



# JACOB'S PORCH RULE

A Vocabulary for the People of Jacob's Porch

## WHAT IS A RULE?

A rule is a guide on how a particular group lives in community. There is a Franciscan rule for those in that order, a Dominican rule, etc. A rule is for the people of that community, not for everyone. It is a way a particular people choose to live together.

This document is intended to be a guide for the people of Jacob's Porch as a vocabulary for the members of this specific community. This is not a document about how to be a Christian nor is it intended to be the perfect way of following Jesus. This is a document to assist in teaching the present members of a particular body of Christ how it is we shape our community, what the core values of this particular body may be, and an explanation of our particular expression of the Christian conversation to the Ohio State University campus.

This document is not the sum of our theology. While this is not necessarily a brief document, it cannot fully capture every nuance of this community nor the theology of her leaders. It is appreciated if this document is not be taken as a Summa Theologia of Jacob's Porch.

While we are a place of flexibility in wrestling with God and allowing a place for people to come from many places and given grace to wrestle with God, we remain a credal church, the leaders adhering to the doctrine of faith as confessed in the Apostle's Creed. This creed illustrates the central tenets on which the leadership clings and teaches.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus, God's only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary

He suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified died and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting.

AMEN.

## WHAT IS IN A NAME?

**WHY JACOB:** Genesis 32: 22-32. Jacob was a liar and a thief. He was a trickster, a swindler. His name means “The Heel” because he held his brother Esau’s heel in birth but also “heeled” him in life, stealing his birthright by tricking his father. He claimed to be Esau to his father. He has fled from Esau’s wrath and now returns to confront his past. In this passage, a man approaches Jacob but unlike Abraham (see Genesis 18:3), this man doesn’t bless him immediately but instead wrestles with him (24). It is a fierce battle with no seeming winner or loser. At the conclusion, the man asks Jacob his name (27). This allusion to the asking of his name formerly recalls Jacob’s sin. It recalls his identity crisis. This time Jacob answers truthfully and offers his real name.

The “man” blesses him by changing his name from Jacob to ISRAEL from “yassar,” to wrestle and “El”, God. His new name is yassar-el, God wrestler. Israel is the name the nation would adopt as their own. They would be known as God-wrestlers. They are defined by the struggle of this relationship rather than the ease. For instance, Jacob leaves the fight with a limp that would mark him for the rest of his days. He leaves blessed *and* limping. This defines the encounter of faith in God, blessed and dangerous.

At Jacob’s Porch, we strive to be a place that is neither simple nor delicate. We don’t see life in relationship with God as uncomplicated. When we encounter God, we will be blessed by the encounter but this does not mean it is easy. When we encounter God, we can be sure we will be blessed but we may also leave limping.

By sharing this truth (small “t” intended), we feel we offer a realistic view of faith. We intend to be a place that engages the wrestling match, that jumps on for the journey. We desire to be a place that does not offer the simple solution and three-step answer but rather the beautiful complication of being in Christ.

**PORCH:** Around the temple in Israel were a set of porticos, or porches. These porches are where Jesus taught, where people gathered to listen to rabbis, where people mingled from various backgrounds, where the prophets spoke out, and where fights often erupted. We are a place just like this. A place for us to mingle, listen, teach, know, fight, make up, and live together.

In our culture a porch is a temporary place. You don’t dwell on the porch but in the house. It hangs on the edge of the house, neither fully inside nor outside. It is a place people stop, talk, share, and move on. It is a place that faces out, not in. We are a place for people to gather for awhile and then travel back into the normal of life. It is temporary but comfortable. It’s inviting, yet asks people to go when the time is up. It is a place for easy conversation but also a place for asking the deeper questions of life and faith beyond the usual. By saying we are a porch, we are saying we are these things. We are a place where life happens, in a temporary place, where life plays itself out in all its confusion and reality as well as beauty. This is the community we strive to be at Jacob’s Porch. Welcome.

## **RULE 1: THE FOUR CHAPTERS: The Gospel in a Nutshell**

- **CHAPTER 1: CREATION.** We were created. Whether in a day or 4 billion years we believe there is a design at work that made us to be, something that defied all chaos and brought beautiful order therein. We believe there is a first mover, an architect, a creator and shaper who “speaks” and the universe obeys. We call this one God. God in God’s total essence is love. God’s love is a selfless love, a love in it’s highest form, a self-giving, never self-seeking love. We were given the “imprint” of God in our creation. This imprint is rooted in God’s essence, love. We are called to be in relationships (love), to create (love), to share (love). These are not simply survival instincts but rather signs that point back to our creator. In it’s most basic form, we are made by love to love. This is good. God’s will is one that creates: yes, he rests on the 7th day but on the 8th God “awakens” to create again. God is always in the act of creation. There is nothing wrong with the world, there is something wrong with us. Which brings us to...
  
