

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

July 4, 2021

“Metaphors”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

Happy Birthday Americans

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“Light.” “Darkness.” Metaphors meaning _____

All kinds of rhetorical devices for the purpose of _____ information.

“Fellowship,” “Practice the truth,” “Walk in the light,” “Cleansed of sin.” “Forgiven,” “Righteous,” “Keepers of His word.” All related to holiness, which is the pure, sacrificial, relationship-enhancing, obedience found only beyond what is normal.

“Disassociation,” “Liar,” “Walk in the darkness,” “Sin,” “Unforgiven,” “Unrighteous,” “Not keeping His commandments.” All related to unholiness, which is the corrupt, self-serving, relationship-spoiling, disobedience that is found everywhere.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

- 1) Authorial intent is _____.
- 2) The intent of the _____ author is vital.
- 3) The only thing that matters is what the True Author _____.

“God is Light.” He is unlike the reality that is defined by _____ relationships. From the basic idea of entropy all the way to the Fall, everything...

Everything in our reality is on a collision course with _____, which is, of course, the ultimate relationship killer.

Human relationships are self-serving, or self-aggrandizing... Is there hope?

Most people are _____ by ideas rather being the _____ of ideas.

Not a few, but “Many” people, who thought they were Christians, will stand condemned before _____ at the end of time (Matthew 7:21-23).

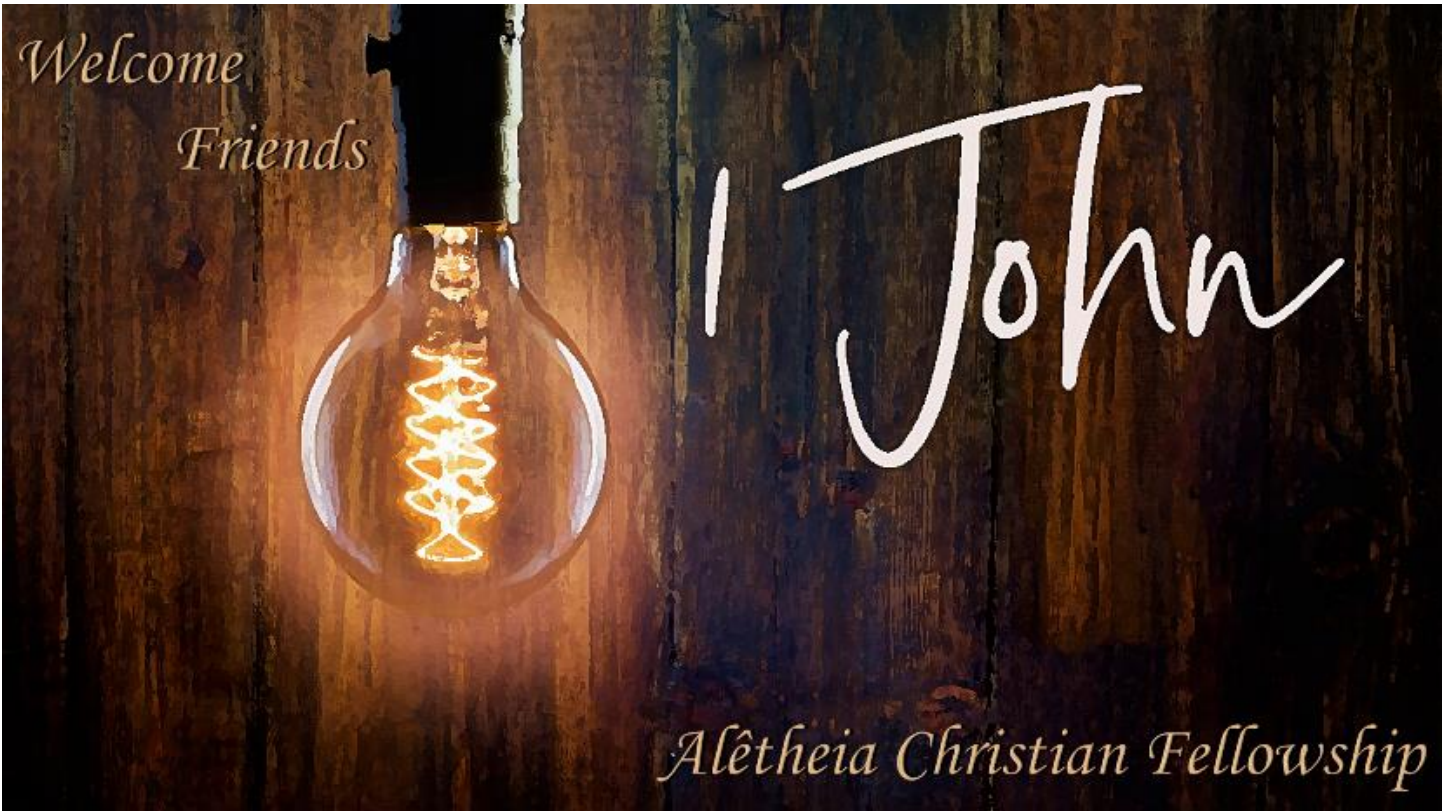
All of them, people possessed by an _____ of Christianity.

