



Philippians 2:1-18

“The Creed And Jesus Christ”
(2nd in a series of 3 on the Great Creeds)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18 "THE CREED AND JESUS CHRIST"

External Opposition (1:27-30) To Internal Life (Divided)

A) vv. 1-3 COMPLETE MY JOY, BE A UNITED CHURCH: BASIS(v.1) + GOAL(v.2) + APPEAL(v.3).

1 So if, therefore, All Four Reasons For Unity Are True *In Christ/ In The Spirit*
a there is any encouragement in Christ, (which there is!) Rapid Series of Clauses: Heart-felt Appeal
b if any incentive (comfort) of love, (which there is!) 4 Motivations (The Solid Grounding)
a' if any participation (*koinonia*) in the Spirit, (which there is!) Fellowship, 1:5, 27, Gal. 3:2, 1 Cor. 12:3
b' if any affection (*compassion*) and sympathy (*mercy*), (which there is!) 1:8, Double Virtue: Affection/Sympathy
Union With Christ/Spirit Cancels Factiousness
2 a **COMPLETE MY JOY** by being of the *same mind*, Make me happy! 10x in Phil., 1:7, Common Way Of Thinking/Acting
b having the *same* love, 4 Outcomes (The Task: Unity Of Mind (2x), Love, Accord)
b' being in *full* accord Lit. "united in soul"= soulmates, Unity Does Not = Uniformity
a' and of *one mind*. unanimous, 1:27, Common Purpose, Unity From Christ/Spirit & Hard Work Of The Community
v.3 Points To Problem In Community//vv.14-16

B) v.3 DO NOTHING WITH BAD MOTIVES: KILLS CHURCH. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 90-109

3 (-) Do nothing from selfish ambition(faction) or conceit(empty glory), 1:17, Double Vice: Selfishness/Conceit, Gal. 5:20
(+) but in humility count others better than yourselves. Lev. 16:29, Alien Virtue: Humility (2:8, 3:21, 4:12), Mk. 10:33-34
Paul Wants Unity In Love/Service, Not Uniform Robots

C) v.4 CARE FOR "THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS". Take Neighbor Into Account

4 Let each of you look not (only) to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. only Not In Gk.
Listen, Love, Learn, Serve

D) vv.5-11 STORY OF JESUS CHRIST: HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE.

Practical Wisdom/Mind- 10x:(1:7, 2:2[2x], 5, 3:15[2x],19,4:2,10[2x])

1) vv.5-7 Pre-Existence And Incarnation: Empty Self Indicative & Imperative (*Is/Ought*)

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 4:2, Communal/Social Reality
//Hymns: Eph. 5:19, Col. 1:15-20, 3:16; I Tim. 3:16
6 a "who, though he was in the form (the very nature) of God, Jn. 17:5, Pre-existence
b did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, An "Advantage" To Exploit
7 but emptied himself, Kenosis, Self-giving, Self-limiting God
a' taking the form (the very nature) of a servant, = Slave (Offensive: Lowest Of Low), Down
b' being born in the likeness of men. Incarnation: Assumes Full Humanity; Sin Excepted
vv.5-11 = Drama Of Salvation, Echoes 3:20-21

2) v.8 Earthly Ministry: Humble/Obedient Self Christ Acted On His Thinking

8 And being found in human form/ he humbled himself Rather Die Than Disobey,Dt. 21:23
and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Humiliation/Exaltation Theme
See Mark 10:45, High To Low Position

1') vv.9-11 Resurrection And Return: Vindicated Self God Takes Initiative: Resurrection!

9 Therefore also God has highly exalted him Resurrection/Ascension/Session = Cosmic Lord
and bestowed on him the name Humanity Welded Into God's Heart!
which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, Is. 45:23, Rev. 4:2-11, Before All
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, Humans/Demons-Angels/The Dead
11 and every tongue confess that "Jesus is Lord," to the glory of God the Father. No Exceptions!
Christ, Spirit (v.1), Father (v.11), Pliny Letters 110

C') vv.12-13 CARE FOR "YOUR OWN SALVATION", OBEY.

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, //Christ's Obedience v.8
not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, 1:27, Test Of Character
13 continue to work out your (pl.) own salvation with fear and trembling; Double Virtue: 1 Cor. 2:3, Eph. 6:5
for God is at work in(among) you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Double Goal
God's Grace Energizes/Grounds Our Efforts

B') vv.14-16 DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT BAD ATTITUDES, EYE TO THE FUTURE.