- **CHAPTER 2: FALL.** Despite how good the world is, we see that we are capable of terrible wrongs. There is something in us that is broken and it is out of our control. The “impression” of God in us, the love we were made for, we turn in on itself. We take love which is by definition self-giving not self-seeking we twist into being self-seeking self-serving. We abuse our capacity to love and instead use it for ourselves in a way that destructs the deferential nature of true love. We call this sin. This is not something we learn but rather we are broken from the start. Also, it is more than our actions- it is our thoughts as well. For this reason our will is not free. We are constantly bent toward making love about us rather than the other. This is sin. We may not act upon it and in this our will may wrest control of our actions from our very thoughts but sin is not defined simply by our acts but our thoughts as well. For this reason we do not have free will but find our will is in bondage to sin and cannot free itself. This fall is something we cannot save ourselves from. We are stuck. We need to be saved.
  
- **CHAPTER 3: REDEMPTION.** We were made for love, chiefly to love in the way of the creator, to love God and others as ourself. But we make all love about serving our needs. This has fractured that initial relationship with the “impression” created in us by our maker. We have failed what we were made to do and we cannot fix this ourselves. We need another. The only one able to resurrect the initial intention of love is the initial lover, God. To move us back to our essence to love requires the first mover to move once again. God does this in a most extraordinary way. God comes to fix it. He does this by coming before us as Jesus. Jesus does what we cannot do loves without reward, loves as we are intended to love. As a sign of his (God’s) own love, he lays his own life down for the world. He becomes the physical embodiment of God’s nature, self-giving love. In Jesus, chiefly in the cross then the resurrection, God makes straight what we have twisted. On the 8th day, God again enters creation with an act of re-creation, creates a new reality. Creates a new way to restore creation to God. God sends a model of the truest love in Jesus. This love then invites us to love the same way. This we call...

- CHAPTER 4: RESTORATION. This act in Christ starts a story that continues to this day. We are invited to love as God has loved in Jesus. We are invited to love the stranger, the unlovable, the widow, the powerless, the oppressed and even the rich and the influential. God teaches us to love without reward. This act is an invitation to join back in the initial creation event, to be invited into the re-creation of the world as it was intended. We are invited to join in God's continual activity of creation and God's joy in restoring broken things into wholeness, lost things into being found, slaves into free, exiles into homecomings, and crosses into tombs. We are invited to do this not out of a debt to God but rather out of thanks for the redeeming gift of Jesus. All our activities are tied into this chapter, not out of any of the others lest it become works-righteousness. We worship as act of restoration. We serve as an act of restoration. We pray as a sign of restoration. We study to understand our place in restoration. We work in our call as an invitation into the deep need to create as an act of restoration.

## RULE 2: UNKNOWING THE REVEALED GOD

- **WE WANT TO BE LIKE GOD TO CONTROL GOD:** It was the first sin, Genesis 3:5. We want to be like God. We wish to know good from evil, to understand all mysteries, to fathom all complex riddles. In the age of reason, we were fed the idea that we can answer all mysteries if we only ask the right questions. But with every question answered in modernity, we discover new questions. We cannot know the universe and can barely fathom the infinite. How then can we claim to know good from evil when we clearly continue in our ways? How can we claim to know God who is beyond language, words, understanding, and comprehension? If knowledge is control, it is hubris to believe we can know God. God is always beyond our control.
- **GOD IS KNOWN THROUGH REVELATION, NOT UNDERSTANDING.** But does this mean God is completely unknown? In short, no. God has been revealed throughout history, over and over in a holy intersection with us, his creation. Indeed, we have been created in his image, male and female. We are reflections of the very creator along with all of creation. In this God is revealed. But there is a difference between revelation and understanding. Something can be revealed without our understanding. It is like a 10th century peasant seeing the Space Shuttle. The shuttle is revealed and the peasant may understand the function and workings of the shuttle through observation but will not know the physics and function of the shuttle or materials. The vocabulary simply does not exist for the peasant. The peasant does not know what a jet is or carbon tiles or electronics or satellites or suborbital trajectories. Yet this does not negate the fact that the shuttle exists, it is just that shuttle is revealed, not necessarily understood. God is like this: we have seen God at work and know what God is up to through God's actions, but this does not mean we fully understand the fullness of God. We cannot contain God in language or our capacity to comprehend. We just know God is, not all that God is.
- **GOD IS A METAPHOR.** I do not mean this literally of course. I mean to say our words are limited. God is always outside of a vocabulary you can create for God. Therefore since we don't have a vocabulary for God, words that can fully encompass who God is, we can only understand God through metaphor. God is "like" a shepherd; this does not mean God is literally a shepherd. God is "like" a king but a king is so much smaller than God. Does the word "almighty" capture God? Is even that word enough? Even this powerful word falls short of the breadth and depth of God's power. Any and all words we would use to describe God will fall short. And since we use metaphor to know God, we must contend with the cultural basis and formulation of our vocabulary. We must acknowledge that metaphor can point to a greater truth rather than a simple analogy. For example, when we consider how God desires to gather us close, we can observe the hen gathering chicks under her wing and see this as an illustration. We use this illustration to understand God's intention. God is not a hen of course and probably God's desire to gather us is much greater than a chicken. The metaphor gives us a cultural touch point to see the greater truth, something from our experience to illustrate God. But even this metaphor will fall short of the fullness of God. It points to God without claiming to describe the perfect nature of God. Again, we can only say what God is like, in this case a hen, not who God is.

