeated six times. As I read this passage I am impressed with how fair and balanced Paul is as he compares the old and new covenants. Paul does not say that the old covenant was hideously flawed—after all, God gave the old covenant to the nation of Israel.

Paul says that there was a glory within the old covenant, but he says the glory was fleeting,

GOD BUILT PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF THE OLD COVENANT. THE NEW COVENANT WAS COMING—THE OLD COVENANT WAS DIVINELY DESIGNED TO LAST FOR ONLY A SHORT TIME.

designed that way by God. *God built planned obsolescence into the very fabric of the old covenant. The new covenant was coming—the old covenant was divinely designed to last for only a short time.*

Paul, as he contrasts the old covenant with the new, says that God designed the glory of the old covenant to be external—so that, like the face of Moses, the shine and luster was fading away.

The old covenant puts a veil over our hearts and prevents us from seeing and believing the surpassing glory of the new covenant—the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ, as compared to the old covenant of Moses and Mount Sinai.

The old covenant is dead and all those who attempt to revive its God-designed obsolescence, are,



PART 3

BY GREG ALBRECHT

spiritually speaking, *dead men* (and women) *walking*. In Galatians 3:10 Paul said that all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

Remember what happened when Jesus died on the cross—ending the old covenant? A literal veil (the veil in the temple) was torn and removed—symbolizing the end of a relationship of fear, the end of any and all veils, and the beginning of a personal and intimate relationship, offered not just to a nation, but to all mankind.

Paul says that the veil remains “until this very day”—what was true in Israel, in terms of an emphasis on external religion, is still true today. When individuals, or a church, or a pastor or a denomination become obsessed with laws, regulations, rules and traditions based on some portion of the old covenant, the gospel—the new covenant in Christ—is obscured and hidden. **A focus and emphasis on the old covenant veils the glory of the new covenant in Christ!**

When this happens people become confused about who God is—they become convinced that he is a god of wrath, that he is upset and angry with those who don't keep his laws. Living in the old covenant keeps people in the

darkness of death and condemnation—away from the light of Jesus Christ.

When people live under the old covenant, they are deceived, thinking that their obedience to law can deliver them from guilt and shame. But the veil of the old covenant doesn't cover guilt and shame—even though many are convinced that the old covenant veil, with all of its performance-based rules and regulations will spiritually hide them, just as Adam and Eve were convinced that fig leaves would hide their physical nakedness.

The same veil, Paul says, still exists today when people focus on rules and requirements as a way to relate to God rather than the new covenant in Christ, which is founded on God's love and grace.

Why do people today, almost 2000 years after the inception of the new covenant in Christ, still prefer the veil of performance-based religion? Let's consider two reasons:

1) **The veil of performance-based religion is favored by the vast majority of religious institutions, because they prefer the control of rules and regulations.** Religious institutions know that human beings are insecure—we naturally prefer order and rules over freedom and grace. Rules, regulations and requirements make people feel more spiritually comfortable and assured, and those same rules, regulations and requirements make it easier for religious institutions to control those who trust them.

Thus many religious institutions and their leaders, unwittingly, often function as a pimp

does to the women he enslaves. Religious institutions demand respect—they demand loyalty—they demand performance as a basis of love and affection—and many human beings fall prey to such demeaning treatment and abuse because they are convinced that God operates somewhat like a pimp.

Do you think I'm overstating the case against Christ-less religion? Here's what Jesus said, in Matthew 23:13, about teachers of the law and the Pharisaical religion that denied the kingdom of heaven to those who trusted them:

"Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's face. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."

We can then safely conclude that some of the responsibility for the deliberate deception, and the continuing spiritual bondage of many, lies at the door of Christ-less religion, its programs, its policies, its leaders and its institutions.

2) **The veil of performance-based religion is favored by individuals because we humans prefer the illusion of comfort given to us by our religious customs and traditions.** Human beings run away from God's grace and from freedom in Christ



Searching for More? Dig Deeper

**With...Thought-Provoking,
Inspiring Christ-Centered Reading**

- *A More Christlike God**—Brad Jersak
- *The Great Divorce*—C.S. Lewis
- *A Grace Disguised*—Gerald Sittser
- *Healing the Gospel*—Derek Flood
- *Repenting of Religion*—Greg Boyd

AND DON'T FORGET!

- *Revelation Revolution**—Greg Albrecht

**Available from CWRm/Plain Truth Ministries—while supplies last—
www.ptm.org*

because humans prefer structure. We prefer a system of rules and regulations—because when we obey them we feel better—we feel that God must love us more based on our performance.

We humans prefer *authority over grace—rules over love—structure over freedom*—because rules and order give us the illusion that we are pleasing and appeasing God. Human beings, since the beginning of time, have willingly surrendered their personal freedom for assurances from political and religious leaders that their every need will be taken care of.

The idea is simple—“here is my freedom—give me now my bread. Take care of my physical and spiritual needs, and I will surrender my freedom”—it's a story line that fills the pages of history.

So we can also conclude some of the responsibility for the deception and continuing spiritual bondage of many—some of the responsibility for spiritual blindness, if you will—lies at the door of individuals themselves. □



Will the real
“Word of God”
please stand up!



