

## “Gifted with *GOD*’s Way as *Our* Way!”

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Who knows folks who think everything *needs* to go *their* way? Anyone come to mind? It’s a *common* notion, it’s usually *selfish*, it’s always *naïve* and it *can* be *deadly*.

Nobody holds the patent on “my way”, and so, many try to claim it’s *their own special right* for all to go *their* way. But who’d *want* the *right* to be so *wrong*? Anyone that’s *wrongheaded enough* to think that, all *must* go “my way – *would* and *does*.

We get ourselves *irritated* when *others* try to get *their* way but we’d be wiser to feel sorry for them. They’re foolishly setting a *trap* for *themselves*, *trying* to get hold of *fantasies* that, as such, are *always out of reach*. What they *fantasize* can’t and won’t *materialize*. They’re trying to have an *unmixed* bag experience in this *everyday world* of *mixed* bags.

We *pretend* that we’re not selfish and use *euphemisms* for *ours* and for *our* jealousy over others’ seemingly “getting *their* way”. But, *efforts* to *conceal* our selfishness *reveal* that we’re just as selfish and clueless as the others.

Well, it isn’t easy to *see* that, “needing” things to go “our way”, is *naïve*, since fantasies of “*our way*” get in our way. They trip us up. Refusing to examine “*our way*”, so as to learn how “*our way*” might more *probably* end – and *not* in the way we intend – we double-down in trying to get “*our way*”. And, we *don’t* get “our way” – because we *can’t*. But we don’t *get it*. Blinded by fantasies, we *can’t* pull out of our full-speed-ahead into disappointments, even despair, that, though unplanned, was predictable all along *our way*. You see, *denial can’t afford to predict what’s not desired*.

When *others* “need” things to go *their* way, since *their* fantasies aren’t *ours*, we *easily* disparage *their* efforts as, so naïve and foolish. We tell ourselves, we’re not *that stupid*. “But, ya are Blanche, ya are!”

Still, in detecting naïveté in others who try to get “their way”, we *might* be able to *identify* with them and *learn* from our fellow fools. That’s what we do in *group* therapy. We also might be able to afford to be more patient and less judgmental, for they’re all like we are – *patsies* for falling into stupid self-set traps of self-centeredness.

Believing that *all* needs to go “my way” is *the way* of this *fallen* world. “Been there, done that”. Still do it.

And, it’s not only that every *thing* needs to go “my way”. Every *one* needs to go “my way”, “my *when*”, “my *where*”, “my *how*”, and my “*Why not!*” That exasperated whine, “*Why not!*” is not a *question*. It’s a *self-centered demand* that *all must* go “my way”, and there’s *no reason* for it *not* to go *my way*! Except, of course, that it’s *not* going my way, and *can’t* go my way, for “my way” is but a *fantasy*.

*Frustration* is the clue that, getting “my way” isn’t all up to *me*. If something or someone *else* is needed for it to even *seem* to go “my way”, *I can’t make it go* “my way” *by myself*. But, why even *buy* into the notion that I *need* it to go “my way”? *Can I predict* my *experience* of outcomes? Am I omniscient? Need anyone ask? Have I ever been *disappointed* after getting what *I’d thought* was “my way”?

In reality, “my way” lies at intersections of blind alleys of “What if!” and dead end roads of “If only!” *Imagined vistas beyond* blind alleys of “what if”, may *seem* alluring

and *imagined vistas beyond* dead end roads of “if only” may *seem* rosy, but *there’s really no way to get beyond* those roadblocks at intersections of “what if” and “if only”. That little word “if”, says it all: “*Ain’t gonna happen!*”

“My way” was the deadly *dogma* of our first parents in God’s gracious gift of Eden’s Garden. That ancient *idiocy* of self-idolatry is *religiously* rooted in the notion that, *by ourselves, we can create reality, ex nihilo*. We can’t *make up truth* to suit “*my truth*”, that self-centered, *supposedly* “postmodern” excuse, for *trying to get my way*. It’s really the *oldest* excuse in the book. What book? The Bible.

