



Almost a Christian-Part 1

Watching Out for the Pacifying Benefits of Dating Christ

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Dating and marriage are two different things for a variety of reasons. Deciding to be boyfriend and girlfriend and deciding to be husband and wife, they are two entirely different decisions. Agreeing to go steady and agreeing till death do us part, they require two totally different considerations.

When I was 16, I met Carlin. She was 15. And boy, I was taken by her. I was enamored. Still am, but really enamored at 16. By the time I was 17 and she had finally turned 16, we went on our first date and we started dating.

After three years of dating, I, uh, popped the question down on one knee, ring in my pocket, pulled it out, “Will you marry me?” Then I waited. She said yes. And 12 months after that we walked down an aisle, stood in front of our pastor, we exchanged covenantal marriage vows and became husband and wife.

If I asked you, uh, when did I meet my wife, if you paid attention, you’d say, “Well, when you were 16.” If I asked you, when did I get married, if you did the math real quick, you’d say, “Well, you must have been 21.” If you’re married and I asked you, when did you meet your spouse, you would have a date or an age. And then I were to go on and say, well, when did you marry your spouse, you’d have a different date and a different age.

What’s interesting at dinner parties or at restaurants is to ask how long that gap was. Sometimes it’s five years, like me. Sometimes it’s 15 years. Sometimes it’s 15 weeks. A few people have blushed and confessed it was 15 days. But there’s a difference between when did you meet your spouse and when did you marry. Those are distinct. Now hold that thought.

We have a problem in the Christian community with the use of a popular phrase that I keep hearing. And it’s the phrase that’s often posited in a question, and it goes something like this: “When did you meet Christ? When were you introduced to the Lord? When did you meet Jesus?” Now, nothing wrong with the question. The problem is what people mean when they ask the question and what people mean when they answer the question. Because as one of your favorite movies puts it, “I don’t think that phrase means what you think it means.”

Because when people say that, often what they mean is, “When did you become a Christian?” And people often answer that question with, “Well, I became a Christian here, and that’s when I met Christ.” Now, if you’re reading and studying through the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we read lots of characters, lots of figures, and if you ask the question, when did Nicodemus meet Christ, you’d have a different answer because you would be in a context that would force you to say, here’s where Nicodemus met Christ, or here’s where Peter met Christ, or here’s where Nathaniel met Christ, or here’s where Philip met Christ.

But then if I ask you, when did they become a Christian, you would have a different answer. Sometimes you’d say, “Ah, gospels say they met Christ, but over here it never says they actually became followers of Christ.” If you fall into the pattern of blurring that line, you will, without knowing it, begin to shape your theology in a very unbiblical way that will leave out this very important period that necessarily precedes you becoming a child of God.



Because the scripture is clear. You meet Christ before you become a follower of Christ. You have a period between being exposed to the teachings of Christ and becoming a follower. That gap for people is different. Some it's short, some it's long, and some have met him and have never come to the place of true conversion. And if you're blurry about those two things, meeting Christ and becoming a Christian, if you're blurry with that, you will necessarily take out a natural and biblical concern that we ought to have about possibly getting stuck in that dating relationship and never moving to the altar.

Are you tracking with that? You can't miss that. It's a critical error, and it's one that Satan would love for us to buy into.

Take your Bibles, if you haven't already, and turn to Hebrews chapter 6, which is a passage that is concerned with the danger of being in this period of knowing something about Christ and even experiencing the benefits of Christ, but never getting to the place of biblical repentance and faith. And it happens all the time. And yet in our minds, in the modern 21st century thinking about Christ, man, we don't leave room for this, and we ought to.

And because we don't leave room for it, as a matter of fact, Hebrews 6 becomes a difficult interpretive passage for commentators and modern preachers because they say, "Well, I don't know what to make of this," when, if you understand that in Scripture, we often see people getting introduced to Christ that never actually become followers of Christ, we start to recognize, well, wait a minute, what about that period in between?

To use our analogy, what about that dating of Christ? Is there such a thing? And if there is, what's that like? Because you know what? When we get connected with the body of Christ and we start participating in the activities of the church and when we start to have some of the encounters that other Christians are having with God and his word, we start to see a lot of great things happening. But it doesn't mean we're converted. Those are two entirely different things.

In Hebrews chapter 6, verse number 4, that's where we left off, he begins a very poignant and very sobering text that helps us think through the fact that you don't want to get into a dating relationship with Christ and fail to get married, just to use our analogy.

He says it's impossible. Verse 4. For those who have once been enlightened—five things. Secondly, who've tasted the heavenly gift, who've shared in the Holy Spirit, who've tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age. It's impossible for those, verse 6, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance because to their loss, they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace.

Then he gives an analogy, verse 7, land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed, it receives the blessing of God. But the land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. I imagine if I were the farmer, I might curse it as well. You've worked on it, you've invested in and all it's producing is thorns and thistles. And in the end, the analogy finishes, it will be burned.

And he says—even though, now this is the most important verse in the entire section here—even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case. Now underline these words. Four words that are critically important: "things that accompany salvation."



Okay, let's get the big context. It's impossible if you have all these things going and you walk away from it, right? We call it apostasy. You get all this and you say, "Well, I've had enough." The text says it's impossible if they fall away—that's next week's message. We'll get back to that—to be brought back to repentance because of what they're doing and it's not good.

But then he says, after all that discussion and the analogy, we're confident of better things concerning you—things that accompany salvation.

