

The Death of Fun (Religion)

Romans 2:15-3:4a

Romans (no. 6 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/the-death-of-fun-religion/>

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

God, awake our soul—that's what we just sang. Send your spirit Lord God and crush our soul, if need be—that what's hidden in our soul would flow out like a river. The life is in the blood, that's what scripture says, that Lord you'd wake up our souls and your life would flow between us and back to the throne, and we'd begin to live. In Jesus's name, we ask that Lord God. Amen.

Message

Romans 2:15, where we ended last time:

Romans 2:15:

They [the gentiles, the nations, the “unbelievers”] show that the work of the law is written [in] their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

That immediately raises three fascinating questions.

- When is that day?
- What is the Judgment of God?
- And how is it that Jews and Gentiles have the same Judgment?

Well, that day is the end of the ages and Paul believed that he and we had already come to the end of the ages.ⁱ 1 Corinthians 10:11: “[These Judgments] happened to [those in the past] as an example, and they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”ⁱⁱ

You see that's how it is that we come to have the life of the age to come, that is eternal life: God judges us.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus said, “Whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.”^{iv} That's eternal life—the life of the coming age. Paul believed that he had already died. To the Galatians, he wrote, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.”

If you asked Paul, “When, and where, did you die?”

- He might say “At the end of the ages.”
- He might say “In the beginning, for the End is also the Beginning.”
- He might say “On good Friday, on a tree in a garden just outside of Jerusalem. It’s also where and when you all died, “because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died.””

He might say any one of those things, but he’d at least say this: “I died on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus when God revealed his son to me and within me.” You remember how it happened: Paul was a young man; a pharisee of Pharisees. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.^{vi} He had, in his words, “advanced in Judaism beyond many his own age.^{vii}” He was winning the religion game and would advance by ensuring that others would lose the religion game—particularly the followers of Jesus.

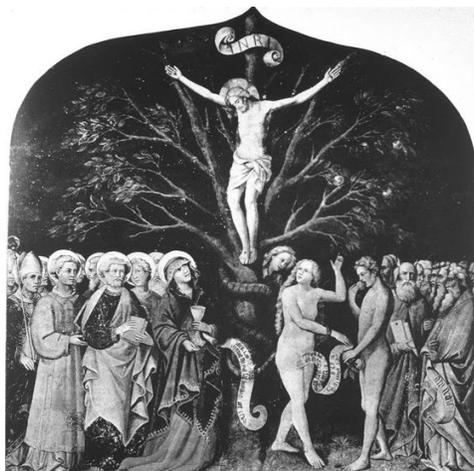
Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus, when Jesus appeared to him and burned the hell out of him, and burned heaven into him; or maybe, heaven had always been in him. To the Galatians, he describes it as the day that God was pleased to reveal his son “in” him—“the Truth in him.”

In the last chapter (of Romans), Paul wrote that we have all “imprisoned the Truth in the chains of [our] unrighteousness.”^{viii} And that means that The Truth, who manifest to Paul on the road to Damascus, revealed The Truth, that had been placed within Paul from the beginning.

Jesus had been placed in Paul

- Like a seed buried in fertile soil.
- Like a breath, a spirit, imprisoned behind a curtain in an old stone temple.
- Like the decision to love, encased in a hard heart, protected by hate.

Jesus, the good in human flesh, the Life of God, and the judgment of God had been buried in a tomb named Saul of Tarsus. But, on the road to Damascus, Saul died and Christ in Paul rose from the dead, and apparently, that was, and still is, Judgment day.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

Last time we preached that this must be Judgment Day.

- It's the two trees in the middle of the garden that look like one.
- It's the cross in the garden on mount Calvary.
- It's the Tree of Life in the eternal garden city of Jerusalem.
- It's the Judgment Seat of God, between the cherubim, in the eternal sanctuary, in the innermost depths of the temple.
- It's the Throne of God on which stands a slaughtered lamb.
- It's the Judgment of God upon all the judgments of humanity.