What interpersonal relationship can you point out that is good and genuine and growing, that required no time and effort?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____



You may remember that two weeks ago we talked about the “Darkness,” and the week before that, we talked about the “Light.”

These are metaphors specifically chosen by God to help us wrap our brains around a concept that will enable us to open up to right relationships.

There’s actually a lot I just said right there, so we’re going to drill down on that today... Not moving forward in the text, but further fleshing it out and I’ve got to tell you that there is so much to think about here today. This is another sermon that could easily be broken down into 5 sermons, which would still be too much for a lot of folks. Fight to understand, get what you can, listen online again and again as necessary. Study, think, pray, learn. Like the Bible itself, there’s a surface meaning, but you’ll find plenty to dig into if you’re willing.

My point in bringing up the metaphors for now is that the Bible writers emulated the Word of God, Jesus Himself, in using the language tools available, in order to drive home understanding. They used, all kinds of different rhetorical devices including, but not in any way

limited to, simile, metaphor, irony, satire and yes, even sarcasm. Beyond that, I've given some glimpses at the innerworkings of some of the Greco-Roman rhetorical devices, language and grammatical structures that are largely lost in our English translations. The reason for all of it was and is to convey information to an audience in a way that they can understand. A Message is just a pontification if it's not understood.

The problem today is that so many people fail to grasp the scope, context, and intended meaning of these devices.

Some folks even reject the possibility that they exist at all. Some falsely believe that Jesus would never be ironic, satirical, or sarcastic. If we cannot understand the basic patterns of language that He employed, then we cannot discern the meaning of the symbols that the words represent in context. Instead of understanding, we may get confusion, but what's far worse, is we often get strongly held wrong-understanding, heretical belief, erroneous opinion, and harmful practice.

While I really like this image of the darkness of ignorance holding the girl as she reaches for the light

of Truth - the metaphor, while Biblical, is not what the metaphor means in I John... We're on about unholy versus holy in this place, not ignorance versus Truth... Of course, they're related but unholy darkness here is the corrupt, self-serving, relationship-spoiling, disobedience that is found everywhere, while holy light here is the pure, sacrificial, relationship-enhancing, obedience found only beyond what is normal. See how unholy darkness is common, everywhere, universal, abundant, while holy light is rare, elsewhere, unusual, and unique. Holiness means other.

We need to grasp what the author was trying to convey by recognizing how they were trying to accomplish the task, and then hang on to the appropriate meaning as we investigate further. That is a vital concept.



The birth of the reader
must be at the cost of the
death of the Author.

