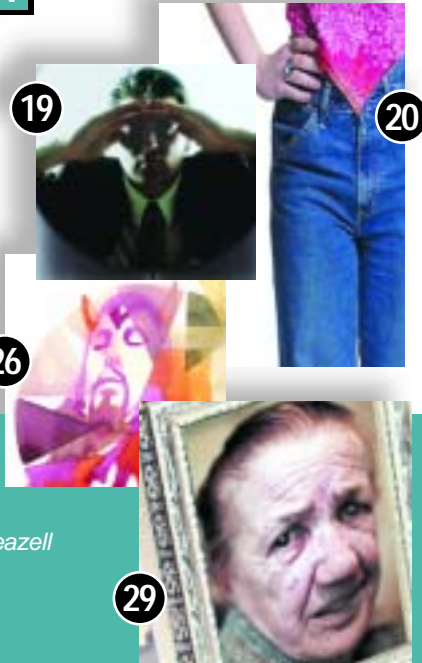


CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

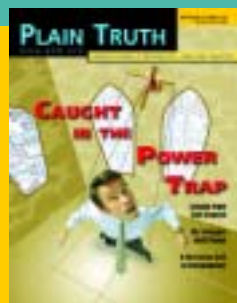
Features

- 19** Who is the Antichrist? *We need only look to Scripture for the answer.*
- 20** "Never Trust a Skinny Person" *How to recognize and avoid the carrots of legalism.*
- 26** Hey...Where Did the Devil Go? *A personal account of deliverance and freedom.*
- 29** Religion Taught Me Rules... *But Grandma taught me grace!*



Departments

- 3** Letters
- 15** He Asked Me to Remind You *Steve Brown*
- 17** Commentary *Greg Albrecht*
- 24** One Pilgrim's Progress *J. Michael Feazell*
- 25** Common Ground *Joseph Tkach*
- 26** Growing Places *Susan Reedy*



6

Cover Story

The abuse of power in God's name is a painful, yet important topic. In this issue we present three articles showing dilemmas presented to Christians when they get "Caught in the Power Trap."

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DESIGNPICS AND MARV WEGNER—PTM

About This Issue

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, at least according to historian Lord Acton (1834-1902). This keen observation has been illustrated through the pages of history a myriad of times. Christendom has its own share of those whose sense of morality has seemed to diminish as his or her power increased—this very dynamic is one of the signs that authentic Christianity has been perverted by religious legalism. The abuse of power in the name of God is the painful, yet important topic we address in this issue's cover story, "Caught in the Power Trap."

Plain Truth contributing writer Dan Schaeffer offers "My Struggle With Power" as an insight into the potentially intoxicating world of authority within the family and the organized church. We welcome Jennifer Jill Schwirzer, a newcomer to our pages, with her insights into "A Christian Cult of Personality?" As an illustration to some of the instruction offered by Schaeffer and Schwirzer we are pleased to offer Cassie Litton's testimonial, "Escape from Cult Control." Schaeffer, Schwirzer and Litton sounds like a law firm, and they definitely present a cogent and compelling case. We thank them for what we believe to be a persuasive look at this very human problem.

As our regular readers know, we do our best to present some controversy in our quest to stimulate thinking about *Christianity Without the Religion*. We're always ready to stir the pot, as long as the gospel of Jesus Christ is the end product served. We're prepared for letters—but please, before you write, be sure and carefully read "Hey...Where Did the Devil Go?" and "Religion Taught Me Rules...Grandma Taught Me Grace." *Plain Truth* circulation has doubled over the past 18 months—welcome to all of our new readers! Let us know what you think and how we can improve our service to you!

—Greg Albrecht, Editor-in-chief

MISSION STATEMENT

Plain Truth Ministries proclaims authentic Christianity without the religion. We:

- Center our teaching on Jesus Christ and God's amazing grace
- Give hope to those burned out by religion
- Warn about and describe religious devices and detours, potholes and pitfalls that can lead us away from God
- Combat the deadly virus of legalism
- Base our ministry upon the essential, main and plain core teachings of historic Christianity

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

For a subscription in the U.S.A. or Canada, call toll free 1-800-309-4466, or visit our website www.ptm.org. Single copies or back issues: U.S.\$4.

Subscriptions outside of U.S.A. and Canada are U.S.\$29.95 a year; credit card orders only.

TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Be sure to notify us immediately of any change in your address by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org/change (please have your old mailing label available for reference) or writing us at *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129 (please include your old mailing label and your new address). U.S. Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write us at Letters to the Editor, *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129, email us at managing.editor@ptm.org or fax us at Letters to the Editor at 626-304-8172.

