

In the Trenches, But Not Alone

by Dan Camp, eEncourager

One of the things the enemy enjoys most is leading Christians to believe we're in the trenches of life by ourselves, nobody understands or cares, and that we are down in the pit *alone*. Sometimes, life feels like a deserted island where the only companion around is an old volleyball, but that is simply cruel deception.

When the going gets rough, the rough get going! That old saying came from an incorrect performance-based mindset that has been popular for centuries. There is nothing new under the sun. Legalism is thousands of years old, but it's still producing best sellers today.

There are some preachers today who are selling things *they decide* to put into it, and believers are buying what they are selling. There is a large segment of the modern church that has been taught, for example, that tithing is the way to financial security, and that if we want to prosper all we need to DO is give 10-50% of our income, and God will bless us. I am not anti-tithing, I am anti-*mixing*. Stay with me, please.

By now, Christians should be savvier. Anything that primarily requires people to DO SOMETHING is *not* the genuine Gospel of God. If there is a cost to you, there's a Red Flag! We may want to believe it. We may even try it. Surprisingly, there may be appearances that it works! But whatever it is, the truth about Grace is not in it if God's favor comes because we keep a law, or use a method, or stand on our ear.

How do we know this? Because the Gospel teaches Grace is a Gift that is already ours because of what Jesus has already done. He has already paid any and every cost. If you want it, you may have it, but you may not do anything to earn it (Eph. 2:8-9).

We have millions of copies of the Scriptures, which our predecessors did not have. Before the printing press, the dispensers of the Truth were highly educated in the ancient languages of the Bible. Who would argue with them?! Who could argue with them?! If they said, "Do this or do that 'because The Book says so,' or 'because God said so,'" folks didn't have much choice.

We don't live during those dark times! We have the Scriptures in our own languages! So why does the "spiritual abuse" of God's people continue so widely today?!

There is a broad general understanding of the Reformers of the Reformation having recovered all of the lost ground of the authentic and historic Church of Jesus. But those fathers, those legends, those supermen and women, did no such thing. Yes, what God did through them is literally amazing, and, yes, we stand in awe and great blessing. But they only began the *reformation process*.

What, then, remains to be reformed? What spiritual ground is waiting to be recovered and taken away from the enemy, as well as those who believe his lies?

Your answers to these questions will reveal if you are a "Noble Berean," whether you have studied in the Spirit, and are a workman who rightly divides the Word of Truth and need not be ashamed (Ref. 2 Tim. 2:15). Do you really know what it means to **rightly divide**?

I believe I remember someone teaching me the truth that The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are NOT "New Testament" books, but did I rightly divide? I'm afraid I didn't. On page 1 of Matthew 1 in BOLD PRINT are the words, "The New Testament of Jesus Christ," and I fell for it.

If you don't know that the Gospels are "**intertestament** books," I have some incredibly good news for you! Despite what human publishers and printers publish and print, a "testament," specific to the Holy Bible and more precisely, "a last will and testament," is only in effect - *after someone dies*. The author of the book of Hebrews makes it crystal clear that God was not satisfied with the Old Way; so, He made a New Way through the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! That New Way, that New Testament, could not begin until *after* Jesus died (Heb. 9:17).

"Rightly dividing" is seeing the Death and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior as God's Great Dividing Line between the Old and the New. The marker of the Great Divide that Jesus provided for us was His cruel Cross. Everything *before* His Cross, not His nativity, is the Old. Everything *after* the Cross is the New.

Do Christians live under the Old? No, we live under the New, under the Gospel of Grace, not the burden of the Mosaic Law given to the Hebrew people (Rom. 6:14). The demands of the Law do not apply to believers since the Cross. Everything changed at the Cross! We are not under Law, but under Grace! Everything changed because of Jesus' Finished Work!

Galatians 4:4 is an incredibly important verse. Have you ever heard any concentrated Bible teaching about it? Probably not. Why is it so important to know that Jesus was born under the Law? It is important because it explains WHY Jesus taught as He taught, which in turn explains WHAT HE MEANT!

Have you struggled to understand the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel narratives? Sometimes they seem Law-filled, and other times amazingly Grace-filled. It's very confusing, and it was a horrible problem for me. I didn't yet know about rightly dividing, and I didn't yet understand the significance of how the timing of Jesus' birth and life under the Old affected the meaning of His teaching in the New.

In fact, I don't think I ever heard anyone teach that Jesus was THE LAST AUTHORIZED MIXER OF LAW AND GRACE. Born under the Law, He plumbed the depths and taught with such authority that the most educated and devoted were astonished! But His coming was The Coming of Grace and Truth (John 1:17), so He was also able to teach Grace and all the differences/improvements believers could and should experience after The Great Divide, His death on the Cross.

Note that Jesus mixed Law and Grace because He was the Person of Grace, yet born and living under the Law. He was unique and His uniqueness as the *last mixer* is unquestionable. No one after the Cross was authorized to mix Law again with Grace.

No apostles mixed Law with Grace, for all were on the same page with Paul and in agreement with "his Gospel." The Spirit carefully gave us Peter's response to some believers who were opposed to Paul's teachings. Peter was not nice to them. Peter did not affirm them, and if anyone tells you that 2 Peter 3 finds Peter faulting Paul, they simply cannot read. Peter does not

fault Paul, and his affirmation of Paul is not just any affirmation because he was the top cop, so to speak, representing all the apostles.

