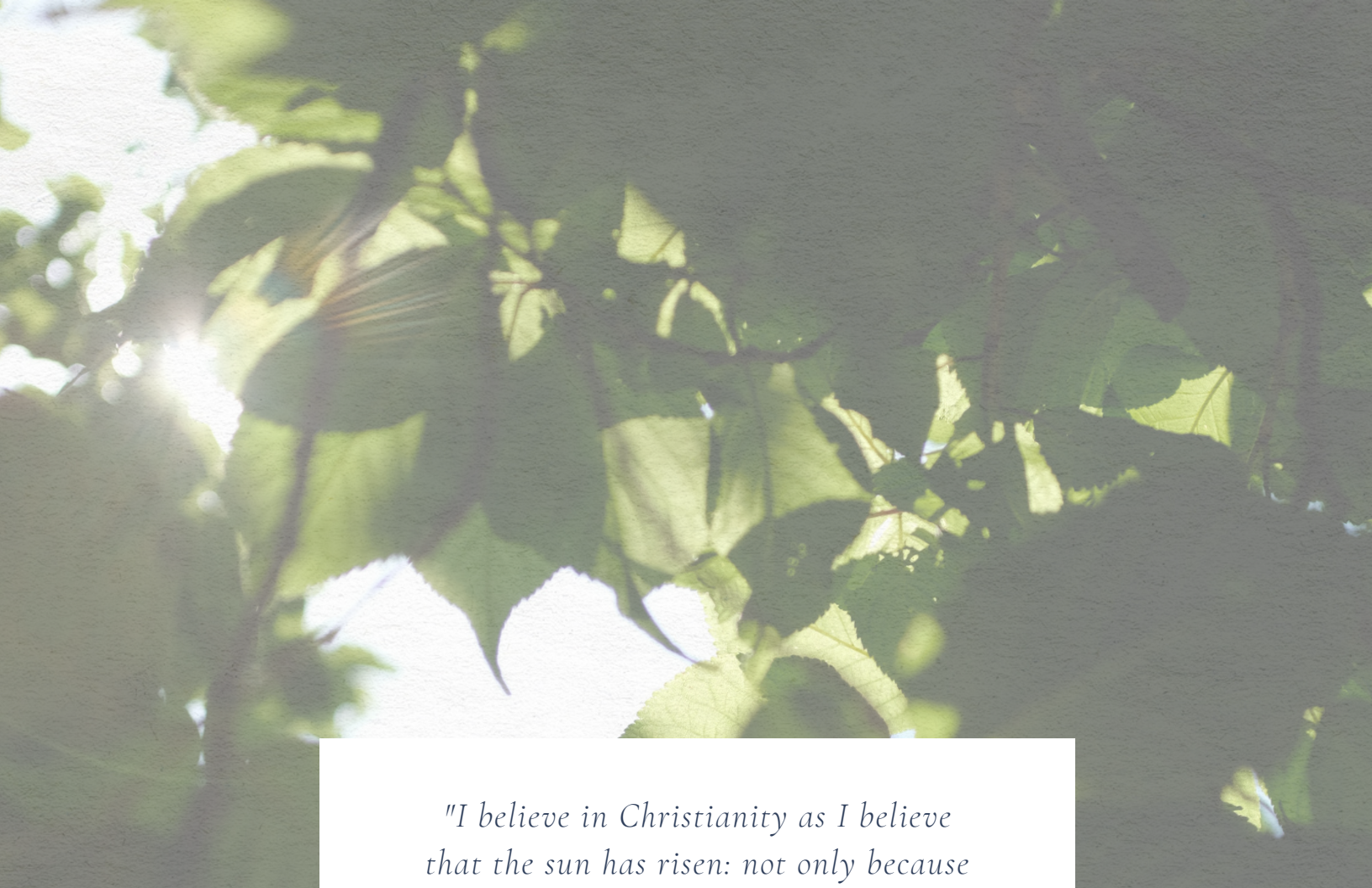




SAGE CHRISTIANITY

POINT OF VIEW



"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." —C.S. Lewis

Each of us has a "light" by which we "see everything else." Such lights reveal the authorities we trust, the guides we find credible, the perspective by which we try to make sense of our lives in contrast to those unilluminated authorities, guides, and viewpoints that we do not trust. In other words, a person who says, "I have no point of view" has just given us one.

