



# Alêtheia

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP



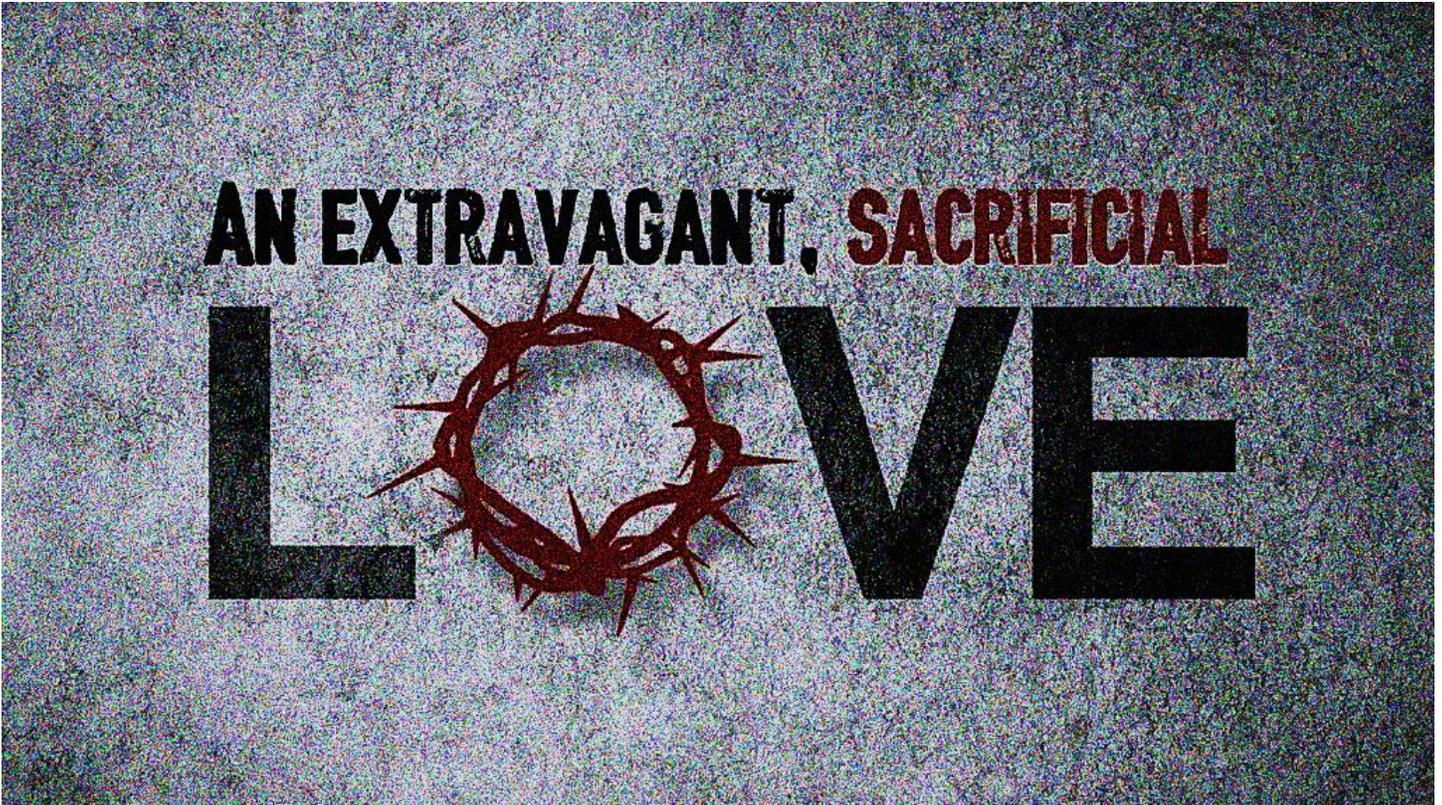

Alêtheia  
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

the gospel of

# JOHN

ΕΝΑΡΧΗ Η ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΝΗ ΠΡΟΣΤΟΝ  
 ΘΗΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΤΗ ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΣΤΟΣ Η ΝΕΝΑΡΧΗ ΤΙΡΟΣ  
 ΤΟΝ ΘΗΝ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΓΕΝΕΣ ΤΟ ΚΑΧΟΤΙΣ

John 3:16-21, 16“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”



Last week we celebrated Moms by looking at how we can better understand the Love of God by observing the love of mothers. Their often unconditional and self-sacrificing love for their children offers us a glimpse of how and why God acts towards us as He does.