**Jesus alone is the infallible
Word of God (John 1:1).**

During our CWR/PTM 2015 “Year of the Bible” we will study and examine the Bible (the lower-case word of God) from a Christ-centered (the upper-case Word of God) perspective. The *word* of God is inspired by the *Word* of God. But by God's divine plan, humans have been profoundly involved in writing, editing, translating, preserving and publishing the Bible. Touched by human hands, the Bible cannot be seen as infallible or inerrant. Jesus alone, the *Word* of God, is infallible and inerrant. Stay tuned during our “Year of the Bible” for Christ-centered perspective, teaching and insight.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Here is part three of our four-part series dedicated to helping sensitize our readers to sensible traits and habits of understanding the Bible.

PART THREE OF FOUR

Four foundational strategies to ensure a Christ-centered interpretation of the Bible:

1) Always understand that old covenant references are understood in the light of the new covenant, rather than the other way around. This principle may sound obvious, but as many (including the author) know from painful experience, it is often overlooked and leads to a world of hurt.

2) Consider the author and his audience—a **passage may not have a meaning now unless it had an original meaning**. Any contemporary application of a passage must in some way be related to the original meaning. Contrary to the claims of sensationalists who use and abuse the Bible to achieve their own purposes, biblical passages are not solely intended to be understood by any specific generation—past, present or future. A text cannot mean what it never originally meant.

Any meaning the Bible may have for any reader will never be in isolation from, nor will it be completely divorced from, the meaning it had to those who first heard or read its message.

Paul reminds us “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit” (2 Corinthians 2:17). The word “peddle” is translated “corrupt” in the KJV and “adulterate” in the Moffatt translation. All study of the Bible is genuine and valid (or invalid) based on the degree to which the reader is faithful to the original purpose and intent of the author, the cultural setting and the literary genre the author used. **A text without a context is a pretext, and pretexts often become the fuel to prove anyone’s already**

Reading and UNDERSTANDING the BIBLE SENSITIVELY and SENSIBLY

existing theories and teachings—thus becoming *proof-texts*.

To check your own subjective ideas about a book or passage you are reading or studying, before you begin to study, write down what you believe to be the author’s purpose—then compare your initial

CONTRARY TO THE CLAIMS OF SENSATIONALISTS WHO USE AND ABUSE THE BIBLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR OWN PURPOSES, BIBLICAL PASSAGES ARE NOT SOLELY INTENDED TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY ANY SPECIFIC GENERATION—PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE.

impression of the author’s purpose with your later conclusions, after deeper study.

3) **Determine the genre of the book or passage.** The genre—the literary style—used by the author helps to further determine the author’s purpose. God inspired the message of the Bible, but he did so in and through humans and he did so in human language. In order to understand the message God has for us in the pages of the Bible we must read it using the normal rules and principles governing the message contained in any book.

The Bible is written in a wide variety of literary styles, including

narrative (story), history, poetry, letters, laws, psalms, proverbs (wisdom), parable and apocalyptic. All genres must be read within their goals and limitations of that genre of literature. It is a mistake, of course, to read the book of Revelation as if it is prose, or to read the wise sayings and advice of the proverbs as if they are laws or the book of Deuteronomy as if it is an instructive or corrective letter from the apostle Paul.

4) First, try to interpret the book or passage you are studying in its literary sense, according to the authors’ intended genre.

When a literal reading does not make sense, or when you wonder about someone who insists that the words you are reading be taken literally, then consider that the passage might be a figure of speech and taken symbolically. Sometimes this is virtually automatic: Isaiah

55:12 says the trees of the field will clap their hands. We realize this statement is a metaphor. We do not believe Jesus to say that he is literally bread—but that when he says “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35) he is using a metaphor, a physical symbol to point to a greater spiritual reality. Words like “as” or “like” are often a sign that a figure of speech follows. □

CWRVvideo
MAGAZINE

Join us for CWRV—a fascinating new video magazine. Several new, thought-provoking videos are posted each quarter. You won’t want to miss a single one!

www.ptm.org/cwrv



Grandma Taught Me...

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

Grandma taught me a lot about faith. Perhaps some day my granddaughter, Kayla, will say that about me. When Kayla was a preschooler her parents were both working. One parent would often drop her off with me and another would pick her up a few hours later. What good times we had, playing and singing and memorizing poetry and Bible verses. There are few things sweeter than a grandchild remembering with great fondness the influence of a grandparent.

Rosa Margherita Vasallo was such a grandparent, and like me she was the paternal grandmother of the one who was honoring her for teaching him about faith.

In his recollections, her grandson was speaking before a vast audience. His grandmother's influence had been foundational in all aspects of his faith and especially in his profound concern for those in society who are marginalized.

He minced no words about income inequality. The "greed for money" leads to "wounds inflicted upon humanity." Wealthy people have far more money than they need. If they are truly following Christ they must give generously to the poor.

And then in grasping for an illustration to bring this message home to his listeners, he remembered his grandmother. What was it she used to say? Ah, yes. She "used to say a shroud has no pocket."