Now, what does that mean? Keep your finger here. Turn back three chapters. Hebrews chapter 3. What we mean by that is something he's already established. As a matter of fact, we went slowly through the third chapter and we dwelt on this for a Sunday. We talked about the fact of what's being taught here and elsewhere in Scripture about salvation and real faith.

Look at verse 14. And we looked carefully at the grammar of this verse. Verse 14. It says, "We have come to share in Christ if," Hebrews 3:14, "we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." Read it again. "We've come to share in Christ." It doesn't say we will come to share in Christ or we hope to share in Christ if—no, it says we have come to share in Christ. We are genuinely partakers in Christ in a real and genuine bonafide sense if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first.

We learn in chapter 3 and elsewhere in Scripture that the proof of real conversion is longevity in the faith. That you will continue in the Christian faith if your conversion to Christ is real.

Now, here's the problem. There are some that look converted to Christ. They've attached themselves to the community of the redeemed, but they haven't really bought in with real faith. That's why the illustrations continue in chapter 4, as you remember, about the people of Israel wandering in the desert, and they come to Kadesh Barnea, and they're on the doorstep of the promised land, but they don't have faith in God. Oh, they're a part of the community of the redeemed, but they're not trusting God.

And in the 12 spies, indicative of the community, only two were willing to say we trust God. The rest didn't trust God. And he says God was displeased with that generation. Now, wait a minute, aren't those your people? Well, they are in name, but they're not in their heart. And the difference is huge.

Because a lot of people think if I'm in with the community and I buy into the principles, I must be in my heart in this thing called Christianity. And he's trying to make the case by analogy. He's made it here by principle in verse 14 of chapter 3: real bonafide faith at last.

Now, what about those that don't last? The emphasis in chapter 6, verses 4 and 5 is, you can experience a lot of incredibly beneficial things. Let's take this apart. We'll spend most of our time in the listing of these five things. But let us first just make a general statement about what's going on in the book of Hebrews.

Number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, and if you haven't found that yet, it's in your worship pack and unfold that. And jot down this, number one: you and I need to beware of the almost. Beware of the almost. Because as the title of this four-week series in this section of Scripture indicates, you can almost be a Christian. You can almost be a Christian.



But being a dabbler who walks away, that's not the thing that accompanies salvation because the thing that accompanies salvation is continuing in the faith until the end. If you don't continue in the faith until the end, we've already learned that in chapter 3, by illustration in chapter 4, you're not genuine. But you're stuck to the community for a while.

And the concern that we should have for all of us is, wait a minute, am I almost a Christian? Because you do know that the Bible is full of examples. Let me give you a few.

Acts chapter 25 and 26, a guy named King Agrippa. Do you remember him, Agrippa? Chapters 25 and 26 talk about King Agrippa. And here's what we learn. Chapter 26, as Paul's preaching, he affirms the fact that Agrippa—here it comes—believes the scriptures. He believes in what the prophets have taught. He believes the Bible, okay? To put it in the vernacular, he agrees the Bible. "I agree with it, I believe in it. I believe in this book."

Not only that, chapter 25 shows us that he is attracted to the apostolic teaching. He wants to know. Matter of fact, he calls personally for Paul to come preach to him. He believes the Bible, to put it in our terms, and he willingly goes to church.

Not only that, by the end of Paul's discussion, it becomes clear that his heart is being drawn to this. He even stops Paul's message. He says, "Are you trying to convince me to become a Christian? You think in this short time you're going to persuade me to become a Christian?" He is being pulled and drawn and yet no indication in the text. As Festus chimes in and shows him how ridiculous this teaching of Paul is, no indication Agrippa comes to faith in Christ. Almost, though. Close. Believes the right book. Sitting under the right teaching. Has the right feelings, but he doesn't quite get there.

Or how about this one, Acts chapter 8? This is a guy named Simon, not Simon Peter. He's often known by what he used to do. He was a sorcerer. Simon the magician. Simon the sorcerer. Remember him in Acts chapter 8? He encounters Philip. Philip is preaching mightily the things of God.

Now note this when you study Acts chapter 8 on your own. You good Bereans, go home and you study this. And you'll find that Simon believed the teaching of Philip. He embraced the teaching of Philip. He was baptized by Philip and his associates. Now check that out. He believes the teaching about Christ. He buys the teaching of Philip. He affirms it and he says, "I want to be baptized." He goes to some Christian school in a blow-up pool and he gets dunked right there. There he is. "I'm in." He's toweling himself off, and he's in.

Peter and John come to town, and he's attracted by the leadership of the apostles, and he even wants to be a part of it. Okay? He's aspiring to leadership. He believes the teaching of Christ. He gets baptized. He associates himself with the redeemed people. And you know what at the end Peter ends up saying about Simon? "Your heart is not right before God, and you are still in bondage to sin."

As a matter of fact, if you read the external early church fathers, Hippolytus and others say that Simon, from Acts chapter 8, becomes one of the major opponents for the next three decades of apostolic teaching in the first century. He bails out. He's an apostate. An apostate. He believed the teaching of Philip. He got baptized. I mean, we were at his baptismal service. He even wanted to be a leader in the church. Almost. Not quite.



If that doesn't do it for you, let me add a third name that we don't even need to give you a reference for. His name is Judas Iscariot. Remember him? Talk about almost a Christian. Think about that. He was the treasurer in the organization. He was the trusted one. He was not only called a disciple, he was designated an apostle. He, we can safely assume, as the apostles did, went into villages representing Christ and even did miraculous sign gifts.

