



May 2017

Dear Friend and Partner of CWR/PTM,

A friend asked me “Christianity WITHOUT the religion? Well, what’s the difference between Christianity and religion then?” Here’s a summary of my answer: ***Jesus is the difference between Christianity and religion.** Religion is focused on what humans are expected and required to perform, and the blessings and success religion promises as a result of their obedience. The cross of Christ is difficult for religion to explain because it seems more like a curse than it is a blessing.*

Jesus is the difference between Christianity and religion because Jesus came to reveal the fullness of the love of our Father. The limitless and unconditional love of God is revealed, more than anywhere else, on the cross of Christ. The more religious a faith or belief system is, the more it finds the cross difficult to fathom. The cross seems to be more like a failure, and it certainly speaks of suffering and pain more than it does blessings and success—the carrot Christ-less religion holds out to its followers.

You have probably already come to this conclusion, so forgive me for the simplicity of this grandiose declaration: Life For Christ-Followers Is Messy. So those who, in the name of God, promise a primrose lane (a day at the beach—“your best life now”), might want to think again. **Jesus never promised us an easy life!**

Now, of course, a messy, difficult life does not prove that we are following Christ, any more than winning the lottery and having someone peel grapes, fan us with peacock feathers and endlessly shovel chocolates into our overstuffed mouths prove our Christianity.

There are plenty of problems in all of our lives—whether we believe in Jesus or not—that we cause by our own silliness or stupidity. It doesn’t take much to make a mess out of life. But then, it’s not just what you and I have done or might do that can really screw up our lives.

Something can come out of nowhere and fill our lives with grief and suffering. Someone you don’t even know or some disease you can’t even pronounce can arrive unannounced and uninvited into your life and cause enormous heartache.

Brutal wars rage in parts of the Middle East and Africa, and desperate refugees continue to flee such war-torn areas in the hopes of finding refuge from...their fellow human beings. People around the world, including here in North America, seem to be filled with a sense of fear and dread.

If this world doesn’t break your heart, then you’re probably hiding your head in the sand or you can’t take your eyes off the television, cell phone and/or social media! **There is no question we all live, to one degree or another, in the valley of the shadow of death. Life is messy!**

Ironically, when people are in a huge mess, they often turn to organized religion for a solution—sadly, that’s often like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

Religion, one of the institutions thought of as a safe haven, is considered a place where people can be set straight, but Christ-less religion can truly mess up someone’s life as well!

Legalistic religious authorities (individuals, institutions or both!) convince hundreds of millions that the observance of a bunch of rules and laws will make God so happy he will be dancing around in heaven. That huge religious trap and deception essentially says to Jesus and to his cross, “We don’t need you. I can please Father God with my religion.” But the gospel says the idea that God is pleased with all of our trivial religious accomplishments is one huge steaming pile of “do-do” (upset with my graphic depiction? See Philippians 3:8).

When anyone is trapped and enslaved in a religious prison, the only thing they can think about is how they can work harder, do more and somehow get better so they can be delivered from the mess in which they find themselves.

Ironically, all the hard work and efforts of those who are trapped by legalistic religion do not make their lives better—the work and efforts of those in religious bondage often help to dig the rut they are in deeper and deeper, so all their efforts make their lives even more of a mess than they were before.

This performance-based trap of religion is incredibly self-centered—there’s no focus on what Jesus has done. All this religious “bull” is about being fixated with performance—it’s spiritual navel gazing. Slaves of religion obsessively and forever ask questions like: How am **I** doing? Am **I** doing enough? Am **I** praying hard enough? Am **I** giving enough? What more can **I** do to make God happy?

The only people who “get better” are the children of God who know that, in spite of their efforts, if their lives don’t seem to get any better God still loves them anyway. **Our relationship with God is not predicated upon *getting better* or *doing more* or *trying harder*.**

If you and I could clean up the mess of our lives then Jesus and his cross would become unnecessary and irrelevant—which is precisely why you don’t hear that much about Jesus in religious, legalistic confines. They don’t want you to be free—they want you enslaved to all their stuff so they can control you.

Life is messy and so are we. I *can’t* help you out of your mess, I *can’t* even solve my own messes, but I do know Someone who can. I can’t tell you what to do and how to do it (although 30-40 years ago I considered myself an expert in telling people how to clean up their lives) but I can point you to Someone who can.

You and I cannot extricate ourselves from the big fat mess of our lives. The gospel of Jesus Christ is unbelievably great news because it announces the Someone who can and will clean up all our messes.

The great comfort and incredible hope is that God’s grace is not limited to the good times—God’s grace shows up everywhere—it’s always with us. God doesn’t get embarrassed by the really silly, stupid, self-absorbed, self-centered, stubborn, sanctimonious, simple-minded and sinful (sorry, guess my keyboard got hung up on the “s” words) things we do and have done.

