

## Moving On...

by Brad Jersak

**I**'m so over him! she sobbed, *I'm moving on!* confirming that she hadn't even begun the process of "moving on."

Theirs had been love at first sight—butterflies of infatuation assured her that she had found "Mister Right"—or, "the One" as she liked to call him. How had it come to this?

Not worth recounting, though she rehearsed the melt-down every sleepless night. If she was truly "so over him," why couldn't she let go and just move on?

Instead, she alternated between depression and panic, fits of rage and fountains of tears. "*Over him?*" Not as long as her identity was tied to his, even by resentment. Let's face it: he still filled her thoughts, however gloomy.

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## Faith after Evangelicalism



# What Others Are Saying...

Volume 8, Number 4  
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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

## Thank-yous & comments

Thanks to all the people at *Plain Truth Ministries*. I've listened to your radio teaching ministry (*CWR audio*) for a while now and it is really a blessing to me. You have been helping me in my struggle to live in relationship with my "Pa" in Jesus, in grace which I desperately need.

**Finland**

I just received and read both the *CWRm* and *PT* magazines. There's so much important information to ponder. Your magazines always provide a spiritual feast. I'm so thankful for your faithful feeding of my mind, soul and spirit. Thank you so very much!

**Arizona**

Thanks for your wonderful work for our Lord Jesus Christ. You present the gift of grace with clarity and simplicity like no other ministry. You have helped me understand how God's people were first commanded to worship via "works-based" physical means, but later after Christ's sacrifice via spiritual, "grace-led" means.

**Ontario, Canada**

I just discovered *Plain Truth Daily Radio* on your website and it's really good! I don't know how I overlooked it for so long. *CWR/PTM* has a lot of good resources that I've been enjoying for years. Now I have a "new" one. I've been downloading mp3 podcasts of the daily radio

program fast and furious the past few days. Thanks to all those involved.

**Nebraska**

Because of this ministry, as the song "Live Like You're Loved" by Hawk Nelson says, I can live like I'm loved... focusing on love rather than on performance. Thank you. *CWR* is in my prayers.

**Email**

Thank you for your continuing steadfastness for courageously making known "The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" to the world in His love.

**Michigan**

Thanks for lifting the veil of religion as I now see the true God and His love for the first time.

**Florida**


One great thing this ministry has taught me is about God's amazing grace and I thank you.

**South Carolina**

Thank you very much for your message about doubt and its role with faith. I found it reaffirming when applying it to my personal path with Jesus. God bless!

**Email**

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# Moving On...

Continued from page 1

## The Big Break-up

I'm speaking a parable. The 'boy' in this drama is not a boy, but a movement. The energetic, sexy movement some call **Evangelicalism**.

**Evangelicalism** gets its name from the old term, *evangel*—tracking back to its New Testament Greek roots, *euangelion*. *Evangel* in that context meant good news or gospel, from *euangelos*—*eu* (good) + *angelos* (messenger). That's where we got the term *evangelist*: messenger of the good news. Or *evangelism*—sharing the gospel.

In that sense, all Christians are evangelical (lower case 'e'), if we all believe in the good news of Jesus Christ and see ourselves as messengers of the gospel. We would hope so, anyway.

How is it, then, that one subset of Christendom took on the moniker "Evangelical" (upper case 'E') and ultimately became an -ism? While believers of various Christian tribes rightly claim to be small-e evangelicals, **let's coin a term for the movement or -ism in its current form. I'll use "Evangelicalist," mirroring the language of "Islamist" to identify the -ism's extremes and potentially violent nature.**

But I'm racing ahead. Back to the romance. Even "**Evangelicalists**" cannot be born into the movement. Every **Evangelicalist** (even toddlers) must discover their inherent "lostness" ASAP so that through "The Sinner's Prayer," they can

be "born again" and have "assurance of eternal life." The many quotation marks above indicate the heavy dose of insider lingo common to the movement, but the language is nevertheless "biblical" (another essential term in their glossary).

The brand of Evangelicalism I knew identified itself as the only true Christianity, as over against churches that were not Evangelical and therefore, not truly Christian. Why not?

The "mainline" churches (Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran) and the "mother church" traditions (Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox) all featured infant baptism, none seemed to believe in conversion or the

need to be "born again." And since Jesus and Billy Graham both said, "You must be ...," if they weren't, then they couldn't possibly be "believers."

In other words, when we asked if someone was Evangelical, that was code for, "Are they born again, saved and going to heaven?" True, we were being exclusive—just like heaven, just like Jesus, who said, "Narrow is the way that leads to life."

## The Allure

So, what's the allure? What attracts so many to join the **Evangelicalist** camp? On positive notes, Evangelicals are unabashed in their worship of Jesus. If you want to meet Jesus, they are more than willing to pounce ... er, help. And I truly did encounter Christ in that context. I will forever be grateful to them for introducing me to Jesus.

They also presented the Bible in a way that made me ravenous for its life-giving words and wisdom. That, plus the array of enthusiastic worship music—from gospel quartets to swaying choirs to rockin' worship leaders—made for enthusiastic meetings that filled our hearts.

And of course, there was a shared sense of mission. We were often exhorted to participate in Christ's "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:18-20. Every child had it memorized early in grade school. Repeat after me:

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything*





*I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Every one of us was enjoined to become a “soul-winner,” sharing the good news with anyone who would listen. Those who succeeded were hailed as heroes, because after all, what else were we born for? Our life goal and mission statement echoed popular *Evangelicalist* ministries: *to know Christ and to*

No, differences aren’t the problem. The drama occurs when differences are escalated into *us-them* tests of fellowship. When Evangelicals in the movement began to say, “If you don’t believe this, you aren’t even a Christian,” the boundaries became walls over which to throw opponents. At that point faith becomes an ideology, an *-ism*. That’s when an evangelical becomes an *Evangelicalist*.

that God created the entire universe in six literal 24-hour days no more than 10,000 years ago? Or could you interpret the creation narrative such that God initiated creation with a big bang 13.8 billion years ago?