Roland Barthes


There are basically three ways the Bible Message is viewed. First, liberal scholars are unconcerned about the author's conscious intent. Take the author out of the equation - he's irrelevant to the task of understanding. It turns Biblical scholarship into an impossible quagmire of opinions, modern culture, and feelings. It is the same as the treatment of the U.S. Constitution by liberal scholars in that field. What the Founding Fathers meant is immaterial. With their high view of human evolution, liberal scholars, not only believe that the Founders lived in a much different world, but that we today, are vastly smarter, better, and more noble than the dead guys of the past. What the

Founders intended is not only unimportant, it's actually tainted by unevolved evil thinking. Similarly, liberal Bible scholars think that the early Christians didn't understand Christianity nearly as well as we do today, so to take what they proposed seriously is to go backwards. The only time liberal scholars care about authorial intent is when they can use it to their advantage. They are happy to play both sides to advance their argument and most people never catch on to the duplicitous switch. An example: One gun control argument is that what the Founders wanted with the 2nd Amendment has no bearing on what we should do now. Another one of their arguments is that the Founders intended the 2nd Amendment to only apply to a government regulated militia like the National Guard.

The second way, common among most middle-of-the-road Bible scholars is to approach the task by discerning the human author's intent. While better, the problem here, is it treats the Bible like any other human document. While that's okay with the U.S. Constitution, when it comes to the Bible it creates disconnects not just between God and the human authors, but between the human authors themselves. We get disconnects

between the Bible Books of Paul and of John, between the Bible Books of Luke and of Peter, etc. The academic investigation into the textual minutia, loses sight of the Spiritual underpinning and saturation as an inspired work.

Well, that brings us to the third, and only correct, way to view the Bible... If we believe that the Bible is a Message from Almighty God to us here on earth written through men that He inspired... Then we must believe that He did that for a reason. Then the only thing we should be concerned with, is what is His reason? What does the True Author intend? That's all that matters. What is God, through these physical writings, penned, selected, preserved, and protected for literally millennia, plural, trying to tell us? Why is that the only correct way to view the Bible? Because if we view it any other way it becomes subjective at best and just another man-made religious nonsense at worst. Trust me when I say that if you don't believe that the Bible available to you today is the very Word of God and is universal absolute Truth applicable to all people, in all places, throughout all time, you need to find a better hobby.



**It is the Holy Spirit who
inspired the Bible. It is the Holy
Spirit who illumines the Bible.**

R.C. Sproul

When we start with that correct basis, we can actually investigate using some of the critical methods employed by academic scholars to help us get what's going on with the text. Almighty God, for whatever His reasons, chose to convey His Message through human authors using human language and He chooses to make that clear today using human preachers using human speech.

To get what I'm saying, you need to know when I'm using an example, making a joke, or being satirical. You need to know when I'm pleading, encouraging, or extolling. Likewise, to understand God's written Word,

you need to know precisely what rhetorical device the Author was using when, and to what effect. There are some things in this little Book of the Bible that are monumentally challenging to understand, and that have been both highly controversial, and incredibly divisive within the church over the centuries and the reason for that is a fundamental failure to understand what the Author intended with the rhetorical devices He chose to inspire John to use.



It starts with “God is Light.” Well, hopefully we understand that here, that means that God is unlike the physical, corrupt, self-serving, “Fallen and depraved

