

# PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

## Come Out of Her and Come to Me!

By Greg Albrecht

*Come out of her, my people...*  
(Revelation 18:4).

**T**he 18th chapter of Revelation is a funeral dirge for the systemic, institutionalized religion mankind has historically embraced. Revelation triumphantly foresees a Christ-centered victory over Christ-less religion that exalts itself and praises human effort and performance rather than worship of the Lamb of God.

Revelation 18:4 is not a literal call to God's people to remove themselves physically from a city or nation or culture, rather it is a call to accept deliverance from the seductive trappings of religion.

All world religions, including much of Christendom, explain and insist that one can only be a part of their religion if one is doing the

right things and avoiding the wrong things. The heart and core of Christ-less religion is human performance.

Jesus says, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Following Jesus is not predicated on what one does and how one behaves—following Jesus is based on believing and trusting. Note the two imperatives: **1) Come out of her and 2) come to me!**

All world religions, including religion as it functions and exists within the broad Christian world, propose that religious practice, deeds, creeds, rituals, prayers and ceremonies is the way to please and appease God and the way to gain his favor and love.

Jesus says the opposite—his invitation is to **1) come out of her and 2) come to me!** Jesus

continually opposed religion as the answer—many times he said religion was the problem.

Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened to **come to him**.

- Matthew 11:28-30 doesn't record Jesus inviting us to frequent a church building or become a member of a denomination. Nor does any other passage in the Bible.

- The invitation of Jesus is not a summons or a divine call to memorize and believe a particular set of dogmas or creeds. Christ-centered doctrine has its place—an important

one no doubt, but the invitation of Jesus is come and embrace him—not a set of doctrinal teachings. The invitation is first and foremost a relational invitation, rather than a cognitive and cerebral one.

- Jesus does not write us a long to-do list that, once we follow it, turns us into a Christian. He does not prescribe rituals and ceremonies and confessions and prayers that, once followed, will make us a Christian. He says **come to me**.

- Jesus doesn't direct us to seek and find a pastor or priest and sit at their feet. He invites us to **come to him**, to believe and trust in him and to rest in him.

### The City of Babylon

Close your eyes and imagine a walled city back in the middle ages or long before that. Let's call this city Babylon. Babylon is the name

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## Confronted by Christ

**A**cts chapter 9 tells us the story of Saul (soon to become Paul) on a path from Jerusalem to Damascus with a mandate in his hand. Charged and empowered by the High Priest, Saul was set to hunt down, arrest and bring the followers of Jesus to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, it would seem Saul's intent was to question, persecute and quite possibly, execute, the followers of Jesus, as he had done with Stephen (Acts 7:4 - 8:1). In telling this story, the book of Acts paints a picture of Saul as a man who was, in a word, *diligent*, in following his path, and in seeing his commission through to its end.

Not far from the gates of Damascus, Saul was suddenly and forcibly confronted. With a *light from heaven* shining down all around him, Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* Without a moment's delay, Saul asked the only question any of us would've asked if we faced such a direct **confrontation**: *Who are you, Lord?* The Lord's reply was immediate: *I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*

From that point in the story, we read of a period of confusion and blindness, a series of specific instructions, a name change, and the assignment of a new commission (Acts 9:1-31). Paul had been confronted by Christ and, as a result, would follow a new path. That new path would change everything.

One of the most interesting people in history to me would have to be the second-century Roman emperor, philosopher and warrior

king, Marcus Aurelius. Known as one of the five last great emperors of the Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius ruled the vast Roman world from 161 – 180 A.D. A man of uncommon clarity, one of Marcus Aurelius' most famous wisdom writings states: *what stands in your path, becomes your path.* These words, and the wisdom therein, can be considered and applied to our lives in Christ Jesus: *As Jesus stands in our path and confronts us, and as we follow him, Jesus becomes our path.*

### Jesus confronts us with the depths of his never-ending love and care for us.

I had a conversation with a friend not long ago as to how our lives in Christ Jesus can be far more of an experience, a **confrontation** if you will, than a mere pursuit of knowledge.

For me, life in Christ has taken place on a path, a specific path, and began with a **confrontation** of sorts to be sure. It all began with my eyesight falling apart at the age of 18. How I began to deal with the reality of that challenge and live my life despite, trusting in him, has been central to my path. In my own way, I'd been **confronted by Christ.**

Have you ever put yourself in Saul's shoes and wondered what that experience, that **confrontation**, must've been like? To be confronted so directly and unmistakably, in such a personal way, must've been truly something to experience. Yet, as Christ-followers, we don't often experience a "road to Damascus" type of **confrontation** in our daily lives.