The editors reserve the right to print or not print comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to print your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

ADVERTISING

Please direct inquiries about advertising rates to Skip Dunn; Phone: 626-304-6024; Fax: 626-304-4087. Advertising in *The Plain Truth* does not imply editorial endorsement or agreement with the beliefs and doctrines of Plain Truth Ministries.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg R. Albrecht

MANAGING EDITOR: Monte Wolverton

SENIOR EDITOR: J. Michael Feazell

ART DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION: Marv Wegner

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Laura Urista

BUSINESS DIRECTOR: Monte Wolverton

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Skip Dunn



Coping with Depression

I found Ray Albrektson's July/August article, "The Long, Dark Night of the Soul: Coping with Depression" insightful and helpful. Not only do I suffer from bouts of depression, but I see it in my family as well. I think the article will help me work through my depression and get on with my life. I found it enlightening that what happens to me in this life is short-lived; that what is waiting for me in the beyond is so much better.

**Karen
Colorado**

I want to make a comment on Ray Albrektson's article on depression. While I believe the author and your magazine have only good intentions, I am shocked that God and his Word are barely mentioned, while the "world's" answers are so highly recommended. There is one weak comment about the fact that the Psalms have been known to help. God's Word is filled with answers to depression without the use of drugs. Many thousands of people have found healing without the use of drugs by simply applying Scripture to their lives. Inability to forgive is probably the number one issue with most depressed people, and no drug can solve that problem. Did God leave his Word for us to just use drugs instead?

**Paige
Email**

Thank you so much for your article about depression in the July/August issue. I suffered from clinical depression for almost a year, and it was the worst time of my whole life. I read a quote in an Ellen Gundersen Traylor book that said, "In the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God."

I held on to that with all my might, even when I was in such a dark place that I began to doubt the very existence of God. At one point I decided that even if God was not real, I would hold on to my faith in him, since that was all I seemed to have left. Most Christians were not helpful—they felt if I just prayed more and quoted more scriptures I would be healed. Luckily, I had an aunt who had suffered from depression, and she was

able to empathize. I also had a Christian doctor who gave me all of the right advice—exactly the same advice you gave in your article!

I would urge people to follow EACH piece of advice, since there are often several factors involved in a person's depression, and each one of them needs to be dealt with. My heart goes out to those still caught in the cycle of depression, but I want them to know there is hope! It is very true: "In the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God." Thank you again for your article.

North Carolina



Passion About The Passion

I've been receiving your magazine for several months now. While reading the July/August letters to the editor, I noticed that Jerry Griffin has experienced a backlash from some readers. I appreciate the author's exposé. When *The Passion* first came out I was very interested, like most Christians I imagine. I've been a believer for approximately 23 years, the first 17 of which I was in a "worship" movement where I was criticized if I didn't always appear "joyful in the Lord." Since about six years ago, I've never been happier in Christ, knowing that I don't have to please him with service that only his sacrifice could satisfy on my behalf.

After seeing *The Passion*, something did not set right with me. There were so many things in the movie that were nowhere to be found in Scripture. This was a huge red flag to me. I would not have known without your investigative reporting where the material actually came from; and I was glad to know. The danger in this situation is obvious—you cannot add to the Word of God.

I appreciate the truths your ministry presents and background information you bring out, that average folks wouldn't have easy access to. More than anything I appreciate the courage required to take an unpopular stand. *The Passion* rattled my cage because of the near hysteria that people had in extolling it. It was only a movie and not biblical. Thanks to Mr. Griffin and the entire *Plain Truth* staff.

**Kellie
Email**

Truth in Advertising

The May/June article, "Truth in Advertising," struck a chord. Churches have tremendous shortcomings, because they are stocked full of self-righteous church types that have the same human frailties non-church types have. Sinners are everywhere, even in the church. When new Christians witness this hypocrisy, they are often turned off to the church. It is easy to be disappointed with Christianity when pious sinners pray eloquently in church on Sunday, but on Monday they are the same mean, judgmental people.

**Timothy
California**

Feel-Good Fluff?

Don't forget that men read your magazine, too. I skip over most of *PT's* feel-good fluff searching for something more relevant to me. Gentle words mean little next to the thundering voice of God coming down from the heavens. I'm a beer drinking, tree chopping, trench digging, motorcycle riding guy, who loves Christ too. Throw some articles my way!