When something *hasn’t* gone *my way* or *isn’t* going *my way*, or *looks* like it’s *never* going to go *my way* – we idolatrous idiots *feel fear* and *frustration* that affixes to our own *fixations on the fictional* and can end in fatalities we so foolishly fail to forecast.

These *unwanted feelings* are the unavoidable spillage of our preoccupation with *self*. We don’t *aim* at these *results* when we stage our scenarios. But *they* hold us hostage, anyway. It’s inevitable! *We write* scripts, *we try to direct* the cast, but *we can’t control* what cast members bring to *their performances*. And, *they are performances*, as are *ours*. The cast, no less than we, is preoccupied with scripts and scenarios of *their own*. Each thinks all needs to go *his* or *her way*, not *our way*. Happy landing, folks!

We’ve been racing *this way* since the *start* of the race. But now, hooked on digital heroin, setting our sights on our selfies, we sense we *can’t escape being noticed* and we *can’t escape noticing that*. So, we posture, pretend and pose as we *try to hide* inside *our selves*. But inside *our selves*, there’s no hiding place. Inside us, we’re all still so distracted with our self-obsessed assessments of *us* and of *others*, and, with all those *otherwise* scenarios of ours.

What’s even *more frightening* is that many who think that they, too, need it *all* to go *their way* – *lie, cheat, steal and even kill*, trying to *get their way* over *our way* and over *us*. If it *still* doesn’t go *their way*, they may amp up their lying, cheating, stealing, and killing with ever more determination and brutality to *get their way* over us.

So, doubling down yet deeper into *our own* irrationality, it seems to us to be even *more* necessary for things to go “*my way*”. But, others notice the same sorts of threats – real or imagined – so they, too, come to the same sorts of conclusions and raise the stakes in *their* defensive and offensive dealings against us. So it goes, running around in circles of fear, frustration and hostility, round after round after round, and with plenty of rounds of ammunition.

It’s *scary*. *Sin* always is – in the sinner and in the sinned against. And, it’s all so stupid, for it’s all so *self-centeredly self-defeating*.

*Fallen, stuck*, trying to get “*our way*”, we’re *motivated to oppose* others with whatever’s at our disposal. Given that we can all be *predisposed to dispose* of other’s ways – and even of others, *themselves* – it’s not a promising prospect.

Now, some do *gang up with others* they *dub* “*our kind*”. In cahoots, they then try to screw the *excluded* others to *save their own* “*us*”, i.e., *me, myself and I*, writ large.

Selfish schemers of *religious* bent, rig self-righteous twists on Bible verses – Left and Right. But, belligerent blaming and boasting with Bible verses vs. “*them*”, begets belligerent blaming and boasting with Bible verses vs. “*us*”. Then, retaliation results in more self-righteous grievance, *ad nauseam*, and more self-righteous retaliation, *ad nauseam*. None of it leads to any real satisfaction *on either side*, for each still longs for what *fantasies* can’t provide.

So it has been for ages past; so it is now in this age of ours, and so it will be, to the end of *the ways of this world*.

And if we don't recognize *us* in at least *some* of our self-centered *opponents*, we're *stuck* in dangerously stupid, self-righteous denial that *blinds* us to what *they're up to* and *blinds* us to what *we're in for*. It's so long been so: "Pride precedes destruction; an arrogant attitude foreshadows a fall." (Prov 16:18)

But this wisdom so often goes unheeded. Inescapably, then, there's *further* loss. And whether or not we *see* it coming, that tragic *payoff of pride* is always *predictable*.

Well, given the evidence of which we're all *somewhat* aware, *all* agree on one thing: *All's not right with the world!* We *don't* agree on *what's* not right with the world, but we agree on *who* aren't right: *Them!* That, right there, is not right. We agree, too, on *who is right*: *we* are – at least, *I* am. That, too, isn't right.

When G. K. Chesterton was asked, "What's *wrong* with the world?" he *rightly* replied: "*I* am". Do we *rightly* reply? A *right* reply is the most *practical* way to *do something* about what's *wrong* with the world since, *we're* in charge of *us*, and we *can't* be in charge of *anyone else*. We can *do our* part. *Our* part might help – or hurt. But, if *we* don't take *responsibility* for *us*, and *our* part, forget about *fixing what else* is wrong with *the world*.

