

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Enslaved by Religion...

Or Free in Christ?

By Greg Albrecht

Change isn't easy...changing the way you live means changing what you believe about life. That's hard... when we make our own misery, we sometimes cling to it even when we want to change because the misery is something we know. The misery is comfortable.—Dean Koontz, author

most of us don't like change. I don't. I am sick and tired of being told every two or three years that my electronic devices are now obsolete. I have no desire to camp out and wait in line for the latest, greatest Smart-phone. I resent being told that I need to purchase, install and download new

upgrades/software. Why can't they make something that lasts until I die—and then change it?

Change IS difficult for us—but it is one of the core elements of human life. Change happens—more quickly and more often than we like—but it happens.

When it comes to following Jesus, the “same old, same old” is not on the agenda. The grace of God blows like the wind (John 3:8)—God the Holy Spirit empowers us to follow Jesus. As we follow Jesus, the grace of God will take us into uncharted territory, away from the well-worn paths of that “old time religion.”

“Old time religion” masquerading as Christianity has a shameful

history of warfare and hatred. The entrenched religious bureaucracy of Christ-less religion has supported slavery and opposed civil rights, even in the name of Jesus.

Christendom at large has often turned a blind eye and deaf ear to the poor and all those in desperate need of help. Christendom at large has historically ignored the abuse of women and marginalized the needs of children.

Jesus proclaimed that his teaching would be like new wine (Matthew 9:17)—the gospel of Jesus Christ is dynamic and bursts traditional religious wineskins. While life in Christ is filled with adventure and new challenges, Christ-less religion is

adverse to change. Christ-less religion is not going to change what it perceives as a winning game of enslaving people and holding them captive to its laws and superstitions.

Are you comfortable with the misery you experience from religious traditions and customs? Then you will be stuck in the mud of old-time religion. Do you want new life and a breath of fresh air? Seek after the dynamic new wine of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ-less religion vigorously defends its lifeless, dying beliefs and practices because it is the great beneficiary of its oppressive rules and authoritarian agenda.

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Fear of Change

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.—Galatians 3:23-25

Before **new, vital and dynamic** faith arrived, we were held prisoners by the law of religious expectations and quotas. The law was put in charge so that we might be led to Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Jesus came and set us free. When we accept, embrace, believe and trust in Jesus we are free (Galatians 5:1). By the grace of God we are free from any system of rules or superstitious religious teachings that might hold us in bondage.

Love replaces law.

Love is a living relationship—that's why Paul writes about our adoption and transformation from slaves to full heirs of all that belongs to Father God.

Jesus came to offer a complete transformation, a total healing from all relationships solely based on law—to a relationship of love and grace. Jesus offers **new, vital and dynamic** faith rather than the oppression of religious bondage.

Jesus did not come to introduce a new religion to this world. The world has always had more than enough religions that enslave and oppress. Jesus came to bring a new way of knowing and relating to God—a **new, vital and dynamic faith** by grace through faith, in and through the new life of Christ that he offers to all humankind.

When we accept the invitation Jesus gives us to follow him and trust him we are transformed from trying to please and appease God with laws, procedures, rituals and ceremonies. By the grace of God we are spiritually reborn into a relationship of love and grace.

Why do people reject God's grace and remain enslaved to oppressive



By his grace our faith is new, vital and dynamic, rather than a cold, impersonal standard of measurement that deceives us about the nature of our relationship with God..

Christ-less religion? Because slaves are comforted when they can see and feel and touch all of the standards expected of them—religion is all about the externals.

When we are free in Christ, we trust in God's grace and we walk by a **new, vital and dynamic faith**. Because truly trusting God and living by his grace is so difficult, many choose, like the Israelites in the wilderness, to return to slavery. They reasoned that as bad as Egypt was at least there they could calculate and see where their next meal was coming from.

A Living Relationship—Not a Lifeless, Extinct Measuring Stick

Religion: *the traditional and widely embraced but fatally flawed notion that our performance of the right rules and rituals will gain us a higher standing with God than we would have otherwise enjoyed.* Religion insists that our relationship with God is **up to us**.

The Gospel: *God loves us on the basis of his grace. Our relationship with God is initiated and maintained on the strength of his love—not our deeds, creeds, efforts or behaviors.*

God's love is in spite of love, not because of love. Authentic Christianity teaches that our relationship with God is **all about him**.

God's love and grace are alive. By his grace our faith is **new, vital and dynamic**, rather than a cold, impersonal standard of measurement that deceives us about the nature of our relationship with God—and whether he is pleased with us or angry with us.

Of course, those who know no other way of life than the prison of law are outraged at Jesus. That's why people who were slaves of religion crucified him. They were outraged at his teaching of God's grace—Paul says those laws were not only inconsequential, but they were/are a curse (Galatians 3:13).

Christ-less religion believes it can (indeed it believes it "must") be disdainful of all who differ with it, condemning them as "outsiders" and "unbelievers" and "unsaved."

People are content to live under some rule of religious law because it offers them the illusion of security. There are many different measuring sticks and standards of law that

promise, like a mirage in the desert, a mystical and mythical promise *in the sweet by and by*. There are thousands of varieties of religious law, but they are all based on one common denominator—you must obey religious law or God will roast you for all eternity in hell fire.

