

Out of the Cult And Into Grace

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

James 1:26

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind

Colossians 2:18

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Preface

I believe that the Holy Bible is a rulebook. It is a handbook that we can use through life to lead us and guide us into all Truth.

But I do not believe that it is the same rulebook that you will find in religion today. Human tradition has created religion, and that religion is far distant from the Church of the Living God. So many today have long forgotten the Author.

I use the word “religion,” because there is a vast difference between “religion” and Christianity. The one of the very first things that Christ did when he came was point out this difference to the “holy” Pharisees.

God gave us His Word. It is a gift. One that was protected by God, all down through time, through the hands of many scribes and translators, separated through misguided translations but brought back together so that you and I can learn more about Him. God WANTS us to have His Word, because He IS the Word.

John 1:1 says that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

That same Word that was the creator of the heavens and the earth is the same Word that led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. That same Word that became flesh and was crucified for our sins is the same Word that

promised to return for His Children. It's the same Word that will one day return to sit on the Throne as our King.

But many times, we look for ways to improve what we read in that Book. Religion, through tradition, has taken a basic set of rules and principles that God gave us as our guide, and changed them into something else entirely. What they do not realize is that by doing so, they are greatly hurting themselves without any reward.

When Adam and Eve walked in the Garden, they had one simple rule. Many have argued about what this rule was, trying to make the "tree" into some sort of sexual innuendo, but the rule was quite simple. God simply told Adam and Eve, "Here is something I do not want you to do. Do not do it."

And it was for their own good.

Eve was deceived into breaking this rule. Adam knowingly broke this rule. Satan stood there in the Garden rejoicing, because he had tricked Eve into persuading Adam to disobey God. This is where our trouble begins.

You see, before this, they knew no sin. They lived fully under Grace. Adam and Eve walked through the garden breaking the "rules" of religion today. They were naked. But they did not know what "naked" was.

When they both were given knowledge of good and evil, this presented a big problem. Satan was right there, tempting them just as he did before with Eve. But now, rather than living fully under Grace, they would have knowledge and understanding of right and wrong. They had discernment.

This knowledge made them realize that they were naked. I'm sure it must have felt strange to them, never having worried about showing their flesh before! There were only two of them – was it wrong to look at each other's flesh?

They had knowledge of good and evil, but they did not know how to apply this knowledge. So rather than find out what God wanted them to do, they made a rule: "Let's cover ourselves with these leaves!"

Notice that this is the very first rule ever made by man and not God. And notice that this rule, though seemingly correct, did not please God. God does not care about man's rules, He only cares about one thing: What He desires for His people. He had given them one simple rule, they broke it, and now the entire race was destined to fall.

Though it is very difficult to understand after years of tradition, God's rules are there to help us. They are not there to punish us. They are not there to set meaningless boundaries. They are not intended to impose guidelines that do not

have any bearing on our daily lives. God gives us His rules to make our lives better.

Like so many traditions we follow, Cain followed a rule of God – but he twisted it into something else. After learning about good and evil, a sacrifice was required. That sacrifice was for their good; the blood of the animal was atonement for sin.

Having knowledge of good and evil is a heavy weight. For the “good,” it is no problem, but for the “evil,” there comes guilt. And with guilt comes inward pain and internal suffering. While it may seem silly to us in today’s world, mankind needed a way to lift that pain and suffering from their sin. God decided to let them exchange it for the blood of a lamb, lifting their weights from off of their shoulders.

But over time, those weights became heavier and heavier. God loved mankind, but mankind did not love him. God was very faithful to His children, sparing even the smallest number of pure hearts.

While God was ready to cleanse the world of mankind and start over, Noah found favor in God’s sight, having the love and kindness that God wants us to have.

The knowledge of good and evil is a two-sided coin. While the entire world chose the evil side, Noah chose good. Noah found Grace, that same Grace that was in the Garden in the very

beginning, in the eyes of the Lord. Because of this Grace, Noah's family was spared. God is so faithful that the entire world may be stripped away from you, but if you are standing in His Grace, you will find His hand of protection covering you from all danger.

The problem is that even after God spared Noah and his small family, the fact still remained: They had knowledge of good and evil. Good brings righteousness, but the evil of curiosity and sinful desire brings destruction.

Mankind knew what was right. It knew what was wrong. But it still did not fully understand why the desire to sin continually caused them to fall.

Like so many today, they felt like the blood of the sacrifice was not enough. They wanted to take things into their own hands. Man desires to be more like God, and therefore has a strong desire to save himself.

And they were no longer under Grace, as Adam and Eve were in the beginning. Man was born into sin, given the choice between right and wrong, and continually bound by the weight of sin. The blood was the only way to atone for that sin, and still they wanted to find a better way!

They wanted rules.

Many pastors today won't tell you this, but when Moses returned from the mountain with the Law,

there were only ten rules. They were God's rules, and they were intended for the good of the people.

They were broad in scope. God wanted the people to interpret these rules for themselves – not imposed by authoritative pastors. And Jesus tells us that all ten of these rules are summed up into two simple rules:

Love the Lord thy God with all of your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

It's very simple. You don't need scribes and Pharisees pouring over the scripture, trying to determine how strictly or loosely we enforce those rules. We don't need interpreters to glean understanding through ancient text and try to see if a period or comma is possibly misplaced, leading to a completely different rule. We don't need ancient archaeology to study the ancient culture and tell us how those words apply to Paul's day, or scholars to study ancient dialects to tell us how the grammatical rules apply.

You can make these choices for yourselves! That is the way that God wants it to be!

The children of Israel were not satisfied with the Ten Commandments. They were ten simple rules, all bound in Love, and open for their own interpretation.

If you love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, you will not put any other gods before Him. You will not make a graven image of another god to bow down and serve it. You will not take His name in vain. He is your GOD.

If you love your neighbor, you will not make him work until he is bone-weary. You will not make YOURSELF work until you are bone-weary. You will take a day and rest from your labor.

You will love your mother and your father. You will respect them if you love them as you love yourself. You will not dishonor them.

You will not murder your brother if you love him. He is your brother.

You will not sleep with another woman if you love your wife. She is your wife.

You won't steal, or lie. You would not want someone doing this to you.

If you love your neighbor, you won't make him feel guilty over the blessings God has given him. You will not covet his possessions – they are his.

After God explained these Ten Commandments to Moses, the Covenant was confirmed. Not the Covenant that would later be known as the Old Covenant or the Mosaic Law, but the very first covenant between God and man that was given to Moses. Exodus 24 describes Moses confirming the Covenant with blood.

But when Moses returned up the Mountain to receive the stone tables, the people began forming religion. The men and women melted their earrings and other jewelry, and broke the first two Commandments before Moses even descended from the Mountain! They made a graven image and started bowing down to it! Immediately after agreeing to the Covenant of God, they breached it!

The Mosaic Law was not the Ten Commandments written on stone and carried by Moses. When Moses descended and saw the evil in the people, he smashed those stones into a thousand pieces! They had broken the Law before the Law was even presented to them!

Exodus 34, along with the entire rest of the Old Testament, is a good example for us. Sometimes when I read the Old Testament, I am amazed that God would use an entire generation of people as an example for us today. It is awe-inspiring that God loves us SO much that He will write his Love Letter over centuries and centuries of time, giving us such a huge example of why we need Love instead of religion.

The Children of Israel had broken the first Covenant that God gave Moses. So God gave them another. And this one had exactly what they wanted: rule after rule after rule. So many rules that it filled an entire two more books!

Then, as an example of why we need God instead of religion, the entire race of Jews spent the next several hundred years breaking those rules!

They were very harsh rules, far from the simple Law of Love that was in the first covenant. Children were stoned for disobeying. If you touched the wrong animal, you were abandoned and left in the wilderness. If your genitals were injured, you could not enter the congregation.

The original rules were simple. They were easy to follow. Love God. Love your brothers and sisters. Live peacefully, and you will be blessed.

Jesus tried to explain this to the Scribes and Pharisees, but they were so bound by religion that they had forgotten about Love. They had forgotten the reason for the Law.

While they stood pointing fingers at those who broke the rules of their religion, Jesus showed them how they were breaking the original Ten Commandments – the very reason for those rules.

In Matthew 5, Jesus gave them example after example of how the people were breaking the Law of Love. If you are angry, you are guilty of murder. If you looked at a woman with a lustful eye, you were committing adultery in your heart.

But like today, the Pharisees could not understand what Christ was telling them. They listened to his words, and searched their minds

for the rules associated with these examples, and found none. There was no rule against being angry. There was no rule against lusting after a woman.

They are examples of how we can justify ourselves by our “rules,” while still being filled with evil of the heart.

Religion today will amplify these statements, gleaning new rules from the letters of text. Like the Pharisees, they are focused on the rules more than they are focused on the reason those rules were given. Sometimes, to the point of establishing rules that cause us to break the Law of Love. They think that Christ was giving us more “rules,” simply because they refuse to read that chapter in context of the chapters before and after.

Since the Pentecostal movement began in the United States, many new rules were added to religion. Some rules were nothing more than custom, older custom, made by men who were unwilling to allow change. Other rules were misinterpretations that the rest of the world was already starting to realize to be false.

We came into this world naked, without anything to show. We die in much the same way, after our clothing rots from our decayed bodies. God does not care about the things of the flesh, the things that we value and respect. God does not care how we look, the outward appearance that is so bound by culture and custom.

Men in the Bible wore robes, what we would call dresses. Women wore breeches. Men “girded up their loins,” turning their robes into what we would call shorts. Togas, kilts, and more were customs for days gone by, and we do not find a single instance in scripture where the Lord told Moses, “Thou shalt not let thine men wear kilts and expose their nether regions.”

When God was describing to Moses the correct way to build an altar, He told Moses that he absolutely HATED the flesh. They were not to touch their tools to the stone. If man-made tools touched the stones of the altar, God considered that altar to be profane. And God considered those “dresses” that the men wore to be no more than nakedness. Exodus 20:22 says, “And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.”