All have *our own* priorities and resentments, *our* vested interests, *our* values, *our* versions of things as they are, *our* verdicts on *what's wrong* and *our* visions of what'd *fix* it all.

But, agreeing *that*, "*All's not right with the world*" is useless if *we all* *accuse each other* of what's *not* right and *we all* *applaud ourselves* for what *is* right. We fault *others* whose ways we *can't* control and we excuse *ourselves* whose ways we *don't* control. There's *no hope* for the world, if hope's *all up to us*.

So *all's* not right with the world. Here's what's more to the point: All *are* not right. All *is* not right with the world, because all *are* not right with the Lord.

And it's no surprise that this *baseline truth* is, and always has been, *deeply resented* and *deeply resisted*. That, too, *is the way of this fallen world*.

An *honest* look *behind* our bragging and blaming would reveal our *rationalizations* about what *we* think *isn't* right *about us*, but pretend *is* right, and our *rationalizations* for *our* faulting *them* to absolve us. But, trying to cope by bragging and blaming that we *can't* *buy*, can't do the trick. We can't *relieve us*, because we don't really *believe us*.

Then, extrapolating from our *self-centered*, and therefore, *disadvantaged* point of view, we *can't* *believe* that *our* bragging is *believable* to *others*. We can't hide from us, what we're trying to hide from them, since we keep *our eye* on what we're *trying to hide*. Stuck in cells of solitary confinement in *our* brains, where *our sense of self* tries to *hide*, we can't help but assume – so naively – that others see through our charade as we do. Then, we're all off and running in yet another round of never ending attacks and counterattacks that lead to more fear, frustration and, then, to more hostile outrage *at*, and *from*, the others.

This all reinforces *to us*, how far short we fall in *our own* eyes as we blindly assume, that's the "us" in others' eyes. Of course, it's not. They use *their* eyes, not *ours*; they're in *their* brains, not *ours*. So, this prompts them to get angrier with us if they ever *fall* for our posturing or ever *fail* to suspect our camouflaging.

In our self-centered bragging and blaming to obtain *our fantasies* for “my way”, we’re repeating the foolishness noted in Ecclesiastes: “The *eyes* are *never satisfied* with what they *see*, the *ears* are *never satisfied* with what they *hear*. . . . I looked on all I’d tried, it was meaningless – a chasing after the wind I never could catch. So I tried to tell myself, there’s *no* meaning under the sun.” (Eccl 1:8; 2: 11)

Under the sun that yet shines *above* all the rationalizing and the storm clouds in our *fallen* hearts and minds, we’re all so easily distracted by *superficial sights and sounds* that we try to spin into *super* sights and *super* sounds. But our souped-up solutions are all still so *superficial*.

Truth, you see, is based beyond *mere sights and sounds*. As Paul told Timothy: “No one has *ever seen* or *can see* the *true God*”. (I Tim 6:16) And he told Corinthians: “Fix *your eyes* on what’s *unseen*”. (II Cor 4:18) He recalled Isaiah’s words: “No *eye* has *seen*, no *ear* has *heard*” what *God has prepared* for those who love him.” (I Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4)

Our own immature and premature imaginations fixate on fantasies that are, indeed, *superficialities*, and, in no way, are *spiritually substantial* or *sustainable*. Even to begin to try to *imagine* the *wideness* of *God’s limitless loving and mighty imagination for the welfare of all* requires *God’s revelation* not our wishful thinking. We must stop *chasing after the winds of change* that promise peace but don’t, and can’t, deliver, and seek *the winds of God’s Spirit, Who’s always seeking all of us*.

Led by *myopia*, we’re *misled*. But, *in a secure response to God’s deep love*, imagination can mature and move us to *empathy* for others and *creative* imagination for *discovery* and *stewardship* of all of the wonders of God’s gifts.

Besides, don’t we realize that *our notions* of those we so disturbingly *envy*, aren’t *their* own senses of themselves? If *we were, who they think they are*, we’d be back in the uneasy familiarity of “ourselves”, still stuck in *dissatisfaction over self*, coveting our mere *images* of our fellow self-doubters.

