

The Illusion of Improvement

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Our nation was not based on an illusion of purpose and commitment



There were few summer soldier or sunshine patriots

The War Between The States (The Civil War)

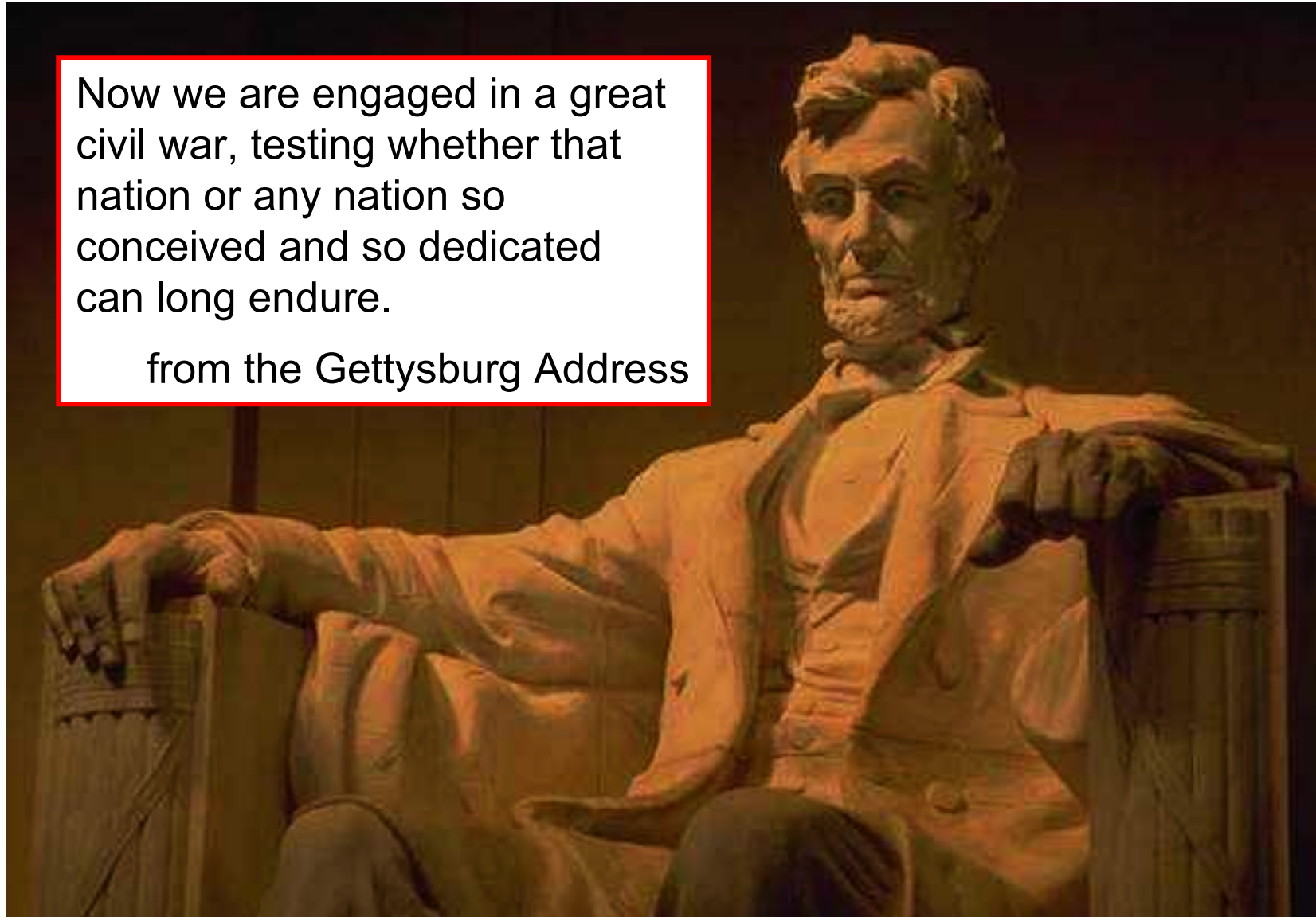


The Union (and its Great Declaration) is Tested

Abraham Lincoln resolved to hold it together

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.