It's an old painting by some Italian artist (Giovanni da Modena), who saw—what I believe the Bible clearly portrays—that God's judgment doesn't change, but we change. In fact, that's God's judgment—to change us into his image.

The picture illustrates two passions, two desires, or two judgments:

- Our judgment to take the Good and God's judgment to give the Good.
- Our judgment to take the Life and God's judgment to give the Life.
- Our judgment to hold the Ball and God's judgment to pass the Ball.

The Judgment of God is hard to understand until you remember that God is our Father, and God is a good father, and all good fathers share a common judgment: the Judgment of fun. "Damn it, kids, I paid a fortune for this vacation and we're going to have fun!" It's a wonderful judgment to issue, but incredibly challenging to enforce because fun is a judgment that must rise from the depths of everyone's soul in freedom. Just one kid that refuses to have fun can hijack all the fun for everyone else. But the more that choose to have fun, the greater the fun—fun is not a zero-sum game but just the opposite, because the fun of one is for all and all is for one.

Last week, I shared that when my children were 2,5,7, and 8, our basement was a kingdom of fun. We'd play ball, didn't keep score, and had no rules but one: you had to pass the ball because that's what made it fun.



Sometimes my 2-year-old Coleman would come down the stairs. He'd see the fun and knew he wanted the fun but didn't understand the fun. So, when we'd pass the ball, he'd run with the ball, hold the ball, and then hide in the corner where he would imprison the fun in his own unrighteousness.

And then I would issue my judgment: "Coleman, Pass the ball; it will be fun." How could I get him to pass the ball? If I were to promise a reward and threaten a punishment, what would I say? "If you

pass the ball now, I'll let you hold it forever, alone in the basement?" Or "If you don't pass the ball now, I'll take it, and give it back, so I can take it again; forever and ever we'll be passing the ball—that's your punishment?" By appealing to his current desires with rewards and punishments, I'd teach him to lust for "hell," alone in the basement, and hate the fun that he longed for in the beginning but did not understand—that is, passing the ball. And if he did pass the ball, in fear of punishment, or longing for some other reward, it wouldn't be fun. It wouldn't be play; it would be work. It wouldn't be a blessing but a curse.

From Coleman, I wanted enough faith that he would surrender his judgment to my judgment long enough to experience our joy—compound joy, a higher consciousness—the fun that is playing the game. I wanted him to lose his psyche and find it, playing the game. And he did. Faith happens when the children watch the Father pass the ball—even at great expense to himself—pass the ball for "the joy that [is] set before him."^{ix} And you see, that's exactly what's happening in this picture, isn't it?

God himself, has made himself the ball and is passing himself to us. Even though we take his goodness like robbers, his life like thieves, and his love like adulterers, whoremongers, and rapists. Even though we take him to ourselves, he is giving himself—and has always been giving himself—to us. He is Love. Love is a noun and it's also a verb; it's being and doing all at once. Ball is a noun but it's no fun unless it also becomes a verb, unless you pass it to your neighbor, unless you play ball.

"In self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being," writes CS Lewis in The Problem of Pain. "For the Eternal Word also gives Himself in sacrifice, and that not only on Calvary. For when He was crucified, He 'did that in the wild weather of His outlying provinces [that's here] which He had done at home in glory and gladness'[that's heaven] [George Macdonald]. From before the foundation of the world, He surrenders begotten Deity back to begetting Deity in obedience. And as the Son glorifies the Father, so also the Father glorifies the Son... From the highest to the lowest, self exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes the more truly self, to be thereupon yet the more abdicated, and so forever. This is not a heavenly law which we can escape by remaining earthly, nor an earthly law which we can escape by being saved. What is outside the system of self-giving is not earth, nor nature, nor 'ordinary life,' but simply and solely Hell..."