But we have become so focused on these rules, that we have trained ourselves to think that our God has the same mind of a human. We think that the things we detest, God must also detest. We think that the things we love, God must also love. This is exactly BACKWARDS from the way it should be!

The Things that God detests, we should detest!
The things that God loves, we should also love!

God detests false prophets. Yet we have a large number of false prophets associated with the Pentecostal movement that are revered and

respected. God detests sorcery. Yet we have Christians today – in religion – who live their lives by the numbers, the Zodiac, the Horoscopes, and more. The very sorcery that men and women in the Bible were stoned for is completely overlooked by so many Christians today!

But while the Pentecostal movement ignored the things that broke the first two Commandments, they added several rules that had absolutely NOTHING to do with the rest of the Commandments.

Wearing a long dress does not make you love your neighbor. Your neighbor will not love you because you wear a long dress – unless he is a little creepy and into that sort of thing.

But it will make you look down on others who do not enjoy your choice in wardrobe. You will fall into the sin of pride simply by the man-made rule that was based entirely upon custom. And not custom of other nations, based entirely upon custom in the United States during the late 1800's and early 1900's.

If you love your sister in Northern Ukraine, you won't be giving her dresses. It's too cold. You'll be giving her the thickest, warmest pair of pants that you can possibly find for her. She isn't from the United States. She doesn't care about the custom of the United States. She isn't concerned with the custom of women wearing breeches in the ancient world, how the men wore togas or

robes in ancient Corinth, or even what the Children of Israel wore as they journeyed to the Promised Land. All she cares about is surviving, and she won't be doing it by exposing her legs to the cold!

The length of your hair does not show love to your brother or sister. I recently saw a group of women shave their heads for a poor little girl who was suffering with cancer. She was crying because her hair was falling out due to the radiation, and was ashamed of how she looked.

Women banded together to show their support, and shaved their heads to show her that you CAN shave your head and still be beautiful. They showed more of the Love of Christ than an entire church of women with hair to their bottoms that speak evil of those "other women" who cut their hair.

The problem is that when you start adding man-made-rules, those rules that have absolutely nothing to do with the Love of God or the Love of your fellow man, there is really no place to stop. As rules are added, new rules must be added to support those rules. It becomes a never-ending cycle, each rule placing a weight upon the shoulders of the person trapped into "religion."

Some have rules on facial hair. Some have rules on musical instruments. Some have rules on how much toe can be exposed through the ends of your shoes. We laugh at some of these rules, but while laughing at our brothers and sisters

who have invented their own man-made rules, we are bound by our own.

At some point, now that these rules have gotten out of hand, we must ask ourselves: Which rule is greater?

The Bible DOES tell us to be modest. So is the law about not showing the other brothers your “sexy toes” greater than the law that permits the “sexy knees”? Is that law greater because it is more modest?

Until you realize that modesty has more to do with pride than with exposure of flesh, you will never understand these words of Jesus Christ:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

--Matthew 22

That Scary Word

When people hear the word “cult,” an immediate sense of fear runs through their veins – especially if it is referring to the group of people they have been associated with for most of their lives. Through the examples of dangerous men, the news broadcasts and documentaries we watch have spread awareness that there is real danger in this world lurking in dark corners by men who seem to be spiritual leaders.

The word “cult,” by definition is a system of religious devotion directed toward a particular figure. In the ancient world, there were cults devoted to the Greek and Roman gods and demigods, and the danger associated with that word was just as real. A better definition, having been proven through examples throughout history would be a relatively small group of people, having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister.

But this is not a “one-size-fits-all” description of a cult. In fact, there is no definition that can apply to every single type of religious group that have separated themselves from others, especially groups that claim to believe in Christianity.

Many times, the hidden danger is not a physical danger. More often than not, it is an emotional danger or a spiritual danger. Spiritual abuse is real, and it is very damaging. And spiritual abuse goes hand-in-hand with emotional abuse, because the follower becomes emotionally attached to their spiritual leader.

That attachment, emotionally bonded to the spiritual leader, is where the danger lies. Those in Christian circles who separate themselves from their Christian brothers and sisters and attach themselves emotionally to a spiritual leader have become followers. Once the leader becomes emotionally attached to his followers and severs his relationship with other Christians, he has just severed himself from the body of Christ and become a cult leader.

At that point, the religion that has you emotionally bound becomes a cult. And though there may not be any real danger at first, these cults are considered to be dangerous because they can go any direction with a group of followers who will stand with the cult even to their deaths.

The first part of Paul's letter to Corinth in 1 Corinthians describes the very same thing we find today. Even in the ancient world, men were lifting themselves into spiritual authority, and poor souls were held captive by their teaching.

These men were causing divisions in the Church, and were breaking the bonds of Christianity itself. These separatists were creating jealousy towards one another, proclaiming that one group had more power or more Spirit than another.

Paul explained to them that we are all just planting seed, and God does the watering. No

man is greater than another, and the Holy Spirit is our Spiritual Guide – not man.

“For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.”

1 Corinthians 3:3-9

If there is any doubt as to whether or not your religion has become a cult, there are ten signs to look for. If your church is showing any of these signs, then your church may be unhealthy. If your church is showing many of these signs, then you may be trapped in the clutches of a cult.

These ten signs are based on Steven Hassan's book “Combatting Cult Mind Control,” paraphrased for simplicity:

10. Individuality is discouraged.

To be considered righteous, you must conform to the ideologies of the religious group. Many times, there are rules that are required.

9. New Identity

The “old man” is wiped away, and the “new man” takes his place. As we will describe later in this book, others around you will notice a change, and many times, this change is not for the better.

8. Hidden Information

Cults are excellent at hiding information. Pastors will preach sermons, only telling you part of the story. Mistakes are hidden and swept under the rug.

7. We Have The Hidden Manna

A cult will tell you that the doctrine of the religious group has “all the answers.” It’s more “up to date” than even the newspapers. There is nothing that cannot be answered by simply listening to the spiritual leader.

6. Time consuming.

Your normal lives become slowly replaced with cult activities, goals, assignments, and anything to prevent you from focusing on the “things of this world.”

5. “Loaded Language.”

Members of the cult feel special, because they have passages of scripture, key phrases, and other language that makes them feel separate from the outside world. Newcomers struggle with this, because they must “study harder” in order to understand. Many times “understanding” simply means, “believing.”

4. Ignore criticism.

Members are systematically trained to ignore any and all criticism. Critical words are explained away in advance as "the lies Satan puts in people's minds"

3. Ex-communication.

Members are told to avoid contact with ex-members, those who could provide the most information are ones to be especially shunned.

2. Don't question.

Cult members are not allowed to question the leaders or the doctrine. Problems or conflicts are typically redirected to the questioner, many times with attacks on character.

1. Join, but don't leave.

Prospective members of the cult, even those furthest from the standards enforced by the cult leaders, are welcome. They are seen as “God’s children,” and God loves them.

But those same people, after joining the cult and having left, are “God’s enemies.” No longer are they the same souls Christ loves and wants to save, they are scorned and destined for hell and eternal separation.

If your religious group shows any of these symptoms, then you will quickly find yourself on an emotional roller coaster as you try to come out of the cult and into the Grace of Jesus Christ. It’s painful. It hurts, both emotionally and physically.

But God will never give you more than you can endure, and there is not a pathway you can choose that God cannot reach down his hand to help you return.

The Bible says that your faith can move mountains, and to anyone who has experienced leaving a cult to find Christ, they will quickly tell you that their cult *was* their mountain.

Boundaries

All of the people I have spoken with that have now made their exodus from a cult seem to have one thing in common: The most difficult time in their lives was when they decided to take that first step through the invisible boundaries of their religion.

When people today hear the word “cult,” they associate it with the extreme cults. They associate this word with religious compounds held by madmen, such as David Koresh of the Branch Davidians or the city of Jonestown where evangelist and “divine healer” Jim Jones lead his entire congregations to their death through mass suicide.

What they do not realize is that the visible boundaries of the cult extremists were not always so well defined. There isn't a person in this world who would walk up to a run-down, old building that looks like it once held a great battle between mafia warlords, one that is guarded by men with assault rifles, and say, “Hey! This looks like the religion for me! I think I can find God in there!”

The Apostle Paul spoke of the men that would come to deceive. All through the New Testament, the Apostles speak of the false prophets that would rise, and the false teachers that would mislead. These wolves in sheep's clothing also have one thing in common: their ambition is to sever the Body of Christ.

The entire book of Jude is a warning to the Church. Get ready. It's coming. These guys will sound sincere, they will seem religious, and inside they are nothing but filthy, dirty, scoundrels!

There is nothing wrong with standing firmly in your denomination of faith. You wouldn't be warming that pew if you thought you were in the wrong place – you'd quickly make an exit for the door. There are many different understandings of Scripture, and until the Lord returns to take us home, there is absolutely no way for us to have all of the answers until all things hidden are made known.

There is a correct and just way to live your lives, and that is according to what we read in the Bible. As Christians, we are to walk in the examples given by Christ, and are to have the love, kindness, gentleness, longsuffering, and other gifts of the Spirit.

Imagine if Jesus, our example, would have separated Himself from everyone who did not see and understand the scriptures the same way that He did. Or the Apostle Paul, who travelled into cities with pagan temples devoted to Greek and Roman gods or demigods. If the early Church had separated itself, there would not have been a Church today.

The Children of Israel were God's chosen. Under Mosaic Law, and instructed by God, they were absolutely told to separate themselves. And

while they broke this rule time and again, ultimately they were a different race of people, one that bore the Christ child. God's plan and purpose was to give His Gift to the world, His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of everyone who believes in His name.

There is no other pathway that leads to salvation. The group of people that you sit with listening to a sermon every Sunday is just that: a group of people. The denomination of faith that you chose – even if it is one of these “non-denominational denominations” – is just that. It is a denomination of faith. It is a group of people who are together because they hold a common set of values.

New denominations that spring up are usually proclaiming “all denominations are welcome, come join us!”