14 (Continue to) Do all things without grumbling or questioning, Ex. 16:7, Double Vice: Grumbling/Questioning
15 that you may be blameless and innocent, Double Virtue: Blameless/Innocent
children of God without blemish in the midst of a "crooked and perverse generation," 1:28,Opponents? Dt. 32:5 LXX
16 among whom you shine(appear) as lights (stars) in the world, Is. 49:6, Double Vice: Crooked/Perverse
holding fast (holding forth?) the word of life,
so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Gal. 2:2, Double: Run/Labor
1 Cor. 3:13, 4;1-5

A') vv. 17-18 REJOICE WITH ME.

17 Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, Libation Poured Over Sacrificial Animal
4:18b, Martyr's Death Or Service?
I am glad and REJOICE with you all. Double Virtue (2x): Be Glad/Rejoice
18 Likewise you also should be glad and REJOICE with me.

THE CREED AND JESUS CHRIST

“... taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

Paul’s couplet on the incarnation.

PHILIPPIANS 2 : 7

Joe Cumming is a bright guy. Cumming is a fellow of the Faith and Culture Center at Yale with a special interest in respectful witness to Muslims- among whom he lived for years. Joe once had the opportunity to meet the Lebanese Ayatollah- one of the most influential clerics in the Arab world. It was the day before the holiest day of the year for Shiites, sort of like asking for a Papal audience on Christmas Eve.

The secretary said Cumming could have five minutes, and at four minutes and fifty-five seconds he should stand to leave. As Joe prayed, he saw a banner across the road. It read in Arabic, "The victory of blood over the sword." It was an historical reference. When the enemies of Muhammad's grandson Hussein came to kill him, he might have called on God to kill them. Instead, he laid down his sword and was massacred, becoming a sign of forgiving the sins of others. When the Ayatollah asked Joe what he had to say, he asked, "Doesn't the banner mean Hussein won a greater victory by laying down his life?"

"Yes," said the sheikh, "that's what it means."

"That's what I believe about Jesus," said Joe, "He could have killed his enemies; instead, he laid down his life in love and prayed for their forgiveness. That’s the key to break the cycle of violence and revenge in the world."

The Ayatollah turned to his followers, "I totally agree with every word this Christian man of God has just said."

Joe stood to leave. "Where are you going?" said the sheikh. "There's more I want to talk about." Joe stayed two hours. At one point the Ayatollah brought up the death of two little boys on the West Bank, killed by a misfired missile as they played soccer. "What do you have to say about this as a Christian?" he asked.

"I look at the suffering of all innocent victims through the pain of Christ," said Joe. "I might wonder at times if God has abandoned us, but in the suffering of Jesus I see the sign of God's solidarity with all innocent victims of violence and suffering."

The sheikh again announced, "I agree with every word this man of God has just said."¹

¹ Edited, PreachingToday search under Philippians 2:1-18.

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When we- in humble boldness and with the Spirit’s help- simply speak the truths of the faith, there is *the ring of truth* about them. God provides the connecting points and the convincing power, not us. Had Cumming not been made alert through prayer, he would have missed the banner that gave the key to unlock the Muslim cleric’s curiosity, “The victory of blood over the sword.” A slogan. How utterly creative is the Holy Spirit, how perfect his timing. Five minutes became two hours because of the deep truth that Jesus absorbed suffering rather than inflict it. In him all the suffering of the world have One with whom to identify, One who understands. What God did after Joe’s departure we do not know.

Christian witness is about preparation- and Joe was prepared, but more than that it’s about availability and trust. Am I his follower in his movement? Do I know the core truths: who Jesus is and what he’s done,² what it means and why it matters? And here the Apostles’ Creed is a great short outline under which to organize your thoughts. It begins with one God who as Father has the power to create all that is; it ends with forgiveness and the resurrection of the dead as the doorway into a world made new and whole. It’s the whole story from first beginning to a new beginning. We all live in the common pain of sin-filled history, but a new world is already on the way, and of it we have a sneak preview in the man from Nazareth. In him we get a taste of the kingdom now and the fullness later. In the Creed we move from creation to the final kingdom in three sections, each of which introduces the next person of the one and holy Trinity whose names differ but whose work is one. The Creed is a masterpiece of pithy summary. Every word matters, it’s all lean, no fat and fillers.