More-often-than-not, we can be **confronted by Christ** in far more subtle, and no less meaningful, ways.

We can be **confronted by Christ** as a still, small voice that gently transforms us and leads us to experience the wonders of his grace, love and mercy. We can be **confronted by Christ** as we seek to forgive the wrongs done to us, or to make amends for the wrongs we've done to others. We can be **confronted by Christ** as we feel his comfort and tender mercies in the loss of a loved one, or in our own failing health, or in any other life circumstance or hardship that leaves us kneeling on the ground.

We can be **confronted by Christ** each year as we approach the Easter season. Jesus once again steps into our path and confronts us with the reality of his life, death and resurrection. Jesus confronts us with the depths of his never-ending love and care for us. He shines his light all around us. Our lives in him, and his indwelling life in us changes everything. We are transformed, and his life, his path, becomes our life and our path.

We can wonder about a sudden and forceful **confrontation by Christ**, such as the one Saul who became Paul, experienced. We can even make the mistake of believing that a "road to Damascus" type of **confrontation** is somehow better or more desirable. The truth is, Jesus confronts us everyday with his love and grace. Jesus steps into our path and calls to us, personally, in a direct and unmistakable way we need. As we yield to and follow him, Jesus becomes our path. As he does, Jesus changes everything. □

—Ed Dunn



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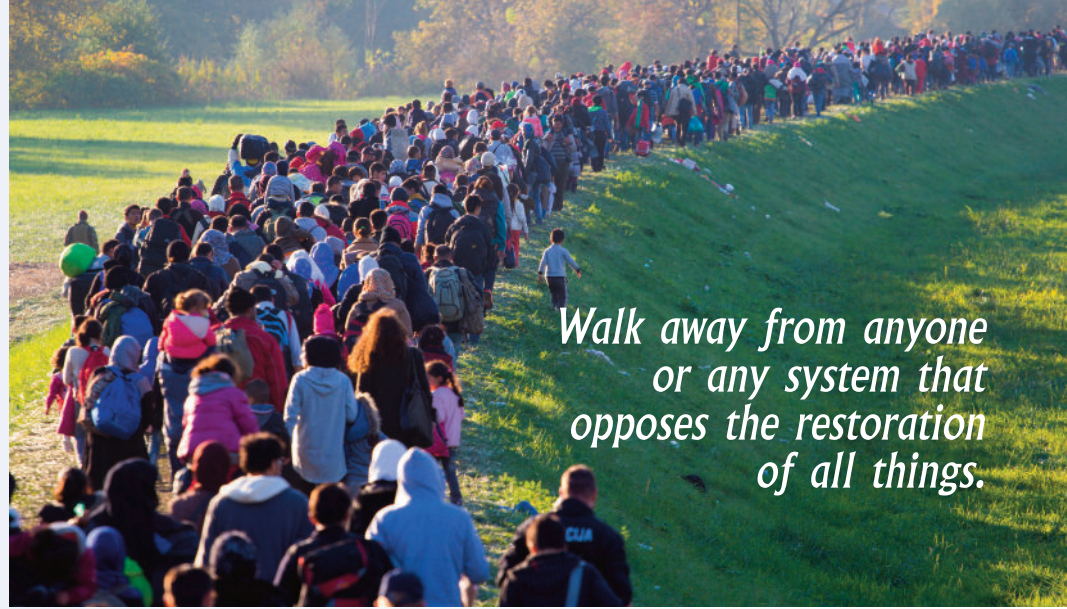
that the Bible gives all cities and all nations who live apart from God's grace.

The citizens in Babylon are under siege. They are weary and burdened. They are fighting enemies outside their walls and they are being insidiously used and abused by enemies within, notably their government and their religion.

They are ruled over by the Babylonian government and the oppressive Babylonian religion. The citizens of Babylon are told when they die in service to their country and their faith they die serving God.

The citizens of Babylon are forced to produce quotas of work to serve the city—all the while they are in fear of their lives, because of the enemies beyond their gates and those who lord it over them within the city gates.

The citizens of Babylon are captives. They have been deceived into believing that somehow, some way, if they just work hard enough, if they fight in the army valiantly



*Walk away from anyone  
or any system that  
opposes the restoration  
of all things.*

enough, if they allow the governmental and religious officials in Babylon to tell them what to do and when to do it—maybe, just maybe, their collective efforts will defeat the enemy and they will experience peace.

