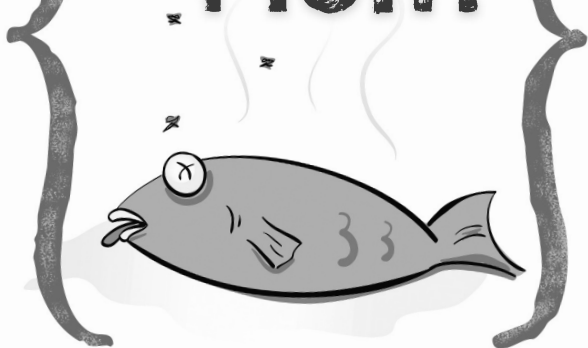


ARE YOU A
**ROTTEN
FISH?**



TODD FRIEL



**GOSPEL
PARTNERS
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Reaching the lost. Together.

Are You a Rotten Fish?

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YOU ARE NOT ALONE

There are gazillions of people who once claimed to be Christian, but who no longer identify as followers of Jesus Christ. There are gazillions more who still claim to be Christians but are not acting like it. Both of these scenarios are very, very dangerous.

Jesus warned that on the Day of Judgment, many will say to Him, “Lord, Lord,” and He will say, “I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws” (Matthew 7:22,23). Even though these people professed to be Christians, Jesus doesn’t agree with their assessment.

Jesus preached on the subject of true and false conversions relentlessly and repeatedly. He spoke of wheat and tares, good fish and rotten fish, wise and foolish virgins, sheep and goats (Matthew 13:24–29,47–50; 25:1–13, 31–33). Jesus was very concerned about spiritual self-deception.

One of Jesus' longest parables was about true and false conversions (Matthew 13:3–23). In the parable of the sower, He described four types of people who hear the gospel:

1. The first hearer does not truly understand the gospel and therefore doesn't respond.
2. The second responds with joy but only temporarily; as soon as the going gets tough, this "convert" gets going.
3. The third hearer falls away due to worldly worries and a desire for wealth.
4. The fourth hearer understands, believes, and produces genuine fruit.

Jesus explained that only the fourth type of hearer was actually saved; the others may have had some sort of religious experience, but they were not genuinely converted. Please notice, the fourth hearer understood, believed, *and* bore fruit. In other words, true converts act like Christians because they *are* Christians.

Jesus spelled out one way to know whether a person is soundly saved: “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). That is a rather colorful way of saying that a person who backslides is one who never genuinely slid forward in the first place.

When Jesus enters the new convert’s heart, He stays there permanently (Romans 8:38,39; 1 John 5:11,12). People who are genuinely saved will act saved and stay saved until they die.

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

If you feel like you really, really believed in Jesus at one point, but now you don’t, the biblical explanation is unflinching: your faith was false. It may have felt sincere, but the Bible insists that you were sincerely wrong. So, my friend, if you are no longer a Chris-

tian, it is because you were never a Christian in the first place.

There are scads of verses that tell us those who once claimed to be Christian, but walk away from the faith, were never truly Christian at all.

These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us. (1 John 2:19)

Please don't be offended, but the Bible is emphatic: if you are not a Christian now, it is because you were never a Christian to begin with. This is staggeringly common.

A major U.S. denomination reported that in 1991, 11,500 churches obtained 294,784 decisions for Christ. Unfortunately, they could find only 14,337 in fellowship. This means... they could not account for approximately 280,000 (95 percent) of their "converts."

Another leading U.S. denomination reported that during 1995 they secured 384,057 decisions but retained only 22,983 in fellowship. They could not account for 361,074 supposed conversions. That is a 94 percent fall-away rate.¹

These shocking “fall away” statistics apply to virtually every Christian festival, evangelistic outreach, Christian concert, church, and major denomination. Perhaps you are one of those statistics.

Maybe you grew up in the church, but you became one of the 60–80 percent who attended youth group, only to run off to college and run away from the faith.

If you are one of the millions who once considered themselves to be Christian, but lost your faith somewhere, thank you for reading this booklet. You are brave.

Additionally, if you claim to be a Christian, but your life looks more like you are a rotten fish, it is because you *are* a rotten fish.

