

Why God Hates Religion II

See “the Way” with the “Eyes of Your Mind”

Fred R. Coulter—July 11, 1998

Let’s understand something concerning this and this is very important for us to realize. Let’s go back and review James 1:26-27, where it talks about religion.’

Let’s understand that God has not called us to a religion.’ **God has called us to a way of life!** God has not called us that we can be ‘good’ in this world, because He has called sinners and harlots and publicans to repentance, so that they can be in the Kingdom of God. Those who were ‘good’ in the world—like the Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes—looked upon Christ, at what He was doing, and they asked the disciples: ‘Why does your Master eat and drink with the harlots and publicans?’ They even called Him a ‘wine bibber.’ Jesus gave the answer and said that, ‘God came to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous.’ They thought they were righteous. So, you can have an outward form of religion’ and that is what this word means.

James 1:26: “If anyone among you considers himself to be religious, and does not control his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* vain.” We saw how that applied to Job. Even though he was perfect in the *letter of the law*, that had nothing to do with salvation. So, you can find people who are ‘good’ in the world, but they are not righteous before God, because God wants to impute the righteousness of Christ to us. That is not a ‘religious’ thing. That is by the grace of God. That’s what this here is; it’s the opposite of that. This is to have an *outward* form of ‘religion.’

Verse 27: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and *the* Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Job was unspotted from the world—was he not? He was perfect and sincere and righteous, but that was not for salvation. God has not called you unto a religion.’ **He has called you unto salvation!**

Now, the Greek word here in this instance, in both cases there in James 1:26-27, is ‘theskeia’—which means *religious observance, the outward ceremonial service of ;religion,; the external form*. You cannot call what we do with the Passover as an outward form of worship. **The Passover is a covenant renewal**, which has nothing to do with the religious observance at all. You renew the covenant with foot-washing, with eating the broken bread and drinking the blood of Christ. He said, ‘This is the blood of the New Covenant.’ He was talking about His own blood.

When you pray you’re not to have an outward form of prayer. You are to go to your closet and pray to your Father Who is in secret. When you do your alms, you’re not to have an outward appearance of doing alms in public. You’re to not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. When you do things such as fasting, you’re not to have it so that everyone knows you’re fasting. All of that is *exterior* ‘religion.’ We saw how that God says He hates the ‘religious’ aspect in Isa. 1, where they made God’s way a religion.’ This ‘theskeia’ is *the external form of worship*.

Now let’s go to another one which is very similar to it: an external form of ‘religion,’ which we find in Colossians 2, the worship of angels. This is where all ‘religion’ ends up: worshipping *fallen* angels or demons.

Colossians 2:18: “Do not allow anyone to defraud you of the prize *by* doing *his* will in self-abasement... [That’s what religion is: voluntary humility.] ...and *the* worship of angels... [The word here for *worshipping* is the verb form of the word ‘theskeia’—meaning that it is *an outward worship*. That’s what people do in worshipping angels.] ...intruding into things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his own carnal mind.” It does lift you up. It does give you a sense of importance.

That’s why there are such things as the ‘inner circle,’ the Rosicrucians, seeking the spirits and things like this, because people get ***all lifted up in their own vanity***. You have power; you have ability over other people. That’s what this is all about; when that happens, when you become ‘religious’:

Verse 19: “And not holding fast to the Head... [looking away from Christ] ...from Whom **all** the body, being supplied and knit together by the joints and bands, is increasing *with* the increase of God. Therefore, if you have died together *with Christ* from the elements of the world... [***That’s what religion is! The rudiments of the world!***] ...why are you subjecting yourselves to *the* decrees of men as if you were living in *the* world? They say, ‘You may not handle! You may not taste! You may not touch!’” (vs 19-21). All religions have *their own* laws.

Now, let’s tie this in to v 6: “Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, be walking in Him... [We’re going to see in a minute that Christ said that He was ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life.’

He didn't say, 'I am *the religion*.' He didn't come to establish a religion.' ***He came to establish a way!*** He came to bring Godliness. He came so that, as we saw in *God Hates Religion #1* that we are to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. God is interested in our heart. He's not interested in just the outward form and ceremony of a 'religion.'] ...Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, be walking in Him; ***being rooted and built up in Him***... [not in a religion] ...and being confirmed in the faith..." (vs 6-7). There is a *false* faith, which you can have in a religion.' It does work for a while, but sooner or later it's going to collapse, because it's not built on the foundation of Christ.

"...exactly as you were taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Be on guard so that no one takes you captive... [The Greek there is *make a prey of you*. In other words, make you a victim of their philosophy, which is a 'religion.'] ...through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (vs 7-8).

We saw last time that all the worship that the Pharisees did in their 'religion' was *in vain*. They rejected the commandments of God that they full-well could keep their traditions. They even rejected Moses in whom they claim that they believed and they followed. Christ pointed out very clearly that with your 'religion' you did not have the love of God.