Talk about an amazing position of power in the early church, and you talk about identification, he's on the back of the bulletin. Way high up on the list. Treasurer. Judas Iscariot. I mean, this is big. He's a leader. And yet, Jesus clearly said, he is destined to destruction, a son of perdition, and his heart before God, guess what? It's not right.

Do you think people thought Judas was a Christian? A genuine, devoted follower of Christ? You bet. Simon? You bet. Simon Magnus or Simon the sorcerer? You bet. Agrippa? He was real close. You can almost be a Christian. There's a lot of examples. And the writer of Hebrews has already said, you've got to be aware of that. It's not about being almost saved. It's about being saved.

Number one, the possibility of dating Christ, or letter A is how I put it. Just know it's a possibility. We've just given a few examples but you and I can probably think of people in our own life who we've watched come associate with with with Christianity. They've had a Bible. They've got their name on the front of a Bible. They've been to Sunday school. They've learned verses. They have been in it with Christ but only at a dating level.

But the dating level, man, it looks real because there's a lot of time at Bob's Big Boy, late night porch talks—you know, at least that's what it was for me at 16. I mean, they exchanged jewelry. I mean, it all happened, but no genuine conversion.

Beware of that, because the possibility is that you and I could experience a lot in the community of the redeemed and never truly be redeemed.

The diagnosis, four passages. Let me just quote them for you. I may make you turn to one. The first one, diagnosis, Luke 8, verse 13. You don't have to turn there because you know this passage. Luke chapter 8 verse 13 is one of the synoptic reports and records of Jesus and the four soils. The sower and the soils, remember that?

He describes the rocky soil this way. He talks about the sower throwing out the seed, which by the way is as good as the seed on the fourth soil that bears fruit some 30, 60, 100 fold. The seed goes out and it falls on the soil in the rocky places. And here's how Jesus in verse 13 of Luke 8 describes it. He says, "On the rocks are the ones who believe the word of God and they receive it with joy when they hear it." Think about that. They're going, "Woo-hoo, I'm into this." But they have no root. They—here's a big word—believe, but only for a while, Jesus said. Because in a time of testing, they fall away. In a time of testing.

Which leads me to a second passage I want you to jot down. 1 Peter chapter 1. This one we can turn to. Once you jot it down, verses 6 and 7, turn there with me. 1 Peter 1, verses 6 and 7.

Jesus said—now remember, Peter was there listening to the parable of the soils. So Jesus taught this and Peter heard it and he knew what he said and he's going to pick up on this phrase, in a time of testing. And Peter elaborates on it. He says, you know what? Here's what the time of testing is all about. It's a time of difficulty, a time of trial. It's a time of struggle. It's a time of pain.

Verse 6. 1 Peter 1, verse 6. It says, “In this you greatly rejoice.” In what? In this great inheritance. It’s coming for us, reserved in heaven for us. “Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of,” what’s the word? “Trials.” What’s a trial? Another word for trial? It’s a test.

“These have come so that,” now note this carefully, “your faith”—now leave the parenthetical section for a minute. We’ll come back to it. Drop down behind the dashes. “These have come so that your faith may be proved,” what? “Genuine,” and may result, if it does prove genuine, in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Now that faith is of greater worth—now the parenthetical section—greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire. You have a faith that when put under pressure is tested, and Jesus said, if it’s tested and it fails, it’s not real. If it’s tested and it doesn’t fail and it endures beyond the testing, then guess what? It’s real, and it will produce all kinds of praise and glory when Christ returns. But it will be tested.

Which means what? Jesus said believe for a while is a phony faith. It’s a faith that doesn’t last. And if it doesn’t last until the end, it’s not real.

Therefore, third passage I want you to jot down. 2 Corinthians chapter 13 should be something we periodically revisit in our personal lives. And that is that we subject ourselves to some evaluation.

Paul put it this way, verse number five: “Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.” Are you in it? Is it real? Next phrase: “Test yourselves. Test yourselves.” He says, “Now do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless, of course, you fail the test.” What a powerful passage.

You’d better be analyzing yourself to see whether you’re really in—not in the doors of the church but in the faith—because if you’re in the faith Christ is in you. But you might find out you’re in the doors of the church but you’re really not in the faith because Christ is not really in you; he’s just sitting next to you on the porch.

There’s a difference. He says examine yourself. Test yourself. How’s the test? Back to the words of Jesus, Luke chapter 8: they believe for a while. Now what happens if they believe for a while and then they bail out? Scriptures say.

Passage I’ve quoted already in our study of the third chapter of Hebrews, 1 John chapter 2 verse 19. And you don’t need to turn there because you remember this one, don’t you? “They went out from us, but they really didn’t belong to us. Had they belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going out showed that none of them belonged to us.”

Does that sound like a tongue twister? Catch it again. They went out from us, but they didn’t really belong to us. Had they belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going out showed that none of them belonged to us.

What’s the point? The bailouts, the temporary faith, the apostates, to put it in theological terms, proved they never had the genuine article to start with. Watch out.



You can date Christ. The question is, what do you do after you date Christ? Do you move on to marriage or do you break up? You don't want to break up. That's next week's sermon, because there's some possibilities connected with that. But suffice it today to say, beware of the almost.