The golden apple of selfhood, thrown among the false gods, became an apple of discord because they scrambled for it.^x They did not know the first rule of the holy game, which is that every player must, by all means, touch the ball and then immediately pass it on. To be found with it in your hands is a fault: to cling to it, death. But when it flies to and fro among the players too swift for eye to follow, and the great master Himself leads the revelry, giving Himself eternally to His creatures in the generation, and back to Himself in the sacrifice, of the Word, then indeed the eternal dance 'makes heaven drowsy with harmony.' All pains and pleasures we have known on earth are early initiations in the movements of that dance: but the dance itself is strictly incomparable with the sufferings of this present time. As we draw nearer to its uncreated rhythm, pain and pleasure sink almost out of sight. There is joy in the dance, but it does not exist for the sake of joy. It does not even exist for the sake of good, or of love. It is Love Himself, and Good Himself, [and Life himself, I would add] and therefore happy. That's Fun."

The Judgment of God is Fun. Jesus was so much fun it got him crucified—he partied with tax collectors and sinners and the religious folks didn't like it. He said that he spoke that his joy, might be in us; that sounds fun.^{xi} The Judgment of God is Fun, which should raise an obvious question: Why do "Christians" seem to have so little fun? Why does Peter Hiatt seem to have so little fun? And why, oh why, did Coleman Hiatt stop playing football? I think it's all one answer and for now, we can call it "religion."

Romans 2:16-17a:

...on that day when, according to my [good news], God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. ¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law...

What's a Jew? In Genesis 12, for no apparent reason, God spoke to a man named Abram saying, "I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you, all the families, all the nations, all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed." Abraham fathered Isaac, which means laughter—that sounds fun. Isaac fathered Jacob. Each contained the blessing, in the form of a promised seed within their loins. Jacob became Israel and fathered twelve sons that became twelve tribes. Each was commanded to love God and love their neighbor as themselves and all were blessed to be a blessing to all the nations of the world.

God would command them to battle various nations at times and yet they had still been promised as a blessing to all the nations for all of time. "Blessed to be a blessing," but they competed for the blessing, battled each other for the blessing, and didn't bless the nations, they held (didn't pass) the ball. Judah was the last tribe standing, and in Judah was the promised blessing, the promised seed: the King of the Judeans—the King of the Jews. He was born to a virgin, placed in a manger, and then nailed to a tree in a garden because he seemed bound and determined to bless Greeks, Romans, Canaanites and, even, party with tax collectors and sinners. The Jews were trying to hold the ball, and the ball was bound and determined to give himself away. They were faithless yet God remained faithful.

In Romans 2:16, "If you call yourself a Jew—" It appears that Paul called himself a Jew, although technically he was from the tribe of Benjamin. By the time of Jesus, any semi-faithful Israelite appears to have been called a Jew. And, as we'll soon find out, Paul will call you a Jew, as well. The Jews were Paul's family, and the synagogue was his church—it means the gathering, the assembly. "Christian" was actually a derogatory name given to the followers of Jesus by those that did not follow Jesus.

You see, Paul didn't see himself as starting a new religion. Judaism was his religion, and he would consider it to be your religion too. You are wed to the king of the Jews and grafted into his family tree. You can't get more Jewish than that. So, when we read the word "Jew" we should hear the word "Christian." And when we read the word "law" we should hear the word "religion."

Paul has just made it clear that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, somehow grows in the garden sanctuary of every human heart. A "law" is dead knowledge of the good—it's a description of the good, it's the form of the good; it's customs, practices, values, rules, and regulations, with which we judge ourselves, our neighbors, and our God.^{xiii} Law is a description of passing the ball.

Love is passing the ball. Life is everyone that's passing the ball. Your life is literally a communion of trillions of individual cells, all passing the ball—the "life is in the ball." And your life is to be part of a

greater life—the Life—but you must pass the ball in order to experience the life and join the fun. The law is any description of love and life, but the law is not love and life.

Romans 2:17-20:

But if you call yourself a Jew [Christian] and rely on the law [your religion] and boast in God [Love] ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law [your religion]; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish^{xiii}, a teacher of children...