**3. Evolution:** Must you believe that Adam was literally and instantly sculpted from dust and Eve carved from his rib? Or could you integrate our creation story with evolutionary theory, allowing for common ancestry with other living things?

**4. The Flood:** Must you believe that Noah’s flood actually covered the entire earth? Or could we read the text to say the flood reflects on a story in which the waters covered the world as they knew it, in a more regional way.

**5. Genocide:** Must you believe that God literally commanded the extermination of whole people groups in the Old Testament conquest narratives? Or could we attribute some of those incidents to human violence done in the name of God to justify their actions?

**6. History:** Must you believe that the entire Old Testament represents historical facts of Jewish history? Or could some of these texts be historical fiction loaded with theological truth? (e.g. Job or Jonah?).

**7. Judgement:** Must we believe that the judgements recounted in the Bible were expressions of God’s anger and actual acts of direct divine violence? Or could we read the language of “God’s wrath” as the intrinsic consequences of sin itself?

**8. Atonement:** Must we believe that the wrath of God could only be appeased through divine violence against Christ on the Cross? Is *penal substitutionary atonement* the gospel? Or might that be just

## ... when we asked if someone was Evangelical, that was code for “Are they born again, ‘saved’ and going to heaven?”

*make him known.* Well said!

Some readers may think me cynical and others, not cynical enough. But try not to read between the lines. It is what it is. To this day, I continue to love Jesus, consume the Scriptures, enjoy some faith-based worship, and share the good news of God’s love wherever I go.

If I’ve packed my bags, that’s what I’ve taken with me. Enough to say I’m still small-e evangelical and play well with other evangelicals.

But there was a dark side to the relationship—not with God but with the movement, especially as it evolved in America. Where did things go sour? How did it get old and ugly?

### The Souring

Those who self-identify as *post-Evangelicalists* cite differences that accumulate over time. But differences need not divide. Even conflict is constructive when based on trust. As I said, you can be evangelical in nearly every part of the Body of Christ, even while seeing and appreciating how body parts differ.

That’s when unChristlike reactions to otherness leads to hurtful disillusionment and it is why so many have divorced themselves from the movement.

Some Evangelicals remain in the movement and grieve over broken fellowship. They retain the label “Evangelical,” hoping to retrieve the word from the extremists. They say, “My beliefs have changed, but I’m still an Evangelical.” Not a few of these find themselves marginalized or even expelled as heretics.

### Must You Believe?

The question comes down to whether one must hold to certain secondary elements of doctrine, and whether the *Evangelicalist* can even admit these are secondary. For many, to be faithful to God is to adhere to these as non-negotiable dogmas. Here are 12 examples:

**1. Inerrancy:** Must you believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God? Or could you affirm that only God is inerrant, while retaining the language of inspiration for Scripture?

**2. Creation:** Must you believe



one atonement theory among many (and not the best one)?

**9. Equality:** Must we believe that women should not teach or have authority over men, excluding them from pastoral or preaching ministries to the church at large? Or could we move to an egalitarian model that declares “in Christ, there is neither male nor female”?

humanity will be damned forever? Or could we hold out for a broader hope? Without being pluralists (i.e. all paths lead to God), might we hope that God’s love, revealed on the Cross, could extend to many who never hear the gospel?

Thus far in my Christian journey, these are just twelve areas where I and millions of

removed from teaching posts or cancelled from speaking at conferences. They saw it as their mission from God.

## Moving On

Eventually, I accepted my fate and left the movement. My departure was never over the differences cited above. I was simply weary of the ongoing spirit of cruelty,

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a wooden railway bridge that curves through a dense forest. The person is wearing a light-colored jacket and dark pants. The bridge is made of wooden planks and metal rails, and the surrounding area is filled with lush green trees.

*As a post-Evangelicalist,  
I must not allow the bitter  
taste in my mouth to  
become a bitter root  
in my heart.*

**10. Moralism:** In the name of holiness, must we condemn and exclude those whose moral standards differ from ours? Doesn’t that obscure the gospel? Or might we make space in our lives and even our worship for those of differing convictions?

**11. Hell:** Must we believe that hell is eternal conscious torment in a lake of fire, with no hope of redemption beyond the grave? Or may we see God’s judgements with hopeful eyes—as restoration rather than retribution?

**12. Inclusion:** Must we believe that the door to eternal life is so narrow that the majority of

others have had a change of heart. Some might say I’ve been enlightened. Others would call me “apostate” and a traitor to true Christianity.

Some have said to me, “All these options are open to evangelicals. Don’t leave us; we need you.”

But others, *Evangelicalists*, have told me directly, “You are no longer one of us. You are not welcome.” They’ve publicly called me an “enemy of the Cross,” “a false teacher” and deny that I’m even a Christian.

Some successfully campaigned to have me

rooted I believe, in the literalist’s retributive theology. As I saw it, the *Evangelicalists* had ceased to be good news. I moved on. Sort of.

Why only “sort of”?

1. *Evangelicalist exclusivists don’t represent all Evangelicals*, so why should I become exclusive? Many of my family, friends and colleagues still identify as Evangelicals. We love each other and refuse to sever fellowship.

2. *Evangelicalist moralism does not represent all Evangelicals*, nor should it infect me. Many Evangelicals are not given to the extremes of the -ism. Their hearts are expansive and their



mission is love. I can work with that.