In the material that was sent to me, the warning was given: 'Well, let's see where this love of God takes us'; indicating that because I preach and teach the love of God, being against 'religion,' therefore, whatever I'm doing and teaching is going to fall apart because we're saying that God hates 'religion.' Well, let me tell you something very clearly: ***The love of God is the greatest thing that there is!*** There can never be enough preaching on the love of God and if you truly love God 'with all your heart, mind, soul and being,' you're not going to be 'religious.'

If you want to be 'religious' you can have a form and we'll look at this back here in 2-Timothy 3:1—notice what 'religion' allows: "Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come; for men will be lovers of self..." (vs 1-2). 'Religion' allows this. Whereas God says, you love Him first, then you love your neighbor as yourself and you love the brethren as Christ has loved us—totally different.

"...lovers of money, braggarts, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers... [that's what I'm going through right

now] ...without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good" (vs 2-3). This 'good' is not the human good, but this good is the good that comes *from the righteousness of Christ*.

"Having an outward appearance of Godliness... [the exterior form] ...but denying the power of *true* Godliness. But *as for you*, turn away from *all* these." So, we are told to get away from 'religious' people like this. We're not to go ahead and embrace what they have done.

Now let's go back and finish the story with Job. Let's see what Job had to do. Job had to *repent*. Job had to repent of his 'religion' just like Saul had to repent of his before he became the Apostle Paul. Job had to go through a very similar experience in a different way; a different method to come to the point of *real* conversion. When we come here to Job 42; let's see the whole experience that Job went through after God cornered him and talked to him. God didn't come down and crush Job. God didn't come down and attack him. He just said, 'Job where were you? I want to tell you something.'

Job 40:8: "Will you even annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me so that you may be righteous? And *have* you an arm like God?... [God didn't come down and squash him. He said, 'Job, I want you to think on this. I want you to really search your heart and mind if you can do this.'] ...Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Deck yourself now with majesty and excellency, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of your wrath; and behold everyone who is proud, and abase him. Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; *and* bind their faces in darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you" (vs 8-14). ***Salvation has to come from God!*** God pointed to His creation and what He made so that Job could see that he was missing and lacking in understanding of God.

Now let's see how Job repented. Job repented! Saul repented! Many other people repented! *God wants you to repent* of your 'religion,' and not bring it into the Church of God and make a 'religion' out of the Church of God. Why, brethren, do you think God is destroying many of the Churches of God today? *Because a 'religion' was made out of it!* When they made a 'religion' out of it, what did they do? *They said, 'Well, look, let's go to the world's 'religions' called Christianity and let's see how they worship their god and we'll do the same thing.'* So, lo and behold, once they became 'religious,' they gave up on everything concerning God. You see what happens in the extreme as these things come along. They didn't repent like Job did.

Job 42:1: “And Job answered the LORD, and said, ‘I know that You can do all things... [Job is beginning to see himself for what he really is] ...and *that* no thought can be withheld from You.... [you’re not dealing with a ‘religion’; you are dealing with God and a relationship with Him] ...“Who *is* he that hides counsel without knowledge?”.... [He’s taking about himself; ‘who is he.’ God asked, ‘Job, who are you, that you hid council without knowledge?’] ...Therefore, I have spoken that which I did not understand...” (vs 1-3). He said, ‘I was just a blithering idiot. I was out there babbling and going on and on about how good I was and how righteous I was and how foolish and stupid of me to do it.’

“...I have spoken that which I did not understand; *things* too wonderful for me; yea, which I did not know. Hear, I beseech You and I will speak; *You said*, “I will ask of you, and you will declare to Me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear... [That’s what ‘religious’ people do, *they hear*.] ...but now my eye sees You.... [This is the *eye of your mind*. You comprehend God. That is not a ‘religious’ concept. That is a spiritual experience with the Spirit of God and Christ in you; that you now *see* and *comprehend* God.] ...Therefore, I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes” (vs 1-6).

He came to repentance. He *saw* God, God blessed him, replaced everything double and replaced his family and gave him the most beautiful daughters in all the world. So, the blessings came at the end. God doesn’t want us to be ‘religious.’

Now let’s go to Ephesians 1:16. Here’s one of my favorite—about having your eyes opened. I hope that you do to. I hope, brethren, that the *eyes of your mind* are open:

- to *understand* God’s way
- to *see* the calling of God
- to see the love of God
- to *see* what God holds out for us
- to enter into His kingdom as spirit glorified sons and daughters of God

That’s not a ‘religion,’ brethren. That is *a reality of our calling!*

Paul said, Ephesians 1:16: “Do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you *the* spirit of wisdom and revelation in *the* knowledge of Him. *And* may the **eyes of your mind** be enlightened...” (vs 16-18). The only way that is going to happen is if you get rid of your ‘religion.’ God hates ‘religion’; it has caused all strife.

