

Sharing in God's Life:

Interviews With C. Baxter Kruger

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Smashwords edition

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Table of Contents

Introduction to the Interviews and Dr. Kruger

Chapter 1: Jesus and the Old Testament Saints

Chapter 2: How Do We Get Enough Faith?

Chapter 3: Perichoresis and Sharing in God's Life

Chapter 4: Seeing the Truth About Jesus and Us

Chapter 5: Jesus Has United Himself to Us

The Publisher

Grace Communion Seminary

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## Introduction

This is a transcript of five interviews conducted as part of the *You're Included* series, sponsored by Grace Communion International. We have more than 100 interviews available. You may watch them or download video or audio at [www.gci.org/YI](http://www.gci.org/YI). Donations in support of this ministry may be made at [www.gci.org/donate](http://www.gci.org/donate).

Grace Communion International is in broad agreement with the theology of the people we interview, but GCI does not endorse every detail of every interview. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees. We thank them for their time and their willingness to participate.

Please understand that when people speak, thoughts are not always put into well-formed sentences, and sometimes thoughts are not completed. In the following transcripts, we have removed occasional words that did not seem to contribute any meaning to the sentence. In some cases we could not figure out what word was intended. We apologize for any transcription errors, and if you notice any, we welcome your assistance.

Our guest in the following interviews is C. Baxter Kruger, president of Perichoresis, a non-profit ministry. He is also president of Mediator Lures and holds two U.S. patents on fishing lure designs. He and his wife Beth had been married for 24 years; they've had four children.

Baxter's ministry has developed a website sharing the gospel of the triune God with the world, promoting international dialogue, providing essays, and prayers, free books and lectures. He established Perichoresis Press – a publishing ministry with six books written and published, three books in the works, and over 150 hours of teaching recorded and available through the website.

He's taught in ten seminaries and colleges, preached in 50 churches, 20 denominations, in four countries, providing a relational, theological vision for a re-integration, overcoming our inherited divisions. His ministry focuses on recovering a relational vision that reflects the union of the Triune God, the human race and all creation, in Christ; promotes healing for relationships, marriages and families; and establishes a framework for international relations.

Dr. Kruger is the author of the following books:

*Across All Worlds: Jesus Inside Our Darkness*

*God Is For Us*

*The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited*

*Jesus and the Undoing of Adam*

*The Shack Revisited: There Is More Going On Here Than You Ever Dared to Dream* (Oct. 2012)

The interviews were conducted by J. Michael Feazell, who received his D.Min. degree from Azusa Pacific University in 2000. At the time of the interviews, he was vice-president of Grace Communion International; he now teaches part-time at Grace Communion Seminary.

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[back to table of contents](#)

Jesus and the Old Testament Saints:

A Round-Table Discussion with C. Baxter Kruger and Steve Horn

J. Michael Feazell: We're delighted to have with us in our round-table discussion Dr. C. Baxter Kruger, president of Perichoresis, an international non-profit ministry. He is joined by his assistant Steve Horn. Let's go around the table and introduce our panel.

Joseph Tkach (JWT), current president of our denomination.

John McKenna (JM), doctrinal adviser to our denomination.

Mike Morison (MM), editor of *Together* magazine.

Steve Horn (SH), Dr. Kruger's assistant.

Baxter Kruger (CBK), husband of Beth.

JMF: Thanks everybody, let's begin by talking about all the people in the Old Testament... many of them are the heroes of the Bible, and yet they lived before Christ came and consequently never heard of Christ, never named the name of Christ, what happens to those people? Are they in hell? I've heard that said.

CBK: If you ask me the direct question, I would say that there are two concepts that are important, and this is where your theology bursts the wineskins of our present conception. The first one is the concept of *prolepsis*, which is there are certain things that happened on the basis of something that has not yet been historically realized. Paul says that God winks at the transgressions committed in the old times because he knew that the sacrifice of Jesus was coming. In essence he's saying God was relating to Israel and to the world at large on the basis of the relationship that he would have with them in the future in the person of Jesus.

That's one thing. The other is that Paul says, I think deliberately, that, not only are all things created in and through, and by and for the Son of God, but he says *Jesus*, and he has in view there the incarnate Son. Just in the mind-boggling idea, basically what we're saying is that Adam

and Eve and everyone after them came into being, by the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. What they knew of that, how much they understood of that, how they could process that, I don't know, but for me, I do not believe that any person will ever wake up on the other side and meet Jesus and say, "Who are you?"

Jesus is the one who knows how people respond to him. Everybody in the history of every religion wants to be the one in the position to say, this is what constitutes a response to Jesus. But he is the only one in that position. Paul says in Colossians that the gospel has been proclaimed to all creation, in heaven and on earth. He is pushing the envelope that way, and that relationship has been there, and is being revealed in some way that makes sense to people, and Jesus is the one who's relating and having that. That's about as far as I can go there.

JMF: What are the implications of that for loved ones, relatives, all people in far-away places who perhaps never heard the gospel or perhaps never heard it in a way that properly represented it, and therefore verbally accepted it ...

CBK: Well, who *has* heard the gospel properly presented since Jesus preached? The good news is that Jesus is the one who has established relationship with the human race. He has done that. That is not dependent upon the church, that is not dependent upon our faith. The Father's Son has established relationship with each of us, in his Spirit. He is addressing us and we are responding. The place of the Christian church is to be a witness to that relationship, to help people know who it is that they are in relationship with – what this is about – what their time and their history is about. The church is to bear a witness and to be a fellowship of light that brings light on what's really going on. It's not Allah, it's Jesus. It's our job to stand up and unpack and proclaim that as the truth, not something we create, but as the truth it is, that he has established.

I think that it is really important for us to recognize that we give up judgment on who's in, who's out and what constitutes that. Jesus has established a relationship with the entire cosmos – in his own incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Everyone, at some level, is aware of that. They may not be able to call him Jesus, because maybe they grew up in a fundamentalist church where Jesus was so small and so mean-spirited that the only thing that they could do is run from that conception because it was so non-human. They are embracing life, and I don't think that when they are embracing life, they are embracing non-Jesus. They are trying to find Jesus in the dark. It's the job of the Christian church to say, "This is what's going on here. You're trying to embrace the real Jesus." You help people see who that is.

JT: One of the key verses in all this incarnational talk that we've had today is one you've alluded to numerous times, that all things are created for him and by him and consist in him. I think one of the most misunderstood issues is this notion that if you die before you hear Jesus' name and have the chance to accept him as your Savior, that it's all over. Somehow, God is handcuffed and you're destined to go to hell for eternity and have eternal torment. What it overlooks is the fact that God is sovereign and he is not a prisoner of his sovereignty, he has a freedom, and since he created all things, and all things live and consist for him, by him and in him, we're not really dead till he says we're dead.

CBK: I think about Lazarus, he's dead four days, comes back to life, and (the Gospel of John was apparently written by the apostle) you think, "John, why didn't you interview Lazarus? This guy's been dead four days? For John, he's like, "Why interview Lazarus when we've got to talk to Jesus? Here's what we're looking at when we're going to meet on the other side – it's right here in front of us." The revelation of who God is, and what God intends, and has planned and has accomplished, is the person of Jesus and his union with us. That's what we come to on the other side.

JMF: Jesus conquered death, and in him, we're conquerors of death as well.

SH: One who was slain from before the foundation of the world, that's what I'm thinking about. We keep bringing this forward into a time in history as if that's important.

JMF: As if God is bound by time...

SH: this is *before* the foundation.

JM: Perhaps we could remember that he came in the fullness of time. How are you going to flesh out the significance of the fullness of time without understanding that he is the Lord of time? He is the Lord of time past, he is the Lord of time present, he is the Lord of time future. He is the Lord of time. He is the judge and Savior of all time. When you're asking questions about how he relates himself to time, you're asking big questions, and you need to get the answers from the Lord of time.

This concept of prolepsis that Baxter is talking about, I see Moses' confession already operating with the concept of prolepsis. He's doing it like this: Because the Lord bailed the people of God out of Egypt, I can confess the one who created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. It's in the light of redemption that you understand creation. That is fundamental to what the meaning of prolepsis is. Nobody understands the Creator without the redemption of the

Creator, and this Creator is the redeemer of all time.

CBK: and the Revealer.

JM: The Son of God, pre-incarnate, is just as time-full (and I think that's what you are thinking of) as the incarnate Son of God – it's just a different kind of time, isn't it?

SH: Some of the actions in the Old Testament particularly, several things were counted as righteousness. If you take the definition of righteousness as being in right relationship – that was what was basically given to them where they were. We just happen to be coming along in the time to where God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the entire cosmos – and a period of time that was written about, we saw that happen in history – we were operating in that particular point in history.

CBK: The basis of the covenant relationship with Israel was the circumcision, and it happened to Israel in the flesh of Jesus. It all pointed forward to him. The old covenant was a covenant in Christ, which he was destined to come and fulfill for them and in their behalf, and we're on the other side of that covenant fulfilled, but just the same thing, we're participating in that.

JMF: It was for “today” the today of Joshua. Today where God meets us – wherever and whenever God meets us – it is the “today.”

MM: It was all pointing forward.

SH: All the language of the prophets pointing towards the Messiah...

JM: And the Messiah is the son of David. “I'll never take my *hesed* – my grace – from off of your house like I took it from off of the house of Saul. In this way, you will be my son and I will be your father.” In that Father-son relationship is something new. Nobody before David is going to have this ... Moses didn't have this kind of relationship with the Lord God, with the great I AM the Lord God is. He chose in his freedom in the time of the monarchy to give this relationship to David. That promise to David is Messianic hope. The messianic David is the grace of God by virtue of the fact that God was free to choose to do this for the sake of fulfilling his promise in covenant with his people in his creation. That's why you can talk about Jesus come in the fullness of time – the promise kept the righteousness of God.

CBK: I was thinking a while ago about this that Moses – somebody was talking about that Moses – and with David too, it's the Spirit of Christ that inspired the prophets, who inspired Moses. It's not like in the Old Testament the Spirit is caught off guard with the Incarnation. The

Incarnation is what's planned before the foundation of the world, so Genesis, the covenant with Abraham and with Israel, and with Israel, with the human race, is not only a foreshadowing but it's patterned after the new covenant. It is not yet historically realized. This is just baby steps, and it's going to be fulfilled in Jesus, and once it's fulfilled in Jesus, then we go back and we see that relation that God has had with all peoples all the time in Christ but there was no way to see that during that great darkness.

JMF: Preparation.

CBK: Preparation, fulfillment, now revelation – in the Spirit.

JMF: The matrix.

CBK: Yeah, we're in the matrix.

JM: I like even this trajectory that we are talking about, that it has typological significance. When Jesus says, "they wrote about me," he's not saying, Moses knew me, and wrote about me. He's saying Moses wrote of God in such a way that he spoke of me even if he didn't know it. All the prophets said that way.

JMF: 1 Peter 1:10.

JM: Yeah, the prophets ... they don't have any idea what they're writing about and probably St. Paul and St. Peter had very little idea that they were writing Scripture – they were writing letters, that's all they were doing.

CBK: They were doing their best they could to write about Jesus and didn't realize what it meant.

JM: Well, who makes it Scripture? The one to whom they were bearing witness – Jesus, because he is who he is.

MM: The Old Testament was an unfinished story. It's a tremendous story and you just wonder where is it going, where is it going? Until Jesus comes along. Ah, this was what it was all pointing to.

JM: And nobody liked it.

CBK: The players didn't like it, but the thing is, the real author of Scripture knew that even though the players didn't, and he counted all the players' rejection of their own messiah to accomplish reconciliation, and the real players in the story had no clue. We were talking last night about, that Caiaphas was the only high priest in the whole history of Israel that did his job. He offered up the one acceptable sacrifice – and he did it for the wrong reason. He did it to save

himself and the people, and he was doing that. That's a picture of how God is a great chess player. It's just three-dimensional chess, and he's way ahead of what we think is going on. And it's revealed to us in Jesus. Then we get it. There's the purpose of God in creation – it's the union between humanity and Christ.

JMF: Barth talks of the debt of gratitude we owe the Jews for bringing about exactly what they were intended to bring about ...

CBK: T.F. Torrance calls it “the womb of the incarnation,” which is just a fantastic [image?].

JT: I think it is vital to understand it in this context that you're now presenting, because I've met Christians and non-Christians who have a very different view – in fact, they might look first at the angelic creation and see that a third rebelled, and so Plan A failed. Then he creates Adam and Eve, and humanity falls, Plan B fails, and so now we come to the Incarnation, and now we are already to Plan C, God has failed a couple of times.

CBK: Yeah, Israel failed,... The incarnate Son and the relationship that he has with his Father and the Spirit and the human race and all of creation in himself, that union, that covenant relationship – between the Father, Son, and Spirit and the human race and creation, that is not an after-thought that God quickly thought of after – Adam fails, my creation fell, I've got to come up with another one – that is Plan A – in the light of which we now understand what's going on with creation, and we now understand what the calling of Israel is about. We now understand what the calling of the church is about.

SH: To use your analogy with a three-dimensional chess board, when God created everything, he had checkmate.

JM: I was surprised that you'd be like in either four or ten, eleven dimensions.

JT: However many dimensions there are, checkmate in all.