Nikodemus came to Jesus unready. He was unready to give up on his ideas about God, Godliness, and the Kingdom of Heaven and he was ultimately rebuked into silence because of it – because of his unwillingness to let go of his religion and surrender to whatever Jesus had for him instead.

Nick failed to believe Jesus when He told him that no one could enter into Heaven without first being “Begotten from above.” At issue was not Nick’s lack of comprehension so much as his lack of concurrence, conformity, or agreement.

Jesus' statement revealed an objection that Nick couldn't get past easily. Namely Jesus' words had brushed aside as irrelevant the performance-based acceptance from God that Nick believed in, was counting on, and desperately wanted to be true.

Nick was one of a handful of elite Jews – he was an overachiever. People who perform well, naturally want acceptance, accolade, recompense, and reward, to be based upon performing well.



Take any group of kids and institute a reward system based solely on their conformity to a set of rules and procedures. Make it so there is no reward for behavior

that is below a set standard and make it, so the reward increases exponentially as conformity rises above that standard. Then the bottom half get nothing, while the top two or three kids reap a bounty – nearly all the reward. Now, without warning, change it to a system that only rewards those who admit that they need help. The kids who throw up their hands and say, I cannot do it – it's too difficult, please give me a reward based on your mercy and generosity. No other kid, regardless of their record, gets a thing. All of the reward goes only to those kids who humbly refuse to claim any credit for their efforts and who instead simply accept the gracious charity. Now, that doesn't sit well with people, especially people who are better at conforming to the standard.

This is one of the things that got Jesus into hot water with the legalistically inclined religious leaders. It is why Nick was incredulous.

High achieving people naturally desire a performance-based reward system as opposed to a system that ignores their exceptional abilities. Obviously, the converse is true as well. Below average, lazy, poorly motivated people prefer systems that reward based on

lottery, or on seniority, or on an equal distribution, or on some metric that they are good at, like participation.

Nick wanted it to be as he had always assumed that it was – He wanted to be rewarded by God for his diligence, talent, and abilities – areas in which he flourished, things that he did well. Jesus said, that's not how it works. So, Nick had a problem with Jesus' description of the way that it does work. Do you?



“Begotten from above,” by definition means that it is God’s choice. No one can make themselves be “Begotten from above.” Only God can do that by choosing to do that for a person.

What then gets God to do that? What is the mechanism that moves God to act? Again, just to make sure we're all on the same sheet of music here, that can only be a mechanism of God's own choosing. Only He can decide what it takes to get Him to act. God's not a human who isn't sure what will move Him, nor is He a machine where we just start pushing buttons hoping to find the right combination.

God knows perfectly well what will get Him to beget a person. It is what Jesus went on to elaborate, when He said it was about "Believing in Him." Jesus explained that as the Israelites in the Wilderness were physically saved by trusting in God's mediator (the bronze serpent) being lifted up, so it would be with Him lifted up as God's ultimate Mediator spiritually, eternally saving all people.