The longer and more philosophically sophisticated Nicene Creed is not as familiar to most Methodists,³ though it is the only statement ever approved by a Council of both the Eastern and the Western churches and so stands as the most authoritative summary of the topics and intellectual commitments of classic Christian faith.⁴ It reminds us that to say

² To divide each article of the Creed into 1) person and 2) work is the normal pattern and builds on the insight that what a person does reveals who they are, i.e. actions reveal essence. In Article II concerning God the Son, the person is announced in a name- Jesus, followed by three titles: *Messiah* (relation to Israel), *the Father’s unique Son* (internal relation to the Father), and *our Lord* (relation to the confessing church). His work is then outlined in five great moments of descent and ascent: 1) incarnation, 2) suffering and cross, 3) descent to the death, 4) the cluster of resurrection, ascension, and session, and finally 5) return at the end of the age, judgment, new, everlasting kingdom.

³ *U.M. Hymnal*, No. 880, which includes the Western *filioque*, “and the Son.”

⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Confess And Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003) is a thoughtful treatment of the Nicene Creed. For an essay on each topic, see Christopher Seitz, *Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mi.:

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Jesus is Lord, and later that the Holy Spirit is *Lord*, means the one divine nature is common to the three persons. Not one God and three Gods; that’s a contradiction. Not one nature and three natures; that’s a contradiction. But one divine nature- one God- in three persons, is not a contradiction though it is a divine mystery. When you deal with Jesus you are dealing with God the Son, not some junior deity, not just some errand boy, not some angel on assignment, but with all the God that can be poured into a human frame and walk around at ground level. In Jesus we meet the Father and are given new life in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is our doorway back into the fellowship of the Holy Trinity, that for which we were first designed. It was *For us and our salvation* and *For our sake* that God came into our midst and make the great descent all they way down to the realm of the dead, as low as you can go, and from there began the great ascent that overcame all our formidable enemies: sin and its stupidities, death in all its forms, and the devil in all his disguises. We are a religion of salvation, and we need it! We need a Great Physician to heal us, a Great Warrior to rescue us, and a Great Friend and Teacer to lead us into a new life. His name is Jesus, and- if the church is right- he is the human face of the only God there is.

It became clear early on in our history that a short, pithy summary of the faith was needed for several reasons, one of which was Christian witness to keep believers on script. Every believer has a testimony- what Christ has done for me, and they are as diverse as the people who tell them. I love testimonies. I relish the variety of God’s work and the often humorous work of the Holy Spirit. But alongside *my little story* there needs to be a common telling of *the bigger story* in which *my story* can find a larger home and make better sense. So into the mold of the God’s personal name- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit- the content of the creed is poured with the longest and central article dedicated to Jesus.

Do I have a simple story to tell about what he’s done for me? Am I willing- when probed- to be honest about my struggles, failings and unresolved questions. Can I say, “I don’t know,” and go find out? Am I open to the insights and links of the Holy Spirit? Do I value people? Can I listen long enough to their stories for the Spirit to make the necessary connections? It’s a discipline; it’s an art form; it’s our job; and you rarely know when an opportunity will come your way. But do I also know *the larger story* that’s outlined in the Creeds? Can I tell someone where it all came from and where it’s all headed and how they can get on board the gospel train with a ticket marked *Paid In Full By Mr. Jesus*.

Think about it. Ours is a God willing to come down and get near all kinds of people, because this is the God who showed up in Jesus, a God who assumes not the disguise but the

Brazos, 2001); the *Ancient Christian Doctrine* series in five volumes, edited by Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009-2010), recovers the range of orthodox patristic teaching, making it available for a fresh reappropriation.

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reality of human flesh and inserts himself in the lowliest of places: a virgin’s womb, a sheep’s feeding trough, suckling a young woman’s breast, having his dirty diapers changed, growing up in a hick village in an occupied country, and finally laying down his life as soldiers mock and the nails are driven through holy flesh as an enacted political cartoon about the futility of bucking the status quo in the name of another kingdom.

Jesus is God the Son come down, God become weak, God become accessible, God with a smile and tears, God embracing death, God come near in the low and hidden places, even the desolate and horrible places. This is our amazing God, and it is the job of the church to announce and enact and communicate this vision of God so that the Holy Spirit has good raw materials to work with in order to make a case for Christ to the next person who crosses our path. The prosperity gospel, the feel-good gospel, the easy-living gospel, the American-first gospel, the give-the-kids-a-little-morality-gospel, and the if-only-you-get-the-techniques-right gospel are all poor raw materials, so beware of substitutes. They don’t work.

