

Religion's Reality



Rebecca O'Connor

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Note From Author

Dear Reader,

Since the writing of this book we have gone through some decision making times. Our country had an election along with making choices of individual preferences or convictions. This book defines the pure religion of Christianity through the Scriptures making a marked difference from the religions of man showing what choices should or should not be made.

I believe we need to take a close look at the name and character by which we identify ourselves as Christians.

Let me best express my point by using basic fourth grade science. Water can be in one of three states: solid such as ice, liquid such as water and gas such as steam. Solid water has a particular shape, water has no shape of its own but fits the shape of the container, etc. So saying, which state is your faith? Is it solid or does it conform from one shape to another? Pure religion is solid while man's doctrines flow into many different shapes and sizes to fit the container of the moment.

I am concerned for the solidarity of believers in Christ today. What beliefs are we to accept and what should we never put our hand to do? If you are not solid in pure religion then you may cross the line from conviction to preference by being poured into ideology rather than solid Truth.

The way one conducts himself/herself through choices and life decisions cannot be separated from their faith. For example, is it possible for a person to be convicted for pro-life yet put their hand to pro-choice? It is only possible through preference and ignorance for what the pure religion of Christianity stands. Pure religion is solid having one very sure shape without change.

I pray for us to grow in the understanding of who we are as Christians and the binding glue that should hold us in divine unity and purpose of pure religion. If we do not unite in faith we will divide and

be easily taken captive. The weak are easily overcome.

Christians may prosper and be blessed even in the midst of trying times, but those who are not of solid faith will be shaken and fall defeated. These are not the times to be wasting in frivolities and excesses of life, but centering in on pure religion and the Love of the Father. We need each other to fill in the ranks and stand in solid faith and purpose. Amen

-Rebecca O'Connor

contents

Religion's Reality	1
Who Died and Made You King?	15
Religious Tolerance?	20
Religion: The Devil's Advocate	26
Other Zahar Books	32

RELIGION'S REALITY

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. James 1:27

If I asked you for the definition of **religion**, what would your definition be? Some might say their religion is their denomination, in other words where they congregate and what they collectively believe. However, people of the same congregation do not all believe exactly the same things. Religion as seen by God's standard is given in James 1:27 showing that **pure** religion is more than a belief but action produced by our faith. Pure religion in God's eyes mentions three main areas:

- Visit [ἐπισκεῖσθαι: to look out for] the fatherless [ορφανοὺς: orphan, comfortless, bereaved].
 - And to look out for the widows [χήρα: a widow who is deficient of help].
- Keep unspotted [ἀσπίλος: unblemished, unspotted] from the world.

In breaking them down further:

We are to look out for the orphan. What exactly is an orphan? Here are the different definitions:

1. a child whose parents are dead
2. a child who has been deprived of parental care
3. one that lacks support, supervision or care
4. one isolated and abandoned
5. a person or thing without protective affiliation or sponsorship

I can tell you the greatest statistics of orphaned children is called abortion. If you check the definition of what an orphan is you can see that a child whose future is to be aborted is deprived of parental care and has no protective affiliation from the government. The unborn child lacks protection in our nation as well as world wide! But let's do get to some specifics:

World-wide: 42 million per year; 115,000 per day

United States: 1.37 million; 3,700 per day

Who are aborting their babies in the U S?

- 37.4% Protestants
- 31.3% Catholics
- 23.7% no church affiliation
- 18% born again/Evangelical
- 1.3% Jewish

[Does it surprise you that 86.7% of aborted babies are being aborted by those identifying with Christians?]

What are the reasons for these abortions:

- 93% convenience
- 6% health of the mother
- 1% incest

[From The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, Alan Guttenmacher, *Family Planning Perspectives*]

[None of these statistics record *The Morning After Pill*, which is accessible from any pharmacy for early home-abortion.]

- We are to look out for the widow. What is a widow?
 1. one who has lost a spouse
 2. one who has been left alone due to the spouse's free time being spent in television, sports, hobbies or overworking etc.
 3. military spouses who are left due to war

This has generally applied to women, however with women in the work force, military and extra curricular activities it may now apply to men as well. There are also the men and women who have been left for another. While no one has died in this circumstance the death of the relationship causes a widowhood just the same and generally without the closure of death but ongoing limbo and pain.

- To keep ourselves unspotted from the world.
There is only one solution for removing the spots of the world and staying as spot retardant as possible and that is through the blood of Jesus. No other religion has forgiveness or the ability to erase sin. Many religions do not believe in sin because they have no right or wrong and others weight the good deeds against the bad. More good deeds they believe lead to a higher plain. But Jesus paid for sin and gives grace in return.