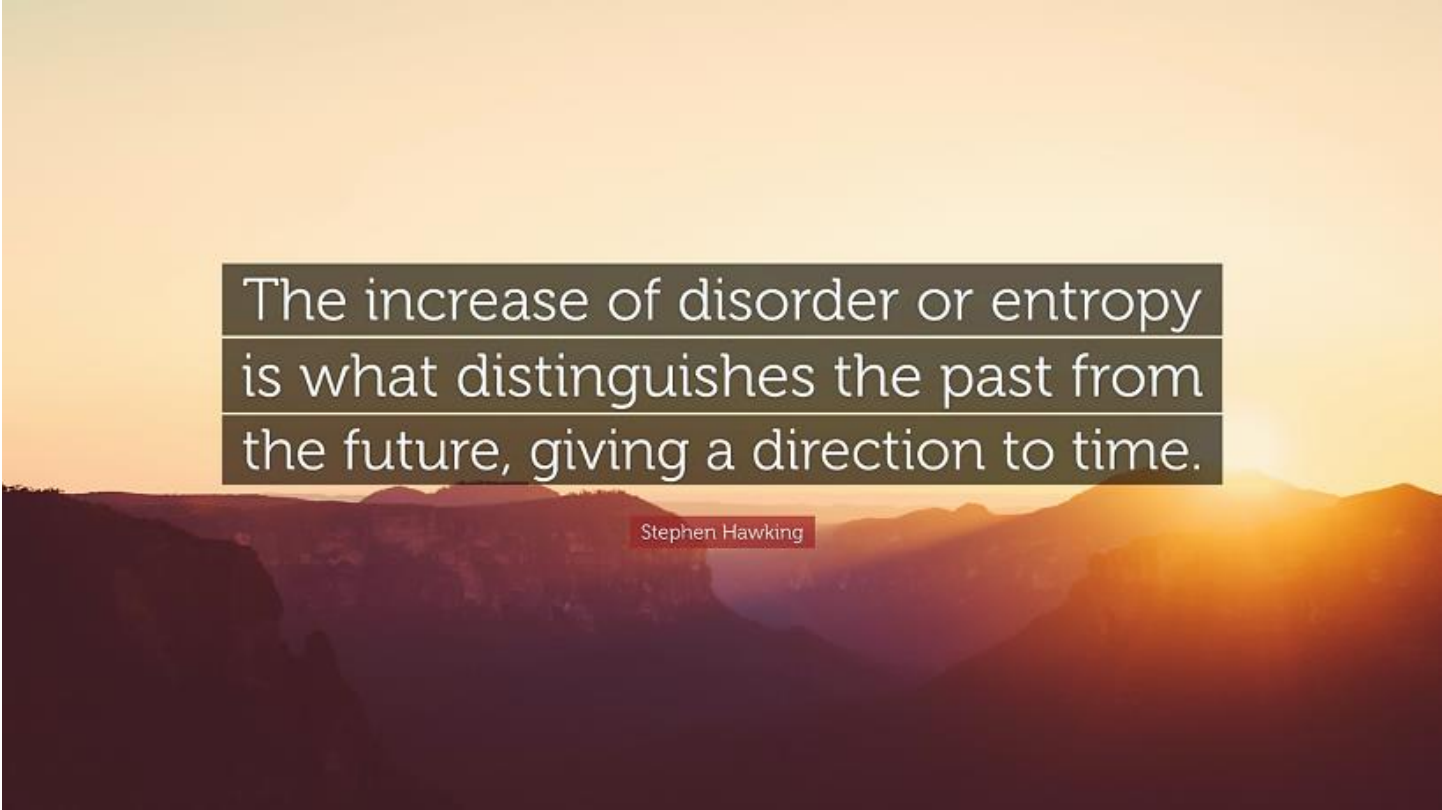
world.” A world that is defined by dysfunctional relationships. Think on that for a moment - let that sink in... We exist in a world that can be defined as ubiquitous relational dysfunction. Start with life itself... What’s more dysfunctional than living by consuming other life? Living is an act of consumption of other life.



I love elk. How much? So much that I spend a great deal of time, effort, and money, every year trying to turn one into a meal. It’s nothing personal... Well yeah, that’s super easy for me to say. I’m sure the elk feels differently about the whole proposition.

It's just a silly example of how the differentness between God and the physical universe can be thought of as a differentness in rightly relating and wrongly relating. God doesn't live off of the life of others - He generously gives them life from Himself.

I'm not saying we need to be vegans - what I'm saying is that our very existence is naturally relationally dysfunctional with everything and everyone. I can give you example after example from the basic idea of entropy all the way to our interpersonal relationships... Everything in our existence can be defined as imperfect, or dysfunctional, or downright destructive relationships.