- **WE MUST SURRENDER TO THAT WHICH WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND:** Therefore we must understand faith as less about knowing God and more about trusting the God that is revealed. Faith is not the working out of who God is and committing this to knowledge, it is rather about working out our relationship to the one who is far above our understanding. Faith is not about knowing God, it is about unknowing and then trusting in the revelation, that God is even when we do not understand. We trust that God is at work, even when we cannot see or know how and why God is working in a particular way. As Anne Lamott writes, “The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty.” (Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith) Faith is not by knowing saying it is true but rather not knowing and believing it to be true by what has been revealed. We humbly walk in the deep mystery of the God not trusting in our definition of God and our words or even our metaphors but rather trusting that we are defined by God, that we become the direct objects of God’s action. This is not to discourage study and theology and pondering the mystery, it is to discourage certainty of our study to lead to a full explanation or understanding of God. Faith is hope in that which we do not see or understand but still claiming it to be true. This I believe is the most true thing there is to know about God for through it we come to the altar of grace confessing, “I believe, now help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)

### RULE 3: FAITH IS WHOLE IN COMMUNITY

- **PERSONAL FAITH IS IMPORTANT, BUT NOT EVERYTHING:** It was a beautiful shift in the institutional church when it remembered that it was not just an institution but a collective of people, individuals whose faith was important to tend and nurture. We are each individually blessed by a gift of faith, even if there is a varying degree of this gift. How we individually act out faith and life is holy and good. However the shift toward individuality we find in our current generation is being misused as it necessitates that salvation is found in Jesus as a “personal Lord and savior”, an individual’s faith as primary in this relationship. This has misled a generation to believe that faith is only a personal relationship with Jesus. Therefore we measure our faith individually, we enact this faith individually, and see faith only has it impacts our individual lives. When we use the word “relevant”, we intimate that it is relevant to us individually, that a message is good only if it means something to us as personally. We want our messages to be about our personal faith. We want songs to be sung that are our personal favorite. Communities are built to serve the individual. This only continues to feed the narcissistic nature of our current generation who believes that the earth and all stars are set to revolve around them, that they as individuals are called to change the world, and that individually they are the foment of God’s kingdom. To be sure, God knows and loves us each personally and intimately, but there is no individual who is or ever will be the fullest expression of life and faith except for Jesus. That is why we need the church, the Christian community.
- **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY COMPLETES WHAT OUR FAITH CANNOT DO ON ITS OWN:** What we cannot do on our own the Christian community does for us. We find our fullness not in our individual faith but in the community’s capacity to act on behalf of one another. A church’s role is not to gather individuals into a common expression of faith but to complete in the whole what cannot be done by the individual. Consider Luke 5:17-20. The man is forgiven/healed but not because of his faith, but Jesus “seeing their faith” (my emphasis added) said to the man, your sins are forgiven. The faith of the friends’ is the active contribution to Jesus’ pronouncement. In community, we are given the gift of carrying the paralyzed, for believing on another’s behalf when his or her faith is failing. We delight in the gift of those who can sing on our behalf when we cannot or who can pray when we feel empty, or who praise in hope for us when we are in despair.
- **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CORRECTS:** It is community we go to for correction. It is through community we read scriptures together, ponder and pray together, and check ourselves lest God look too much like us. If left to the individual to define scriptures by how they feel and their knowledge, this will almost certainly lead to incorrect thinking. Community plays a role in our understanding by being a filter to the individual, a place to be led into right-praise (ortho-doxo). This correction and community includes not only the present community but the generations of Jesus followers who precede the present community. When we come together we gather the generations of the faithful who have gone before, the current generation, and mysteriously the future generations. This is called the teaching magisterium of the Church. It is the whole

church that corrects. We learn not just by reading by ourselves individually but by listening to what others have written, to what our neighbor has observed, and what we ourselves bring to the conversation. For instance, if you read scripture and believe that we should murder all fornicators, it would be foolish to go out and do so. It is your job to go to your community, those present and past, and ask their wisdom. If you are wrong, you will hear so. It will be plain. Perhaps there may be a few who would agree on this course, but if the other 99% disagree, we should probably consider our thinking as needing correction. Community is not just within your building but across the generations and geography.