The person who says she is neutral, objective, and has no point of view other than what rational evidence dictates, likely underestimates the "light" she trusts to decide what it means to be rational, why it is that rationality is placed first among her other ways of knowing, what constitutes evidence, how she knows this, and what assumptions she will use to accept or reject the evidence in front of her.

Like anyone else, we too have a point of view. Our point of view hinges on Jesus, including all that points to him, and all that he points us to. Certain core commitments flow from Jesus being the light by which we make sense of things.



01

TO LOVE THE
GOD JESUS
LOVES

O I

TO LOVE THE GOD JESUS LOVES

Jesus believed in God. He spoke of this God as being like a shepherd who looks for a sheep that is lost, or a woman who searches for a missing coin. Most often Jesus spoke of God as a good and heavenly Father. According to Jesus, God and God's ways are also like:

- a woman kneading bread,
- a king inviting us to a wedding feast,
- a fisherman with his nets,
- a farmer who plants,
- a holy Master who perfectly and equitably judges us,
- a field with a hidden treasure worth selling all you have to gain it
- a ferocious warrior king bringing evil to justice and defending the innocent

Jesus said this God is Spirit and Truth and can be known by a relational way of love right now within this physical world. One of Jesus' early followers, named Paul, said it this way. "God is not far from any one of us. So much so that we can feel our way toward him and perhaps find him."

Mysteriously, Jesus spoke of this God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (which is why his followers to this day feel like children trying to describe a mystery riddle when saying that no other God but this one exists and yet this one God exists in three persons).

Audaciously, Jesus spoke of himself and this God as one. That Jesus is God. If you were to cry out into the universe: "God, show yourself to me!" Jesus answers by putting himself into view. According to Jesus, we will see and learn who this Heavenly Father is and what makes this God lovely, when we look at the person, teachings and works of Jesus.

This is our quest.



02

TO LOVE THE
WORLD AS
JESUS LOVES IT

02

TO LOVE THE WORLD AS JESUS LOVES IT

According to Jesus, our world is loved by God. In this light, we can follow Jesus as he walks into the quiet of night among trees and friends and breaks into a song to God. Our sense of our environment is made alive by Jesus as he teaches us as one who is awake to lilies and sparrows, the weathers and creatures of the earth. We follow Jesus into his carpenter's shop by giving ourselves fully to our own vocations and artistry. We see clues of God everywhere and seek to derive joy from God's joy, and to aid in the flourishing of God's world. Far from hiding or separating from daily life, Jesus entered it with skill, tears, and joy, and we seek to follow him in doing the same.

According to Jesus, if God cares so dearly for what isn't human in this world, how much more, is his care for we who are? Each person is created with dignity and is so known that God is present to each strand of hair we have or lack. Sun and rain will warm and nourish us no matter who we are. Even if as enemies, we dislike, disregard, or despise God, God is kind to us.

O 2

TO LOVE THE WORLD AS JESUS LOVES IT

In this light, Jesus says the sum of God's ways in this world are these:

To love this God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love every humanbeing as ourselves, including our enemies, just as God does.

For this reason, we believe that we are to enter the public world gladly, creatively, and graciously as those who love the One who created it, and as those purposed to love those who inhabit it.

So, we seek to resist ideas of love that say:

You can never affirm one thing about someone with whom you differ lest you endorse everything about them.

Or

You can never disagree about one thing because that means you hate everything about them.

O 2

TO LOVE THE WORLD AS JESUS LOVES IT

Jesus said of such loves, “what good is it if you love those who are like you and love you back?”