- To call yourself, “a teacher of children,” you’d have to judge others to be children and yourself to no longer be a child.
- To call yourself, “an instructor of the foolish,” you’d have to judge others to be fools and yourself to be wise.
- To call yourself, “A light to the blind,” you’d have to judge others to be blind and yourself to be the light.

Romans 2:19-20:

if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish^{xiv}, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth

Isn't Jesus “the embodiment of knowledge and truth?” “Embodiment”—so, is he a dead body or a living body? Perhaps that depends on how you take him in the sanctuary garden of your own heart, whether you take him as a possession or receive him as a gift; whether you hold the ball or surrender to the ball game.

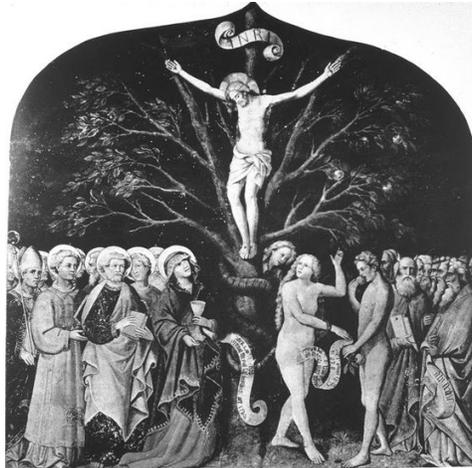
Romans 2:21:

you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

You then who teach others to pass the ball, do you pass the ball? You who coach football, do you even enjoy football? Do you pass the ball just for the love of the game or for some other reason? You who preach love, do you use love to preach or just love, Love, And so, you preach?

Romans 2:20-21:

²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

Now, it's easy to say, "No, I don't rob temples," until you sit at the base of this tree and learn that his body is the temple and everyone around you is his body. And so, every time you are loved and refuse to love, you take life from his temple—you take the ball and imprison his life within yourself.

It's easy to say, "No, I don't commit adultery," until you take a good look at this tree and learn that it's your naked husband that hangs on the tree. Every time you turn to another helper you commit adultery against him. Bride of Christ you were made for communion with him.

It's easy to say, "Of course I don't steal," until you get a good look at the tree in the middle of the garden. It turns out that every time you boast, you steal glory from your Creator. You're not your own creator and you don't create the Good or the Life; you can only receive the Life as a gift and pass him on.

Romans 2:23-24:

You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

The name of Christ is blasphemed among the nations because of Christians. As Gandhi said to the evangelist E. Stanly Jones, explaining why he hadn't joined the church, "I love your Christ; it's just that so many of you Christians are not like your Christ."

The name of Christ is blasphemed among the nations, and in our own nation, because of Christians. We lost the culture war precisely because we decided to fight it in the first place; or, at least we fought it with the wrong weapons—worldly weapons. We have fought by actually seizing power and attempting to claim our rights through legislation—that's the law—all the while claiming to follow a king who surrendered all power, forfeited all rights, and gave his life for his enemies—that's Love.

We talk about grace and yet we are profoundly ungraceful.^{xv}

- We're like stone temples that enslave the spirit deep within.
- We're like clay vessels that imprison the truth in our unrighteousness.
- We're like Old Wineskins that need to burst and bleed the new wine.
- We're like foreskins that inhibit communion.

Yep, I said, “foreskins.” I didn’t write the Bible and that’s what it says—religious people are like foreskins that numb the world to the joy of communion with God. Next verse.

Romans 2:25:

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision [your religion] becomes uncircumcision [akrobestia, literally, “foreskin.”]

This is all rather astonishing but hopefully, you remember that the very first religious act that God has Abraham perform—after making Abraham watch as he cuts the covenant, 400 years before God gives the law in the form of the ten commandments—the very first religious thing that God asks Abraham to do, when Abraham was 99 years old, God said to Abraham, “You and all the males in your household will be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. It is the sign of the covenant.”

And if Abraham didn’t say it, he certainly thought it: “Um... Couldn’t we just wear T-shirts, maybe start a 501c3, non-profit organization, pull together a vision statement, five and ten-year goals, a list of rules, regulations, and expectations that everyone can agree to together (like a religion)? But, cut the skin off the tip of my penis? Why?”