John 14:6

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

- **Way:** ὁδοῖς the road: - journey, [high] way

Jesus is the road on which the journey leads to Truth and life. Jesus and through His shed blood alone is the remedy or spot cleaner from the worlds filth, which was the third point of pure religion.

The early church appointed deacons for the service of the widows etc. Today deacons are the janitors of the building and lawns or in some cases filling in and preaching when the pastor is gone. This Scripture in James 1:27 does not point itself at the deacon but to all believers and yes, even the pastor. Pure religion does not wait for a widow or orphan to ask for help because the word **visit** means **to look out for** and does not wait around for an invitation.

Not all religion is pure. We see the elements of pure religion from the verse in James, but any belief outside of pure religion is just religion. Pure religion and religion are at odds not being the same at all. The world lumps all religion as the same in definition yet different in philosophy. Sociologists and anthropologists have tried to define that religion thusly:

Limbeck: "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought... it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments"

Rudolf Otto: "The Idea of the Holy"

Friedrich Schleiermacher: "feeling of absolute dependence"

And then there is me:

Rebecca O'Connor: I would define religion as man's own understanding of dependence upon an idea from which all facts gathered are gleaned to fit the idea and anything contrary is to be cast out of thought as irrelevant or in err. These ideas are based on feelings whether experiential or culturally influenced. It is basically self-molded.

I see the difference from religions to pure religion and believe everyone has a form of religion by these definitions. Everyone has a formed belief whether it is to believe in an unseen entity, a government, self or science. Whether people admit to the little unknowns about their belief, we still all believe something. Very few

live in the area of **pure** religion. If you want to check yourself go back to James 1:27 and see what you are doing for the uncared for child, the lonely and brokenhearted and how well you follow what Jesus taught. Jesus gave the same test:

Matt 25:31-45

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

Look at the Scripture this way: imagine that each person you meet is really Jesus in disguise. How would you treat Jesus? How would you speak to Jesus? Would you offer Him your time, substance, grace? **“Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”**

Look at the life of Jesus. He was unspotted of the world and a servant to all ministering to the need of the afflicted and ministering the True Word of God. In the school of ministry I heard many of the teaching pastors say that the minister’s job was to preach the Word and teach, while the congregation’s job is to go out and minister to the people. Jesus did both. Being a pastor does not exempt one of pure religion. There are different offices and gifts for use within the church, but pure religion is more than talk it is a walk and it is for all.

There is very little pure religion being practiced today, while religion itself thrives throughout the world. That being said I believe that anything added or subtracted to Jesus **is** just vain religion. Jesus has been re-written by translators, preachers, teachers and laymen alike. I believe we all have some religion with which to deal. Religion is deadly and through the years its target is to first kill Jesus, which it did and next kill His Words, in which it will never succeed. Jesus warned of this telling of His own death AND resurrection, but also the controversy and attack of His Words and deeds:

Matt 10:22 *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

Matt 24:9-13 *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

John 15:18-19 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

John 17:14 *I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [Jesus speaking to the Father]*

Jesus further said that it would be even the members of your own household or family.

Matt 10:34-38

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

People have misunderstood this Scripture thinking Jesus Himself brought the strife of religion, but He is saying just the opposite. Because Jesus came anyone who believes on Him and His Words would be under scrutiny of religion and religion is man's idea trying to protect itself against Truth. Religion is dependence without freedom, while Truth will set a man free:

John 8:32

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Think of those with whom Jesus spoke harshly. Was it the sinner or the religious leader? Jesus Words of condemnation were for the religious. He came for the sinner who was broken. You have heard the saying, "If it ain't broke don't fix it!" Did you know that it is a version of what Jesus said? Look:

Matt 9:12-13

They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Do you get Jesus drift here? You cannot ever save a person who does not believe he is lost. Think about it.

So why am I making such an issue over the little word religion? Because it is lazy and reckless about Truth. It is lazy reliance upon a thought or feeling of no substance and no Truth or half truth producing nothing...manifesting nothing, but argument and attack. Religion is not constructive, but destructive. It is the side that you are on and everyone else wrong or in the extreme case everyone else should be wiped off the face of the earth. Jesus never told His disciples to argue Truth, but gave them this advice:

Matt 10:12-14

And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

The house being worthy simply means having an ear to consider Truth. Even when certain Pharisees tried to gain an argument Jesus stopped them by asking a question which they could not answer. Nicodemus was a Pharisee with an ear to hear so Jesus helped to teach him.

Religion's byproduct is division. While I was shopping in a health food store I overheard an argument between two men. Both used Scriptures to prove a point and cancel out the other man's Scripture.