Well, nice going, *fallen* folks! It’s not strange that, all self-centered, self-seeking is still, but “a chasing after the wind” that we *never can catch*.

But in all of this *idolatry of self*, we still don’t even begin to *catch on* to, how *monstrously far short* we all fall from God’s glorious goals *intended* for us all. Even as Paul was writing of our deeply *sinful* condition, he couldn’t refrain from alluding to the *life God intends for us*. (Rom 3:23)

And it’s at *this point* in our *experienced* guilt, consequent *shame, fear* and lame-brained *bitterness* and *hostility*, that we’re *graciously gifted* by God with the opportunity for *true self-awareness* that, *when admitted to ourselves and confessed to God*, opens us up to God’s amazing grace.

It’s this deep and abiding grace of God that Christians in Philippi gratefully received. Paul followed up on their *new life in Christ*. He knew that, now liberated, they could afford what he urged: “If, *you* have any *encouragement* from being *united with Christ*, any *comfort* from *his love*, if now, *you know* the *fellowship of God’s Spirit*, if there’s any *tenderness* and *compassion*, then complete my joy in you by being *like-minded*, having the *same love*, being *one in spirit* and *purpose*. Do nothing from *selfish ambition* and *boast*. Instead, in frank *humility*, consider *others* before you get all *bogged down* in your *selves*. Look out for the ways of others, as you do your own.

“Your attitude should be that of Christ Jesus: In his very being, God from all eternity. But he didn’t count that as something to cling to *for himself*. By free choice, he made

himself to be nothing, taking on the nature of a *slave*, and made like a *human*. Coming to earth as a *man*, he humbled himself, and became *obedient* down to death – even death on a cross! For this, God *raised* him to the *highest* place and gave him the name, the authority, above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, in heaven, on earth, and in the world below, and every tongue proclaim: *Christ Jesus is Lord*, to God the Father’s glory.” (Phil 2:1-11)

If it was for us, as lost sinners, that Christ left eternal intimacy with the Father to come into our *sinful* world, live a *sinless* life for *us* and die in *our* place, where in this fallen world of ours is there any basis for boasting in *self*? Where’s there any basis for *blaming* instead of confessing *our own* faults and, so, relating to others with *earnest empathy* and *fully affordable forgiveness*?

It’s in the deep security of the self-giving Savior’s love that we can *afford* to drop our pretensions, cover-ups, and ludicrous notions that we need things to go “my way”.

Resting in God’s love in Christ, we get, to *get on* with our privileged calling to be the people we’re created and redeemed to be for one another, to God’s glory. Otherwise, we’re stuck, digging ourselves deeper into defensiveness and estrangement from what God means for us to become.

Well, here’s the world’s *oldest* sad story of needing it to go “my way”. Genesis, Chapter 3. Let’s not assume we’ve *already heard* it, and let’s not assume *we all* weren’t there.

The snake was the shrewdest of the wild animals the Lord God had made. It stalked the woman with a lie: “So, God said you *mustn’t eat any of the fruit* in this garden, huh?”

“Well, we *can* eat from any tree *but that one*”. She then pouts a lie: “We can’t *even touch it*”. She does cite God’s *warning*: “If you *eat the fruit* of *that tree*, you’ll die!” ”

“Hah!” scoffed the snake: “You won’t *die*! Let me tell you something: *God knows*, if you *eat* from *that tree*, *your eyes* will be opened wide. You’ll *be divine, knowing and defining all good and all evil*. You’ll be a ‘know-it-all’.”

At first, she thought the snake’s assessment was *too good to be true*. But, she also thought it was *too good to pass up*. Decisions. Decisions. Yes, she had a *choice*. *We all have choices*. And *she chose to buy* the *lie* she *wanted to buy*.

She gazed at that fruit. She *liked* what she *saw* of it, but she *saw* what she *chose* to see. She supposed, *if it looked good*, it would *taste good*. And, she couldn’t let go of her *fantasy* of what all it would be like, to *be*, “a know-it-all”.

The Lord God had already told her *all* she really *needed to know* about the fruit of *that tree*. But she *fell* for a *lie she told herself*. To *outsmart* the Lord God, she rejected *divine revelation* and bought *her own damn dogma*. Trying to get “her own way”, she swallowed *the fruit of her own lie*.