- **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WORSHIPS GOD:** Christian community gathers believers into praise for God. It is an act of the whole to sing, dance, teach, learn, eat, commune, baptize, and send believers into the world. Christian community does all these things despite the personal preference of the worshippers. Worship is not chiefly to edify the worshipper, again an individual-centered desire, but rather is a play enacted for God expressing our joy, thanks, frustration, anger, and ultimately praise to God (see the Psalms). We can do this as individuals, praising where we are, worshipping with every step in our lives, but the fullness is when this is lifted in community. Worship teaches us as well, draws us close to God in our act, and thus impacts our individual faith. But if how we are individually impacted becomes the measure of our worship, we have lost the goal and made ourselves the object of our worship. When someone says “I got nothing out of worship today”, I say tough. Perhaps this worship is not about you. Perhaps another was deeply touched. We come together in worship for them as much as yourself.
- **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ACTS ON GOD’S BEHALF AS THE KINGDOM:** What a community of believers can accomplish far eclipses what an individual may achieve. While our culture constantly highlights the vision of the individual and pats on the back the one who creates the non-governmental organization to feed the poor, it forgets the community that the one gathered around to complete the vision that she or he could not do on their own. Yes, Bill Gates had an idea. But more so, he had a team, a community of others who fleshed this vision into Microsoft. Microsoft is nothing without the whole community who believed in the vision and worked together to achieve this. The same is with Christian community. Christian community fulfills the individual’s vision and brings it to completion. Christian community acts cooperatively with the individual in drawing the fullness of the vision. The fullness of the individual’s call into the kingdom is made whole by community.
- **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ARE WHOLE WHEN THEY ARE BROKEN:** Despite all the good that comes from Christian community, they are still broken. They are full of people and thus flawed. Some see this brokenness as a reason to avoid church. This is because of the claim, whether placed on community on the outside or from within, that the church is intended to be a place of perfection. Often one individual paints a picture of the whole, one person makes a mistake and the individual then defines the community as “good” or not. Once again, individuals over the corporate. Of course, this is not the case. As famed evangelist L.L. Nash once stated, “The church is not a



museum of saints but a hospital for sinners.” (attr.). When the church is at it’s best, it is a church that confesses it falls short. It is a church that knows that while it is the best we have to offer on earth, it is still not the fullness of God. It is a place that acknowledges that it is broken. But it is through our honesty, our transparency as a broken space, that Christ’s love and power can be made known. By being a place of open brokenness we can show that we are not built on the world’s understanding of power and attractiveness but Christ’s, where the meek inherit the earth, the mourning are comforted, and the poor of heart shall see God.

## RULE 4: HUMILITY, VULNERABILITY, DIGNITY

- **THE THREE FOLD PATH:** Being in a place that acknowledges our shortcoming to fully know the revealed God, we encounter a variety of ways of understanding Christ in faith (theology). With such variety, how do we honor the path on which we journey while honoring the differences in one another without abandoning our core convictions? It is a three-fold method in which we engage in our conversations. The three-fold path is **humility, vulnerability, dignity**. These words are to be a guidepost for all our conversations, mentoring, small groups, Sunday night discussions, out-to-eat moments, and the many other places we engage our community.
- **HUMILITY:** When we begin our conversations, we must begin acknowledging that we may be wrong, that the conversation has merit, and that the other may have much to teach us. Humility means when someone disagrees we do not react with righteousness but with the heart to be instructed. Humility calls us to set down our desire to be right and prepare for the possibility that we may be wrong and in need of correction.
- **VULNERABILITY:** Vulnerability is the virtue of reacting well to things that may be close to our identity, things that we may react to emotively. In our lives of faith, there are things we hold very dear, dear truths that are centering, holy, and honestly learned. People may poke awful close to these truths and our reaction may be to lash out rather than to listen. For instance, if you hold communion as an important, indeed central part of your walk of faith, if someone were to state that this is not necessary or perhaps your view is incorrect, it may be painful to hear and the “fight or flight” reflex may be triggered. Vulnerability means acknowledging that in a faith community such as this, this is not a possibility but an inevitability. Vulnerability in our relationships means we fight the desire to fight or flee and instead be open to listen and be instructed. We will have folks question us, our faith and traditions. We are called to be vulnerable as Christ was on the cross. To acknowledge the other “to forgive as we have been forgiven” and know that we still may need to humbly acquiesce that our dearly held belief may be wrong and then to listen patiently.
- **DIGNITY:** All this is not to say that you must surrender what you believe to some ambiguous “all things are right” mentality. Dignity teaches us that while we are humble and vulnerable to listen and be gracious, we do not have to give up what we believe to be right. We can have the dignity to say what is on our own heart without surrendering what we hold as true. Dignity means standing up for what we think to be right. We do not have to change what we think but we can change how we listen, engage, and understand the other. We may even come to honor the other, even if we disagree, when we take the time to listen and try to understand. Consider Romans and Paul discussion of those who are vegetarian and those who eat meat. We are not to condemn that which we disagree with. At the least, we are called to honor those traditions as an expression of faithfulness.