3. *Evangelicalists do not hold the monopoly on evangelical faith—and neither do I. Faith arises wherever God pleases to reveal himself. For example, Muslims around the world are having visions of Jesus Christ and turning to him. Could he not also appear even among the Evangelicalists?*

4. *As a post-Evangelicalist, I must not allow the bitter taste in my mouth to become a bitter root in my heart. Many of our readers are, like me, “posties.” Others still identify as Evangelicals (without the -ism). They continue to experience spiritual nourishment and living faith where they are. It’s not for me to poison a good well with the toxins of my negative experiences.*

In the end, we must all test the fruit of moving on. Will our moving take us closer to faith, hope and love in Christ—or away from him? My prayer and intent is to be an agent of love to those still in the movement and for those who’ve already made their exit. □

*Brad Jersak is the Editor-in-Chief of CWRmagazine.*

## WALKING AWAY

A lot of walking away will do your life good. Walk away from arguments that lead you to anger and nowhere. Walk away from people who deliberately put you down. Walk away from the practice of pleasing people who choose to never see your worth. Walk away from any thought that undermines your peace of mind. Walk away from judgmental people, they do not know the struggle you are facing and what you have been through. Walk away from your mistakes and fears, they do not determine your fate. The more you walk away from things that poison your soul, the healthier your life will be. — *Dodinsky*

## SHE DROVE AWAY

Dear CWR,

For years, I have felt the frustration of having people ask me what church I go to when talking about my relationship with Jesus, automatically assuming I go to church. It seems more important to them to hear about what church I go to than to hear about my relationship with Jesus.

I describe myself as a non-denominational Christian who doesn’t go to church. But when I try to explain to someone why I don’t go to church or affiliate myself with any religion, most people don’t get it.

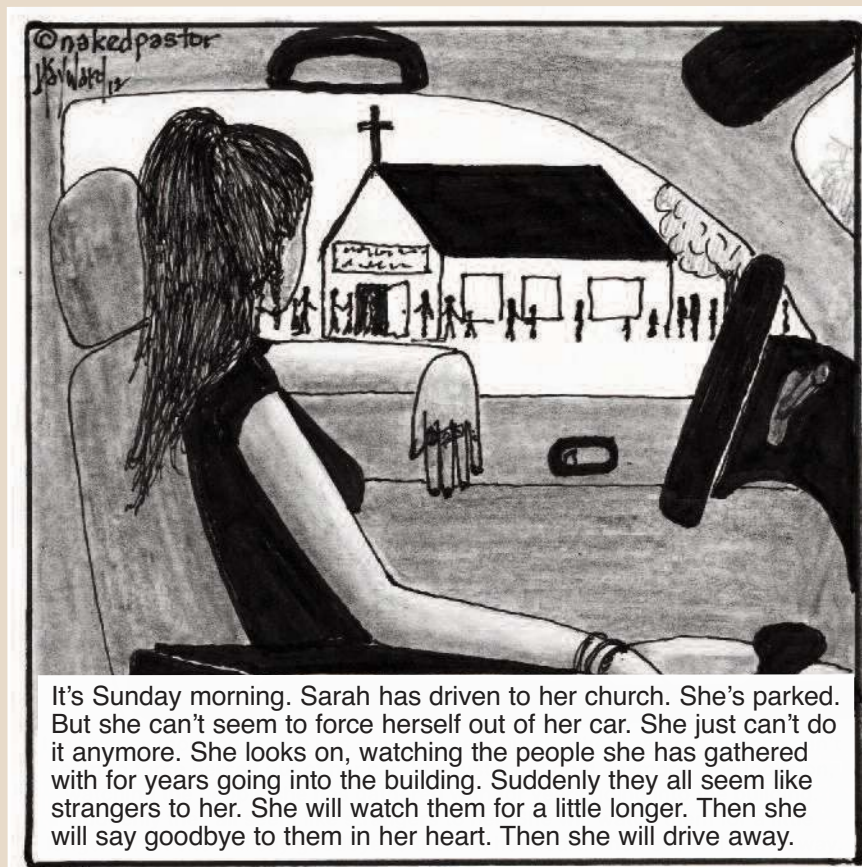
But you guys seem to get it, and you speak for those of us who don’t have the time, energy or intelligence to get across what we are feeling and have been feeling for years.

I understand and accept that ours is a path of discipleship, but still, when going down “the road less traveled,” it’s nice to bump into fellow disciples every now and then.

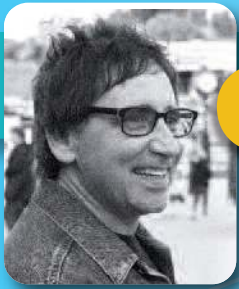
Thank you for being a voice for those of us outside the religious system.

Thanks be to God for you!

Warren, Ohio



It's Sunday morning. Sarah has driven to her church. She's parked. But she can't seem to force herself out of her car. She just can't do it anymore. She looks on, watching the people she has gathered with for years going into the building. Suddenly they all seem like strangers to her. She will watch them for a little longer. Then she will say goodbye to them in her heart. Then she will drive away.



# CWRm

BRIAN ZAHND

## AXIS OF LOVE

# Vive la Révolution!

**W**hen Augustus Caesar was Roman Emperor, the coinage of the economy bore the image of Caesar with imperial titles such as *Son of God*, *Savior of the World*, *King of Kings*, *Prince of Peace*. Sitting in his palace on Palatine Hill, Augustus could never have imagined that in less than forty years these titles would be re-appropriated for a Galilean peasant who had suffered a state-sponsored execution under the jurisdiction of a Roman governor. Caesar Augustus could never imagine that within a few centuries, millions of people would pledge their allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth, calling him the King of all kings.

But that's what happened. If this sounds very political, you're right, it was. And it is.

Jesus didn't become a child refugee for spiritual reasons, but for political reasons. Jesus the Messiah wasn't executed by Rome for spiritual reasons, but for political reasons.