But after their number has grown, and after tradition has set in, they start to form boundaries. The common theology that brought them together becomes doctrine, and that doctrine becomes law. Any who do not conform to that law should join some other group of people, because they can't see eye-to-eye.

What happens next is in the hand of God. All throughout history, great men like Martin Luther began reformations that gave the Church tremendous spiritual growth. Today, all denominations of faith are better because of the stand that Luther took against the authoritative

structure of the church. Luther broke down boundaries that once corralled the people into a very damaging way of life, and because of his example, men are not given the same level of power as before.

Luther's reformation opened the door to fellowshipping around the Word of God with no boundaries. Knowledge and understanding of the scripture has greatly increased because great men reasoned out the Scriptures together instead of bowed down to one man's understanding of the text. Many things that we now believe were not common beliefs in the early Church.

But some groups of people rise who fall into the same error that made Luther take his stand. Because one seems to be a teacher, or one has a spiritual gift, or simply because one already has power, some religious groups will raise one man into authority over their group of people.

If we were still under Mosaic Law, and following the Old Testament leaders as our example, this would be correct. The Hebrews 1:1 says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets"

The problem is that when cults rise with authoritative figures, this verse is often quoted without focusing on the second verse in that chapter. Nor do they focus on the "Long ago" part – it doesn't fit their agenda.

When we read the entire chapter in context, we find that New Covenant Grace is much different than Old Covenant Law. The Children of Israel were called to be separatists, but the New Testament Church is called to spread the Gospel to all nations.

There is no reason for us to be separatists; we are not producing the Christ child!

Reading the next few verses in Hebrews 1, we find that we have a new Leader. That Leader is not a man:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” -- Hebrews 1:1-4

Separation can only come through the doctrines of men. God does not want us to sever ourselves from others who believe in His Name.

The best example in scripture is given in 1 Corinthians 12:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more

presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

-- 1 Corinthians 12

Rather than taking the example of Christ and making new “shepherds,” these separatist cults would rather make new sheep. And they like to keep those sheep well sheared.

Before physical boundaries are visible, cult leaders will build invisible barriers against all other Christian groups that are not in full agreement with their own denomination of faith. Sometimes those barriers are established before the denomination itself is established.

These invisible boundaries are intended to keep the sheep on the inside, which greatly hinders the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It doesn't take very long before salvation is no longer preached to those outside of the barriers. Once the boundaries are established, and those on the inside are considered to be “saved,” “salvation” is preached only to the “saved.”

And more often than not, that “salvation” has very little to do with Jesus Christ. Instead, it has

more to do with those boundaries that have been established.

This creates an “us verses them” mentality. Those on the inside are your dearest and closest friends. Those on the outside are lost and dying. You would love to reach out and help them. Your heart is bleeding for them. But they won’t accept your boundaries, and so they are doomed to hell.

Your fellow sheep then become closer to you than ever before. Doctrinal boundaries then become lined with emotional boundaries. As humans, we draw closer to those with common interests and ambitions.

But this is unhealthy for spiritual growth. If Martin Luther had never broken down these barriers, open discussion of the Bible would never have been permitted. We would all still be under the authority of the small group of men of the church instead of under the authority of Christ our Leader.

And it is unhealthy for relationships. Most cults will not admit to pre-arranged marriages, but at the same time, you won’t find too many people marrying outside of the cult. What once was a wide world of “fish in the sea” becomes a small number of “goldfish in the fish bowl.”

But the unhealthiest aspect by far has nothing to do with our human lives. Our flesh and bone mean absolutely nothing to God, it is the soul that He is concerned with. We are supposed to

be sheep, following the Great Shepherd. But as His sheep, we are supposed to be warriors for the Faith. We are not designed to be contained in a corral so that some vicious wolf can walk around cracking whips or devouring our flesh, we are designed for one purpose: To lead other souls to Christ.

The longer we remain under these boundaries the more our swords become dull. Our minds lose focus on the skills necessary to lead others to Christ. They aren't needed! Those that will make it are already in the corral!

This is the greatest power that Satan has in his grasp. Satan was defeated; he is no longer in power. He can no longer control us. After the resurrection of Christ, there is only ONE thing that Satan has the power to do: great signs and wonders that will deceive many.

His hands are tied! He can no longer fight! We hold a sword in our hands, the Bible, and we stand against an enemy whose hands are tied behind his back!

The only thing that Satan can do is to deceive the army of the Lord into making their weapons dull. He has no power to strengthen his own forces, and so he causes large groups of Christians to bundle themselves into corrals and stop fighting. He has no power to stop the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so he causes us to stop spreading it OURSELVES!

Like I said, the most difficult time in the lives of any who have fled a cult was trying to tear through those boundaries. Some faced religious boundaries, fearing certain death if they even questioned their faith. Others faced emotional boundaries, struggling to let go of the friends they once held dear within the invisible compound – because they knew that once they set foot into the sunlight, those left behind would soon forget their name.

Some even faced financial boundaries. Living under a highly modified version of the Old Testament tithing system, many men have made small fortunes at the expense of shearing their sheep. This money is often used to help those inside the walls of the invisible compound, seldom used outside the perimeter, and many grow dependent upon this financial aid.

To tear a hole through these boundaries was to tear a gaping hole into your own heart. No person in their right mind wants to leave friends and family behind. No person sets out with an ambition of ripping their own heart out from their chest and throwing it to the wolves!

But many who have been brave and paved the way before you will tell you this:

Their swords had grown dull. Their desire to learn the scriptures was almost non-existent. Their passion towards spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ was more of a part-time hobby that rarely got attention. Their eyes had grown dim

from the darkness inside the walls of the spiritual compound.

It hurt as they tore through the barriers. The sunlight brought intense pain into their eyes. The voice of millions of other Christians crying out for them to come to Christ was deafening. Their fingers cracked and bled from the digging through the scriptures as they breached the defensive walls.

But after their eyes adjusted to the light, they realized how much sweeter life could be walking through life hand-in-hand with Jesus. No longer were invisible walls separating them from other Christians. No longer did that smiling face in the restaurant look like “seed of the serpent,” and much greater was the reward for holding that door for the elderly couple or lending a hand to the poor.

Most that have learned about the Love of Christ have a burning desire to blow larger holes in those invisible boundaries of the religious compounds. Many have setup tunnels or “underground railroads” leading to freedom, helping as many friends or family as will reach out to grasp their outstretched hand.

They have found their purpose in life. They realize their calling. It isn't for fame or fortune that leads their soul astray; they have found true meaning in life by telling others that God loved them enough to send His only Son, Jesus Christ to die for their sin. Christ came and lived the

perfect life, suffered and died on the cross, was buried and rose again. When He rose, that sin stayed buried.

The boundaries were broken, over two thousand years ago!

Finding Comfort In Grace

The most difficult first step for any person as they leave the darkness of a cult and are blinded by the sunlight of new life in Christ is finding comfort in Grace. After studying the scriptures without the filter of man, it doesn't take long before coming to the realization that this word, "Grace," has an entirely different meaning in the Bible than they were accustomed to in the past.

To any new convert to Christ, this word, "Grace," is comforting. It is freedom. It is love. It is peace, joy, and hope. It is every good gift that Christ gave us by his suffering and bleeding on the cross, as he hung there crying, "Father forgive!"

But by nature, cult theology will rob you of God's greatest gift. That same Grace that sets a sinner free brings chains of bondage to the cult member. That same freedom in Christ that a new Christian experiences as they read their Bibles for the first time is a job and a chore for those who have been programmed to believe a *different* kind of grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 is my favorite passage of scripture, having been through this experience. This should be the foundation to everyone's faith, yet it has been covered with the graffiti of man's theology:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." – Ephesians 2:8-9

This word, “grace,” is translated from the Greek word “chariti,” the word very similar to our own English word “charity.” It is a Gift, because you are loved, and not given to you by anything that you can possibly do by yourself.

This gift won’t be given to you because you followed the rules; it has already been given to you. It won’t be given to you because you stayed within the invisible boundaries created by man-made religion; it has already been given to you.

Strong’s Concordance describes this word as “blessings,” which afford joy and pleasure. It uses examples, such as the love of a good master towards his servants, and of one finding favor in the eyes of the Giver.

In other words, we have found favor in God’s eyes, but not from ANYTHING that we do, simply because He loves us as a father loves his child.

One author explains this word “Grace” using the phrase “Unmerited Favor,” the summary of the entire definition of the translated word. Our favor in God’s eyes is unmerited – we did not do anything to deserve it, we can never repay it, and it is only because He loved us enough to send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins that we have this Grace.

To the new Christian, this is wonderful! This is the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ! Christ came to save THEM, and they did not do

ANYTHING to deserve it! Why anyone would not want to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ is beyond me, it is a free Gift! All you have to do is have faith in Jesus Christ!

But as converts to Christ from the chains of a cult, this isn't so easy. We had to "earn" this Grace. We had to follow man-made rules in order to even deserve it. And if we broke those rules, we were "taken out from under it." For some, even to question the rules or theology was to be taken from Grace.

We want to serve Christ. And we want to walk in His perfect will. We do not want to do anything that He does not want us to do.

For this reason, the first mistake every cult member will make as they struggle to find their new life in Christ is to try and determine which rules they SHOULD follow in order to deserve God's Grace.

Finding a church becomes difficult. I can remember reading through the belief system of many different churches once I realized that I had been born and raised in a cult. None of them sounded like Christian churches to me – they did not have the same rules I grew up with. I began accusing some groups of not having read their Bibles, because they didn't know the rules for earning God's grace!

That same pride that causes scorn towards other Christians will cling fiercely. Without even

realizing it, you return to the same sin that made you decide to leave the cult in the first place.

Remember the last half of that passage of scripture from Ephesians? *“Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Boasting is one of the many sins described in the New Testament. And this word “boasting” does not simply mean bragging through words spoken, we can also have boastful hearts. Boasting is the reflection of “pride,” which is also a sin described in the New Testament. Those same Christians that love the Lord Jesus Christ with all their hearts in those other churches are no different than us. They are no less deserving of God’s Grace. They have done nothing less than we have to deserve God’s Unmerited Favor – because we also did absolutely nothing to deserve it!