CBK: That's the beauty – Jesus is the light of the cosmos – not just the light of the Christian church. He's not only the one in and through and by whom are all things, but FOR him. Here, in this person, and in the relationship between – God on the one side and the human race in another that exists in his very identity – here we see what God is up to from all eternity. This is the revelation, this is the unfolding of what's been hidden and we could not conceive of. That's a Christological hermeneutic – that's the truth of all truths, that's the way to think as a Christian.

JM: Every time you are going to read covenant renewal in the Old Testament, you are asked

not only to read God with his people, but the creation is always asked, called upon, to bear witness to what he is doing with his people. God never just bears witness to himself, between himself and his people. He always says, “Heaven, come over here and look at this. Earth, come over here and listen to this, because I’m speaking with my people and you’re my witness.” The creation, the cosmos, is always a part of every covenant renewal you’ll ever read throughout the whole Bible.

JMF: God enters into covenant relationship with Israel numerous times in the Old Testament “that all nations might know that I am the Lord.”

JM: Yeah, that’s very important.

MM: To be a light to the nations.

CBK: Cause Israel did what the Calvinists do, and what the church typically does, which is “we’re in and you’re out, and this is for us, and God loves us and does not love everybody else.” He says, no, I’m calling you Abraham, I will bless you, I’m going to protect you, and I love you, and through you I’m going to reach the world.

The restoration of relationships

JMF: One of the stated purposes of Perichoresis under your supervision is recovering a relational vision that reflects the union of the triune God, the human race, and all creation, in Christ. Promotes healing for relationships, marriages and families, and establishes a framework for international relations. That is a tall order, and yet it accurately reflects what the gospel is all about.

CBK: It looks like, if it’s a goal, it’s a tall order. How in the world are you going to do that? But if it’s a reflection of the international relation that’s established in Jesus, of the healing for all relationships – marriage and family and racial, and sexual – if it’s a Christological statement, then it’s not a tall order, something that’s been accomplished that’s not being revealed. The more you focus on Jesus in terms of, he is the Father’s Son and the Anointed One, and he is the one in, through, and by him all things are created, the more you focus on his identity, the more you realize, he is the point of union – he is the point of relationships. And he’s already accomplished it in himself in his own person.

Now comes our education, our coming to realize that these divisions that we create because of our own insecurities, and anxieties, and darkness, are false divisions. We have a responsibility – a global responsibility, too, because the cosmos is bound up in Jesus’ relationship with us. I’m

a part of Jesus' relationship with you, and with people in Australia or India or Russia, this is of a piece IN Christ. That warrants as a framework that says, "Wait a minute. We've got to re-think things here." Because it's easy just to say global and national divisions and religious divisions and even in the Christian church, a couple of thousands of denominations within the Christian community, within the Protestant community. But underneath that there is a oneness that we have in Jesus, and that's why Paul says, "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Because the unity... don't create it, it's there in Christ. Preserve it. Stay focused on that, and that liberates you from recognizing people or nations according to the flesh.

JT: That leads to a question that we get asked when we're talking about the Incarnation and all that it implies, and how we participate in the divine nature – some will level the accusation that we're just teaching a form of universalism. How do you answer that?

CBK: I wish I could. I wish and pray that the whole human race comes to see the truth. I have my doubts about certain denominations, but I am not a doctrinal universalist. I am a hopeful universalist. The world is reconciled to Christ, we're included in the family, Jesus has established a relationship with all of us. He sent the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, and it is possible for us to say consistently again, and again, and again – even indefinitely – say, "no, I'm going to live in my own world. I'm going to live in the way that I see things, the way that I see God. I've got my theology, I've got my vision of God, I've got my vision of the world, I've got my vision of what Jesus did, and I am god. My vision is what counts, and Jesus, you line up with me and everybody in the planet line up with me."

That creates chaos and conflict and internal pain, and it's possible for that to be an indefinite position. But God never changes, and this is important, that what we do (or do not do) does not have the capacity to change the being of God or his relationship with us that he has established. We're not talking about changing God from being a Father back into being a judge. We're talking about the fact the he has bound himself in relationship with us. That is never changing – the Spirit is haunting us and trying to enlighten us, and that's the state of things.

Now, how it comes out? We're not in a position to say with any kind of dogmatic reference. It's theoretically possible that no one would get it, no one would see. It's theoretically possible that almost everyone, or even indeed all, will come to see. There are people that I respect, George McDonald and Thomas Erskine among them, great thinking Christian godly men, that the love of the Father poured forth from both of them. They both were committed universalists.

They just believe that the love of the Father was going to win, it was just impossible not to. I think, that's probably ... that's good.

But I just can't say that. So, I'm not a universalist, but I understand why people who are operating out of a legal framework can only hear me saying that, because for them, if you pray to receive Jesus, then you've got a ticket to heaven and you're going. And if everybody's got a ticket, then everybody's going to go to heaven. But the plain fact is that there are people who don't want to go. They may have a ticket and the trip paid for, but they don't want to participate in it. It's not going away, it's a very miserable form of existence.

JMF: C.S.Lewis' book, *The Great Divorce* ... [**CBK:** Fantastic book.] talks about that.

JT: That was a nice turn of phrase the way you've explained that, they have a paid ticket in their pocket but they don't want to use it.

CBK: In C.S. Lewis's image, the door of heaven is always open, and even the door of hell, and maybe it's the same door. It's not "we died, and God goes back into being God, and forget this Father, Son, Spirit stuff, and forget this covenant relationship. Sorry, all that's over, you had your chance, now it's gone in flames." It's covenant relationship, and where are you in the journey? Whether you see or whether you don't see, you're not changing God in this.

JT: I think you will agree with me, it's almost an odd question about "are you a universalist" because when I look at the early church fathers, they all wrote with a hope that everyone

CBK: They believed in a cosmic Jesus. They believed that Jesus is the one who has reconciled the cosmos, and so they were looking for the manifestation and the revelation of that, and they wanted to participate in the unveiling of that. Our Jesus in the West today is (for Pete's sake), without the church he can't even have a voice. It's like we make Jesus Lord of our lives – who's lord, then? The announcement is he is Lord, he has come and established a relationship with us; therefore quit living in your own world and come live with him in his. Walk with him. Let him disciple you. Let him teach you about the Father.

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[back to table of contents](#)

## How Do We Get Enough Faith?

**JT:** Working pastorally, we've met people who have ups and downs in their lives, and when they have the downs, they always feel like such a failure, that they were just not faithful enough, and they didn't have enough faith. When they better understand this Incarnational theology, they have a whole different context in which they're living. Unfortunately, with the proliferation of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, many people are trying to work up enough faith, and then the fall is very painful and great when they realize they haven't worked up enough faith. Perhaps you can comment on the difference between living in the faith of Jesus as opposed to working up your own faith.

**CBK:** That's the difference between religion and Christianity. Every religion in the world is going to tell you that you have to build a relationship with God, or maintain a relationship with God – here is how you do that, go do it.

Christianity says, no one knows the Father but the Son. Jesus says, come to me and you can share in my relationship with the Father, which means I'm the true believer, and I will share my faith with you, and you can participate in my relationship with the Father, and that's an easy thing, he says. My yoke is easy, my load is light. I'm not like the Pharisees, who are going to keep lists upon list upon list of things you've got to be doing to entertain and maintain some sort of relationship with this invisible God.

To me, the greatest news in the world is ... there's a singer/songwriter back in, I think he's originally from Alabama – named Pierce Pettis – one of the, just brilliant singer/songwriters of our time, but he's got a song called "God believes in you." One of the lines says, when you feel so ashamed that you could die, God believes in you.

For me, the news is that, not only does the Father, Son, and Spirit believe in me, believe in us, but they've established a relationship with us, and with me and with all of us across the world. And so it's not about us working up something in order to get into a relationship. Faith is a discovery that Jesus has established a relationship with us, and it's a discovery that commands me to stop my own false religious believing and pretense, and to rest in the reality of that relationship. It's a discovery that summons me to acknowledge it by reckoning on it – and beginning to live and participate with his mind, with him. It was great relief there.

**JM:** I think one of the most comforting aspects of this kind of confession for me has been that Jesus Christ has repented for me. That I do not have to dig down into the depths of my own

being to find a proper repentance before God, because Christ does that for me. To me, I can only catch one little minnow, but I'm a fisher of men because of who Jesus is.

**CBK:** How could you repent without knowing what sin really is? We're not even in a position to say how bad have we actually done in our own self-effort. Only Jesus is in a position to say, "this is what the mess is," and he receives the Father's love in the middle of that for us.

**JMF:** Don't we often see our own sin and sinfulness way down the line, after we've been Christians a long time? We tend to think, I'm worse now than ever, it seems to me, and it's probably because we can see what sin is better, the longer we walk with Christ.

**CBK:** There are several dimensions, there's one that I want to point out there and that is, my friend, Bruce Wauchope, in Australia, he's done a series called "The gospel and mental health" that's available in our website. But one of the things that he points out is that, as we come to know that we are accepted, truly just accepted as we are, only then do we start letting out stuff that we've been keeping hidden and suppressed and in a closet. That's when we begin to be healed – only in the light of our acceptance can we even acknowledge that this is going on, let alone come forward with it. So he says quite often, the gospel is news about acceptance in Jesus, everything starts falling apart in people's lives, because they are no longer trying to hold it all together. They let it come forward, and that's where real healing starts.

**JT:** That's freeing. The legalist can't see this, because he's wearing not just thick glasses, but welder's glasses, and they're comparing themselves to this list of rules. They misunderstand the context of Jesus' ministry, or John the Baptist's ministry, when they talk about repenting. All they do is heap up a larger and ever-growing burden of guilt on themselves.

**JMF:** They have to try all the harder to hold everything together.

**SH:** If you're not seeing yourself in Christ, who else is going to hold it together? It's going to get dumped in your lap every time. So to me, the whole paradigm of talking about sin goes far deeper than the ten commandments or the legal models. He goes all the way into you not seeing, and you denying who you are in Christ, and what has been accomplished in and through his death, burial and resurrection.

**JMF:** It leaves you with deep depression or hypocrisy or both.

**JM:** It took no other than Christ to show me how much I hated him. Only he could show me that. No one else can show us how much we hate who God is, except God.

**CBK:** Only then, by revealing the relationship that God has with us, that he won't let us go.

He's accepted us.

**JM:** That's why we say ... He's a very merciful God.

**SH:** We started out talking about the faith issue, seeing that participating in Jesus' faith, he is the one who has the relationship with the Father. He is the one who knows the Father. He is the one who actively participates in the love of the Father and the Spirit. He shares that with us. He shares everything that there is with us. So he is sharing our faith.

I used to read that Scripture, "If you have the faith of a mustard seed, you could say to that mountain 'be removed,' and it falls into the ocean." I read it and read it and kept trying to conjure it up. Finally I read it one day, and I felt so stupid, because after a while the way I read it was, it says, "you don't have it. You don't have the faith of a mustard seed. Jesus is the one who's got all the faith." He shared it with us through grace, that's what saved us, and took a lot of the pressure off.

**JMF:** So I don't have to depend on the quality and level of my faith to know that I'm saved.

**SH:** No more than you do for your own salvation. It's not up to you, it's a finished work.

**CBK:** Who has ever moved beyond "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief," I mean, honestly? Would that not be the apostle Paul's last confession? Or the great Athanasius? Isn't it "Lord I believe, help my unbelief"? I see it, I want it, and so you tell me the difference between looking at it ourselves, as Steve was saying, independent, outside of union with Christ, outside of his faith and faithfulness. We are trying to put our quantity of faith over here to see if it qualifies to get an exchange miracle, if we flex it enough. That independent faith is to say, no, Jesus is the one that moves mountains, and when we participate in him, we find ourselves getting water because he says "get water," and he is going to transform it into wine. We don't do that, he does that. He's the transformer.

**MM:** I was thinking about how people want to get other people saved, and yet those other people are already saved. Maybe it's more of an educational process than a saving process?

**CBK:** We have to rethink – because you're thinking it about this way – you cannot be lost if you don't belong. Salvation has to be rethought in the light of the fact that Jesus has a relationship with us. I had this discussion with a Calvinist at the American Academy of Religion in New Orleans out on Royal Street. I was going to eat supper and he followed me and he was arguing with me all the way. We got out in the middle – it was Canal Street, which is a boulevard – and he said: "Surely you don't believe that all these people out here in New Orleans are in

Christ.”

I just looked at him and said, “Well, of course I do. I mean, how else did they get here?”

He said: God made them.

I said: *Which* God made them?

He said, “God.”

I said, “*Which* God?”

He said, “I don’t know what you mean – God’s common grace?”

I said, “Which God, what’s his name?”

He wouldn’t say it. He wouldn’t say, Father, Son and Spirit, because that would have meant that there is a relationship that Jesus has with all these people in New Orleans whether they prayed the prayer or even are one of the elect... So he’s gonna hide behind the notion of common grace – and some generic common grace that the Father relates to people behind the back of Jesus – as opposed to seeing that all things come into being in and through Jesus and now he has lifted us up, all of us, into this relation.

Now we can talk about getting saved – getting saved is what Jesus did for us; now we can talk about our *experience* of that. And where are we in our journey of understanding?

The first encounter that I had that I remember was in college, and I was at a camp, and boy, it was very powerful and I thought, “this is fantastic.” Everybody tells me “you got saved.” I thought, “I got saved.” Then I had another encounter that was even better, three years down the road and, well, what was that? They said, you get a second blessing. Ok, a second blessing.