from the Gettysburg Address



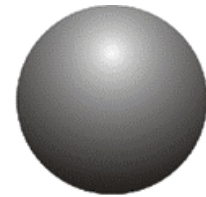
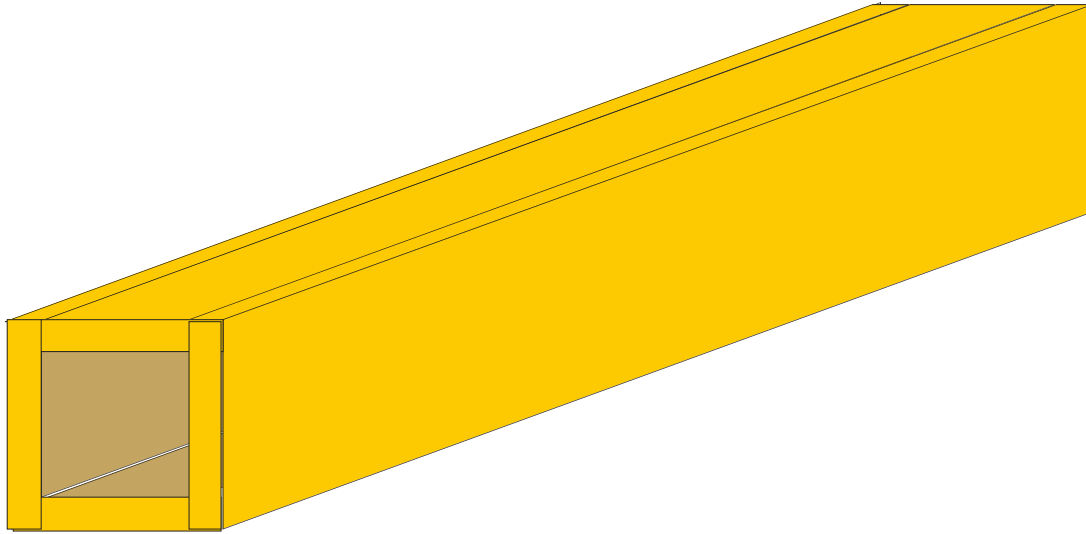
Fortunately he was successful!

The Centennial Celebration (1961 to 1965)



My folks wouldn't let me take it home!

Principles of the Wooden Cannon



cannon ball

- No photo record in the archive (Dad was not too proud)
- Poor engineering design (why I became a physicist instead of an engineer)
- But the illusion was sufficient at the time
- and I didn't have a real cannon ball, anyway

Potential World Conqueror?