If your life is marked by an ongoing, unrepentant lifestyle of sin with no remorse, the Bible is brutally honest: “When people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil” (1 John 3:8). If your fruit is rotten, it is because your root is rotten.

Sorry for the punch in the nose, but please know, I just hit myself too. You see, I was a

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false convert of the worst sort. I actually studied to be a pastor, but I wasn't a genuine believer. A true Christian doesn't study about Jesus during the day but

live like the devil at night. My lifestyle simply did not match my profession of faith. I was a rotten fish masquerading as a good fish.

The Christian life is marked by a radical change from an old man to a new man; from a lover of darkness to a follower of the light. Christians are by no means perfect, but genuine believers increasingly demonstrate that

they are being transformed into the image of God's beloved Son. If you're not growing in holiness, then you, my friend, are a false convert on the AC/DC highway.

While understanding the reality of false conversions explains why so many people are fake or former converts, it does not give us the *reason* they were not soundly saved. So now that we have the hard part out of the way, let's jump into the deep end and figure out *why* you are a rotten fish.

YOU HEARD THE WRONG GOSPEL

Imagine an automobile factory that doesn't know how to make cars, or a farmer who doesn't know how to harvest crops. As ridiculous as that sounds, there are far too many churches that do not correctly teach the very basics of the Christian faith. There is a very good chance that you never heard the true gospel presented rightly; therefore, you were never truly converted.

You genuinely responded to what the person or preacher said, but it was not the right response because you were not placing your faith in the right thing. This is shockingly common.

Before we can determine if you heard a false gospel, we need to understand what the true gospel is. It is almost certain you have never heard what you are about to read.

THE TRUE GOSPEL

Here is an undeniable fact: people sin and do terrible things. If you don't believe me, just visit a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant. Children are vipers in diapers and we never seem to outgrow the ability to do bad things. Bad things like hatred, slander, racism, elitism, sexism, dishonesty, stealing, cheating, fornicating, bullying, murder, cruelty, etc.

While all of those sins are atrocious, there is an even more wicked sin that outranks them all: not worshiping, obeying, and loving the God who made us and sustains us.

This is a lame analogy, but I think you'll get the point. Imagine you rescued a dog, cleaned up his mange, spent scads of money on vet bills, brought him into your home, fed him, walked him, and even picked up his messes every day. Now imagine that dog not only disobeys your commands, but he bites your hand when you try to feed him. How would you feel about that pooch?

Now imagine how God feels. He knit you together in your mother's womb and gave you life (Psalm 139:13; Job 33:4). He has fed, clothed, and provided shelter and every good thing for you (James 1:17), yet you bite His hand. You and I haven't just made mistakes, we have committed cosmic treason.

- Instead of praising God, we use His name as if it were a four-letter filth word, or treat it uselessly, like "OMG."
- Instead of thanking God, we live as if we are responsible for keeping ourselves alive and well.

- Instead of being obedient, we overrule our consciences and do whatever we please.

If you would not tolerate a naughty dog, how much more should God not tolerate rebellious humans made in His image? God would most certainly be justified for being very, very angry with sinners. And that is precisely what the Bible says:

God is an honest judge.

He is angry with the wicked every day.

If a person does not repent,
God will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.
He will prepare his deadly weapons
and shoot his flaming arrows.

(Psalm 7:11–13)

Like I said, you have probably never heard about God's settled, justified, and righteous indignation with sinners. Most likely, you have never heard a preacher explain why a loving God should and *must* punish sinners.

God is just plain different than we are. We are outraged by atrocities like a Holocaust or mass shooting. God is too, but He is also indignant at every sin because He is just that much holier than we are. We see a few sins as being awful; God sees all sins as being damnable.

Think of it like this: when you stand in Los Angeles and stare at the sky, it looks blue. But if you board a plane at LAX and ascend above the clouds, you would suddenly see a thick layer of smog hanging over the city. You would also observe that the sky above you is much bluer than you thought when you were on the ground. What happened?

Your perspective changed because your vantage point changed. The higher up you fly, the better you are able to see. Now, can you understand why God is so angry at sin? His holy perspective is *way* higher than ours. We tend to see sins as “human nature,” or mere mistakes, but God sees sin as “terrible” (Romans 7:13). Because His nature is holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3), He sees every single sin as wicked, wicked, wicked.