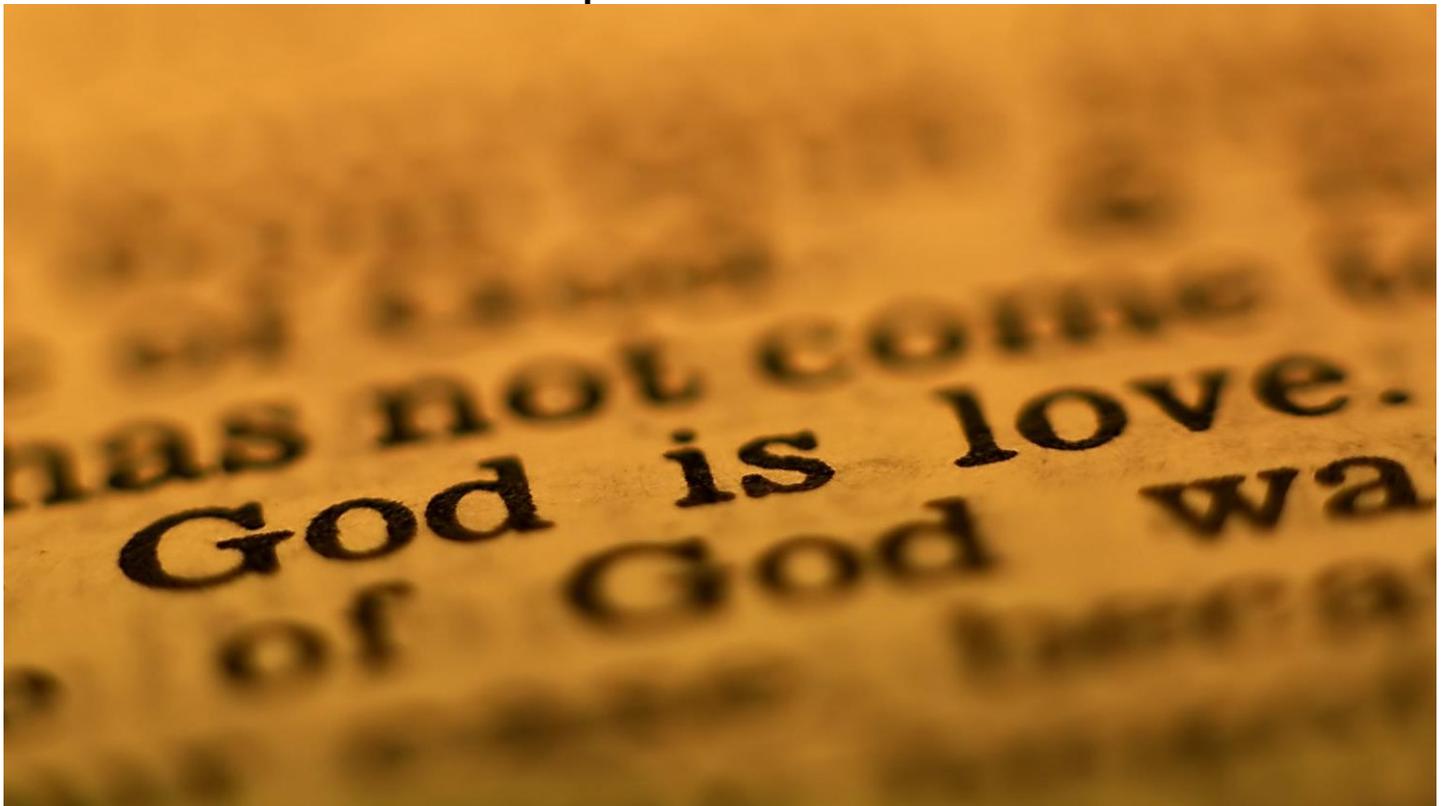


Jesus would be lifted up as the final and so only Mediator of God's Salvation. The way to enter the "Kingdom of God" was to be "Begotten from above," which was accomplished by "Believing" in the One Whom God sent as the supreme Mediator.

What does that, "Believing," entail? Last week we looked at the type of belief required; 1) individual or personal + 2) active, and so measurable + 3) continuous as in habitual + 4) objectively encompassing Jesus specifically + 5) intense because it's important and + 6) intellectual because it's a daily, hourly choice to believe. We looked at that.

In doing so, we also touched on the details of the Mediation and the Mediator and that is where we need to focus today.