No, just an early re-enactor

Now re-enactments are very common



The props help you to feel a “real” part of it

The Illusion of Righteousness

**Are we pretending
to be
Christians?**

The Illusion of Righteousness

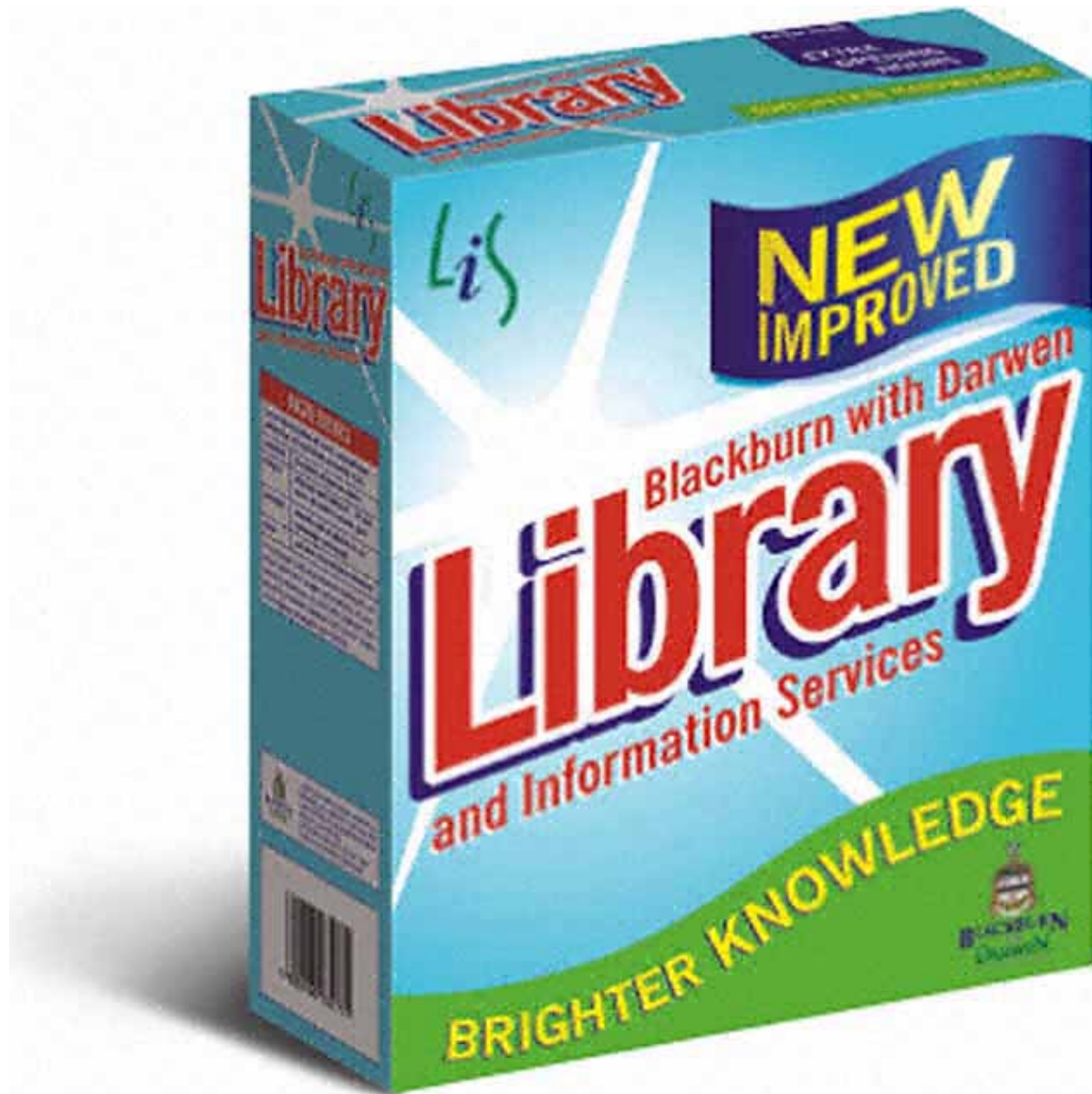
**Are we pretending
to be
Christians?**

Can others see we are genuine?

Or,

Do we look as absurd as a square cannon?

The Illusion of Improvement



The Illusion of Improvement Process