The two Scriptures were: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth , hand for hand, foot for foot," [Ex 21:24] and "but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." [Matt 5:39] No, this was not an argument between Moses and Jesus, even though the Pharisees used the same technique of pitting Moses against Jesus. I thought it strange to use the words of Moses against the Word/Jesus back then because it seemed both men were in essence arguing against themselves. I have since come to realize that the only pure religion is through Jesus. It is only by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we may be cleansed. If it could have been accomplished with Moses God would have never had to leave heaven and shed His blood. However, this is why we have the many different Christian churches believing differently yet all believing they are a New Testament church. There are faith fellowships and denominations believing that "Though God slay me yet will I trust Him." While those words are in the Bible they are not THE WORD OF GOD, but a quote from the words of Job. Job's words are not eternal truths but words spoken in confusion. There are many voices written within the Bible from subjective mortals. Since it is so hard to tell the voice of God from the subjectiveness of the one delivering the words we need to cut to the chase and read the red lettered version in the New Covenant.

God's voice is not a guess nor is it necessarily spoken by a Godly personality. It is not in a toss of the "lot" nor the reading of Urim and Thurim nor the reading of stones in a gazing priest's ephod, but in the eternal Words of Jesus, which are the only words that will never pass away [Matt 24:35, Mk 13:31, Lu 21:33]. Everyone uttering the Word of the Lord is a secondhand witness while Jesus is first hand and out of the mouth of God without the middleman. Religion is not a discerner of the difference.

Studying the religions of the world will show religion's reality. Here is the top twenty-two listing of religions world-wide from the largest on down:

Christianity: 2.1 billion

[The largest is Catholicism 1.2 billion; approximately 39,000 different denominations are considered Christian and range in their doctrines of belief]

Islam: 1.5 billion [Sunni 85%, Shi'a 15%]

Shi'a: Hezbollah

Sunni: Al-Qaeda, Fatah, Hamas, PLO

[Many aspects of Islamic law see more than religion but also a political unity, which is for the elimination of non-Muslims and anything not the Muslim realm which is incompatible with Islam. There are those who live in non-violent philosophies yet all have the same end times scriptures in the Quran saying that Islam will defeat the Christians and the Jews]

Secularism/Agnostic/Atheist: 1.1 billion

[While not believing in any absolutes they believe themselves to be absolutely right. While their message is tolerance they work hard to attack and eliminate Christian or Judean thought]

Hinduism: 900 million

[The religion is difficult to define for the varied traditions and ideas coalesced within making them more henotheistic i.e. identifying with a single god but belief in many gods]

Chinese traditionalism: 394 million

[Patriarchal, meaning the elder male of the family was the infinite power with all males being higher than the female specie; all answers and guidance comes from the patriarch]

Buddhism: 376 million

[Buddhism is difficult to define due to the fact that Buddhists do not agree upon what they believe; key words would be: achieving Nirvana, meditation, Karma, reincarnation]

primal-indigenous: 300 million

[Folk religion: bases upon superstition and rituals; mostly African and Chinese populations, however there are adherents in Christendom and Islam as well; religious beliefs without clergy]

African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million

[Patriarchal head of tribe; key words or phrases: distant god with intermediaries, spirit or god possession, offerings and sacrifices, altars, ancestor worship]

Sikhism: 23 million

[God being the universe; led by gurus; salvation is determined through discipline and meditation; no heaven or hell destination but the continual rebirth of reincarnation; the five evils are: ego, anger, greed, attachment and lust] This sounds very similar to

Oprah's religion.

Juche: 19 million

[Ideology of North Korea; part of Kimilsunism; spirit of self-reliance; originator: Kim Il-Sung 1955]

Spiritism: 15 million

[Séances; communing with the dead; the Greek word would be daemon; Taoism, reincarnation; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist]

Judaism: 14 million

[Based upon sacred texts [tanakh] or Hebrew Bible, traditions and learned rabbis who interpret the texts and laws; its belief in the single, omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, transcendent God who created the universe]

Baha'i: 7 million

[Belief in a series of divine messengers: Abraham, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Bahauallah and others; a collective evolution of justice, peace and unity on a global scale]

Jainism: 4.2 million

[Follows the path of Moksha which is: true perception, true/right knowledge, true/right conduct by being liberated from all karma; branch of Buddhism]

Shinto: 4 million

[Japanese roots influenced by Buddhism; no emphasis upon afterlife but fitting into this world is the primary goal; no binding dogma, no place of worship, no persons of holiness and no set prayers; reverence of nature and artifacts and processes]

Cao Dai: 4 million

[Vietnamese in origin; ethical practices of: prayer, veneration of ancestors, non-violence and vegetarianism; In the beginning was Tao an eternal energy and after the Big Bang God was born; God then created yin and yang; God took control over yin and created a Goddess to watch over yang: from this the universe materialized]