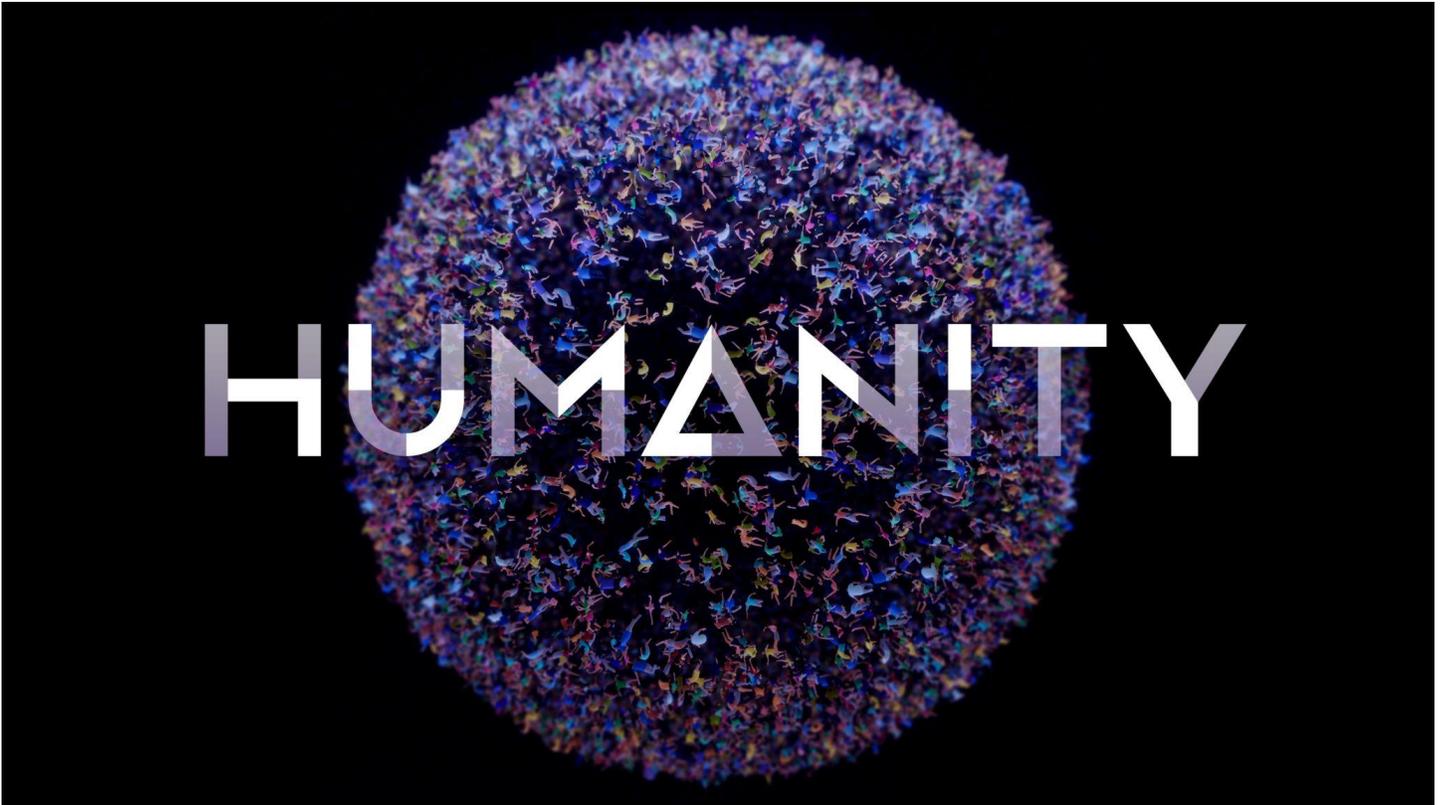
Explicitly, Jesus was indicating that He, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, was going to be sacrificed to end the sin problem once and for all. Why would that be? Why would God become man and sacrifice Himself to end the sin problem?



That's the elaboration from John that we just read. "For God so loved." Why does God so love? Because the Bible declares that "God is Love" (I John 4:8). He is

Agapê. That does not mean that He does Agapê, or that it is His default position, or even that it is part of His essential personality. God is Agapê in the sense that it is descriptive of His essential being. It's simply Who He is as part of His intrinsic nature.

As unconditional, altruistic, selfless, and self-sacrificing love itself, God obviously then, loves the world that He caringly created. What is the "World" though? In this context the world means the totality of humanity. Some people with a doctrinal agenda don't see it that way. Without going into a crazy complicated explanation, I'll just say that this passage that we read repeatedly refers back and amplifies the opening of this Gospel. John 1:9&10 tells us that the Word "Was the true Light which, coming into the world (same word), enlightens every man. He was in the world (same word), and the world (same word) was made through Him, and the world (same word) did not know Him." Clearly the "World," is all the people whom God created lovingly and intimately by breathing His Own breath into the original man whom He formed from the dust of the earth.



That means all people. Every person is born into a darkness through which God's Light shines. Some respond with receptivity and others with rejection, but God loves all of us so much that He created us and gave us a home. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Most strikingly though, He gave us the freedom to choose Him as a Father to whom we defer and submit and trust, or as someone we ignore as we choose more personal control.



It's a rejection of God in the role that God would naturally and logically and reasonably play in the life of a person wanting to be intimately connected to Him.