The increase of disorder or entropy is what distinguishes the past from the future, giving a direction to time.

Stephen Hawking

He said entropy - he's going to talk about physics - run now - run! It will be super brief... Entropy, is explained by the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, with the basic idea that everything, and I do mean everything, tends towards disorder. You could take a massive open space and cool it to zero degrees. You could set up a dozen heaters inside with each one set to a different output and as they ran you could go around in the space and measure many different temperatures. Many pockets with distinct temperature profiles. It would be a complex orderliness of specific temperature zones. Turn off the power to all of the heaters and almost instantly the entire space devolves back to a

single temperature. The order of zones with their unique temperature profiles is not only lost - it is irreversibly, irretrievably lost. Without turning the heaters back on, the temperature of the room, will never go back to the way it was of its own accord. Never. It isn't like it has a memory of what was, and it will try to reorder itself to return to that order. Everyone can easily understand that... No matter how long you wait the room will not return to the distinct pockets of unique temperatures again. Atheists talk in terms of, "Given enough time anything is possible." No, it's not.

That's actually a twofer, but my point here is that everything in the physical reality around us is on a collision course with death, which is, of course, the ultimate relationship killer. Death is the destroyer of relationship. So, not only are our relationships dysfunctional, they are doomed to annihilation with the inevitable ever-approaching death facing us all.