Zororastrianism: 2.6 million

[Was the main religion of Iran before Islam; transcendental god Ahura Mazda a god of truth and order and opposed to chaos; good thoughts and good deeds keep chaos at bay; their dead are

positioned upon a hard slab for the vultures and weather etc. to clean the flesh from the bones=fire and earth were too sacred to put bodies within]

Tenrikyo: 2 million

[Belief in a single god: Tenri-O-no-Mikoto; reincarnation is part but without great emphasis; Origin: by Miki Nakayama in 1838 after her husband and son were afflicted and a Buddhist monk came in to exorcize the spirits; during the incantation god entered into her body; objectives are to gain a joyous life on earth through charity and abstinence of greed, selfishness, anger and arrogance]

Neo-Paganism: 1 million

[Umbrella term for pantheon of gods; witchcraft; German mysticism and anti-Semitism; Dianic Wicca; New Age; Mother Goddess; Gaia; Neo-Druidism etc.]

Unitarian-Universalism: 800 thousand

[Unity of searching truth; roots in Christianity but went far beyond grasping Jainism; believe that God is too good to damn them and that they are too good to be damned; each person may search for their own truths; some hold to God being female, others that God is passive, while others believe in atheism as the truth of their search or pantheism of gods]

Rastafarianism: 600 thousand

[Believe as Christian and Jews howbeit they believe the western society [Babylon] have corrupted the Truth; they believe Jah incarnated here on earth in the form of Jesus Christ and that Babylon corrupted His teaching so He incarnated again as Haile Selassie emperor of Ethiopia from 1930-1974; they believe Africa will be the site of Zion; black pride; black supremacy]

Scientology: 500 thousand

[Created in America by science fiction writer Ron Hubbard; the church's goal is: a civilization without insanity, criminals and war; they believe that which is true for you is what you have observed to be true; there is no absolute right or wrong; they believe implants from dictators and extraterrestrials etc. have brainwashed people and control populations. No wonder Tom Cruise did such a good job in the remake: War of the Worlds. Cruise must have thought it was a religious movie fighting off

those terrestrial implants! Sorry, I couldn't help myself.]

Those are by no means all the religions in existence but some of the top religions. Whether some are peaceful as Scientology and Unitarianism seem to be they attack Christianity. Listen to Hollywood and the liberal media. Anything concerning or touching Christianity and you see and hear the hatred being spewed as well as those peace loving transcendentalist who **can** find a vicious tongue against conservative Christian values. All Christianity wants is not having their children programmed to humanism and liberalist doctrines in the education system of the world and the freedom to worship. College professors have made Christianity their main target. They think they are fighting against religion, but they are in truth promoting the humanist agenda, which is a religion. Professors in this nation are vehemently religious! Not only that they are proselytizing by blackmail of grades given. I have talked to many Christians who have felt their grades at risk by the liberal humanist manifesto. Scientology has it backwards...they are the implants trying to reinvent our nation through the education system. Capture the young mind and you will capture the nation eventually.

Wars, rumors of wars and religious wars down through history and in the future have three main Abrahamic factions which are: Christians, Jews, Muslims. The final chapter in religious wars come down to these three. All three claim by the religious doctrine they support that they are the only one of the three who will survive. All three believe there will be a great war:

Islam believes Jesus will return to over throw al-Dahjjal [anti-Christ] and kill all the pigs [Jews], then break all the crosses and declare Islam is the only religion.

Jews believe that the Messiah will come and defeat all gentile nations and restore Israel forever.

Christians believe Jesus has already come and then next appearance will be after the anti-Christ. [Some Christians believe that Jesus will come and rapture or take them out before the appearance of the anti-Christ.]

All three are expecting "ONE" to come to deliver them and only them. What some will see as the Messiah others will see as anti-Christ. Of the world's religions of humanism and atheism or scientology and Unitarianism will become fearful for the happenings upon the earth. Catastrophic weather and economy will devastate the

worldly and many hearts will fail with fear. Christians expecting to go through nothing will become disenchanted with their faith. Jews also will become disenchanted waiting for a Messiah that they have given up on.

The book of Luke addresses the gentile Christians:

Luke 21:25-27

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The book of Matthew addresses the Jewish believers in Matt 24: 15-30. While this is the same time it is written with the Jewish nation in mind.

Many religions but only one pure/clean, spotless religion. Paul was a very religious man, yet not pure religion, but the religion of man until a revelation on the road to Damascus. Look at Paul's words and testimony:

Gal 1:11-16

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's

womb, and called me by his grace,

*To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the
heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*

We all need to get into the red letters of the New Testament and be conformed to the image of God in pure religion. Jesus gives all the instruction you will ever need and He is the road on which we journey until we get to our final destination.

WHO DIED AND MADE YOU KING?