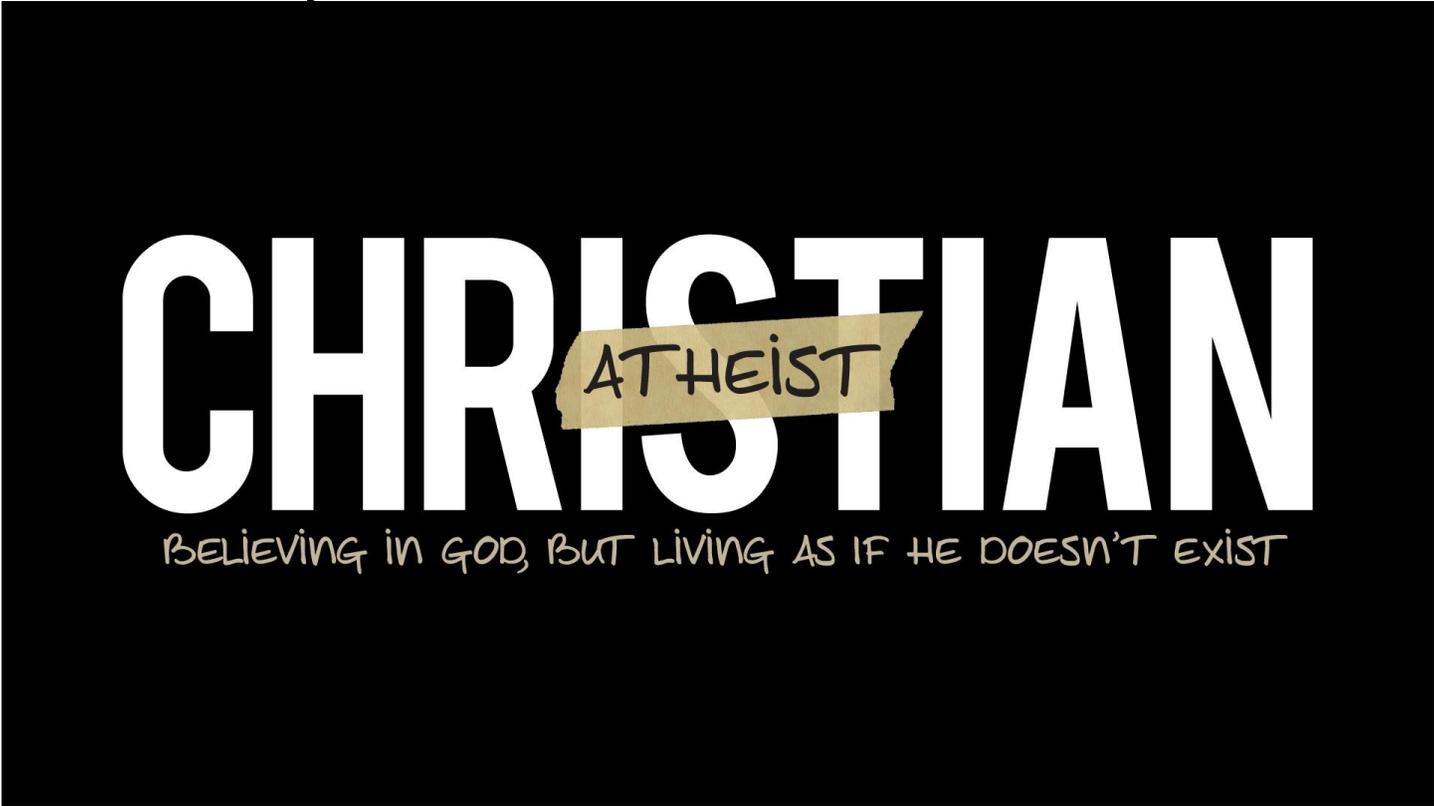
Our many times great grandparents chose independence over trust. Genesis 3:6, When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

We are definitely related to those two – the apple hasn't fallen very far from the tree – pun intended, and yes, I know that it wasn't an apple. People constantly choose independence over trust. I don't know how many teenagers trust their parents enough to instantly conform to their every wish, but I've never met one. Even 12-month-old babies push boundaries and seek independence from the control of their parents. Pushing boundaries is like a full-time job for kids... and adults.

It may make sense to push back against human authority – no matter how well-intentioned human authority is fallible. Well, Almighty God is not. To seek independence from Him is to seek independence from Him. It is to separate from the God/creature, or if you prefer the Father/child relationship that He has established.

