



## Shoplifter Christians

Shoplifter Christians are often Christians who miss the whole point of the Gospel.

Last week someone sent me the text of a sign from a tourist gift shop. It read: “Shoplifters Will Be Beaten to Death.” If I were a shoplifter, I don’t think that would be my favorite store. I would think, *Of course it’s a joke. But, just in case, I think I’ll do my shoplifting somewhere else.*

I’ve been thinking about that sign, and I’ve decided there is a similarity between that sign and the way many Christians view their relationship with God. In fact, now that I think about it a bit more, shoplifters and Christians are not altogether that dissimilar.

For instance, both Christians and shoplifters try to hide the bad stuff. Shoplifters want people to think that they are just normal shoppers, and, I suspect, if anybody recognizes them for what they are, they flee. Christians do that, too. We go to church in our very best clothes, carrying a Bible and looking quite spiritual. If anybody recognizes us for what we really are (i.e. sinners badly in need of God’s grace), we flee too.

Paul said in Ephesians 4:25 that each of us should put away the lies in the church and “speak truthfully to his neighbor” for we are all members of one body. That’s hard to do for shoplifters—and for Christians. Because the roles we play are so important to us, it is quite rare for us to take the masks off and get honest. It simply costs too much.

I have a pastor friend who once said during his Sunday morning sermon, “If you guys really knew me, you wouldn’t want me as your pastor.” The people in the congregation laughed, and a few probably agreed with him.

Then he smiled and said: “And there is one other thing you need to know. If I really knew you, I wouldn’t want you as my congregation.”

It would have been good for that congregation if both the pastor and the people really did know each other. There would be a lot of embarrassment, shock and disbelief, but once everyone got over the shock of having others know their secrets, there would probably be revival. And then we would be a bit less like shoplifters.

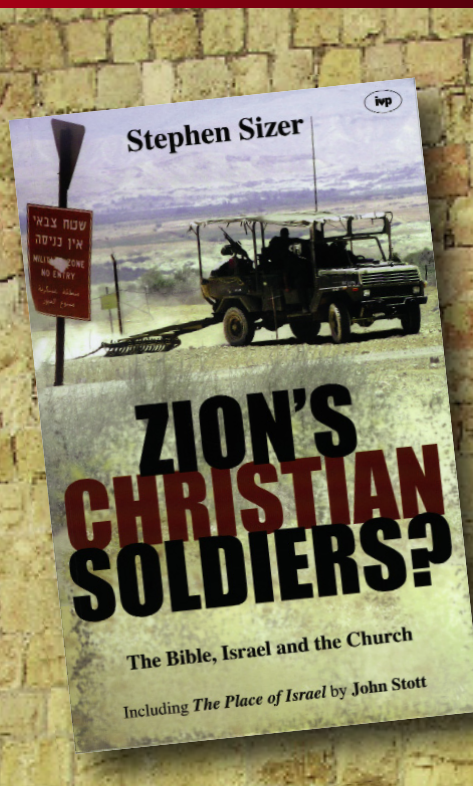
### Hidden Motives

Another way shoplifters and Christians are similar is that both Christians and shoplifters have hidden motives in what they do. The shoplifter appears to be in the store to buy products and is really there to steal products. Just so, most Christians appear to be in church to worship, have fellowship and serve Christ when some (me included, so this isn’t a sermon) are there for a variety of other felt reasons.

Paul had trouble with the church at Corinth. One of the problems he addresses in his letter to that church is how people used the Lord’s Supper as an excuse to do some other things.

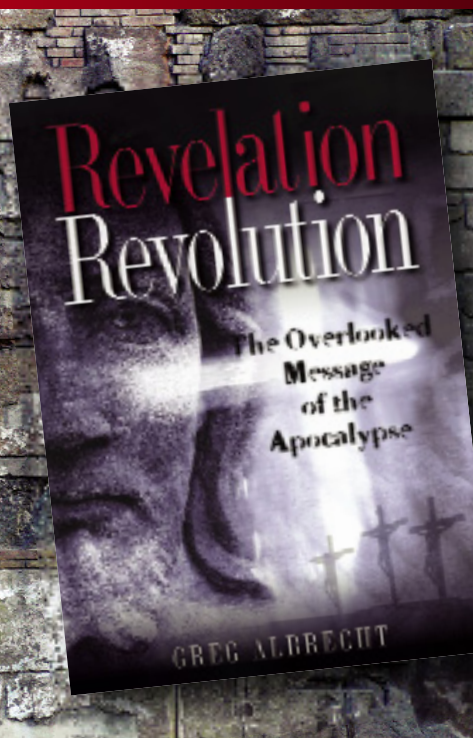
He writes: “Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.... Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you” (1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 20-22, NKJV).

While I was studying that, I thought to myself, *You may be bad, but you*



**M**any Bible-believing Christians are convinced that God blesses those nations that stand with Israel and curses those that don't. This belief has had a significant influence on attitudes towards the ongoing Palestinian–Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Claims made in books like the *Scofield Reference Bible* and Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* have fed into the contemporary Christian Zionism movement, with radical implications for how we view our faith and the world in which we live. Stephen Sizer contends that this view is based on misinterpretation of the Bible. He provides a positive alternative based on a careful study of relevant biblical texts, encouraging dialogue on the relationship between Israel and the Christian church. This accessible volume includes numerous tables and diagrams, questions for Bible study and further reflection, and a glossary of terms.

**\$15—shipping included  
ask for item #B251**



**I**f you, a friend or a loved one have wondered if the biblical interpretation behind the *Left Behind* series is the only way, or the best way, to understand Bible prophecy—then *Revelation Revolution* can be like a refreshing, long awaited oasis in the desert! *Revelation Revolution* is a grace-based, Christ-centered exploration of the biblical book of Revelation. Greg Albrecht plants the cross of Christ firmly in the midst of what he sees as irrelevant and misleading interpretations of biblical prophecy, ideas that may even unwittingly war against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**\$12—shipping included  
ask for item #B233**

**OR ORDER BOTH FOR JUST \$22—shipping included  
ask for item #M161**

**Call 800-309-4466**

*Available in U.S. and Canada only—while supplies last.*



he asked me...

*aren't that bad.* That's when the Lord reminded me of the times I looked for everything but him in the church.

He reminded me about the time I was bent out of shape because someone didn't speak to me or give me credit for what I had done in "serving the Lord."

I thought of the way I was upset because everybody didn't see things my way, dressed differently or had a lifestyle different from mine. I thought of the many business deals done in the church and the times when so many (me too, on occasion) tried to "do a deal" with God himself.

I thought of the selfish motivations, the cliques in the church, and the revenge and sin many of us have planned while pretending to listen to the sermon.

### **Afraid of Punishment**

There is one other way shoplifters and many Christians are the same. Both are afraid if they get caught, they are going to be in trouble. If shoplifters aren't beaten to death, they can surely go to jail for their actions.

Many Christians feel the same way about God. They think—*Yes, God loves sinners, but if you sin, he will probably beat you to death.*

Both shoplifters and Christians know that there is an authority which, if made aware of their actions, will make life quite unpleasant. The shoplifter is, of course, quite right.

*The Christians are dead wrong!*

In fact, that is the most amazing truth of the Christian faith—God doesn't kill off Christian sinners, he loves them and is quite fond of them. *Shoplifter Christians are often Christians who miss the whole point of the Gospel.*

In the church, shoplifters won't be beaten to death. The Head of the church will love you and very gently make you better, and even if you don't get any better, he'll still love you.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

**THE PLAIN TRUTH**