1 Peter 2:9

*But ye are a chosen generation,
a royal priesthood,
an holy nation, a peculiar people;
that ye should shew
forth the praises of him who hath
called you out of
darkness into his marvellous light:*

My mother was once confronted with a relative who believed that God was all religions and all names and she began to name a few. Mother's answer to the argument was simple and ended the conversation: *"Jesus was the only One of them who died for me."* That is an amazing Truth to think about. All other gods or goddesses require the blood of others as well as death and destruction for all opposers.

- **Superstition is a religion.** What superduperstition died for the world? But Jesus died to save the superstitious.
- **Atheism is a religion.** What atheist died for the world? But Jesus died to save the atheist.
- **Agnosticism is a religion.** What agnostic died for the world? But Jesus died for the agnostic.
- **Skepticism is a religion.** What skeptic died for you? But Jesus died for the skeptic.
- **Humanism is a religion.** What humanist died for you? But Jesus died for the humanist.

Go through all the religions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and *isms* of the world and none of their gods died for you. But Jesus came and died to save an entire world...all cultures and all peoples everywhere. Then He commanded that we go and tell them what He did for them so they would know!

Mark 16:15

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Did they go out as Jesus commanded? NO! The early church added to themselves where they were and set over them elders and deacons because they got so great a number that they could not help

all the widows and those with special needs etc.

Acts 2:41-47

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Acts 4:32-35

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Acts 6:1-3

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

Jesus had warned them over and over that they would be hated and as the Christians grew in mass the political world and religions got nervous and feeling threatened began to persecute the church. So Christianity finally began to scatter to other parts and do just as Jesus had commanded in the first place.

Acts 8:1-4

*And Saul was consenting unto his death. **And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.***

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

You see man cannot seem to help it but be religious. As a fourth grade teacher I saw this in action even with nine-year-old students. We had gone to chapel, during a worldwide day of prayer, class by class throughout the day. When my class went to pray they scattered throughout the sanctuary to pray separately. As time passed some began to read from passages of Scripture and others went to pray with fellow students. This was a beautiful flow of the spirit and it inspired and sparked their faith. The class approached me to let them go to the sanctuary everyday to pray. Now while I knew they were genuine I also did not just arrive off some banana boat, thinking that we could skip other subjects! When I told them they could use their recess time instead of class time, no one balked. I stayed in the back of the sanctuary and did not interfere nor did I lead anything, but sat quietly. The next two days were about the same but by the fourth day several "leaders" were organizing the prayer. When we got back to class I had told them a story about the famous Azusa Street Revival and the importance of following the flow of the Holy Spirit rather than organizing the things of the spirit which killed the flow of the Azusa Street Revival into just being the Azusa Street Church. The students listened but did not hearken. The class "leaders" [self-appointed] continued to lead, friction arose and division set in. They began to fall off in numbers opting for recess, but for the organizers who now carried paper and pen to dictate each role to be performed when I stepped in and stopped the **free** expression of their religion. You see

people just cannot help it. The “leaders” were disgruntled with their teacher and I’m sure I was not held in highest esteem by some parents [of the “leaders”] for hindering their faith. The little buggers continued their plea out on the playground proselytizing others to serve their cause. In the end what started as a beautiful flow of the spirit turned religious with friction and division as is typical of the animal.

I have to tell you of the example of my mother in her love for Jesus. I must say she was the least religious person that I have ever known and my dad was also right in there. Every Saturday for quite some time the same Jehovah’s Witness came to our door. Mother did not believe in the religion but opened her door and invited her in each week. This woman loved coming to our home. She felt welcomed. Mother would offer her coffee and they would have a pleasant chat [not debate]. The woman was impressed with how all of us worked together on projects and crafts, of course being Saturday Mom had wisdom in how to occupy four active children. Even though the woman was a Jehovah’s Witness it was the witness of my mother’s loving acceptance that touched her heart. In Proverbs 31:10-31 you can read more about Mom for she was the virtuous woman written about and as verse 28 tells and I am one of her daughters to rise up and call her blessed.

“Yeah, well who died and made Christianity king?” Jesus! Jesus went to the right hand of the Father to make continual intercession for us as we use Jesus name, Words and do His deeds on earth. We have more than merely power of attorney; we inherit His gifts, royalty and Son-ship with the Father.

John 1:12

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Rom 8:14-17

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also

glorified together.

Phil 2:15

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

John 14:12

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, **the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works** than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

Now to address the religious mind who says the works are not the miracles but service or servant hood, which is also true yet not exclusive to the meaning:

Mark 16:17-18

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

And to the argument that this was for the disciples in that generation only: [Matt 24:35; Mk 13:31; Lu 21:33]

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Jesus had more than twelve disciples when He was on the earth and after He left the earth. We who are learners of Him today are His disciples. So if His words applied to His disciples only, then just as His Words are still alive today so are His disciples.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

[Note from the author: After finishing this chapter I felt so slapped around by conviction that I mistook it for applause! This is a chapter I got for me, but I will share it with you for the better good of us all. Proceed with caution.]