Needing an ally, as we all do when trying to validate our *wrong* ways and spread the blame, she *shared* some of that forbidden fruit with the man. He, too, *fell* for it. *Suddenly*, they both felt what they’d *never* felt: the *horror of guilt and shame*. *Now they knew experientially*, the *evil* they’d only *heard about* in the Lord God’s *gracious warning*.

They quickly grabbed up some fig leaves to cover up their guilt and shame, but fig leaves were *useless* for that.

In the cool of the day, trying to hide *inside* their sin and shame, they heard the familiar approach of their generous Creator, coming to them again, as their loving Companion.

“Where are you *now*?” These words were no guilt trip. They were a sad wake-up call, *confirming* what the man and woman already sensed about *where* they were, *now*.

The man mumbled: “I’m scared. I’m, ah, *naked*. I’m hiding.” The Lord God asked, “*How* do you *know* you’re *now naked*, by eating fruit I told you *not* to eat?”

Ignoring this useful question, the man barked back in blame: “*That woman* you gave me. *She* gave me the fruit. So, I ate some.” He *blamed God* for giving him a partner who, unlike all of the other creatures, was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. Receiving her, he had jumped for joy.

The Lord God asked the woman, “What have *you* done?” She ignored this useful question, and barked back in blame, “*The snake!* The snake *deceived* me! So, I ate some.”

The Lord God didn’t waste a question on the snake, but declared: “Since *you’ve* done *this*, you’re cursed. You’ll crawl on your belly as lowest of all, for as long as you live. I’m putting enmity between you and the woman. Your offspring and hers will be at odds. Her offspring will crush your head as you crush her offspring’s heel.”

The Lord God told the woman, “I’ll increase your pain in childbirth; longing for your husband, he’ll rule over you.”

The Lord God told the man, “You *agreed* with your wife to eat fruit from that tree, though I’d commanded: ‘You must never eat its fruit.’ The ground is cursed because of you. By hard labor you’ll eat from that ground all the days of your life. It will sprout weeds and thorns; you’ll eat wild vegetation. By the sweat of your brow, you’ll find food, until *you* return to the ground from which *you* were taken. You’re *dust*, and to *dust* you’ll return.”

The Lord God clothed the two in animal skins. But, as they were now *fallen*, they must be kept away from the Tree of *Life* lest they *trap* themselves in their *fallen* state.

So, the Lord God *expelled* them from the Garden and put angelic guards with flaming swords, turning in every direction east of Eden, to keep them from that Tree of *Life*.

Well, in spite of how very true-to-our-everyday-life this ancient account of sin is, leave it to *fallen* humanity to toss it away as an outdated fable.

What in *our* world or in world *history* makes *this* account outdated? It’s in an *ancient genre*, but reflects what we all know of *our own* human nature – historically, culturally, anthropologically, psychologically, sociologically, and most readily, *autobiographically*. But our *fallen human nature* resists truth as readily, as selfishly, as our first parents did. They rebelled *in our place*; we *take after them*.

*The Forward* is a *progressive* Jewish periodical, founded in 1897 as a Yiddish defender of socialism. Now, it claims to be “a guide to the varieties of Jewish experience”, but smears *Orthodox* Jews as the “new white supremacists”.

Here’s *The Forward’s* *perversion* of the story of Adam and Eve. It’s spun by a rabbi from Humanistic Judaism.

She claims: “The story that begins the bible ... is actually the story of the first sexual assault of a woman.” And, she says, God was “the perpetrator”. God *raped* Eve!

In *all* the centuries of Hebrew and Christian commentary on this story, *all* missed what this come-lately rabbi now *projects into* the text. Of course, they missed it. During all those centuries of biblical study – BC and AD – *none* could have found *her nonsense* before our *postmodernist* PC.

The Humanist rabbi opines that Eve was simply “hungry, so she does the most natural thing in the world and eats a piece of fruit. For just following her instincts, trusting herself, and nourishing her body”, engaging in “self-care”, God “rapes” her.