There are those that we’ve seen in some of these reports who say that they want to do away with

all religion,’ that doesn’t make us party to them at all. Do you think that God, when Christ returns, is going to have Christ save part of the Catholic Church and part of the Protestant church and part of the Islamic church, part of Buddhism, part of Confucianism, part of Deism, part of animal worship? Do you think God is going to save a little bit of that because it’s ‘good’? **No! That is the good from the knowledge of the tree of good and evil!** Understand this: **not all good comes from God; only the good that comes through His Holy Spirit.** There’s a counterfeit good, which is in ‘religion,’ which comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **No!** God is going to **destroy all religions.** You need to think on that!

That’s why when you read in the book of Revelation—when the Churches began to get involved in the way of the Nicolaitans, that’s religious hierarchy and in the way of Balaam, eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication with Jezebel the prophetess, and going into the depths of Satan—they were going into the ‘religions’ of this world. God corrected them. God said even to the Church at Pergamos that if they didn’t repent of the deeds of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam that He was going to come and fight against them with the ‘sword of His mouth.’

We’re seeing that happen today with the Worldwide Church of God. God has fought against it with the ‘sword of His mouth’ and it is no longer a Church of God. They didn’t repent! They didn’t heed! They wanted ‘religion’ so God let them have it. Now they have it; *they don’t have God!* We need to understand that. That’s why my prayer for you is the same as Paul’s; that:

“...the **eyes of your mind** be enlightened in order that you may comprehend what is the hope of His calling... [not a ‘religion’] ...and what *is* the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the inner working of His mighty power” (vs 18-19). That’s what God wants us *to know* and *to know* the power of His love and have the understanding that surpasses knowledge.

Let’s begin to see that **God’s way is a way which leads to Godliness.** True Godliness comes from worshipping God in *Spirit and in Truth*, but we have to understand something very, very important: **The way of Christ is not a ‘religion’!**

John 14:6: “Jesus said to him [Thomas] ‘I am **the Way**... [He did not say, ‘I am the religion.’] ...and **the Truth**... [He didn’t say, ‘the way to good,’ because all Truth exposes good and evil.] ...and **the Life; no one comes to the Father except**

through Me.” That is through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father. It isn’t going to be any other way.

Verse 15: “If you love Me... [follow My religion. *No!* (Jesus said): ...keep the commandments—namely, My commandments.”

Verse 23: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.’” So, you have God the Father and Jesus Christ together. It’s really a tremendous and wonderful thing that God has called you to. Let’s hope that you *hear* the hope of His calling and *see* the greatness of God in it.

Let’s see what Jesus says about religionists and hirelings, John 10:1 “Truly, truly I say to you, the one who does not enter the sheepfold through the door, but climbs up **some other way**...” Different than Christ who is *the Way*. Making a ‘religion’ out of ‘God’s way’ is *another way* and God does not want it. If you climb up some other way, what are you? *You are a thief and a robber, because you are ‘religious.’* Isn’t that what He said of the scribes and Pharisees? *No question about it!*

“...that one is a thief and a robber. But the one who enters through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and **he calls his own sheep by name and leads them** out. When he brings the sheep out, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger for they will flee from him because they do not know the voice of strangers” (vs 1-5). Why don’t they know the voice of strangers? *Because they are not ‘religious’!*

- They are converted!
- They have the Spirit of God!
- They are yielded to God!
- They follow Christ wherever He goes!

Verse 7: “Therefore, Jesus again said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.’” You have to go through Christ. And that verifies what Christ said:

John 14:6 “...‘I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.’” It can’t be any other way. He makes it very clear.

John 10:8: “All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers...” Of whom were the ‘religious’ leaders of Judaism, the ‘religious’ leaders of the other religions of the world, claiming to give salvation—thieves and robbers.

“...but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved,

and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy...” (vs 8-10). That’s why God hates ‘religion.’ That’s what the ‘religious’ people have done.

“...I have come so that they may have life, and may have *it* more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. But the one who is a hireling, and who is not *the* shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming... [other religionists] ...and leaves the sheep, and flees. And the wolf seizes the sheep and scatters them. Now, the hireling flees because he is a hireling and has no concern for the sheep” (vs 10-13).

Christ on the other hand is entirely different. Christ wants a relationship with you. He doesn’t want you to have a ‘religion’ called *Christianity*. He wants you to be a Christian in deed, with Christ in you, the hope of Glory.

Verse 14: “I am the good Shepherd, and I know those who *are* Mine, and am known of those who *are* Mine.” That tells you what Christ thinks about others who are ‘religious’ people.

Let’s understand some more about ‘religious’ people and what Christ thinks about them. What’s going to happen to some of them in the Day of Judgment? Sure enough they’re ‘religious’; sure enough they’re prophets; sure enough they may even use some of the Words of God; sure enough they use the name of Jesus Christ. You can have a very strict ‘religion.’ You can be just like Saul was before he was called to be the Apostle Paul, of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. You can beat the flesh, but you’re still not going to be in the Kingdom of God, because that’s all *exterior*. Or you can have one of the many other ‘religious,’ which is *the broad way* to go.