In Paul’s letter to a church in the northern Greek city of Phillipi we observe an early stage of the creed-forming process. Now whether Paul himself formulated the central paragraph on the person and work of Jesus, or whether he received it from others and passed it on, is disputed.⁵ What is clear is that in the midst of an appeal for unity and humble encouragement in a local church, he set at the center the story of the Lord himself who humbly came down from equal glory with God into our troubled world. And how far did he go? *Even down to death on an old, rugged cross, the symbol of suffering and shame.* And if Jesus did this and was so richly restored that his name is now *above ever name*, don’t you think we ought to humble ourselves and work for unity in the church here at Main Street so we don’t look as divided and fractious as the world around us? There’s good stuff at the start and finish about how we are to think and behave, but the jewel is at the center in verses 5 through 11. It’s an early Christian hymn or creed about Jesus- *who* he is, *where* he’s come from, *what* he came to do, *where* he is now is, and *why* it matters.

The bibliography of books and articles written on these seven verses alone would be several hundred pages, so extensive is the research. And why so much interest? Because here we have Paul in the 50's of the first century- only twenty five or so years after the events themselves- either composing or passing on an elegantly formed summary of the person and work of Jesus Christ. He assumes the church will recognize it as part of his teaching when he founded the church. And the intellectual claims of this poem are utterly astounding.

⁵ The literature on Philippians 2:5-11 is voluminous. On the options, see Peter O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1991); Bonnie Thurston and Judith Ryan, *Philippians & Philemon* (Collegeville, Mn.: Liturgical Press, 2005); Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker, 2005).

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Go back with me in your imagination. Way back. There was One who pre-existed all creation, who was there before time and space exploded from the singularity of the Big Bang. Way back when there was only God, no before-or-after, no here-or-there, not empty space but nothing at all if you can imagine that, and there God was. So rich was the communion of love within the divine lie, there was nothing to fear, nothing to have to hold on to or grasp in order to keep, so when the world tumbled through pride and foolishness and fell into the grip of rebellion and bondage and death, the Son let go and emptied himself of all the privileges of deity in a great descent as he was sent from the Father and enabled by the Spirit to be conceived and finally born of Mary *in the likeness of men*. This is first sweeping move Paul announces in verses 6 and 7:

“... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, *being born in the likeness of men.*”

Christmas is a wrinkly red, cheesy newborn male child, soon to be circumcised and named Jesus. God has inserted himself into human history in this child. Incarnation is God assuming human flesh and laying aside the privileges of deity without ceasing to be divine. Emmanuel- God at our level. To explain Jesus requires God language. He did not come to us *from us*; he came *to us* from outside us and above us - from God. He's not just a good Jewish kid who did well because he had a good mom named Mary. No, though now hidden in flesh, this one shares the form and nature of God, or else he is no good to us.

But his new human status- low as it was- was not yet low enough. It was followed by three decades of Nazareth obscurity, two to three years of public ministry, then a sudden downward move. First he surrendered the privileges of deity and emptied himself into humanity; he now voluntarily surrenders his life itself to the forces of religion and government that stand opposed to his new way. Verse 8 is the second move down, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself *even further* and become obedient unto death, *even death on a cross,*” the most shameful and torturous death ever devised, utterly humiliating. Down from deity, now down from life to where the dead reside- as low and you can go. So wherever you may wander, Jesus has already been there.

Now because of who he is, Jesus' death cannot be the end, else all the forces of evil and meanness in this world have won so that God is not God- at least not here on planet earth which is where the problems are; things are fine in heaven. But there is a silent period from Friday about 3:00pm to sunrise two days later. God does not have to rush to fix things too quickly. Give time for the cross in all its finality to sink in before a hidden door is kicked open. There Jesus lies in darkness, in state in a borrowed tomb as a temporary renter. He is dead, and his disciples are intellectually bewildered and spiritually nauseous from the vertigo of it all. Life is spinning. What went wrong? What did we miss? Nothing; this was

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the divine purpose, that the humanity of God the Son be utterly humiliated and discounted in death to demonstrate just what’s wrong with the world as a whole. This is how we act when God shows up in person; we dismiss and then kill him; we need saving.

Then something happened. No one saw the event, though soon enough there were the after-effects of the empty tomb and the multiple re-appearances, which for the Jewish women and men who saw him had only one explanation: Jesus has been raised and entered the kingdom.⁶ Resurrection is more than resuscitation back to this life; resurrection means Jesus is now alive with the life of God in a new, indestructible body. Part of creation, his body and his soul which together comprise his whole person, has inherited the kingdom and come back to reveal the only prototype of a new kind of human body, a resurrected one. He has been carried back to where he was before and from which he now appears. Resurrection appearances mean he lets his friends- and at least two skeptics, Paul and brother James- in on his secret and promises to continue the work through them. His *name*- a cipher for who he is and what he had done- is now the standard; Jesus is the one before whom all will stand. And- whether willingly or unwillingly- all without exception will acknowledge who he is; our privilege as disciples is to do it ahead of time and voluntarily. He is the One before whom we get on our knees.