The citizens of Babylon are corrupted and enslaved by guilt and shame—they are spiritually blind. They believe in all kinds of superstitions which further serve to keep them in bondage.

Meanwhile, as they are toiling and fighting, as they are weary and

burdened, a Savior intervenes for them. The Savior meets the enemies within and without.

**The Savior defeats the enemies—single handedly.** The Savior has no army—he wins the battle apart from any contribution or assistance from the citizens in the city who fear for their lives.

*The Savior wins the battle in the most unconventional way—he willingly sacrifices his life on the battlefield, allowing the enemy to have its way with him. And while the enemy is pouring out all its hatred and violence on the Savior, the enemy thinks it is winning—because naturally, if you kill your opponent, you win, right?*

**Wrong! The Savior wins by appearing to lose.** After his victory, the Savior enlists representatives and messengers to go to Babylon and to all the Babylons of this world announcing that the war is over and victory has been won by the Captain of their salvation.

### **The Savior's Invitation**

*Come out of her and come to me!*

Give up your wearisome lives in whatever version of Babylon in which you are living, forever burdened by endless religious requirements to measure up.

Give up the false and spurious promise that deceives you into thinking that one day, if you work hard enough, you just might qualify to enter into a heaven-like state where you will rest.

*Walk out of the religious bondage...*





The announcement that Jesus makes in Matthew 11:28-30 is to follow him and therefore to rest in him. The announcement is that Jesus is our Savior and that he has won the battle—the victory has been won! It is finished. It's done.

In Revelation 18:4 a heavenly voice speaks to people enslaved in Babylon *"come out of her my people."*

Leave the oppression. Come out of the slavery and bondage of the walled city.

Walk out of the religious bondage—reject the attractive and seductive deception that you are in control of your destiny.

Walk away from anyone or any system that opposes the restoration of all things.

You can't do anything about your enemy—the only way you will ever experience peace and rest is to follow the Savior, who says, *"come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

The Savior invites us to come out of our slavery and bondage, to turn our backs on any and all systematic entities that encourage their followers/slaves to focus on themselves—to fixate and obsess on their performance, as if their performance will determine whether or not they ever experience rest and peace.

Babylon attempts to rule over us, abuse and oppress us by putting our progress in the spotlight. Christ-less religion of Babylon places a focus on what and how we are doing and less and less on Jesus, our Savior, and what he has done.

Babylon is a definitive explanation for so much of what passes for authentic Christianity today which is all about doing more and trying harder.

Babylon is a message of self-salvation. It's a message about finding your purpose in 40 days and having your best life now. It's incredibly seductive and alluring because we all want to think that we have what it takes to make God happy with us.

## **Yeah, But ... What About Doing Good Things?**

Does the gospel of Jesus Christ announce that those who follow Jesus shouldn't even try to do more and get better? No, it doesn't say that. Obviously, improved and better behavior is preferable.

But the gospel is not primarily about people getting better.

The gospel is about Jesus being better and imparting his way of life to those who follow him, relieving them of their guilt, anxiety, shame and religious slavery so they may truly trust in him, resting in him and enjoying his peace.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that there is a better way to get better than obsessing and fixating on your need to get better.

When you follow Jesus you are forever relieved and saved from an obsession from getting better—that's what it means to be saved.

***You are saved, when you follow Jesus,*** from the endless programs and requirements of religion.

***You are saved, when you follow Jesus,*** from forever worrying about whether God is mad at you and whether you have done enough to please him.

***You are saved, when you follow Jesus,*** so that you don't have to worry about getting better—Jesus has taken care of you getting better.

We do not grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by behaving better, or working harder, or doing more—we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by trusting and believing.

We ***1) come out of her and 2) come to him*** by trusting and believing in and on him—implicitly and without reservations.

We come out of her and come to him by accepting his invitation to leave our bondage, accept his freedom and embrace the grace of God. □

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## ***Reflections Along the Jesus Way with Greg Albrecht***

***Christianity Without the Religion—Quote for the Day***

# Which Thief Are You?

by Brad Jersak

## Mark 10:35-40

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

## Luke 23:32-43

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the

king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

**W**hen will we face the final judgment? Historically, people of virtually all faiths have looked forward to a day in the future, a final accounting where God examines our lives and renders a final verdict and sentence. Christianity is no exception, for the Scriptures (and Christ himself) foretell such a day (though Scripture does not support specific expectations and assumptions many have).