## RULE 5: THE RULE OF AGAPE

- **THE FOUR LOVES:** There are four words for “love” in greek, **philia/philos, eros, storge, and agape**. Each love is a beautiful and holy thing, necessary to the life of faith. A person or community needs each love to properly exist. But there is a fundamental difference between the first three loves and the fourth. While each of the first three, philia/philos, eros, and storge are beautiful and necessary, each also brings an element of danger when disconnected with AGAPE love.
- **PHILIA/PHILOS:** Philos is defined as a love that is bound to a core identity that can stem from community, thoughts, trials, etc. Philos love is understood by what binds a community together, that is the central thing that ties one to another. A good example of this are sports fanatics. A fan community This is one that rally’s around a common team and finds it’s community by identifying with this team. It can also be a group that identifies around a common experience, such as a cancer survivor’s group, AA, graduates to a certain school, fraternities/sororities, etc. These communities can create strong bonds of love and loyalty to those within the community. Philos love is what makes a group “community” and community we know is core to our formation as people. The down side of this love is that it depends on that core identity to exist. If this should be removed, the bonds of philos can be broken and community can break down. If someone should leave the fraternity, the relationships therein suffer. Philos may also lend to an in/out mentality within the community itself. This may be true in some good ways but can also be abused. If someone should choose to root for a new team, the others may feel he or she is a traitor and may turn their back on them. The person loses identity as a person when they are removed from the community. Philos is a conditional love, a necessary one yet flawed.
- **EROS:** Eros is most commonly referred to by its “erotic” component, often tied to a sexuality. When we speak of passion, we speak of a love that passes the head for the heart. It is a love that “come from the gut” (my phrase). It is a love that wells up sometimes despite ourselves. It can surprise one in its ferociousness and defy understanding. It just is. This passion is holy and necessary to relationships, especially in marriage covenants. It makes one respond simply out of the joy of seeing or hearing good things. It is visceral and vital. A danger of this love is that it can be addictive and temporary. The new convert experiences this zeal, this excitement of the new and extraordinary. However when passion wanes, we may find ourselves seeking this kind of experience elsewhere. We can thus become spiritual adulterers, selfishly seeking our next spiritual orgasm. We jump from community to community, or perhaps worse from religion to religion, seeking the high we get with the new and interesting. In the end, we may seek love for our own sake rather than the other. Eros can be fleeting and self-serving, and thus can be flawed.
- **STORGE:** Storge is the most basic and “easy” love. It may translated into “great LIKE” rather than love. In our culture, we do use the word “love” to describe this “great

like”: we *love* to eat, we *love* to read, we *love* that band, etc. While “love” is the word we use, we certainly wouldn’t equate this to eros or philo love. It is not the same as a love for community or spouse. Storge is often a love that is somehow differentiated from us. It is found in the person or even thing or activity outside our experience. It may be this love we share when we think of the hungry, destitute and poor. It is a pathos of care for the other, whether that be thing or person. In this, storge is holy and necessary as it can drive us to look outside ourselves to those in need. Storge falls short when one objectifies the other and curates our desire to care for and correct as a means to serving our own needs. Storge can be a love that feels fulfilled in the act of caring for the other without the depth of concern that a person deserves. In a sense, we can make the “person” a “thing”, they can lose their humanity in our desire to help. At best they may become an equation to be fixed. At worse, we may abuse the poor, widow and orphan in an effort to make ourselves feel better and assuage our guilt. Storge can be selfish and depends on what we desire and love, therefore by itself it is flawed.

- **AGAPE IS NECESSARY IN HOW IT CORRECTS THE OTHER THREE LOVES:**  
 Agape is usually defined as “unconditional love.” This would mean a love that desires nothing for the one who loves but is rather fully sacrificial on behalf of the other. This is the essence of God’s love for us and is always the greek word used in the New Testament for this love. It is easy then to say this is the love that is the important one. And it is! It is the reason for the grace we have been given, it is the source of joy, the way we are in this relationship with God. God loves us and there is nothing we can do to make God love us any more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us any less. We need AGAPE more than just about anything. It can also be defined as a love that is known by what it does, rather than what it is. It is a love that gives, that surrenders, that lays self aside for the love of the other. This is the Christ. It is a definition of Jesus’ laying down his life for creation, not because it is deserved but because of great love (see Romans 5:6-8). Agape love is not a love that sits still, it is a love that moves and is active. Agape is known by its results, not its essence. Agape’s role in the life of faith is how it corrects the other loves.
- **PHILOS CORRECTED:** (1 Corinthians 13:2) When philo collapses, when the central idea core to the identity of a community in particular is removed, agape is what calls us to commitment to those with whom we have committed. Agape is the love that stays, even when one feels abandoned. Agape is the love that remains when fragile communities show their humanity. When we lose our “what am I getting out of this” notion of community and rather “what am I surrendering into this community”, we see our philo perfected in our sacrificial giving to community. This means we sometimes come to church not for ourselves, but for the community. We arrive not because we need it but because others need you there. We surrender to the whole.
- **EROS CORRECTED:** (1 Corinthians 13:1) Eros is holy and necessary. Passion is highly prized and necessary to life and faith. Agape corrects eros by creating a sustaining presence of love and commitment beyond the exciting and temporary. It gives one patience from one mountain top to another. It commits us as much to what

we have known in passion as the ordinary and every day. Passion commits us to the sacrificial covenant of relationship rather than the fleeting excitement of a moment. Agape removes the necessity of the mountain in favor for the every day. While we desire to continue to have mountain top experiences, it is not the basis for the community and connection.