Therefore, we look at a passage that lists five things that happened to someone who is associated with the community, the redeemed, and we say, we better test ourselves. Are these the genuine article or the plastic fruit? Let's take a look at them.

Verses 4 and 5 in Hebrews 6. Let's just list them, and we'll put it this way in your worksheet. We're going to consider the difference. We're going to take the phrase, each one of them, and we're going to say, how can this be a temporary, phony, less than biblical Christianity experience? And then what's the real article look like?

First phrase is this. Verse number four, it says, "who have once been enlightened?" They've been enlightened. They've once been enlightened. The word, it's an analogy of light. They've kind of stepped into the light. They have something new going on up here. They're enlightened. Their minds are enlightened.

Now, there's a difference. You can date Christ and have a level of enlightenment. You can be a part of the community, the redeemed, and you know what's going to happen? You will have some enlightenment. I put it this way. On the left side, there's a line there. Here's what one person could say who's dating Christ, and it would be true. Let's put it down this way: I have some new insights.

"I'm going to church now, and you know what? I'm starting to understand some things. I mean this is better than Tony Robbins and this is better than the self-help section of the Barnes and Nobles. I'm starting to get it now. This is enlightening. I know some things now that are really changing the way I relate to my wife and how I'm parenting my kids and the business ethics at work and you know what, wow, it's really changing things."

You come to church, you're going to learn a lot. You come to church, you're going to interact with the truth. You come to church, you're going to see the world through a lens and a perspective of biblical truth, and you're going to see the light bulbs pop on in your head. You can do all of that, though, and never be converted.

Because if you're really converted, that enlightenment's not going to be, "I have some new insights." Put on the other side of that line, you can either say that, or you can say this. Okay, here's the other half. You ready? I'm a new person. I'm a new person.

It's not that I have some new insights. I got a new brain now. As Paul said, I am a new man now. I am a new creature. To go back to our Sunday school memory verses, 2 Corinthians 5:17, if any person's in Christ, he is a new creation. Brand new. But I got some new thoughts. I got some new perspectives. I got some new ideas and insights. No, I got a new mind now.

Now, the center of our emotions in Western culture is the heart. But in Eastern culture and in Old Testament motifs, and even in Roman motifs in the New Testament, the heart is the center of my thinking. And the scripture promised in passages like Ezekiel 11. Let's turn to that one. We got time. Ezekiel chapter 11. Even if we don't have time, we'll stay a little later.



Ezekiel 11. God says he's going to give us that new heart. He's going to change who we are, the fabric of our being. Paul called it a new man, a new person. I am a new man in Christ. The old man's dead. That's different. Now, non-Christians can come to church and have lots of new insights, but a real Christian is a new person. They have a new mind in Christ.

Ezekiel 11, verse 19. Look at this. "I will give them," this is very insightful, "an undivided heart." Now, here's the thing. You've got an undivided heart before you come to church, right? I mean, if you don't have a granny that's trying to pound biblical stuff into your head, you're out there in the world just a normal person. You're not undivided. You're living for yourself, and everything's cool.

Problem is, you come to church, and you know what happens? Now all of a sudden you're feeling guilty about things you didn't before. You're being pressed to do things you weren't before. And now all of a sudden, oh, I'm divided. And God looks at the community of the redeemed—he's talking about Israel here after the captivity, bringing them back—and he says, "I'm going to give them an undivided heart. And I'm going to put a new spirit in them. New spirit."

Big S or small S in your English translations? Small S. I think that's probably accurate. We're talking about, I'm a new person. Paul said, a new man, a new creation. Galatians chapter 6, verse 15. A new creation. That's what matters. Am I a new creation? And he says, you're going to put a new spirit in you.

And I'm going to, guess what, remove the old hardware, remove the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. "And they will follow my decrees, and they'll be careful to keep my laws, and they will be my people, and I will be their God." Different heart.

I mean, you can put new programs on your old computer, right? Or you can get a brand new motherboard and a brand new operating system, and you can keep putting those same new programs on there. The problem is there's a lot of conflict trying to put the new programs on the old computer. And the Bible says it ain't about that.

And people come to church all the time, got the old motherboard, the old hardware, to use a very modern 21st century analogy here, and just keep piling on all those new great programs. They won't work real well, but you'll get them. I mean, some stuff's going to help. Problem is you're trying to work off the old platform. You need a new platform.

All you Mac guys are going, yeah, you need a Macintosh, what you need. That'd be a good analogy but I don't have a Mac so, um, do you get the difference here? You can be enlightened and people are in church all the time. But what we need is a new mind in Christ, a new heart, a new person.

Secondly, he says back in Hebrews 6—it's printed on your worksheet there—not only are people once enlightened and then bail out, but they're also people who have, look at this, tasted the heavenly gift. Tasted the heavenly gift. And the syntax and grammar of this, it makes it the focus on the generosity of heaven. Heaven bound or heaven sent generosity coming down from God. Nothing specified here, nothing specific, but God's gift, his generosity coming toward you.

Let's put it this way. People can come to church and they're in the community of the redeemed, and they start getting what I say, what I call here, blessings. And they start to say, "I have some new blessings now in my life. I have some new blessings."



Now, notice this. In the world, there's something we call in theology common grace. Because were it not for common grace, there'd be nothing happening on this planet but bad. Right? But God sends what's called common grace. He allows people to enjoy sunsets and full stomachs and carne asada burritos and all kinds of things that they can enjoy, even though they're sinners and bound for God's wrath one day, they get to enjoy that because of common grace.