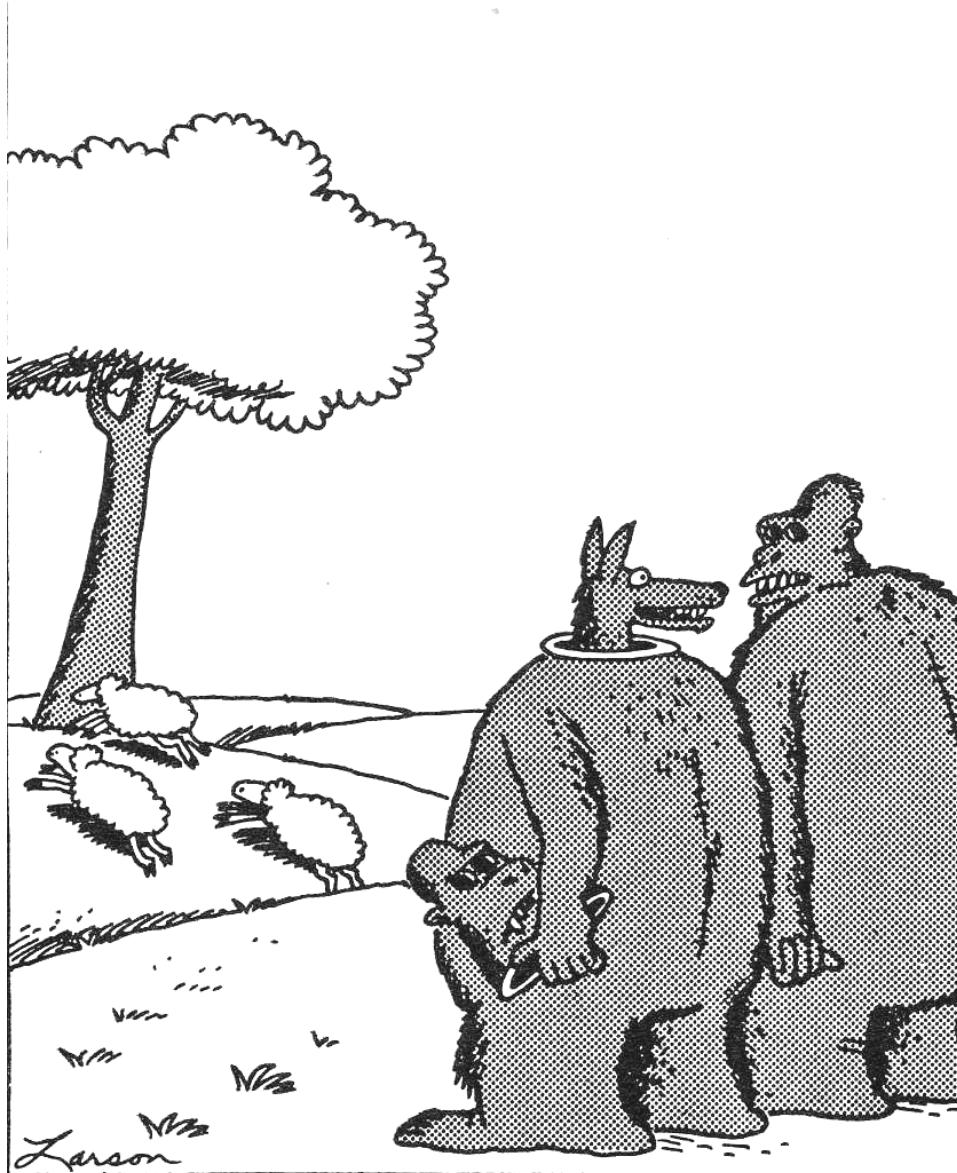
- The world demands “better” (continuous improvement)
- You can't be better if you stay the same
 - (no matter how well it is working)
- So, you must implement and advertise a change (New and Improved)
- Even if it is for the worse, the “spin” gives you momentum forward
- This process ultimately leads to a pendulum action between better and worse
- It is permissible to return to a previous position as your improvement

