

The image is a movie poster for the film 'Caught!'. It features a dark, dramatic sky with heavy, grey clouds. In the foreground, the silhouettes of tall grass and weeds are visible against a dark ground. A wooden gallows stands on the right side of the frame, with a noose hanging from its horizontal beam. The word 'CAUGHT!' is written in large, bold, red, 3D-style capital letters across the upper middle of the poster. The exclamation mark is a solid red sphere.

**CAUGHT!**

BY BRYCE BOUCHARD  
WITH STEVEN CRAWFORD

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In the 1800s, the British Empire spanned nearly a fourth of the globe. In the more far-flung corners of the empire, the colonial governors acted almost as surrogate kings; they ruled their territory in the name of the British crown, but they were the real law of the land. Given virtually unlimited authority, the British governors often abused their power and corrupted their position by perverting justice for money, favors, or other corrupting influences.

However, there was a bright spot in the midst of this widespread corruption. His name was Colonel Nigel Peel. Peel had a reputation as an honest and capable man, a man who was kind and gentle towards all but absolutely inflexible in his integrity. In his personal life, he remained quiet and humble, devoted to his wife and son. In 1848, Peel was appointed governor of the island of Resoto, a former

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Dutch possession located near present day Indonesia. The island was an important port for British ships traveling to and from the vast new acquisitions in China. It was a crucial position to be filled by a wise and firm man. Though his family was still young (his son Jack was now 13), his sense of duty to the crown was paramount.

The problem was quickly apparent. Crime was rampant. The island had become a haven for pirates and was one of the main pathways for the smuggling of opium to Australia, Africa, and Europe. The garrison was undisciplined and little respected. Peel's first act was to whip the garrison into shape. He then issued a series of edicts that greatly eased the lot of the native islanders, tightened down on crime, and restricted the flow of opium through the island. The native islanders saw him as a savior of sorts and would cheer him whenever he appeared in public. Peel established a court for disputes and was a fair administrator. The

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<sup>1</sup> Habbakuk 1:13

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 64:6

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It's funny to me now in retrospect that I thought that giving God control of my life would be so boring. Of course there have been hard and dark times, but I can't begin to tell you how the last twenty years have been the biggest adventure that I have ever lived! I hope and trust that you will also respond in faith and abandon to this great and loving "Judge" who gave Himself in our place.

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Several years passed, years of peace and prosperity for the island. Peel's son began his passage to manhood under the careful eye of his father. On the island, however, despite the stern restrictions that Peel placed on it, the illegal transport of opium continued. In the fourth year of his governorship, the trade took a deadly turn. Some of the native population got their hands on a misplaced crate of the powder and out of curiosity, experimented with it. The opium smugglers had found a new market for their drug. Opium was rendering many useless and taking the lives of others who overdosed on the highly addictive drug. Lawlessness increased, and Peel knew he was facing a crisis. Though it went against his gentle nature, he knew that only through strong action could he solve the problem facing him.

His decision was swiftly implemented. He constructed a gallows next to the main dock and issued a decree that anyone who was

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His decision was swiftly implemented. He constructed a gallows next to the main dock and issued a decree that anyone who was

found selling any amount of opium would be hanged. This severe measure shocked everyone, and though his integrity was not questioned, many doubted that he would follow through with the punishment. Nonetheless, for a while, this new respect for the law put a hold on the drug trade, and the island once again knew peace. However, this could not last forever. One of the most unsavory of the old Dutch colonists, a man named Peter Goeterhusing, was caught peddling opium to the natives. Would Peel enforce his law? Soon after, Peter hung in disgrace, and the natives no longer doubted Peel.

Again there was peace on the island. Another year passed. Prices for opium grew as the supply bottle-necked. How long would it be until someone else risked death for profit? One night, the small island police force investigated a tip about a new opium den involving a young man named Rafa who had a history of addiction. He had gotten clean two years earlier,

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decided to make the leap of faith. Hung-over from the previous night's partying, I woke up in an unfamiliar hotel room on the beach. I was unaware of how I ended up there. But I didn't care. All I cared about was starting a new life. It was obvious that my being at the helm wasn't working. So, I walked down to the beach at sunrise and stood in the water. There on the beach, a simple but profound transaction took place. I asked God to forgive my sin and reluctantly, but with hope, offered Him control of my life.

Twenty years have passed since that morning. My life immediately began to change and has not stopped changing for the better ever since. I could not have imagined the peace and fulfillment that I have experienced in living in a relationship with God. Sure, I still struggle with selfishness and many other sins, but there is such hope in seeing that God is ever changing me and empowering me to love. I also couldn't have imagined such intimacy

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Over that year, a very dark year for me, I found myself longing all the more to know God, to be at peace with Him, and to live for something that really mattered. Eventually, I

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Resoto was a small island, and news of the arrest quickly spread. For the most part, the islanders were dismayed. Peel's devotion to his son was well-known, and "the Judge" was a widely respected man. However, there were many scattered throughout the island that wondered how deeply Peel's commitment to justice ran. Would he condemn his own son to death, preserving justice and maintaining the

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integrity of the island? Or would he use his authority to pardon him, tarnishing both justice and his ability to check the devastating opium trade?