Then I had a really huge one in Scotland with J.B. Torrance teaching, and I’m going, I didn’t know how to categorize it, and he is the one who said to me, “you have many, many experiences in your life. Don’t build your theology on experience – your salvation happened in Jesus. It unfolds in your life relationally. There are moments of great insight and liberation and clarity. There are moments like that, but those are not when you get from outside of Jesus into Jesus. That’s revelation. That’s clarification. You used the word “education,” which is a fantastic word. Education means to draw out.

**MM:** I was thinking Jesus *announced* his good news. He didn’t ask, “Is this true or not?” Rather, he announced it as a fact.

**CBK:** Again, and again, the gospel is not an invitation, it’s a declaration of reality – I am the Lord your God, I am the light of the cosmos. Follow me and you won’t walk in the dark, you’ll

be in the light. Again and again and again, it's not an invitation, it's a declaration of reality. That declaration summons us to change our view of reality and come and participate. And the kingdom's here.

**JM:** I remember one day at Fuller Seminary, Tom Torrance was being haunted by Evangelical born-again people, and they wanted to know, "when were you born again?" I can tell you, I was born again in 1972, because of some experience I had in San Francisco. Everybody was after Tom because could they do the same, they could say, I was born again in such and such a date and such and such a time. When they asked that question to Professor Torrance, he said, "Well, it was around A.D. 30."

**CBK:** In Jesus' resurrection.

The abundance gospel

**JT:** That triggers another area that I think we should ask you to comment upon. It's interesting how quickly Christianity can be turned into a religion – of lists of rules, and things to do or another way of saying it – making a formula out of Christianity. Something that's ever growing in popularity in the United States, and I'm afraid it's one of the worst things that the United States exports outside its country, is this health, wealth, prosperity gospel – if you just do these right things, have the right amount of faith, you'll be wearing a Rolex watch in just a matter of months and driving a new Lexus – maybe you could comment on that.

**CBK:** Everything that happened to Jesus and his apostles. You can't have a vision of the gospel that excludes what's happened to the apostles and to Jesus himself. I think God wants us whole and complete, and we are in Jesus – and that unfolds in history – and it includes our death. The experience of our salvation, the unfolding of it includes our death.

I have this conversation with a friend back home who says, "Baxter, you teach that everything is bound up in Jesus, and if it's bound up in Jesus, then all we've got to do is believe enough, and if we believe enough, it will all unfold."

I said, "You're right. If we believed with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then the truth in Jesus will be set free. What you're excluding is the journey, and the journey is our life, which includes our death. That's when we learn it."

We learn it when we die – that we're not the Lord, we don't have the power of life, we never did, and we've always participated in Jesus. One thing that needs to be on the table is that, that suffering is part of the way in which we can participate in the faith of Christ – as he'd learned the

things who he was (Hebrews 5) through the things that he suffered.

The second thing that I think is important is that, he is the one who tells us what we are supposed to believe, what we are supposed to do. That's not in our control. There were servants sitting around when Jesus commanded these servants to get water, he transformed it into wine. The next day, they went out – “we're gonna get water.” So they get water, get more water, get more water. But that's not what Jesus is doing. He's the only one who transforms it into wine – he calls the shots.

That's why the Lazarus story is important. It says explicitly in John 11, “Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick” and it says, he stayed where he was two more days. It was like a two-days journey. After four days the man has been dead, the sisters come out and said, “If you would've been here, our brother wouldn't have died.” He says, this has been done for the revelation for the Son of Man. This suffering, this not getting the Rolex, this struggle, this man died and was rotting, he went through that, that family went through that, for the revelation of Jesus Christ. We've got to have a place for that obviously biblical story in our theology.

**JMF:** Jesus said, I've come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. We want to interpret the word “abundantly” as Rolexes and Lexuses – abundance of possessions. What we possess, our position, prestige, power – that's not the abundant life. When you boil it down, what people really want, what people really need and what constitutes abundance in life, ask any rich person who's never have a love relationship, who's never had anybody care about them and love them and has never loved anyone – we need and want love – that's abundance. People would trade all the riches they have for somebody who loves them, cares for them, to feel accepted and know that they're beloved. This is abundant life.

**CBK:** Jesus, when he defines eternal life – this is eternal life, that they may know you. Knowing the Father and this Father's heart (which is what you're saying), knowing his love for us produces an unearthly assurance within our souls, a peace and a hope that is life. It has an infinite variety of expressions. It may include giving your own life for the benefit of another person. That abundant life is not just... that's an American invention, only recently did anybody think about anything like that – only in a materialist world would anybody dream of that.

Abundant life is knowing the Father's heart and experiencing his lavish love. Today, whether that's in Los Angeles, or in Australia, or wherever it is – and in the midst of our lives and relationship. In the freedom that comes from knowing I am assured in my soul, with that

unearthly assurance, now therefore I'm not self-centered. In this moment I'm living in assurance and therefore I can be other-centered like the Father, Son and Spirit, and I can be there for my family, be there for my friends, for their benefit – that's the rippling of the river of living water. That's the kingdom, the way of being in life with the Father, Son and Spirit. The abundance of their way of life comes into expression in us through assurance. That's it, that's what we want.

**JMF:** Giving ourselves away entirely and receiving ourselves back from God and from one another – totally different sense of abundance from the way we've defined it.

**SH:** One of the things interesting to me about the grace of God is that he would give you the desires of your heart, so to me, there's nothing that would preclude anyone from wanting to have riches and health and all of the other stuff – Paul said, what good is it then if I gain everything but I don't have Christ? That's kind of strong language to me. You can probably pray yourself into a million bucks. So what? I've seen more miserable wealthy people than I care to even speak about right now. They have all the money in the world.

**CBK:** And what freedom and beauty it is when do have a Rolex, so you can give it to somebody else.

**JMF:** Exactly – even Abraham was a rich man for his age, a wealthy man. And yet this wasn't what defined him. It's not what made him be who he was and successful.

**JM:** We must be talking about life in the new creation – the new heavens and the new earth as the new children of the kingdom, that's where life is ultimately very abundant.

**CBK:** “Wherein dwelleth right relationship.”

**JMF:** “How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,” Jesus told the disciples after the encounter with the wealthy man who couldn't let go of his possessions. But even so, they said, “who can be saved then?” “With God all things are possible. Even this, a camel going through the eye of the needle, God can even do that.” He does do that – save rich people and poor people alike, there's no difference when we're in Christ.

**CBK:** To come back to what I call the unearthly assurance, the longer I live ... that is the real gift of the gospel to us. It takes the pressure off. It helps me to see that I am loved, and have been loved and I am accepted and I'm included just like I am right now today. So I can let go of stuff – to strive – even striving of earnest prayer to get a Rolex watch. Whatever it is, you can let go of that and just be. That leaves you not in self-centered mode, not in narcissistic mode, not in frantic mode, but in the calmed mode where you're free to give of yourself for others – which

creates fellowship, and that life of the kingdom has an inbreaking, it expresses itself.

**SH:** The question is, what makes you whole and complete and in need of nothing? To me that's the real question.

**JM:** Having no need, to be nothing.

**MM:** Reminds me of Paul in prison in Philippians. He is in prison what does he talk about? He says he wants to know Christ and his sufferings and also the power of his resurrection. He knows that one is on the path toward the other. He is not even praying his way out of prison, he's just assured of, that if he dies, he will go to be with the Lord, that's all that counted.

**CBK:** There was a George Wishart in the Reformation right before ... he was a guy that evidently was preaching when John Knox was converted or came to the light, or whatever you want to call it. But Wishart was also burned at the stake and he was down in a well in St. Andrews (and there's a marquee out there marking it in the road) and he was singing. It was one of those wells ... basically a foot around it goes down, at the bottom it's five feet. You've got enough room to stretch out there, but that's it. He was singing down there, and people that listened to him all came to faith, because they could not figure out how in the world this guy was having a good time. Then that even was sort of idolized: that's what *we* are supposed to do.

He was experiencing the Father's care for him as a person in the midst of that trauma. And it was light. Other people say, What is going on here? This is beautiful. You wouldn't want to say to him he did not have abundant life in that moment. He didn't have freedom, he didn't have a Rolex watch, or any other kind of watch, for that matter. He was living in his own mess because of where he was and could not get out, but nevertheless the Lord met him there. It was something very real and very deep and very beautiful about it, I guarantee he would not have given up a million years for exchange somewhere else.

**SH:** Idolatry, comes to my mind also. Praying for prosperity.

**CBK:** I think your question is...Steve, what constitutes being whole and complete and in need of nothing? For me the only answer is that we know the Father as Jesus knows the Father.

**JT:** And the only way we can do that is through Jesus himself.

**JM:** If we read John 17 in his prayer for us, not only for his disciples but those who will believe (through his disciples) in him, that the Father and the Son in the Spirit share with those who believe in Christ is abundant life. It is life forever, it is the new creation. Though the history of the church can deny this answer to this prayer of oneness, "that they maybe one, Father, as we

are one” – though the history of the church may deny it, the church can’t deny it. The church of Jesus Christ is one with the Father, of the Son, in the Spirit.

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[back to table of contents](#)

## Perichoresis and Sharing in God's Life

**JMF:** We've never covered *perichoresis* as a word, and what does it mean, and why is your ministry named Perichoresis?

**CBK:** We just wanted to figure out what would be the hardest thing to actually pull off in the universe [laughter].... So we just figure a name like that... No.

Oh, goodness. The word means, technically, mutual indwelling. What attracted me to it early on was the way in which the early church was grappling to explain how the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit works, and how can there be three in one. For me, to come to see Jesus as the Father's Son, as the Anointed One and the one in and through and by and for whom all things were created, and to say and to speak the name of Jesus Christ is to say Trinity, and humanity, and creation are not separated but bound together in relationship.

I started thinking, Steve and I were talking about this, we were excited about this, like, how do we talk about this person *Jesus* in this way? Then we talked about the idea of starting a nonprofit ministry that was essentially Christologically focused, helping people recover the early church's vision, and we were talking about how do you summarize this in one word. We talked about "Immanuel," we talked about "union," both of which are great words that summarized what we were talking about, but those are words that are used all the time.

I said my favorite theological term forever is *perichoresis*. It's just right at it. It's saying it all in one word. It says union without loss of personal distinction. It says Father, Son, Spirit relationship – oneness but not enmeshment. It's just a classic word, and I was naïve enough to think that a word like that would not be a marketing problem. The interesting thing about it is, it's not a marketing problem with the younger generation. They love stuff like that. They just love words like that.

We'd backed into it there, but the other thing I think is interesting about the word is as we march historically, the old divisions between science and religion – or at least some of those parts of division are beginning to, not fall away, but we're having conversations – and it seems to me that there is a lot of scientists out there who're trying to come to some concept of how things can be united and yet remain what they are without being psychologically enmeshed or absorbed. I think that word and the concept of Perichoresis is going to be very much the forefront as we move into the third Christian millennium, and in terms of the larger discussion.

**JMF:** In the description of the ministry of Perichoresis, you have written that you have

established critical dialogue with scientists, with doctors, lawyers, counselors, and teachers, and provided a relational theological vision for a new integration – overcoming the inherited divisions between those disciplines.

**CBK:** Yes. That’s again a Christological affirmation. Once you see that Jesus is not just one individual and a sea of individuals that are unrelated, but he is actually the one in, and through, and by and for whom all things are created and are sustained. Then in him, in the person of Jesus, you’re talking about the point of unity. You’re talking about the one who holds it together, and so that gives us a whole new vantage point for international politics, a whole new vantage point for law and justice and what are we trying to do, and who are the people that we’re involved with.

Instead of recognizing people according to the flesh, like Paul says, don’t recognize people according ... he doesn’t recognize people according to the flesh. Paul said, “one died, therefore all died.” All our divisions, and all the ways that we recognize and honor one another is out – there’s only people bound up in Christ and the giftedness in that. That’s the way we look at people. That revolutionizes the way we go about our relationships, it gives us a framework to know that I’m not ever going to meet a person in the planet [including the Calvinist] who is not included, and is not a joint heir with me, and a participant in the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. To know that’s who I’m dealing with radically changes the way that I approach... (or theoretically, radically changes, and we still fall to our own prejudices, thanks), but it gives us a foundation for a new dialogue.

Then when you talk about that in terms of economic theory, for example, where did our current American economic theory come from? It came from some philosophy. Some guy or group of guys’ way of thinking about the nature of economics. Thinking now in Christ that we are bound together in this relationship, we now have the responsibility to live in the unity of our relationship together. That changes some of the dynamics and what pushes our economy and the way we value different things. These are all implications. What I found is the more I proclaim this Jesus, the more I’ve got economists or physicists, or scientists. Or psychologists and all, and so when they see something of the implications for their field, immediately they want to have a dialogue, and that’s what’s beginning to happen.

**JMF:** Physicists and paleontologists, we tend to, as Christians, limit our dialogue to “creation vs. evolution,” and it’s a stark kind of a dialogue that draws lines in the sand, God

against the evolutionist and that sort of thing. But what you're talking about supersedes and transcends that kind of thinking.