Instead, we say that Jesus has affirmed things about us while not endorsing everything about us. He has likewise disagreed with us without hating us. Jesus’ love has the power to affirm people he doesn’t endorse, to disagree with people he doesn’t hate.

One of Jesus’ early followers described the love he learned from Jesus in this way.

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

We seek to bring these full resources of Jesus’ love to any neighbor we encounter, even if we differ in terms of politics, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, class, or age, and even if we disagree ideologically regarding what is true, beautiful, and good for the world, even when we must nonviolently but tenaciously oppose evil as Jesus defines it.



03

TO LIVE A LIFE OF
PRAYERFUL
ATTENTIVENESS AS
JESUS TEACHES IT

03

TO LIVE A LIFE OF PRAYERFUL ATTENTIVENESS AS JESUS TEACHES IT

Following Jesus breaks down ideas of sacred vs. secular spaces. All of life becomes a sanctuary for prayer. We speak to God out of love.

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.*

Then, Jesus teaches that we speak to God out of love for the needs of our neighbors and ourselves, including our enemies. With humanity in mind, we ask that God:

*Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.*



04

A DEVOTION TO
JESUS AS THE BIBLE
PRESENTS HIM

O 4

A DEVOTION TO JESUS AS THE BIBLE PRESENTS HIM

Centering on Jesus in this way, it becomes important to describe the Jesus we have in mind. As best as we can see, at least five contrary ways of thinking about Jesus currently commend themselves to us. We welcome, learn from, and enjoy people who inhabit each of these divergent views. But as fellow travelers, even though we too can get entangled especially in the first two of these views, we don't aspire to them.

O 4

A DEVOTION TO JESUS AS THE BIBLE PRESENTS HIM

1. The culturally conservative Jesus.

These neighbors tend to highly regard and emphasize the supernatural truth claims of Jesus, but they often resist or are suspicious of the love ethic of Jesus. This view is tempted to shrink Jesus' love ethic so that Jesus' way becomes synonymous with the sexual, economic, ethnic, and political values of cultural conservatism that are popular in a generational moment. The result, in our opinion, is that Jesus looks more like the current version of cultural conservatism, than the Jesus presented to us in the Bible.

2. The culturally progressive Jesus.

These neighbors will maximize in a powerful way some of the love ethic of Jesus (how love as Jesus views it re-shapes our view of persons, places, things and our creator). But they often resist or are suspicious of the supernatural truth claims of Jesus. This view is tempted to shrink the teachings, miracles and truth claims of Jesus so that they are synonymous with the sexual, economic, ethnic, and political values of cultural progressivism popular within a generational moment. The result, in our opinion is that Jesus looks more like a current version of cultural progressivism, than the Jesus presented to us in the Bible.

3. The Secular Jesus.

These neighbors think of Jesus in light of their atheism or agnosticism on the one hand or their various "spiritual but not religious" quests on the other. Neither looks to the supernatural truth claims or love ethic of Jesus recorded in the Bible in any explicit, intentional, or particular way.

4. The Jesus of the Major Non-Christian Religions.

These neighbors look to their own religious teachers and guides and do not primarily look to the supernatural truth claims or the love example of Jesus in any explicit way.

O 4

A DEVOTION TO JESUS AS THE BIBLE PRESENTS HIM

In the community of Sage Christianity, we're all traveling toward Jesus from one or more of these various cultural versions of him. None of has arrived. We are trying imperfectly but earnestly to let the supernatural truth claims and the love ethic of Jesus remain aligned to how Jesus is presented in the Bible. At Sage Christianity we are searching for:

5. Jesus as the Bible presents him.

The supernatural truth claims of Jesus and the love ethic of Jesus are all on display and kept intact. We encounter all of it, let all of it be what it is, and grapple with it. This means that the talking points of a Jesus follower will affirm but also substantially differ from culturally conservative and culturally progressive talking points. We gradually learn what this means and seek to live by this light.