Early Christians weren't persecuted for spiritual reasons (Rome was remarkably tolerant of religions), but for political reasons.

The Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord" was not a benign spiritual platitude, but a subversive political claim.

The intuition of Herod and Pilate who persecuted Jesus at his birth and authorized his execution was correct—this Jew posed a threat to their world order. Herod attempted and Pilate succeeded in killing this single Jewish life. But the life persecuted with death, God vindicated in resurrection. Everything Jesus taught or did to announce and enact the government of heaven was endorsed by God on Easter Sunday.

The Kingdom of God is not the disembodied bliss of heaven, but God's alternative arrangement for human society. Christians confess Jesus is Lord now, not Lord-elect. Under the reign of King Jesus, the poor are blessed, the sick are healed, sinners are forgiven, war is abolished, mercy triumphs over judgment and love trumps everything.

Jesus posed a serious challenge to the status quo when he said, "Many who are first will be last, and the last first." This provoked the very rich and the

very powerful to conspire to kill Jesus.

But—even though the Kingdom of God is without coercion, persuading by love, witness, Spirit, reason, rhetoric, and if need be, by martyrdom, but never by force—to resist the Kingdom of God always leads to a self-inflicted Gehenna. Opposition to the Kingdom of Love is the highway to hell—not the retributive hell of an angry god, but the consequential hell of going against the grain of love. If God is love, then to oppose love is to hurl oneself into a godless abyss.

Of course, politics is prone to fall prey to pervert the pursuit of the common good into the demonic pursuit of power. Christ Jesus overcame this most seductive of all temptations in the wilderness and embodied his fidelity to God all the way to his crucifixion at Calvary.

I believe in the revolutionary politics of Jesus. I'm neither Republican nor Democrat. I'm neither conservative nor a liberal. I'm a revolutionary Christian. I believe Christ gave us the Sermon on the Mount as our Constitution and the Beatitudes is our Bill of Rights.

As a follower of Jesus, I am not permitted to dismiss Jesus' command to care for the poor and love our enemies as "impractical in the real world." No! The world of greed and war is a fake empire, a giant falseness, a colossal lie. The real world is the world of God's unconditional love and infinite mercy—it's what Jesus called the kingdom of God.

So, when a Roman governor in the grand fake empire asked Jesus if he was a king, Jesus affirmed that he was indeed a king and that his life bore witness to the truth of God—a truth that contradicted the grand lie of Rome at every turn.

This is why, in the end, Herod and Pilate had to kill Jesus.

And this is why, in the end, God overruled Herod and Pilate and all the principalities and powers by raising Jesus from the dead!

The revolution began at Bethlehem.

The revolution culminated at Calvary.

The revolution continues wherever Christians dare to take the red letters seriously.

**Vive la Révolution!** □

I usually loathe conversations about who's going to heaven and who's not. Mostly because it's never really a conversation about who's going to heaven. It's just an opportunity to damn people we don't like to an eternity in hell, while assuring ourselves of our own mansion in paradise.

But I've been watching a show called *First Peoples* on PBS<sup>1</sup> and it really got me to thinking and that thinking got me to asking questions whose answers don't fit so well into the traditional Christian model of eternity that I was taught as a child.

*First Peoples* looks at how

ago.<sup>3</sup> But even if we go with a much younger set of fossils, we're still left with around 90,000 years of human history.<sup>4</sup>

Which, in turn, means we're left with tens of thousands of years before even the earliest traces of the Judeo-Christian faith begin to appear.

This has always been a touchy subject for Christians. Even those who are adamant that a verbal confession of faith in Christ is necessary to avoid eternal flames have to deal with the people of God in the Old Testament—the Jews. The “work around” for that problem, of course, is that Jews were/are part of the Old Covenant

since they not only never heard about Jesus, but they never even heard about Abraham or Moses or Noah either?

And if they don't, if being part of the Old Covenant or confessing Jesus as Lord is the price of admission for heaven, then what does that say about God? In other words, what kind of God gives life to countless people for tens of thousands of years only to doom them to an eternity in hell because they never have any kind of a chance at accepting the free gift of salvation? And if that free gift of salvation really is dependent on saying the right prayer, what does

## DO ONLY CHRISTIANS GO TO HEAVEN? ZACK HUNT

humanity—*homo sapiens* to be specific—first spread across the planet. The show was eye-opening to me for two reasons.

First off, I honestly didn't realize how amazingly complex the human evolutionary tree really is. I knew that the famous picture of monkeys evolving directly to humans isn't right and I knew there were other branches of humanity like *homo erectus*, but until I watched the show I never really realized there were so many human species (more than a dozen!<sup>2</sup>) and it didn't really click that we (*homo sapiens*) lived alongside of some of them and even interbred with them for tens of thousands of years.

It's that last thing—the tens of thousands of years—that really got my mind to wandering. Although there is some debate about which remains are those of the most ancient modern human, paleontologists pretty much agree that modern humans began appearing around 200,000 years

and that their salvation is secured by Jesus, meaning the atoning work of the cross flows both forward and backward in time.

So there's a good chunk of the Church today (particularly evangelical Protestants) who are totally ok with the idea of Jews joining them in heaven.

Space is even made a lot of times for that hypothetical person who grew up on a desert island and never heard about Jesus.

But if the fossil record is right, then there wasn't just one hypothetical dude on an island who didn't get a chance to hear about Jesus. If the fossil record is right, then there were tens of thousands of years' worth of people who lived and died long before Christianity or even Judaism was a thing.

So, what do we do with them? (And what do we do with the other strains of humanity? And what about Neanderthals?)

Do they get to go to heaven

that say about our own role in salvation? For all our talk about faith alone, given all the emphasis we place on a confession of faith, it sure sounds a lot like salvation is almost wholly dependent on what we do and the only thing we have to do is say magic words that bind God to our will.