And yet in John's Gospel, Christ says the Father did not send him into the world to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17). He doesn't say that Father will sentence unbelievers to perish. He says he came to save a world already perishing. He says that the Father renders all judgment into his hands and he himself judges no one. Seek

the Scriptures and you'll see for yourself.

The Jesus of John's Gospel also says that the judgment has already come and the verdict is already rendered BY US! By our orientation to the Light. And this comes into clearest focus when Christ is lifted up, glorified and enthroned **on the Cross!** (John 12:32). The prince of this world is driven out and the world system stands condemned (John 12:31; 16:8-11).

The Cross becomes, for John, Christ's judgment seat and our response is our sentence. Choosing Light is life and rejecting the Light is death. It's not that one leads to the other. Any judgment is intrinsic to our choice regarding divine Love.

That's why some stylized versions of the Cross have a slanted footrest at the bottom. This represents the Cross as a scale of justice. The side that points up represents a willing "Yes!" to redemption and the side that leans downward represents a willful "No" to salvation. At the Cross, we become our own judges.

Historically, the two thieves crucified with Christ became archetypes of those choices. They are the first to pronounce their own judgment, one through a saving plea for mercy and the other through his damning mockery of our Lord. The story is framed to challenge us: "**We are all one of the two thieves—which thief are you?**"



## Refracted through the All-Merciful Judge

As I meditated on this passage, I began to refract the words, spoken and unspoken, through the pure prism of Christ the All-Merciful. I slowed my pace to read between the lines and beyond my assumptions. What follows are not conclusions and still less “doctrine.” They are prayerful observations and nothing more, held before *Abba* with open hands.

I’ll call the penitent thief “**thief #1**” (though he doesn’t speak first). Notice what Jesus actually says to **thief #1**: “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*” I’ve always wondered how that could be since on Easter Sunday, he tells Mary Magdalene, “*I have not yet ascended to my Abba.*” I’ll leave that riddle with you for now. Enjoy the mystery!

Here’s my first point, refracted through mercy: just because Jesus said to **thief #1**, “*Today you will be with me in paradise,*” does that automatically mean he’s implying to **thief #2**, “*You will NEVER be with me in paradise*”?

Just because **thief #1** asks Jesus, “*Remember me,*” does that automatically Christ will remember **only** him and not **thief #2**? What if Jesus’ deepest desire is for *Abba* to remember and forgive *everyone* at the Cross? In fact, isn’t that exactly what Luke 23:34 says, immediately after we were first introduced to the thieves?

Now we come to the actual words of **thief #2**: “*Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*” Given his predicament, I’d say that’s not a bad prayer. If we hadn’t heard the words filtered through Luke’s report (“he hurled insults”), we might be less inclined to pick up on the snotty tone. Still, refracted through the All-Merciful One, I imagine Jesus’ answer: “*I AM. And I will.*”

Which thief do you see? After all, Christ has already said of himself, “*No one takes my life from me. I lay it down and I take it up of my own accord.*” And he says of all those there that day and across all time, “*If I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself.*” Even **thief #2**? Even me?

We tend to default so quickly to dualist binaries that the two thieves become the perfect image of us and them (and I’m somehow always in the “us” group). I can identify with the penitent thief, humbly asking for mercy (because I do, a lot) or with Peter, tearfully confessing his three-fold denial.

But we so seldom identify with **thief #2** in his desperate, rude cry for salvation or Judas the betrayer, despite his grief and return of the blood-money. That’s because we see them so clearly in the “them” camp, even through the Evangelists’ eyes. Because of that, we may fail to see love for him in Christ’s eyes.

But wasn’t the Cross the ultimate negation of us-them enmity? Wasn’t it exactly on that Good Friday when Christ forever tore down the “wall of partition” between insiders and outsiders, the righteous and the damned, the enlightened and the ignorant? And don’t we regard it as a day of hope for all sinners?

Maybe not. Maybe **thief #2** is the one man so offensive that Christ used his final energy to turn his face from him. Maybe **thief #2** and Judas really are just “toast,” our permanent images of those who are eternal hopeless. Maybe **thief #2** is our sure proof that death can, at the end, separate “them” from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, Paul’s convictions notwithstanding (Romans 8:38-39). I sure hope not. □

*Brad Jersak is the author of the award-winning More Christlike series, published by CWRpress.*

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## Master Potter

**Y**ou need a kiln! Tony, my ceramic sculptor friend was steering me into clay. I was already selling a few sculptures in other, less enduring media and had already produced a few ceramic pieces. It seemed like the next logical step. So I did my research and ordered a ceramic kiln—a high temperature oven that solidifies clay.