Well, “self-care” *can* be and *often is*, *motivation* for *sin*. It’s a very common euphemism for trying to *get our* wrong ways. And the rabbi *does* what she claims Eve *did*. But, tunnel vision “self-care” blinds us to *unintended*, though *predictable*, outcomes.

How does this rabbi describe Eve’s *punishment*? With *more* PC! “She will never again feel safe in her nakedness. She will never again love her body. She will never again know her body as a place of sacred sovereignty.” So, she concludes: “Eve, our blessed mother, is saying #MeToo.”

Whether ancient, medieval, modern, or postmodern – *blaming* God is the continuing self-centered attempt to *reconstruct reality*. We copycat the Fall even here on this far side of the world, east of Eden.

To try to *justify* us, we say, “It’s *just*, self-care”. But that sneaky little word, “just”, that we “just” slip in, to justify us and hide our *misbehavior*, is *unjust* and cannot *justify* us.

Saying, “what’s *true* is what’s true *for me*, my truth, what *I feel*” doesn’t help us, for what we *feel* depends on what we *think*, what we’re telling ourselves. We can’t unravel our *feelings* unless we unravel our *thoughts* that *result* in our feelings and that then *motivate* our *behavior*.

But, most people have no idea *how* to *think* their way out of *troubling feelings* to identify, challenge and change what they *could discover* are *irrational notions* resulting in their *unwanted* feelings and *unreasonable*, even *deadly* behavior. So, they remain mired in an emotional morass they can’t escape, tied up in ego-driven, bull-headedness, thinking they need everything to go, what they call, “my way”.

Discarding the Bible, even if they’ve never really *read* it, people *set themselves up* to *miss* the *deepest* Truth and thus, what’s really *true* or *false* about *them*. Without *divine* revelation, with mere *self-talk*, they *trust* their *feelings* for *truth*. But *feelings merely reflect* thoughts, *feelings* can’t *reflect upon* thoughts so as to *discern* whether the thoughts are grounded in reality or fantasy. If the feelings flow from misinformation and irrationality, they’ll mislead us into unwise, dangerous and even deadly, behavior.

Augustine observed: “The New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed.” From Adam and Eve to Noah to Abraham and Moses and on through the Law and Prophets, down to Jesus of Nazareth and the witness of his apostles after his resurrection, we learn of the outworking of God’s divine plan to redeem fallen humanity. In April, A.D. 33, on a cross outside Jerusalem, God’s promise in Genesis 3 was *fulfilled*. Three days later, the risen Christ *proved* it.

In Romans 3, we read Paul’s witness. *His way had* been to *self-righteously persecute* Jesus’ followers. But, *on his way* to persecute still more of them, Paul was suddenly overwhelmed by *Christ’s* astounding *Self-disclosure*. Ever after that, *Paul* took *Christ’s Way* across the Empire.

In his letter to Romans, he asked rhetorically: “Should we think that we Jews are *better* than *others*? Not at all, for we see that all Jews and all Gentiles are under the power of sin. *No one* is just, not a one. None understands. None really *seeks* God. All have turned away from God.” (Rom 3:9-12)

Paul’s previous trust in *self-righteousness*, as “Hebrew of Hebrews”, is left behind and he now explains: “A righteousness *from God*, apart from Law, has been *revealed*, to

which the Law and Prophets bear witness. This righteousness *from God* is *by faith in Jesus, Messiah*, to *all* who *trust him*. There's no difference, *all* have sinned and *all* fall short of the glory that God *intends* for all."

This Good News outshines and overcomes all ludicrous *self-righteousness* of *tribal rivalries* and all of the uselessly defensive huffing and puffing about "us" over "them".

Paul wrote: "All are justified *freely* by God's *grace* through redemption by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a *sacrifice of atonement*, through *faith* in his shed blood. ... Where then, is there any room for *boasting*? It's excluded." (Rom 3:21ff)

Jesus was *the final Adam*, our *final representative*. As God *in flesh*, he lived a *sinless life*, where the first man, *Adam*, fell into sin. Paul contrasts the first "living *man*" with Christ, the "life-giving" *man*. (I Cor 15:45) "As in Adam all die; in Christ all will be made alive." (I Cor 15:22)

But *fallen* humanity, even *graciously granted* a gnawing sense of *guilt*, tries to ignore the truth, defiantly boasting in *self* while uselessly blaming all else *but self*.