**CBK:** It's like a shift in paradigm – it's like the Augustine-Pelagius battle – you're either Augustinian or you're gonna go to the Pelagian framework. But both of those are operating out of the same framework – they are both operating out of failed understanding of objective union – that Jesus has established a relationship with us, that he did that prior to our vote. The whole discussion has now got to be changed. In the same way, when you see in Jesus Christ that he is the one that established a relationship with us and with the whole cosmos, it is integrated in his own being, in his own person and his relation with the Father and Spirit. Now we've got a new paradigm or a way in which we can begin to think differently about some of these things, and not necessarily assume division – but begin to think, well, let's explore this.

Let's think through (for example) Boethius, shortly after Augustine's time, came forward with a definition of "*person*." He said that a *person* is an individual substance of a rational nature. Ever since then, that's been the reigning concept of *person* in the Western world. Our educational system is established on that basis – an individual substance of a rational order, rational nature.

Let's redefine *person* in the light of Christ. A *person* is one who exists in union with Christ and therefore in communion with the Father and Spirit, in communion with one another and in communion with creation. So you can be an individual and not a person, because a person is when you are participating in the relationship in which you exist. So you've got a very different concept.

What it means for me to be a person involves my relationship, in Christ, with the whole cosmos, with the environment, with the water, with ecology, with everything and not just in my backyard, so to speak, but in a global and cosmic level. Just that one little thing changes radically some of the implications. We ought to think about lots of things. That's where we are right now in recovering the gospel of the ancient church – we've got a lot of work to do. We've got to re-think tons of things, and that's where we need help. Thank goodness, we are a long way from being the only people on the planet who are wrestling with this. This is going on all over the place.

**SH:** Perichoresis is also a term used by the early church to describe and to talk about the Trinity. When you start to see that (I used to teach this, mind you, at a place called Harbor House

with crack addicts and drug addicts)...the way we talk about the *mutual indwelling*, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually dwell in each other to the degree that they function as one – in relationship. Because we were trying to move away from a legal framework into one that showed them a loving Father rather than a condemning Father.

**MM:** Historically, the word *perichoresis* has been used for relationships within the Trinity, but from what I hear you saying, it's like we are also invited into this relationship, too. Are we participating in *perichoresis*?

**SH:** And we function perichoretically when we do it. Absolutely. It's almost like the butterfly effect.

**CBK:** It is a Trinitarian way of being, and we belong to that way of being, and we're not going to function properly or be happy or prosperous when we're living in a way that is alien to that way of being. It's a fundamental word because it helps us to understand in marriage, how you can be one and yet not lose yourself in that co-dependent enmeshment, the boundaries that are established are real, but you've got one-ness.

**SH:** Separate and distinct but yet one.

**MM:** We've been invited to the party.

**CBK:** Well, it's even stronger than invited to the party. We're being told we're AT the party. We're included in the party.

**MM:** So we can either have fun, or we can choose not to.

**CBK:** Or you can stay and fight to stay outside and watch from a distance.

**SH:** You can certainly choose to participate or not to participate. You're not going to escape the consequences of either side.

**JMF:** But there is no other way of existing or being, apart from this perichoretic relationship that God in himself has created through Father, Son, and Spirit and in which all the cosmos exists, including us, no other way of being.

**SH:** Amen. We move, we breathe, and we have our being.

**CBK:** It's almost like you would say, ok, is it thinkable that this God who exists in this way, as Father, Son, and Spirit, in this perichoretic relation in which there is one-ness but no loss of personal identity – is it conceivable that this God would think up another way of being and wire the universe in that way? What we have revealed in Christ is ... this is who we are, this is who God is, this is the way the cosmos is wired. That's why Jesus did miracles. Because, it's made

for him. It's built after the blueprints or the pattern of his own relationship with the Father and the Spirit. When he spoke, it was made to respond to him in that way.

**JMF:** Everything that exists then comes out of, as a product of God's love.

**CBK:** Relational love is the Father, Son, and Spirit, it's been called into being and sustained in and out of that. It has its stamp on it. This is where I think the theory comes forward. If we're going to understand the nature of things or how they work, then, here's the blueprint. We're looking at the Father, Son, and Spirit relationship, we won't understand who we are and what we're made for, in what existence we have – here it is, this is the nature of the relationship. It's other-centered, self-sacrificial, love, mutual delight, self-giving, for the benefit of the other – that's the way things are made and they function like that.

**JMF:** But how do we think of ourselves, we don't think of ourselves that way. Typically, at our heart-level we think of ourselves in negative terms. We see our failures ...

**CBK:** Individual substances that are totally depraved!

**JMF:** We see ourselves as ugly, worthless on the outside, unlovable ...

**SH:** And independent ... functioning on our own and we have life within ourselves and we can produce that. What do I need with God?

**JMF:** Or at least we can struggle to produce it.

**SH:** In our fallen minds we think we can. It's only through the quickening of the Holy Spirit that we get convicted to conversion to have a renewing of the mind to see that we never brought anything to the party in the first place.

**JMF:** But there is a healing in that, in fact, this is all about healing.

**JM:** There's an aspect to this that I think we should pay some attention to. The perichoretic relationship between the divine and human natures of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is one kind of perichoresis. Perichoresis of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ is not the same as the perichoresis between the Father, Son, and Spirit in the Trinity.

**CBK:** That's correct. That's why basically the former was dropped as the Trinitarian view of perichoresis emerged historically; the other Christological kind of moved to the background.

**SH:** Because of our fallen minds.

**JM:** I believe that we have to learn to integrate them and distinguish them – that there is a perichoretic relationship between the perichoresis in the Incarnation and the perichoresis of the Trinity. I believe this is important for the relationship to physics, to science. Because the divine

and human natures, the divine nature of the Word of God, is spaceless and timeless. When the Word of God becomes flesh, what has been living eternally (and I like to use the ... whatever space and time are a reflection of, in eternity, so that I can say un-created space-time) has made room and time for itself in the Incarnation. So now, in this one person – which is why you cannot use Boethian terms – in this one person you have space-time, having been created by God for God, as a man, in relationship with the un-created space and the un-created time that God is, as triune.

**CBK:** That's another dimension of the word, the meaning of the word perichoresis: *make room* for another within you own space/time.

**JM:** You have inherent in this perichoresis, the way that transcendence and empiricism belong to one another.

**CBK:** You got a hold of something. Someone's got a hold you right there. I cannot quite get it, but I smell it.

**JT:** Let's bring it to a level that maybe people can grapple with by asking a really difficult question. If we are partakers of the divine nature, and I believe we are, and if all the world, all the people – whether they are witting or unwitting of their participation, how do you explain in human history events like the Holocaust?

**CBK:** Something of that enormous proportion, and pain and suffering, needs a deep and detailed answer, but there are basic things to be said. How do you explain the failure of the church? To me, the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not a computer life. Jesus is not programmed to love his Father. He's three persons in relationship, and that life is one that involves (to speak anthropomorphically) mind, heart and will of each of the three persons. It involves the choice, and so the life of God does not exist as a pre-programmed thing. It exists as a relationship that's real. Each person is real to the other person.

If the goal is adoption, if the goal is to create something that is not, and then bring that to participate in this Trinitarian life, then one of the things that has to be built into it, is our own distinct mind, heart, and will. Because otherwise we're just computers with Christological software, we're robots, and that's not the point. So that will and that choice is there. We're included in this relationship now. To participate, we must choose to do so in ongoing relational basis.

But to me, that is the crack in the door that allows in the snake. Because we can, in our own

distinct mind, hearts and will, (although we're united with the Father, Son, and Spirit and share in that life), we can, in our distinction, become very confused and very dark. In our darkness and confusion, we can act out, live out of that, and do harm to ourselves and to one another, individually, and corporately, and to the cosmos. The Holocaust is the extreme example of that. But any form of murder, any form of where we are acting out of our confusion and darkness which ultimately is not us – do not belong to us as God's creatures, it comes from the evil one – that's another discussion.

The other thing I want to put over the top of that is, in no way taking away from the pain that the Jewish people suffered, not only there but throughout their history, the other thing is, this beautiful scene in the Lord of the Rings, when they're in the tunnel, and Gandalf is leading them through the darkness and they go across this bridge and this demon creature comes up with fire and it's lapping at them, the bridge is falling in and Gandalf walks out and he slams the staff onto the ground and says, "you shall not pass." Everything shakes, and the demon goes back down...

When I saw that, I thought, what God has done is that he has this stake in the ground as the death of Jesus. He is saying, here on this side is the human freedom. In your darkness you can do this, and this, and this, and you can do this to my creation, and you can do this to yourself and to other people. But I'm taking responsibility for your freedom and I'm putting an end to the consequences of it. At the end of this we have resurrection, where things are restored, and so we get back what was lost. You know, the Lord restores the years that the locusts devoured (in Joel's prophecy). We get that back in the resurrection, so God is wonderfully taking responsibility for giving it to us and taking responsibility for it at the same time.

In the midst of that, we have to live with the consequences of our own darkness and what we do to one another and to the creation. We've got environmental tragedies going on around us right now that's going to create a lot of trauma for a lot of people around the world. What the Jews went through is unthinkable. What any person that's been murdered, the rippling implications and consequences of that for the family.

Now, what God has said is, it's not enough just for me to punish the murderer, what I'm going to do, what I'm after is to restore the life of the one who's murdered and to restore the relationship between the murderer and the one who is murdered, and bring both sides of the family back into one-ness and right relationship. That's the vision of heaven, and the kingdom of heaven. Through Jesus' death and resurrection he's put an end to the implication, the eternal

implications of the holocaust and is restored there. How you work that out, I don't know.

**JMF:** Forgiveness. A person who has experienced something like that finds it very difficult. How on earth can you forgive somebody who kills your child? And yet in Christ we're talking about God himself, taking on himself the consequences, the pain, the suffering of that, handing back life and restoration in such a way that forgiveness really does become possible.

**CBK:** He shares his forgiving heart with us, just like he shares his love with us. That's the only possibility of forgiving someone who has created such a grievous problem for us and our lives and our families, is that, the love and forgiveness of the Father is given to us by Jesus, and we can choose to participate in that or participate in the darkness over here, which is to retaliate and to demand retribution ...

**JMF:** ... which is the spiral of human history.

**MM:** What about people who can't forgive God, you know, not just the murderer ...

**SH:** I was thinking about that, too, when you were talking about people who have had things happen to them. I like the line from whatever movie I saw and it says, Jesus might forgive you, but I'm never going to do it. I'm never going to forgive you. There are people who carry that kind of anger around that we're not required...

**MM:** They've been hurt so bad ...

**SH:** We're not really required to do that. That kind of anger crucifies us on the inside. They will take you to your grave. We're really not, I don't think we're required to do that, not until you're good and ready to do it. People have a lot of guilt in themselves, other stuff like that.

**JMF:** The beauty is that, as with our faith, as with everything else that forgiveness already exists in Christ, we simply have not gotten to the place where we can see that and receive it for what it is – receive the healing that will come from it. Robert Capon talks about it in his books... he has one story in one of his books about it's kind of a gangster scene where there is a hit-man and one of the gangsters is [what did they call it], snuffed or rubbed out, [there's a word for it] and he shows how in Christ in the end, the snuffer and the snuffee are able to sit down together in the kingdom and have a drink together and be restored in relationship in spite of everything that took place between them.

Beautiful picture, very difficult, of course, if not impossible for us to enter into immediately, but through the death and resurrection of Christ, which we all have to experience eventually, we're all going to die and there is only one way to die, there is only kind of death that exists, and

that is the death of Christ and only one thing comes of that death, is the resurrection of Christ into which we have no choice but to enter – whether we receive it like the [dwarves] of Narnia, or whether we going to receive it like the children of Narnia...

**SH:** When John was talking earlier about the perichoretic relationship that exists in the Trinity, mutual indwelling functioning as one, and that is different than what we experience, I totally agree. I still have to think that, that's definitely going on and it is shared with us – we just can't see it. What we don't have is the pair of glasses, it's the understanding, it's the fallen mind, it's whatever you want to call it (besides sinful human nature – because I hate that terminology), but I do know that, that perichoretic thing is going on with us. Jesus is in us, he lives in us, we mutually indwell in him. The glory of it is that, we see it, we get a glimpse of it on this side, but we will see it in totality on the other side.

**JM:** Live forever as a child of God is bound up with his eternity.

**SH:** That's true. Inescapably so.

**JM:** You could have perished, I mean, you could be nothing. But he said, no.... There are many, many testimonies, I think three or four I've seen myself, where people come out of the Holocaust, I think Corrie Ten Boom gave one... I've seen Jews who have met their keepers, their prison guards, and they have had to, just because they can't live with this anger, and they found forgiveness. How do they find that kind of forgiveness?

**MM:** They reject the name Jesus, but that's the real source.

**CBK:** Jesus is really not into getting credit, you know. He's really not worried about his ... He's more worried us living the life.

**JMF:** I read a book, I don't even remember the name of the book or whether it was fiction or what it was, but at the end of the book, it typically reads, the end. This one said, the beginning. I think part of what we're trying to say is that the gospel tells us, even to ourselves personally, regardless of how well we know ourselves and our sins and our sinfulness [the way we know ourselves best], we have not come to the last page of our story yet. For one thing, in terms of all of our history of our pain, and our suffering and our experiences that bind us and tear us down and we have not come to the end of the story where we see ourselves as we were created, and as we really exist in Christ as good and beautiful and part of a perfect creation. When we come to that end, last page, then we see ourselves that way, we've really come to the beginning.