For his part, Jack Peel was filled with guilt. His foray into the opium trade had been to pay off some outstanding gambling debts. To transgress the law was no small matter, but he had also reintroduced Rafa into the grips of the drug that so shortly after took his life. As he was awaiting trial, his remorse drove him to aid Rafa's elderly mother in any way he could. He fetched her water daily and provided her with a steady stream of food. The day of his trial loomed.

For Peel, there was never a doubt in his mind that he would maintain justice. He knew that if the consequences of the law were not fulfilled, the law would no longer be a check on the opium trade. Yet he could not tolerate the thought of his beloved son perishing. Many a sleepless night he applied his mind to

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That year, I set out to be a good person. But for every one good thing that I did, I would become aware of five to ten areas that I was selfish or gossiped or unkind toward others. I began to read the Bible and as I did, the pastor's words were only reinforced. Life also became more and more meaningless to me. Over that year, I became increasingly aware of the loftiness of God's standard and how short of that standard I was falling.

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In speaking of God, Augustine said "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you." This restlessness inspired me to seek peace with God and genuine fulfillment in Him. Through this process however, things got much worse in my life before they got better. The Bible says that "The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ." Essentially what that means is that by trying to do good, we realize just how far short we fall of perfection...of God's perfection. This principle was very much at work in my life.

I had a conversation with a pastor who asked me two thought-provoking questions. "If I were to die now, do I think that I would go to heaven?" and "If God asked why He should let me in, what would I tell Him?" I realized that I did not have satisfactory answers for either question. My response was that I hoped that

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The prosecution was almost superfluous. Jack had signed a confession, the police officer had eye-witness evidence, and all the other men involved had implicated him. When Jack was asked to speak in his defense, he could only mumble about the support he had provided for Rafa's mother. But even as he recounted those efforts, they seemed pitiful in comparison to his crime. It was almost insulting to mention them. His offence stood, and there was no question that he should be convicted.

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with apprehension. Let me assure you, the law stands immutable. The opium trade is a despicable plague on this island that must be eradicated. Any involvement with it still demands death. Jack Peel, because I must uphold justice, I sentence you to be hanged from the gallows." There was a gasp from the courtroom and a small sob from Jack. Judge Peel looked down at his son, still so young, now with the weight of death upon his shoulders. His soft gray eyes filled with tears.

Judge Peel began to speak again, and again the courthouse grew silent. "My son, all here know of my great love for you, but I cannot pervert justice." Jack hung his head. But his father continued to speak. "Therefore, if the law demands death for your crime, there must be death. I will be hanged in your place, bearing your punishment. And with that, Col. Nigel Peel, colonial governor of the island of Resoto removed his judge's robes. Like a common criminal, he was hanged for all to see.

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## A Real Life Example...

Perhaps it will help to share with you my story about how I've developed a relationship with Jesus. I grew up going to church on Sundays. Though I was terribly bored most of the time, I was also curious about God. What was He like? How could I get Him to do what I wanted and give me what I longed for?

As I matured, my concept of God was formed largely by popular American culture. I would pray to God, mostly to ask for help. As life continued, however, there were two things that troubled me. The first was that I had a growing sense that I may not be meeting God's expectations of me, even though I was uncertain of what those expectations might be. The second was that I was becoming deeply dissatisfied with the person that I was becoming. I progressively began to see my inherent selfishness and inability to truly love others. It also

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## Expounding on the Allegory...

The story you have just read is an allegory and its elements reveal a profound spiritual truth. The general consensus among Americans is that if there is a God, he is probably a loving God. We also have some sense that he is probably a God of justice as well, but this aspect of his character is not often considered. The reason? If God were indeed just, that would naturally imply that we, his creation, are subject to a standard that we may not meet, or simply are not interested in meeting.

But, just for a moment, consider the implications of a God of love who does not also exercise justice. Reflect on the story of Judge Peel. Would he be a truly loving judge if he did not also exemplify justice? Try for a moment to recall a recent movie that you've watched in which the bad guy won or evil ultimately triumphed. How did you feel? Why do we feel cheated, robbed, and defiled when the bad guy

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wins? Because we innately know that a society in which there is no justice, evil prevails. None of us wants to inhabit a justice-less society. God would not be exercising true love if he did not punish injustice would he? A true, pure love demands him to hold some standard of justice for everyone he has created. This begs the question, though, of "What is that standard?" What things are all right for us to do and what things should he prohibit? What standard should God require? Who would meet his standard? Mother Theresa? Bono? Billy Graham? You or I? Where is the cut off?

## Our Problem

The reality is that God does not grade on a curve. Nor does he allow for any impurity in our behavior. His standard, or expectation for mankind is perfection and he must enforce this standard. Anything less would make allowance for corrupt behavior and would not be truly

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of our guilt. It is simply placing our faith in Jesus' performance on the cross rather than trusting in our own good works. Again, He met the perfect standard. It also means offering God the lives we live from here on out.