Resting and trusting in God’s love that graciously loves me in spite of my imperfections, the love that loves me no-matter-what, and the love that forgives the big fat mess I so often make out of life—all of that is what it means to be free in Christ.

The wonderful, almost-beyond-belief, too-good-to-be-true news of the gospel is that God will never, ever give up on you and me, no matter how big the mess, how smelly the situation might be and how embarrassing it all is—he will not give up.

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:12-14).

Years ago a rancher in Colorado received 9,734 renewal letters from *National Geographic*—each one informing him that his subscription was about to end. The renewal machinery addressing labels for envelopes blew some kind of a fuse, so that the rancher's address was printed on 9,734 letters instead of just one.

When the rancher took the ten-mile trip into town to retrieve mail from his post office box, the post office had several large bins of letters for him that would not fit into his box—9,734 renewal letters from *National Geographic*! The rancher sent in the money to renew his subscription, with a note that said, "I give up. Keep sending me the magazine."

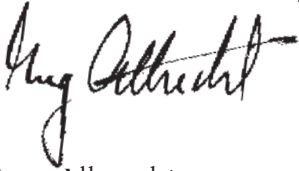
God will never stop sending you and me renewal letters—he has no intention of letting us drop our "subscription." God doesn't give up. God offers to clean up all the messes of your life and of mine, by his grace. In fact, in Christ, he already has.

If we accept his offer, then, even though physical circumstances may not change miraculously, God will miraculously transform us from being up to our necks in the raw sewage of life, and He will give us a seat, next to Jesus, in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

So, let's embrace Jesus and the amazing grace of God—close your eyes, take a deep breath and rest in Jesus. Cast all your cares and worries and burdens at the foot of his cross. Surrender and stop trying to make your life perfect—he doesn't expect that! Let him make you spiritually perfect, for you are one of his loved sons and daughters.

Thank you for your generous and consistent support of our ongoing work—together we are telling folks around this world exactly what you and I know and need to be reminded of—**God loves us all, no matter what!** Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Your brother in Christ,



Greg Albrecht

President, Plain Truth Ministries

P.S. We share this note of thanks from someone in Texas who is being blessed by the ongoing ministry of PTM/CWR—which you help to provide through your prayers and offerings.

KEEP IT UP! *Don't quit...it's all about Him and always has been. God wants us to have a part in what He is doing. Take care and thanks to everyone at CWR/PTM!—Texas*

CWR/PTM Prayer List—May 2017

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray that I'll be able to find work again. I was laid off from a job I had for six years. Some health issues have also come up, and I am 60 years of age.—New York

CWR/PTM gives me hope about myself and peace about the pain I'm dealing with from cancer. Thank you!—Delaware
I have some cancerous cells on my prostate and would appreciate your prayers.—Texas

Please pray for my father-in-law who was diagnosed with Poorly Differentiated Carcinomas Cancer and is getting treatment at a hospital. Thank you so much for your prayers.—India

Pray for both my elderly mother and brother, who are barely surviving on Social Security and food stamps.—Washington

Please pray for my eldest son who is having hip replacement surgery soon. And please pray for my second son who is on prescribed drugs that keep him high. He won't listen to me and gets mad when I try to talk to him.—Kentucky

Please pray for the healing of my hip, back, shoulders and dizzy spells.—Florida

CWR/PTM helps me to stay focused on God in a world full of distractions. Thank you!—Ohio

Please pray for my friend who has kidney failure and for another friend who has heart problems.—Idaho

Please pray for my wife's sister who is badly affected with bi-polar disorder.—Oregon

I just spent three days in the hospital and received a blood transfusion because my red cell count was low. Please pray that I can get my strength back.—Georgia

Thank you for your continued prayers about my wife's battle with cancer.—New York

Please continue to pray for my grandson, so he can have a drug free-life.—Alabama

Please pray for me as I am in terrible pain. I have shingles so bad that I lost my job and can't drive.—New Jersey

My husband had surgery for a brain tumor. Please pray for his recovery.—Texas

Thanks so much for encouraging us to "fear not." Life is hard and it's so easy to become afraid. We need the reminder not to look around but look to God for help in our time of need. I'm so thankful for PTM.—Alberta, Canada

I request prayer for my dad. He has pancreatic cancer and is having an operation in Durban, South Africa.—England

Please pray for my son to find a full-time job—he has tried and tried. Also pray for my other son to get his own place to live. We are having to help both of them financially.—North Carolina

Please pray for my husband's complete recovery from a stroke and restoration of his hearing.—South Dakota

Please pray for me as I am suffering from heart fibrillation and insomnia.—New York

I need to have my right hip operated on. Please pray that everything goes well.—Washington

There are so many who are hurting. I pray that God will heal them and help them find comfort through Jesus.—Illinois

Dear God: We bring you many requests and needs. You know each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for your love and grace, we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—Amen.