Well, it must certainly have something to do with the fact that humans were created to produce fruit—that is, more humans—through intimate communion in the sacrament of the covenant of marriage. Just as believers are created to bear the fruit of the spirit through intimate communion in the sacrament of the covenant of Grace. And if things are working optimally this is rather fun. I’m trying to avoid all double-entendres—but this is a picture of something utterly profound; it is a picture of passing the ball. We call it “making love”, although more truly it’s Love making us.

Three weeks ago, we pointed out that Jesus was single. And yet, he came to be married to each and all of us. With bread and wine, he proposed a marriage covenant. On the tree in the garden, according to Paul, he was circumcised. He then delivered up his Spirit, that it might descend into each one of us. He passed the ball, the promised blessing. The prophets tell us that circumcision really isn’t about penises. It’s about the thing to which the penis is attached: a man’s heart. The foreskin is a picture of the leathery skin that grows around a human heart as men and women seek to hide themselves from the love of God. It’s truly astonishing, for it means that obedience is really not something we can *do*, so much as something that *happens* when we are undone—circumcised. Faith is not an addition that we make, it’s more like a subtraction that God makes—allowing our hearts to commune with him.

Romans 2:25-29:

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision [your religion] becomes uncircumcision [foreskin].²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised [foreskin]— (Jews referred to gentiles as “foreskins” in that day and I’m thinking it was probably politically incorrect.)— keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision [foreskin] be regarded as circumcision?²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised [a foreskin] but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.²⁸ For no one is a Jew [a Christian] who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.²⁹ But a Jew [a Christian] is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

You see, only God knows if you're playing ball with him in the Sanctuary of your own heart, but the world will begin to figure it out, by whether or not you're having any fun—by whether or not they see the fruit of Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faith and Self-Control.^{xvi} Paul is also pointing out that this fruit grows on Gentiles as well as Jews, (that is Christians). And so, he anticipates the following response:

Romans 3:1a:
Then what advantage has the Jew?

Let me rephrase that:

- Why be a Jew if God also loves gentiles?
- Why obey the law if one day everyone will obey the law?
- Why would I be a Christian if everyone gets saved in the end?
- Why forgive my enemies now if I don't get to despise them later?
- Why worship a savior that saves everyone?
- Why love if there's no reward for loving?
- Why pass the ball now, if I don't get to hold it forever all alone in the corner of the basement?
- Why play, if I don't win?

I remember looking at two-year-old Coleman holding the ball in the corner of the basement, while we all waited for him to lose the ball and join the fun. I remember thinking—perhaps not in these words—but I remember thinking: “This is so weird (the angels must look at us and think this): Coleman, can't you see that you've already won? I have already made my mind up about you. I have already judged you. You've won. Coleman, you are mine and I am yours. Coleman, all things are yours. The house is yours. All these toys are yours. Your brother and sisters are yours. Mom is yours. I am yours and the ball is yours—I bought the ball for you. But you won't have any fun until you've learned to give it away. Passing the ball is not payment for some other reward, Coleman. Passing the ball is the reward, it's your first step into a world of fun.”

Well as I told you last time, I kept passing the ball to Coleman, and one day he surrendered his judgment to my judgment, he revealed a mustard seed of faith buried in the garden of his soul and he passed the ball to someone else. And before he knew it, he had lost himself and found himself in a world of fun; actually, a communion of fun, one for all and all for one.

As I said last time, Coleman and I would just stand out in the street throwing the football back and forth for hours. In Elementary School Coleman joined a pee-wee football team; he worked like crazy and yet to him it wasn't work; it was play.



They won some, they lost some, but either way, Coleman had fun, just because he loved playing the game.



One day I said to him, “Buddy, doesn’t it bother you when the coach yells at you?” He looked at me and said, “Dad, isn’t that what the coach is supposed to do?” As a kid, I was so insecure about myself, I couldn’t lose myself in the game and so I rarely enjoyed the game and was never very good at the game. But Coleman got good at the game.