You step into the community of the redeemed, you start going to small group, you get involved in the partners program, you come here to church every Sunday, you're going to have common grace on steroids. A lot of common grace. God is going to step it up for you because you're standing in the community of the redeemed.

It's the difference between, I got a son, my eight-year-old's turning nine today. It's his birthday, July 2nd. He's going to have a party tomorrow. But it's going to be a Mike Fabarez party. It won't be a Bill Gates party, right? Those are different parties, I can assure you.

Now, here's the thing. I throw a party for my son John, and he experiences that party, and that's all good and fine. But let's just say he connects with Bill Gates' kids, which I don't even know if he has any, but if he does, how old they are, whatever. Let's just imagine he's got an 8-year-old. You know better than I do, but okay.

My son gets to know in a chat room or something, Bill Gates' son, and they become friends, and Bill Gates' son says, "Hey, John, you want to come up to my birthday party?" And my son goes, "Yeah." "Well, Dad's going to send down the private jet. We're going to pick you up Orange County Airport. We're going to fly you up here to Seattle or wherever the guy lives, and you're going to be able to, on the Gates estate, experience my nine-year-old birthday party."

And you know what? My son is going to have a better time at his party than he'd ever have at his own party, because it's going to be Bill Gates' estate—or the state. Does he own the state now? I don't know. It will be a great party.

Now, he's going to get back and say, "Dad, I went to Joe's party up there, Joe Gates' party, and man, it was incredible. We had sparkling cider on the yacht. We bought a small country in the afternoon. I don't know. We flew planes and whatever. We did amazing things. And at my party, we played GameCube. Dad, it wasn't very good."

Now, here's the thing. You hang out at Bill Gates' kids' birthday parties, lots of stuff will come your way that'll be better than what you have in the world. But it's totally different if you're adopted into his family.

It may not look different because Joe Gates, if there is such a guy that's eight years old or nine years old, he experiences all the same stuff that John experiences at the party, but in reality, he's got some trust fund somewhere where there's like trillions of dollars that he'll get to spend one day. My son goes, gets cake, and goes home. Lots of great stuff, but my kid doesn't have college paid for after going to the party. When he's 18, he gets no trust fund. He gets a pastor's kid's savings account. Bill Gates' kids inherit the world. Right?

But at the party, you really can't tell the difference, because they all get to use the diamond-studded bounce house or whatever that—right? No difference?



Here's the thing. People join the party every weekend. They get to experience church with Christians. And God's common grace is poured out on steroids to us. But one has an inheritance in the eternal kingdom and the other doesn't. And it's hard to tell the difference when they're sitting next to each other in church.

Because they experience a lot of emotions in the worship. They experience a lot of edification in preaching. Yeah, they get a lot of common grace. A lot. Extra. It's more than common. They get uncommon grace. But they don't have salvation. It can happen. Matter of fact, it happens all the time.

Do you think Judas didn't experience some incredible things for three years on the front rows? Being an apostle? Yeah, but he's in hell, right? He's in a holding tank right now awaiting the great white throne judgment.

Difference? One had it and one didn't. One said, "I got some blessings." The other one, let's put it this way, is captivated by grace, and that's different. Captivated by grace. And that's different.

There are people that I know that are in the church that often talk about the blessings of being a part of the community of the redeemed but you never really hear their heart in sync with grace. And in scripture, you look all over the place and all you see is the apostles going, wow, it is amazing that I as a sinner, hell-bound sinner, am now have the lavished grace of God poured out on me.

A couple of passages to quickly jot down. 1 Timothy 1, verse 14. 1 Timothy 1:14. 1 Timothy 1:14, Paul is talking to Timothy about the fact—here's how he puts it—that the grace of our Lord Jesus was poured out on me abundantly, and he's not thinking of the blessings he gets for going to church, he's thinking of eternal salvation. He says, along with the faith and the love that are ultimately in Christ Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 2:16. 2 Thess 2:16. He says God who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and hope. That's different. That's not, wow, it's really great to go to church. I hope I get to go back next week and get another blessing. This is eternal encouragement and hope because I'm celebrating the grace of God.

One more, jot it down, and then this one would be good to turn to. Ephesians chapter 1, verses 5 through 8. Ephesians 1, 5 through 8. I know we're turning it to a lot of text today. But as I reminded the first service, this is Compass Bible Church. This will turn into a lot of passages. Just show your husband the bulletin. Compass Bible Church.

All right, Ephesians chapter 1. Captivated by God's grace. Look at the focal point here. Look at the interest. Look at what the spotlight is on. It's not on the temporal goodies. It's not even on the spiritual goosebumps. It's on something far greater and bigger. And this is where real Christians are stuck on this.

Ephesians 1, got to pick up the last two words of verse 4 to catch the sentence. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as sons. Even that phrase. You don't hear people that just attend church and get some of the blessings talking about that. He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the pleasure of his will, to the praise, verse 6, of his glorious—there's the key word—grace. To the praise of his glory.



You know what you're going to be focused on in eternity? As you get your inheritance? Man, this is incredible. I don't deserve this. Incredible. And here, the earthbound, real converted hearts are always focused on and captivated by the grace of God, which he has freely given to us and the one he loves.