### Who Goes to Hell?

For the sake of the argument (and because even the most conservative Christians I know usually agree that God wouldn't damn the hypothetical “island man” to hell), let's assume that God doesn't send ancient people to hell since neither Judaism nor Christianity would be a thing for a bazillion years.

What do we do with more contemporary people, the folks who did live during the time of the Old Testament or even the New Testament but never had the chance to accept the free gift of salvation because the folks



writing the Bible didn't even know their corner of the world existed...and vice versa. Do the countless Hindus living and dying on the Indian subcontinent for centuries while Abraham and Moses and David



Skhul V.  
Mount Carmel, Israel.  
Species: Homo sapiens.  
Discovery: 1932. Age: 80-120,000 years old.

and Paul were doing their thing on the other side of the world go straight to hell because they weren't part of the Judeo-Christian tradition they had never even heard of?

Okay, maybe we can put them in the same camp as the hypothetical desert island dude. I'm sure most rational Christians wouldn't damn them to hell for their ignorance. But let's push this thing a little further.

We seem to be ok making space for temporal and geographical isolation when it comes to salvation, but what about cultural isolation?

It's hard to understand the power of cultural isolation if you've never travelled far from home. But if you have, if you've had the opportunity to get out and see some of the world, then you know how powerful cultural isolation can be. You know how difficult it can be, not only to change and accept something new, but to even give the

slightest bit of validity to different food, different dress, different ideas, different religion. If you've only ever grown up around other Christians, it's easy to say "Well, you heard about Jesus and it's your fault if you didn't accept him as your Savior."

But if you only ever grew up around other Muslims, for example, just the opposite would be true. In that cultural bubble, the very idea that Jesus would be anything other than a prophet would be blasphemous to you.

So, what do we do with folks like that (whether they be Muslims or Buddhists or Aboriginal or whatever)? Is their cultural isolation really that much

different than the temporal or geographical isolation we're willing to make space for in our theology?

And if so, why?

Now, before anyone feels the need to remind me that there's only one way to Father, let me just say that I completely agree.

However, I also believe that the atoning work of Jesus is efficacious beyond our wildest imagination. It has to be if it's going to save someone like me and it has to be if it's going to save someone who lived 90,000 years before God was born in a manger.

### Some Help from C.S. Lewis

I guess I'm a little like C.S. Lewis in that respect.

**I have become weary of putting limits on who's in and who's out.**

If you've read *The Last Battle*, then you know what I'm talking about. When the heroes of the story get to the new Narnia (heaven), they meet someone they never expected to see there: a young man named Emeth who during his life had worshiped the rival god Tash. Even Emeth is shocked to be there, declaring to Aslan (Christ, in the form of a Lion), "I am no son of thine, but the servant of Tash." In response, Lewis (speaking through Aslan) makes one of the most scandalous theological assertions in the history of children's literature,

*"Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me." Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, "Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one?" The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, "It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast*



done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child?"

Somehow conservative Christians overlook this bit of apparent heresy in their outpouring of love for C.S. Lewis. But despite its apparent heresy, I think Lewis' imaginative snapshot of heaven is actually profoundly insightful, incredibly hopeful, and deeply Christian.

### Could Lewis' Vision Be True?

For Lewis, salvation is still found exclusively in Christ (Aslan), but that salvation isn't limited by a confession of faith or even by a confession of another faith. Apparently borrowing somewhat from Matthew 25, Lewis makes the argument that there can be only

one Truth, only one Object of our desire, only one Source of goodness, and if we are seeking that Truth in both heart and life, then our temporal, geographical, and even cultural context don't really matter.

Like I said, it's an incredibly scandalous claim for most Christians today, but it flows naturally both from scripture and from our own appeal to natural theology and the grace of God when accounting for some hypothetical desert island people.

After all, in Matthew Jesus reminds us that at the end of all things, confessing "Lord, Lord" doesn't guarantee a ticket to heaven. Instead, he will turn to each of us and ask "I was hungry. Did you feed me? I was thirsty. Did you give me something to drink? I was naked. Did you clothe me? I was sick and in prison. Did you come and take care of me?"

Whether we want to admit it or not, the answering of those questions is not dependent upon time or place or even knowing the name of Jesus.

In other words, if what Jesus tells us about Judgment Day in Matthew 25 is true, then C.S.

Lewis' vision of heaven isn't that far off. Which means when we get to heaven, there's a good chance we're going to look around and see people we didn't expect to be there.

For that, I say "Thanks be to God."

Not because I don't value the particularity of the cross and resurrection, but because I very much do.

Because in that atoning work, I see **love that defies expectation and grace that shatters the limits we try to place on it** to reach out and redeem every moment, every corner, and every culture in creation. □

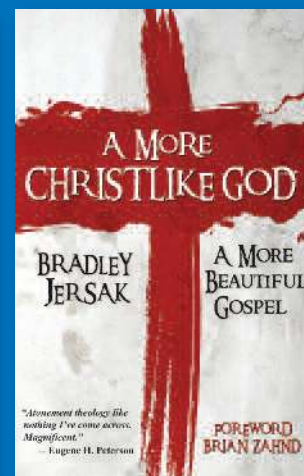
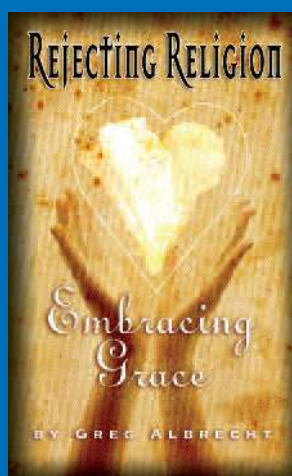
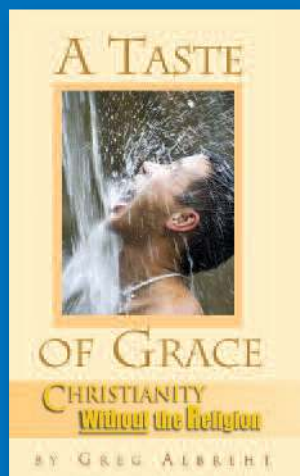
*Zack Hunt is a writer, blogger and youth ministry veteran based in Nashville. [www.zackhunt.net](http://www.zackhunt.net)*