Allusions to the Illusion

God is not fooled

- I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies... Amos 5:21
- “The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?” says the Lord... “Stop bringing me meaningless offerings!” Isaiah 1:11, 13
- Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment. John 7:24
- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Matthew 7:15

Is it all about the external wrapper?



**“Hey! I think you’ve hit
on something there!**

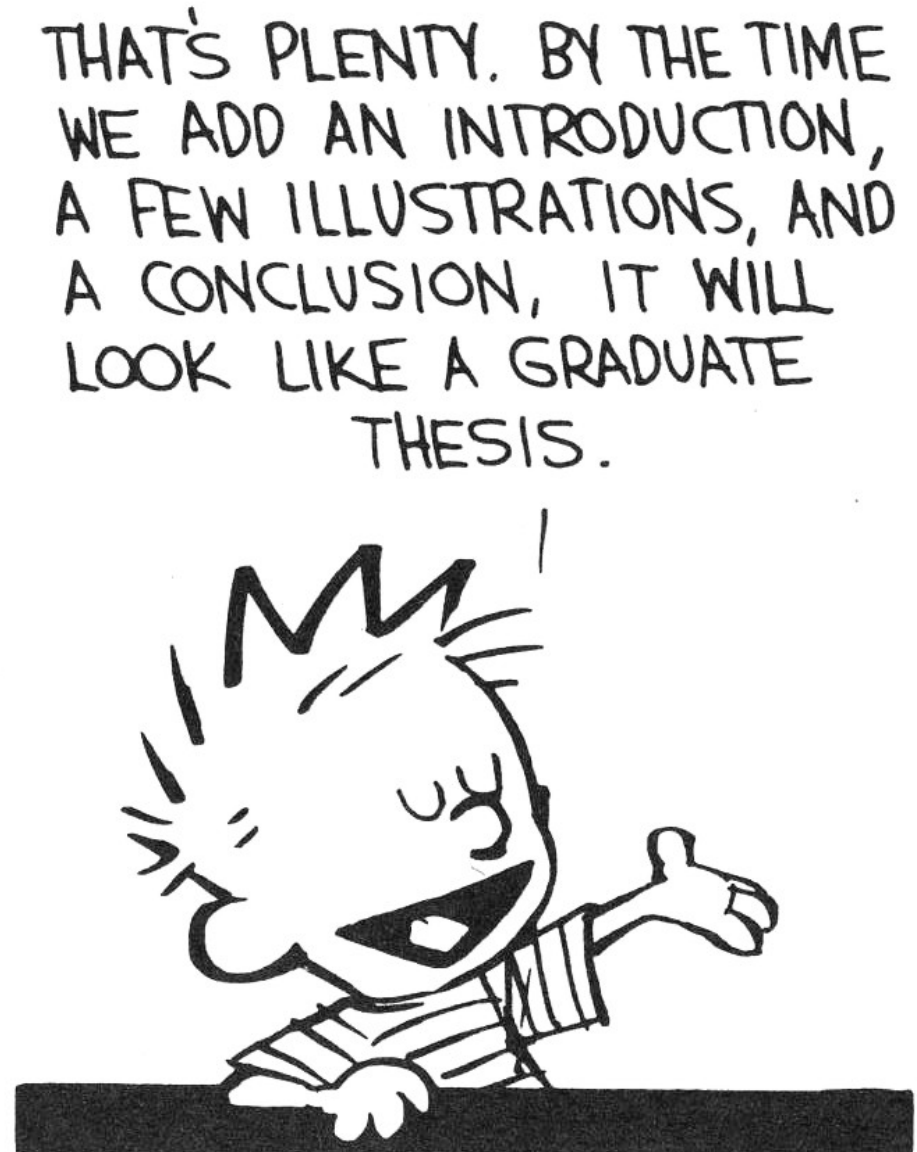
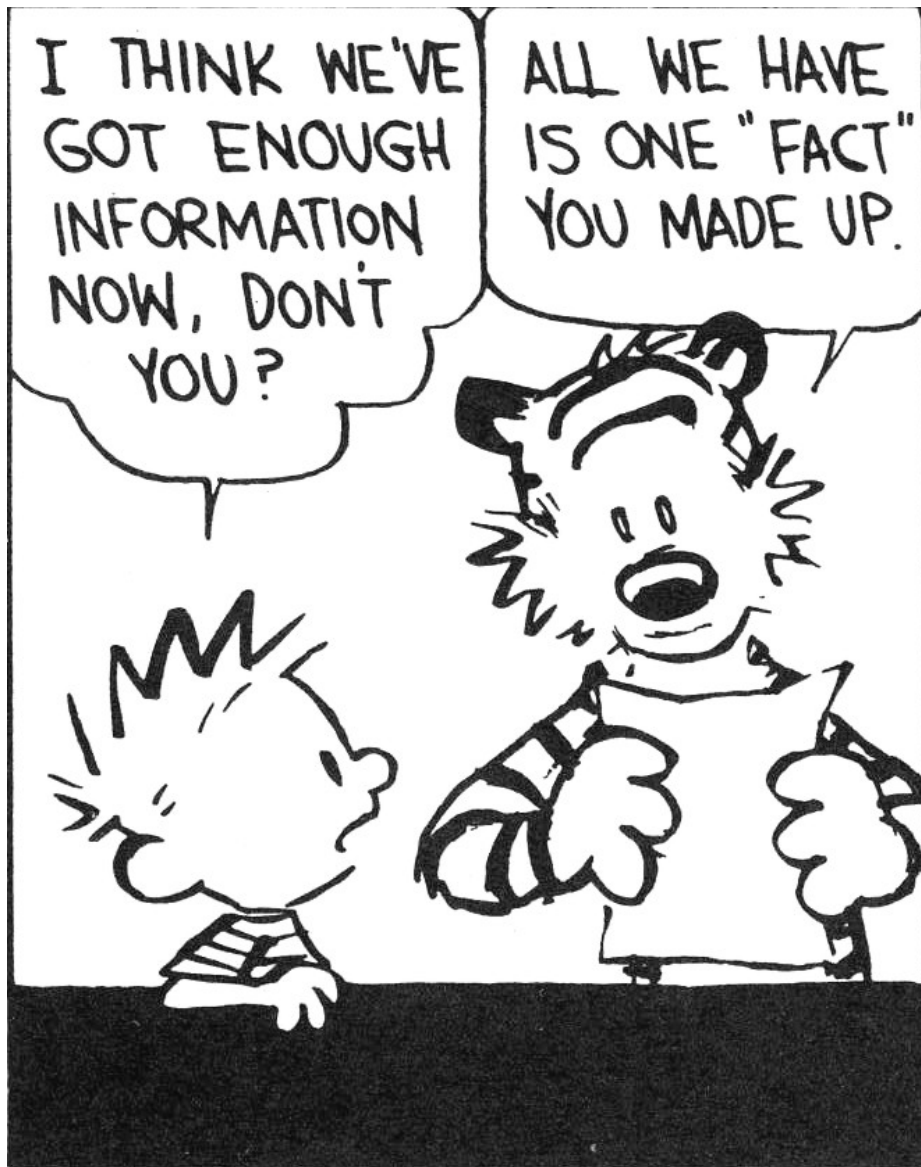
Sheep’s clothing!

