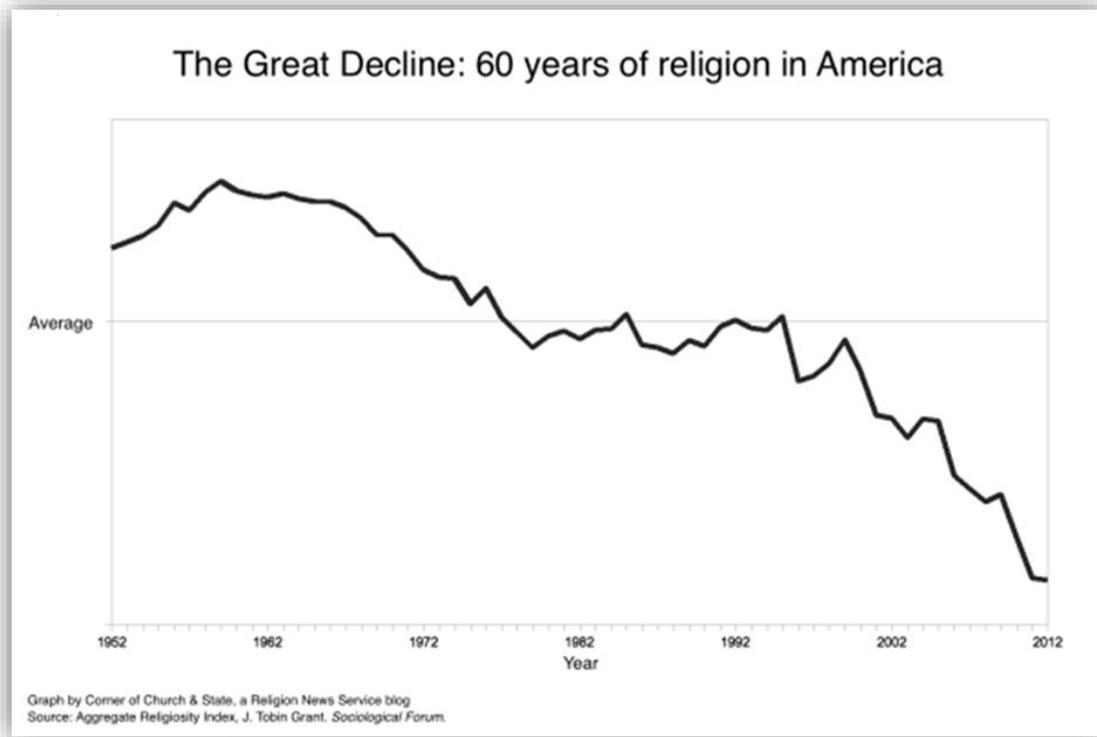


This Laptop is coming a day earlier than usual because, assuming my car is fixed in the morning, I'm going over to Winchester for a few days . . . .

What comes to mind when you see this graph?



This graph actually makes me think about a box of juice I got at the grocery. The label says “100% Sparkling Fruit Juice,” and it’s labeled as “cranberry,” but examination of the ingredients reveals that cranberry juice is fourth and last on the list, after “carbonated water,” “apple juice concentrate,” and “white grape juice concentrate,” and right before “natural flavors.” The enticing pictures and clever labeling are decoys to sell a diluted, cranberry *flavored* product, disguised to look like something it isn’t.



Erin Bunting, reflecting on such a discovery, wondered, “What if I had an ingredients label printed on me? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would He be? . . .

“My packaging may be convincing. I may look and sound like the real thing. But what if someone came to me looking for Jesus beneath my ‘Christian’ label and found something else instead . . . something ‘Jesus-flavored’ but not ‘Jesus-filled?’”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Erin Bunting, “Jesus Flavored, or Jesus Filled?” [www.Kyria.com](http://www.Kyria.com) (10.7.09).

When I look at this graph of American religion since World War II, I see evidence of millions of people—and millions of them Baptist—who may be a little bit “Jesus-flavored,” but who certainly are not “Jesus-filled.” Hold that thought for a moment.

I’ve always enjoyed flying. I think what I like best is feeling the surging power of the huge engines as they propel us from one world to another—either accelerating into the sky or decelerating back to solid ground—and wondering whether or not, in this particular instance, the engines will be able to accomplish this successfully. And several years ago I learned something about accelerating aircraft that I hadn’t known before.

There’s a point in the acceleration down the runway at which the Captain says to the First Officer, “V1,” for “Velocity 1.” This velocity, based on variables such as barometric pressure, air temperature, wind speed and direction, and the weight of the aircraft, is the point at which there is no longer enough runway in front of the aircraft to stop it, and the plane is now committed to lift off. There is no aborting the takeoff now. After V1, there is no pulling back on the throttle. V1 is the point of no return.