Down from deity into humanity: the first move. Down from human life into human death: the second move. And now, in a third great sweep, Jesus is more than restored in a great upward move. He carries our humanity into the heart of God. Verses 9 through 11:

“Therefore also God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ to the glory of God the Father.”

Christmas: he came down. Good Friday: he went as low as you can go in death and the grave. Easter: he was fully and gloriously restored, giving birth to his church and having apostles like Paul compose creeds and hymns to make the big stuff memorable.

In his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey shares an episode from his youth when the concept of “the Word becoming flesh” dawned on him with profound meaning:

“I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and ammonia content. I

⁶ See my forthcoming *Resurrection* (Bristol, 2013) for a fuller treatment.

pumped in vitamins, antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light. You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one emotion only: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern. To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions I began to see would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and 'speak' to them in a language they could understand.”⁷

This is it; this is where it starts. A needy world, a virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit, a true historical incarnation, a live birth, the life of Jesus as God’s story inscribed in flesh, his death and resurrection, a church limping through time with good news for all who respond.

Billions of people were scattered across the great plain before God's throne. Some near the front were belligerent, “How can God judge us?”

A brunette pulled back her sleeve to reveal a tattoo from a concentration camp. "What does God know about suffering? We endured terror, beatings, torture, death!"

In another group a black man lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly robe burn. "Lynched for no crime but being black! We have suffocated in slave ships, been wrenched from love ones, toiled till death alone gave release." Far out on the plains were hundreds of such groups.

Each complained about evil and suffering in the world. How lucky God was to live in heaven with no weeping, fear, hunger, or hatred. Indeed, what did God know about what people had to endure? "After all," one quipped, "God leads a pretty sheltered life."

So each group sent out a leader. There was a Jew, a black, an untouchable from India, one from Hiroshima, one from a Russian gulag. In the center of the plain they consulted. It was simple. Before God would be qualified to be their judge there would be a test: God must endure what they endured. God must be sentenced to live on the earth as one of them.

Because of God's power, conditions were proposed. He could not use divine powers to aid himself. Let him be born Jew and the legitimacy of his birth doubted. That would put him at the bottom of the human heap. Let him champion a cause so just, but so radical, that it brings down upon him the hate, condemnation, and efforts of the religious establishment to eliminate him. Let him try to describe what no man has ever seen, tasted, heard, or

⁷ Edited, PreachingToday.com search under *Incarnation*.

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smelled; let him try to communicate God to men and women. Let him be betrayed by his dearest friends. Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him see what it is to be terribly alone and completely abandoned. Let him then be tortured and die between common thieves.

As each leader announced their portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval rolled through the throngs. But when the last had finished, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved. Jesus now stood before them, and they suddenly knew God had already served the sentence they proposed.⁸ He came down into flesh, down into weakness and pain, laid down on a cross and gave up the ghost.

God knows, not just theoretically, but from experience in Jesus what it's like to be a weak, dying, hoping human being. Nothing that is human, save sin alone, is foreign to him. He understands. He knows your story. He is merciful to all who lay their lives before him for healing, for forgiveness, and to have the wheat sifted from the chaff in their inmost being. Our God does not lead a sheltered life. We worship the God of incarnation, the bold and loving One who entered this world as it is that we might be restored as God's children. Right now, in heaven, is a human body transformed by resurrection. It is the body of Jesus, and it is the template and first example of what all who trust him shall one day inherit. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, sums up the meaning of this great act of God:

"When Jesus Christ came down from glory, it was that He might bring us to glory; and that He might be sure not to fail, He clothed Himself with our nature. In that He has taken into union with Himself our nature, what does it signify but that He intends to take into union with himself our persons."⁹

What a great salvation is ours! Relish it. Drink deeply from it. Get some of the goody and share it. Our world needs to know the God who shows his face to us in Jesus Christ. Talking about him is our job!

Will you be his apprentice and follower? Will you let him place you where he will in order that his story be told? He wants you, and wants to use you. I know no other way to explain my exceedingly odd, adventuresome life. His fingerprints are all over me. To find your own version of the Jesus-shaped life is the meaning of life. That's all I have to say. Anything more must come from him.

Phil Thrailkill, Main Street UMC, November 18, 2012

⁸ Hewett, *Illustrations*, 302.

⁹ <http://acacia.pair.com/Acacia.John.Bunyan/Sermons.Allegories/Doctrine.Law.Grace/Part.Two.12.html>.