- **STORGE corrected:** (1 Corinthians 13:3) Storge can be selfish and is based on what we desire and love, but this can be corrected by agape by making love the goal of our action and work rather than self-seeking. We have a desire to serve the other, especially the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the poor and the oppressed, but when we objectify these others, we remove the necessary component to love them as people, not as means to make us feel better or problems to be solved. Agape corrects storge by helping us understand that our goal is not to feed the poor but rather love them in such a way that we cannot help but be called to sacrifice in serving them. We are not called to love them as a thing, but as a person. Storge is the love that keeps us looking outside ourselves and agape prevents this from becoming superficial.
- **ALL LOVES ARE NECESSARY TO THE LIFE OF FAITH:** To clarify, the three minor loves are not to be avoided. They are absolutely essential to the walk of faith and life in community. We need philos, eros, and storge. Any person or community missing one of these is missing out on a beautiful facet of faithful living. We simply need agape to shape these into holy expressions lest we corrupt the gift of love.

## **RULE 6: EVERY STEP IS THE WAY**

- **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?:** The word “Christian” has been co-opted by society for a functional social moralistic deism. This can be seen most clearly when the word “true” gets thrown in as a superlative. This idea of “true Christian” implies that there is an “untrue Christian”, a Christian that does not hold some sort of truth, often defined by the one who would use this descriptor. In an argument over words, it seems the word “Christian” is getting lost in our culture by competing understanding of this title. Arguments over what a Christian is gets lost in a desire to peg down to a definition. Rather Christians are not so much a THING but a WAY. Christians are not a set of perfected beliefs or being a certain way but rather a group that are about becoming something else.
- **WE ARE BECOMING CHRISTIANS:** At the Porch, we approach the word Christian as not so much a title but rather a description of a way of life that is not yet perfect. In truth, we are always becoming Christians, we never are Christians. This is to mean that the walk of a Christian is never perfected in this life. We are always in a state of becoming without ever bringing this to fulness. Perhaps this means to be a Christian is to acknowledge we are not Christians. Like the bumper sticker says, “Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.” We will always fall short. We are constantly growing and changing into that which is Christ. In short, only in admitting that we are NOT Christ-followers that we can be Christ-followers. Only when we understand that we are never perfect in our expression do we realize that this is indeed the very thing that perfects us.
- **FAITH IS NOT PERFECT BUT IS ALWAYS PRESENT:** We often objectify faith, it is something we have or not have. As an object, Jesus always remarks faith as neither having or not having but rather a possession of degrees. Jesus talks of faith that is having a little or a lot (“you of little faith” in Matthew 14:31 and “seeing his faith he immediately loved him”, Mark 10:21). Therefore faith is not like a light switch, either on or off, but more of a dimmer. It is always on (sort of I know) but it can be dim or it can be full. A part of the life of faith is understanding this movement of more or less but not without. It is good to be frustrated when things are “low”, yes, but not to abandon hope. We are called to know that faith ALWAYS ebbs and flows, goes up and comes down. Part of The Way is to understand that being a Christian is not about in or out, yes or no, right or wrong dichotomy but rather understanding the walk of faith is a figuring out faith, of working through things, the good and the bad (1 Timothy 2. The Way is to to be ON, not had.
- **FAITH IS A JOURNEY:** Israel was always falling in and out of love with God, yet God remained faithful. Following Israel and her journey in the wilderness following her exodus from slavery is a model for our own journey in faith from an exodus of fear and death into a hoped-for future. Israel wanted to go back to slavery just to remember to go forward. Israel took up other Gods just to be reminded that YHWH is her God. Israel was learning as it went along. It wasn’t blessed by perfection but rather invited

into a relationship. The wilderness was not so much about the destination of Canaan but the working out of her relationship to God. This is like our own journey of faith. It is stepping forward, fumbling, recovering, losing way again, etc. etc. We embrace not the destination of faith but the ups and downs of faith. We don't embrace fear when things go poorly but rather the opportunity this brings for God to make big changes. We don't embrace the "mountaintops" for we are always sent back to the valley. But we need not fear for "while we go through the valley of the shadow of death (we) need not fear for YOU ARE WITH ME." In conversations we need not be threatened by doubt but to claim it as a part of our life of faith. We are in a journey from lost to found, not the fulfillment of it.

- **EVERY STEP IS THE WAY:** knowing that we are always on the path from lost to found, we must abandon language that sounds as if we are either in or out, on the path or off. Every step, even the misstep, serves a function of teaching, reprovng, encouraging, and growing us into faithful followers. We must abandon "Christian" as something we follow which is perfected by us. We are neither on the path or off, we are simply on The Way. Every step we take is a part of our journey of faith. We are called to move forward boldly not for fear of losing our way but in certain knowledge that WHEN we lose our way, we are accompanied by a God who goes with us through the valley. We are people of The Way.