In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of his sins. And you find a lot of people that casually associate with church, and they talk about the blessing of their kids or their grandkids or their friends at church, but they never talk about this incredible, glorious grace that was granted to us in redemptive love by the blood of Christ. You don't hear a lot of that unless they're singing a hymn about it. Their hearts don't connect with it.

In accordance, here it is again, with the riches of God's what? Grace. It's all about grace. That he, I love this word, lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Real converted Christians don't say, "Well, I get a lot of blessings being a part of this thing." Man, they are on their knees. They're overwhelmed with grace. And if that hadn't happened to your heart, maybe you're just dating Christ. Because once you get on the other side of this thing called real Christianity, something happens to your heart as it relates to grace. You get it and you celebrate it. And that will be your focus and theme throughout eternity.

Enlightened, it's more than new insights. Tasting the heavenly gift, it's more than new blessings—being captivated by grace.

Look at the third one. Back to Hebrews 6. The third one, bottom of verse 4: who've shared in the Holy Spirit. And some people go, wow, that just seems like a strong statement. It is a strong statement. Shared in the Holy Spirit. Now remember this, when you hear that and you think, wow, that seems so, that's got to be a converted person. No.

Look at this. John chapter 6—Jesus talked about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I'm sorry, John 16. In John 16, verse 8, he said, spirit's going to go into the world and convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Remember that verse? The world is going to be convicted through the work of the spirit, sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Now, you have a conscience when you're born. We all do. Romans chapter 2, and it helps us understand what's right and what's wrong. And it's written on your hearts by God, the law of God, and an impression of it, albeit weak and subject to misunderstanding, and subject to being quashed and deluded, you have a thing called a conscience. That's what the Bible says.

Your conscience helps you know that's wrong. You shouldn't have done that. Don't do that. And this is right and you ought to do that.

You step into church where people around you are all now filled with the Holy Spirit. They are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You know what? And the guy on the front is teaching about the book that the Holy Spirit wrote. You know what? Your conscience is going to be aided. You're going to pour in the ethanol, the fuel, the high-octane fuel. You are going to have a conscience on steroids in church. That's what's going to happen to you.



Because the Holy Spirit now is going to, from the outside, start to enforce what already is written on your conscience. And He will start to press upon you. Because His job is to convict you of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Therefore, you might say, being a part of the redeemed, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is impacting you. I put it this way. Letter C, you might say, hey, I have some new conviction. Conviction, not only when I do wrong, but I have new conviction to do what's right.

"I've been going to church for a while, and when they first did that Mexico mission thing, I didn't even feel prompted to pull out my wallet. But, you know, I've been going to church for a while now, and that Lucas guy got up and talked about it. Man, I wrote a check. Man, and I did it because, you know, I feel like I should do it. I felt convicted to do the right thing."

Great, new conviction. Your conscience is now on steroids in church. Doesn't mean you're redeemed, but it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You're dating Christ, and you can bet if you date Christ and come to his church, he is going to send his spirit to work on you. He is going to press upon you.

But that's different. And Jesus pointed the difference out between the Holy Spirit with you and the Holy Spirit in you. It's a totally different thing.

As a matter of fact, the person that's truly redeemed on the other side of the line can say this. It's not just that I have some new convictions. Other side, the Holy Spirit is resident in my life, and that's a different thing. The Holy Spirit is resident in my life. That's a different thing.

It's one thing to have the Spirit press upon me. Boy, you shouldn't do that, and you should do that, Mike. It's another thing when he moves in and brings the baggage. He says, hi, I'm here, and I'm here to stay, and I'm going to live with you. I'll be your roommate now. How about that? That's different. That's internal.

Passage I want you to look at with me. Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8 makes this crystal clear that conversion changes the arrangement from the outside pressing in to the inside working out. It's from external pressure to internal leadership. That's what the Holy Spirit does for the converted.

Now before that, your dating period, you're going to have a lot of external pressure from the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, you can have so much pressure depending on how you respond to it. You might be like Saul was who later became the Apostle Paul when Christ said to him, "Isn't it hard, Paul, Saul, to kick against the goads?" Do you remember that passage? He's fighting it. The Holy Spirit's pressing on him, but the Holy Spirit's on the outside. There wasn't yet an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a conversion, where he now had the Holy Spirit as his roommate. It hadn't happened.

But when he does, here's what it looks like. Romans 8, verse 9. Romans 8, verse 9. "You, however, are not controlled by the flesh." Translated in some translation, sinful nature, but it's the flesh, this body, this fallen humanness. "You're not controlled by that anymore, but by the," small S or big S? Big S, "spirit. If the spirit of God lives in you," see, where does he live? In you. "And if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Christ."



“But if Christ is in you, your body,” this sinful flesh of yours, “is dead because of sin, yet your spirit,” big S or small S? Small S. That’s you. That’s this new heart, this new man, Paul calls it, “is alive because of righteousness.”

Because here’s the thing, the Holy Spirit is not moving in unless you get changed. So the you has to change from old man to new man, from heart of stone to heart of flesh, and now the Holy Spirit can say, okay, I’m in, because I’ve changed your heart, and now I’m gonna live inside of you. Before that, when your heart is stoned, like Saul kicking against the goads, all the Holy Spirit can do is press upon you.

But then he works conversion in you, your heart is changed, and now he says, okay, I’m moving in. And he moves in and leads from the inside out, not the outside in.

And the Bible says, verse 11, “the spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you.” If he is living in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, your sinful flesh, through his spirit who, if we didn’t get it yet, lives in you. Do you see the emphasis here?