**JM:** That's *Till We Have Faces* ... [reference to a C.S. Lewis book]. We're gonna have a

face at last...

**SH:** You're not going to be looking at a smoky mirror ...

**JT:** It takes one more question, since we are about to run out of time, and that is, speak for these last few minutes, some eschatology here, you've got the popularity of books like *Left Behind*, and people looking for a second return of Jesus and... Speak to this culmination of all reconciliation ...

**CBK:** My golden rule on eschatology is: whatever we say about the *last things*, we must not assume the absence of Jesus Christ today. We're talking about the second coming, we cannot assume that it means he is not here now. He *is* here now. He said, I'm not going to leave you orphaned, I'm going to comfort you, you're going to discover you're in my Father and I'm in you, that's what's real. So to me, eschatology is largely about repentance and the conversion of our minds. It's about the restoration of proper seeing and sight. Jesus is not absent, the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not absent. The kingdom of heaven is not absent, but we're like the dwarves in Narnia. We are sitting in our worlds, our own relationships, we are oblivious to what is really happening. Eschatology is the second, and third, and fourth, and fifth, and sixth coming of Jesus to reveal himself to us in our darkness, and it's we who are in the dark, as Jesus says, we're the ones that are getting light.

That's the process that involves history in space and time, just like it takes some time for a person to go from being a baby, to those hard years of adolescence, and then they're close to adult-teen years where they know everything about everything, and everybody around them is really stupid. Then they begin to learn, wait a minute, I don't know so much. Then they begin to learn some things for real. And that process it takes time. You can't have 42 years of experience given to you by reading one book.

So history is the time and space given to human race by the Father, Son, and the Spirit to get to grips, to live out their own theories on who we think God is, and the way we think this works, to kill ourselves, to maim and destroy someone – it's the space and time God has given to us today so that we can come on the tutelage of the Spirit to see who we really are in the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and choose personally and willfully to participate in that with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength, because we've experienced evil, we've experienced the chaos, we've experienced the darkness and we don't want it. We don't want any more to do with it. That's almost inconceivable to think that, but that's what human history is about – it's the

education of the human race.

**JMF:** Thank you so much for being with us again, Dr. Kruger, and thanks Steve, thanks to everyone in the panel.

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[back to table of contents](#)

## Seeing the Truth About Jesus and Us

**J. Michael Fezell:** Before we get started, I've got to ask about Mediator Lures, and I'd like to see one.

**C. Baxter Kruger:** Well, I brought one, surprise, surprise. This is one of 14 colors, my favorite, which is the Christmas bream [a type of fish], green and red. I've loved fishing since I was a little boy. My mother's favorite picture of me is staring down a cane pole after the picnic was over and everybody was back in the car. My dad had come down twice to get me and I would not leave. I stood there until I caught the fish. They had to wait in the car for like an hour, an hour and a half.

I always loved fishing, I always loved the idea of fishing lures, I love making things with my hands, woodworking – things like that. I dragged the Christmas tree out to the front street to be picked by the garbage one day and literally and simply I heard the Lord say, cut off a piece of cedar and make a lure. I always wanted to have a lure that looked like a real bream. I cut off a piece and the whole process started – it's probably 12 or 15 years in the making now, 12,000 hours, just all the free time I would come up with, trying... how do you make the thing shine, how do you make it work, what about the tail. Steve Horn, my friend, he is involved, he would spend hours working on it, and one thing led to another over a period of time.

Finally got 'em where I can make them by hand, and I would give them to my friends, but nobody would fish with it. They'd put them on the wall – as art. And so I thought, maybe we can get this into plastic in a production lure. We finally did that about two months ago, and so I handed it out to some of my friends, and they would not fish with those. So I finally decided, what we have here is not just a great fishing lure, but we actually have more of a collectible. So that's what I do – I make them. They're hand-crafted and I sign a number of them in very limited quantities. I fish with them, but most people just put them in cases and put them in their homes, office or that sort of thing.

**JMF:** One of the things you've talked about in your books and in your lectures has to do with fishing, baseball, all the fun things of life – that these are all NOT separate from being a Christian, that Christianity involves everything we do, and all of us.

**CBK:** One of the disasters of the modern Western tradition is the separation of sacred and secular. When you begin with the proper vision of Jesus Christ, you realize that this incarnation thing is for real – that God (the Father, Son, Holy Spirit) has no interest whatsoever in drawing

us into a non-human relationship. God became human. The Son of the Father became flesh and established a relationship with us. Through the vast majority, the sum of God's time on earth, he was a carpenter. He wasn't even involved in "ministry." I'd dare say, he'd built more tables than he preached sermons.

We've got to recover this vision – the point of Christianity is not to escape our humanity, the point of it is to see the Trinitarian life is being given to us and the way that this is expressed is in and through our ordinary human experience – I mean from making fishing lures ...

My daughter-in-law came out one day years ago and she just stood there and watched me paint one of these lures, and she said to me: "Dad, how did you come up with the idea of doing this? How did you do the tails, how did you do the colors, how did you do the eyes, how did you get the scales, how did you think this up?"

It was probably one of two times in my life where I got it right the first time. I just said, "Laura, I've got a friend who loves to fish. Every time I get around my friend he shares his ideas with me, and nothing thrills him more than for me to carve his ideas into being."

She said: "Do I know your friend?"

I said, "Sure, you do."

"Is it Steve Horn? Is it Clayton James?"

And I said, "No."

"Who is it?"

"This friend loves flowers, and cooking, and crawfish boils, and music and laughter and dancing and fellowship and music and soccer."

She said, "Who are we talking about?"

I wish I would have had this recorded, because it was absolutely precious. It was a confession of faith. She said, "You're talking about Jesus, aren't you?" It was a confession of faith by a daughter of the Bible belt where "this is almost too good to be true." She knew it was true. She knew Jesus is involved in our humanity – that's where our humanity comes from – it's from the Father, the Son, and Spirit.

I said, "Laura, when you sit down and play music and you feel the joy of that – what I want you to understand is that music doesn't start with you. It's not your music. It starts from the Father, Son, and Spirit – that's where harmony comes from. They share it with you and you get to express it. I get to express it in being a lure-maker, or a theologian or a dad, or a friend, or a

baseball coach – or just having coffee with friends. It's the way in which God lives out the Trinitarian life in and through us, in and through our human experience. When we recover that, we get our humanity back.”

That's one of the things that's destroyed the Western Church. People are bored sick with it. Who wants to go and be involved in a thing where we leave our humanity at the door? I remembered distinctly as a child in a Presbyterian church (which I loved when I was growing up – I didn't mind going to church at all. I loved it.) But one thing that bothered me from day one is I can remember my dad and my best friend's dad, named Tuck Williams – who had the most distinctive laugh in the world, they would stay outside of the building as long as possible (and most all of them smoked in those days), and they would smoke their last cigarette and my aunt Polly played the organ and she hit a certain part in her interlude and all the men outside knew that was time to go to church. I can remember looking back and watching them step over the threshold and they all changed. I could hear them laughing, and they stepped inside, and they went in their “we're-going-to-worship-God” mode. They got real serious, real earnest, real artificial. I thought, “There is something disastrously wrong here.” As if God is embarrassed by our laughter. As if the Father, Son, and Spirit didn't come up with laughter.

Part of my journey in my life is to connect the dots between the humanity of riding bikes, our romance, our sex, our making lures, our inventing dishes (food, I mean) – understanding how God relates to that. Incarnation is staring us in the face and I think, “Where have we been? What have we been talking about for 2,000 years? This should be the message that we proclaim from the rooftops all the time.”

**JMF:** You've written about the “ultimate lie.” What is the ultimate lie?

**CBK:** In one word, the ultimate lie is “separation.” Underneath every religion and philosophy in the world is the lie of “separation” – that the human race is separated from God. Then it becomes a matter of “OK, how do we get back to God, or how do we get God to us?” Now we have a series of variations on a theme: “How do we get across the divide from where we are to God, or how do we get God to bless us here?”

**JMF:** Rules?

**CBK:** Rules, faith, repentance, works, crystals, charms, I mean, you name it: prayers, you can make a list over here of all the things human beings must do to get to God. That creates a very powerful group in the middle who decides what this is. You look at the idea that separation

– I think it’s a flat-out denial of Jesus Christ and the incarnation! God is come to us. God has embraced us in Jesus. Why are we talking about separation? It’s like we’re going to pretend that there’s no Incarnation, and that Christianity is just a variation on this theme, so what we’re going to do to get across the great divide to God is that we’re going to believe in Jesus. Or we’re going to have a special kind of repentance that’s different from all the other religions or philosophies.

I’m thinking, “Wait a minute. The news is not that we can get to God. The news is not that we can receive Jesus – an absent Jesus – into our lives. The stunning news of the gospel is that Jesus has received us into *his* life. He’s received us into his fellowship in his life with the Father and the Spirit. That’s been done and that’s who we are.

We don’t start with separation, we start with *union*. Now we have to rethink everything in the universe, because we have built into our default settings – as fallen people, and those who are influenced profoundly by Greek philosophy – we have our default settings of separation, separation, separation.

**JMF:** We are not worthy...

**CBK:** We are not worthy, we’re not good enough, we’re not going to make it, a whole series of those kick in, and so you ask a person who they are, you ask any person in the United States of America. “Are you good?” There is not one person you will get who will say, “I am good.”

I say, if you can’t stand in a mirror in your bathroom and look yourself in the face and say “my name – and I am good, with the goodness of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, because I do not exist alone.” There is no just Baxter. The only Baxter there is, is the Baxter who exists in Jesus in his relationship with me. So in the core of my being, is not that old Calvinist doctrine of total depravity – at the core of my being is Jesus Christ “union-ed” with me and with us in the world, and I am good with their goodness. I am good with the goodness of the Father, Son, and Spirit and their beauty.

The next question is: If that’s true (and it is), or *since* that’s true, why is my life still a mess? That’s where we’ve got to think through a whole new way of talking about what sin is, which is NOT new! It’s the early church – it’s John, it’s Paul. We’ve been trapped in Augustinian dualism – it’s been handed down to us...

**JMF:** What’s an Augustinian dualism?

**CBK:** OK, I’ll give you the Cliff notes.

**JMF:** Yeah, that’s what we need.

**CBK:** The first thing we need to talk about is that the early church – in the time of the apostles and right after that – the thing that they knew for sure, that they were prepared to (and did) die for – was, whatever else we say, the man Jesus Christ is God. We know this is the Lord – we’re not giving this up. That’s number one.

Number two, they realized that Jesus prayed to the one he called Father and they realized he was anointed in the Holy Spirit – and that there is a relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit. They were not trying to develop a doctrine of the Trinity – they started catching an enormous flak from the Greeks and the Jews, being accused of polytheism and tri-theism and things like that. So the early church began to develop its understanding and it said: “We are not giving up on the deity and humanity of Christ” and so, what’s his relation with the Father, what’s his relation with the Spirit? – and they worked out the doctrine of the Trinity. They came to see, over against the Jewish view of oneness and over against the Greeks’ view of the indivisibility of the thing called God or the ONE – the early church came to realize that the deepest truth about God is this relationship with the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit.

It’s not sad, it’s not boring, it’s not religious, it’s not dead – it’s alive, it’s creative, it’s other-centered, it’s about acceptance, in the light, and life and love, and it’s beautiful – and that’s what’s fundamental about the being of God. So if you peel back the onion of divine being, so to speak, and you come to the core of God-ness – you find relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Augustine knew that, and so he’s got this beautiful treatise on the Trinity that he wrote, but he was also steeped in Neo-Platonism and the premise of Neo-Platonism.

Just hang with me, this is important. The premise of Neo-Platonism is: whatever else you say of God – or The One – it’s indivisible. There is an essence at the bottom of this thing or behind it all that is indivisible. So it can’t be relational. Augustine is trying to develop a Christian vision, at the same time maintain his Neo-Platonism – and so what he offers to the Western Tradition is really two Gods. You got the Father, Son, and Spirit, and then you got the deeper truth about the being of God. Just like through a back door – beyond the Trinity. What being is this essence of God? What is the deepest truth about God – it’s not relationship. What is it? For Augustine, it had to be absolute, total sovereignty. For the rest of the Western tradition, steeped as it was in Roman law and jurisprudence, it became a legal view of holiness.

I don’t mind saying that the holiness of God is the deepest truth about God – but what I mean by holiness is a Trinitarian vision. Holiness is the utter uniqueness and the beauty and the

goodness and the rightness of their relationship – that is the whole essence – is the wholeness of the relation, and their love, and their mutual passion and delight.

**JMF:** You've called that the "great dance."

**CBK:** Yeah. I tried to find a similar phrase to talk about that, and "the great dance" is an ancient phrase that you find in the church. C.S. Lewis uses it a couple of times in some of his books, and I thought that's what we can use to describe, in a snapshot, the life of God. It's a great dance, it's not boring and sad – it's not self-centered, it's not narcissistic, it's not about separation – it's about fellowship, and communion, and love.

But then you've got this thing over here that's deeper than that. You say, if we just stayed there – if we just stayed with Irenaeus and Athanasius and gone with the Trinity through our history, then the next thing we would realize was that, "MAN, this relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit – now, I know why Paul says we are predestined to adoption as sons and daughters." It makes perfect sense. If God is like this, then adoption is the main point, and off we go and running. Our challenge for listeners is go find books in the Western tradition that have been written on the subject of "adoption" – in 1500 years – and compare that with the books that have been written on "justification."