V1 is not the only such marker in takeoff, though. After V1, the aircraft can no longer be stopped, but it is not yet going fast enough to generate sufficient lift to take off. That takeoff speed is “V2,” after which the plane begins to leave the ground (and there are several other “V speeds”).<sup>2</sup> On August 27, 2006, Comair flight 5191 crashed and burned in Lexington, Kentucky (an airport out of which I’ve flown a number of times) because the mistaken runway from which it was trying to take off had sufficient length for it to reach V1, but insufficient length to reach V2.

The V1-but-not-V2 situation is one in which many churches find themselves. The language we usually use for this is “stagnant” or “in decline,” and some researchers estimate that as many as eighty percent of North American churches are routinely in that situation.<sup>3</sup>



Nobody wants to be in a stagnant or declining church, but a recent national research project concluded that “most churches will not make the adjustments and changes necessary to move from stagnation and decline to revitalization and growth.”<sup>4</sup> “Too many churches,” those authors noted, “choose their past over their future, their heritage over their growth, and their traditions over their children.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V\\_speeds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V_speeds); <http://aviationglossary.com/aircraft-terms-definition/v-speeds/>

<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around, And Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), p. 19. An average of ten churches close their doors forever in this country every day.

<sup>4</sup> Stetzer, p. 18.

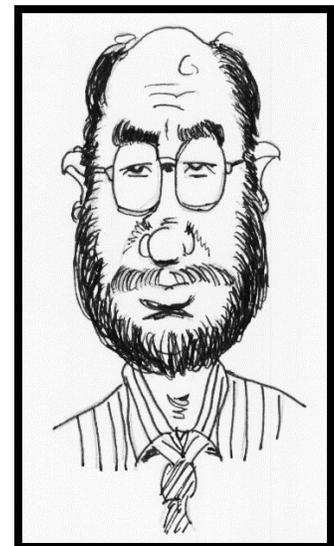
<sup>5</sup> Stetzer, p. 213.

As we consider our congregational Strategic Plan this weekend, what would you say is the “velocity” of your spiritual life these days? Have you reached V1, that point of commitment to Jesus from which there is no turning back? Have you reached V2, that point of obedience and deeper commitment that makes you ready to follow Him, *no matter what*?

Consider this: It takes *just one additional degree* — from 211° to 212° — for water to be transformed into the usable energy of steam. What would it take for you to “add one degree” to the level of your commitment to Christ in this place? *Will you do it?*



Your “reward” for having read this far is this drawing one of my students made during my professor days long ago. ☺



## ***The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know***

**O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

### **Week twenty-two: TRUE CONFESSION**

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

Thirty times in the five short chapters of 1 John, the Beloved Apostle used the word *know* in order to drive home the reality that we can have assurance of the salvation freely offered to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. The word translated *forgive* in our English versions finds its origin in a Greek word that means “to send away.” The same word is used when describing the scapegoat that was sent away by the high priest into the wilderness, symbolically taking with it the sins of the people of Israel.

It is also the word used in detailing how the fever left a certain person after the touch of Jesus. And it is God’s desire to send away our sins from us as well. He has provided a way, and this is the issue at hand in 1 John 1:9. Here we discover how to get our sins sent away so that, as the psalmist said, they may be separated from us “as far as the east is from the west” and remembered no more (Psalm 103:12).

#### **FORGIVENESS IS CONDITIONAL: “*If we confess our sins*”**

The forgiveness talked about in 1 John 1:9 all hinges upon the “Big If”: “if we confess our sins.” Thus, we are immediately confronted with the reality that the forgiveness of our sins is conditional upon the confession of our sins.

Confession literally means that “we say the same as God” about our sin. We agree with Him regarding it. Sin is not some little vice that we can laugh off. It is not something we can excuse by saying everyone is doing it. Sin is so serious that it necessitated the cross. Confession is our way of saying, “I agree with You, God. I have sinned.”

#### **FORGIVENESS IS CONFESSIONAL: “*confess*”**

Confession agrees with God about our sin. What we may camouflage as concern, God calls the sin of worry. What we may refer to as righteous indignation, God, who knows our hearts, calls it the sin of anger. What we may try to say is just an admiring glance, God calls the sin of lust in our heart. Confession gets open and honest with God, and there is no forgiveness without it.

#### **FORGIVENESS IS CONTINUAL: “*If we confess our sins*”**

Note carefully it is our *sins* that are at issue here and not our *sin nature*. God deals with our sin in 1 John 1:7 saying, “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” Sin is singular here because the verse refers to our sin nature that Christ dealt with on the cross. There are important distinctions between the root (sin) and the fruit (sins). First John 1:9 deals with our sins—which we are to continually confess when we are made aware of them through conviction in our hearts.

Our *sin* was dealt with on Calvary. When we were converted to Christ, we did not have to confess all our *sins*. Who of us could remember through all the years a fraction of them? It is our sin that is dealt with in our relationship with God, and that relationship cannot be broken. It is our “sins” that come into play regarding our ongoing fellowship with Him.

God dealt with our *sin* once and for all on the cross. He now deals with our *sins* by cleansing us in response to our continual confession. As God brings issues to your mind during times of devotion and meditation, agree with Him and live in the solid promise that is yours in 1 John 1:9: “*He is faithful and just to forgive!*”