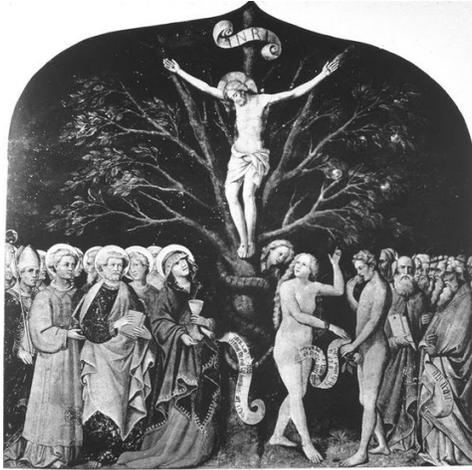


He made Varsity at Bear Creek High School his sophomore year, and Bear Creek was good. Yet at the end of his Junior Year, he said, “Dad I don’t want to play football anymore?” I said, “why?” I remember he said, “Dad, it’s just not any fun. My coach is all about winning games, and so no one plays the game just for the love of the game. Dad, I miss playing football with my friends; that’s what made it fun.” Coleman didn’t say this, but he could’ve said this, “Dad, I don’t think my coach is circumcised. I mean, he doesn’t love playing the game; he only loves winning the game; so, we try to win games, and we’ve lost all the fun.”

If you play to win, you’ve already lost, because you’re not playing. If you follow Jesus in order to beat your neighbor and win a game, you’re not following Jesus; you’re crucifying Jesus and losing the war.^{xvii}

- You’re seeking to win your life and you’ve already lost it.
- You’re seeking to be first when Jesus rejoiced at being last.
- You’re seeking to exalt yourself and Jesus implores you to humble yourself.

The false gods of this world all seek to hold the ball and so cannot comprehend the game. The evil one cannot comprehend Love. In fact, they're terrified of the game. The true God: the persons of the Godhead, the three for one and one for three, they constantly humble themselves and exalt the other—God is fun.



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And so, the Jews went to the Gentiles and asked them to crucify Jesus. You see, it's religion that crucifies the king of fun.^{xviii} How that escapes us over and over again is shocking. And yet, then and there is precisely when and where he wins the war. It's on the tree that he lifts his head, surrenders his spirit, passes the ball, wins the war, and makes all things new. He is the judgment of God. He is the door to the New Creation—The Age to come.

It's great to play games in order to learn to pass the ball. And so, one team might try to beat another team to win a game, but that game is a game and must never be the war. We ARE engaged in a war, but NOT against people or even a team of people.

- We battle the void with the presence of God.
- We battle non-being with being.
- We battle desecration with creation.
- We battle division with communion.
- We battle evil by passing the ball.
- We battle death with love and when everyone loves, all is life, and everyone that's anyone wins the war^{xix}

Actually, Jesus has already won the war, and the day you believe it is the day you'll begin to have fun playing his game, which is really a dance—the dance that never ends, for it is the end: eternal life. He is the Judgment of God, He is the commandment of God^{xx}, He is life eternal.^{xxi}

Romans 3:1-3:

Then what advantage has the Jew [or the Christian]? Or what is the value of circumcision [or baptism or communion]? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles [the sayings] of God.^{xxii} ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

Just because you don't pass the ball and so don't win a game, would you suppose that God loses the war? God has already won the war so that you might enjoy playing the game.

Romans 3:3-4a:

³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! [literally: "Hell no"] Let God be true, though everyone [man] were [is] a liar...

So, Jews are judged by the same judgment as Gentiles, for the Judgment of God is fun—one for all and all for one. Why don't Christians have more fun? Religion. And why doesn't Peter have more fun? I can't describe this in detail and you don't need to believe it really happened, although it did.