**Richard
Connecticut**

Christianity Without the Religion

What do you mean by the *Plain Truth* byline, "Christianity Without Religion"? Both the *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* and *Webster's New World Dictionary Third College Edition* give as the etymology of the word "religion": *re*=back plus *ligare*=bind. Hence to bind back or re-connect. Isn't humankind suffering the consequences of not being bound (connected) to our creator? Isn't the break (breach) produced by sin in the Garden of Eden precisely what the work of Christianity is intended to repair (Isaiah 58:12)? The word ligament has the same root source and no part of the body which moves to accomplish work can do so without being connected (bound) to the source of power, the muscle. Humankind has no greater need than to be re-connected to spiritual muscle to do spiritual work for spiritual intentions. The church does not need to be without religion. The church needs the religion of Christ, pure and undefiled (James 1:27). By this definition we (humankind) don't need "Christianity without religion." We need Christianity that accomplishes religion. By the etymological definition, the *PT* byline says "Christianity Without the Success." I'm sure you don't mean that.

**Marvin
Iowa**

• *Why do we say Plain Truth magazine is all about "Christianity Without the Religion"?* Some points to consider:

1) *You note the etymology, or origin, of the word religion and conclude that by this definition, religion is necessary. But a word's origin, dictionary definition and popular connotation may be three different things. In this case, one dictionary definition is "the service or worship of God." But the popular connotation of religion is "a system of practice and observance intended to make the worshiper more acceptable to God." PTM believes the popular connotation of religion fails to address the central issue of Christianity—that we do not gain salvation on the basis of our deeds but on the basis of God's grace. We do not believe Jesus came to found another religion, for the world then and the world now suffers from too much religion. Christianity stands alone among all world religions on the basis of its claims that human deeds do not play any part in the salvation that God alone can give. Thus, we believe we need more Jesus and less religion.*

2) *We believe religion, in large part, has co-opted Christianity, re-defining it and misrepresenting it. Religion, even in the name of Christ, often teaches that human performance gains a higher standing with God. Religion has placed itself in the spotlight, replacing Jesus Christ. Bad News Religion is based on the conviction that the harder humans work, and the more humans produce, the more pleased and appeased God is—thus, the central core of religion becomes human effort and achievement, rather than the atoning work of Christ on the cross.*

3) *The call to repentance—to "come out of her my people" (Revelation 18:4)—is actually a call from Jesus to those who are imprisoned by religion. We must surrender our human ideas that what we do has any eternal merit in the eyes of God, and instead accept the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, who alone can and will save us. Faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.*

4) *The gospel of Jesus Christ frees us from human religious traditions and practices. We are no longer slaves to human institutions, but instead, as Paul often notes in his epistles, we become slaves of and to Jesus. We follow Jesus alone, rather than any religious system or entity that has subverted and counterfeited the gospel. Thus, we stand for authentic Christianity, without the religion.*

Kind of Like Jesus

It's important to me that you know how much your ministry has blessed me. I've been going through some lonely times with hardly any money, and your ministry is always there—kind of like Jesus. You're truly doing his work. Thank you so much!

**Millie
South Carolina**

COPYRIGHT & POSTAL INFORMATION

The Plain Truth is published bimonthly by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2005 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Standard flats postage paid at Pasadena, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Volume 70, Number 5: September/October 2005. Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. *The Plain Truth* is a trademark and may be licensed for use internationally.

PLAIN TRUTH RADIO PROGRAMS

Join us for inspiration and biblical teaching daily with *Plain Truth* radio on our website at www.ptm.org.

OUR WEBSITE

Visit our website at www.ptm.org to browse *Plain Truth* archives for past articles, to find out more about Plain Truth Ministries and our other products, to subscribe and to update your address.

SUBMISSIONS

The Plain Truth rarely publishes unsolicited manuscripts. Please review our writers guidelines at our website (www.ptm.org) before submitting queries. Include SASE with query. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

The Plain Truth is published by Plain Truth Ministries. If you are interested in learning more about Plain Truth Ministries, please request a copy of our monthly *Plain Truth* Ministry Letter by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org (please have your mailing label available for reference) or writing us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Plain Truth Ministries gratefully acknowledges support from the Worldwide Church of God, helping us with this ministry.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Plain Truth Ministries gratefully accepts tax deductible contributions to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept contributions in U.S. funds by check or credit card. Call us at 1-800-309-4466, or write us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

MEMBER  EVANGELICAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

MEMBER
NRB


Plan Truth
Ministries
Worldwide