



God is love—wild and free and without limits. God lavishes his love and grace on you and me because of who he is, not because of anything you or I can ever do or offer him.

If you want a bargain, then you want Christ-less, performance-based religion.

Bargaining is what religion is all about. Religion is about making a bargain with God—you know the drill—we try to haggle and negotiate with God, and our prayer goes something like this:

“OK God, I will pray more, I will pay more, I will try harder, and I will do better. I will stop doing bad things.”

“Then, if and when I do, here’s your end of the deal God. If I do all this stuff for you, then I don’t expect to win the lottery, but in return for what I do for you, here’s the deal: you should make sure I don’t have any serious health problems, no tragic accidents to me or my family, no huge family dramas and no kids in trouble with the law.”

Christ-less religion teaches that the purpose of prayer is to change God’s mind and to get him to see it our way—to make a deal.

But one of the primary purposes of prayer is to change us. God doesn’t need to change.

God doesn’t do bargains. God doesn’t do religion!

Our relationship with God is all about God. Our relationship with God is offered to us on the basis of God’s goodness, not in any manner, shape or form on our goodness.

Our relationship with God is *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone*. And that is such a deal! □

Healing

Words age. Just like people, as words get older, they also change. Just like some of us, word meanings begin to sag, develop new wrinkles and can lose touch with our rapidly shifting culture. Old definitions become tired and crusty in their twilight years. If we don’t pay attention, these aging words deteriorate.

Words, like people, that were once full of life, meaning and faith may atrophy and become crotchety and religious—best consigned to verbal retirement.

Biblical terms such as *sin, repentance* and *justification* have not aged well.

Religion imbued these storied terms with finger-wagging overtones until they became grumpy and legalistic. They wearied ears and hearts to the cringing point. It’s tempting to put them out to pasture for good.

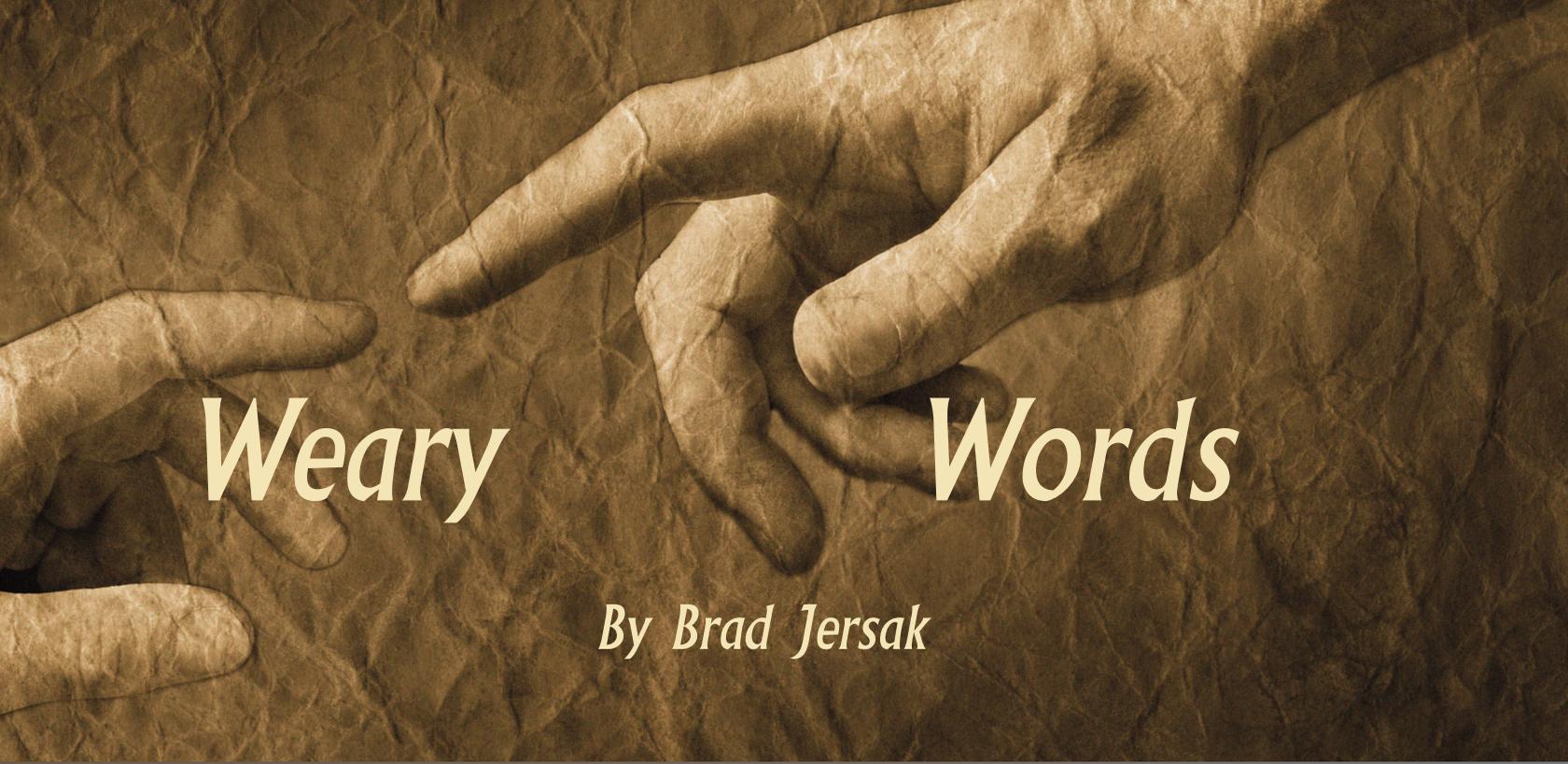
This need not be. Like my many silver-haired friends, the ancient words used by Christ and his apostles contain libraries of beautiful wisdom. If we’re willing to listen and give them due care, we may even heal these weary words for fresh use.