The apostle Paul said that the Father's eternal purpose for us is to include us in this relationship. We don't have 1500 years of discussion about this. Why not? Because over here [on one side] the "deepest" truth of God is holiness – not Trinitarian holiness, not relational holiness, but holiness conceived in terms of moral law and jurisprudence.

**JMF:** And that concept of God separates us from God – now we've got to find a way to get there, so we use Jesus as the bridge that we walk across to get there.

**CBK:** There you go. Off we go, and our "family conversation" for 1500-some-odd years talking about the Holy God (which is true, God is holy) but not *that* kind of "Holy" – holy in this [on other side] relational way. When Jesus says, "Be ye holy as God is holy," he's not talking about this stainless-steel, antiseptic, squeaky-clean, boring kind of holy. He's talking about "be whole," be relationally together, be one, be in fellowship and communion, be unique in this. But over here [on the first side] we've got this holiness of God: stainless steel, moral rectitude, perfection – this God then calls the shots for the entire discussion.

**JMF:** That's just a concept, a Greek idea... That isn't what the scriptural revelation of God is.

**CBK:** Well, we've gone and found Bible verses to support it. That's why we've never even thought about the stunning news. How stunning is it, that the only reason the human race exists is to be included in the Trinitarian life of God. I want to talk about that. I want a conversation about that. Give me 1500 years to talk about "adoption." And let's bring that into "this is the vision of God – as Father, Son, and Spirit" as opposed to "God is the stainless steel, holy God who's not interested in relationship at all."

**JMF:** That gets into all these areas that you're involved with – scientists, doctors, lawyers, counselors, teachers – all these various expressions of human life and thought, energy, development, technology – all of that is wrapped up in who we are, who has God has made us to be – the whole cosmos.

**CBK:** We have not talked about the real foundation for what we are talking about here. We're talking about some good implications – but the real foundation of this is WHO Jesus is. Who is this person Jesus Christ?

What has happened to us is that we think of Jesus as a typical American individual – he lived, he died, he rose again, he did things for us, out of grace and love. But Jesus, when we go to the New Testament – the first thing you find is Jesus is the Father's only Son. That's the shocker. That's the mind-blowing thing. That's why the apostle Paul begins every one of his epistles with the reference "to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The mind-boggling thing about Jesus was not his power or his miracles, or even his courage to confront the system. Prophets did that. The mind-boggling thing about Jesus in the New Testament in the first instance is he is the one who has this relation with the one he calls Father – Abba, Father – and he is the recipient of "thou art my beloved Son in whom my soul delights." This is unique, this is unparalleled biblically. Jesus addresses God as Father, there is no reference in the Old Testament, there is no reference in any of the ancient literature that we know about – to this day that we found – where any individual ever called God "Father." Jesus calls him, "my Father," and the Father calls him "my Son."

And so point one: Who is Jesus? He is the Father's true Son. The second thing that's stunning about Jesus is: He is the Anointed One – the long-awaited Anointed One. He alone in biblical history is anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure as a permanent gift. So what do you make of this? He is the Father's Son, and Anointed One, and so that's where the church has led over its pilgrimage to see that this is not something that the invisible holy God back here just

arbitrarily decided one day, “I’m going to be super gracious, oh, it’s Jesus and Mary – this is revelation to us in our darkness of our character, in the way of being of God (as Father, Son, Spirit) from all eternity.

**JMF:** We usually hear that presented as kind of an after-thought. God created a perfect world, sin entered and God said, “What am I going to do about this?” So he sends...

**CBK:** Plan B. Jesus becomes Plan B. The final point in terms of the larger picture, the third thing we see in the New Testament, in terms of answering the question “Who is Jesus” is he is the one in and through and by and for him all things were created and are sustained. The presentation of the New Testament to us is that Jesus is a Person who exists in three relationships: relation with the Father, relation with the Spirit, and relation with the whole creation. The question is: when this Son, this Father’s Son, this Anointed One became a human being, did he break ties, did he become the classic American individualist – all alone? Or, did he come in his relation with his Father? Did he come in his anointing with the Spirit? And did he come in his connection with the whole human race and the whole creation?

The Christian answer to that is “Jesus held on and brought all of this together in himself.” He is the point of relationships; he is the point of view. So if you’re going to speak the “name of Jesus Christ” biblically and in the tradition of the apostles, you’re saying “Trinity,” and you’re saying “humanity,” and you’re saying, “cosmos.” You’re saying that the Triune God and the human race and the universe are not separated, but bound together in relationship – that’s who Jesus is!

To deny his relation with his Father would mean Jesus has relation with us, but he has not included us in his relation with his Father. But no, that is not true. He is in relation with his Father, he is anointed, he’s brought all of this together – and so that becomes what I call the truth of all truths – that’s our Christian heritage, that’s how to think as a Christian – is to start there. When you speak Jesus’ name, you say, “No separation,” you say, “union,” you say “covenant relationship” forever. Now we can re-think everything we thought we knew, in the light of Jesus.

**JMF:** There is a concept in the Christian preaching, what you typically hear is, you’re a sinner, you’re separated from God, you do this or that, and then God will accept you. You’re saying that this is not the place to start at all.

**CBK:** Jesus is not a footnote to Adam, in his Fall. The apostle Paul says that we’re predestined to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. That’s before the fall – that’s before

creation. That adoption is the purpose of God for creation, and our adoption through Jesus Christ was the plan from the get-go, from the beginning. We've made the Fall the central thing of which God is relating to, when the central thing that God is relating to is actually the Incarnation and the accomplishment of our adoption in Jesus Christ – that's the point. Now we're going to re-read the Old Testament and creation in the light of the fact that Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, is coming to establish a relationship with us, who are basically dirt. We are going to go from non-being, from dirt, to the right hand of God, we cannot do any of that – the Father's Son can do it, and that's what he is going to do. He is going to anoint dirt with the Holy Spirit – that's the plan from the very beginning.

We can see that the Fall is not the thing that sets God's agenda. What sets the Father's agenda is his purpose for us in Christ. The Fall means it's going to be a bloody mess. It's going to be loud crying and tears, as Hebrews 5 puts it. It's going to hurt. This is a quagmire of darkness and chaos and pain and brutality, and Jesus is going to suffer. In the genius of the Father, Son, and Spirit, they take our human response of rejection of God – rejection of Jesus, abuse, trauma, universal total rejection (with the possible exception of the three Marys and John the apostle, but basically, total universal rejection) and establishes a relationship between the Father and the human race at its very worst – and includes that broken human race in this Trinitarian life. That's at the heart of the gospel.

Now we can go back and understand what sin is. Now we can go back and talk about faith and repentance, and heaven and hell, and what the church is, what the distinction between the church and the world is, eschatology, election. Because what's happened in Jesus Christ, what has happened in his Incarnation is not plan B, that the Father thought up real quick after Adam botched it. Jesus is the eternal Word of God. Jesus Christ as the Father's Son incarnate, as the Anointed One, as the one in whom he has gathered the human race – this Jesus is the eternal Word of God, this is the Alpha and the Omega, this is not Plan B, this is Plan A. This is the first and only Word and the first and only plan.

Now we have a hermeneutic as Christians on how to address and re-think everything that we thought we knew. That's our calling as Christians – to take this Jesus Christ seriously.

**JMF:** In the light of that, how would you present the gospel? Let's say you have a two-minute presentation of what is the gospel, the heart and core of the gospel, how would you put it?

**CBK:** Slight variations. In quick conversations, I just say you belong to the Father, Son and

the Spirit, you always have and you always will.

**JMF:** So that's the starting place?

**CBK:** You start off with *you*. You start off with the relationship that Jesus Christ has established with the human race. It's real. Our problem is... (I take these [thick-lens eye glasses] with me everywhere I go.) [Put on eye-glasses] Our problem is we just cannot see it. It makes no religious sense to us. It didn't make any sense to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were looking over at Jesus and saying, "Jesus, your vision of God is wrong." That's what we do. That's what's sin is. Sin is saying to Jesus, "Your vision of the Father, and your vision of the Spirit, and your vision of the relationship that you've established between the Father and the Spirit and the human race is just unfit – it's wrong. Jesus, you need to repent." Sin is insisting that Jesus Christ repent and change his mind and his vision, and come and line up with us in our darkness.

Jesus says, I have come into the world as light so that you may not remain in the dark [remove glasses] but will see what is – what he has established in himself. So in terms of proclaiming the gospel, I want to make sure that people understand that you don't begin with separation. Jesus has established a relationship with you and he called you to walk in it. He says, you can live in this [put on glasses] and you can insist on imposing your vision on the world, on your wife and children and people around you or even on your own denomination if you choose. But it's going to be miserable as hell because it's not real. What's real is the world [remove glasses] that the Father, Son, and Spirit has established.

So faith is saying to Jesus, I want to participate in your way of seeing things, not my way [put on glasses]. And repent and say, Jesus, rip these things off [remove glasses] quick, and reconstruct my basic vision, reconstruct my mind, renew it thoroughly, here it is, I don't want to see things the way I see them anymore. I want to see things the way you see, I want to live with you in your world, I want to participate in your relationship with the Father, and your relationship with the Spirit, and your relationship with the human race and your relationship with the cosmos.

**JMF:** So repentance is seeing things the way they really are, it isn't changing something that makes God change toward you.

**CBK:** Exactly, it's *metanoia* [the Greek word for repentance, meaning "change of mind"]. It is a radical change of the way we perceive God, the way we perceive ourselves, the way we preserve the cosmos. It's a radical reorientation. Be transformed in your experience of life by the

renewal of your mind, by the renewal of the way you see things.

If you want to live in this [put on glasses] world, with its vision of God as the stainless-steel holy version, and we are all sinners and broken and we can't get to God and God doesn't want us anyway. But Jesus is there and has opened the path – if we want to live in that world, we can live in that world.

But what Jesus is saying, No, come to me, come to me if you are heavy laden and I will show [remove glasses] you who the Father is, and you can live in my relationship with my Father with me. You can live in my anointing with the Spirit. You don't have to achieve this, I *give* this, I've included you in this.

That's the dogfight of human history. If Jesus is not Plan B, as he is Plan A, then that gives me as a theologian a basic three-fold structure to human history: We've got creation or the beginning or preparation. You've got fulfillment in Jesus in his person, and now you've got revelation. So human history is a time in which God is creating space and place for us to be, to live out our theories, to insist on our way [wear glasses] and to suffer the consequences, so that we could come to know [remove glasses] as a race who God really is, who we really are and learn to participate in it, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It takes time. If you're a parent, you know it takes time for your children to come and see some things.

**JMF:** The doctrine of the Trinity lies at the heart of really understanding who we are in Christ, but it's a doctrine that just kind of sits on the shelf – it's not really put forward, we don't take it seriously...

**CBK:** Isn't that the saddest thing in the world, that the doctrine of the Trinity has been marginalized? The most beautiful thing in the universe – is the way the Father loves his Son, and way the Son loves the Father, in the fellowship of the Spirit and that great dance of life, that beauty, that goodness, that other-centric love and care is put over some religious insurance manual that nobody wants talks about.

**JMF:** It's always there in the Statement of Faith and the Statement of Beliefs, there is always the statement that we believe that God is three in one and so on, and yet it's not central to teaching, and what you are talking about here as our part in this relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit having been brought into it, this doesn't...

**CBK:** The Spirit is calling the church to repentance, to change its basic mind and to come back to its original vision, because the whole Augustinian split – that's one problem that gets

introduced, but when we don't see that God is Father, Son, and Spirit (and that's the truest truth about God, there is nothing deeper than that relationship), then we're often running in a family conversation that's going to lead us over here [motion to a spot] into separation, into this fear-based model, that's going to crucify us all on the inside, making us a relational disaster. We come back here [another spot] and start, we then see that relationship is what the whole thing is all about. We're going to be having a relational theological discussion that integrates our humanity and our life from the very beginning, and adoption is going to be a main thing, and the question how do we live this up? How do we live this up globally?

The church is called to be the place, the fellowship, the group of people – within the world of darkness, that group of people raises its hands and says, Jesus, you have your way with my mind here. You come and teach us, you transform the way we see things, and we want to work out the economic, the environmental, the ecological, the relational, the international, the political, the scientific, the cosmic implications of who you are Jesus Christ – as the Father's Son, as the Anointed One, as the one who's drawn the human race and cosmos together to himself, we want to think out the implications of that, we want to see what it means for our marriage, we want to see what it means for the economic theory, we want to see what it means for the environment. We're going to throw everything we have into that, because we believe that if we think through a marital or relational understanding in the light of Christ, we're not afraid that it's going to lead us into a divorce problem, or fragmentation of relationship problem. We believe that it's going to lead us into wholeness. We're not afraid to say that Jesus is the one in whom all things are held together.

Let's think that through – why are we afraid? The church is afraid now because we've been backed in the corner. We've been backed in the corner because we've lost the vision of Jesus that has been handed on to us by the apostles. Recovering that, we end up having this thing – many people might perceive it arrogance, but it's really the apostolic swagger. My friend David Upshaw talks about this thing called the apostolic swagger. They knew, they *knew* that Jesus was not a theory. He was not just another Platonic form. They knew that this is the one in and through and by whom and for him all things were created and are all things held together. They knew that if we follow him with our minds and hearts, this is going to bring healing and wholeness to us, this is going to liberate us. They were not afraid. They gave their life joyfully in the service of that revelation.