The heavy fallout from fallen humanity's hostility to God in Christ is evident in the *history* of hostility against those who are *in Christ*. Christ had warned: "All will *hate you* because of *me*." (Mark 13:13; Matt 10:22) He explained: "If those who are *of this world's ways*, hate you, recall, *they hated me* before they hated you. If *you belonged to this world's ways*, *this world* would embrace you *as its own*; but you're *not of this world's ways*, so *this world* hates you." (John 15:18f; Ps 35:19; 69:4)

For two millennia, God's Spirit of Truth has sent His truth around the world. But sadly, even in many so-called "Christian" countries, fewer and fewer now *believe* in God. Still, God's word is taking root throughout the Third World while, here in America, Pew Research finds that, only 43 percent, in ages 18 through 29, believe in the God of the Bible. And, no wonder! Churches, Left and Right, have preached "another gospel" that's *not* the Gospel of Christ.

*Legalists* boast of *rule keeping* in their own *self-righteous* settings. That's *self-worship*. Others *virtue signal* a silly "interfaith" creed to gain *their* cred, or they say that they're "spiritual, but not religious" to flash their postured "*progressive*" largess. Still others *boast of atheism* to *boost* themselves in *secular* circles. But it's all idolatrous *self-worship* – sanctimonious *self-seeking* for *status* and *approval* from others whose coveted *affirmation* is utterly worthless, today and everlastingly.

What the Psalmist noted about *fools* saying, "There's no god!", really isn't about *speculations*. (Ps 14:1) It's about being sold out to *self* as to a *god*. None is *godless*; *all are worshippers*. In the end, we worship *self or the Savior*.

After their Last Supper, as Jesus and his disciples went up into Gethsemane, he said to them: "Tonight, you'll all be scandalized because of me. You'll run away, as scripture says: the Lord "will smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered". (Matt 26:31; Zech 13:7) And when Jesus was arrested, they all ran away.

Jesus cautioned: "Don't think I've come to bring *peace* on earth – not peace, but a *sword*." (Matt 10:34) He meant the *inevitable conflict* between *his way* and *this world's way*. The *resistance* is, and always has been, *fierce*, for *this world's way* is opposed to Christ and his followers.

Today, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, worldwide persecution of Christians is at another *record high* with 215 million under *high levels* of persecution – that's 1 in 12 Christians. With Jesus' Twelve, it was 11 killed and 1 banished to Patmos.



Most *major* persecution of Christians today comes from Islamic and Communist enemies of Christ, though there's also persecution from Hindus and Buddhists. Eight of the *ten most* oppressive countries are Islamic. North Korea is *the most oppressive of all* countries. The persecution is based in *rival religions*, including the religion of *atheism*. Persecution of Christians in Mexico and Columbia is from organized crime and governmental corruption.

Cultures that *most oppress Christians* most oppress *gay men and lesbians*. But Western culture, rooted in Christian values, attended to the oppressed, the sick and disabled, the illiterate, prisoners, women, orphans and other children, slaves, racial minorities, the unborn, et al. When concerns for *gay and lesbian* rights came up, and even if it wasn't clear to the *secular* activists of that movement, *Christian* motivation for *liberty for all* was the backstory there, too.

Christianophobia in America today is mainly from *secularist contempt*. It's not the *physical* or *deadly* violence found elsewhere, but it's unrelentingly vicious.

Sociologist George Yancey is an African American Christian who's taught sociology of race and of religion in secular universities. He says faculties have misgivings about his ability to teach *religion* classes since he's a devout Christian. They fear he'd be biased. But, he says, "The fact that I am an African American did not create any fear about my bias in teaching the race and ethnicity course." He concludes: "Black racial bias is acceptable while Christian religious bias is not." He says: "I have learned a lot about anti-Christian animosity" in *academia*.