Because of the decision by our earliest ancestors, we default to that position. It's in our DNA. We are inherently independent, even when we pretend otherwise. I've had many people tell me that they trust me and my teaching and my counsel, right up until I tell

them something they don't want to hear. People trust me until they don't. It's like that for all of us, isn't it?



**CHRISTIAN**  
ATHEIST  
BELIEVING IN GOD, BUT LIVING AS IF HE DOESN'T EXIST

We do the same thing to God. Christians say that they will follow the Lord no matter what because they trust Him fully and yet... I mean it's just who we are. I've always jokingly said that I'm two or three bad sermons in a row away from standing in this room alone. It's not entirely a joke. If I get crusty enough people will vote with their feet. If I fail to meet expectations for very long, people will scrape me off like dog doo on their shoe. We will do likewise to Jesus... We're just more subtle about it.

Know that, accept that, own that, and then pray that the Holy Spirit prevents it from ever happening to you. You can stay the course no matter what happens in His power, but not in your own. Now, if you don't buy what I've said here, congratulations, Nikodemus didn't buy it either. The reason is pride. We'd all like to think that we would never walk away from the Lord. Nick did. He eventually returned, but he did walk away.



So, we have a choice to entirely trust God as evidenced by our complete obedience to His every instruction, or to trust in ourselves enough to do it our way, at least to some degree. That creates two and only two realities. Those perfectly following the Lord

and those not. That's a problem because no one perfectly follows the Lord. So, if you're counting, that's everyone in one camp together.

Fortunately, God is love and as the Serpent told Eve, "You surely will not die!" God is too nice to let anything bad happen to you. He was just kidding when He told Adam and Eve that they would die for blatantly violating His command. Just like God today, I mean we don't really believe that He's going to seriously punish anyone for breaking His commands now.

Unashamedly reject requirements to reserve sex for marriage. To reserve marriage to male/female monogamy. To hate divorce as He Himself hates divorce. To have enough self-control to not get drunk. To refrain from lying, cheating, and stealing. To be repulsed by injustice and the abuse of those who are weaker.



“Don’t worry,” the Serpent still says, “God’s too kind to take any punitive action against you. Do what you want, let me open your eyes so that you will personally know good from evil, and you will be like God and can choose your course, instead of relying on Him to direct you.” Good grief, it only makes sense, God loves you, He won’t let you perish. In that original exchange the Serpent told Eve that God was the liar, which was a lie she believed – at least according to her behavior. Eve believed the Serpent over God because the Serpent told her what she wanted to hear.

Satan has not changed his playbook in all this time, not because he's afraid of change, or isn't proactive, or isn't innovative; it's because it still works just as well as it did in the Garden. All sin against God is the result of doing what we want rather than what God wants. That is a physically demonstrated lack of Trust, which is really calling God untrustworthy and since He declares otherwise, it is actively calling God a liar with our actions.

Again, God is love, so ultimately it will all work out in the end. Because He is love we can do as we please, even call God a liar, and still go to Heaven. At least that's how most people act. Well, there's a minor problem.



Every bit as much as God is Love, He is also Just. Just, as in, perfectly righteous. Put another way, God is Light, which is pure Truth, which, is to say, that He is Other – Other than that which He created – set apart. The Cherubim and Seraphim cry out in His throne room continuously, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty” (Revelation 4:8). Holiness, among other things equals perfect Justice. Bringing us back around. He is perfectly Just, which can be stated as perfect integrity. God cannot lie at all, ever. There is no darkness in Him at all, ever. What that means is that God is forced by the perfection of His Being to give all

humanity what it has requested... Independence from Him.