## RULE 7: THE FUTILITY AND BEAUTY OF “ENOUGH”

- **THE FUTILITY OF ENOUGH:** There is a dangerous word in our vocabulary: “enough.” It means fulfilled. It means complete. When applied to our discipleship, it becomes a dangerous word. It assumes that the relationship we have with Christ in our following is like an equation we can balance. If we do enough work in our spiritual life, we can accomplish a perfection in our faith that will put us on even footing with God. Enough assumes any work we may partake in can equal the creator of the heavens and the earth. It assumes we can be on par with Christ. It assumes, frankly, that we can manage our salvation and that the debt we owe to Christ is something within our power to accomplish. We want to pray enough, read enough, learn enough, serve enough, worship enough, and love enough so that God will be pleased with our self-made perfection. We want to have this fulfillment. Need it be said this is futile? We will never pray, learn, read, serve, worship, or love enough. We will always fall short of the glory of God. (again, Romans 3:23) To assume we can accomplish this will certainly lead to our despair. When we trust our own work and hands, we will soon see that all our work is futile and vanity. (Ecclesiastes 1:1-4) To then **DEPEND** on our own work as salvific enough will lead to this despair and hopelessness. We will fail at our salvation.
- **THE BEAUTY OF ENOUGH:** The beauty of enough is not what we do but rather what God does with what we offer. Placing “enough” in our own hands we fail. Placing “enough” into the hands of God will bring a joy in the surrender for God to make what little we have and make it enough. For instance, in the feeding of the crowds (4,000, 5,000, and otherwise), Jesus always takes what is clearly not enough, in each case a few loaves and fish, to feed the many. What Jesus does with our humble offering is remarkable. Jesus takes what we give and makes it enough. When we depend on our work to feed we fail. When we surrender what we have to Christ, God will make this enough. This is not meant to be a magical incantation of manipulating God but rather an acknowledgement that our own work is not enough. We can never pray enough, but what prayer we do offer, Jesus makes it enough. We could never sacrifice as Christ had, but what we do let go of, Jesus makes it enough. We could never love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, but what little love we may give, Christ makes it enough. This is a reminder to our needing Christ to perfect us. It is a reminder to be humble in our journey to know we need Jesus’ action to make what we give enough. The beauty of enough is not that we give enough, but that Christ’s grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). We can give thanks for Christ to take our feeble gift and do spectacular things with this.



## RULE 8: ONE SMALL STEP

- **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION:** The metaphor of journey then is effective for how we follow in the way of Jesus. Instead of looking for Christ, we walk with Christ. Every step is The Way. Instead of doing enough for Christ, Christ claims us as we wrestle and wonder. Enough will never be enough. All this is true. Yet it is easy to settle in and say “Well if there is nothing I do that is going to make any difference to God, then perhaps I shall do nothing.” Paul asked the question this way, “Shall we sin so that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1) This may be applicable but only if we treat being in The Way as justification, that is how we are justified before God. But perhaps, rather than seeing any activity we take on as solely being beneficial to God, perhaps we can see that moving forward is good for our own sake and growth in the Spirit. Our actions may not change God but may help shape and direct us. Perhaps our actions are not so much about how we are justified to God, but rather how we are living into a holy life, that is “sanctified” in our walking. It is a reflection of how we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in guiding our steps. Therefore our discipleship is much more about defining and guiding us than making God happy. If we are to treat all God’s action as only being applicable to some sort of hell in our future neglects the presence of hell in our present. It is Christ who partners with us in sanctifying our lives and partnering us into holy living.
- **ONE SMALL STEP:** This idea of walking with God may put one off. “How are we not to worry about doing things yet at the same time strive forward in our actions?” If we make the end goal of justification, this indeed is danger. But instead, if we see our action as being present-focused, that is addressing our lives today as justified but in need of present correction, we may have peace in the journey. We need not worry about the destination but the journey, thus we can focus on taking One Small Step in faith. This is focusing on the present small step we may feel called to take rather than attempting to make the whole journey in a single bound.
- **WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE:** We want fulfillment now but we cannot achieve this. Instead we can settle and be SATISFIED with a single small step. For instance, if one wishes to be deeper in scriptures, it may be too much to decide to read the whole bible in a night. Instead, focus on the one small step one may take to advance in faith today rather than plans for every day in the future. (cf. Matthew 6:34). Perhaps open the bible now and read a little today. Don’t worry about reading the whole thing in a week lest you become discouraged if you do not complete this. Instead, be present, open the word. Read. This is a small step which may reap big rewards. No, we cannot pray enough. But we can pray now. Or find a small way to pray. This is not to bring fulfillment of a perfect prayer life but rather to walk with Jesus, to take one small step. This step is not toward Christ but with Christ. Rather than feeling the guilt of not doing enough we can instead encourage one small step. We do not walk out of guilt but out of freedom. We are FREE to walk with Christ not guilted into it.