#### Notes:

1. "First Peoples," PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/first-peoples>.
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo>.
3. Eric Wayman, "Meet the Contenders for the Earliest Modern Human," *Smithsonian.com* (01/11/12).
4. "Skhūl V," What does it mean to be human? <http://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence/human-fossils/fossils/skhul-v>.

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I spent some time this morning in Matthew's gospel, and I found myself returning again and again to the ending phrase of Matthew 11:19, "But wisdom is proved to be right by her works."

That's odd, right? If you don't stop to catch it, it's easy to assume that wisdom is proved right because it works. But listen to the difference: *wisdom is not proven right by her success, or her outcomes, or her results. It is proved to be right by her works.* As in, wisdom is in the doing, regardless of the outcome.

That is such a hard lesson, but it is a critical one.

This phrase comes at the heels of Jesus' comments about his current generation, which he compares to people who complained that they played music and sang and nobody responded. Then John comes, neither singing or dancing, and people say he has a demon. And then Jesus comes along, singing and dancing, and they call him a drunk and a glutton and a friend to sinners.

None of this makes any sense, which I think is Jesus' point. The 'generation' in this example is the crowd that is always dissatisfied with whatever is happening, whether it's drinking or not drinking, dancing or not dancing. We have all been part of crowds like that, groups that can only seem to find something wrong. It is exhausting and life-sucking and destructive.

Where does wisdom play into all of this? Wisdom does not get tossed about by the crowd. Wisdom does not have fleeting frustrations or convictions that change with the wind. Wisdom, in contrast, is proved to be right by her works.

Sometimes that might be

# On Wisdom Amidst the Crowd

drinking, or not drinking, dancing, or not dancing, eating with tax collectors or not eating with tax collectors. It's not the outward stuff—it's not some random rule, that guides wisdom. **Wisdom is knowing who you are (in God) and what you are to do (for God) and simply doing it. No matter what the crowd says or does in response.**

I get that this feels totally unfair. If we are going to persevere in wisdom, it would be nice to have something to show for it. But as far as I can tell, wisdom has

never operated that way. Wisdom takes the long view, which also means we cannot receive immediate confirmation that we are on her path. We will not get a golden ticket or immediate results or flaring lights. Most likely, those are all responses and reactions from the crowd, not wisdom.

**Our calling is to step outside of the mayhem and just keep doing what we believe is good and right and true and beautiful,** in the quiet and unassuming way that good and right and true and beautiful things have always grown among us.

The sunny side to this is that once we get released from relying on outcomes, we actually feel pretty free. We feel open. We find joy in the rightness of the work, despite the reaction of the crowd.

Wisdom happens by doing. Wisdom is proved to be right by her works. Another ancient manuscript has the word *children* instead of works. Wisdom is vindicated by her children...just in case you thought you would get this all sorted out within one generation. Wisdom is slower than that, but it's lasting, and that's something the crowds don't have going for them.

I don't know what to expect for us in the near future, but I do hope for wisdom to be our shared work, as small as it is, as insignificant as it may feel, as quiet as it may be. And I'm praying that I let go of my own need to be proved right and trust instead that in good time wisdom herself will be proved right.

May we do what we can to be part of that work—no matter what. □

*Danielle Shroyer is based in Dallas, TX. Her most recent book is entitled, Original Blessing: Putting Sin in Its Rightful Place.*



Danielle  
Shroyer

# Teaching the Cross to Children

Brad Jersak

What is God like?  
Jesus showed us!  
What did Jesus show  
us about God? That  
God is perfect love!  
That God loves us!

**S**o begins my children's book, *Jesus Showed Us!* Imagine the mixture of joy and sorrow when I received this response from a 5-year-old child: "I'm not afraid of God anymore."

The abusive backstory to this comment makes the gospel of God's healing love even more potent. Sadly, many otherwise healthy children suffer spiritual damage and grow up afraid of God because of the brand of religion they were raised on. Children are especially vulnerable to this as we try to explain what the Cross means.

## Gospel Missteps

Two common missteps come to mind immediately:

1. "Jesus died for your sins." Without a doubt, the Bible teaches us that on the Cross, Christ bore and forgave our sins (e.g. Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:15, 1 Peter 3:18). How this works is a great mystery and sharing it requires sensitivity. When religion paints Jesus as whipping boy for the wrath of an angry God, what does a child hear? "Jesus died because of you!"

A thoughtless evangelist says, "YES! Your sins did that to him!"

I have heard these words. But they needn't be spoken, because children infer them. Imagine the sensitive psyche of a child who feels personally responsible for the torture of their beloved Jesus.

It's good for behavior control in the short-term but ultimately creates adult atheists.

2. "God was punishing Jesus" [for your sins]. So, Jesus died because of them, and who did this to Jesus? Religion says that God the Father did it. Why? To punish your sins. And what does a child hear? How do they process a God who loves them *and* who did *that* to Jesus for them?

Meditate on that. I did—as a six-year-old. Worse: I accepted it gratefully, because that's what good boys do. I must love this violent God or burn in hell forever.

Does that not seem psychotic? How could I even love this God?

## The Cross for Children

How instead should we talk about the Cross and Jesus' death with children?