Sheep’s clothing!

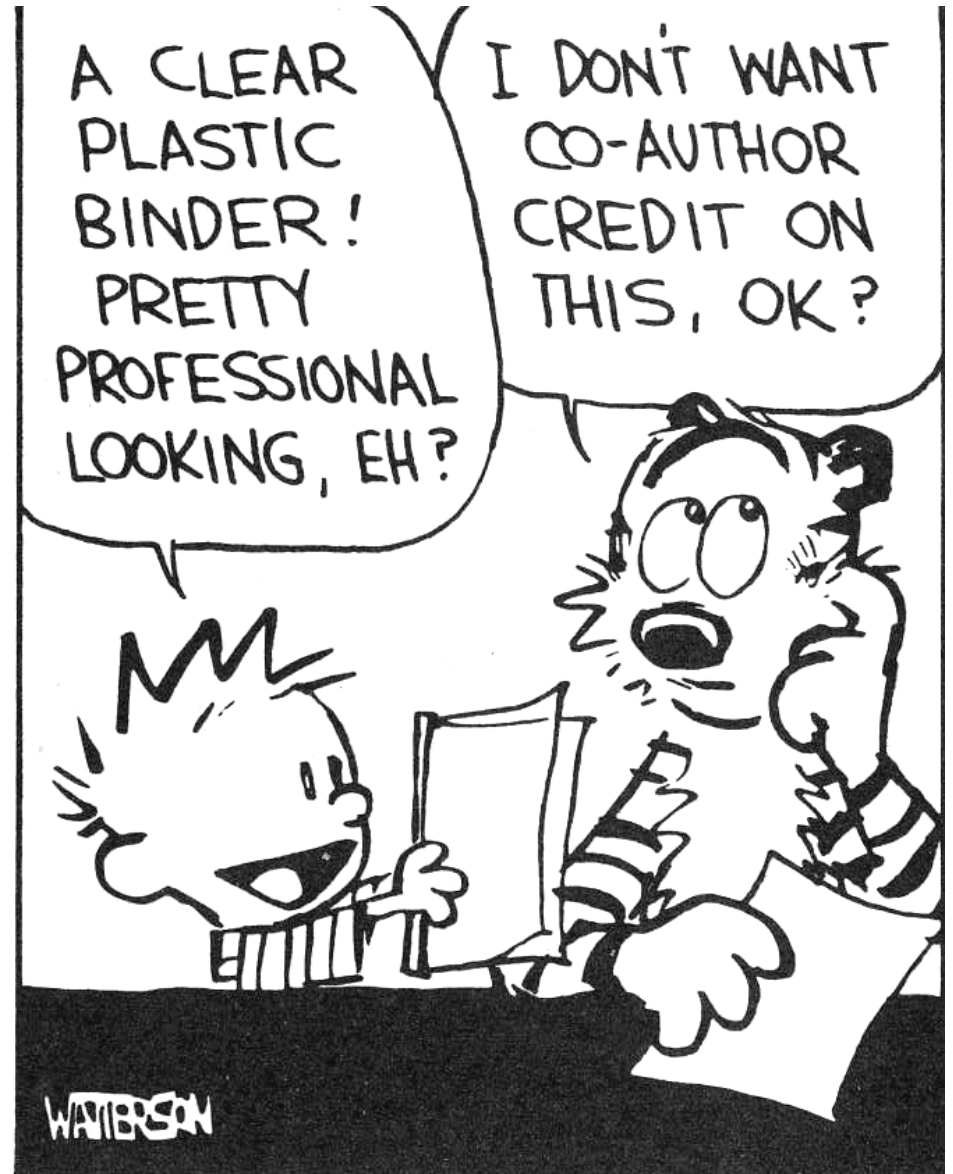
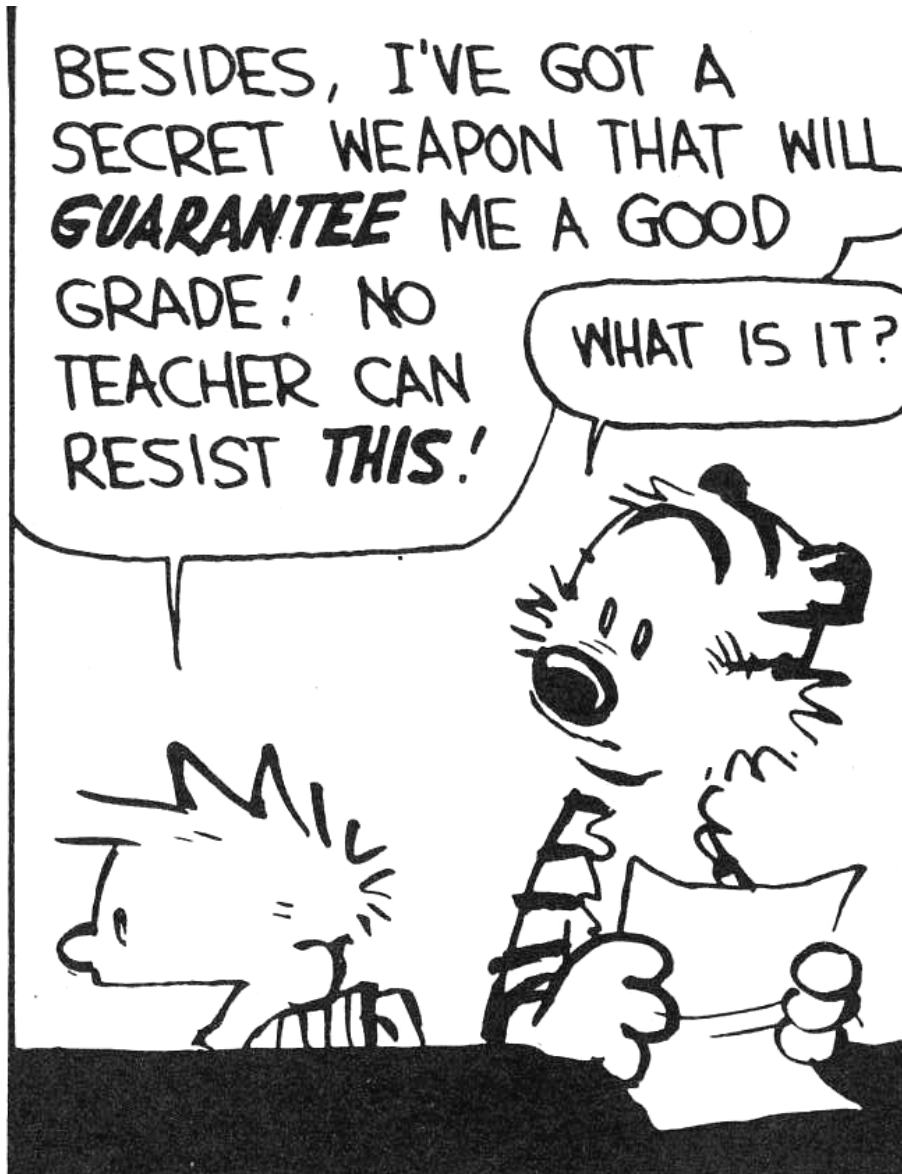
**Let’s get out of these
gorilla suits!**

