

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]

The Fourth Beatitude

*Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be filled.*

—Matthew 5:6

If you are one of the hundreds of millions who struggle with your weight, you might have fantasized about not craving and enjoying the foods you do. Those of us who seem to always been peeking at the scale, realizing we would do well to shed a few pounds, might be tempted to think what a blessing it would be not to have an appetite.

But of course loss of appetite can be a serious, potentially life-threatening condition. Loss of appetite can potentially have a serious impact on our health—it's one of the conditions that a doctor's staff asks us to divulge while we're waiting to see a doctor.

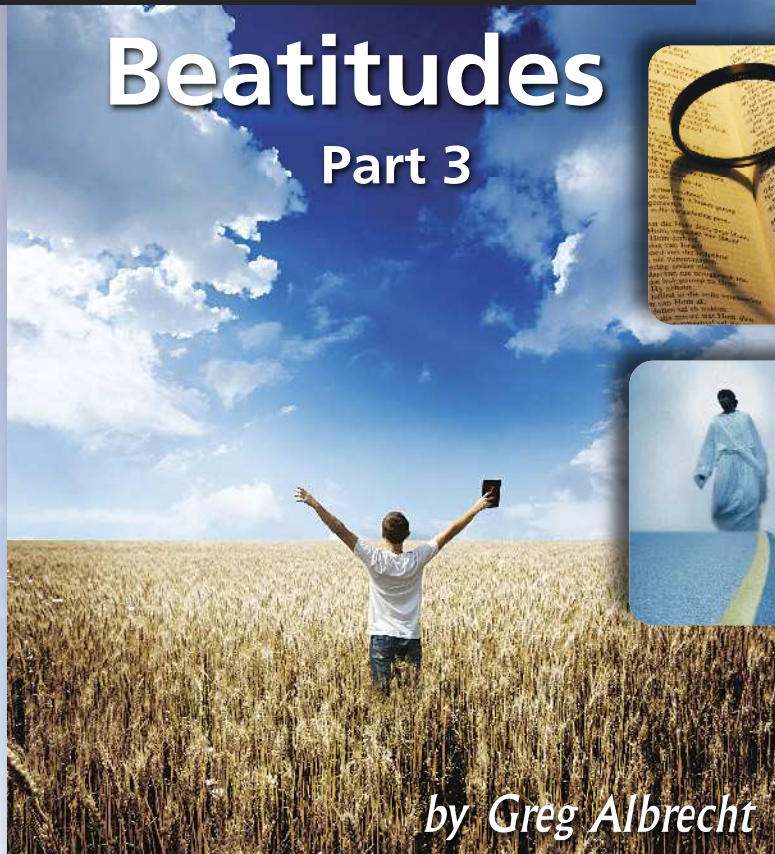
Hunger and thirst is primarily a beneficial need—a blessing, if you

God creates humans with a desire to know him—he creates us with a spiritual deficiency—he creates us with a desire to connect with him...he increases our spiritual appetite so that we hunger and thirst for his righteousness.

like, a natural desire God has created for us to have—so that our life might be sustained.

God creates humans with a desire to know him—he creates us with a spiritual deficiency—he creates us with a desire to connect with him—to be spiritually nourished by him. And as we yield

Beatitudes Part 3



by Greg Albrecht

to and grow in his grace and knowledge, he increases our spiritual appetite so that we **hunger and thirst** for his righteousness.

And what exactly is the righteousness of God? The foundational food in God's

nutritional system is Jesus, the Bread of life. **The Lord's Prayer** instructs us to ask God for our daily Bread, and we can understand that instruction both physically and spiritually.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John we read that Jesus is the true Bread that comes down from



heaven, and Jesus, that true Bread, will enable the one who hungers and thirsts for him to eat of him and never die.

When we eat of Jesus, we find that we cannot get enough of him. When he feeds us, we always keep coming back for seconds and thirds.

