

# AC/BC

## A Nice New Heart in Naughty Old You

January 5, 2025

**Today I want to welcome you to 2025 ... AC. After Christmas!**



You see, **BC** means **Before Christ**. Whereas, **AD** stands for **Anno Domini**. Which is *Latin* for: The year of the Lord. Which **basically means: after Christ**. So, I'm changing it to **AC** today. Because, it's all about **the effects of the new birth of the new us, after Christ redeems the old BC us**.



For instance, those **simple night-shift shepherds, BC**, were *simply* shepherds. Tending to their *daily duties* in the dark. But *then*, after Christ, they *literally, saw the light and suddenly had a higher calling in life*: a profound, heart-pounding goal of **spreading good news of great joy of new life**. As do we as AC believers – regardless of our regular day-to-day or nightly vocation.



And don't forget those **confused though otherwise wise men, BC**, who had to pull over and ask King Herod for directions when they were left in the dark. Until, after Christ, when the star reappeared, and they **were shown the way to the truth of life**. As are we AC believers. And before all that, in those BC days, came **two discouraged parents**, to a tiny overcrowded, seemingly God forsaken town, with nowhere to turn, no place to give birth, no family or friends to help out, and no confirmation that God was in control. Because, they too were in the dark, BC. But then, after Christ, and His unlikely messengers, **were empowered with the confidence of knowing the truth**. As are we AC believers, who see it, receive it, and then, most importantly, refuse to forsake it.



Which brings us to the *big, after-Christmas, question* that every *secular Christmas show* asks us to consider: **Were you naughty or nice?** Shar and I watched a new Christmas show with the *g-boys*, wherein only *one twin sister* gets a gift for being *nice*. But Santa accidentally puts it on the *wrong twin's bed*; and leaves. And the *naughty twin wakes up*, is momentarily excited, but then realizes the *mistake*, and then quietly puts it on her *sister's bed* and goes back to sleep. But suddenly, a *red alert* goes off in Santa's sleigh, because a *naughty* just turned *nice*! *Naughtiness* used to carry a much more severe connotation. Like in *King James' day*; when they used *naughtiness* as the extreme opposite of *righteousness* – saying, in Proverbs 11:6, that:

The *righteousness* of the *upright* shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. – Proverbs 11:6 KJV

[Because] Righteous are You, O Lord ... [So] Why are all those who [claim to deal in righteousness, yet actually] deal in treachery at ease [in conscience]? You have planted them ... they have even produced fruit. [But it didn't last, because] You are near to their lips but far from their mind. ... [So be warned] Do not believe them, [when they claim to be on God's nice list] although they may say nice things to you." – Jeremiah 12:1-6 NAS

But, **if Christianity is true, shouldn't believers be obviously nicer than nons?** Great question. *Glad I asked.* Cuz let's be honest, **we've all had or have some BC friends who are way nicer than some of our AC friends.** Ever think, "Why aren't you a Christian? You act more like Jesus than most believers!" Ever find it hard to share your faith, because of a Christian influence who belongs on the naughty list? Wouldn't it be nice if we could just point out the obvious observation that all believers are nicer and kinder and all-around better adjusted than all non-believers? Well we can't. Cuz they're not. Know why? Three things. 1) **Transformation is often a lifelong process.** When we're reborn, **your nice new heart is stuck inside naughty old you!** And it's life's work is to get you to "die to sins and live for righteousness", (1 Pet 2:24) which requires you ...