Jesus said here in Matthew 7:13: “Enter in through the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it... [‘religion’ is also *a way*, but **not God’s way!**] ...for narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (vs 13-14).

Then He gives a warning. Why does He give this warning at this place? Because there will be many coming along with ‘religions,’ trying to tell people how to be saved; do this, receive the Lord in your heart and so forth.

Verse 15: “But beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, for within *they* are ravening wolves.” You can’t convert the nature of ‘religion.’ You can’t convert the nature of

‘religious’ people if they want to stay ‘religious.’ You must repent of being ‘religious,’ just like Job did, just like Saul did.

Verse 16: “You shall know them by their fruits. They do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, do they? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit... [if it is from God; the good from God] ...but a corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit.... [you can’t take the corrupt way of ‘religion’ and make it good enough to be accepted by God. ***There’s no way! It’s an impossibility!*** That’s why Christ died, so that we can repent and go *His* way.] ...Every tree *that is* not producing good fruit is cut down and is cast into the fire. Therefore, you shall assuredly know them by their fruits” (vs 16-20).

What he says next is very profound and you need to understand this to the very depths of your being in order to understand ***why God hates ‘religion’*** and what He’s going to do to ‘religious’ people.

Verse 21: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven... [it’s not because you can be ‘religious.’ It’s not because you can say the name: ‘Lord’ or even say, ‘Lord, Lord.’] (Here’s what’s going to get you into the Kingdom of Heaven): ...**but the one who is doing the will of My Father**, Who *is* in heaven.” *Doing* means to be practicing as ***a way of life***; you are doing the will of the Father in heaven.

What about those who are ‘religious’? Verse 22: “Many will say to Me in that day...” In the day of judgment. You can just name off whomever you want to name off. You can turn on the television station—if you have Trinity Broadcasting in your area—and you can just go right down the line of all the ‘religionists’; put their name in there. Oh, they are doing good works. Oh, they’re doing wonderful things. They are supposedly healing people, supposedly casting out demons and all of that sort of thing. But ***that doesn’t mean that they are from God.***

Verse 22: “Many will say to Me in that day ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name?...’”

- Didn’t I give many inspiring sermons in Your name, Lord?
- Didn’t I foretell events to happen in Your name, Lord?
- I was doing Your work, Lord.
- I was a very ‘religious’ person.
- I had the Bible.

“...And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name?...” (v 22).

- We’ve cast out thousands of demons.
- We had rallies and campaigns everywhere.
- They came by the hundreds, by the thousands, they fell over on their backs and they spoke in tongues.

“...And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?”

- Lord, we built hospitals and we had clinics and we helped the poor and we helped the sick.
- We did all these things.
- Lord, we had a *pure and undefiled* ‘religion’—just like Job.

Verse 23: “And then I [Jesus] will confess to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.’” What is the greatest iniquity that can be worked, brethren? ***To make a ‘religion’ out of the way of God!*** You think on that. Maybe you might think that’s a strong statement, but that’s just the way it is.

Verse 24: “Therefore... [He tells how you do it rightly] ...everyone who hears these words of Mine and practices them, I will compare him to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock... [that Rock was Christ] ...and the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; but it did not fall, for it was founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not practice them... [You may take part of them and make a ‘religion’ out of it. You may even use the name of the Lord, but *you are not built upon Christ.* Many will appropriate the name of Christ. Many will say they have a ‘Christian religion,’ but that doesn’t make them Christians in deed before God.] ...and does not practice them shall be compared to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand” (vs 24-26).

When we had the rains this year in California and we had 230% the normal rain. We have some of these riverbeds where they hardly have any water running in them most of the year. Only when we get some rain in the winter do they have any water in them. This year these rivers became raging torrents. Right out about three miles from our place, there is a bridge, which crosses over the river, and just down from the bridge the river came in a bend. With the raging torrent all the area, 800 feet of land, was sand and they built a house right on the sand. The floods came and the wind blew and it beat upon the bank of the river. It took away all 800 feet of sand and a brand new house, without escrow having closed yet, fell and collapsed. It was a good

house, a wonderful house, brand new, not even lived in. But it wasn't built in the right place.

If you are not built on Christ, it's going to fall! Christ says, "...and great was the fall of it" (v 27). He's saying these great self-important men, who applied themselves to a 'religion' called *Christian*, are going to fall. They are not going to be in the Kingdom of God.

Now let's look and see something here that's important for us to understand concerning *God's way*. We've seen this is *man's way*. It says in Proverbs that 'there is a way which seems right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.' We need to understand that in relationship to what we are doing. There is on the other hand *the way of God*. The way of man is very broad in the way it's doing, where it's going and how it's headed in all of its various forms of 'religion' and government, *but it's all coming to an end*. We're living in the end-time when it is going to collapse.