Jesus gives a parable in Matthew 20 about laborers in a vineyard. The first workers agree to a day of labor for a denarius, or a “day’s wage.” They began working, but the master of the house found more workers later in the day.

Though the first workers were still laboring, new workers started long after, and received the same wages. This was repeated the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hour of the day, each worker receiving the same “day’s wage” for their labor.

Those that were first worked the hardest. They worked all day in the hot sun, working for the

“day’s wage” that they agreed upon. But they were upset, because those that only worked half a day received the same “day’s wage.”

Jesus says that this parable describes the Kingdom of Heaven. Our labor does not earn us any more favor in God’s sight. He chooses us for the work that He would have us do – not the work that man would have us do. He chooses us at the time and place that He wants us to serve – not at the time and place that man would expect us to come.

And the best part? We ALL receive the same reward!

This should make us rejoice and sing constant praise to God! The Children of Israel suffered through Law. They labored from the day Moses broke those stone tablets to the day Christ was rejected. They earned their salvation through the constant work of the Law.

But we have come into the Kingdom at the eleventh hour! We did not labor like the Jews, and we receive our reward simply because the Master chose us! His love for us is Unmerited Favor, something we don’t deserve, given to us with the Reward of New Life in Christ!

Anyone who listens to or reads this is probably thinking to themselves right now, “WHAT? Why would ANYONE not want to accept this Grace that is so freely given? It’s so EASY to be a child of the King! Why not just accept it?”

It's not that simple.

Cult worship does not always serve the same God that is described in the Bible. Sure, they serve a god that is called "Jesus Christ," and they serve a god whose Father's name is Yahweh, but they are not the same. In fact, these gods are far from the same.

Remember the history behind the covenants that brought the Mosaic Law. Remember how God made a covenant of ten simple Commandments that were all bound in two simple rules: Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Remember how the children of Israel broke the first and second rule immediately after making the first covenant between God and man through Moses. God's wrath was kindled. He was a loving Father, but he was also an angry Father.

This time of punishment was a time of correction. The Mosaic Law was given to show the Children of Israel that they could never save themselves. The entire rest of the Old Testament shows how a righteous man would rise and uphold the Law, and then that same righteous man or those with him would quickly fall and break the Law. Each time they broke the Law, God's anger was kindled.

This is the "god" that is served by the cult. Not God in His fullness, but one single personality of

God. They serve the God of Law, not the God of Grace. They serve the God of wrath, not the God of Unmerited Favor. They serve the God of the Old Testament during punishment, not the God of the New Testament after penalty for that punishment was paid.

Many cults subscribe to the “Oneness” or “Modalistic” theology, the idea that the “god of punishment” from the Old Testament is the same Jesus that died on the cross in payment for those sins. It is common among many cult, from the Jehovah’s Witnesses to the Mormons and more.

This theology is designed to lift the cult leader into power. Sermons or writings will be presented that lead the people into believing that this same “god of punishment” is alive and well in the ministry of the leader. Some will even start believing that this leader is “god” himself. Others will label the ministry or the denomination as “god” and compare the two spiritually rather than physically. They will believe that the same “god of wrath” in the Old Testament became Jesus of the New. Then, that same “god of wrath” in the New Testament was made manifest in today’s “age” through the ministry of the cult leader.

But as in times of punishment in the Old Testament, they will tell you that if your “works” do not meet the standards of their theology, you will “grieve the Holy Spirit” into leaving. That same “god of wrath” that seemingly turned His

back on the Children of Israel would turn his back on YOU!

This is the reason that the Trinitarian belief is denied in so many cults. The Trinity is not some new idea that creates more Gods – it is the SAME God of the Bible. It just isn't the "god of wrath" that they have been serving.

The "Children of Israel" were called "Children" for a reason. They had a Father. This Father was Yahweh. He was a loving father as He displayed with Adam. He was a graceful father as He showed to Abraham and David. He was an intelligent Father as we find with Solomon. He was and IS the Heavenly Father who loves His children.

That Love brought punishment for disobeying. God does not want us to serve other gods, and when the Children of Israel did, they were punished. But they weren't punished because God did not love them – they were punished so that we would one day realize that God's Grace is sufficient. There is no reason to serve other gods; we serve the greatest God of all! We serve the God who loves us!

That Son who died on the cross for us was not the same Father who punished the Children of Israel. That Son stood before men as the Father called him His own beloved Son. That Son begged the Father to let the "cup" pass from him as the hour of the Gift was coming. That Son cried out

unto the Father to forgive the Jews, because they did not know that they were crucifying the Gift.

That Son promised to send His Holy Spirit to us. That Holy Spirit would lead us, and guide us, and would never leave us. He promised that He would “never leave us nor forsake us.”

That Son is God. That Father is God. That Holy Spirit is God. These Three, the Three that we read about in our Bibles, are One. They are inseparable, yet we find example after example in scripture describing one as a Father, who loves us as His children. We find One as a Son, who intercedes on our behalf to the Father. And One who lives within us, a Holy Spirit that gives us strength. A Holy Spirit that will never leave us or forsake us.

Finding comfort in Grace means finding the truth in that very statement. He will NEVER leave us. He will NEVER forsake us.

Finding comfort in Grace is learning to take those first steps, while the Father is holding our hand. The Loving Father is reaching down his hand to his child, letting us hold onto His finger as our legs wobble. As we learn to walk, He is standing there with us.

Christ is standing there, covering us with Grace. The Unmerited Favor that he purchased on the cross is flowing through us as he intercedes on behalf of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is within us. It is calling out, begging us to take more steps. It is leading us to the Truth! It is drawing us closer to God.

You won't find comfort in Grace until you suddenly realize that these Three are One. After being misled by a cult leader whose motives were his own, that trust is hard to establish. You don't want to trust in the blood that was spilled on the cross. You won't trust that the cross is sufficient – and you will want to take your salvation into your own hands.

Until you find comfort in Grace, you won't trust the Holy Spirit that is calling out from inside of you. You've already been led, and you realized that it was not down a pathway that was pleasing to God.

But when you realize that Jesus IS God, and until you realize that the Holy Spirit IS God, and that same Father that showed his wrath to the children of Israel also had the ability to show love, mercy, and Unmerited Favor, you will become more confident. Your next step becomes easier, because that is GOD speaking inside of you! The faith in your own salvation becomes greater, because that is GOD standing there on your behalf, erasing every sin that you committed. Your next step seems more solid – because that same GOD is reaching down to hold your hand!

Finding comfort in Grace is realizing what Grace is. It isn't some strange magical power that

requires words spoken during baptism. It isn't some mythical angel sent down to spread his wings of healing. It isn't some code of conduct that you live by to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

Grace is a Gift, one that is given because the Father loves you. He knows that your next few steps may cause a tumbling. But He also knows that He'll be right there to pick you up as you fall. And He already knows which direction you are going to fall, because His Holy Spirit is the One leading you.

Accept the Gift! Find comfort in Grace! Find peace and satisfaction in knowing that the Father loves you as His own child!

Rebel Without A Cause

During my thirty-seven years within a cult, I can remember people leaving. They left never to return, and soon to be forgotten. While under the cult programming, we focused on the things in their new lives that we considered to be “evil,” telling ourselves that their sudden change exposed who they “really are.”

Now, having spent several months on the other side of this fence and watching the hundreds who are beginning to flee, I realize just how backwards that statement really was. Our thinking was more directed at pacifying our inner questions and concerns rather than targeting the person for which it was intended.

There is such a wide range of change, and even wider a range of duration before this change takes place. Some have left the cult for many years, and really have not changed that much. For others, it is a slow and gradual process, taking one step at a time as they learn for themselves between right and wrong.

Some escapees, however, hit the ground running. Their change is immediate, and they seem to make themselves as noticeably different as possible in just as little time. Their difference in appearance or personality is so sudden, in fact, that cult members would consider them “rebels,” and even more to the point, “rebels without a cause.”

But if we examine the situation a little closer, we find that even for the “runners,” this statement doesn’t quite fit.

When a person who has been indoctrinated with cult programming for several years suddenly drops all rules and takes the opposite stand, it is a shock. Not just to the cult members, but also to those who are also fleeing – but fleeing a little more carefully. Even to those on the outside, these people are “rebels without a cause.”

For a long time, I looked at these people with a very wrong, critical point of view. I actually looked down on them as I tried to untangle all of the extra-biblical teaching from my mind. While I was working through all of my issues, they seemed to be happy and free, not caring in the slightest with regards to their eternal destination.

Looking back, I realize that many of them were struggling much, much worse than the rest of us.

There is emotional scarring from years of emotional and spiritual abuse, and it causes great inward pain. Many of them also have silent histories of physical or sexual abuse that turn those scars into open wounds that may never heal. While other churches are taught to expose, correct, and even notify authorities, cults by nature are taught by example to hide these things under the rug. The system could not survive if the rug were not there.

And while the illegal abuse seems likely to have the most impact, that's simply not the case. Their memory can associate specific events with the abuse, label those as "wrong," and move on. But the emotional and spiritual abuse is much more difficult to label.

Spiritual abuse occurs when a person in religious authority, usually having a unique spiritual practice, misleads or mistreats his or her following by misinformation of information or abusing their position. This type of abuse is the most difficult to heal, because it cannot be noticed during one single event. There are hundreds, thousands, of these very slight tugs into the direction they lead.

This type of abuse is also difficult to explain. One might point to a specific teaching or a specific sermon to another cult member, and the abuse is so small that it goes unnoticed. Many would even deny calling it "abuse," because the leader may have simply made a mistake or misspoken.

To identify spiritual abuse, you must examine the entire series of teachings, from the day the leader decided that he or she wanted to rise into authority, to the start and finish of their climb into power, to the teachings while under spiritual authority and sometimes even unto the last words spoken before their death.