By taking this approach, we hope to recognize our honest disagreements and genuine questions with Jesus as the Bible presents him. We also hope to recognize our own cultural preferences which we are prone to tame Jesus with. All of this is so that we have a real relationship with Jesus. We don't want to turn Jesus into a mirror of ourselves or of the fleeting preferences of our cultural moment.

O 4

A DEVOTION TO JESUS AS THE BIBLE PRESENTS HIM

When we encounter Jesus as the Bible presents him all of us will be ravished, bewildered, or offended at some point. He's an equal opportunity ravisher, bewilderer and offender because he has his own mind, his own convictions, and his own point of view.

At this point, you might feel at least two concerns.

1. The first is that we've used the word "devotion" to describe our approach to Jesus as the Bible presents him. That sounds intense.

2. The second is that by saying "as the Bible presents him" we seem to believe that the Bible exists as a trustworthy authority for our lives. When so many have felt hurt, harmed, or even abused, by the Bible's use and misuse over the years, these pains rightly give so many of us pause. This sounds insensitive or even dangerous.

First, we try to use the word "devotion" to capture our love for Jesus as more than having a respect for some of his ideas. One of the earliest recorded historical Christian points of view, says this:

Christ died for our sins,
just as the Scriptures said.
He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day,
just as the Scriptures said.

They saw Jesus as "Christ," which is to say the promised one of God. A teacher, yes, but much more. Significant to historians is that Christians described Jesus as "Christ" or "Messiah" very early, within close proximity to his death. Even First Century Jewish and Roman historians recorded that Christians spoke of Jesus as "Christ." They not only saw Jesus as someone to learn from or imitate, but also someone to adore and worship.

This brings us to a question about our commitment to the Bible.



05

A HUMBLE CONFIDENCE

that the account the Bible gives us of Jesus and all things, is historically trustworthy, emotionally satisfying, intellectually plausible, frustratingly puzzling, and true.

05

A HUMBLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE ACCOUNT THE BIBLE GIVES US OF JESUS AND ALL THINGS, IS HISTORICALLY TRUSTWORTHY, EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING, INTELLECTUALLY PLAUSIBLE, FRUSTRATINGLY PUZZLING, AND TRUE.

We ourselves have been hurt by Bible misuse. Our desire is to see how the Bible functioned in Jesus' life and to learn how to follow his use of it.

Regarding what Christians call, "the Old Testament," Jesus regularly taught from it. He quoted from memory and publicly read the scrolls. He repeatedly, intentionally, and sometimes offensively, applied many Old Testament images, stories and promises to himself. He said plainly that the Bible is God's word to us, that he will neither abolish nor remove this God-word but will fulfill it.

05

A HUMBLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE ACCOUNT THE BIBLE GIVES US OF JESUS AND ALL THINGS, IS HISTORICALLY TRUSTWORTHY, EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING, INTELLECTUALLY PLAUSIBLE, FRUSTRATINGLY PUZZLING, AND TRUE.

Similarly, when encountering rival narratives about God, himself and the world, Jesus would turn to the Bible and say, “it is written” or “God has said.” Jesus spoke as if he had authority to say what the Bible did and didn’t intend. He was so bold as to assert that he was the true interpreter of cultural wisdom. “You have heard it said, but I say to you,” Jesus declared. In sum, Jesus said that the Scripture cannot be broken and that he was its proper interpreter, not only for our personal faith, but for our public lives.

In a startling way Jesus even said that what Moses, the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets taught was about him. Boldly, Jesus said that to read the Bible without this Jesus-oriented lens is to miss the intent of it entirely.

Jesus went further to say that God would bring to mind all that Jesus taught his original disciples, and that these followers would go into the nations teaching what Jesus had taught them.

As best as we can see, if you were listening to Jesus in real-time, you would not only hear his regular references to the Bible, but you would also hear him speak as if truth exists apart from our opinions of it. Jesus went so far as to say that he himself is the truth.

