



## "This is a football."

As "seasoned Christians" we are tempted to bypass the basics and fundamentals so that the game might begin.

It's that time again—football season is here! You can't miss it (even if you try!).

There will be high school games on Friday night, college games on Saturday and NFL games all day Sunday, Monday nights and occasionally other nights.

Critics of football note that football is as close to religion as some folks ever get. Critics of religion (like me) can only say "thank God" for that. Let's get close to God, but let's get as far away from religion as possible.

Speaking of God, religion and football, the legendary coach Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers is said to have given a "This is a football" lecture to his team at the beginning of every season—and sometimes after a humiliating loss.

The lecture would begin with self-evident, elementary information—fundamentals so obvious new players not yet aware of Lombardi's philosophy initially felt bewildered and even patronized. Holding up a football Lombardi would begin by saying, "This is a football."

The lecture continued with the basics, as Lombardi told his team about the ways in which a football should be held, advanced down the field via a run or pass—and the way in which a football can be kicked, fumbled, intercepted and taken away.

At times he took the entire team to the field and walked them around the familiar territory—patiently rehearsing the dimensions of the field, the rules and how the game is played. Even rookies don't like to wade through the fundamentals, and for veterans, well, elementary lectures can seem insulting and demeaning.

The principle holds true throughout many facets of life, including what it means to be a Christian. As "seasoned Christians" we are tempted to bypass the basics and fundamentals so that the game might begin.

But it's the fundamentals and basics that determine whether the game is won or lost. Religious people can get excited about all

kinds of games that are played within Christendom. Their cry—let the games begin!

The "games" include:

- Healing crusades.
- Promises of health and wealth in return for obedience to specific religious regulations, rites and rituals.
- Prophetic speculations about *end times* events and when the Rapture will happen.
- Being *slain in the spirit* and *speaking in tongues*.
- Crusading and forming picket lines against abortion doctors.
- Evangelizing—filling a quota with those to whom you *witness*, often nothing more than a nice way of saying you have subjected others to *your* denominational dogma.
- Letting people know where you stand (which is actually where you have been told to stand by your church and denomination) and where they can get off.

Some in Christendom would absolutely insist that to be a Christian one must:

- be baptized using a specific amount of water, at a particular time of your life, in a particular church, following a religiously prescribed course of instruction.
- pay at least 10 percent of your income to a church or ministry.
- refrain from eating certain foods or drinking certain beverages.
- *go to an earth-bound church*, in a building, at a specific point in time, wearing a specific kind of clothing, singing the appropriate music, saying proper, valid prayers and creeds, and performing correct rituals and ceremonies.
- *keep and observe* certain days as holy, and make sure not to *keep and observe* other days that less enlightened souls *keep and observe*.
- *put in enough time* praying every day, and devote oneself to an equal amount of time reading and studying the Bible every day.
- *have all your doctrinal ducks lined up*, so that you are assured of having pure, unadulterated information and knowledge. In a variation of another game, "the one with the

# Tell Us Your Story!

We're working on a major article about real people who have been rescued from religion by God's amazing grace—and we'd like for you to be in it! If you were lost and God found you—we want to hear about your journey from legalism to liberty!

- Tell about the spiritually unhealthy church or toxic religious experience from which God rescued you.
- What kind of religious rules and regulations were imposed on you—how were they enforced?
- Describe the criticism and condemnation you experienced, if any.
- If you left your church or changed churches, tell us about your departure. Did family and friends give you help—or were they more of a hindrance?
- What about your current spiritual address? Do you attend a brick and mortar church—do you attend *CWR*, perhaps—or do you not attend any church at all?
- Given everything you have experienced so far, describe your spiritual journey. Do you still find yourself occasionally bogged down in muddy swamps of religious legalism—or are you on the high road of God's grace?

We really want to hear from you! Send us a page or two, by mail at

**My Story**  
**Plain Truth Ministries**  
**Pasadena, CA 91129**

(We will protect the confidentiality of correspondence that we deem to be of a personal nature).

Or email us at [managing.editor@ptm.org](mailto:managing.editor@ptm.org) in the subject line, print: My Story



## commentary

most toys wins in the end”—this religious game says “the one with the most and best *truth* wins in the end.”

- Set the *right* example by being seen at the *right* times in the *right* places.

- The message, in summary? In order to be a *true, real and better Christian*, you really need to join *my* church. Translation: You need to “do it” (that is, do religious stuff) *my* way—or the highway.

If you were asked to coach a group of Christians the way Vince Lombardi coached his football teams, where would you start? How would you begin your “*This is a football*” lecture to Christians?

I think “*This is Jesus*” is the place

to begin. My “*This is Jesus*” discussion includes basic issues like God’s love and our relationship with him based on and in his grace.

The core of “*This is Jesus*” is all about the transformed life that the risen Lord lives in those who completely trust in and surrender to him. “*This is Jesus*” includes the significance of the cross of Christ and his resurrection and walking by faith, not by sight. “*This is Jesus*” is all about the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives.

You can’t play football without a football. You can’t be a Christian without Jesus. You can get dressed up in a football or a religious uniform. You can do what you’ve been told is the *right* stuff at the

*right* time in the *right* place—but if you don’t have a football, then you’re not playing football.

Same principles apply to Christianity. The legendary Christian “coach” named Paul said that without Jesus, all the religious stuff in the world is “dung” (Philippians 3:8, Authorized King James Version). Paul knew what religious legalism looked like and smelled like—and he also knew Jesus. If you don’t have Jesus, then all you’ve got is religion.

For my money, one of the best “*This is Jesus*” talks is recorded in Philippians 3:1-11. It’s basic stuff, and it needs to be reviewed regularly. □

—Greg Albrecht