Many view salvation as a formula that we carry out to get an angry impersonal God off of our backs and get our way into heaven. As is demonstrated in the judge story, God is personal, not just a religious system. And He deeply loves us. Would not the mercy shown to Jack Peel move him to abstain from involvement in opium or any illegal activity from this point on? If we truly grasp the depth of our sin against God, we are moved to despair. And if we are forgiven by this God at the expense of His own Son's dying in our place, we are moved to want to live our lives in a way that pleases Him.

The Bible makes it clear that making this decision to ask forgiveness and to entrust our lives to God is not a trivial matter. It is not a

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that Jesus never talked about Hell. He actually talked about it more than anyone else in the Bible. He made it clear that everyone who does not come to God through faith in Him, will spend eternity in a place called Hell. He said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." <sup>6</sup> He also made it clear that this Hell is a conscious torment, a lake of fire, and unending for eternity. Of course this notion is totally unpopular to us. It always has been. Unfortunately, our fondness or approval of God the Creator's rules is irrelevant.

### **Sweet Forgiveness!**

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loving us. The Bible says that "God's eyes are too pure to look on evil. He cannot tolerate wrong."<sup>1</sup> The problem is none of us can meet His standard. No one ever has been utterly perfect. Nevertheless, it would not make sense for Him to lower the standard because of our inability to meet it. This inability to meet God's perfect standard is called sin. In past centuries, the word sin was used as an archery term. If perfection was the bull's eye, then the distance between perfection and where the archer's arrow actually hit was called sin. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, sin literally is missing the mark of God's standard of perfection.

Sin is a tricky topic. We all know that this world is filled with injustice and that people routinely do horrific things to each other. But those crimes so apparent in others seem to disappear when we examine ourselves. When we consider our own actions, they seem reasonable and justifiable even if the outcome is

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Sin is a tricky topic. We all know that this world is filled with injustice and that people routinely do horrific things to each other. But those crimes so apparent in others seem to disappear when we examine ourselves. When we consider our own actions, they seem reasonable and justifiable even if the outcome is

harmful. We all consider ourselves relatively “good people.” But here’s the problem: If God deals with the world according to its own self-estimation, the entire system becomes corrupted. It is because of God’s goodness and pure love for mankind, that He maintains His standard of perfection for us.

Sin is an unpopular idea. But even more unpopular is what the Bible says about the consequences of sin. It says that what we earn for sin is death. Most people cling to the idea of a loving and forgiving God. “If God is love,” they say, “how can God punish us?” Surely it is inconsistent with our concept of a loving God for Him to send people to hell. But again, most people would only selectively apply this conception of God. We can see God punishing a pedophile. And to let Hitler off for his crimes would be a gross miscarriage of justice. You see, to be a good God, He must somehow uphold both love and justice.

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## Our Response to God’s Provision

So, where does this leave us? This leaves us with a response to God’s declaration of our guilt and His provision for our guilt. What if the claims of Christianity in the Bible are indeed true and you choose to reject God’s provision for your guilt? Jesus says, “Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”<sup>5</sup> If we choose to reject Christ’s offer for forgiveness, there is a logical outcome. It makes sense that as we tell God that we don’t want to have anything to do with Him while here on earth that He would honor that request...for eternity. If we read the Bible fairly, we cannot get around the reality of what God describes as the punishment for dying while still under His wrath for our sin. If we do not want to submit our lives to God on earth, then we are choosing an eternity without Him. Many of my friends have a misconception

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You see, through Jesus’ death on the cross,  
God upholds His standard and maintains His  
love for us by meeting His own standard.

1 Peter 3:18 says, “Christ died for sins once for  
all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring  
you to God. He was put to death in the body,  
but made alive by the Spirit.”

A Judge Peel-like storyline took place in  
the heavenly realms. God took off the robe of  
being in Heaven and came down to earth as a  
man, Jesus. Because there was no other way  
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ing. There are some moral absolutes that cross  
time, culture, and tradition. For example,  
people generally feel guilt when they steal, lie,  
murder, or cheat on their spouse. Why is this?

Because the perfect God has created them  
and given an internal sense of his standard of  
perfect behavior. This is where guilt comes  
from. Incidentally, with time, it is possible to  
ignore this God-wired guilt and not feel it any-  
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## Good Deeds Prove Futile

Even though most people deny this inner sense of direction, it's still obvious that it exists. Most of the time it seems to come out in our trying to perform "good deeds" to make up for the things that we know we have done wrong. The problem is, none of these good deeds can make up for us missing God's mark of perfection. God says that even "Our righteous acts are like filthy rags."<sup>2</sup> It's like Jack Peel trying to make up for his foolish choice by taking care of Rafa's elderly mother. It

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## God's Provision

So is that it? Are we all doomed? Fortunately not! Scripture says, "Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we too must die. But God does not take away life, instead, He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him."<sup>3</sup> It also says "God does not want anyone to

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