It is very similar to a criminal investigation. Finding the body does not label the suspect a

killer. You must first find motive, and then find how that motive was employed.

The cult I escaped had many of these “road signs.” Some of them were so strange that cult pastors or cult members would ask, “Why would he purposefully do this? Why would he purposefully do that?” They were subtle instances of spiritual abuse that it seemed no man in their right mind would knowingly do.

I heard the question, “Why would the leader lie about his conversion to Christ? He continued preaching ‘the gospel!’” I also heard the question, “Why would he lie about his own birthdate? There was nothing to be gained by doing so!”

When we take one or two, even ten or twenty instances of spiritual abuse, and examine them individually, they do seem silly. Even an expert examining them might toss them aside as “mistakes” or “forgetfulness.” But when we combine these misleading statements with the hundreds of other, similar, instances of spiritual abuse, we find a pattern that is designed to lead the follower in a direction that is away from truth.

It is because of this that we find “rebels without a cause.” They actually have a cause, or a purpose, but they themselves do not fully understand what is behind that purpose.

Some of them have tried to explain their spiritual abuse to family or friends, but are not able to piece together the motive for the murder. Some have even stumbled across the loaded gun with a missing bullet in the chamber and smoke pouring out the barrel, but without motive they might as well give up!

These are the people that I feel the most compassion towards. They're reaching out, begging for others to notice, but don't have all of the information. They sense those thoughts from the scornful eyes, and realize that they are quickly going to be an outcast. They have stumbled onto the underlying issues, and now they are forced to give up their life, as they once knew it. They just don't understand why.

As they struggle to find themselves, they find themselves scorned. Not just by the cult, but also by some that have escaped. Rebellion against the right purpose is praised, but "rebel without a cause" is seen as reckless and dangerous.

But these people do not create sudden change in their lives because it is comfortable to them. Many times, it is through severe inward pain. Many of their changes have to do with outward appearance or with actions that can be seen easily by others. They want to be noticed, and they want to be observed as different from those who are under the spiritual abuse they have uncovered!

In the thirty-seven years of my bondage in the cult, I never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unlike several of my peers, I studied the cult teaching to levels far beyond most, and was very eager to listen to the cult leader's every word. I knew almost every doctrine he created, every fictional story he told, every supernatural event he deployed in his campaign of spiritual abuse, and even many of the sermons by heart. The "gospel" we were taught was a different gospel. The differences were like night and day.

From the day Moses broke the stone tablets over the idolatrous and rebellious people, mankind has struggled to understand God's purpose in giving us the Gospel. These rules given under the Mosaic Law had purpose, and Jesus tells us exactly what that purpose is. God wants us to have perfect love. Love for God and love for man. All the commandments are summed up into those two things.

Men do not understand. They focus their thoughts on the evil that is created by breaking the rules rather than the good that God intended. Every single one of the Ten Commandments can be answered by love. If you love, you will not kill. If you love, you will not steal. In all things: love.

When Christ came to fulfill the part of the Covenant that man could not keep, we entered into the eternal covenant of Grace. And if we examine the spiritual abuse that the people

suffered in the days of Christ, we find some very strong similarities.

God was no longer the authority of the people. The Scribes and the Pharisees were seen as great spiritual leaders, and their interpretation of the Law was the ultimate authority. Common man could not argue with their interpretation, because they had no “spiritual authority.”

They had “Lawyers,” men who studied the Law. These men would take the words of that Law and twist them to their own benefit, raising the “spiritual leaders” into even higher authority. New “Laws” would be invented, and none of these new laws could be answered with love. They were “Laws” simply because the leaders proclaimed them to be so.

To the Scribes and Pharisees, these followers of Christ were also “rebels without a cause.”

There were many rules under the Mosaic Law that dealt with outward appearance, outward expressions, and outward actions. These rules did have purpose: God used the Children of Israel to show us that mankind cannot save itself by their own works. It is only by the Grace of God that we can be saved.

Christ, by example, taught His disciples to be “rebels without a cause,” or rather, “rebels against tyranny.” Mark 7 gives us an example, Christ teaching AGAINST the Mosaic Law

regarding pork, food sacrificed to idols, and more:

*“And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is **nothing** outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” – Mark 7*

Churches today take the scripture “whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me” from Matthew 18 out of context to say that we should respect the religious beliefs of others no matter how wrong they are. I know many who have escaped the cult that will strictly adhere to the dress code simply because they want to show their respect to the friends and family within the cult.

What they do not realize is that they are not showing their respect to cult members. Once you are on the outside, all respect is lost. Instead, they are showing their support to the teaching, no matter how false. I can remember other cult members saying, “She still knows it’s wrong to wear those pants – when she’s around us, she still wears them!”

The laws of modesty had very little to do with sexuality. “Breeches” were actually a woman’s garment, and the men wore robes, which were similar in structure to the dresses of women today. Unlike today, clothing was associated with stature.

When the Bible instructs women not to wear garments that pertain to men, or to wear “modest” clothing, these teachings are against “pride,” which Christ just called “evil.”

And sadly, the Pentecostal movement has taught men and women to become prideful in their choice of apparel. Others who do not follow their same rules are either scorned or condemned, making the clothing that seems “modest” with regards to sexuality to become the very opposite of modest. Their clothing has now become their idol.

Anything that you include in your worship that does not follow the teaching of Christ and the new covenant can very easily become idolatrous. In of itself, there is no harm in wearing clothing

that covers skin. I know very good, Christian people who wear this type of “modest” clothing. But when your religion teaches you that you must live this way in order to be “clean” or “pure,” then you have just replaced the blood of Jesus Christ for those old rags. You have let your idol nullify the Work that Christ did for you on the cross.

Looking back, these “rebels without a cause” seemed to be breaking rules that put them in pathways that angels feared to tread. But after reading the Bible without the blinders of spiritual abuse, I’m not so sure this is the case. Many of the rules we thought were scriptural through the twisting of the Bible seem less important as those twisted scriptures are untangled. Very little of our rules were founded in love for our fellow man. Many of them actually hurt our fellow man, and most of them filled our hearts with pride, which is sin. We placed more emphasis on these rules than we did the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and these rules became our idols.

While they probably did not yet realize it, they were lifting their hands, saying, “We no longer submit to idolatry! We choose the Blood!”

Weights

After breaking through the barriers of a cult and into freedom, you will quickly find that this “freedom” you first experience is not nearly as incredible as it sounds. In fact, many who have taken this journey will tell you that freedom comes with great price.

The Pentecostal movement bred many spinoffs, divided churches that separated themselves from other Christians. Like the original movement from the Azusa Street Revival, they focused their ambitions on attaining the “spiritual gift” that they mistook for the Gift of the Holy Spirit that was promised by Christ.

For the original movement, “speaking in tongues” was the evidence that you had received the Holy Spirit, and once you had this “evidence” in your lives, you were “sealed to the day of your redemption.” (In other words, you had everything you needed. Your experience stops here.) For others, healing was the “evidence,” and for others some other spiritual gift.

Many have taken the “travel guide” laid down by the Pentecostals as their ultimate roadmap: “Justification, Sanctification, Baptism of the Holy Ghost”. These “milestones along the way” were nothing more than just that: milestones. But for the Christian who’s following the pathway laid down by the Bible, these aren’t just stops along the way, we are continually learning and growing in the ways of Christ. Sanctification is a continual process, starting from the day the doctor helps bring you into the world and ending

on the day the doctor takes his fingers to close your eyes after death.

Very few from the Pentecostal movement recognized the evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives that Paul tell us to look for: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Since “sanctification” was a milestone in their history, they never put it on the roadmap for a frequently visited future.

But notice Paul’s words directly behind these gifts in Galatians 5: “Against such things there is no Law.”

The early church was also on a journey, breaking through barriers that were very similar to our own. Having focused on tradition that was wrapped around the Law of Moses, each rule given in the Mosaic Law had become a part of their inner makeup. They were programmed to believe and follow these Laws, and were trained from birth to believe these Laws were required for salvation. If they did not keep these Laws, they were condemned, and were no better than the Gentiles they despised.

But Christ came to fulfill the Covenant that included the Law as their requirement for salvation. No longer were the Children of Israel to be a race of works-righteous faith, they were given the power to break through those barriers into freedom in Christ. All Law was fulfilled by love, and the many laws that did not produce

perfect love were under examination in scriptures to show us their weakness. Christ came to show this weakness, and how this works-righteous faith actually produced the opposite of love.

But like we see today, men bound by tradition were not able to see and understand the Gift that God was giving them. As they continued their journey from Law into Grace, there were many laws they tried to bring with them. Like a packhorse on a long journey, they stacked these things onto their already cumbersome load, weighing themselves down with burden.

If we continue on in Galatians into Galatians chapter six, we see why Paul reminds us “against such things there is no Law”:

“Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.”

Notice the reason these people tried to carry the law of circumcision with them: “The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

The cross of Christ removed all of these burdens, and paid the penalty for the breach of the Old Covenant that included the Law. A new Eternal Covenant was established, one of Grace, and one that lifted the many weights that they carried for generations.

But there were many still inside those boundaries. And to the Jew who remained behind those barriers refusing Christ, these new Christians were using the cross to break all the rules. They despised the idea that the man they hung on the cross could have removed them from tradition. They despised anyone who broke that tradition. They persecuted those who were trying to experience freedom.

Many who have made their journey from a cult and into freedom will tell you this. There is persecution still today.

Men and women who refuse to accept the Cross of Jesus Christ as their only way to salvation have chosen to carry these weights of burden on their own shoulders. Each rule they try to follow adds a weight, though the burden from that weight may not be noticeable. When you stack them on top of each other, all of these weights become an unbearable burden.

Some cults avoid television. That is a weight. When they are fellowshipping with another Christian, and that other Christian has a television in their home, they are uncomfortable. If it is turned on, that weight gets heavier.

One cult does not believe in drinking coffee. Passing by a coffee shop in a mall brings an uncomfortable weight. Another refuses to enjoy sports. A walk in the park is uncomfortable for them. Several of them adhere to a dress code. A walk in the grocery store places you around several people who deny your faith. Some of these weights are burdens against something so common that it's difficult to even leave your house without feeling that burden.