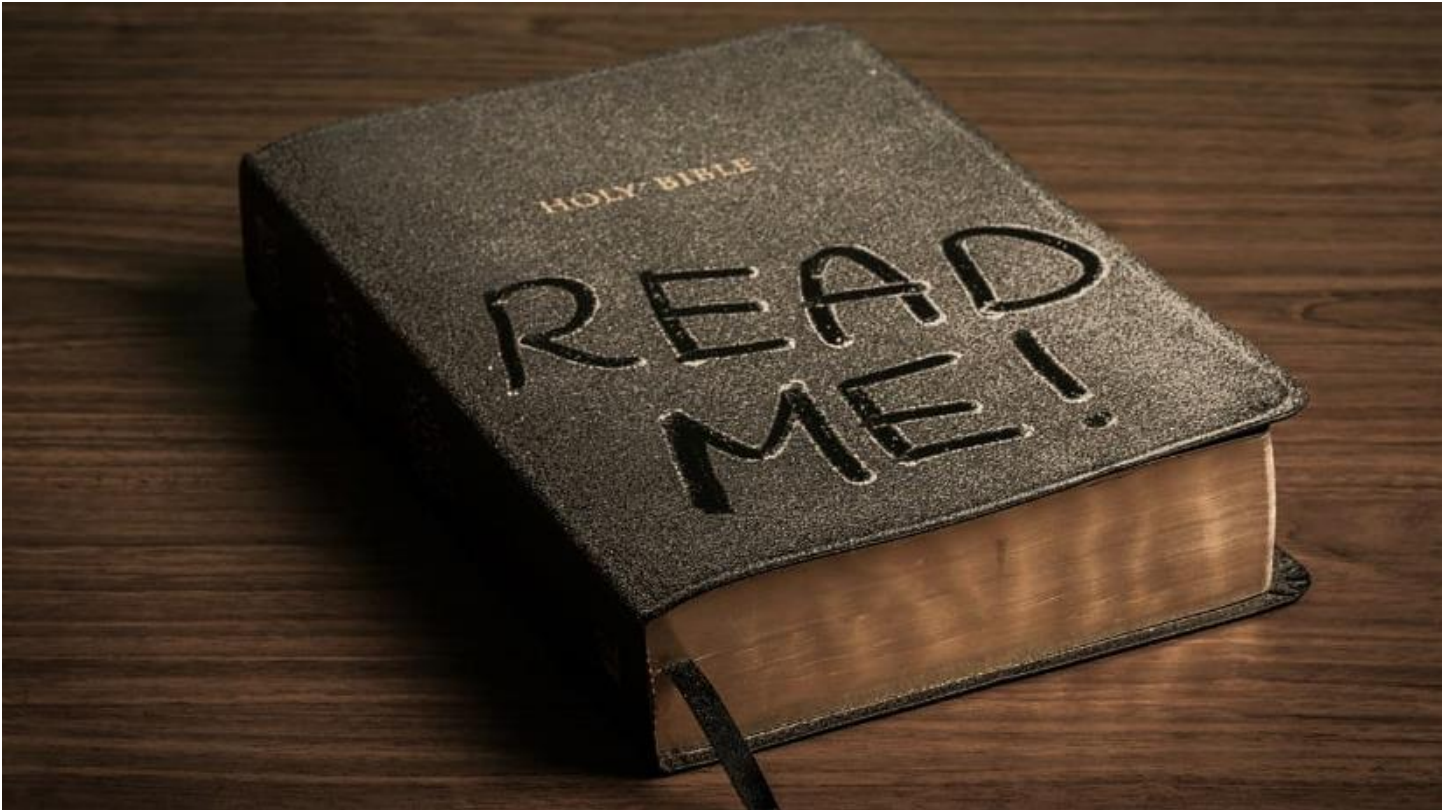


The best interpersonal relationship on earth is imperfect to the degree that it is about the participants. When I make a relationship about me, I obviously taint that relationship as I skew it towards an outcome I prefer, whether I'm consciously aware of it, or not. What initially drew you to the romantic interests in your life was not a love for them, but a love for yourself. Trust me. Human love is self-serving.

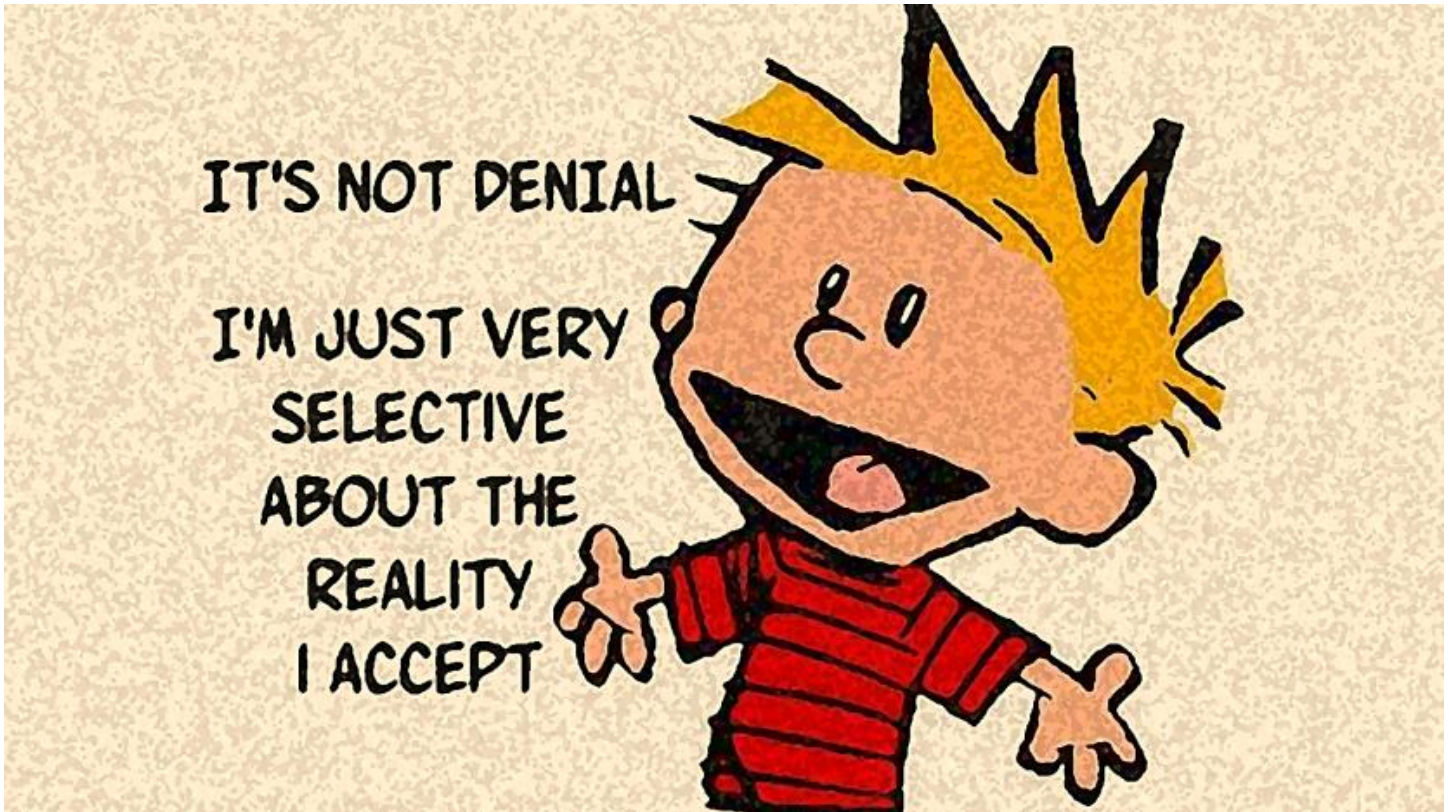
Now, get this... When I make a relationship about the other person, while that seems good, actually I likewise taint that relationship as I skew it towards an outcome that I think is best for them... Well, who am I to