After the prodigal son rejected his father, and left home for a far country, he found that his choice to reject the father's love had horrible consequences. The consequences of the prodigal son's choices meant that he was without resources to buy food and he longed to fill his stomach with anything—even the garbage that he was feeding to pigs.

Luke 15:17 says the son came to his senses—he had a change of heart, spiritually. I believe this parable tells us once the son realized he needed his father, then God opened his eyes to grace. I believe that God started to restore a spiritual appetite within his prodigal son.

Continued on page 3



Grace Is Senseless, Irrational and Absurd

Faith in Christ is not just for people who seem to have it all together, who look for all the world as if they are having their “best life now” as they prance around on religious high horses—faith in Christ is for all of us, including those of us who are *just slobs on the bus, trying to make our way home* (to paraphrase the lyrics of a 1995 song by Joan Osborne, “What If God Was One of Us?”).

Christians of all ages, sizes, shapes and colors have been drugged into a stupor of thinking that good human behavior is the key to their relationship with God.

You may have heard about the person who was told their behavior had disqualified them from membership in a particular church—so in agony and heartfelt prayer the disqualified person who, according to religious authorities, had failed to make the grade, prayed to God.

The disqualified, disgraced and excommunicated person said, “They won’t let me come back to church to worship you.”

God said, “That’s okay, they won’t let me in either.”

God’s grace (and the gospel which announces God’s grace) is ludicrous and absurd—it’s senseless and irrational to those who define, experience and know God in religious terms.

The New Testament says we lose our lives and then we find them, the first will be last, the weak will be strong, that we walk by faith, not by sight, and that Jesus became poor that we might become rich.

Does that make sense, or does it sound senseless, irrational and absurd?

Christ-followers believe that God became a man, and that God is *One* and yet at the same time, He is *Three*—Father Son and Holy Spirit.

That doesn’t make sense! You want something that makes sense?

The laws of the old covenant make sense. The old covenant (a covenant of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience) makes perfect sense.

Trying to live a good life, trying to be good, trying to show up at the right time in the right place wearing the right clothing with the right look on our faces in order to earn God’s commendations and approval makes sense.

It makes sense that doing religious stuff, obeying and following and performing all religiously required and mandated rules, regulations and rituals will get your ticket punched for heaven.

And believe me, because that song and dance makes sense, Christ-less religion plays that tune, sings that song and marches to that drum beat—over and over again.

When God came to us, in the person of Jesus, we see him in the pages of the Gospels, in hand-to-hand combat with religious authorities. He’s not sitting in the front row of the synagogue, with all the religious wheels, nodding his head when performance-based religion is preached and explained.

In fact, the teachings of Jesus insist that when religion and its authorities and its followers stomp on the gas pedal of their virtuous deeds, invariably toxic gas comes out of their exhaust pipes, suffocating anyone close by.

The toxic gas of performance based religion that can be spewed even out of our own exhaust pipes can poison us—that toxic gas can lull us into a spiritual la-la land where we believe we have pleased and appeased God because of all of our good behavior.

The gospel of Christ—the gospel of God’s grace—comes along and proclaims the insane, ludicrous and absurd idea that one cannot rely on one’s own performance and one’s own behavior.

In fact the gospel says that living a life governed by law, by religion, by performance, by virtue and good deeds is absolutely opposed to the grace of God.

You can’t live by both law and grace—it’s one or the other. You either live your life governed by religious rules, regulations and restrictions—a reasonable religious life that convinces you that you can please and appease God...or you live by grace.

Grace is not for those who insist on following Jesus while dragging along all their religious honors, commendations and good works.

Grace is not for those who live by rules and seek to commend themselves to God on the basis of what they believe they deserve rather than taking the risk of absolutely following Jesus and living by the grace of God. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for the complete message “Grace is Senseless, Irrational and Absurd” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of May 25, 2016.

The prodigal son started to long for the spiritual food he had rejected—the food his father could provide. So, hungering and thirsting for the Bread of life, the prodigal went home.