To devote ourselves to Jesus as the Bible presents him not only means that we will try to resist editing what the Bible says about Jesus, but we will also try to resist editing what Jesus says, teaches, trusts, and practices about the Bible.

05

A HUMBLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE ACCOUNT THE BIBLE GIVES US OF JESUS AND ALL THINGS, IS HISTORICALLY TRUSTWORTHY, EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING, INTELLECTUALLY PLAUSIBLE, FRUSTRATINGLY PUZZLING, AND TRUE.

Therefore, we are not suspicious of the Bible in Jesus' hands (though we have many questions, puzzles, and mysteries we don't understand) but we are suspicious of ourselves. Not because we can't know anything but because we cannot know everything. Whatever we do know truly, we know substantially, but also imperfectly, incompletely, and sometimes distortedly. Therefore, our handling of the Old and New Testaments leads us to pray, and to a humble posture. We resonate with the questions and doubts of those who see Jesus at odds with the Old Testament or with the Apostle Paul. But we trust that Jesus is more knit together with Moses and Paul than it sometimes appears.

The earliest Christian point of view highlighted Jesus' emphasis on the Bible.

*Christ died for our sins,
just as the Scriptures said.
He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day,
just as the Scriptures said.*

We hope that in some small but true way, we can learn to do the same.



06

TO TAKE
SERIOUSLY THAT
SIN, INJUSTICE, AND
EVIL ARE REAL

06

TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THAT SIN, INJUSTICE, AND EVIL ARE REAL

When Jesus spoke of love, he was honest about enemies who will oppose us, and that we too are sadly capable of making ourselves the enemy of others.

When Jesus taught us to pray, he spoke honestly about scarcity with ordinary needs, along with what he called, sin, temptation, and evil.

Jesus said that unclean things, defiling and evil things, come from within us. He gave names to some of these sins.

For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you.

He taught us to include these sins along with many others that he described, in our talk to God. "Forgive us our sins," he said to pray.

But we are also sinned against. We've suffered pain, hurt and harm from those who've lied to us, slandered us, stolen from us, misused physical intimacy and sex, betrayed us in marriage, or used violence against us. "Forgive those who've sinned against us," he teaches us to pray.

Individuals or groups of people (sometimes referred to as a system), can invite, habituate or demand that we excuse or praise, what Jesus calls a sin. And lest, any of us are tempted to pride, Jesus calls each of us to admit our vulnerability toward initiating, collaborating, and participating in sins like these. "Lead us not into temptation," we pray.

06

TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THAT SIN, INJUSTICE, AND EVIL ARE REAL

Why are we prone to sinning and being sinned against?

Because, according to Jesus our loves are corrupted.

In our hearts, we are prone to love unlovely things.
In our hearts, we are prone to love lovely things badly.

Corrupted loves, sins, describe why we can feel lost and fragmented, within ourselves, with others, with our world, and with God. To make us whole again, to recover us from sin, temptation, evil, and corrupted loves, Jesus used a kind word that can in our cultural context sound cruel. The word is “repent.” The word on Jesus’ lips simply means to turn from the direction we were traveling and to take a different way instead. He is the direction.

Jesus could also use imagery that can in our cultural context sound trite, unintelligible, or political. Jesus invites us to be “born again.”

Jesus believed evil is real and no illusion. He further believed in an “evil one” whom he referred to as the devil. For all these reasons and more, Jesus taught that our sins and corrupted loves have stolen the freedom, honor, dignity, love, contentment, and happiness that God gave us to enjoy. Since all of us are sinner and sinned against, in some way, we’ve needed our sentence from fair judgement reduced or removed and a way of healing and forgiveness given. The earliest Christians said it this way:

*Christ died for our sins,
just as the Scriptures said.
He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day,
just as the Scriptures said.*

We join them in seeing the unjust crucifixion of Jesus as God’s means of overcoming evil and providing a way of forgiveness and justice for our sins and hurts.