People today who are religiously brainwashed, who are slaves of legalistic religion, are scandalized by the idea that it is possible to know God and relate to him on the basis of his love and grace rather than by law. What standard, they ask, will we be held to if we don't have laws to tell us what to do, when to do it, how often to do it and how much of it to do?

What is the standard that God uses to measure Christ-followers who have embraced the new covenant? God is pleased with us on the basis of his grace—he does not evaluate us or judge us or condemn us on the basis of laws—we stand before God because of Jesus.

New Wine Into New Wineskins

The word “law” is often used in the New Testament to speak of the old order of things under the old covenant, as contrasted with the new covenant, given to us by Jesus.

The new covenant is not based on the Ten Commandments but rather the new commandments, which are: Love God and love your neighbor. The new covenant is new, vital and dynamic faith.

The new covenant is new wine, because it promises that Jesus will live in us and that by his power and by his love we will be enabled and empowered to do what we can never do of and by ourselves.

The old covenant is: “You must do it or else.”

The new covenant is: “If you accept God's grace, then Jesus will do, as he lives within you, what you can never do.”

That's why Martin Luther boldly proclaimed, “Christianity is not a new law!” Sadly, much if not most of Christendom today, believes and practices legalistic religion.

Many people who think they are practicing Christianity are just practicing another form or permutation of religion—another way of attempting to please and appease God on the basis of human performance.

It's so much easier not to change—it's so much easier to reject Jesus and live by religious rules and regulations. It's so much easier to live by physical, religious standards and guidelines and measuring sticks that tell us exactly how well we are doing, or not.

Embracing Grace and Trusting Jesus = Freedom in Christ

When we fully embrace Jesus, we embrace freedom in Christ. But it's hard to live free, by God's grace. It's so much easier to slave in the fields of religion and its taskmasters.

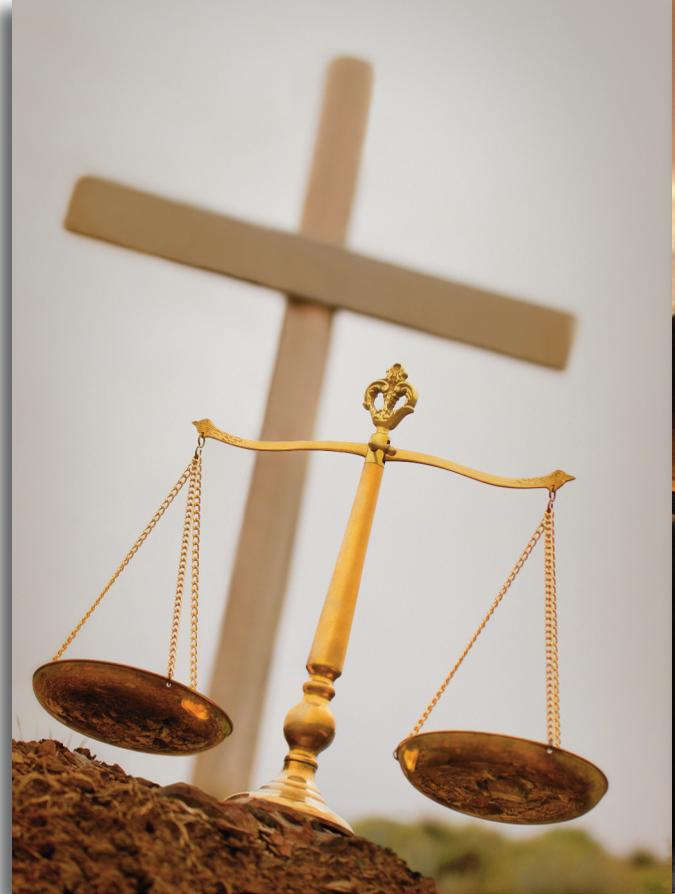
It's so much easier if your pastor, priest or congregation tells you that you are either right or wrong—because if you “just trust God” how will you have any measuring sticks, standards or calculations?

It's much easier to obey a law we can touch, smell, feel and taste than trust in God's unseen grace.

But the birth of Jesus radically proclaims a new way—the way of grace. Living by God's grace means living in and through Christ, living with our family and friends with forgiveness and grace.

Living by God's grace is a frightening way to live because God's grace means living free—being free in Christ means that we live with and by Jesus. He is our Lord. Jesus alone—not Jesus plus something. Only Jesus.

The problem with living in and with Jesus is that Jesus seems to always do things in unexpected ways—at least by our human standards.



Living by God's grace and being a Christ-follower means living free in Christ, not bound by laws, but trusting in God's love and grace, energized and empowered by our living Lord.

Like loving you and me no matter what. Wow! That's tough to believe, isn't it?

Like showing up as God in the flesh, as a baby, in a barnyard in Bethlehem.

Living by God's grace and being a Christ-follower means living free in Christ, not bound by laws, but trusting in God's love and grace, energized and empowered by our living Lord Jesus Christ.

What will it be for you?

- Moses or Jesus?
- Law or God's grace and love?
- Attempting to earn God's favor

by your religious performance, or accepting and trusting in Jesus, who did and does for us what we can never do ourselves?

• The oppression and bondage of Christ-less religion, or **new, vital and dynamic faith** in Christ? □