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[back to table of contents](#)

Jesus Has United Himself to Us

JMF: Your PhD degree is from King's College, Aberdeen, and you were mentored by Professor James B. Torrance. Would you talk about that?

CBK: J.B. (as we called him – he preferred to be called James, but all his students called him JB) was a father figure to many of us that studied. There were a group of Americans that were there at that time back in the late '80s. I did my doctoral dissertation on the subject of the knowledge of God in the theology of T.F. Torrance. But JB was my professor. TF had retired by those days, and JB was just wonderful. Just to be able to go and listen to him lecture – this was at the end of his career, so he was fantastic. My wife and I basically hawked everything we had, just to go have the opportunity of studying with him.

JMF: You wound up taking over his classes after he retired, didn't you?

CBK: Yeah, that was a tremendous privilege and a very fearful undertaking, but the university did not hire a replacement for JB that one year. That left Trevor Hart to teach theology by himself, and so he asked Dante Mail (who was a friend of ours) to stay for a few months and teach, and then he asked me to come behind them and teach; then I realized what he was asking me to teach was JB's classes. So I stayed there for two years and taught his classes.

I remembered the first day walking into his class, and that was at the other side of the podium and lectern, and I was saying, "What are you doing here?"

There's so much history there: that building was built in 1495, about the time Columbus was discovering America – that building was there and theology was being taught there. [**JMF:** Wow.] And it was a remarkable experience for me.

Then we decided it was time for us to move back the United States. It's a bit colder in Scotland than it is in Mississippi. Five years of freezing is enough, so we moved back to the United States and worked as associate pastor for a while. In that process we realized that what we need to be doing, what I need to be doing, was writing and teaching in a wider format. Steve Horn, David Upshaw, Clayton James and myself got together and decided we're going to have a go at a non-profit ministry that did just that, that wrote books and did lectures and put on conferences, and let's see what happens.

JMF: Your focus is unique. Could you talk about that?

CBK: You mean theological focus? "Unique" is an interesting word – in some ways I would say "Yes," but I don't want to say "unique" in the sense of not part of mainstream historic

Christianity.

In studying T.F. Torrance, you have to learn Athanasius and Irenaeus and Hilary and the two Gregorysts and Basil and the early church's theology. You have to learn Barth, you have to learn Calvin and Luther, because those were so formative to his thinking. So what I have to say is not unique in the sense that it's part of all of that conversation. Every theologian wants to make a contribution to the church – contribution to the way we see things. Not necessarily original and un-thought of, but one that is “on the basis of.” [i.e., building on previous work]

Integrating our humanity with our salvation in Christ is one of the areas where I think there's a unique flavor. It sounds very much like a Southern version of what the Reformation and Athanasius and early church were on about. It's sort of my take on it, because for me religion is never to be separated from our humanity. I hear what the fathers in ancient and modern times are saying about Jesus' relationship with us and his union with us.

My question is always been, “Well, I see that. I see that he's united himself with us as a gift of grace and this is who we are. What does that mean? And what does that look like? Does that mean we have to give up motherhood and fatherhood and fishing? Does that mean we give up life?” I struggled with some of that early on in my childhood because I felt like there was a gap between God/church and my humanity, and I knew it was wrong.

So in the fathers and in Torrance and in Barth and in the Reformation – the reformers, I realized that there is an integration here, and so I think to do something unique about us is holding on to that magnificent powerful vision of Jesus Christ's union with the human race – is something that he did, and is something that is real. We are turning the page and saying, Now here's what it looks like as we live it out. It works its way out in our human expression, in our motherhood, in our fatherhood and making lures, and being a teacher, and being a janitor, running a bread route.

Years ago I was teaching in the central United States, and this young student picked me up. It's flat in that part of the country, and we were passing farm after farm after farm and there were tractors and farmers. This young student, we were talking and I asked him, “What are you going to do when you finish school?”

He said he's going to go to seminary.

I said, you're going to be a pastor?

He said, “Yeah, I'm gonna be a pastor.”

I said, “What would you say to that farmer on that tractor right over there, about the way Jesus Christ relates to his farming?”

The young student said, “Well, I never thought about that.”

I said, “He’s gonna be in your congregation, and that man gives 70 hours a week to farming. His family gives their father and husband for 70 hours a week to farming, their whole family tradition is bound up in farming, and so you don’t know how Jesus relates to what he is and what he does as a human being.”

He said, “I haven’t really thought about that.”

I said, “Why would you expect him to want to come to church? You’re not showing him how Jesus is related to his whole existence.”

And I said, “Isn’t it striking that you will go home tonight…” and I said, “are you married?”

He said, “Yeah, I’m married.”

I said, you’re going to go home tonight and you’re going to eat supper, right?”

He said, “Yeah.”

I said, “What’s the first thing you’re going to do when you sit down at the meal?”

He said, “We’re going to pray.”

I said, “What are you going to do?”

He said, “We’ll thank God for the food.”

I said, “Why? He did not grow the food.” I was being facetious because, yes, the Father provided food through the farmer – the farmer’s participating in the Father’s provision through the Son and in the Spirit, and this is holy and beautiful and good, it’s not secular. It’s the way we participate.

This young student said, “I never thought about that.”

I said, “Now you can honor the farmer for who he is, and his family. It’s not just the farmer, he is one who participates in the way the Father provides food…”

JMF: And the farmer needs to know that.

CBK: Yes! He needs to live in the dignity of it over and against our culture, which says “Money, prestige, power, position, gives dignity.” No. Dignity comes from what we’re participating in.

The servants got water for Jesus. He transformed it into wine. We can’t do that. The farmer can make the things grow. But he participates, and Jesus is the one who makes it grow. He’s the

good shepherd. He's the bread of life. We need to learn to relate to people in Christ, in who they are in Christ, and take off our sort of glasses – flesh glasses which says, it's segmented according to money and prestige and power and position and education.

If you want to talk something unique, it's not unique in the sense that it is biblical and Jewish right down the line for centuries. But it's been lost in any kind of meaningful way. We can now begin to see our humanity for what it is. There is no such thing as just human. There is no independent self. There is no just human person. It's us bound up in the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and life comes to expression in our ordinary human life.

JMF: In a marriage, or say, a person is a doctor or a scientist, or a lawyer or a factory worker or a fisherman, if his eyes are open to that, how does it change how he goes about what he is doing?

CBK: Let me give you a story. I was on a plane many years ago, flying from Dallas to Seattle, Washington. And I think it was Seattle, maybe in Portland. It was the first time I had flown in that part of the country and I had never seen the Rocky Mountains, so I deliberately got a ticket booked on the side of the plane; window seat. We got on the plane, and every other seat in the plane was empty, everybody had space, and I thought, this is going to be great. The plane backed out and stopped and pulled forward, and the door opened and on the plane came this guy who looks like Indiana Jones. He's got leather hat, leather backpack, jacket, the whole nine yards, and he was walking back and I thought, I know exactly where the man's going to sit. Sure enough, he walked back 30 rows and sat next to me. There was a young lady, I believe on the other side.

He introduced himself as a systematic micro-evolutionary biologist. He was coming back from a research trip in the Caribbean, and he was all concerned about plants, all concerned about plants becoming extinct. He had a list of plants and the Latin names of plants that we've already lost, some that we're losing, what we must do to save them. He was going on and on about this. Then he started a little bit about evolution.

Somewhere over Idaho, I think, he said, "What do you do?"

I said, "I'm a theologian."

He said, "I guess you want to talk about evolution."

I said, "No, I don't care about evolution. But I've got a question."

He said, "What's your question?"

I said, “Where did you get your passion for plants?”

He said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “Was your Uncle Freddie a botanist, I mean, your mother a botanist? Did you just decide one day you’re going to be passionate about plants? You’re a grown man, you know their Latin names, Latin names of plants that are no longer extinct, you’re concerned about their future, you want to see them flourish not die. Where did that come from?”

He said, “I never thought about it.”

So I pull out my napkin – he’s got his diagrams – and drew three circles, and I said, Father, Son, and Spirit. I said there’s only one man, there is only one person in this universe that cares about plants, because they belong to his Father – his name is Jesus. And Jesus is not going to care about those plants without our participation. He’s put his passion for his Father’s plants inside of you, you’ve been toiling around in the Caribbean participating in his passion for his Father’s creation and its care, and its flourishing. And you don’t know who you are.

The first thing he said was, “If that’s the truth, why haven’t I ever been told about that?”

I said, “You just were. You just were told.”

In that moment you could see the difference, because until that moment, he thought *he* was doing that. It was his passion, and by God, it was his idea and it was his energy and he was doing this, and he was proud of what he thought he was doing in his own strength as a human being. And in that second, the light of Christ dawned, he saw himself for who he really was. He’s part of something much larger.

He said, “I’m not even sure I believe in God.”

I said, “The most important thing is whether or not God believes in you. He does, and he’s sharing his life with you, and that’s who you are. If you can come to see that and believe in Jesus, then you can give yourself to participate not in a prideful look-at-me-I’m-better-than-you way, because he’s going to make everybody in other departments feel “less than” because they’re not botanists, they’re just theologians or whatever. But you can participate in this in a much more personal way where you can give yourself to be a part of this and include the way in which Jesus is doing a lot other things.”

That’s a simple illustration to me of how that begins to work out. Pride is gone in a sense of, I want to participate, Jesus, in what you are doing here. Show me more, what am I missing, what are you doing with these plants. You’re the one that’s in resurrection and you’re bringing these

plants back, what do we do, how does that work? And you give yourself to participate in a much more intelligent and clear and less prideful and sanctimonious way.

JMF: Typically, when you go to church, you hear a sermon, you come away feeling discouraged or even worried about your relationship with God, because what you hear at church is, “Here’s ten commandments.” You not only hear “ten commandments,” but then Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself, love the Lord with all your heart and all your mind,” and all. And you feel like, “I don’t do that,” and you feel condemned because you know you don’t measure up to what you’re hearing you’re supposed to be doing – and that’s where you learn about God and about what you’re supposed to be doing. We don’t hear this. Why is that?

CBK: Can I tell another story, is that all right?

JMF: Go ahead.

CBK: This is my all-time favorite. This is a true story that happened when my son was... he’s now 19, he’s six-foot-five and he looks down on his father with great delight, but anyway he was 6 or 7 at that time. I was sitting in the den in our house on Saturday afternoon sorting through junk mail getting rid of them, watching a football game. He peered around the corner, 6 or 7 years old – face paint, camouflaged, plastic knife, guns, the whole nine yards, and one of his buddies was with him. The next thing I knew, there’s two camouflaged blurs that just came flying through the air and hit me, and we started horsing around and laughing and we end up on the floor in a pile of laughter.

Right in the middle of that, I felt the Lord saying, “Baxter, pay attention. There’s something huge happening here that’s very important.” I’m just scratching my head thinking, “A dad, his son horsing around on the floor, Saturday afternoon, it’s got to be going on all over the planet, what’s the big deal?”

Little by little it began to dawn on me... I did not even really know this other little boy. If you replay the story and you take my son out for a moment, and he’s back in the back of the house and this other little boy walks in the den camouflaged, the same outfit, he looks at me, he’s never seen me, I’ve never seen him. I don’t even know his name, he didn’t know my name. Presumably, he would have thought I was Mr. Kruger. But the last thing he’s going to do is come flying through the air and engage me in that kind of intimate play.

But the fact was, my son was there, and did know me. He knew that I loved him, he knew that I liked him, and that I wanted him, he knew my acceptance. In the freedom of that

knowledge of my acceptance and that knowledge of who he was and my love for him, he did the most natural thing in the world, which was to engage me. The stunning miracle was that, I saw my son's freedom with me, my son's knowledge of my heart rubbed off on that other little boy. He got to feel it and taste it and experience it with us. It wasn't his, but he got to share in it with us. It not only rubbed off on him, it was in him and he functioned from it. So to me, the Lord was saying, "That's the gospel."

The gospel is the news, and my son in the equation would be Jesus. The gospel is the news that we have a place in Jesus' relationship with his Father and in the Spirit he's sharing his own emotions, his own life, his own sense of his Father's presence – he wants us to live in it.

Religion would be when the boy suddenly gets... a whisper comes along and says, "But you're really not a part." So the boy steps over here, and he starts thinking, "How can have a relationship with God like... or to use the analogy, how can I have a relationship with Mr. Kruger like his son does?" And he starts writing down things that he can do that look like our relationship. The fact is, he is included in it, but he's choosing to carve out his own relationship with me rather than to participate. Every religion starts out with that separation, and it is going to prescribe things that you can do to have a relationship with God, when the New Testament is saying the stunning news is that Jesus has come to bring us and to receive us into his life and that's who we are and he wants us to participate – bear his fruit, fruit of his relationship with his Father.

That's the simplest story, but man, is it huge in its implications. We back out and we insist on having our own path to God, our own relationship to God the way we want it, the way we think it ought to work, the way we read the New Testament, and we're going to go at it that way. When the whole time, we've been included in this Son's relationship with his Father. Somehow we get to thinking that dirt can somehow climb into the being of the Trinity. Somehow that we who are fashioned out of the ground, can do something to achieve the Holy Spirit – the one single special Spirit in the universe. We're going to do something to achieve that. That's where religion – it's just a constant striving to create a relationship that really is already there and given to us, and it's the function of darkness and blindness.

