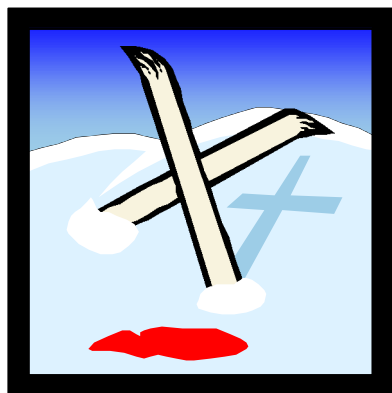


# Fred Wanted to Ski



More than almost anything else, Fred wanted to ski. But Fred was afraid.

Fred was afraid that he might get hurt, or even killed. Fred was afraid that he wouldn't be very good. But most of all, Fred was afraid that people would laugh at his tiny little skis.

Fred would tell others, and himself, that he didn't want to ski. Fred would tell others, and himself, that skiing was cold, wet and nasty. But still Fred, and everyone else, knew that he really wanted to ski.

All alone in his cold, darkened room at the lodge, Fred would read the Good Book. When the skiers returned from the slopes, Fred would regale them with stories from the Bible.

Most of the skiers would roll their eyes and walk away. But some stayed and listened. It made Fred feel good to have people pay attention to him. It made him feel even better to be the one in the conversation who knew the most about the topic, so he continued his Bible studies.

One day Fred came across the following passage:

And he [Satan] brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

--Luke 4:9-12, KJV

Something snapped in Fred's already fragile mind that day. Skiing, he told himself, was nothing but a fancy way of leaping off of a pinnacle. The desire he felt to ski, he told himself, came from the devil. His avoidance of skiing, he told himself, was a virtue. When he refused to ski, he told himself, he was doing God's work.

When Fred had told himself these things again and again. And when he finally convinced himself, he started telling others. Fred told them that skiing was cold, wet, nasty and dangerous. Fred told them that the desire to ski came from the devil. Fred told them that skiing was evil, and therefore skiers were evil.

But many people had been skiing, and knew that with proper precautions it was fun and safe. The non-skiers all had friends who were skiers, and knew they were no different from anyone else. So the skiers and their non-skiers friends just laughed at Fred.

Fred screamed and yelled and told the people that they had been deceived by the devil. Most just laughed. An unbalanced few (mostly latent skiers) joined him. So Fred and his followers moved away from the mountains to a place where there was little snow.

Fred settled among the plainsmen. Fred told them that skiing was cold, wet, nasty and dangerous. Fred told them that the desire to ski came from the devil. Fred told them that skiing was against the laws of God, and therefore skiers were evil. Most of the plainsmen had never been skiing. Few had even met a skier. Knowing no better, many people accepted Fred's fantasy as reality.



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Conservatives wanted to pass laws barring skiers from public office, or from jobs in teaching. Moderates said things like "Hate the skis, but love the skier!" Even liberals started saying things like "if people want to do cold, wet, nasty and dangerous things in the privacy of the mountains, that's none of our business." They never realized that skiing was a perfectly normal activity, and relatively safe if you take the proper precautions.

Every time a skier broke the law, or behaved poorly, Fred proclaimed it evidence of the moral weakness of skiers. When young men and women learned to ski while away at college, Fred proclaimed it evidence that the schools were under the control of an Atheist-Skier conspiracy. When the courts threw out anti-skier laws as unconstitutional, Fred proclaims the judges to be the willing tools of Satan.

Every time a skier would get hurt or catch a cold Fred would proclaim it to be a punishment from God for their sins. When an avalanche struck, Fred proclaimed it to be God's judgment against skiers, heedless that many of the dead and injured were not skiers.

Fred, in his insanity, turned away from those who needed help. He encouraged his followers to turn away too. Worse, his insanity had spread to the point where liberal commentators were saying things like "But what about the babies, surely they never skied!"

A few could see where this madness would lead, but no one would listen. The day they feared came: A couple of Fred's followers decided God needed a little help. The followers found a young skier named Matt. They lured him to a desolate ski-slope, and they tortured him to death.

People were shocked and they were horrified. They held their breath. Surely, they thought, Fred would have to see that his hatred was wrong.

Fred arrived at Matt's funeral with a few of his followers. They carried signs with slogans like "God hates skiers" and "Matt burns in Hell."

Horror upon horrors! Fred was clearly insane. Surely the mainstream churches would speak against his insanity.

But few ever did.

So the clouds opened up, a bright light shone forth, and God spoke:

"Fred, you're a twisted bigoted idiot. There's nothing wrong with skiing. If I didn't want people to ski, I could easily have made it impossible."

"You Popes and Bishops and Ministers should be ashamed of yourselves for not speaking out against this man's delusion. You have been charged with spreading my word but have failed to spread the most basic element: Love"

"You who call yourselves my children: What part of 'love your neighbor as you would love yourself' didn't you understand?"


"And you skiers, wipe that smug smile of your face. I've heard what you've been saying about snowboarders. Do the words 'do unto others' ring a bell?"

"Each and every one of you: listen up, I've said it before, I'll say it again: Go forth, and be excellent to one another. Get that right, and the rest will follow."

The last echoes of God's voice faded. The clouds came together. The great light of God faded.

Fred and his followers realized the great evil they had done. The mainstream churches realized that complacency was complicity. The skiers realized they too were not without faults. The snowboarders got some pants that fit.

Everybody forgave everybody else, and from that moment on everyone was excellent to one another.



In October in Wyoming a pair of Christian thugs brutally murdered Matthew Shepard, a young gay man. Pastor Fred Phelps and his supporters picketed Matthew's funeral with signs reading "God Hates Fags" and "Heaven Won't Take Fags-Hell Has Him Now." Some of the more liberal churches mumbled reproach. After two or three days of halfhearted attention, the media returned to discussing President Clinton's sex life.

God was notably absent from both discussions.