I am sure most of us have heard of religious tolerance. It sounds like a very benevolent thing to give...tolerance. Are you tolerant of people who do not believe as you do? Did Christ tell us to tolerate one another? No, Jesus told us to love one another. Jesus taught us to love just as religion teaches us to tolerate. Now there's a test for you! I personally find it hard not arguing with the television when a liberal is speaking. I am not even tolerant of liberals and would be quite happy if they became extinct. I could, however, be politically and religiously correct if I said that I loved the liberal but hate his/her liberalism. What a farce that statement is. I cannot separate the man from his personality. A man is who he is or as the Scripture says, "**As a man thinks in his heart so is he.**" I have said this before in writing, but religion says that God loves the sinner but hates the sin, however what was said goes more like this:

John 3:16

*For **God so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

- **World/κοῖσμος** : world with its inhabitants

It does not read for God so loved only those who did that which was right. God loved the world, which was enmity with God. God *is* Love. There is no love in tolerance. Have you ever been tolerated? Well, did you feel the love? Someone's being civil to you against his feelings of disgust or judgment is not love no matter how you cut it. So what does this tell you about me? I am dealing with the *impure religion* in my heart. I want to have God's unconditional love and give it to others as well. People, what I am saying is we need to be delivered from our religion! Pure and undefiled religion does not hate nor tolerate, but is giving and loving.

We are a people of emotions and passions of love and hate. We war within our own hearts. We say we love all people, but our hearts know the truth. Tolerance does not sacrifice nor go beyond inconveniences of self. Look at some quotes and see if you can catch the love:

Anon: "Tolerance is more difficult to maintain when you know that your religion is true and their religion is wrong."

Copen: "Contrary to popular definitions, true tolerance means putting up with error."

Hagar: "My son, always respect and honor the other fellow's point of view. Unless it's different from yours, of course."

Anonymous: "I find tolerance based on the intolerance of intolerance intolerable."

David Odell-Scott: "We value tolerance as a virtue. Yet, consider tolerance from the perspective of the person being tolerated. Have you ever been tolerated? Or had someone say to you that they can just barely tolerate you? The experience of being tolerated by another doesn't feel like the one tolerating you is virtuous."

I will let you do the test of tolerance versus love and see if you can pass. **Fill in the blanks with either the word Love or a form of Tolerate:**

1 John 4:7-12 [Here is the Scripture just in case you need help.]

Beloved, let us _____ one another: for _____ is of God; and every one that _____ is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that _____ not knoweth not God; for God is _____.

In this was manifested the _____ of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is _____, not that we _____ God, but that he _____ us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so _____ us, we ought also to _____ one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we _____ one another, God dwelleth in us, and his _____ is perfected in us.

Or what about these Scriptures:

John 13:34

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye _____ one another; as I have _____ you, that ye also _____ one another.

Rom 13:8

Owe no man any thing, but to _____ one another : for he that

_____ another hath fulfilled the law.

1 Thess 4:9

But as touching brotherly _____ ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to _____ one another.

1 Peter 1:22

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned _____ of the brethren, see that ye _____ one another with a pure heart fervently:

Tolerance is not in the Bible. Some Christians might like the bumper sticker showing a fist with the words: ***“Truth not Tolerance!”*** However, see if the Scriptures could have been written using the word intolerant? It was not tolerance or intolerance that took Jesus to the cross, but it nailed Him there. Love took Him to the cross.

John 15:13

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 13:35

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Tolerance does not look out for the widow and orphan nor does it keep from becoming spotted of the world, for tolerance is of the world. Look at the Scripture in 1Co 13 and know that the word charity is LOVE:

1 Cor 13:1-8

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not LOVE, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not LOVE, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not LOVE, it profiteth me nothing.

Verses 4-8 give the characteristics of love:

- Charity suffereth long
- Is kind
- Charity envieth not
- Charity vaunteth not itself
- Is not puffed up
- Doth not behave itself unseemly
- Seeketh not her own
- Is not easily provoked
- Thinketh no evil
- Rejoiceth not in iniquity
- Rejoiceth in the truth
- Beareth all things
- Believeth all things
- Hopeth all things
- Endureth all things
- Charity never faileth

Tolerance makes the boast of being longsuffering, kind and not puffed up nor does it think that it seeks its own. Tolerance believes it bears all things and that it does not fail, but tolerance has its wall built just the same. Tolerance and love do not mean the same thing. Tolerance adjusts ones stand to put up with a lesser idea, belief or life style, while love deems itself lesser than others and willing to serve regardless of the idea, belief or life style.

