

**Intro:** When people ask what I do I am reluctant to say I'm a pastor. Usually one of three extreme responses: Really quiet... Super spiritual... hate religion.

I hate religion too. My definition: Religion is man's attempt to impress God.

Religion means more bondage to people already influenced by too many toxins in their lives.

Christianity is about a relationship versus religion. Created in God's image as relational beings. Created for relationship, not religion. Religion is toxic.

**Toxic—anything containing poisonous material capable of causing serious sickness or even death.**

The church throughout history has certainly added some toxins to the world. Consider the Inquisitions, the Crusades, the 30 Year War. Today, look at cults, radical Islam, etc.

I do not believe the statement, "religion has caused more problems in the world than it has helped." In reality, along with the problems, the church has brought mercy, medical care, (consider most hospitals), universities, disaster response.

Apostle Paul was champion at being religious. Until he met Jesus & his entire life turned around. He learned about grace, salvation was based on what Christ had done and his relationship with Christ.

He sought to root out religion because he experienced how toxic it had made him.

***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7***

**pervert: *metastrepho* (met-as-tref'-o); to pervert, to corrupt, to distort or to poison.**

The Jewish religious people of Jesus day, Pharisees, took the 10 commandments and extracted over 600 laws that they said you had to obey.

**How do we identify toxic religion? Two identifiers:**

**FOCUSES ON THE EXTERNAL RATHER THAN ON THE INTERNAL.**

***Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Matthew 23:25***

**Illustration:** Sippy cup with spoiled milk

Religion is our effort to close the gap with human effort! How long I pray... How much \$ I give... I go to church. **Illustration:** Wear your Sunday best.

Religion is reducing Christianity down to do's and don'ts. **Illustration:** behavior vs. heart

### **PROMOTES SPIRITUAL PRIDE.**

Isn't this true? People in churches rallying around the fact they are right and everyone outside, in the world, is wrong. That is they do, sit around being right, become inward.

Jesus despised religious pride and told a story to his disciples to reinforce His point. Background on tax collectors.

***To some who were confident of their own righteousness [right standing with God] and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'."*** Luke 18:9-12

We take pride in our spiritual practices. It is great to take pride in your church and to promote it. Just be cautious not to make comparisons. Examples:

- Expository vs. topical teaching (Jesus didn't teach expositively)
- Hymns vs. contemporary music (first Protestant hymnal published in 1532)
- Communion every week vs. communion once a month
- Sunday school vs. small groups
- Sunday morning, night and Wednesday night services

I'm right and you are wrong! Difficult to see because when you are convinced you're right (or familiar with something), everybody else is wrong and it's so easy to look down on everyone else.

How should we view other churches? If they preach the gospel of Christ and teach from God's word, then we celebrate what we have in common. Unity. Pastor gatherings each week. Contribute.

### **THE GOOD NEWS**

***Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...<sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...*** Romans 3:20-22

**1) YOU CANNOT EARN GOD'S ACCEPTANCE BY OBSERVING THE LAW.**

***Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law...*** Rom 3:20

You cannot work your way to God. Religion says you can please God by your external works. You are right with God by what you do or you don't do. 'I don't drink and I don't smoke and I don't chew and I don't run with girls who do! I must be right with God!'

'I don't go see rated R movies, I read my Bible, I give money, I don't cuss unless I hit a bad golf swing or someone cuts me off, but I am right with God by what I do.'

**2) THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW IS TO SHOW YOU YOUR NEED FOR A SAVIOR.**

***...no one will be declared righteous...by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin***. Romans. 3:20

Let's just take the 10 Commandments: **Have any of you ever told a lie?** Guilty, if you are not raising your hand you are lying! **Anybody ever lusted?** Jesus said that if you lust you commit adultery in your heart. Anybody ever **coveted something?** **Enviied something?** Wanted what your neighbor had? Anybody ever **put something ahead of God?** Idolatry, the number one?

What the law does is it says, I am bad, I'm a sinner; it shows not that you need religion, it shows that you need a Savior. The law reveals your need for a Savior. You cannot earn God's acceptance by observing the law. The law shows you your need for a Savior.

*"It is a righteousness that He both requires and provides for us."* -Jerry Bridges, Gospel for Real Life

**3) RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD COMES BY FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE.**

*It is Christ plus nothing! Not Christ plus circumcision, not Christ plus church membership, not Christ plus how much money you give, not Christ plus how you behave; righteousness with God comes by faith in Christ and Christ alone.*

***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to ALL who believe***...  
Romans 3:22

**Religion**

**What I do**

**About me**

**If I obey God will love me**

**Have to**

**Obligation**

**Pride**

**Do**

**Relationship**

**What Jesus has done**

**About Jesus**

**Because God loves me I can obey**

**Get to**

**Response**

**Humility**

**Done**

Does all include a doubter? Does all include a bad sinner? Does all include someone who really messed up? Does all include someone who grew up in church? Does all include someone who didn't grow up in church? All includes anyone who puts their faith in Christ, they will receive the righteousness of God and they will be totally forgiven. Righteousness with God comes through faith in Christ and Christ alone.

**“God treated Christ as we deserve to be treated,  
so that He might treat us as Christ deserves to be treated.”**

***“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’<sup>14</sup> I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God...”*** Luke 18:13-14 [justified = just as if I never sinned]