Many of these things are unnecessary weights. Many of them produce scorn instead of love. Those weights that do not produce scorn have absolutely nothing to do with your love of God or your fellow man, and cannot be found in scripture. Those escaping the cult realize this.

But like the men and women bringing their tradition into early Christianity for fear of persecution, men and women escaping a cult bring their tradition into their new lives – sometimes for the wrong reasons. Instead of bringing with them a way of life they enjoy, many of them bring their traditions as “weights” that continue to burden them down.

There is nothing wrong with avoiding sports, especially if your heart is not in the game. If you

can walk by a group of others who are enjoying a casual game of basketball or a round of tennis without feeling any emotion whatsoever, then this aspect of your new life is without burden.

But if you pass by that same group of people and long to be in there with them, refusing to do so because of your tradition, there's something wrong. If you pass by them and feel out of place because you have never experienced what they are doing, that weight gets heavier. And if you look at them with scorn or pride, then your weight has just brought you to your knees.

Sadly, adjustment to freedom is not an overnight change. Many will tell you that this "out of place" feeling may last for several years. The weights that they carry are so great in number that removing them one-by-one will take a lifetime.

Using the Bible as our example, we find that this hesitation to be free is human nature. When Christ died on the cross, and the penalty for sin was paid once for all, we don't find a group of new Christians celebrating their lives without the Mosaic Law that they were programmed to follow. In fact, we find many sections of Paul's letters – which came years later – reminding them that the New Eternal Covenant of Grace made the Old Law obsolete.

It is ironic, because many cult churches are familiar with the old-time Gospel song, "Come Unto Me," but have never really stopped to consider what this song is referring to. The song

is a reference to scripture, Matthew 11, and it is begging them to take these weights, these burdens that drag them down, and cast them onto the back of Christ. Christ was taking these weights, and nailing them to the cross on our behalf.

Immediately after rebuking the people because He loved to drink wine, Jesus said this:

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This “rest for your souls” is God’s REST. It is not God’s PENALTY. Christ did not come to replace the Mosaic Law with another set of Laws that were greater in power. In fact, He came and lifted the Mosaic Law. It was part of the Old Covenant that had been broken by the people, and the Children of Israel were living under the penalty of that Law. Christ came to fulfill the

portion that the Children of Israel could not fulfill – keeping the Law – to set them free from their part of the bargain.

And then He made a New Covenant that had no weights. It had only one, simple requirement: “faith in Jesus Christ.”

Living under this New Covenant, children of God by Grace through faith, we still keep the Ten Commandments, the original Law of Moses that was given to the people. There were two covenants given to Moses, remember? The first one was broken, and Moses broke the stone tablets containing the Law. The second covenant became the Mosaic Law, and it was filled with works-righteous faith. It was given as an example that we will never be saved by our own works. But rather than trying aimlessly to save ourselves, we uphold the original Law. And we do so by love.

If we love God, we keep the first two commandments. We will not serve any other god, and we will not make idols to bow down before them. And if we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not kill. We will not steal. We will not covet his possessions – instead, we will celebrate with him because God has richly blessed him!

All laws are fulfilled in love. And love carries no weight. In fact, love lifts us, making our feet lighter. Through our unburdened lives, we can lift the burdens of others.

That's why Paul said, "Against such things there is no Law."

There are no rules, no weights. There are no burdens that Christ wants us to bear; He told us to cast our cares upon Him. His burden is light – and He WANTS to bear our burdens for us. He wants us to be happy and free, telling others about Him. He wants us to tell others that freedom in Christ means giving Him our weights!

Psychological Warfare

One of the lengthiest processes after leaving a cult, one that is very critical in the recovery of the person escaping is deprogramming. Almost anyone who has escaped will tell you that they had no idea they NEEDED deprogramming during their time inside the cult, and even until long after escaping.

Programming is very subtle, not noticeable by the listeners, and many times not even intentionally administered by the cult pastors. What the pastors do to the people, they do by example.

During the Korean War, Americans held prisoner in the camps of the enemy went through sessions of “criticism and self criticism.” This psychological tactic was employed not only against the American prisoners of war, but also against the Korean militia. The Korean military leaders recognized the power of programming.

This tactic was relatively new to the American military. It was also employed by Hitler in Nazi Germany, but was widely overlooked until long after the history of the war was examined. These sessions, combined with the other military techniques, became known as “psychological warfare.”

The US army created a division called PSYWAR (for psychological warfare), and specifically recruited men with advanced education and intelligence to combat the enemy.

This technique of “criticism and self criticism” had very deep, and very long-lasting effects. The prisoners of war initially felt this routine was childish, not realizing that they would likely suffer from these effects for the rest of their lives. What they first thought was just slightly insulting conversation became programming that was embedded into their minds forever.

The Koreans would repeatedly criticize the American prisoners of war. Their mocking statements would seem childish or playful, but were specifically designed to drive these listeners to begin criticizing themselves. Over and over, the Koreans would nit-pick every single aspect of the Americans until the Americans would start to believe the insults and fill themselves with self-condemnation.

Eventually, the growing humiliation would completely break down the personalities and psychological makeup of the prisoners, turning them into different people than when they were first captured. And it was a gradual process; none of the prisoners could recognize their change until some of them managed to escape to others who could see and understand that these were not the same people.

They were broken. They were discouraged. They were pessimistic. They were filled with self-condemnation and self-pity. They were filled with the very same effects that we find within a cult.

The similarities between this psychological warfare and the cult I was born into are absolutely striking. For those like myself who were born into it, there was no prior personality to compare – we were molded and programmed our entire lives into the people we became. But for others, those who lived normal lives until they became trapped inside a cult, the story is much different. The change in their lives was clearly visible.

A reporter for a lifestyle magazine named “YOU” interviewed the family of a young woman who became trapped in the cult my family grew up with. The young woman was not born into the cult, but fell in love with a young man who was. As she started attending the church, she began to change.

This change was not evident at first. It was very gradual. Over time, her personality changed to the point that even her own family and friends became outcast. Like the prisoners of war in Korea, she became broken, self-condemning, and in all ways: different.

The mother is quoted as being shocked that this much of a change could happen in her daughter. “My children were real achievers and were involved in church work. Nobody thought something like this could happen to us.”

The loving mother knew something was wrong, knew that her daughter was no longer the same ambitious and motivated daughter that she once

knew, and put a plan into motion. They snuck into her Canadian home in the early hours past midnight, whisked her into Africa to a deprogramming facility, and spent the next several weeks deprogramming her daughter from the mind control and psychological warfare of the cult.

“She was emotionless,” her mother said. “I didn’t know her. It was heartbreaking.”

After finally ripping a great deal of the programming from her mind, even the young woman was shocked. Especially shocked that she could be so subtly turned from her own parents.

The cult began breaking her down, filling her with self-condemnation for the life she lived and the way her mother had raised her. “They persuaded me my parents were trying to keep me from having a better life,” she said.”

But finally, after weeks of help from a doctor, the young woman could love her family once more. She was thankful that her mother loved her enough to risk real danger to take her to find help. “At times like this, you realize the value of a family,” she said.

This was not some cult like you see in the movies, with dark dungeons and men in long, brown robes. This is not some dark building where the people sit around a large five-pointed star in the floor, holding candles up to the man in

the center. The young woman describes the cult church as being like any other – a very inviting place from the outside. “It seemed like an ordinary church to me,” she said. “The women wore long dresses, but apart from that there was nothing unusual.”

The people inside of a cult are good, loving people. They will show you kindness while they see you as a prospect. They will show even more kindness if you come inside their walls. Some will tell you that once you become “one of them,” you become more loved than family. But just watch what happens when you leave that family!

And the “one of them,” is part of the programming.

There are several aspects to psychological warfare that are very common routine in a cult. Some of these techniques are employed regularly without even realizing that these techniques have a long-lasting effect.

The state of hypnosis is required. Not the waving of a pocket watch while a creepy looking man stares into your eyes and tells you to listen to the snap of his finger, but rather the mental state of hypnosis where your mind becomes placed into a very high state of suggestibility, relaxation, or meditation.

The church is the perfect place for this. Especially the cult churches that force silence

prior to the service – the people are forced to enter meditation in reverence to the Lord.

The music can be a factor. Music with rhythm having beats close to the human heartbeat will cause even more suggestibility. The closer the patient becomes to sleep, the more powerful the suggestion. While you find upbeat, exciting songs praising Christ for His work on the cross in other churches, you will find many cult churches with slow, dragging music. I can remember one man telling me after the service in the cult church I attended, “That sounded like funeral music!”

Once the people are programmed to receive, you will find many cult pastors with the Charismatic-style preaching, screaming at the top of their lungs as though they are preaching to an entire arena filled with three hundred thousand people without having a microphone. Many of these pastors scream like this in a church of fifty people.

Those who have never heard this style of preaching will laugh and make statements like “That man sounded like Hitler!”

And they are not far from the truth.

There is a pattern in psychological warfare. The men who were masterminds of controlling people through power of psychology have one thing in common: they are remembered as “screamers.”

When the person is most receptive to programming, the loud voice at the platform is seen as a figure of authority far greater than before. The words start to come in a rhythmic beat, matching close to the heartbeat.

Then, as the pastor gets deep into the sermon and the congregation becomes adjusted to this rhythm, the pastor starts filling them with the same type of self-condemnation strategy that the Koreans employed through psychological warfare.

This strategy has worked. It changed the personalities of the Nazi soldiers under Hitler so much that they did unspeakable crimes against humanity. It has raised military leaders into great power in several communistic, developing nations.

And it makes the people lift the pastor into power.

When a cult pastor is lifted into power, very few question his motives and objectives. He becomes the leader, not the shepherd. Rather than leading the sheep and pointing them to Christ and the Bible, he leads the people respect his own understanding of scripture without confirming his doctrines for themselves. They are truly programmed to receive.