By showing children that in word and deed, Christ was always revealing that God is perfect love, most especially on the Cross. The New Testament testimony is consistent: on the Cross, Jesus showed us God's love for all people (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10).

What follows is how I share the meaning of the Cross as God's love to children, which I flesh out fully in my book, *A More Christlike God* (CWR Press).

From the first time a child sees a cross, I say:

What is God like?  
Jesus showed us!  
Jesus showed us what  
God is like in many  
ways, didn't he! Jesus  
showed us God's love  
most on the Cross.

These lines reflect the passages from John's Gospel and first epistle listed above. The Cross revealed God's nature as infinite love. The height, breadth, width and depth of God's love (Ephesians 3) come into clearest focus on the Cross.

Thus, it's absolutely critical that we clear up for children (and adults!) the question of where God is and what God was doing on Good Friday:

God was in Jesus on  
the Cross, showing us  
God's love!

Where was God in this picture? Turning away from Christ? (NO. Psalm 22:24). Yahweh says through the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10), "They will look at ME, the One they have pierced." The apostle Paul insists, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Where was God when the skies darkened and the earth quaked? There. On the Cross.

## What the Cross Says about God's Love

In *A More Christlike God*, I sum up three key revelations of cruciform love. The Cross shows us that God is self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love. This is what I say to believers and seekers, but also to little children.

### 1. Self-giving Love

On the Cross, God gave  
his best gift to the  
whole world!  
What gift did God give  
us? Yes, God gave us  
Jesus—  
God's firstborn Son!



Jesus was God's great love gift for all of us!

What was God doing on the Cross? Giving God's best—God's Son—to the world. Giving himself to the world. As NT Wright notes, John 3:16 does not say, "God so hated the world that he killed his only Son." Rather, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" as a love gift to everyone.

### 2. Radically Forgiving Love

On the Cross, Jesus forgave everyone in the whole world.

God even forgave the people who killed Jesus! Jesus shows us that God can forgive anybody and anything!

Note how I avoid accusing the children of Jesus' murder but I do include them as recipients of God's forgiveness. In Acts 2:23; 5:30; 7:52, we read that "wicked men"... "betrayed and murdered" Jesus Christ—not the little children who love Jesus but sometimes disobey Mommy and Daddy.

Through Jesus's intercession, "Father forgive them," God pardoned the sins of the conspirators. He forgives the Temple leaders, the Roman soldiers, both thieves and even Judas! If God forgave them, he can forgive anyone. So all are included, including children, in God's universal forgiveness.

### 3. Co-suffering Love

On the Cross Jesus suffered with everyone who suffers

God became a human so he could feel what we feel.

On the Cross, Jesus shows us God understands.

Compassion (literally "co-suffering") emphasizes empathy

through shared experience. God-in-Christ knew suffering and sorrow, just as we do. Children need to know that God understands and that God cares. This is exactly what the author of Hebrews 2:14-18 and Hebrews 4:15 claims.

To summarize, these three facets of God's cruciform love all point to the truth that God's love "never fails," that "God's mercy endures forever," and that "God's lovingkindness is everlasting." Children of the Cross are led to this conclusion:

Jesus showed us God's love even when he was dying. Jesus never stopped loving. Jesus showed us!

### Why did Jesus need to die?

Adults—so attuned to retribution—often ask, "If not to appease God's wrath, why did Jesus need to die?"

But children know! The Cross, shows us that God is love!

But he also died to enter the grave and overcome death—to "break the power of him who holds the power of death ... and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14-15). Jesus' death was how he destroyed death ... and his resurrection proves it! And that means Jesus is alive now—his love is with us and in us forever!

The last word goes to a three-year-old who responded to this good news. He exclaimed joyfully, "Jesus is the winner!" Truly! □



Illustration by Shari-Anne Vis from *Jesus Showed Us!* by Brad Jersak.

*Jesus showed Us!* is an adaptation of Brad Jersak's award-winning book, *A More Christlike God* (CWR Press), illustrated to teach children how Jesus came to reveal the love of our Heavenly Father, Jesus' own Abba, to the whole world.

# TRINITARIAN REVOLUTION!

RICHARD ROHR

I think we are in the beginnings of a *Trinitarian Revolution*. History has so long operated with a static and imperial image of God—as a Supreme Monarch and Critical Spectator living in splendid isolation from what he (and God is always envisioned as male in this model) created. His love is perceived as unstable, whimsical, and preferential.

Humans become the God we worship. So it is quite important that our God is good and life-giving. That's why we desperately need a worldwide paradigm shift in Christian consciousness about how we perceive and relate to God. This shift has been subtly yet profoundly underway for some time, hiding in plain sight.

The slowly-dawning revelation of Trinity was supposed to have radically altered our image of God, but for the most part it did not. The old dualistic hardwiring was too ingrained. In order to come together in politics and religion, to take new scientific findings in biology and quantum physics seriously, and for our species and our planet to even survive **we must reclaim relationship as the foundation and ground of everything.**

In his book, *The Structure of*

*Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn popularized the phrase “paradigm shift.”<sup>1</sup> Kuhn said that paradigm shifts become necessary when the plausibility structure of the previous paradigm becomes so full of holes and patchwork “fixes” that a complete overhaul, which once looked utterly threatening, now appears as a lifeline.

I believe we're at precisely such a moment when it comes to our image of God. Instead of the idea of the Trinity being an abstruse conundrum, it could well end up being the answer to Western religion's basic problem.