This appetite is a divine gift—a blessing of God’s grace—a *be-attitude*. Blessed are they—happy and contented are they—who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The Fifth Beatitude

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.—Matthew 5:7

Question: If God doesn’t require us to do good things before he blesses us, how about this verse? How could Jesus have been more clear—“blessed are the merciful, FOR they will be shown mercy.”

Answer: If Jesus meant that God only gives us mercy if we are first of all merciful to others, and if Jesus meant that God will only forgive us AS or WHEN we first forgive others, then we are all in a world of hurt.

Apart from God, we have no idea how to extend mercy and forgiveness. Sure, we can be merciful and forgiving to some extent—but Jesus was not talking about human mercy and forgiveness. Jesus was talking—both in this beatitude about showing mercy, as well as in the Lord’s Prayer about forgiveness (Matthew 6:12)—about God’s mercy and God’s forgiveness.

How then, pray tell, can we extend and offer God’s mercy and God’s forgiveness if we have not first received and experienced God’s mercy and forgiveness ourselves?

This misunderstanding about how we must first of all forgive and show mercy before God will extend mercy and forgiveness to us is due to the mindset that many have when reading these passages.

Many are convinced, as a result of living in the Western world, of pragmatism—of cause and effect. Many within Christendom believe that a right effort will bring about a

right result. Many sincere church-goers believe that they can cause, by their behavior, failure or success.

Christ-less religion capitalizes on this ingrained thinking, and perverts teachings like these grace-based beatitudes so that many believe they are some kind of litmus test for “getting saved” and “getting into” heaven. The idea is that we’ll “make it” if we work real hard to behave this way.

But Jesus was not teaching cause and effect. The new covenant, embodied within the teachings of Jesus and his disciples in the pages of the New Testament, is absolutely crystal clear:

The fact that you or I may show incredible mercy to another person will never earn our salvation. The fact that you or I may extend mind-boggling, staggering forgiveness to someone who has harmed or injured us does not mean we deserve God’s forgiveness.

If we accept this corrupted interpretation of this beatitude, then we will think that God will not be pleased with us **until** we are merciful to others.

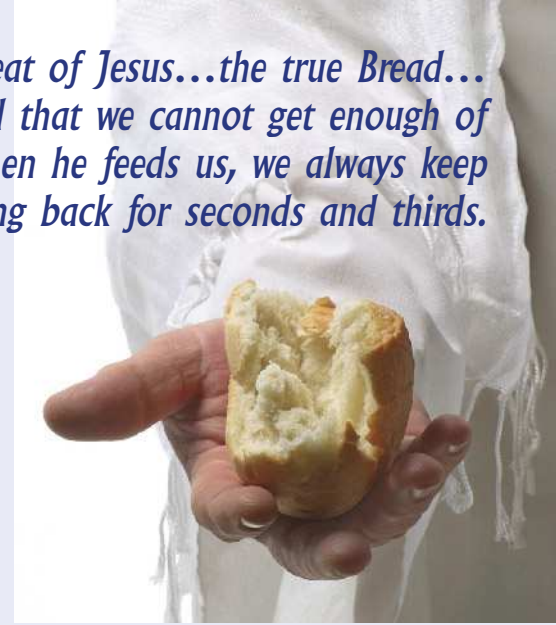
Christ-less religion does its best to deceive us into thinking this list of beatitudes is nothing but a list of magic formulas, so that once we behave as Jesus tells us to, then nothing bad will ever happen to us—because we will be blessed. This corrupt religious interpretation of this grace-based teaching of Jesus says that once we work real hard to do good stuff, then God will bless us and not curse us.

But that Christ-less notion falls apart in just a few verses, when Jesus says, in vs. 10, that those who accept God’s grace are blessed because they are persecuted.

Here’s the key—when we turn this corrupt religious interpretation right side up, or rather when we read how Jesus turns it right side up, then here’s what we realize:

When we have received God’s mercy, we are blessed by becoming tools of his mercy. **When we**

When we eat of Jesus...the true Bread... we find that we cannot get enough of him. When he feeds us, we always keep coming back for seconds and thirds.



accept God’s remarkable mercy that we can never earn, then Jesus’ mercy lives within us, and we are, by definition, merciful individuals.