You can't take your accumulated

possessions with you on that final journey.

In a biography titled *El Jesuita*, Cardinal Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, told the author that his grandmother not only had a strong influence on him but also on all her grandchildren. She had given them each a hand-written testament and blessing. He treasured his copy and kept it always with him as he traveled, tucked inside his prayer book. No wonder.

The lines are touching:

May my grandchildren, to whom I have given my whole heart, have a long and happy life but if pain, sickness or loss of a loved one should fill them with sadness, may they remember that one breath taken at the Tabernacle, where [Jesus] the greatest and august martyr is present and one

...his tender mercies of faith formation began long before he was in seminary. "I received my first Christian witness from this woman: my Grandma! It's a beautiful thing to receive this first in the home, with the family."

glance at Mary at the foot of the cross, will act like a balm that is able to heal the deepest and most painful wounds.

Pope Francis has a special place in his heart for women who "bring tenderness and motherhood into the world."

He once reminded his audience "of the love of many mothers and grandmothers in transmitting the faith" and he pointed them to "the early days, as seen when St. Paul said to Timothy: 'I remember the faith of your mother and your grandmother.' All mothers who are here, all grandmothers—think about

this! Think about handing on the faith."

For women wishing to be ordained to the priesthood, the reign of Pope Francis may not hold out much hope. But to hear the voice of women through a man like Francis does make ministry more meaningful.

"Once when I was in the Seminary, my grandmother told me: 'Don't ever forget that you are about to become a priest and celebrating mass is the most important thing for a priest... Celebrate mass, every mass, as if it were your first and last.'"

What about his mother, Regina? What influence did she have on her son and his siblings? For one thing, she transmitted her love for Italian opera. She was a beautiful class woman who wanted her

children to be prosperous, to do important things and make a mark on the world. She struggled long and hard about her oldest son aiming so low—about her son's determination to enter the priesthood.

But as the Pope so fondly recalls, his tender mercies of faith formation began long before he was in seminary:

"I received my first Christian witness from this woman: my Grandma! It's a beautiful thing to receive this first in the home, with the family." □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"Stop asking God to bless what you're doing. Get involved with what God is doing, because it's already blessed." —Bono of U2

"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."—George Orwell

"A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on."—Winston Churchill

"Christianity is a lifestyle—a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, inclusive and loving. We made it, however, into a formal established religion, in order to avoid demanding lifestyle itself. One could then be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish and vain at the highest levels of the church, and still easily believe that Jesus is 'my personal Lord and Savior.' The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great."—Richard Rohr

CWRa began airing in Northern Ireland in April.



IMAGE COURTESY OF BBC

Do All Dogs Go to Heaven?



Blondie, who was the "cover girl" for our cover story "Do All Dogs Go to Heaven?" in our May/June 2001 issue, recently passed away. Beloved pet of Art Director Marv Wegner and his wife, Paula, we remember Blondie with this tribute and invite you to read the entire story published some 14 years ago. Here's an excerpt: *The Garden of Eden was populated with animals. Certainly they were an important part of God's creation. In the symbolic descriptions of the kingdom of heaven, the animal kingdom plays a prominent part. In fact, in these symbolic teachings, the animals are no longer antagonistic towards each other, but predator and prey are co-existing peacefully, and children play with animals once considered lethal (Isaiah 11:6-9).* See www.ptm.org/dogs

MISSION STATEMENT

Plain Truth Ministries proclaims Christianity without the religion. We express our Christ-centered ministry as *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.*

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

For an electronic subscription go to www.ptm.org/sub. The Internet allows us to serve readers around the world. Archives of the past two decades of *Plain Truth* are available at www.ptm.org. Printed copies of *Plain Truth* are a benefit mailed to generous, regular PTM Friends and Partners. If you would like to contribute go to www.ptm.org/donate.

TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Be sure to notify us immediately of any change in your address by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org/change or writing to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129, or email us at managing.editor@ptm.org.

The editors reserve the right to print or not print comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to print your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We will protect the confidentiality of correspondence that we deem to be of a personal nature. Correspondence published by Plain Truth Ministries does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Plain Truth Ministries.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg Albrecht
SENIOR EDITOR: Brad Jersak
MANAGING EDITOR: Laura Urista
ART DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION: Marv Wegner
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Monte Wolverton
PUBLISHING AND CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Dennis Warkentin

COPYRIGHT & POSTAL INFO

The Plain Truth is published six times a year by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2015 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Volume 80, Number 4: July/August 2015. Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. *The Plain Truth*® is a U.S. trademark.

SUBMISSIONS

The Plain Truth does not publish unsolicited manuscripts. Please review our writers guidelines (email managing.editor@ptm.org) before submitting queries. Include SASE with query. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

The Plain Truth is published by Plain Truth Ministries (PTM). If you are interested in learning more about PTM, visit our website at www.ptm.org (and email us) or write us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Plain Truth Ministries gratefully accepts contributions (tax deductible in the U.S.) to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept donations in U.S. funds by check, money order or credit card. Please call us at 1-800-309-4466, visit our secure website, www.ptm.org/donate, or write to us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.