Brothers, we have an obligation. It’s not to the sinful flesh, to our fallen humanness, to live according to it. No. If you live according to the flesh, you’ll die. But if by the Spirit you’re putting to death the misdeeds of the body and you live.

Verse 14. Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you didn’t receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the Spirit of sonship by which we cry out from the inside, “Abba, Father.” And the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, small s, that we are children of God. Not from the outside, from the inside.

And that’s a different thing. That is a totally different thing. It’s not enough to say, I got some new convictions, and I feel the Spirit. I’ve encountered it. I’ve shared in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It’s not about sharing in the Holy Spirit. It’s about the Spirit living in you. It’s about Him being resident in your life, and that’s different. And those of us that have gone from dating to marriage, we know the difference as it relates to Christ.

Letter D, number four, fourth thing. Not only sharing in the Holy Spirit, but tasting the goodness of the word of God. And that one’s easy to understand, right? Oh yeah, I know non-Christians can do that.

They can, I put it this way. I can say as a non-Christian, I benefited from the Bible. I benefit from that. I don’t always like everything he preaches on, but every now and then he throws out a nugget, it’s pretty good, and I put it to work. And you know what, it’s good, I benefit from it.

You know why you benefit from the Bible even as a non-Christian? Because as Psalm 19 says, verse number nine, the ordinances of Yahweh are sure and altogether righteous. You’re dealing with a good book, a true book, God’s book. And if you deal with God’s book and decide even to take just a little bit of what it says and and you say I’m gonna live by that, you know what, things will go well for you at least in that part.

Now again, you’re trying to put—just like the software analogy—trying to put some new programs on an old motherboard and doesn’t always work well. But you know, to whatever extent you say,



you know what, I'm not gonna live an open marriage or I'm not gonna I'm not gonna engage in these sexual activities, I'm gonna do what the Bible says—you'll be blessed because you do. Because you reap what you sow. And if you follow the directions of God, yeah, it's better for you.

And non-Christians can soak up that benefit all the time in church. Go to Bible study. I learned another nugget. It was good. Put it to work. My business is doing better. My marriage is better. My parenting is better. Great. Doesn't mean you're converted. Because the relationship of the Scripture to the Christian is different than just benefiting from the Bible.

Let's put it this way. To capitalize on Psalm 19, if you read Psalm 119, you find that the resolve of the person who's a true follower of God is someone who sees the scripture differently. I put it this way. He has this resolve: I will obey God's word.

The resolve of the real Christian is not, it's really cool, I'm benefiting from the Bible. No, no, no. The real Christian says this: I am resolved to do what it says. I obey God's word. My resolve is I will obey it. I'll continue to obey it. It's different.

There are some people that see the Bible as an optional guidebook of principles. And as you do, and as you put those principles to work, you will have some benefit in your life. But the Christian says, it's not an optional, nice benefit to my life. It is my navigational system. It is what I live by. It is my constitution. It is the authority in my life. And if it says it, I do it even to my own hurt. I do what it says.

I mentioned Psalm 119. Why don't we turn there real quick? I won't change too many more. Wear some of that gold off the edges of your Bible. It's okay. We'll get you a new one.

Psalm 119. Look at verse 105 and this whole section. It's an acrostic poem, as you know. One section of verses following each of the Hebrew characters, the Hebrew alphabet.

In Psalm 119, 105, very familiar verse. Part of what caused us to use Compass as the name of our church. Because God, in His revealed Word, has laid down for us a map, a guide, and it is to guide us. It is, much like 105 says, it is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. It tells us where to go.

Look at verse 6, though. It's not just a cool little optional map for us, a nice little GPS if I want to turn it on. Look at 106. "I have taken an oath and confirmed it that I will follow your righteous laws."

Now, I know non-Christians that come to church, but they don't get to that level. They don't say that. They say, "That's kind of cool. I'm going to listen. Yeah, I'm going to get something out of it. It's nice. Good. It's a benefit. As a matter of fact, I'm doing a lot more what the Bible teaches."

No, no, no. Christians get to the place where they say, listen, here's the reality. "I have taken an oath and confirmed it. I will obey your righteous laws."

Look at 107. "I've suffered much. Preserve my life. Oh, Yahweh, according to your word, accept, oh, Yahweh, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws, though I constantly take my life in my hands. I won't forget your law. The wicked, they've set a snare for me, but I haven't strayed from your precepts."



“Your statutes are my heritage” for how long? “Forever.” “They’re the joy of my heart.” Underline verse 112. “My heart is set on keeping your decrees.” How long? “To the very end.”

Now, real Christians get to that place because they understand this is the authoritative voice of God, inscripturated in black and white, and it is our guide. Well, I don’t know if that’s a—I don’t know if I like that a whole— it doesn’t matter. God has spoken. We respond, see.

Now, non-Christians, they’re not quite there, and yet they have a lot of Bible studies they go to.

I got some new insights? No, it’s more than that. Got some new blessings? More than that. Got some new convictions? It’s not just conviction. It’s the indwelling of the Spirit. Got some new benefit from the Bible? Not about that. It’s about the Bible being our guide.

Lastly, letter E. Under the same heading of the verb above in verse 5. Not only have we tasted the goodness of the word of God, but these people have tasted the powers of the coming age. Now, this gets tricky. Wow. How can you taste the powers of the coming age and not be a genuine converted person? Happens all the time.