07

WE DESIRE TO
ANTICIPATE THE
AFTERLIFE AS
JESUS TEACHES IT.

07

WE DESIRE TO ANTICIPATE THE AFTERLIFE AS JESUS TEACHES IT.

*Christ died for our sins,
just as the Scriptures said.
He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day,
just as the Scriptures said.*

We believe in Jesus' bodily resurrection (which is no metaphor to us, but historical and factual). Through Jesus, death has died, and each of us will rise again after death to relate to the God who created us according to his just and merciful account of our lives in Christ.

Jesus spoke often of heaven. By far, in the Bible, it is Jesus who speaks most about hell.

Heaven is described as a new heaven and new earth, an open city where God dwells, that is holy, just, consoling, like a wedding feast, like a lifetime full of adventure, in which artistry and work thrive, with no scarcity of resources and food, in which every tribe, tongue and language is represented and all the dignity of the nations is retained, along with our personalities as individual persons with new bodies. All our corrupted loves, sins, and wounds from being sinned against, are finally made whole, as we are home with the God we love and Jesus as our forever lamb and groom. The imagery invigorates and startles us but heaven according to Jesus is a place of Jesus-centered holy love.

07

WE DESIRE TO ANTICIPATE THE AFTERLIFE AS JESUS TEACHES IT.

Often, Christian people have followed Dante rather than Jesus in how they talk about hell and who they talk to about it. Often, Christian people have followed fire and brimstone preachers, rather than the teachings of Jesus, in their manner and message about hell. Though, following Jesus in his message and manner doesn't remove all questions or frightening sobriety, following Jesus' message and manner differs dramatically from what most of us have known. We seek to speak of heaven and hell as Jesus did, in the way that he did, and to whom he did, and with the full resources of love in which he did.

CONCLUSION

Because we are committed to Jesus as the Bible presents him doesn't mean that we are good, nor that we are more moral or wiser than another.

We share a great deal in common with Progressive Christian concerns. We feel the angst and ache that devastating evils, pains, injustices, and doubts provoke. We lament how churches have often offered no hospitable place of love to ask honest questions, wrestle with real sorrows or work through confusing doubts. We have in common a desire that people need kind and knowledgeable spaces to deconstruct their faith wisely. And we are likewise convinced that trite answers, church bigotries, cultural syncretism with Christianity and moral platitudes are reasons to put Christian churches into question.

And yet, by our little creed above, it is apparent that we go this far with neighbors who've chosen Progressive Christianity as their light, but we turn a different direction and look for a different hope.

Likewise, while we learn from friends who focus solely on Jesus' words in the Bible (Red Letter Christians) on the one hand and Fundamentalist Christians on the other, our approach to Jesus and the Bible differs somewhat from both. With Red Letter Christians we cherish the words of Jesus in the gospels, but we also follow his lead regarding the Old Testament and the apostles he commissioned to teach in his name.

CONCLUSION

With fundamentalist Christians we cherish the Old and New Testament Writings, but we do not believe these can be rightly read or understood apart from the Gospels, the centrality of Jesus, and the grace of God.

And while we enjoy our neighbors who tell us that “your truth is yours and my truth is mine” we do see things differently. It seems to us that “your truth is yours and my truth is mine” is its own absolute truth statement by which we are meant to see the world. We believe that Jesus gave us a different absolute to light our way.

Regardless, we seek to show gentleness, respect, delight, and grace to anyone, even if the “light” by which they choose to see the world differs from our own. Even if someone wants to consider us their enemy, we will seek wise love as our response and will seek repentance and forgiveness when our talk and life hasn’t matched our hope.

Further Resources

Christians through the centuries have often tried to put their faith into short summaries. Here are further examples.

The Nicene Creed

The 39 Articles

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Heidelberg Catechism

The London Confession

The Lausanne Covenant