Think about some of the evangelists and even priests who have committed the adulteries that they have preached against. They were those who tolerated the sin of others yet they envied those who sinned and eventually sinned in much the same way as they cried out against from their pulpits. Pure religion is not abstinence, but a walk in love through Jesus. When one abstains from sin it is because the sin is desired. Rather it is to love the purity of God's Word and the love of brethren wherein there is nothing from which to abstain. Abstinence is denying oneself from a wrongful desire, while love has no wrong desire. Do you understand the difference? Religion is abstinence, while pure religion is Love.

Pointing these things out without remedy holds no value except to leave one in a state of condemnation. So here is what I can offer as a help to deliver us from all religion:

- Practice pure religion until it becomes you

- Seek Jesus out in the Scriptures
- Stretch beyond yourself to give
- Pray to see people the way God does
- Give aid where needed
- Regard your need last

There are things the Holy Spirit will offer in insight. Some of the things my parents taught me were, for example, about what to pray before a meal. It is appropriate to be thankful for our daily bread. It is admirable to pray and intercede for those who have no food, have eating disorders or physical conditions whereby they are malnourished. This is the practice of prayer before a meal of my parents. It by no means is left off with mere words in prayer but divine appointments that come through those prayers. Do not pray for the hungry unless you are willing to give to their need should the Lord send them your way. Religion might be thankful for their food but pure religion is looking out for the hungry and multiplying the fish and the loaves in the supernatural and natural.

When you have a personal need find someone of the same need and pray for their need and yours will be met. But the best advice of all is in Luke 6:

Luke 6:27-38

- *Love your enemies*
- *Do good to them which hate you,*
- *Bless them that curse you,*
- *Pray for them, which despitefully use you.*
- *Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.*
- *Give to every man that asketh of thee;*
- *Of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.*
As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.
For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.
And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.
And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.
- *But love ye your enemies*
- *Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again*

*And your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.
Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

- *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:*
- *Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned:*
- *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:*
- *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.*

For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. Amen?

RELIGION: THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Mark 7:6-7

*Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written,
This people honoureth me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship
me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

You have heard people playing the devil's advocate, but what exactly is that other than taking the opposite view than the one presented to make an argument? The word advocate is one who pleads on behalf of another. Therefore one may **play** the devil's advocate or pretend to take a side for the sake of an argument, but did you know that there exists a real advocate of Satan? This advocate pleads on behalf of Satan much like a lawyer pleads the case of a defendant.

The enemy only seems stupid, but the cunning of the devil is in religion. Satan has been able to penetrate the heart of man without knocking but by invitation. It is only Jesus who knocks and waits. If you do not believe that statement then answer this for yourself:

- Who did the atheist invite into his heart?
- Who is still knocking and waiting for an invitation?
- Are you aware of atheism being a religion?

The atheist invited no one into his heart yet he has a set of individual beliefs he lives and judges all things by. Atheists do not congregate yet they do walk together as they agree. People assume that an atheist has no faith yet they believe something. It is just more individually rather than corporately. They like to believe that they are not religious, which is ridiculous.

*Many self-described atheists tend toward secular philosophies such as humanism and naturalism, there is no one ideology or set of behaviors to which **all** atheists adhere; and some religions, such as Jainism and Buddhism, do not require belief in a personal god. [Wikipedia]*

You could say the same thing for Agnosticism, Humanism, Superstitionism, Scientology, New Age, Unitarianism and the list goes on into tedium.

What, after all, is belief?

1. Something believed; an opinion or conviction
2. Confidence in an idea not necessarily susceptible to rigorous proof
3. A confidence in a system, science, theory or trust in a person or god

You can see by the definition atheism is religion. I call atheism self-inflicted, however atheist parents indoctrinate their children just the same as any religion. I saw an example of this on a program when an atheist family of four was given Bibles that they all threw down on the floor taking the lead of their father. They say they promote free thought in their children, but this free thought is handed down to them from one generation to the next. This is not meant as a criticism for we Christians also train our children in Christianity. The difference is we do not deny this, as do the atheists.

Now let me be fair and balanced. Religion goes from the atheist reaching into the denominations. Outside of pure religion, religion itself is the devil's advocate. Since Satan could not destroy Jesus another idea was formulated to create religion and sprinkle in some holiness attitudes and practices along with performance and observations and then put up a sign atop the building to tell one from another with each single one being THE only true one. Rather than getting rid of Truth, which was impossible, formulate half-truths that sound plausible. When these things are continually practiced they become strong in purpose for proselytizing and adding to the numbers.