Did you see *The New Yorker's* recent anti-Christian virtue signaling: "Chick-Fil-A's Creepy Infiltration of New York City"? The writer is apoplectic over Chick-Fil-A's opening in Downtown Manhattan. Chick-Fil-A is not *chic*. It's not what a New York restaurant critic, in another context, calls a " 'must' for those who can't face their friends without selfies they took there ... to avoid friends sneering, 'You haven't been? Loser!' "

But *The New Yorker's* blast is aimed at Bible verses and a statue of Jesus at Chick-Fil-A's Atlanta headquarters. The writer disdains the company's goal, "to glorify God", and he goes berserk over Chick-Fil-A cows that, in good-humored salesmanship, urge us to, "Eat Mor Chikin". He perverts this simple, silly slogan into some sort of deadly exploitation of chickens over cows.

Ironically, he follows all of this with a *faux pas* in a self-absorbed tweet to his fans: "Welp time to sit down with a Wendy's spicy chicken sandwich and a cold one and read more mentions." He's oblivious to the fact that Wendy's founder was another one of those *horrible Christians*. If he finds out, can he then tweet: "Welp time for some KFC"? Damn! The Colonel, too, loved Jesus.

But what's a social snub from a self-styled snob or an insecure elitist's stink-eye, over against what our Christian sisters and brothers suffer from daily torture and deadly attacks all around the world, while we sit here in safety?

Gay historian Martin Duberman has written two more books. One, subtitled, *Hustlers, Cocaine, Depression and Then Some*, tells of his gay life in the '70s and '80s. The other, *Has the Gay Movement Failed?*, reviews the LGBT movement from the '70s to today. He grants that a lot has changed. But, from his Far Left point of view, he says it's all been far too "conservative", not "radical" enough to *really* "change the culture". Fantasizing a far more *radical change* of which he dreams, in a *fully "liberated" world* to

come, he, too, ends in unintended irony, as he muses: We “can perhaps be excused for wondering in what distant millennium [really radical] change is likely to occur.”

He has *no idea* of the *earthshaking transformation* that’s coming *at last*, when *this* world’s “center cannot hold [and] mere anarchy is loosed upon the world [as] the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity”, in Yeats’ words. But, Yeats’ and Duberman’s visions fall flat against the *everlasting liberation* in the Second Coming of Christ and God’s Peace in New Heavens and New Earth.

This fallen world that Paul said, “was subjected to *futility and frustration*, not of its own will, but by the will of Him who subjected it in the *sure hope that it will be liberated from bondage and brought into the freedom and glory* of the children of God.” (cf. Isa 65:17ff; 66:22f; Rom 8:20f; II Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1ff)

When the only Son of God, in the body of the only sinless man, faced the end for which he’d come – punishment for our sins in *the most horrible of deaths, to put to death all death* – he communed in agony with his Father, known in the depths of eternal intimacy. In three grueling prayers he pleaded to be spared the ordeal for which he’d come, for it would mean his being unimaginably forsaken and his Father’s anguish, as he suffered and died for us.

On that dreadful night, having been betrayed by one and soon to be deserted by the others who were dozing off and would soon be hiding out, he prayed that he might not have to endure *the way of the cross*, if there *were any other way*. Yet, in each prayer, he reaffirmed his faithful obedience: “Nevertheless, not *my way*, but *Thy way*.”

*Our only way* back to the Father was by the *way* of Jesus’ cross. He was *The Way*. So he *laid down his own way* and *his own life*, to be *The Way* for *us* by way of his cross.

On that cross, as priests, Pharisees, Roman officials and the rabble *seemed* to be getting *their way*, getting rid of him, Jesus, in excruciating pain, asked, “Father, forgive *them*, they don’t *know what* their doing”. (Luke 23:34) And, they *didn’t know* what *in hell* or *in heaven* was going on there, that unimaginable day, at Golgotha.

But Jesus’ mother and disciples *didn’t want* him to be up there on that cross. It *seemed* that they *were not* getting *their way*. Yet, three days later, they were with the risen Christ.

Jesus told us to ask every day, for our Father’s way, here on earth, as it is in heaven. Every day, we get to get out of *our way*, and have *God’s way*, *be our way*, grateful that God’s way is *Jesus, Who is, Himself, The Way*. What a gift – to exchange *our fantasy way* for *God’s way forever!*