Now, let's look and see that God's way is called *a way*. Let's understand that

- God's way is *perfect*.
- God's way is *righteous*.
- God's way is not a 'religion.'
- God's way is a *way of life*.

Verse 30: "As for God, His way *is* perfect... [If Christ is *the Way* and He is perfect, and if He is *the Truth* and *the Life*, which He is, and *God's way* is perfect; why would you want to pollute it and make it a 'religion'? ***Think on that!***] ...the Word of the LORD is tried. He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him, for who is God besides the LORD? Or, who is a Rock except our God?" (vs 30-31). We are talking about the same thing in Matt. 7.

Now, Psalm 25:8, it talks about God and *His way*: "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore, will He teach sinners in ***the way***."

Verse 4: "Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me **Your paths**. Lead me in Your Truth, and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You do I wait all the day" (vs 4-5) You see how totally different this is.

- He's going to *teach* us.
- He's going to *lead* us.
- He's going to *bring* us in ***the way*** that is right.

Let's see some Proverbs and then we'll see in the New Testament how it is called ***the way***—the way we are to live and conduct our lives.

Notice what the Holy Spirit does here, Proverbs 8:20: "I lead in the way of righteousness,

in the midst of the paths of justice." It says in Rom. 8, that as many 'as are led by the Spirit of God ***they*** are the children of God.' And if any have not the Spirit of Christ, 'he is not none of His.' That's what happens with a lot of these 'religious' people. They look good, they sound good, but they don't have the Spirit of Christ. They are 'religious.' We need to let the Holy Spirit lead us in the way of righteous. Let God, *through His grace and love*, impute His righteousness to us. That way we're not going to be having a 'religion.'

Proverbs 9:6 about the *way of God*: "Forsake the foolish and live; and go in the ***way of understanding***." God's way is a ***way of life***; it is a ***way of understanding***.

Proverbs 10:17: "He who keeps instruction *is* in ***the way*** of life ... [There it is again. It is ***the way***.] ...but he that refuses reproof goes astray." You can take what I have to say anyway you want, but if it is the Truth and the Word of God, well that's the way it is.

Nowhere do you find the words together: 'Christian religion.' ***Nowhere*** do you find that God loves 'religion.' What you find is that *God's way* is a ***way of life; a way to live!***

Acts 16:17: "She followed Paul and us *and* cried out, saying, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, and are preaching to us ***the way*** of salvation.'" Not a religion,' but ***a way***. It's called ***the way of salvation***.

Acts 18:24: "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man who was skilled in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. He had been instructed in ***the way of the Lord***... [Not in 'religion' but ***the way*** of the Lord.] ...and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.... [you know the rest of the story, they came and taught him even more perfectly] ...And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And after hearing him, Aquila and Priscilla took him and expounded the ***way of God*** to him more perfectly" (vs 24-26). So it is ***a way***.

Acts 19:8: "Then he [Paul] entered into the synagogue *and* spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God." He went right into the midst of the lion's den as it were, right into the synagogue where they had all their 'religious' folderol and things that they followed. A 'religion' has everything prescribed: you must do this and do that and do the other thing. Paul was in there speaking concerning the things of the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

“But when some were hardened and refused to believe, speaking evil of **the way** before the multitude, he departed from them *and* separated the disciples; *and* he disputed *these things* daily in the school of a certain Tyrannus” (v 9). What Paul did is he got away from the ‘religious’ people. He came and witnessed to them so that they would have some understanding of what they needed to do and where they needed to go. But he separated from them. Why stick around for all the ‘religious’ argument and everything that goes on that they have and that they do? It’s the same way with the Church of God. God doesn’t want to have all kinds of ‘religious’ folderol and fighting and bickering and so forth. There’s one man that is a self-appointed teacher and he said, ‘Well, if you pray and ask God for something and He doesn’t answer, and you pray the second time and He doesn’t answer, then God’s answer is *no*. So you don’t pray anymore.’ Well, Christ gave the parable of the widow woman, that you keep coming to God and you keep asking and you keep coming to God. To say that you are limited to pray twice for something! Spare me!

Christ is praying for us everyday. He is there as our Intercessor. He is there to help us and to uplift us. What if Christ only prayed for us twice in our entire lifetime and then gave up on us? You see where that kind of thing goes. This man does have a ‘religion’ and he does sound very convincing, but he is not sent from God, because he is not teaching the true *way of God*.

Verse 23: “And at that time it came to pass that there was no small tumult about **the way**.” ***The way of God!*** We’ll go through and see that *God’s way is the way*.

This is where Paul is explaining about how he was called, Acts 22:1: “Men, brethren and fathers, hear now my defense to you.’ And when they heard him speak to them in the Hebrew language, they kept the more silent; and he said, ‘I am a man *who is* indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel... [He was very ‘religious’ and Gamaliel was one of the leading ‘religious’ teachers of the time.] ...having been instructed according to *the exactness of the law of our fathers, being a zealot for God, even as you all are this day; and I persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering up to prisons both men and women, as also the high priest and all the elderhood bear witness to me; from whom I received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring bound to Jerusalem those who were there also, in order that they might be punished.*” (vs 1-5). Of course, he’s implying of the way that he was persecuting them. That’s what Paul was doing, persecuting *the way*.

