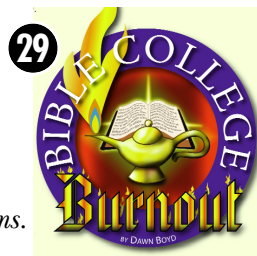


CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

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Cover Story

5 *Three perspectives on how to make sure our relationship with God doesn't degenerate into empty religion and silly superstition: 1) Fishy Business, 2) Jesus Junk and 3) A Cause for Every Effect.*

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY MARV WEGNER—PTM.

About This Issue

Our cover story tackles the issue of superstition within Christendom, and who better to take on this thorny topic than Ron Benson, Monte Wolverton and Phil Cooke? Ron has a great sense of humor, he's a deeply converted Christian, who, by his own admission, is still working on his fishing skills (see photo). Ron, along with Phil and Monte, give valuable insights about our relationship with God—and how to make sure it doesn't degenerate into empty religion and silly superstition.



In "Women in the Pulpit" Doug Trouten gives an even-handed analysis of this ongoing controversy—welcome back to our pages, Doug! We also welcome three new authors in this issue who offer challenging and thought-provoking spiritual food: 1) "Religion: The Lie...the Truth" by Ken Armstrong, 2) "Christian 'Nice Guys'" by Paul Coughlin and 3) "Bible College Burnout" by Dawn Boyd.

We have a great year planned—including two new columnists. So don't touch that dial...you won't want to miss a single issue! We realize your time is valuable, so we will do our best to give you provocative, entertaining, grace-based and Christ-centered reading during this upcoming year.

On a personal note, this is the year that I will experience the big "60." I am prepared to receive "encouraging" little notes and cards all year long. I anticipate messages such as: a) "You don't look that old" [feel free to send lots of these messages, they never get "old"!], b) "60 is the new 50" [I'm tired of this cliché, or am I just tired?] or c) "They shoot horses don't they?" Ron Benson invited me to celebrate by going fishing, but having read his article I might be freaked out with all of those little superstitious things he does while fishing!

Do let us know how we can improve our service to you (apart from farming out the editor-in-chief!). We enjoy hearing from you—call, email or write to us. Our mission is to serve you with Christ-centered teaching, *Christianity Without the Religion*, based on God's amazing grace. God bless you as we greet this new year.

—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

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The River & the Rescuer

The focus on grace in Mark Littleton's article "The River & The Rescuer" (November/December 2006) is appreciated, but the author still sells Jesus short. Can an omnipotent, eternal, defined-as-love God be diluted into a marginally successful "Rescuer"?

The Rescuer claims to "love everyone equally" and "infinitely" but only rescues relatively few. The author and others like him want us to believe that "everyone was approached [by the Rescuer] at least once," but is this true yet? Is the risen Jesus so un compelling that most people will refuse him when approached in person? Thomas didn't. Maybe God is a better Rescuer than we give him credit for.

Mark Oregon



Seniors Shacking Up

The article by Ron Benson in your November/December 2006 issue hit home especially hard for me, as I've been forcing myself to remain alone for many of the reasons he cites. Mr. Benson showed compassion and understanding of the problem. I went through a terrible divorce from a legal marriage years ago and cannot put myself at the mercy of the state again.

Phil Washington

I believe no valid reason exists for a couple to forego legal marriage. Though my heart goes out to those who have lost a long-time mate, "shacking up" is not worth the heartache that this choice can bring about. My grandfather avoided a legal marriage after the death of his wife of almost 50 years. He and his newfound friend moved to another state.

Though my family accepted their situation, I saw many changes in my

grandfather. He avoided situations where he would have to introduce his new "mate." Family gatherings became awkward for him, and he seemed ridden with guilt. We seldom saw him. Legal marriage is necessary for the order and unity of our families, communities and country. "Shacking up" is not good for anyone of any age.

Paula California

• For more letters about this article, see page 16 of this issue.



Pilgrim's Voyage

Thanks for your thought-filled September/October 2006 issue featuring the article "Pilgrim's Voyage." I saw a commonality throughout that whole issue—it is all about Jesus personified as love, as a manifestation of God's grace! It is "grace"—unqualified—without the "but rewarded by works." Any true good works of a born-again Christian are only a manifestation of and through God's grace.