The sides and boundaries are drawn. We achieve high attitudes with tolerance or firmly convicted non-tolerance and hatred. Hatred leads to death for the hater as well as the hated. Wars and conflicts, hate crimes inflict our world.

"The Jews are a nervous people. Nineteen centuries of Christian love have taken a toll." Benjamin Disraeli

"In Constantinople, more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in the years 342-343 than by all the persecutions by pagans in the history of Rome." Wil Durant

*"In the Bible, the ones who were most certain about what they were doing were the ones who stoned the prophets."
Bob Chell*

*"We have lobbed verses of Scripture, like hand grenades, into the camps of others, convinced we only have truth."
Rev. George Carey*

Religion fights what it is against; Jesus came to die FOR something...someone. **When our faith and belief focus is on what we are against rather than what we are living for we are in religion's core.**

Jesus lived in pure religion. Remember the story of the woman at the well? Behind the story is a great example of religion vs. pure religion. First of all let's look at some of the history of the Jews and Samaritans.

"The Samaritans were a "mixed race" contaminated by foreign blood and false worship. The Jewish historian Josephus indicates that the Samaritans were also opportunists. When the Jews enjoyed prosperity, the Samaritans were quick to acknowledge their blood relationship. But when the Jews suffered hard times, the Samaritans disowned any such kinship, declaring that they were descendants of Assyrian immigrants." (Nelson's Bible Dictionary)
*"The Samaritan was publicly cursed in their synagogues-could not be adduced as a witness in the Jewish courts-could not be admitted to any sort of proselytism, and was thus, so far as the Jew could affect his position, excluded from eternal life."
(from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary)*

If you did not get that suffice it to say Jews and Samaritans were not friendly with one another. It was common knowledge that no Jew would speak or walk alongside a Samaritan. Look at Jesus example:

John 4:7-29

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 *The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?*

12 *Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

13 *Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:*

14 *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

15 *The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*

16 *Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.*

17 *The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband:*

18 *For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.*

19 *The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.*

20 *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*

21 *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*

22 *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*

23 *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

24 *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

25 *The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.*

26 *Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*

27 ***And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?***

28 *The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,*

29 *Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*

What was Jesus manner with this woman? Was He being tolerant,

intolerant, religious or loving? Jesus asked for water but offered the woman living water. Jesus was offering her eternal life. Tolerance bites its tongue, intolerance unleashes its tongue and the religious tongue argues, while love offers all it has. Had Jesus not been present but the disciples only how would this story change? Religion changes the outcome away from the scope of pure religion. Pure religion lends itself to the sinner.

Did Jesus ever use words of chastisement? Oh my yes, He certainly did but not for the "sinner" but to the "religious". You will remember the WOES in Matt 23:13-37. Because of the wording used, the reader assumes Jesus disgust for these, but in verse 37 you hear that He speaks from a broken heart rather than anger:

Matt 23:37

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

You can never break the heart of one who tolerates or is intolerant of you. You can only break the heart of the one who loves you.

Yes, religion is the devil's advocate and many are the devils that sit in the congregations going quite unnoticed. But they are there stopping the flow of the spirit of God, getting offended, misquoting Scriptures while defending arguments, whose widows and orphans suffer in silence.

Religion's reality is this:

- It unleashes judgment
- It is only for itself, while being against all else
- It may put up but has a harder time shutting up
- It will stand against rather than for something
- It is self-aware
- It abstains from wrong as long as it can, while resenting those able to do the deed
- It makes up programs to follow...religiously
- It counts attendance as righteousness
- It is a breeder of hatred, while preaching love
- It has disrespect and disregard for what it does not understand
- It rejects
- It excludes

- It is based upon ignorance, culture, superstition and experience
- It can wear suffering as a badge

In religious Christianity it expects everything, while giving nothing

It is exactly as Lucifer had said:

Isa 14:13-14

For thou hast said in thine heart,

- *I will ascend into heaven,*
- *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:*
- *I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:*
- *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;*
- *I will be like the most High.*

Religion then might be better said to be the “Act” of God, played Satan in live performance at a church near you! Jesus asked a simple question:

Luke 18:8

*Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find **faith** on the earth?*

Faith/πίστις: *persuasion*, that is, *credence*; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God), especially *reliance* upon Christ for salvation; abstractly *constancy* in such profession; by extension the system of religious (Gospel) *truth* itself: - assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.

When Jesus returns will any be found in pure religion? I bring these points to you not for the sake of argument, but for the sake of understanding love’s great purpose. Without love we have nothing, for God is love. I do not ask you to judge your pastors, but judge yourself. I bring these points to you in order to deal straightly with your heart. Dare to discern what is in your heart. Knowledge is not for condemnation but for deliverance. The lack of which is to perish!

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