Let’s see what God has called us to do. Let’s see that God has called us to Godliness. God has called us to do this; this is not a ‘religious experience,’ but this is truly something based upon living by every Word of God. This is what God wants with ***His way***:

- God wants a *converted heart!*
- God wants a *converted mind!*
- God wants His Spirit, His love, His faith, His hope *to grow in you!*
- God wants you to *grow in grace and knowledge!*

Hebrews 10:16, this is what God will do: “This is the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,’ says *the Lord*: ‘I will give My laws **into their hearts**, and **I will inscribe them in their minds**... [That is anything but *exterior*—correct? That is deep into your very being—isn’t it? *Yes!* That’s why God hates ‘religion,’ because ‘religion’ stops this from coming into being a deep conversion.] ...And their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again” (vs 16-17). That means no more, *forever*. That’s what God wants. He wants this coupled with worshipping Him in Spirit and in Truth. Then you develop the correct Godliness as being led by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s see how this works. In the book of 1-Timothy, Paul talks an awful lot about Godliness, because that’s what he wanted Timothy to do and to teach; ***not ‘a religion.’*** This word *Godliness* means *the inward kind of worshipping in Spirit and in Truth*.

1-Timothy 2:1: “I exhort, therefore, first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men; For kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all Godliness and respectability” (vs 1-2). Godliness means that ***you begin taking on the character of God***. You have the inner worship of God in Spirit and Truth. Whereas, ‘religion’ is:

- the *outward* form
- a *ritual*
- a *tradition*
- a standard set *by men*

—which they think is good; which will then cause God to bless you because of your ‘religious goodness.’ ***No!*** That’s not what God wants. That is not Godliness! Godliness is entirely different.

1-Timothy 3:16: “And undeniably, great is the mystery of Godliness... [The *mystery religion* of Babylon is a *mystery* ‘religion,’ but the mystery of Godliness is that ***you can become the son or daughter of God!***] (he explains it): ...God was

manifested in *the* flesh... [That has to do with the Godliness that Christ was able to bring when He came; that God actually came and became a human being so that He could be the perfect sacrifice for all those that He calls. God personally imputes that to you.] ...was justified in *the* Spirit, was seen by angels, was proclaimed among *the* Gentiles, was believed on in *the* world, was received up in glory.”

Let’s see what Paul’s admonition to Timothy was—what he should do. 1-Timothy 4:6: “If you are teaching these things... [All the teachings that he has through all the writings here.] ...to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, being nourished by the words of the faith and of the good doctrines that you have closely followed.... [a ‘good religion.’ No! It’s not there! ‘Religion’ does not enter into it.] ...But refuse profane and old wives’ fables; rather, exercise yourself unto **Godliness**.... [developing the character and the mind of Christ] ...For physical exercise is profitable for a short time; but Godliness is profitable for everything, having *the* promise of life—of the *life* that now *is*, and of the *life* that *is* coming” (vs 6-8). He was telling Timothy—writing and instructing him—to develop the kind of *inward* Godliness, which *reflects the character of God* in his life.

1-Timothy 6:3: “If anyone teaches any different doctrine, and does not adhere to sound words, *even those* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine *that is* according to **Godliness**... [here’s the ‘religious’ person]: ...He is proud and knows nothing. Rather, he has a morbid attraction to questions and disputes over words, from which come envy, arguments, blasphemy, wicked suspicions, vain reasonings of men who have been corrupted in *their* minds and *are* destitute of the Truth—*men* who believe that gain is Godliness.... [and it’s not] ...From such withdraw *yourself*. But Godliness with contentment is great gain” (vs 3-6). That’s what Paul was teaching here, the true *inward* Godliness.

Here’s the charge that he gave Timothy. Again, all the way through 1-Timothy, he is talking about *Godliness*. Verse 11: “But you, O man of God, flee these things... [the things of the flesh] ...and pursue righteousness, Godliness, faith, love, endurance *and* meekness. Fight the good fight of the faith! Take hold of eternal life to which you were also called, and did profess a good profession in the presence of many witnesses” (vs 11-12). That’s what he told him to do; not to develop a religion,’ not to have a *form* of Godliness, but to truly have deep down Godliness *inside*.

Let’s see that the Apostle Peter wrote about this, too, concerning the kind of Godliness that we

need to have, which comes from God through the Holy Spirit of God. You can’t create this with a religion.’ You can’t do it with a standard which men set up. Any organization that does—it may prosper for a while, it may last quite a while—sooner or later is going to come to an end.