The number one question I get asked from those escaping the cult I was born into is this: "If [our

cult leader] was not the 'Messenger For The Hour,' then WHO is?"

They have been programmed to lift a man into power. They have been programmed to bring a man into the ultimate authority, which essentially is the same as worship. They have been programmed to worship a man.

And this is not scriptural. If you twist scripture from the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, you might be able to stretch scripture enough to place the high priest into authority. The cult I came from stretched it even further to lift the prophets into the ultimate authority, not realizing that the high priests were the ones at the highest ranking position under the Jewish tradition. Prophets were nothing more than humble men, putting themselves out of the way so that God could speak through them.

But that is Old Testament. That is Old Covenant. We live under the New Covenant of Grace, not the Old Covenant of Law. We no longer make yearly journeys to offer our sacrifice to the earthly high priest. We are no longer to be reminded of our sins as these pastors try to do with their "condemnation and self condemnation" psychological warfare.

There was ONE final Sacrifice, and It was nailed to the cross once for all.

Hebrews chapter 10 says that the yearly sacrifice was a shadow of things to come, meaning that

they were given to the Children of Israel as a “type” of the final Sacrifice that would be offered by Christ.

It says that the old way was inefficient; we were constantly reminded of our sin, because the blood of bulls and goats can never take away our sin.

The book of Hebrews teaches us HOW we should preach – something that very few pastors in a cult follow. They themselves are “programmed to receive,” and are following their instincts based on their own programmed mind.

There is no self-condemnation. There is no provision for pointing fingers at the congregation on a weekly basis, reminding them of their sin. There is no belittling the people, breaking them down into submission so that the pastor can become the hero during a massive altar call.

He is not supposed to be the hero of the story.

Hebrews chapter 7 tells us that we have a new High Priest, and that High Priest is Jesus Christ. He is a High Priest forever – not until some cult leader comes along and deploys strategies of mind control and self-condemnation. Christ is the one we are supposed to follow, and we are supposed to follow Him by leading of the Holy Spirit that is within us!

I wish there was an easy answer to those struggling to deprogram. I wish there were some way that I could say, "It's easy! Just do [this]!" I wish I could point them to a doctor that will make the transition easy, or to a self-help program that will make the deprogramming be much less painful.

But I can't. Those who have gone through deprogramming will tell you that this was the most painful part of their experience as they escaped a cult. It is a roller coaster of emotion, from deep, painful sorrow to anger and hatred of the system that changed their personalities to such a bitter, self-condemning person. It brings great compassion to those that have been hurt by the programmed pride of being the "chosen few" in the "us against them" programmed mentality. That compassion is so extreme that it becomes painful.

But there IS a book I can point you to that will have all the answers. It is a book that they've held in their hands all this time, and it was patiently waiting for them to open it and unlock its power. It is a book that will teach them to respect themselves. It will teach them to respect others. It will teach them to show love, compassion, and mercy on their fellow man – even to those that do not believe the same way that they do. It's a book that does have all the answers – if you just take the time to study and read.

That book is the Bible.

The Love Story

By nature, religious cults are a tightly knit group of people with an unhealthy level of intimacy. They are a very close, affectionate and caring group of people who over time have become almost exact clones of personality. They look alike. They think alike. They start liking the same things.

The cult I escaped had an unhealthy affection for wilderness, simply because the fables told by the cult leader included stories from the wilderness. People who would never have chosen to be the outdoors type were climbing mountains, hiking trails, and hunting game. Some churches within the cult even frowned upon many other activities, especially if it could be associated with modern entertainment you would typically find indoors.

When you are on the inside, you become more than family. You become part of the mold, and over time, this mold actively changes the makeup of your personality.

Again to the example I came from, the cult leader died in 1965. Had he been alive for the next fifty years, this man would have changed with the times. We find recorded example of his change during the years that led to his death, but this change was stopped abruptly by an automobile accident.

As Hollywood started making an impact on society during the early years of the leader's ministry, and many churches were condemning

this change, the leader strongly opposed watching these movies. When television started spreading like wildfire, this grew worse. Sermons would include quotes like “Satan’s pulled one over on you! Now you’ve got it in your homes!”

But as these changes started becoming largely accepted, the leader himself started frequenting movies. Those in the cult who never knew this hold on to the earlier belief – that movies are ‘of the devil.’ But those who saw the leader in theaters or who have enjoyed a movie or ballgame on the television with the leader’s own sons will no longer deny themselves the entertainment they once forbid.

This presents a problem. Now, the cult itself is split into two groups: those who now realize that they themselves are in charge of their televisions, having the power to decide whether to watch good or watch evil, and those who practice asceticism.

Asceticism is denying “worldly pleasures” to achieve a higher spiritual state. It is the belief that you are the one in control, not God. If you want to be more like God, and be presented “holy,” then you must abstain from the pleasures of this world.

This is a dangerous heresy, one that has been condemned since Gnostic influence started to infect the early church. Irenaeus wrote an entire

book, "Against Heresies," condemning this pagan influence that was infiltrating Christianity.

The Apostle Paul also spoke out against asceticism:

"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind"

Colossians 2:18

Before you can accept asceticism, you must first deny the cross of Jesus Christ. You must deny the power of the cross – deny that His Grace is sufficient. You must believe that there is something that YOU also must do before you can be saved.

In Mark 7, Jesus Himself condemns the Pharisees for letting the tradition of their rules and "boundaries" take priority over the Word of God. They had forgotten the very reason the Law was given, and had denied themselves the love of their fellow man for their own tradition.

He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making

the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Mankind, by nature, has always struggled with tradition. Unless they remember the underlying reason a doctrine or a law is given, they will start to focus on that law. Over time, the reason is completely forgotten.

Jesus knew this as he was having the Last Supper with the Apostles. Though what he did has now become tradition, the reason for what he did will never be forgotten.

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”
Luke 22:19

While many view the tradition of taking the Lord’s Supper in their churches as some supernatural event, we find little or no support of that in scripture. All scripture points to the cross, and this that Jesus instructed the disciples was a beacon throughout time. From the time He ascended to the day He will return, people will remember the cross.

But a religious cult will take simple tradition and make it become dangerous. Those who do not follow tradition are cut off and scorned. Those who follow it are filled with pride. That pride is amplified as the minds are molded to become one personality.

We can find this example even in nature. If you throw a piece of meat to a pack of hungry wolves, the first wolf that finds it will start tearing into it. If there's room for a second and third, they also begin to devour the meat. But when those around, those who do not have the meat, start trying to get some of their own, the three wolves will snarl and growl at them as if they were a different kind of beast. Wolves will turn against other wolves, even though they are the same creature.

Cults are no different. Men and women who were once friends, family, or neighbors are seen as the "ones who didn't get the meat." ... especially if they once "had the meat" and decided to eat something else.

The priority of cult members is to hold onto what they have, because they are internally starving themselves of something new.

Christianity, by nature, is spreading the Good News that Christ came to save the lost. We are sharing our meat with others, and there is a bountiful supply. In fact, the more we give to others, the more spiritual meat we get for ourselves.

But a religious cult is just the opposite. Rather than freely give, those who did not receive the meat are scorned and condemned. Those who once had the meat will never be given another piece; they are denied and rejected.

One of my favorite chapters in the Old Testament is Ezekiel 16, “God’s Faithless Bride.” It is a love story, one that all should know by heart.

A vision is given to Ezekiel, describing how the Children of Israel continually fell to idolatry and were not faithful to her True Husband, the One True God. And God does not tell Ezekiel that the Children of Israel were a different race of people, intended to rise above others to scorn and condemn them.

God says this: *“Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.”* Ezekiel 16:1-4

The Children of Israel were comprised of human beings. They were the same flesh and bone as the Amorites and the Hittites, and yet God chose them. They did not earn their being chosen by the worldly pleasures that they could have forbade.

And more than that, God tells Ezekiel that they were not “holy” when He chose them. God calls them “naked.”

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered

your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.” Ezekiel 16:8

Throughout the chapter, God reminds Ezekiel how Israel fell to idolatry time after time. She had become nothing more than a harlot, unfaithful to the One True God and becoming intimate with the idols of Baal.

Israel had taken pleasure with the cults of Baal, and that influence had turned her into a harlot. God describes how displeased He is with the Children of Israel, and says that she has become like her mother, the Hittites. God’s description of how the Children of Israel had become is no different than what we see in religious cults today.

“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.” – Ezekiel 16:49-52

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, and many cult pastors give an unscriptural reason for this. The reason they give usually supports their own agenda, whether it is the type of clothing, appearance, music, and even homosexuality. But that is not what God says.

God says that Sodom would have been spared had they showed compassion to the poor and needy. They were haughty, filled with pride.

They had become like the religious cults of today.

But while we could point to example after example to show the similarities between a cult and the destruction of Sodom, that is not the point that God is making. Their hearts and minds had been molded into a similar personality. Abraham pleaded with God on behalf of Sodom, begging the lord to spare the city if fifty were found righteous. All the way down to ten people, Abraham pleaded with God and asked for mercy. But there were not even ten to be found in the city. They had all become of like minds, similar personalities. All filled with pride, none caring for the poor and needy. They only cared about themselves.

God says that the Children of Israel had made the city of Sodom look righteous! They were worse!

But they were chosen.

They did not save themselves through works-righteous faith. Israel was worse than the city

that was destroyed by fire, condemned by God, and was a prostitute in the eyes of God.

God chose them.

“For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God.” – Ezekiel 16:59-63

What God did in this vision to Ezekiel is something that many cult pastors will never do as they condemn those who are outside the boundaries of their cult. God was very harsh and condemning in his words, telling the people not to serve other gods and rebuking them for the gods they served. God wants the people to serve Him, and Him alone.

But then, after calling Israel the greatest prostitute that ever would walk the face of the earth, after calling her the mother of harlots, God lifts her up. God shows His mercy and faithfulness.

God pointed to the Cross.