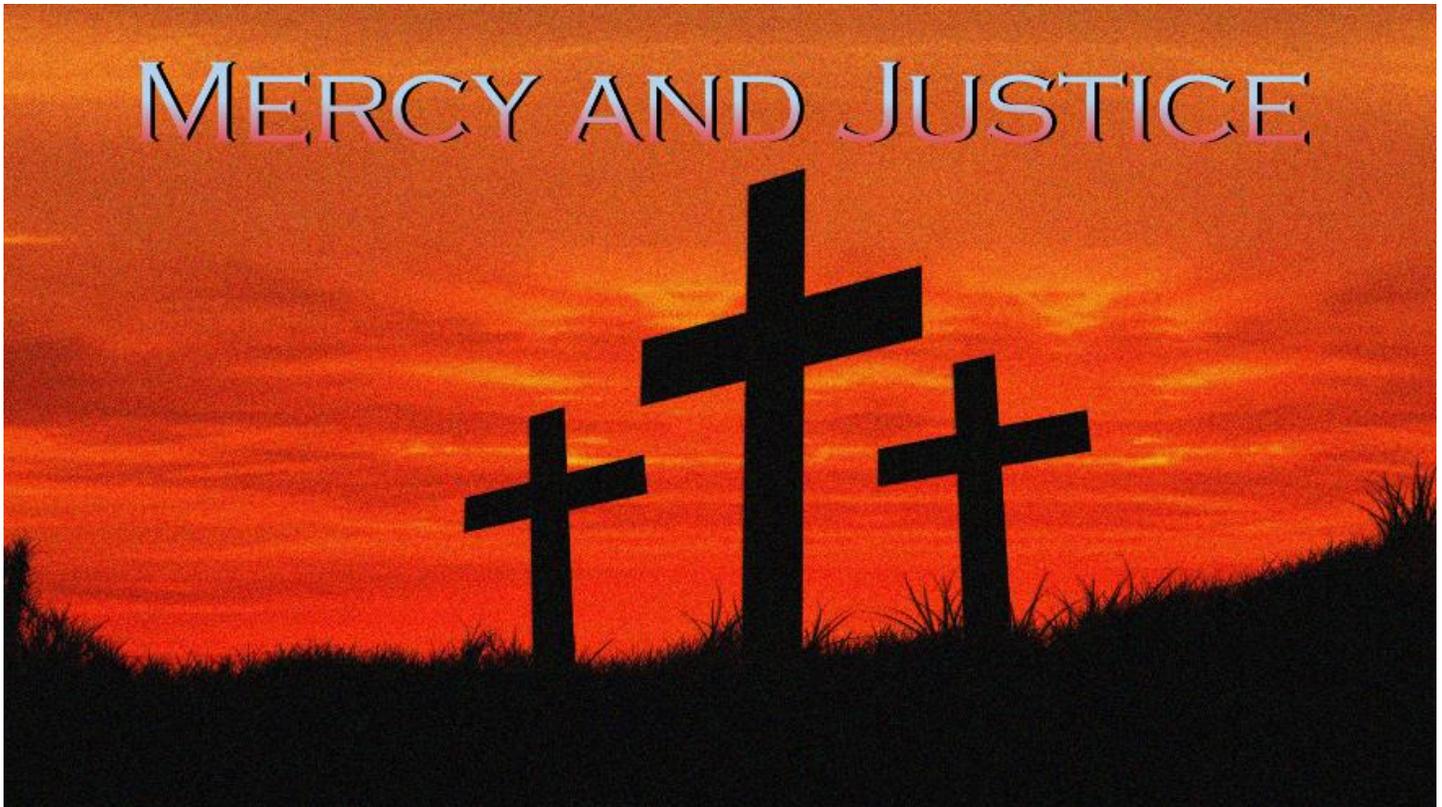
That is eternal “Outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12, etc.). We are, all of us, doomed. There is no negotiating with perfect integrity... There’s no bribe, no mitigating or extenuating circumstances, no grounds for leniency or any appeal to another court. It is what it is and there is no way around the facts in the case. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” says God’s Holy Word (Hebrews 10:31).



Now God has a problem. On the one hand He truly is pure Love, while on the other He truly is pure integrity. Not only is no one genuinely trying to perfectly conform themselves to all of God's Will, no one could succeed at perfectly conforming anyway. Therefore, no one is earning their way into Heaven, God cannot cheat and look the other way while we sneak in, and He clearly does not want any person to perish (II Peter 3:9).



It's a pickle, to be sure. What if, and I'm just spitballing here, what if God Himself came and paid the penalty for sin on behalf of people?



This is what's going on in the passage we started off with today. God's perfect love and His perfect Justice are satisfied in Jesus.

God loved the people whom He intimately created so much that He handed over to those same people what was to Him the most precious thing imaginable. The eternal Word made fragile flesh. In a sense God entrusted part of Himself to our care.

Of course, He knew how well we would care for Him. The point was God became man to endure all that is man but was able to overcome our natural fear and

weakness to be the one and only to perfectly conform and thereby earn Heaven. Instead of taking what He was owed, He allowed the Father to place the entirety of sin upon Him and He paid the debt we could never pay, on our behalf.