JMF: In most preaching, what I hear all the time is, you are separated from God, you're a sinner, we've got to help people know that they're sinners and cut off from God and then show them the way. The way is, you say the sinner's prayer, let's say, or you start believing and now

God will change his mind toward you. It's the old Jonathan Edwards ... the hanging over the throne...[**CBK**: Oh, oh, in the pit of hell dangling like a spider's web over...] of an angry God, if you do x, y, or z (have faith, repent, change your ways, etc.), then God will change his mind toward you, apply the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on your behalf – that's how the gospel is most often presented.

CBK: You want to know why the church is dead and dying? I mean, that's not the gospel.

JMF: Give me a one or two-minute gospel presentation that...

CBK: The incarnation means that God has come... the Father has sent his Son to establish a relationship with us. Did Jesus establish a relationship with us, or not? Is he the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world or not?

I've grown up here in the same kind of preaching you're talking about. It's a much larger discussion, but it's a product of Augustinian dualism, then the Western tradition, and legalism. The gospel is the news is that the Father's SON – the Anointed One – has come to us and established a relationship with us. We're like my son's buddy – we're included in it, and we don't know who we are, so I'm not trying to get anyone to Jesus. I'm not trying to get anyone into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has done that – he's bigger than we are, he's bigger than Adam, he's bigger than the church. He's the one who embraced the human race in his own life, death, and resurrection and ascension.

Our role is to announce the good news. Not to say, "It's possible to have good news." Our role is to say, this is who you are. You too belong. You're in this. You're included in this. In that moment of announcement of the light... or in that moment of revelation, where we suddenly see that we're already included, not separated, not trying to figure out how to climb my way back to God, that produces, as my friend Bruce Wauchope says, "That produces mental illness." Striving, all kinds of fragmentation, and our soul is in fear. It doesn't produce relationship.

But when we see who we are, we discover reality that we don't create. That the Father, Son, and Spirit have created, in relation with us, we discover it, and at that moment we're called to believe. Are we going to believe in this reality or in... (I carry my glasses with me, because this is the issue.) Are we going to believe in the way *we* see things (and that's the little boy backing off and saying, "I'm going to do it my way"), or are we going to say when the light comes, "Man, now I see who I am."

When you see who you are – that you're included in this relationship, here's one of the

things that happens. You then begin to know for the first time, what it means to be a sinner. Now that I see that I'm included in that relationship, what a fool I've been trying to create my own. How proud I've been of what I have created and maintained in my own strength, and that's where the gospel reveals to us what sin is.

JMF: So the starting place of the gospel is that the truth that you're already included.

CBK: Yes, the starting of the gospel is Jesus Christ, and he is the one who has a relationship with the Father, he's the Anointed One, he's the one who has the relationship with us and in him, in his existence, in his person – all of us are bound together in that relation – that's the starting point, and that's the light of life that Jesus talks about.

When you see this in this light, you know the light of life, you won't walk in the darkness – that's the truth that sets us free (John 14:20). In that day you will know that I am in my Father, you're in me – you're not outside, you're going to see that you're in me and I'm in you.

That's the truth that sets us free from the illusions of our religion, and illusions of our own ideas which we keep trying to impose upon God, I mean the Father, Son, and Spirit. What's ironic is that in laying out the gospel presentation as we've done in the modern evangelical (and I stress modern evangelical) approach – laying it out the way that we do: we start off with a holiness of God and a sin – that we became sinners and there has to be some sort of a sacrifice. We have defined sin there out of our darkness.

Jesus says, "No one knows the Father but the Son." We who don't know the Father have come up with a definition of sin over here, and we're going to figure out how Jesus solves that problem. But we're blind! Even our doctrine of sin is a blind doctrine of sin. We need the life of Jesus Christ to help us to see the problem, so we can't start with the problem.

We start with the truth of who we are in Christ, that shines light on the darkness and we suddenly say, "Oh, now I can begin to see what sin is – sin is our not receiving the Father's love. Sin is believing that I'm separated from God and figuring out a way to carve my own way back. Sin is me insisting that God live in my world with me, rather than me living in the embrace of the Father. He loves me, he calls me to receive his love, now I can see who I really am. Now I can see what a mess I have made of my life and why. Now I can see what my future is.

JMF: That's very different from religion, that is also very different from universalism.

CBK: Yes, universalism ... I get accused of this a lot. You can understand if you've grown up in this other model, then the other model says, if you've done the contract, if you've had the

deal and closed the deal with Jesus, then you're going to heaven.

So if everybody is included then, everybody's going to heaven. But the biblical notion of heaven is relationship. Jesus says, "This is eternal life." Not that you go to a place and have a seat in the auditorium and can watch the big show. Eternal life is knowing the Father. Eternal death is living without knowing the Father. It's relational.

Universalism is this idea that says, it's the counterpart to Calvinism and its double predestination sort of thing which says, there are a selected number of elect and they will irresistibly be brought to know the truth and set free by it. Universalism is just extending that sort of irresistible grace kind of doctrine that says, everybody's included and everybody's going to be brought to see it, and that's that, it doesn't matter.

That's not at all what I'm saying. That's not at all what the Scripture is saying. Jesus says, he is the light of the cosmos, not all the Christian church. He says, he takes away the sin *of the world* – the cosmos, not just the sin of the believers. What happens in Jesus is the Father has come searching for us in the far country of our blindness and darkness and has established a relationship with us, and he will never let us go. That is the truth about the whole cosmos. Every person on the planet, Jesus Christ is in relationship with them – that's what he's done.

As we hear about it, we have to make a decision: which world am I going to live in? The New Testament says even the people who chose to live here are already included, they're just insisting on imposing their way of relating to Jesus onto Jesus rather than saying, "Take my mind and turn it around, I want to live in your world with you, your way. I want to participate."

So the New Testament leaves it, in my interpretation, the New Testament says it's possible for people to sit, who are included in this relationship, people who are not only loved by the Father, but now Jesus has established a relationship with them – it's possible for them to live in their own world although they're part of this relationship indefinitely. That's where we ended. You can't go any further than that.

I've got younger people who have come along and who have studied Barth and Torrance and George McDonald and they want to make a doctrine, they want to say, "Oh, everybody's going to be saved." George McDonald did that, and so did Thomas Erskine. C.S. Lewis didn't. He said, "No, we have to stop and say that..."

My hope is, I think it'd be the greatest in the universe if everybody came to see the truth and be set free by... and I hope for that, and I pray for that. But I cannot say that, that's exactly what

will happen, because that would be to deny our freedom as human beings. That would mean all we are is computers with Christological software. We're not persons in relationship, we're just computers, and we are being programmed by God, and that's not the way it is.

Universalism is a hope. I mean, who wouldn't want... don't you want to see everyone come to know the truth and be set free by it? Well of course we do, that's our heart's desire. That's not something we created, that's the desire of the Father, Son, and Spirit. But can we make a doctrine out of that? No way, the New Testament won't allow us to do it, and even the gospel as we see it in Jesus won't allow us to do it. It's possible for us to live in our darkness.

But that darkness is chosen, and it's chosen again, and again, and again. We refuse... Jesus is able to break through our darkness and reveal the truth to us, and that creates a crisis. What am I going to believe? Which world am I going to believe? Which world am I going to live in? Which Baxter? I'm the one that's making that decision. He doesn't give up. But it's possible for me, for us to say, "Were going to continue to live in this goofy world that we've created in our own heads – as being the real world."

JMF: Dr. Kruger is author of *The Great Dance*, which is available at www.perichoresis.org, along with access to Dr. Kruger's lectures and many other books and articles, and we hope that you'll take advantage of those.

Announcer: You've been listening to *You're Included*. Be sure to check for future programs on this series on our website, www.youreincluded.org. If you've enjoyed this program with Dr. Kruger, you might also enjoy the [articles](#) he has written for *Christian Odyssey* – a magazine that helps make sense of the modern Christian life. *You're Included* is devoted to the good news that your heavenly Father loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ.

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[back to table of contents](#)

## **About the publisher...**

Grace Communion International is a Christian denomination with more than 47,000 members, worshipping in about 900 congregations in almost 100 nations and territories. We began in 1934 and our main office is in southern California. In the United States, we are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and similar organizations in other nations. We welcome you to visit our website at [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org).

If you want to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we offer help. First, we offer weekly worship services in hundreds of congregations worldwide. Perhaps you'd like to visit us. A typical worship service includes songs of praise, a message based on the Bible, and opportunity to meet people who have found Jesus Christ to be the answer to their spiritual quest. We try to be friendly, but without putting you on the spot. We do not expect visitors to give offerings—there's no obligation. You are a guest.

To find a congregation, write to one of our offices, phone us or visit our website. If we do not have a congregation near you, we encourage you to find another Christian church that teaches the gospel of grace.

We also offer personal counsel. If you have questions about the Bible, salvation or Christian living, we are happy to talk. If you want to discuss faith, baptism or other matters, a pastor near you can discuss these on the phone or set up an appointment for a longer discussion. We are convinced that Jesus offers what people need most, and we are happy to share the good news of what he has done for all humanity. We like to help people find new life in Christ, and to grow in that life. Come and see why we believe it's the best news there could be!

Our work is funded by members of the church who donate part of their income to support the gospel. Jesus told his disciples to share the good news, and that is what we strive to do in our literature, in our worship services, and in our day-to-day lives.

If this e-book has helped you and you want to pay some expenses, all donations are gratefully welcomed, and in several nations, are tax-deductible. If you can't afford to give anything, don't worry about it. It is our gift to you. To make a donation online, go to [www.gci.org/participate/donate](http://www.gci.org/participate/donate).

Thank you for letting us share what we value most — Jesus Christ. The good news is too good to keep it to ourselves.

See our website for hundreds of articles, locations of our churches, addresses in various

nations, audio and video messages, and much more.

www.gci.org

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### **You're Included...**

We talk with leading Trinitarian theologians about the good news that God loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ. Most programs are about 28 minutes long. Our guests have included:

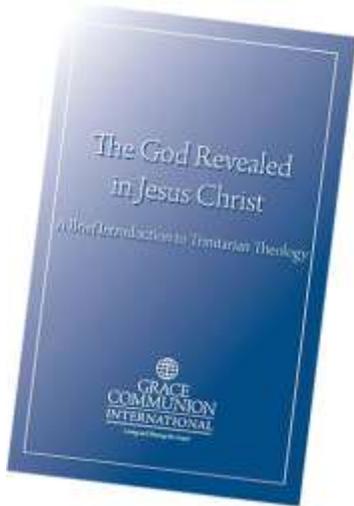
Ray Anderson, Fuller Theological Seminary  
Douglas A. Campbell, Duke Divinity School  
Elmer Colyer, U. of Dubuque Theological Seminary  
Gary Deddo, InterVarsity Press  
Gordon Fee, Regent College  
Trevor Hart, University of St. Andrews  
George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary  
Jeff McSwain, Reality Ministries  
Paul Louis Metzger, Multnomah University  
Paul Molnar, St. John's University  
Cherith Fee Nordling, Antioch Leadership Network  
Andrew Root, Luther Seminary  
Alan Torrance, University of St. Andrews  
Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh University  
William P. Young, author of *The Shack*

Programs are available free for viewing and downloading at [www.youreincluded.org](http://www.youreincluded.org).

### **Speaking of Life...**

Dr. Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International, comments each week, giving a biblical perspective on how we live in the light of God's love. Most programs are about three minutes long – available in video, audio, and text.

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### **Want to read more?**

Readers in the United States are eligible to receive a free booklet, *The God Revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*. This booklet explains, in simple language, how all our most important questions are answered by a simple starting point: Who is God? We can be confident that God has planned something excellent for us. To have a hard copy mailed to you, phone 1-800-423-4444. Readers in other nations may read the booklet online at [www.gci.org/god/revealed](http://www.gci.org/god/revealed). It is also available as a free e-book in the same place as you obtained this e-book.



## **Grace Communion Seminary**

Grace Communion Seminary serves the needs of pastors and others engaged in Christian service who want to grow deeper in relationship with our Triune God and to be able to more effectively serve in the Incarnational life of the church.

**Grace** is the essence of our lives. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ reveals God to us, grants us life in him, leads us in forgiving and being forgiven, and gives us salvation. Our Triune God and his grace and love revealed through Jesus Christ is the center of our theology.

**Communion** defines the relationship we have with God, Jesus, and one another (2 Corinthians 13:14). The communion of the Holy Spirit binds us with Jesus, enlivens God's love in our hearts, and unites us as followers of Jesus Christ. We live in inseparable unity in Christ in the perpetual effects of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost.

**Seminary** describes the scope of our educational goal. We offer graduate-level courses on the Internet. You can earn a nationally accredited master's degree entirely online, without any need to travel. We want to help you minister more effectively where you are, not to uproot you. We teach from a perspective of Trinitarian Incarnational theology. For more information, go to <http://www.gcs.edu/>.

Grace Communion Seminary is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council, [www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org). The Accrediting Commission of DETC is listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency. The Commission is also a recognized member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

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[back to table of contents](#)