An unhealthy intimacy with those in your chosen place of worship leads to pride. If your religion gradually transforms you into seeing other humans as lost and dying creatures unworthy of the Cross of Calvary, then you have become no better than the pack of wolves.

While unhealthy intimacy seems loving from the inside, and those inside the boundaries view this as “like-minded and in one accord,” those on the outside are starving for the piece of meat. And they are rejected with a snarl. They experience the opposite of love.

Paul describes healthy Christians, those who are following the words of Christ. He describes how we are to interact with one another, even those who are not within the boundaries we create.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-10

Freedom

If you were born and raised in a cult, lived your entire life believing in a better pathway to salvation than the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its simplicity, and taught that there were several “extra things” you must also do in order to be saved, then you will find yourself in a strange place as you try to accept freedom.

Freedom, you will quickly find, is something that other churches take for granted. They never experienced true bondage like you have. While you were born with shackles, they were born free.

The last half of 1 Corinthians 10 is a passage of scripture that you won't find in too many sermons from cult pastors. It doesn't align with cult theology, and rather than try to understand what this passage is telling us, most cult pastors will avoid it altogether.

But as you enter your newfound freedom into a church that teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you'll find the opposite end of the spectrum: pastors teaching this passage of scripture without fully describing its meaning in simplicity!

Shepherds leading congregations that have *only* known freedom do not need to highlight the portions of text that describe freedom; their faithful followers are already free. They don't need to teach the people how to heal their hands from the chains that once had them bound; they've never experienced the chains of a cult.

So for a person who has just fled a cult, this passage of scripture is greatly imbalanced. On the one hand, the cult avoids the passage describing freedom because it would break the very foundation of the cult. And on the other hand, shepherds teaching the free have to guide their sheep in such a way that this freedom is not abused.

The only way you will find the middle ground is to read the scripture for yourself, without any background doctrines or teachings, reading freedom in the simplicity that Paul describes.

And as with any passage of scripture, we must do two things:

First, we must remember the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Good News that mankind could not save themselves, but God loved us so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die for our salvation. That Christ paid the penalty for sin, which was eternal separation from God, died, and rose again so that we can rise with Him. While He lived on this earth, He lived the perfect life because we could never live it. And it is by Grace, Unmerited Favor, that we are saved. Not because of anything that we ourselves can do. It is a Gift from God, one that is given freely with no strings attached.

Paul reminds us of that throughout his letters. My favorite example is this:

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” - Ephesians 2:8

The second thing we must do when reading any passage of scripture is to read everything in the chapter – not just the short passage. Sometimes, we must read the chapter before it and the chapter after it, so that we can fully get the context in which it was written.

These were letters that Paul wrote, not books. They had no chapters. They had no verse or line numbers. Paul was writing a letter to the Church, just like we would write a letter to a friend. He did not intend for the reader to “snip out” a verse here or there to glean a new doctrine.

For example: Let’s say that you wrote a letter to a friend, telling them that your Father had built a house, and they were welcome to stay. You told them how you’d be out of town, so they could walk right in and make themselves at home.

But suddenly, you remembered a problem, and gave them warning: Don’t use the bathroom. After you gave the warning, you proceeded to tell them WHY they can’t use the facilities. They aren’t ready. Maybe they’re leaking, or not turned on. There is a REASON why they can’t use the bathroom.

Would you want your friend, the reader of your letter, to start marking off sections into

chapters? Would you want them to number the lines, and start pulling quotes from lines 5, 12, and 96?

Would you want them to take that middle section and run through the streets preaching, “Thou shalt not use thine facilities!”

I know this sounds silly, but that is what churches have done. They have taken the words of Paul’s letters, chopped them up, and gave them a blended mix of what they want these words to say. They pick and choose what fits their own agendas. They lead entire herds of sheep away from the fold through twisted scripture.

But take that to a much, much larger scale. They have done the same thing with the Letter that God wrote to us: His Word.

In the chapter before 1 Corinthians 10, Paul has just told us that he surrendered his own rights, and he told us why. It wasn’t an instruction that we ALL surrender our rights – he did this so that he could help lead others out and into freedom. He went into those people in self-made bondage to life them from their man-made bondage.

Devious minds have snipped the chapter before, 1 Corinthians Chapter 9, and placed those same chains of bondage on their own sheep. They snip out sections, avoiding the very first words of the chapter:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. – 1 Corinthians 9:1-2

Towards the end of the chapter, Paul describes the reason why he placed himself under bondage. If we read closely, we find that he only placed himself under bondage when it was necessary:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

But Paul's train of thought suddenly hit a bump. He remembered something. The bathroom was broken. He had to inject a warning to the reader: "Don't use the bathroom!"

Paul remembered what happened when the Children of Israel were set free from their bonds

of slavery. He remembered how they had breached the Old Covenant immediately after being set free. They quickly turned back to idolatry, making God very angry. God wants us to serve Him, and Him alone.

So Paul injected a warning: Don't do like THOSE GUYS did! They were all free, all baptized with the same water as they passed through the sea. They all ate the very same spiritual food, and drank from the spiritual rock, which Paul said was Christ.

But when they entered into the wilderness, they turned to the idols of the pagan nations, time after time. They were free from Egypt, bound by Law, and continually broke that Law. Each time they broke the Law, they received the curses of the Law.

Paul warns those who had just escaped and found freedom: Continue to flee idolatry. Do not lead yourselves to sexual immorality, because this will lead you into even greater temptation.

And after saying all of this, then we get to the section of scripture that the cults will avoid. Let's examine:

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" – Corinthians 10:13-14

You are going to receive temptations. That is a fact. But with each temptation that tries to snare you back into idolatry, God has already provided a way of escape.

“I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?” – 1 Corinthians 10:15-19

In other words, the Children of Israel are our example. Just as they ate the same spiritual food, representing Christ, we eat the same spiritual food, representing Christ. We are no different than the Children of Israel, who were once bound by Law.

And that Law told us not to eat food sacrificed to idols. That Law told them not to do any single thing that might lead them into serving other gods – and yet they still did it! But the food itself was not the idol! Food is nothing, except ... food!

“No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot

partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" - 1 Corinthians 10:20-22

But when your neighbors try to lure you in, and make you serve other gods – that is overstepping the boundaries of your freedom. Do NOT serve other gods. We cannot serve the One True God while serving any other god.

But here's where it gets to the good stuff:

"All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up." - 1 Corinthians 10:23

Ask yourselves: Having been in a cult where the pastor snipped a few verses here and snipped a few verses there, why did the pastor not snip THIS one out and use this for his "context?" Sure, they will use the second half of the sentence as their entire sermon, but what about the "All things are lawful" part?

Paul says that ALL things are lawful. We are free. We have true freedom in every sense of the word. We are to avoid idolatry, live within the boundaries given to us by our own conscience and the leading of the Holy Spirit, but we are free.

And each person's freedom differs one from another. Each person's temptation is in a different area. As they grow and learn their

strengths and weaknesses, each person must learn to walk in a way that is pleasing to the Lord – not pleasing to their pastors.

All things are lawful.

After you've experienced freedom from a cult, you'll find that this is where pastors in churches of the Body of Christ start to teach. They already assume you know the first half of this chapter, they assume you grew up with the same freedom that others not bound by cults have experienced.

To put it simply, Paul speaks as a great philosopher. In other words: "All things are lawful, but all things must have balance."

If we become imbalanced, we do great damage to both ourselves, and those around us. We may be free, but we need to recognize that our actions affect others. We must not be self-centered, but we must show the fruits of the spirit, which include caring for others.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." - 1 Corinthians 10:24-26

Cults will tell you that this is "Satan's world," or "Satan's Eden." That is heresy. This earth is God's, and everything in it is under His full control. The pagans offer the meat to their idols, but God owns the meat – the idols do not. We do

not even need to question our own consciences according to Paul. God is in control.

“If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— I do not mean your conscience, but his.” - 1 Corinthians 10:27-29

Notice that. Paul DOES tell us to abstain for conscience’ sake. But not YOURS! HIS! The one who thinks he has seen you participating in idol worship!

How can you lead them to Jesus Christ, severing them from worship of this idol, if they mistakenly think that you served both?

When a cult pastor tries to strip you of your freedom, taking you as “his sheep” and shearing you beyond all recognition, here is all you need say. Paul gives you the perfect answer:

“For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?” 1 Corinthians 10:29-30

The ending of this chapter is not the ending of the letter. But it is the ending to the thought. It’s Paul’s “bottom line”:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.” – 1 Corinthians 10:31-33

About the Author

John Collins is the author and Webmaster of www.seekyethetruth.com.

Almost 36 years in “the Message”, the name of the group of people (cult) following the teachings of William Marrion Branham, John has dedicated his life towards helping those who are still in this cult, and to those who are no longer bound but serving Jesus Christ with many questions. His goal is to remind both groups that we serve a living God who does not look to any organization, doctrine, mystery, or gift of the Spirit; we serve a God who looks at the heart.

His main purpose is to point others back to the Bible, which is the Absolute. All words of men may fail, but the Word of God will never fail. We should put our hearts and minds back on Jesus Christ, who died on the cross so that ALL could be saved by grace through faith.

Seek Ye The Truth started as a central place for all cult followers to ask the questions openly and anonymously, many of which they had in their hearts and minds for several years and were afraid to ask. The original goal was to go "hand in hand" with the local pastors, spreading the answers and vindicating the teachings of William Marrion Branham.

As research started to progress, more false teachings were found than truths. More prophecies had failed than had succeeded. None could be proven. Bible teachings came from Gnostic texts and other strange beliefs, and did

not line up with the Word of God. Cult pastors had no answer.

While some live normal lives walking "middle ground," many are starting to become very hurt and abused. Many suffer depression. Physical and sexual abuse, and self-condemnation stories started surfacing.

Over time, Seek Ye The Truth slowly transformed from a site of questions into a site dedicated to help those in need. There are almost two million cult followers of William Branham around the world, making it larger than some of the other cult followings, and there are almost no support groups for those desperately seeking help. Please join us as we help others.

God Bless You!