God's perfect Justice is fully satisfied in Jesus and so His Love as well. Anyone, anyone, and everyone who embraces that plan of Salvation will be Saved. God Himself has provided a perfect path to Him in Heaven and all we must do is follow that path. Seems simple, doesn't it?

The problem for us is we are too proud to entirely rely on the completed work of Jesus for our Salvation and so we try to at least get the tip. Right. Someone buys you a wonderful expensive dinner and you insist on paying the tip. Why? So, when someone says, I heard Bob bought you dinner, you can proudly say, well, sure, but I got the tip.

For those unable to allow God to pay the entire bill including the full tip and just humbly say thanks, there is nothing but condemnation.

You say but Scott, the passage plainly says the God did not send Jesus in order to condemn, but in order that He might save. Correct, that is the purpose.



Just like a rescue helicopter sent to an injured person bleeding in the ocean, who is surrounded by hungry sharks. The helicopter is dispatched solely for the purpose of saving, but if the person refuses the help, the net effect of the helicopter's presence is condemnation.

From the get-go all humans have been condemned. That's our native default position – we are all bleeding victims in a sea of hungry sharks. We put ourselves into that position, and God has provided a way out, but He's left the decision to be Saved by Him, the way He chooses to Save, up to you. If you reject His offer of

Salvation, you are already condemned. You have condemned yourself.



In Isaiah 61:1-2, the great prophet foretells of the Messiah when He said, 1The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; 2To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God.” People always skip that last bit. Salvation by its very definition means that there is something one needs to be Saved from and that is the “Outer Darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth,” which will be

cast lock, stock, and barrel, into the Lake of Fire, along with the Serpent of Old.

When God intervenes in the affairs of men, He always judges whether that is His purpose or not – it is the effect of His interference. Because of that reality, His judgment always starts with His own. That what Isaiah was saying, that's what we saw in the Temple Cleansing and that's what will happen when Christ returns.

When you carefully think about what the Jews were doing on the Passover in the Temple when Jesus showed up – I mean really stop and analyze it all – you should see remarkable similarities to what Christians are doing in church today. Look at what we make of Christ's legacy.



Church in America this morning is about ritual and tradition in many edifices. It's about a social gospel in some, a prosperity gospel in others.



It's about Trump and the Republican Party in a few and it's about God, guns a glory in a few others. It's about great programs, wonderful small groups, excellent Bible studies, and polite interactions. It's about an exciting rollercoaster of emotions during the singing and about an entertaining, easily digested and personally affirming uplifting message. Oh, and we'll bow our heads while someone prays.



People love the darkness and hate the light because we all know what's right and wrong deep down – we know. Then through the Grace of God we are drawn to the Light anyway and we surrender to the Lord and accept Salvation and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are transferred from the kingdom of dark to the Kingdom of Light.

But here's perhaps the most important idea for most of us today, we are still drawn to the dark. Our flesh is weak, and we succumb to our fear, and we fail to conform to the Spirit within and then we seek the darkness to hide.

Fundamentally, if you are not a Christian, you've never been in the Light and if you are a Christian, you have no business going back towards the dark.

The key to success for the one who believes comes in the final verse, "Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." Our Christian works are those that God carries out through us.



You see, acting like a Christian doesn't get you anywhere with Christ. You receive your status based upon Him and His righteousness. You are Saved

because of His completed work, not your own. Once Saved you are changed. You are “Begotten from above,” and so as a Holy Spirit informed new creation you allow the Spirit of God to minister through you to all those around you. You love God and you love your fellow Christian, and you love the world as God loves the world. It is that work which is true and the one through whom it is wrought eagerly, happily dwells in the Light, basks in the Light with a clear conscience.



At the final judgment, everyone  
will stand before God alone.

R.C. Sproul

quote fancy

It isn't to say we always get it right, but once you know what it is to stand in the Light joyfully unashamed, then that's where you'll want to be. Focus on Jesus and do your best to allow Him to drive your car when you

forget and take over and run off the road. Feel badly, take responsibility, apologize, endeavor to do better, accept full restoration and get back on the road and let Jesus drive.

In one of my favorite Bible passages the Apostle Paul basically says I have made mistakes, but I have a clear conscience. There are few things in the world better than a clear conscience before the Lord.