Let’s see what God has called us to. 2-Peter 1:2: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in *the* knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as His Divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and **Godliness**...” (vs 2-3). Notice that ‘religion’ is absent in every one of these things—isn’t it? James—who wrote to the twelve tribes of Israel, who wrote to carnal unconverted people—yes, he called them brethren, but that doesn’t mean that they were brethren in the sense that they were brethren in the Church. That is just brethren in the sense that Jews call all Jews *brethren*—that’s all.

It’s Godliness, not ‘religion.’ You can’t take those two verses and say, ‘Yes, let’s have *pure and undefiled* ‘religion’ before God.’ What if you became just like Job in the letter? You would still have to repent sooner or later—wouldn’t you? *Yes, because ‘religion’ didn’t save Job.* ‘Religion’ isn’t going to save anyone. As a matter of fact, that’s why **God hates ‘religion,’** because it takes the name of God and creates its own version of what God wants and that’s not what God intended.

Verse 3: “According as His Divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and Godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by *His own* glory and virtue... [Then he gives all the steps whereby you may grow in all the characteristics of Godliness]: ...Through which He has given to us the greatest and *most* precious promises, that through these you may become partakers of *the* Divine nature... [We are not talking about a ‘religion’ so you can be a better person today. We’re talking about that *you receive of the nature of God. You receive of the mind of Christ.* That is tremendous that we receive of the Divine nature!] ...having escaped the corruption *that is* in *the* world through lust” (vs 3-4).

Then he shows what we are to be diligently doing. The Apostle Peter wrote this just before he was ready to die. He was urgent with the brethren that they understood what they needed to do. Because, who would know what they would do after he dies. Paul said, ‘I know that after I die that many men are going to rise up and tear apart the Church of God, and many wolves will enter in and others will rise up taking disciples after themselves.’ Brethren, if that is not the state of the Church today, I don’t know what is. We have all of this with ‘religion’ going on.

This is what we are to do, v 5: “And for this very reason also, having applied **all** diligence besides... [You put your whole life to this, not ‘a religion,’ but *your whole life!*] ...add to your faith, virtue... [Godly character] ...and to virtue, knowledge.” When you have Godly character and you study the Word of God and you grow in the grace and knowledge of God, then the Word of God becomes living. The Word of God really opens up to you for understanding. It leads you and guides you and is written in your heart and in your mind. That’s what God wants to happen.

“And to knowledge, self-control...” (v 6)—temperance.

- self-control comes from the Holy Spirit
- self-control comes from knowledge
- self-control comes from understanding

“...and to self-control, endurance... [patience then can also mean endurance—that you hope all things, you endure all things and love never fails.] ...and to endurance, **Godliness**” (v 6). These things must be built. The character of Christ must be *built in you*. You are to have the Spirit of God in you; that Christ has created in you.

“Verse 7: “And to Godliness, brotherly love; and to brotherly love, the **love of God**.” Finally, *the love of God!* That’s the whole progression of how things are and how God wants it to be.

Let’s see how God is *creating Christ in us*. That’s the whole purpose of why God has called us. He has called us to be converted. Ephesians 4:22: “That concerning your former conduct, you put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts... [Did Paul have to do that? *Yes, he did!* He had to put out Judaism. He had to put out his ‘religion.’ He had to forsake everything. He didn’t come back and try to recreate it again. *No! He forsook it!*] ...And that you be renewed **in the spirit of your mind**; and that you put on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and Holiness of the Truth” (vs 22-24). **True Holiness**—and Holiness is like Godliness, created in true Holiness. Then it tells you what to do with this.

It’s very important for us to understand that by grace we are saved, Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith... [not ‘religion’—**faith!** Not a *false* faith—**true faith**.] ...and this *especially* is not of your own selves... [It doesn’t come from within your being up to God. That’s what ‘religion’ is. ‘Religion’ *is from the self outward*.] ...Not of works, so that no one may boast, for **we are His workmanship**... [God is *creating in you* that you can be a son or daughter of God.] ...**created in Christ Jesus unto the good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we**

might walk in them” (vs 8-10). Which is *the Way!* ‘I am *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*.’ God’s way is *a way*. It is not just something that is a ‘religion.’ Let’s hope we understand that.

Let’s see what Paul did with *his* ‘religion.’ Let’s see what we need to do with *our* ‘religion’ and what we need to replace it with. Philippians 3:4: “Though I might also have *reason* to trust in *the* flesh. If any other thinks he has *cause* to trust in *the* flesh, I *have* much more; circumcised on *the* eighth day; of *the* race of Israel, from *the* tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; with respect to law, a Pharisee; with respect to zeal, persecuting the church; with respect to righteousness that *is* in law, blameless... [*Pure and undefiled* ‘religion’—that’s what Paul had—**blameless!**] ...Yet the things that were gain to me, these things I have counted *as* loss for the sake of Christ. But then truly, I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count *them* as dung; that I may gain Christ. And may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is*... [religion] ...*derived* from law, but that *righteousness* which *is* by *the* faith of Christ—the righteousness of God *that* is based on faith; that I may know Him...” (vs 4-10).