As we grow in his grace, he matures us, and because of the spiritual growth Jesus grants us, we become more merciful. As God’s dear children, we know that he does not require us to do the impossible. He does not expect us to earn his mercy by being merciful to other people. We are blessed to be able to extend mercy to others because God has first of all extended it to us, and in Christ, extends his mercy in and through us.

1 John 4:19 explains: *We love because he first loved us.*

That’s a Christ-centered principle—**we extend and show mercy because he first extended and gave his mercy to us.**

There’s an old story from the Wild West. A rancher had a huge ranch, but it was often the target of thieves and rustlers, who would steal the cattle.

One day the rancher’s hired hands caught a cattle thief. They caught the thief red-handed and took him to the ranch house.

Those were the days when penalties were enforced by those who had the power to do so, whether they were deputized or appointed to or not.

So when his hired hands hauled the thief before their boss, and asked him what he wanted to do

...as long as we live we are filled with sin and impurity—but God chooses, by his grace, to see us as his dear children, adopted by him, and by his grace, a part of him, heirs of his kingdom.



with him, he said, “String him up. Hang him. That will teach him a lesson!”

So they hung that cattle thief, but the rancher was not as rough and tough as he seemed.

The rest of the day the rancher couldn’t get the fact that he had taken the life of

another person off his mind. That night the rancher had a dream. In his dream he died and was standing at the Pearly Gates of Heaven. St. Peter welcomed him and took him to see God the Father, and asked the Father, “What do you want me to do with him?”

The Father said, “Forgive him, that will teach him a lesson.”

The Sixth Beatitude

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.—Matthew 5:8

First of all, again, we must combat the idea that somehow our efforts to become more pure in heart will result in God blessing us so that we will eventually be rewarded by seeing God. It is oh-so-easy to be deceived into thinking that these eight beatitudes are lists of things God wants us to produce in our lives and therefore we should be getting busy doing so. God will heal us and help us unlearn the principles of legalistic religion so that we might fully embrace the grace of God.

Has any human being, ever, become pure in heart, so that by their efforts to spiritually cleanse and purify their heart they are qualified to see God?

Abraham, the father of the faithful, lied. Moses disobeyed God. David, a man after God’s own heart, murdered and committed adultery. Peter, a disciple of Jesus, denied Jesus.

The Greek word for “pure” is also the root word for our English word *catharsis*. As you probably know, *catharsis* refers to an inner cleansing of the mind or emotions. The Greek word can also refer to the process used to refine metals so that pure in heart means an unmixed, unadulterated and unalloyed mind or heart.

Such purity is obviously far beyond the capacity or ability of any human being to produce, because we

are, at our very best, flesh and blood—which means that we are filled with lust, greed, envy and vanity, and that as long as we live in this mortal body of flesh, we will be afflicted with our nature.

Of course, as the New Testament explains, no matter how often we may stumble and fall, God chooses to see us as righteous and pure—he chooses to see and acknowledge our “blessed” spiritual position in Christ, that is our union in Christ.

We are not pure in heart in the absolute sense, because as long as we live we are filled with sin and impurity—but God chooses, by his grace, to see us as his dear children, adopted by him, and by his grace, a part of him, heirs of his kingdom.

What we are in Christ is called a *positional truth*—our spiritual standing before God is based on our God-given position—our union in and with Christ. God sees us as transformed and reborn, and our standing before him is righteous, because of Christ’s righteousness, which God applies to us.

So we are pure in heart—that’s a spiritual reality—God chooses to see us as pure in heart, even as his grace is actively transforming us (2 Corinthians 3). At the same time, we have that gift of God’s purity in, as Paul said, jars of clay. The gift of God’s purity is a treasure that lives within our mortal, sinful bodies—and our bodies remain far from pure as long as we draw breath.