Late one night with Susan, praying for a friend struggling with memories of abuse, the evil one manifested in our friend. At one point he grabbed my hand, put something in my hand, and wrapped my fingers around it tightly as if wrapping them around a ball. And then he tried to hold them there. I blew on his hands. The breath burned like fire, and he let go. Then, left my friend. When it was all over, my friend said, "I need to tell you, I was aware enough to know that something was putting something in your hand; it wants you to hang on and never let go. I don't know what it was, but you need to let it go."

And almost immediately I think I knew what it was. It was you, and this church, and a reformation that I so earnestly want to see happen. It was the good. You see, Satan can only tempt us with the good. And he tempts me with the good by making me believe that I have to win the war to save the Good. And so I make rules for myself, judge myself, condemn myself, and then beg him to let me stop playing the game because I'm not having any fun.

Jesus wants me to trust that he's won the war, so I can have fun playing the game. There's only one rule and that is "Pass the ball," because you want to pass the ball. "Preach," because you want to preach. "Love," because you love Love." That's called faith and it manifests as fun.

If you're not having fun, ask the Lord, "Am I holding the ball?" If you are, don't just make a bunch of rules about passing the ball and, so, judge yourself for not passing the ball and then create a bunch of rules so you can pass the ball better and, so, win the game. That's religion and it's the death of fun. Instead, confess, "Dad I'm not passing the ball." Then watch him as he passes the ball to you, once again.^{xxiii}

Communion

Sweetheart, this is my body given to you [breaks bread]. This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins [pours wine into cup]. Drink of it, all of you. Then, pass the ball. Amen.

Benediction

And so, to you, Dad, we pass the ball. We worship you. And it really is all kind of funny because God, I think we live our whole lives so desperately afraid of losing the ball or passing the ball. But one day Lord, this old body of mine—this flesh—will die, I'll breathe my last, and I'm sure it will scare the poop out of me, and then you'll pass the ball back to me and start laughing. So, God, I pray that you would help us to believe the Gospel, so we can be free, right now. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Sometimes people say, Peter, what difference does it make? I mean, this church sacrificed a lot, you sacrificed a lot to preach this message; what difference does it make? I just get an aneurism almost and this is the way to describe it: Can you imagine what a difference it would have made if I had left the basement for a moment or two and someone came in and talked to my children and said, “Hey guys, your dad seems like a good guy, but you need to know this: if you win this game, he will reward you with blessings just unbelievable—isn’t that great? And if you lose, he will torture you forever and ever and ever, and you will never join the game.” If my kids believe that, just a little bit, do you think that would affect the way they played the game? Oh, they might work really, really hard at playing the game but they wouldn’t trust me, they wouldn’t love me, and it would be absolutely no fun. I think for the last 1500 years or so, the church has largely not been playing the game. So may you believe the gospel, pass the ball, and have fun. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Let us start with the most fundamental idea of all which the Christian gospel has to set against the basic suspicion of our modern world. It is, at its absolute simplest, that when we go out, we encounter, not nothing, but *God*. Everything we are and everything we do does not run out into emptiness: it runs up into him, into his love and his holiness. He is the frontier by which all our life is bounded. And he is the frontier also by which the whole of history is bounded: it too does not go out into nothingness; it runs up into him. That is the significance of a judgement set where the bible sets it, not merely at the close of every individual life, but at the end of the world. It is saying that the whole process of the universe also ‘adds up’, and that none of our lives can be judged by themselves alone, but only in relation to this final account. . . . But while the vision of a *last* judgement is the great contribution of the Old Testament-and it is to this that we owe ultimately all idea of progress, of history ‘getting somewhere’-it is not the only or the most important thing the Bible has to say about judgement. For the New Testament introduces a fresh theme, which is still so unfamiliar that one cannot even state it without sounding paradoxical. It is that the last judgement has already happened.

- John A. T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World*, pp. 138-139.

ⁱⁱ But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. – Hebrews 9:26b

ⁱⁱⁱ History is the display of the supposed advantages of power and intelligence which some men possess over others, of the struggle for existence hypocritically described by ideologists as a struggle for justice and freedom, of the ebb and flow of old and new forms of triviality. Yet one drop of eternity is of greater weight than a vast ocean of finite things... The Judgment of God is the end of history, not the beginning of a new second, epoch. By it, history is not prolonged, but done away with.

- Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.77

^{iv} John 5:24

^v 2nd Corinthians. 5:14

^{vi} Philippians. 3:6

^{vii} Galatians 1:14

^{viii} “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth imprisoned in the chains of their unrighteousness.” - Romans 1:18 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*

^{ix} Hebrews 12:2

^x Lewis is referring to the Greek myth of Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena who each tried to exalt themselves by obtaining a golden apple labelled “for the most beautiful.” The false gods compete at exalting themselves, the three persons of the true God only compete at exalting one another.

^{xi} John 15:11, 17:13

^{xii} Religion forgets that she has a right to exist only when she does away with herself. Instead, she takes joy in her existence and considers herself indispensable...Man has taken the divine into his possession; he has brought it under his management...The polemic of the Bible, unlike that of the religions, is directed not against the godless world but against the *religious* world, whether it worships under the auspices of Baal or of Jehovah; and against the heathen only in so far as their gods are relative powers and authorities which they have raised into metaphysical absolutes and which are therefore an abomination unto the Lord and abolished in Christ.

- Karl Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, pp. 67-71

^{xv} Some even fantasize about a day when God might be ungraceful, his patience might run out, he might decide to no longer “seek and save the lost,” but endlessly torture the lost—no longer Love, but just the opposite of Love.

^{xvi} You may have noticed that everything Paul accused the nations of, He has now accused the Jews of, and he calls himself, and us, Jews. So as the nations are judged, so are we judged and the fruit of the spirit appears to grow on gentiles as well as Jews, that is, us.

^{xvii} The final verses describe the taunts flung at Jesus by the passers-by, by the Jewish authorities, and by the brigands who were crucified with him. They all centered round one thing—the claims that Jesus had made and his apparent helplessness on the Cross. It was precisely there that the Jews were so wrong. They were using the glory of Christ as a means of mocking him. "Come down," they said, "and we will believe on you." But as General Booth once said, "It is precisely because he would not come down that we believe in him." The Jews could see God only in power; but Jesus showed that God is sacrificial love.
--William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2, Revised Edition*, p. 367

^{xviii} Since the primary motive of the evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one's evil from oneself, as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some other highly visible form of Christian within our culture? . . . I mean only that evil people tend to gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment it can offer them.
-- M. Scott Peck, *The People of the Lie*

Christendom is a cancer eating away at the Body of Christ. – André Sneider

The only true religion ever sanctioned by God became "dung" in the mind of our Apostle Paul. – J. Blake Botner

^{xix} The cosmic Christ is no threat to anything but separateness, illusion, domination, and any imperial ego. In that sense, Jesus, the Christ, is the ultimate threat, but first of all to Christians themselves. Only then will they have any universal and salvific message for the rest of the earth. - Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, p. 182

^{xx} And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me... I am the way, and the truth, and the life – John 12:50, 14:6

^{xxi} If we are, as it is said, shadows, he is eternal clarity in his eternal changelessness; if we are shadows that hasten away—my soul, take heed, because whether you will or not, you are hastening to eternity, to him, and he is eternal clarity! Therefore he does not only hold an accounting, he is the accounting.
- The Essential Kierkegaard, edited by Howard and Edna Hong, p. 489

^{xxii} Don't these things teach you how to have fun? Is it not a blessing to enter the kingdom now, rather than later? Or do you not want to enter the kingdom at all? In which case, you're not yet saved, and already trapped by hell.

^{xxiii} Then our good Lord Jesus Christ asked me: "Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you?" I said: "Yes, good Lord, and I thank you very much. Yes, good Lord, may you be blessed." Then Jesus our good Lord said: "If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. To have ever suffered the Passion for you is for me a great joy, a bliss, an endless delight; and if I could suffer more I would do so."
-*Julian of Norwich: Journeys into Joy*, selected spiritual writings introduced and edited by John Nelson, p. 72