

If you never hear another single word about marketing, here's the one word that's a "keeper" you should remember: differentiation. That's right, *differentiation*.

To gain context for that, we need to back up for a minute to the topic of our first episode on marketing. That's because the whole idea of differentiation is dependent on the core thrust of marketing, which is a laser-like focus on an *"offering that has value."* Every business, every nonprofit, every religion, every person is striving to get others to agree that their offering has value and then to act on that notion.

So, just what is *differentiation*? It's when the party making an offer works to appreciably distinguish their offering from all others. The larger the distinctions, the better the differentiation. So, to sustain success, every product and every service must distinguish its offering as *different in value*.

And there's no better way to discuss and fully understand differentiation in marketing than to focus on the greatest offering ever, an offering perceived for centuries by billions to have the greatest value ever: *Christ and Him crucified*. There's a reason why Christianity has grown and been sustained for two millennia—because believers believe that Christ's sacrificial offering holds utterly unique value to them.

That being the case, let's look at the common major contrasts to Christ. And it's pretty clear that all other major religions establish the same essential schematic for success—namely that each person must take action that's moral or righteous to earn their way to the next level, whether that's going directly to heaven or perhaps being reincarnated to a higher existence. Even a considerable number of Christians seem to believe at least a partial version of the idea that you must somehow help earn your way to heaven.

But the New Testament is clear. Not one person can truly keep the Ten Commandments or the Bible's larger set of laws. And if we break even one small part of the Law, we are guilty of breaking the whole Law. And God's justice is such that we must pay the wages of our sin, which is death. But...Jesus's offering on the Cross on each believer's behalf paid the price for their sin. Paul wrote it this way: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV) Actually, this instruction by Paul encapsulates the best transaction ever offered, the gift of grace! This was ground-breaking in Paul's era...and still so today!

And, from an "offering" and a "value" and a "marketing" perspective, this is huge...this is unique...this is actually a one-of-a-kind "capital D Differentiation" completed by Christ at the Cross, *perfect in both its standards and its distance from supposed competitors!* See, no one person's works will *ever* be enough to gain heaven, whether you take a journey with Buddhism or Islam or Judaism or New Age belief or Mormonism...or even if your works-justifying-journey is labeled "Christianity" by you or by others.

Indeed, the Cross is the ultimate "offering that has value"—wildly, completely differentiated from every other philosophy or religion. That's why true faith in Christ is so very powerful. Wow, the free gift of grace resulting in salvation...in the remission of sins...in eternal life and fellowship with God. *Whosoever wants this gift of grace can have it* by the simple response of accepting Christ and His atoning work on the Cross.

Let's lay that aside for a moment and look a different direction. In some of the marketing that occurs in the fashion world, there's a practice called "knockoffs." So just what is a knockoff? That's a product which is deliberately designed to appear to replicate the authentic, value-delivering design or brand, often down to the specific logo! You know, like a wristwatch that looks very much like a Rolex but really isn't. Then the fake Rolex doesn't deliver like the real thing. The buyer expecting the real thing is dissatisfied, but the seller got the fruits of the sale by misrepresenting the fake watch as authentic. In this way, the original product's differentiation is somewhat mimicked—and thus essentially co-opted—by the knockoff artist.

In fact, the offering of Christ on the Cross is so powerful that, during the early Church era and then over the centuries following, authentic faith in Christ has had countless knockoffs! And many of these knockoffs

are what we can call an “arithmetic approach.” That means, instead of simply choosing to be an obedient disciple of Christ and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God like Jesus did (Mark 1:15-16), people have presented false differentiations adding or subtracting from Jesus’s finished work of the Cross. They enjoy the credibility of the Word of God’s authentic differentiation but crave decisive power over people, an inappropriate power that accrues to the leaders who devastatingly add or subtract from perfectly sufficient truth.

This method isn’t new. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “...‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!...thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down...’” (Mark 7:9b, 13a) Wow, *making the Word of God void by your tradition!* Fascinating.

The Revelation to John is also very pointed about such religious arithmetic. “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” (Revelation 22:18-19)

Let’s illuminate some ground here that’s been firmly established for a very long time. Sure, we can astutely differentiate among watches and cars and music concerts. But the differentiation of Christ and Him crucified is the ultimate “capital D Differentiation.” That means Jesus afforded believers a perfect sacrifice—a finished work for salvation and eternal life—a Differentiation that we are never to try to *add to* with our false notions of salvific works or law-righteousness, nor *subtract from* with mushy claims, like asserting that Jesus is *merely* a moral teacher or a great model to emulate. Sure, these attributes and descriptions of Jesus are true, but subtracting the power of Christ and the Cross is a dreadful distortion of the realities and benefits of His sacrifice that we are to clearly teach to others. Sadly, knockoffs have been a recurring internal problem in churches from the start...and that’s why God warned us away from them!

And we absolutely must remember what the writer to the Hebrews said: “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.” (Hebrews 8:6-7) Wow, did you hear that? The new covenant in Christ is better than the old covenant—in other words, Jesus’ new covenant with believers is the ultimate in “capital D Differentiation”—there’s nothing remotely like it for *any* person, *including in the old covenant!*

This core is why key verses in the New Testament help liberate the believer to the truths of the New Covenant, stating such a differentiated truth as this: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14) And then there’s this from Romans 7:6... “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

Yes, there have always been disagreements among sincere believers about what specific Bible verses mean...but, here, isn’t the person who avoids fully embracing these verses *actually subtracting from the New Covenant?* Aren’t these two verses key to “capital D Differentiation” of a life in Christ...as compared to a life in the Law delivered by Moses? Of course, such verses in Paul’s epistle to the Romans *are* part of the definitive knowledge of *capital D Differentiation!*

The believers who work to become saturated with core New-Covenant understandings of differentiation are foundationally equipped to stand out as differentiated in every role in their lives: ready with a witness for Christ...ready to differentiate with their lives in Christ...ready to apply solid differentiation in every aspect of their lives—from family dynamics to stewarding of their vocation to Biblical neighborliness.

Tell me, how’s *your differentiated life in Christ* impacting others? ...What a purposeful privilege that is!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Have you really, truly accepted the gift of grace through faith that Paul described to the Ephesians (Ephesians 2:8-9)? If so, can you describe (market, proclaim) it well to your coworkers or neighbors, as part of being a committed disciple of Christ?

2. Have you been tempted to fall for a knockoff of the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God—like works or law-righteousness being the pathway to heaven? Or perhaps fall for something more subtle, a “hybrid” of legitimate grace with just the “right” measure of legalism? Describe how you think about this temptation.

3. Will you neighbors or coworkers substantially agree that you lead a differentiated life in Christ? Be specific.