The fact that God chooses to accept us and see us and know us as pure in heart rather than as flawed and failed is yet another reason why the gospel is

The fact that God chooses to accept us and see us and know us as pure in heart rather than as flawed and failed is yet another reason why the gospel is such good news...incredibly wonderful news!

such good news—and this one beatitude, as we logically consider its implications, tells us that story of incredibly wonderful news!

Let’s return briefly to the process of refining metals which the Greek for “pure” in heart implies. Refining metals is a process—it’s not an instantaneous act, though it has a beginning.

In a similar way, whether we use words like redemption, salvation, justification or sanctification we are speaking of a process which God initiates, in and through us.

There is a beginning—a singular act—but there is also an ongoing process—and both act and ongoing process are supervised and empowered by the **Divine Refiner**—the **Master Potter**.

Divine Refining leads us to “see God.” God’s grace supplies spiritual insight and vision so that we might come to see and know him. God’s gift of purity in our hearts heals and refreshes our spiritual vision so that God becomes more visible and known to us. □

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE NEW COVENANT?

BY STEPHEN CROSBY

When considering how to interpret the Old Testament, for me the answer is only found in the Person and work of Christ: a *Christocentric* (Christ-centered) interpretive filter. It is my opinion that if we are on any other foundation, we will end up in some very bizarre beliefs and practices based on a strictly literal and flat interpretive grid of the Old Testament.

What the KJV translates as “by” in “*has in these last days spoke unto us by His Son,*” is the Greek word, *en*. Depending on some grammatical particulars that little word *en* can mean: in, within a place, near by, by, by means of, in contact with, in union with, in the presence of and so forth. In Hebrews 1 it means very literally: God has spoken from within a place and that place is His Son. That makes no sense in literal English, but the author of Hebrews was trying to



...how to interpret the Old Testament...for me the answer is only found in the Person and work of Christ: a *Christocentric* (Christ-centered) interpretive filter...if we are on any other foundation, we will end up in some very bizarre beliefs and practices...

capture something profound.

The glorious news of the new covenant, of the glorious Savior is this:

- The Son of God is the Message.
- The Son of God is the Medium.
- The Son of God is the Method.

- The Son of God is the “place” from which God has finally spoken, once and for all.
- The Son of God is the perpetual frequency of divine thought and communication.

Literally, Hebrews 1:2 means that God has spoken in these last days, in, through and by His Son. It is really impossible to concisely translate into English. The frequency of all *divine interaction with humanity is no longer law and obedience to precept. It is no longer letter and rule. It is no longer code*

and conformity. God’s frequency has changed. The only frequency of divine thought is that of Sonliness.

If we want to know what God thinks about something, we find it in the revelation of the Son—not in Proverbs, or Psalms or any other Old Testament text. If we think we understand something from Scripture, or if we think the Spirit is “showing us” something, we

Like an entire universe collapsing into a black hole, the author of Hebrews, *writing to Jews*, makes the preposterous assertion **that ALL** of Yahweh’s revelation has been collapsed into the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is either cosmically altering truth, or utter madness. You are free to decide which.

In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son (Hebrews 1:1-2, CEB).

OUR PATH: THE JESUS WAY

THE *JESUS WAY*—WHAT JESUS IS ALL ABOUT

The *Jesus Way* is our focus for 2016-17. We begin 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.





Like an entire universe collapsing into a black hole, the author of Hebrews, writing to Jews, makes the preposterous assertion that ALL of Yahweh's revelation has been collapsed into the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Stop right here. Hold it! There is a hierarchy of inspiration! There is a hierarchy of authority in Scripture's own testimony concerning itself! This was written by a Jew who understood his own heritage and his own scriptural tradition.

When the author says: "No one has ever perceived God with understanding," that includes the Jewish patriarchs—Moses, Elijah, David and

so on.