determine what's best for someone else? You might say, because I'm the parent! Right, because no parent-child relationship has any dysfunction. As parents we must choose for our kids, but it doesn't mean we choose correctly. We make mistake, hence the dysfunction. It is self-aggrandizing.

Both have me in the middle. I hope you can see that. All human relationships are doomed to dysfunction at best! So, what hope is there? None, really, if I'm blunt, there is no hope. Human love can only ever be imperfect, and fickle. It will either be self-serving, or it will be self-aggrandizing... It's a miserable life, in a miserable world, and then you die. Good grief am I glad that I came to church today!



If there is no Creator, or if there is an uninterested Creator, that's it. I firmly believe, predicated on the evidence, that there absolutely must be a Creator and that He would have to be like the God that the Bible describes. Further, anyone who has applied their reason to the issue, must recognize that such a Creator has no need to create... He didn't do it for Himself. Again, thinking through the issue one is forced to conclude that God created to selflessly share Himself with His creation in right-relationship. Again, precisely as the Bible describes.



With that we discover that the human population is divided into two, and only two camps. There are those who are genuinely desirous of having an eternity-long right-relationship with God and through His power right-relationship with all others in that camp. And there are those who do not.

In that description, can you see, that many calling themselves Christians and actually diligently doing Christian things are really in the second camp?

They may do what they do because it was the way that they were raised, or because they think that it's a better

way to function in society, or because they feel good about being good... There are as many reasons as people really, but probably the biggest reason of all is something that I mentioned the other day...

Most people are possessed by ideas rather than being possessors of ideas... An idea either has ahold of you, or far less commonly, you have ahold of the idea. An idea has ahold of you when you don't fully understand that idea, nor the ramifications of it, and yet you incorporate it into your belief system even though it is at odds with other ideas that likewise have ahold of you.

An example is a person flying to protest against fossil fuel aboard a private jet. Or a person protesting against hunting while eating a Big Mac. Muddled thinking is everywhere, and if you don't believe me, just hold up a mirror. We all do it... We should all work to do it less, but more importantly we should expend a great deal of time and effort to do it less where it matters most. Prioritize your muddled thinking...

Nothing can matter more than your own potential eternity. Only the most foolish of people would ignore

this area of ideas and so, the world must be full of fools. Please, I beg you don't assume anything in this area.