As a matter of fact, the Bible says people are going to line up in Matthew 7, and they will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not perform many miracles, cast out demons,” and he will say, “Depart from me. I never knew you.” Not I used to know you when you were doing those cool miracles for me, but I never knew you.

There are people, and today I know it’s not the apostolic age, but there are people that with us in the last 12, 13 months have said, “Man, I have been on the front row watching what God has been doing at Compass Bible Church, and God is doing some amazing things, and I’ve even been a part of it. I’ve actually contributed. I’ve actually volunteered. God has done some great things through me. I’ve watched them. I’ve witnessed them.”

They say that. Let’s put it that way, letter E. They put it this way: I’ve seen God do big things. I’ve watched the power of God. I’ve even been utilized by God to do some things. Wow, it’s amazing.

Now that’s different. Because it’s interesting, the focus in Matthew 7. It’s not on the powerful things you saw God do or that God did through you. It comes down to, you know when he condemns them and says, “Depart from me, I never knew you,” “you who practice lawlessness.” The problem is you may have done some big things for God, but you weren’t changed. The power of God didn’t change you.

Let’s put it that way, letter D or letter E: I’m transformed by God’s power. That’s different, see? I’m a different person because God’s power is not only working through me. God’s power has changed who I am. I am a new creature. I’m transformed. I’m being renewed by the renewing of my mind. I’m transformed by that. I’m not conformed to the world anymore. God is making me different.

There was a man who had a front row seat watching God do great things. And it wasn’t Judas. His name was Nicodemus. And Nicodemus had done some incredible things himself. Jesus confesses that he is a teacher of the law. He stood up like I’m standing up right now with a scroll, and he probably took the book of Isaiah and had analyzed it and outlined it, and he got up in front of



people, and he taught people God's word. And when Nicodemus met Jesus, he looked him in the eye, and he said, "Unless you are born again, you will never enter the kingdom of God."

Judas did some amazing things, but he was never born again. The power of God never came down on his heart and changed it.

Let's look at these again. I've had some new insights. I've got some new blessings. I have some new convictions. I benefit from the Bible. I've seen God do big things.

If the average person says that to us, we think, you're in, man. You're a part of the team. Problem is, you can say all those things and not say these things: I'm transformed by God's power. I'll obey God's word. Holy Spirit's in my life. Captivated by God's grace. I'm a new person.

And you know what? They don't get that. They get this. God says no. I want to see this. See this in your life. You see this in your life and you have a distinction of being a church going beneficiary of the community of the redeemed.

Make sure you're not dating Christ. Make sure you've stepped across the line to a true covenant relationship with Jesus Christ because these may be subtle in your mind right now but the more you study them the more distinct they'll become and you'll realize I cannot, I cannot settle for an enlightenment that's only insight; it's got to be a new mind. I mean, you just go right on down the list.

Please don't let this message come and go. Don't analyze it. Don't sit there, well whatever—you know what, if it's true and you should do that kind of analyzation. But once you do and you recognize this is God's word, you need to go home and engage in 2 Corinthians 13, examine yourself, verse 5, and see if you're in the faith.

As a matter of fact, don't even dare to go home because you might get killed on the freeway on the way home. Do it before you leave this place and make sure you're in the faith.

And if you're not, you know what you gotta do. You gotta cry out to God in repentance. You have to put your full and complete faith in Jesus Christ and what he's done. You've got to understand your need, and you've got to know you're hopeless without him. And if you're willing to do that today, you'll move from the list of five that are good, but they're not conversion, to the other five. And that's where you need to be.

Can't tell from the outside. I can't watch from here and see. Most people didn't call Judas as a bad guy. Most people didn't see Simon initially as a bad guy.

We don't want to hear it from Christ, do we? We want to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Let's pray.

God, we ask for you to do a work in our hearts today. No matter how much we think we know, no matter how much experience we think we've had, no matter how many great things we've seen you do, help us all to stop right now and to ask ourselves, is this a genuine, bonafide relationship with you, or am I just dating?



Dating, it has a lot of benefits. I'll experience a lot of God, but maybe I've been on that ladder for a long time, and it's time for me to get with it. And it's time for me to say, yeah, I'm going to do it. It's time for me, by your grace, to recognize that what I need is to dive in with both feet.

And God, if there are some here today that have experienced a lot, been dating you a long time, they need to step into that. I pray you do your work in their hearts right now. And that we would see and hear of their testimonies at the baptismal in just a few weeks as they testify to the fact that you changed their hearts.

Not about walking an aisle. It's not about raising a hand. You know that, God. You laid out for us what it's about. It's about doing business with you right now where these people sit. And as they sit there and do business with you and analyze their heart and your spirit shows them that they need to take that step into genuine repentance and faith, God, we know that the next step for them is spelled out as well. It's called baptism.

I can't wait to see people expressing what you've done in their hearts, even this morning, in a couple of weeks, in the afternoon. Look forward to that. But God, for now, help us all to do our own testing, our own evaluation, our own analyzation. May your spirit have his way in our hearts right now.

And may this resonate in us, and may we not leave today without making sure where we stand with you. And God, for those that are like Saul, the hard-hearted among us, who are kicking against your work in their lives, oh God, we pray today would be a day that you knock them off their horse like you did with Saul. You close their eyes to everything else until they open their eyes to your son. Pray that would happen today.

God, thank you so much for this clear and yet poignant and challenging passage. It's been good for us to study it. In Jesus' name, amen.