The author knew what he was saying. The Jewish patriarchs perceived things only in shadowy form as Paul (also a Jew) said (Colossians 2:17)! The substance is only in Christ! The notion that somehow the Old Covenant—*all of it*—is the informative divine measure of how we are to live today, makes as much sense as saying that playing Milton Bradley's game "Operation" makes you competent to do surgery!

Jesus, *Y'shua*, the crucified Jew and despised Nazarene is both the eternal and eternally alive Word of God and Lord (John 1:1).

Christ is the interpretation of Scripture. He is our standard and measure. Our understanding and application of Old Testament Scripture must be *adopted, adapted* or *rejected* based on what we see in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. □

Stephen Crosby and his wife Rita have ministered in churches, conferences and Bible Schools in nations on four continents for over forty years. Steve and Rita reside in the suburbs of Charlotte, NC. For more information visit www.stevencrosby.org.

must measure it against the template of the Son. The Son in resurrection is the canon of Scripture—not Old Testament proof texts! The Son is the new and final measure of all things. I believe that the "Christ-Act" is the interpretive filter for every word, phrase or thought in Scripture—from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21—Jesus is the Word of God. *If we have seen Him we have seen the Father. It cannot be said any plainer.*

What do I mean by the "Christ-Act"? It is the totality of what God has done *for us, in us and through us* through Christ. What many think is the essence of the gospel is the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. That is just the foundation of what God has done for us. As awesome as that is, it is not the whole story.

Christ's ascension, glorification, the Spirit outpouring and the Spirit indwelling are all part of Christ's work, and the foundation of what God wants to do *in us and through us*. The Christ-Act is the interpretive filter for every word, phrase or thought in Scripture—from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21—Jesus is the Word of God.

Paul's declaration in Colossians 2:9 that in Jesus of Nazareth the fullness of deity dwelt, and that He was the express image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) are either true with cosmic implications or Paul was off his rocker.

To think that the Jew who made these statements (Paul) somehow didn't fully understand the implications of his own statements on the Jewish scriptures he grew up with, or that the new believers had to comply with some element of an inferior revelation, is simply not credible.

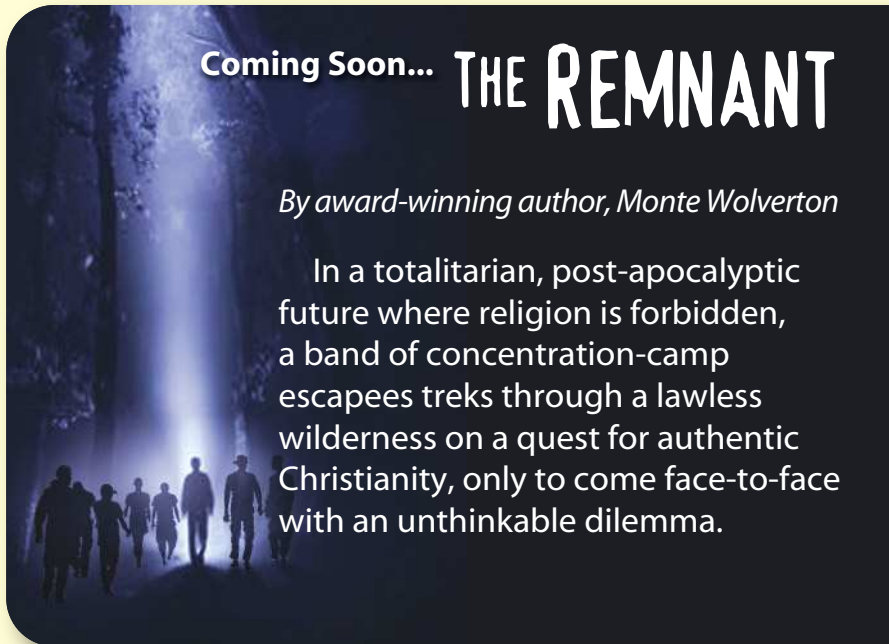
John 1:18 *alone* should settle this matter. Here is a fair translation with expanded meanings:

No one [no one, ever, at any time] has ever seen God [perceived with understanding]. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known [openly revealed Him, accurately understood God and made Him known].—CEB

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.