Be a person who possesses an idea instead of only being possessed by an idea, especially when it comes to the metaphysical future. What I mean is fully investigate what it actually is to be a Christian and then either be one, or not, but to pretend to be one, or to assume that you are one without being one is just a horror show.



Not a few, but “Many” people will stand condemned before Jesus at the end of time and protest, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” (Matthew 7:22). They will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, instead they will be denounced as by Jesus as “Evildoers” and cast out forever. Can you see that those people believed that they were Christians?

What I can tell you about them is that they are all people who are possessed by an idea of Christianity and simply assume that it’s good enough.

This is a bit tricky... I’m not saying that in order to be Saved, a person must possess the idea of Christianity, as in fully understanding what it means and then embracing it for what it actually is, and I’m also not saying that a person must fully wrap their entire identity up in Christ, which is the consequence of possessing Christianity. Why, because “With God all things are possible.”

What I am saying is that a failure to possess Christianity and identify with Christ as I just described

leaves a person's future uncertain. Every person whom Jesus will turn away will have failed to possess and will have failed to identify... Every one of those "Cast out," will be in that boat. There may be some very much like them, whom Jesus will save because they will have something the others don't. In a word, right-relationship. It's possible to have bad theology and still be saved, it's just a whole lot less likely and less certain. What it is, is right-relationship and the better you know someone the righter the relationship can be. Jesus' words are telling... "I never knew you." It is 100% relational.

Of course, Jesus knew each and every one of them far better than any of them knew themselves - He's God! What He means is that He never had a right-relationship with them. While they bothered with everything that didn't matter, they missed the one thing that did - Him.

So, it's possible to have right-relationship with Jesus and not to have figured out Christianity and not to have properly incorporated it into your existence, and not to have placed your entire identity in His - it's possible,

but why take that chance and why live your Christian life as so much less than it can be?

When I was on my five-year-long wrestling match with God over resigning from my dream job, He finally impressed upon me this reality. He said, "Scott, you don't need to do this, abandon your career and step out in faith to start a church. I'll still love you. You'll still go to Heaven. I'll still use you. But you will miss what is better." In essence it would be taking an easier path and settling for far less in terms of my Christian life.



To “Have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), requires being outside of your comfort zone... You cannot grow when you keep yourself insulated in your safety bubble of what is easier. There will be challenges, there will be setbacks, there will be rejection, there will be study, there will be introspection, there will be difficulty, there will be pain, I promise it will be anything but easy. In following that path, we actually follow Jesus, and we gain from it many things, not the least of which is assurance.

How can I be so confident that Jesus won't cast me away? Because I have come to know Him, and it wasn't easy. It is still not even remotely easy... Jesus never said it was going to be easy. What He said was, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24).

What He said was “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12&13). Are you ready right now to lay down your life for the person on the other side of the church? Jesus wasn't playing games. What He said

was “Whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” And “That everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” And “Do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” And “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:21-48). You might say to me, well I remember this place where Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). We don’t have time to fully explore that now, but in short, the only people Jesus is talking to are the “Weary and heavy-laden.” It is to reject easy and follow Jesus, which as I just said will be hard... The key is not doing it in the strength of your flesh, but in His strength. If we were fully able to trust Him, our incredibly difficult road would be easy and the burden light. It’s a question of how much you trust.

Here’s the deal. Choice A) Do little, keep things relatively comfortable and easy, and you will never trust God much. You won’t find out how little you trust Him until some calamity befalls you and then of course, it will be too late. You may very well go to Heaven, but

any assurance you have will merely be an assumption based on a false understanding.

Choice B) Do much - by do, I mean “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Think, study, step out, do much and what you will find is difficulty commensurate with the degree you push forward, but through the struggle you will come to know, and you will come to trust, and you will come into His rest, and you will gain an assurance that is real based upon correct understanding.

What interpersonal relationship can you point out that is good and genuine and growing, that required no time and effort?

Your choice really.