Christopher Wisconsin

PT Welcome in My Home

Each issue of the *PT* is welcome in my home. If there was an issue every month, that would be a double blessing. I start off reading Steve Brown. He jump starts me because he tickles my funny bones. They're somewhere near my heart.

Then I read Susan Reedy and Greg Albrecht, learning as I go on to the main features. I'm grateful to be part of your ministry. God bless PTM!

Frank Nevada



"Grace, but"

I just finished reading the article "Grace, but" by Greg Albrecht in the

September/October 2006 *PT*. After many years I have come to understand what God's grace is. I am free from my own bondage which came from believing what I had heard most of my life.

**Belinda
Texas**

Greg Albrecht's Commentary, "Grace, but" in the September/October 2006 issue is thought-provoking. The humor is uplifting (especially the last line). In the past I have believed in rewards once we get to heaven. PTM has shown me a new layer of grace. Jesus did pay the whole cost of our salvation.

So why did God put reward scriptures in the Bible? Like the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-28, and Revelation 22:12, "My reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Then there's the treasure scriptures, like Matthew 6:19-20 and 19:16-21. Storing up treasures in heaven by giving here on earth. These seem to muddy the water of grace and give people ammunition for the "rewarded by works" teaching. How do all these scriptures fit together with grace?

**Bruce
Email**

- *There is no doubt that passages like the ones you mention contain the idea of differing levels of awards/rewards. What they are not clear about, and in fact what they do not teach at all, is that anything we are given in eternity is based on our performance on earth. Everything in eternity is by God's grace. God is the Source of all of our physical differences—whether we are good looking, academically gifted, athletic, tall, short, etc. God is also the Source of the spiritual gifts each of us are given.*

This does not mean that our desire to serve God is diminished simply because we realize we can do nothing to improve our relationship with God, for if we truly understand our relationship with God, we will realize that because of what Jesus has already done, it cannot be improved—it's as good as it's ever going to get!



Christianity Without the Religion

I have been searching for a church that is Christ-centered, a church that God is in. For a long time I thought I had found one, but it wasn't what PTM is. I have now found PTM and your online church,

Christianity Without the Religion. I believe that God has found me and is ministering to me through you. Thank you so much for having the courage to yield to him.

Oklahoma

One of your past sermons at *Christianity Without the Religion* was talking about freedom in Christ and how some interpret that to mean doing whatever you want. I believe we have freedom to choose to obey God. This freedom is scary to some, who are afraid of choosing to disobey. But grace says God is always eager to forgive and wipe out the penalties of our disobedience—while still giving us the freedom to choose. Legalism may have started from a good idea...helping us to make the right choices. Unfortunately, it led to restrictions that led to the loss of the freedom that Jesus gave us through his grace.

New York

We are so encouraged by your website; it is refreshing! I pass it on to Christians whom I feel will benefit from the truth and are open to God. I watched the short video on the virus of legalism, and that has been affecting me personally. How I long to come into the freedom and love God has for me. Now I go on your website every day to build myself up with what God says about me, not how religious people view me, which has always led to me feeling bad about myself. Jesus came to lift the burdens from mankind, but religion piles the burdens on even more.

Thank you for being there and for spreading the truth, which I know comes at great cost. Without people like you, God's truth remains hidden and people like me are left to grope in bondage and fear. I sit here worshipping God with your *CWR* services and I feel his love and presence filling me with himself. I pray that God will bless and keep you as you minister the truth on the Internet.

**Victoria
United Kingdom**

Correction

In your Nov/Dec 2006 Commentary, "He Came Anyway," you stated that Mary was an unmarried teenager. But Matthew 1:24-25 [NKJV] says Joseph "took to him his wife and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son."

Email

- *You are correct. What I meant to say is that Mary was an unmarried teenager when she became pregnant, not when she gave birth. As you state, Matthew reminds us that Joseph married Mary while she was pregnant with Jesus, so that when Jesus was born she was married. Thanks for being a careful reader!*

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