If anyone tells you the apostles of Jesus were divided about the fundamental core of the Gospel of Grace - that the fundamental core of the Gospel IS Grace - please send them my way or to another "Grace-guy." There was one "Great Common Denominator," summed up best in Gal. 2:20, and ALL the apostles understood, agreed, and taught from that base, the Grace-base, the "Not I, But Christ Living In Me" base alone.

Yes, there are countless visible *numerators*, the activities and responsibilities of our lives, but ALL flow from The Life, the Resurrection Life, The Great Common Denominator, Christ Jesus living in us His "FIT-Life."

Would you like to be a FIT believer? The Gospel says that you have Jesus' FIT-Life!
Jesus F-OR you, Jesus I-n you, and Jesus T-hrough you, **F-I-T**, for, in, and through you. He IS your Life, and His desire and intention is to live For, In, and Through you, which makes you the fittest of the fit!

Now **physical** fitness is something requiring much effort, discipline, consistence, and persistence. My wife has been working for several years on her physical fitness, so that she could run in a recent half-marathon, her first ever. I will not reveal her age, but she is not a spring chicken. She is an athlete now, not vocationally, but by virtue of her fitness. And she will be the first to tell you that any athlete who fails to credit the life in the body as the cause and reason for the desired result, that person is not giving credit where credit is due.

Spiritual fitness is no different than physical fitness in this sense; the One Who Is The Life produces the desired results. Spiritual fitness in Christ Jesus is better than physical fitness, because He is able and willing to apply His FIT-Life to any believer based on Grace alone. In fact, you can't sweat to get it, and you don't have to die physically to get the full effects of His fitness, His Life, in you.

Father does not want our "blood, sweat, and tears." He does not accept any striving, trying, or trying harder. He only accepts the Finished Work of Jesus, which is available to all who will abide, depend, rely, trust, and believe in Jesus within us. He is the Vine, we are the branches, St. John taught (chapter 15).

Do the branches produce the fruit? Do they struggle and sweat and work? No, the branches do not produce anything. Branches BEAR, the Vine is the Life, and the Life alone produces. The Life is the invisible Common Denominator for all of the visible numerators.

Does it LOOK LIKE the branches are DOING something? Yes, it does. It most certainly appears the branch has a LOT to DO with the outcome of beautiful delicious fruit. But if your average fruit tree could talk, what would it have to say for itself?

"It wasn't me. I'm just a branch. I didn't produce any of that fruit. It may look like I did it, but I did not do it. The Life flowing in and through me - the FIT-Life of God *for* me, *in* me and *through* me - HIS LIFE DOES IT ALL."

Does it look like some believers have it all together, producing incredible good works to the Glory of God? Yes, it certainly does appear that way, doesn't it? Is it possible that the appearance is real, that it is them doing it?

Are you a milk-fed believer or a meat-fed one? Are you a Noble Berean who digs into God's Word and hears His voice? If so, you already know there are two possibilities in answering this hard question. Only The Life produces real fruit. So, one answer is that it looks like some believers are doing great things because they **are** living by Grace, abiding in Christ, and LETTING HIM live FIT – for, in, and through them. He is the One DOING the producing, the work, and bringing about the results. It is not them, but His Spirit in them.

The other possibility is quite a surprise for many in the modern church. The apostles all knew the "forms of god-likeness that lacked the power of God." They were always on the lookout for "The Good Flesh," that is the *sarx* (Greek) or "Self-life," working with Sin, the Persona (noun), in us, to accomplish good deeds **without God**. Unfortunately, it is possible to look busy and good in the flesh - the good flesh - without relying on Christ in us.

What???! Are you kidding me???! No way!!! I have never heard such an outrageous thing!!! There is no such term in the Bible as "Good Flesh!"

We have heard responses like the above, and at one time, WE HAD THE SAME OBJECTIONS! My tires were totally deflated, however, when a dear brother showed me the Tree of Knowledge, and he asked me, "What was its full name?" I brashly replied, "That's easy! It's the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."

And then I saw it. It was like the first time I had ever read the verse in Genesis. "Good and evil," or rather, evil **AND GOOD**. And my heart sank. Human good and human evil come from THE SAME TREE. The "Good Flesh" comes from the wrong tree and can imitate Christ in us. This was not my happiest "Ah-Ha moment."

There had been many forms of godliness in my life, many years of DOING FOR GOD, many, many times when I had not only worked and served in "the arm of flesh," but I had also taken credit for the outcomes. Worst of all, as an elder, a leader, a teacher, and on and on, I had taught others to DO likewise.

In his wonderful one-year biblical worldview training program called Centurions, Charles Colson personally taught my wife and me, "You will only truly learn what you teach." To that we now add, "Those who teach, primarily teach what they are taught."

This is why we now teach Grace and the GIFT of Righteousness (Rom 5:17). Grace alone can conquer trenches and troubles and spiritual abuse, and Grace doesn't need any help! Grace was agreed upon and taught by all the apostles, who all used the Cross to rightly divide the Word of Truth. Grace explains what Jesus meant when He taught, and Grace makes us Spiritually FIT! Grace is The Great Common Denominator that gives Life to all our visible numerators. And Grace makes us glad to give Jesus in us all the Glory! There is nothing as great as Grace!

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