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## **Jesus Didn't Say That!**

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I am reminded of an upstart church in West Africa. It was called the 'never die' Church. The leader read John 11:25-26, "...everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." He applied the 'me' to himself. He founded a church and taught that those that believed in him as their pastor would never die. As congregants died, death was blamed on lack of faith. Of course the pastor eventually died. The church faded away, which tends to be the consequence when one applies the words of Scripture using one's own perspective.

There are many perspectives on the Bible and Christianity. I sometimes wonder where they come from. I recently read an article on another perspective. The author noted that nowhere in the Bible did Jesus' words address a particular lifestyle behavior. He concluded that since Jesus himself never issued a statement on the subject, accepting such behavior was the most appropriate expression of Christian love. In his arguments, the author effectively expanded Christian behavior to 'anything goes' since Christ's love covers all behaviors. If we take the words of Scripture and applies them to fit our own perspective, then Scripture becomes what we wish.

But making Scripture fit for our own benefit is not the message that God gives us through the words in the Bible. The Bible is not a mere book of laws governing behavior. If so, then Christians would just strive to be what God says we should be and interpret from the Bible what that behavior should look like. This is not the case. Rather the Bible as God's Word fills us in about our relationship with God. We find we fall short – we miss the mark of what God would desire us to be. The behaviors which exhibit our shortcoming become apparent.

But God's Word doesn't leave us hanging in that limbo. We are told that Jesus as God's Son was sent, not to pronounce our behaviors as all okay, but to fulfill the law that our relationship with God might be restored. Paul expresses it clearly for us in Romans, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (8:3-5)."

We are given freedom through Jesus. Our behaviors are condemned. Freedom in Christ doesn't proclaim all behaviors okay, it just means that we now live not for our behaviors but rather for Christ through the Spirit. In gratefulness for what God has done for us, we live out our lives through behavior which witnesses to Christ – not behavior that reflects our own preference and perspective on our relationship with God.

What a joy to know Jesus. We don't live through our own perspectives or those of others. We have a better one – God's Word in the Bible.