## **RULE 9: BEING THE AROMA OF CHRIST (2 CORINTHIANS 14-17)**

- **WE ARE NOT THE REASON FOR THE SEASON:** The temptation of any church is to feel they are the fullness of the whole Christian tradition. But the goal of the church is the same as the goal of John the Baptist. Instead of calling people to himself he deflected their stares to another. He called to repentance, to renewal, to life. But John did not call people to himself but rather the one who would follow him. His message was powerful and people came. He was Elijah and many did not miss this fact. Our role as the church is to be as John was: teaching, exhorting, prophetic words, calling to new life, baptizing, but always pointing away from the church as the singular reason to existence. Our reason to exist is not for our sake but for the one in whom we are baptized. We are baptized into Christ, not Jacob's Porch. It is not to take pride in our church. It is not to point people to our worship services, our programs, our small groups, or what-have-you. We do not exist for our sake.
- **WE ARE A SMELL, NOT THE BREAD:** This is not to say the church is evil and we should abandon church. Indeed, we need church as stated in rule 1. We desire to be a church but our goal is not for our sake but rather to be a smell, an aroma (2 Corinthians 2:15). When we are at our best, we are not "the thing" but can make people hungry for that which we desire to point to. For instance, you do not know you are hungry till you smell baking bread. Our goal is to make people hungry by what we have Christ doing in our midst. We are called to be a distinct aroma of Jesus and what Jesus is. When we are at our best, we smell like Jesus: all his joy, healing, inclusive grace, painful correction, love for the outcast, direction to the leaders, everything. We are not the bread, but when we are seeking Christ our hope is that we smell like the bread of life. Our job is not to be the cure, that is we are not the place or people of healing, we are to send people to Jesus, the healer. We are to create the itch, the desire, the ants-in-the-pants of faith that makes someone uncomfortable with life as usual. We are not "the thing" but if we can point to "the thing", then we honor John, we honor the prophets, and we honor Jesus.

## RULE 10: NOT WELCOME BUT EMBRACE

- **THE SIN OF COMFORT:** If we want to be God, then of course we want God to look like us. If we want God to look like us, then of course we want our community to look like us, to like what we like, to despise what we despise. We want to surround ourselves with the world's idea of success. We want the power of attractive people, we want the glory of high incomes, and we want the idol of achievements. We want our place to look like us not only because we may believe we are right, but maybe more to the point, to be comfortable in our surroundings. We don't want our boat rocked, we don't want the different or odd. We want our worship to serve us. We want programs to care for us. We want our church to be about how it serves us. We want comfort and this can be a sin if we worship our comfort. Frankly, we don't want to wrestle with a great God, we may rather cuddle with a friendly God who like the same hymns we do.
- **ART PROVOKES:** We want our community to be less about comfort and serving our individual's taste and more about the uncomfortable, the honest places we do not wish to tread but are often led. Rather than bowing to consumer culture, it is our hope to prod people into exploring the uncomfortable places and modes of faith expression. We want our community to be like art. Great art provokes, not just comforts. An artist prods the observer, to think differently, to see the world more clearly, and to reshape their thoughts. Art can comfort and console but also in confronts and convicts. It provokes us into a deeper understanding that is outside of what we want. It makes us see things past what we want them to look like but perhaps what they may really be.
- **NOT WELCOME BUT EMBRACE:** When we gather together, we gather together all of us into one in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) to be sure but we also each bring our separate gifts. We each bring different experiences. We each bring different thoughts and expressions of who God is. The desire is to make sure all present act, think, and worship the same way so that we obtain a sense of comfort and ease in our community. But this means we can diminish voices in our midst into a bland common denominator. To invite people doesn't mean they are welcomed if they think, act, believe exactly as we believe. This is a half-welcome, a "philos" welcome that is not corrected with agape. It is welcoming only if they hold the central thing in common. To embrace means to love fully the person that enters no matter how uncomfortable they make us feel, how "right or wrong" they may be. We embrace fellow journeymen into the walk we have in Christ. They may be at different places, they may think different things, and may even seem "unChristian". But this is to deny that they are not on the path. If the walk of faith is present imperfect then we must honor where they are in their journey (humility), even if we heartily disagree and desire for their correction (dignity). We must extend the grace to the other embracing them as Jesus embraced Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1), not because he was righteous but because grace and hospitality was simply his to extend.

- EMBRACING THE “OTHER”: Frankly, this scares people because the world would rather neatly delineate into black and white, right and wrong, good and bad, pretty and ugly, successful and unsuccessful. But we are a place of grace and thus must be welcoming as Jesus welcomed. We must have the mind and heart of Christ for the other, the one the world despises. This is not just the obvious in the homeless and those of another race but also the nerd, the dork, the strange, the forceful, the annoying, and the upsetting. We must return to this community not because it looks like us, likes the same things as us, or because they are “our kind of people.” We must welcome the Other. It was from the Other, ignorant fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, and harlots that Jesus used to change the world.