... to put off your [naughty] old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt ... and to put on the [nice] new self ... in true righteousness – Ephesians 4:22-24 ESV

But keep in mind, so you don't get discouraged, that **dying is a lifelong process.** Which is why, 2) **It's about progress over perfection.** You've heard me quote this so many times, cuz it's just so good:

He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. – Hebrews 10:14 NIV



Also known as being sanctified. So, when it comes to those He's working on and in, regardless what stage of the process they're in, **the proof is in the incremental improvements.** And that, sometimes hard-to-see evidence, **it's our AC/BC proof of the truth, and our witness of the light of new life.** And it's more powerful than you think. However, as Paul himself recognized, sometimes it requires confidence in the Lord's work, when it comes to dealing with those who are still far from the Lord's goal. Listen closely:



In all my prayers for all of you, I [can] always pray with joy ... [being confident] [not in you – or there'd be no joy! But] that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion – Philippians 1:4-6 NIV



And so, although it would be nice if we could point out that only non-believers are naughty, we can't. Cuz, 1) Transformation is a lifelong process; and therefore 2) It's about progress over perfection; and 3) **Trademark infringement.** Cuz the label's been badly abused and misused.



Just imagine if there was no penalty for using NIKE's label any ol' way that anyone wanted. **Their name brand could no longer guarantee quality.** We'd have to identify the authenticity by examining the goods. Same goes with Christians. **The believer brand can't guarantee fidelity.** Never could, actually. So **we gotta examine the goods.** Which is something Jesus has always been very much in favor of. When He healed people, **He often sent them to His most severe critics and skeptics for inspection.** (Mat 8:4) Turns out, **Jesus likes His work and His goods checked out.** He said so straight out when He made the obvious observation that:

"People light a lamp and put it ... on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [Well] In the same way, let your light shine before others, [on earth] so that they may see your good works [That's your "goods" thanks to His "work"] and [do so in such a way so that they will] give glory to your Father who is in heaven." – Matthew 5:15-16 ESV



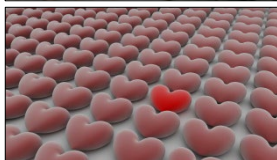
Because *those* on the *naughty* list, can *talk the talk* like they're on the *nice* list. Which is why we need to see the AC/BC. Cuz **it's all about the before and after**. Whether it's *teeth whiteners, wrinkle creams, hair tonics, or acne treatments*, **we demand to see a comparison to contrast** before we'll *trust* (to some degree) that the *product produces* what the *sales pitch promises*.

And we need to *guard ourselves* and *others* from those who *boldly wear* the *believer brand*, but make *no attempt* to live by the *code* for which it stands. **Not for condemnation but preservation**. Cuz, they're *dangerous*. And *doubleminded*. And *deceitful*. And do great damage. Which is why:

Jude, a *bondservant* of *Jesus Christ* [warns] ... those who are *called*, [and] *sanctified* by God the Father, and *preserved* in *Jesus Christ* ... [that] *certain men* have *crept in* ... *ungodly men*, *who turn the grace of our God* into [a license for] *lewdness* ... serving only *themselves*. They are *clouds without water* [to the thirsty] ... *trees without fruit* [to the hungry] ... [whose *doubleminded words* are like] *waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame* ... [because they're] *grumblers*, [and] *complainers* ... who cause *divisions* [Yikes! You don't think you'd be on the list ... till you see the list!] ... But *you*, beloved [bondservants] ... *keep yourselves in the love of God* [and grow!] – Jude 1-21 NKJ

[And] Produce *fruit in keeping with repentance*. – Luke 3:8 NIV

Cuz *that* long-term *progress*, however slow, is how we *identify* the *nice trees* from the *naughties*.



[Jesus said] “You will know them by their *fruits*. [For instance] Do men gather *grapes* from *thornbushes* or *figs* from *thistles*? Even so, *every good* [work] tree bears [some] good [kingdom] *fruit*, [so, no matter how prickly, bristly, or thorny they seem on the surface, if they're producing even a few Christ-like Grape Nuts or Fig Newtons, He's at work] but a [truly] *bad* tree bears [only] bad [kingdom] *fruit*.” – Matthew 7:16-17 NKJ

So you *best* be *careful* and *prayerful*, because **you, or someone who frustrates you, might be like the Durian fruit!** Ever smell one of these beauties? It's a *spiky tropical fruit* known for its *pungent, piggy poo, odor* and *hard outer spines*, while *inside* it contains *soft and sweet segments*. And *get this*: of *all the fruit trees*, the *Durian* takes the *longest* to produce *fruit*. Anywhere from 7-15 years after *planting*. So, *be warned*:

“For *each tree* is known by [examining] *its own fruit*. [Not by comparing it to the quantity or quality of another tree] ... The good [new] man out of the good [news] *treasure of his heart* [eventually] brings forth what is *good*” – Luke 6:44-45 NAS

The whole *point* of a *living relationship* versus *dead religion* is **our Father's unique work in each individual heart**. It shouldn't *surprise* us – since He made it *astronomically improbably* for even *two snowflakes* to be *alike* – that **He isn't into cranking out carbon copy kids**. Know what the *self-righteous nice-talkers* hated most about *Jesus*? The *company* He kept! And still does! Just look at your *neighbor*! Question is, do you know your *neighbor* is looking at you? **We're all on our own individual sliding scale**. So, the *only* question that *matters* is: **Which way are you sliding?**



**Remember Junkyard Wars?** It was the U.S. version of the British show, *Scrapheap Challenge*, in which contestants had 10 hours to cobble together a contraption, using only what they could scrounge in a scrapyard, to then compete in a race or challenge. And **the onlookers are cheering and screaming and just thrilled to see them clunking toward the finish line!**



Think about the naughty son. (Lk 15:20) What'd he have to show for his faith when he got home? **Clothes that smelled like piggy poo ... and tears.** And that was enough. For starters. Because, **salvation isn't about who's naughty or nice according to secular or religious standards.** It's about who all surrenders all to follow Christ in their cobbled contraption. I loved that show; cuz I grew up in a scrapyard. And also because, **we're all a bunch of cobbled contraptions heading toward the finish line.** Paul refers to death as the finish line of his race. (2 Tim 4:7) So why don't we, as 2025 AC believers, try to **lighten up and lower expectations till we're thrilled to see someone clunking toward the finish line.** The Lord's in charge of the nice list. In fact, it's in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Rev 21:27) And it contains the names of **all those who know they belong on the naughty list,** and humbly, sometimes tearfully, **acknowledge it, and embrace His mercy, and gradually but steadily grow in righteousness, and are grateful for His grace every step of the way.** And therefore **gladly offer that grace to others, without condemnation, even as they rightly examine what's growin' on their trees.**

And **it's crucial to closely examine our own before and after.** Because we can fall into pride on the one side, or despair on the other, if we compare ourselves to others rather than keeping our eyes on Christ, and the "goods" He's working in us, **by faithfully tracking our AC/BC progress.** And it's vital that we also do this with those we're praying will improve; so that we, like Paul, can pray with joy in the confidence that there's something good going on in there ... somewhere.

Andy the atheist is very kind. **Nature and nurture produced a pleasantness in him.** So, for him, nice is natural. Whereas, Curt the irritable Christian is ill-tempered. Though he's slowly growing out of it, **nature and nurture produced an abrasive distrust in him.** Funny story: I asked Chatgpt for a list of Men's names that sound grumpy. And I got this. And #5 on the right, under "More abrasive-sounding names" is Bruce! I was stunned. But what a stunning case in point: **you don't think you'd be on the list, till you see the list!** And then, to add insult to injury, I typed in "Men's names that sound nice" and #4 was Noah! Now, of course **God regards a naughty nature as a bad thing and a nice nature as a good thing.** But here's the thing: **Andy's natural niceness isn't his gift to God, but God's gift to him.** So when it comes to patience, kindness, or whatever, **if anyone sees their natural fruit as their own doing, it'll be their undoing.** Cuz they'll see little need for the Lord.

And yet, Jesus aims one of His strongest warnings squarely at the naturally nicest, saying:

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." – Luke 12:48 NIV

That might be the silver lining of so clearly failing! Because, like Peter's denial, there's no denying it. So, with Christlikeness as your goal, how're your goods progressing as we head toward home?