The kiln is relatively easy to operate. All the complicated temperature adjustments and kiln-sitting of the past have been replaced by programmable electronics. What can go wrong? Many, many, many things.

The inside of a kiln is both hellish and glorious. Heat in excess of 2,000 degrees does far more than bake clay—it actually transforms particulate silica and other elements of fragile, dried clay into something completely new and enduring.

But the heat of a kiln also creates huge stresses in clay objects. Trapped moisture can turn to explosive steam, straining hidden flaws, causing objects to crack or shatter.

My first experiences with the kiln were both delightful and catastrophic. Being thrifty, I made some tiles from a block of clay left over from years ago, but I couldn't remember its firing temperature. I fired the tiles much too hot. The result was something like large, melted, volcanic chocolate chip cookies (which ruined some of the shelves in my kiln).

I was deeply depressed for about five minutes. Then I saw their potential, splashed some glaze on them, refired them, cut them out with a tile saw, hung them on the wall of our front porch and called them art. I've received several compliments, thanks to my lack of skill.

One larger sculpture looked great—until I fired it. A weakness or air pocket in the clay caused a quarter of the figurine to shatter in the kiln. Again, I was depressed for several minutes. Not to be thwarted, I used ceramic putty to patch it together. I ground off the rough edges, painted it with automotive

enamel, and it ended up in a gallery.

I'm too cheap to throw away perfectly bad clay. But there's another angle. I've seen too many accidents yield really cool art. And that's a good thing—because even the best potter (or ceramic sculptor) can't be 100 percent sure there won't be some flaws among the many variables involved in the process.

You've probably read Bible passages that talk about God as the Master Potter and us as the clay. Sometimes we read into these passages the idea that God is sculpting perfect little Christians on an assembly line. As we move down the conveyor belt of life, he grinds off rough edges and polishes us until we are paragons of godly character, at which time we flit off to our eternal reward.

Meanwhile, over in a dark corner of God's workshop is a scrapheap of ugly, misshapen, broken vessels that didn't pan out for God. Periodically, he angrily hurls them into the everlasting, fiery torture of his hell-kiln. I won't go any further because this doesn't comport with reality, the Bible, logic or the nature of God as I understand him.

I'm not sure about the theological correctness of this, but I think that God's kiln is the world. Of course, we forget that life in the kiln is not the goal—it's the process that we all have to live through. Yet God's method of working his clay is radically different than my method.

To begin with, he gets in the kiln with his clay, enduring the stresses and explosions along with us. Sure, from appearances it may seem that some of us are destined for the scrapheap. But God's fire is not there to destroy—it's there to transform. In the end, His cleansing and purifying fire (1 Peter 1:7) transforms our fragile, flawed, broken shapes into magnificent works of his art, each one totally unique, yet reflecting the image of Jesus.

If only my kiln worked like the Master Potter's. □

—Monte Wolverton



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"The feet of saints are as much of clay as everybody else's, and their sainthood consists less of what they have done than of what God has for some reason chosen to do through them."—Frederick Buechner

"If you can't see the sun, you will be impressed with a street light. If you've never felt thunder and lightning, you'll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God, you'll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures."—A.W. Tozer

"Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand."—Isaiah 64:8

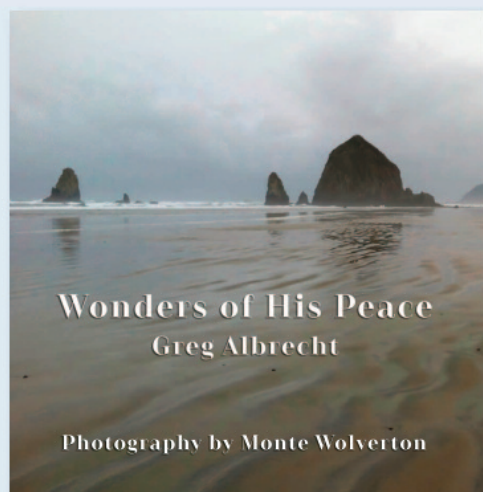
"I suddenly find I'm tired. Tired, as Saint Paul was, of having to come to you hat in hand and explain for the thousandth time that the jailhouse door is really open. And tired above all of having to apologize for God because he doesn't run what you consider a respectable penitentiary."  
—Robert Farrar Capon

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