Calling in the Pros

Sometimes good health and longevity can be a problem. My wife Kaye retired a while back from decades with the Oregon Department of Employment. Retirement was great—at first. She didn't have to get up early every morning. She was free to practice her other profession as a licensed massage therapist. She could spend more time with family and friends. She could remodel her home. She could travel. She could can peaches and play Scrabble.

She did all those things. Somewhere in there she married me. A couple of years went by, and she found herself with time left over. I sat in our living room and watched her scan the newspaper and the Internet for local volunteer opportunities. One morning she noticed a call for NOW (Neighbors On Watch) police volunteers. Our town has about 190 police officers plus support personnel, but they rely on 140-some NOW volunteers for many things.

Kaye applied and was accepted. For eight weeks she learned how a police department works, how to operate a police radio, how to spot signs of crime, how to discern people in need of help, and much more. She did a ride-along in a patrol car and spent an evening in a 911 call center. Finally she graduated, receiving her diploma from our local police chief. She had gained a fresh admiration for our law-enforcement professionals. Now she serves several times a month, driving around neighborhoods with her partner, handling radio communications and doing other tasks as needed by the department.

Needless to say, I am proud of Kaye's accomplishment and community service. I think I even feel safer with her on duty.

Early on, I was surprised to learn how much time instructors spent ingraining trainees with a fundamental concept: *You are not cops.*

This would seem obvious, but just in case someone gets the wrong idea, trainees are warned: *Do not bring weapons of any kind while on duty and do not intervene in police activities. No interrogations. No interventions in fights or domestic disputes. No chasing down and cuffing of suspects.* Those are things professional police officers do.

Why? *Because they have the necessary training and qualifications. That's their job.*

By contrast, NOW volunteers are there to serve as eyes and ears for peace officers, and to be a positive presence in the community.

There's a spiritual parallel: Christ-followers are kind of like NOW volunteers—we are called to watch out for our neighbors and friends and to be a positive Christ-like force in whatever environment we find ourselves. Because we love our neighbors, we help, serve and encourage them.

Christ-followers (especially new ones) can get pretty excited about their faith—and of course that's a good thing. Yet suddenly (and understandably) some want to “get” family,

As Christ-followers, one of the most helpful things we can do is to avoid jumping in and trying to fix problems beyond our abilities...

friends, neighbors and coworkers “saved,” and in the process fix all their spiritual, emotional and physical problems. Some, with little or no training, but with plenty of enthusiasm, begin to dispense all kinds of advice—theological, psychological, marital, nutritional, medical, financial, legal—and much more. Worse yet, some may discuss and share the confidential personal problems of their friends with others, under the guise of concern and prayer.

This is kind of like a NOW police volunteer kicking open a door “TV-style” and apprehending a criminal at gunpoint. Oh, yeah, I've done it—not apprehending criminals, but I've tried to go in and “help” people beyond my qualifications. The results were similar to my early sad attempts at my own plumbing, electrical work and car repair—*things which I now leave to the pros.*

As Christ-followers, one of the most helpful things we can do is to avoid jumping in and trying to fix problems beyond our abilities—and to encourage friends and family to get qualified help and counsel when they need it. □

—Monte Wolverton



Quotes & Connections



"The Institutional Church (ecclesia) has killed only two kinds of people. Those who do not believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ and those who do."—Will Durant

"They knew. They knew. And they let it happen."—Mike Rezendes, *Boston Globe* reporter in the movie *Spotlight* (winner of the 2016 Academy Award for Best Picture), uncovering sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church.

"Gentleness is given to those who have learned that God will not have his kingdom triumph through the violence of the world, for such a triumph came through the meekness of a cross." —Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir*

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it with religious conviction." —Blaise Pascal

"The most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why."—Anon



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 Hiatt, Robin Parry, Wm. Paul Young

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