As Catherine LaCugna writes:

*The God whom Jesus loves, relies on, by whose power he heals and forgives sin, is not a political monarch, a tyrant, an aloof authority figure, a castled king or queen whose subjects cannot visit, an isolated figure who cannot suffer because he does not love. . . . The God of Jesus Christ is, as Bonaventure put it, the fontalis plenitudo, the fountain overflowing with mercy and justice, and also the telos, the end and fulfillment of every creature.*<sup>2</sup>

God has forever redefined power in the Trinity! God's power comes through powerlessness and humility. The Christian God is much more properly called all-

vulnerable than almighty, which we should have suspected and intuited by the shocking metaphor “Lamb of God” found throughout the New Testament.

Unfortunately, for the vast majority, God is still “the man upstairs,” a substantive noun more than an active verb. In my opinion, this misunderstanding is partly responsible for the quick expansion of practical atheism and agnosticism we see in the West today. Rational and sincere people wonder, “If God is almighty and all-loving, then why is there so much suffering in the world?”

If God is all-vulnerable, then perhaps God stands in solidarity with all pain and suffering in the universe, allowing us to be participants in our own healing. This does not make sense to the logical mind, but to the awakened soul it somehow does.

Let the *Trinitarian Revolution* take root! □

## Notes

1. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago Press, 2012).
2. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (HarperSanFrancisco: 1991), 399.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance* (Whitaker House, 2016), 35-36, 171.





### “Is the Bible ‘the Word of God’?”

**Q** Some people call the Bible “the Word of God.” Is it? What is the Bible exactly? Some say it is inspired, and then some even say it is infallible and inerrant.

**A** It is common to hear the Bible referred to as “the Word of God.” The Bible is also believed to be inspired—but definitions of “inspired” vary. Others believe the Bible is also “infallible” and “inerrant.”

John 1:1 tells us that in the beginning the Word was both with God and was God from all eternity (the book we call the Bible certainly was not). The Greek word translated “word” is *logos*, defined as the dynamic reality that upholds all things.

John chapter one leaves no doubt that the Word of God (*logos*) is the second person of the triune Godhead—Jesus, the unique, one and only Eternal Son of God. Jesus Christ is the Word of God who was with God and who is God.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, composed by many different authors and editors over many centuries. Most Christ-followers agree that the authors of the Bible were inspired—some in unique and miraculously ways—but the human authors also expressed their own worldviews, personalities and even prejudices and wrote in the culture and milieu in which they lived.

We might think of the Bible as a window. It enables us to more

clearly see and comprehend God. Were it not for a window, we would not see beyond the wall of our own narrow perceptions and realities.

However, the window is not the object of our worship. The biblical window is of human and divine origins. We can say that God inspired the window but not without human involvement. By using humans in the recording, writing, preservation, translation and publication of the Bible, God sent a clear signal. The window would not be perfect as God is perfect and holy. The window of the Bible has cracks, dust, smears

### Jesus is the one and only Word of God. Only he is infallible and without error.

and bears the indelible imprint of human fingerprints. God never designed the Bible to be the object of our worship. We must not worship the *Bible—bibliolatry*—we use the Bible for what it is, a tool, as God clearly designed and intended, to know him and see him more clearly.

As a window the Bible is not the Word of God—the Bible, as a window helps us see and perceive Jesus, the Word of God (and the fullness of God, for that matter). We should read the Bible from a Christ-centered perspective, remembering its purpose is to reveal the Word of God. We should also remember that the books of the Bible are not all written in the same linguistic style (genre) so we

must read each book in the style in which it was written, not to mention the culture in which the author lived.

The Bible should be understood from a Christ-centered perspective, and some parts of the Bible are more important than others. Christians read the Old Testament in the light (and Light) of the New Testament and the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Anything in the Bible that does not make sense within the focus and filter of Jesus is not as important or essential as Jesus. For example, many

instructions were given to Israel, who lived under the old covenant. They were required to observe the seventh day Sabbath and not eat pork or shellfish.

How does a focus on Jesus help us to understand what the Bible says about those topics? The Bible says that the annual holy days of the old covenant were to be observed “forever.” But in the light of Jesus, his incarnation and his death on the cross, how do we understand “forever”?

Jesus is the one and only Word of God. Only he is infallible and without error. The Bible is a tool—a window—but it is not infallible nor is it without error. □

**Note:** For more discussion about the Bible, we invite you to read and download “Battle About the Bible” and “The Bible: What It Is and What It Isn’t”—click “resources” at [www.ptm.org](http://www.ptm.org).

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## **CWR**audio *Summaries*

### **AUGUST 2017**

**The Way of Grace** Contrary to popular religious opinion, God's grace is not all about digging in, refusing to compromise values and dogmatically letting others know when and where they are wrong. *Week of August 6*

**Jesus is Our Center** Ironically, religion at large is incredibly self-centered and self-absorbed, an endless quest of trying to convince God to love and approve us, whereas Christ-centered faith is surrendering to God who already loves us. *Week of August 13*

**I Want to Know Where Love Is** God's love does not magically cause all our pain to dissolve in a puff of smoke, but the mystery of the greatest love of all is that in Christ he shares our heartache and pain, and gives us rest and peace. *Week of August 20*

**In Christ, NOT Under the Law** God's grace cuts through unending religious red tape that sucks the life out of those who would rest in Christ. *Week of August 27*

### **SEPTEMBER 2017**

**This is God** The most important spiritual need in our world today is for the image of God with which so many have been indoctrinated to be healed and transformed—so that we all might know who God really is, and who he is not. *Week of September 3*

**All Jesus, All the Time—Why?** The more Jesus is at the center of our faith, then the healthier our faith will be. *Week of September 10*

**Forgiveness—Why?** There is no doubt that the act of forgiving another is good for the one offering forgiveness—but is that the primary reason that Christ-followers forgive? *Week of September 17*

**Healing and Binding Up** Jesus has not only experienced what it is like to be human, but in some way, beyond our comprehension, he is experiencing our suffering right now. *Week of September 24*