We may be just as far off the mark with our illusion

The Illusion of the Wrapper (1 of 2)



The Illusion of the Wrapper (2 of 2)



Jesus discusses the **Illusion of Righteousness**

Matthew 23:3b ... do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

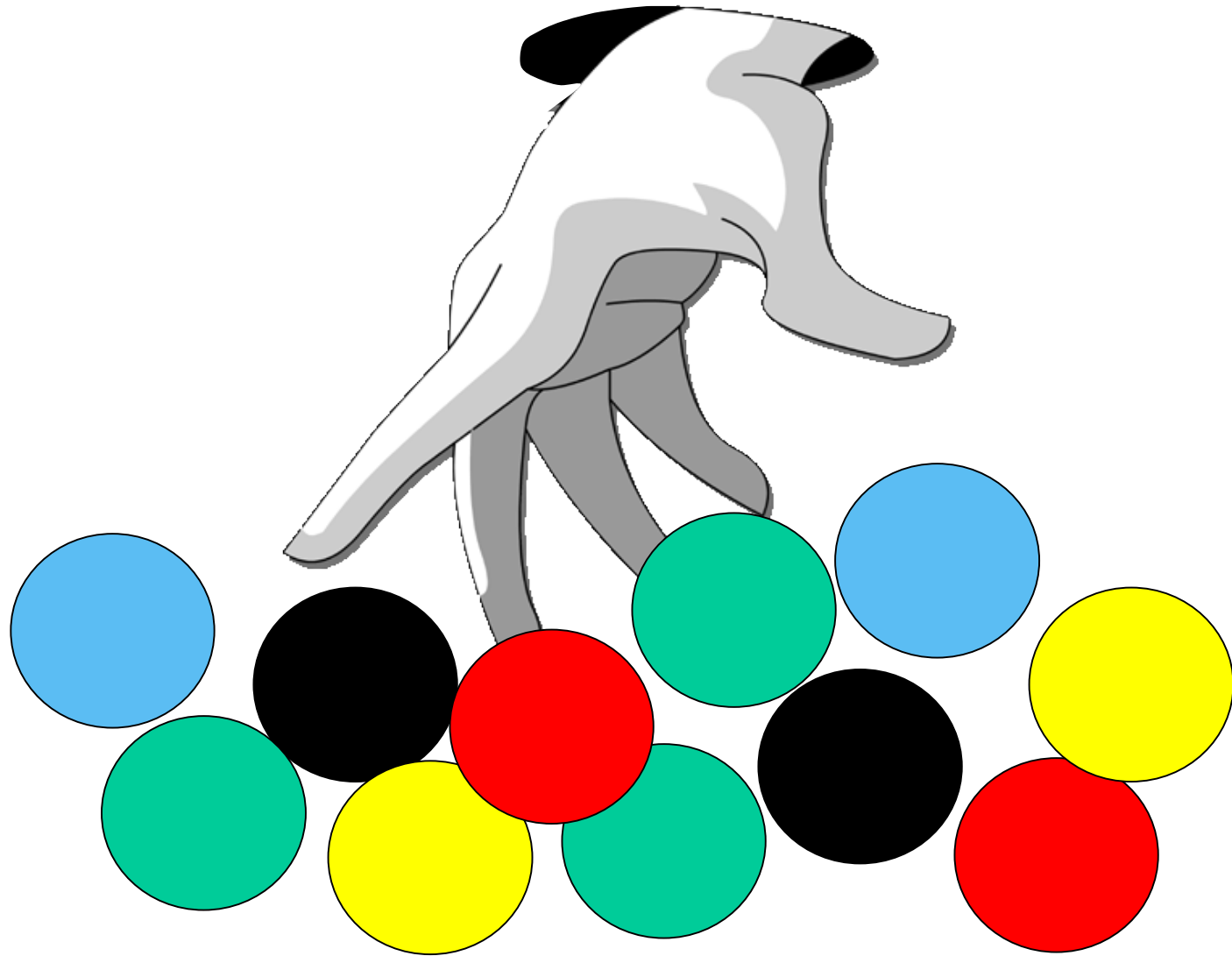
Matthew 23:5a "Everything they do is done for men to see...

Matthew 23:6-7 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

Matthew 23:23b ... you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Matthew 23:28 ... **on the outside you appear to people as righteous** but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Trying to grab it all



God “reveals” himself to Elijah

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:9-13

God shows Himself in an unlikely “Wrapper”

- Not in the great and powerful wind
- Not in the earthquake
- Not in the fire

Mt. St. Helens

God appeared to Elijah in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:9-13)
And to us all as a tiny human baby (Luke 2:11-12)

Does our “Wrapper” show our true nature?



By their fruit you will recognize them.

**Do people pick grapes from thornbushes,
or figs from thistles?**

Matthew 7:16

Defining Moments

**We may be just a cloud of “righteousness”,
giving the appearance of solidness**

What really “proves” our character?

**What shows the world that we are not just word,
but deed?**

- Finding a bleeding man beside the road
- Meeting a notorious sinner by a well
- Meeting someone that you don't respect
- Seeing a man healed (on a holy day)
- Finding a person with AIDS who needs care

The Prodigal Son's Brother

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

But he answered his father, 'Look! **All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.** Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

1 Kings 19:9-13

The brother had only the illusion of righteousness

The True Righteousness

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as **Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...**

Ephesians 5:1-2

... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... just as **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:26-8

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

Galatians 3:28

We must love and treat everyone the same!



All Are Precious In His Sight



There was no illusion at the cross

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word...

Hebrews 1:3

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...

Colossians 1:19

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

Colossians 2:9

Jesus was the True Righteousness

God wants us to be like Him

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Matthew 5:48

... put on the new self, created to be like God in true
righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:24

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed
to the likeness (image) of his Son, that he might be the
firstborn among many brothers.

Romans

8:29

God's Grace provides the power

From Illusion to Real: The Velveteen Rabbit



Through God's Unfailing Love