“Sin”—Missing What Mark?

We’re often told “sin” refers to “missing the mark” but then left to assume the bullseye is moralistic perfection. Rather, the goal or *telos* of human design and destiny is none other than a love union with the Trinity, with each other and with our world.

To sin (every kind of sin) is to misuse our God-given freedom and energies for selfishness. Sin is turning away from self-giving, other-welcoming love.

Inevitably, our forays into self-centeredness are



Weary Words

By Brad Jersak

also self-destructive—a turn from love and life into a wasting disease that ultimately proves fatal apart from the help of a Great Physician.

How did Christ deal with the destructive effects of sin? One answer is that God-in-Christ reconciled us to himself by (1) *forgiving* our sin and (2) *healing* us of sin.

First, the Trinity of Love *forgave* or *pardoned* the guilt incurred by sin, expunging our record of

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wrongs. Sin that is forgiven need not be punished. Punishment is the opposite of forgiveness.

On the Cross, God in Christ forgave our sin and reconciled us to himself.

That was a “done deal”—the moment Christ prayed “Father, forgive them!” and proclaimed, “It is finished!”

Second, Christ *heals* us of the sickness of sin itself (not just guilt for sin). Sin is our selfish turn from love, defacing the image of God in

us and defiling our actions. But God “heals us of sin” with an empowering grace that frees us from slavery to self-will.

Christ frees us to surrender to love and to bear the fruit of his Spirit. This is the *righteousness* of love expressed in real life.

This understanding of “sin” rehabilitates other tired words such as “repentance,” “justification” and “reconciliation.”

- *Repentance* is not self-loathing. It is simply turning back to love in orientation and practice.

- *Justification* is not a legal verdict. It is the restored state of our love union with God.

- *Reconciliation* is not changing God’s resentful mind. It is the restoration of the love we had previously abandoned.

How Christ Accomplished This

This is why it is so vital that we proclaim Christ as God Incarnate—

one Person, both fully God and fully human.

As God, Christ directed his all-inclusive, expansive love toward rebellious humanity. Jesus showed us God’s love.

As the true human, Christ turned humanity back to the love of God in the vicarious, God-welcoming *metanoia* (change of mind and way of life) of surrender—from his baptism, through Gethsemane and ultimately on the Cross.

By turning and returning humanity toward divine Love, Christ reunited Creator and creation. He walked our prodigal hearts back into his Father’s house. He restores unselfish love in our deepest being and in our daily lives.

In this one God-man, all humanity (including you and me) and all divinity (Father, Son and Spirit) are united in love.

That’s good news for weary words and weary people—a beautiful gospel I’ll never tire of hearing or telling. □

Brad Jersak is the author of A More Christlike God and its forthcoming sequel, A More Christlike Way. See page 6 for more details.