This is the whole purpose of our being called, brethren, **that we might know Jesus Christ and God the Father**.

Verse 10: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection...” Just think what that’s going to be like when Christ calls us out of the grave and we are raised from ignominy to glory; we are raised from dust to spirit and given a glorious spirit body and mind, having the very character and nature of God **for all eternity**. This is what we are dealing with. We’re not dealing with *a* ‘religion,’ with the *outside* ritual—NO!

“...and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead; not as though I have already received, or have already been perfected; but I am striving, so that I may also lay hold on that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count myself as having attained; but *this* one thing *I do*—forgetting the things that are behind...” (vs 10-13). Forgetting the religion, forgetting all those things that I did which were contrary to God; count them but dung, put them behind me.

“...and reaching forth to the things that are ahead, I press toward *the* goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. So then, let as many as *be* perfect be of this mind.... [Again, it’s Godliness *in the mind*. It is not perfection in a

‘religion,’ pure and undefiled exteriorly.] ...And if *in* anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal even this to you” (vs 13-15).

Philippians 1:27—the ultimate that God wants us to be: “Only conduct yourselves worthily of the Gospel of Christ... [He didn’t say ‘your religion.’ **Your conduct!**] ...so that whether I come and see you, or am absent, I may hear the reports about you; that **you are standing fast in one spirit**, striving together with one soul for the faith of the Gospel.”

This is where all the brethren in the Church of God need to start focusing. We need to come above all of the stupid doctrinal things and every ‘wind of doctrine’ coming along with the slight and cunning of men. Listen brethren, I want to tell you something. If you really don’t begin to know and understand your Bible, you need to ask yourself: Will you be in the resurrection? You can learn as much as you can. If you have life in you and you are learning and growing and overcoming, that’s what counts. God will add to you knowledge, but you need to be applying yourself to *know* the Word of God.

- That you can *think* with the Word of God.
- You can *understand* the Word of God.
- You can *live* with the Word of God.

That’s what God wants!

Can we all start coming with one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel? The true faith of Christ—not be fighting over whether we are ‘a religion’ or not. Of course, we are *not* a ‘religion!’ Well, the world can look at us and they can claim that we’re ‘religious,’ but **who cares what the world thinks about us**. Sooner or later they are going to take their ‘religion’ and kill us anyway. **Are we seeking to please men or seeking to please God? If we are seeking to please God and Christ is in us, then we will be in the Kingdom of God**, no question about it.

Verse 28: “And not being intimidated in any way by those who oppose *the Gospel*; which to them is a demonstration of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God; because it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His name’s sake... [There are things we’re going to have to suffer and go through and that’s just the way it is.] ...Experiencing the same conflict that you saw in me, and now hear of concerning me” (vs 28-30).

Here was the Apostle Paul, one of the most prolific writers of God—14 epistles in the New Testament. Brethren, that’s over half of all the books in the New Testament. Do you understand that?

There are 27 books in the New Testament and Paul wrote a little over half of them. That has to tell you something about the Apostle Paul:

- what he suffered
- what he went through
- what he did
- how dedicated he was

—this is our example. That’s why God inspired these epistles to be here, to encourage us in really growing in grace and knowledge and faith and love and Truth. That’s what God wants us to be.

Philippians 2:1: “Now then, if *there be* any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of *the Spirit*, if any *deep* inner affections and compassions... [In other words, he’s saying, ‘If there’s going to be any end result of what we are doing here, in the *way of God* and what I am teaching you’]: ...fulfill my joy, that you be of the same mind...” (vs 1-2).

How can we be like-minded? *Not fighting and striving and bickering and sending out inflammatory papers here and there!* I kind of feel foolish doing this whole thing, having to stand up and defend myself and Bob Hunnicutt. But if you can’t take the Truth, if you can’t take the heat, either learn to live in the kitchen and take the heat with the Word of God, or as the old saying goes: ‘if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.’ That’s not to try and drive people away. That’s not trying to say that God doesn’t want you, but you have to come to God on ***His terms, not yours! No one is going to tell God or Christ what to do or how to do it!*** We go to God and He tells us what to do and how to do it and when to do it. And we say, ‘Yes Lord, with all our heart, we will.’ That’s what God wants us to do. That’s what Paul is talking about here.

“...having the same love... [the very love of Christ, the very love of God] ...being joined together in soul... [*One mind!* This means *minding the one thing* and what is the one thing that God wants us to mind? *It is the Kingdom of God!*] ...minding the one thing. *Let* nothing *be* done through contention or vainglory... [That’s where ‘religion’ leads to. Always! Always! Always!] ...but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself... [because God has called each one of the saints] ...Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others. **Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus**” (vs 2-5). That, brethren, is not a ‘religion.’ ***That is deep and profound conversion:***

- with the love of God
- with the Truth of God
- with Christ in you, the hope of glory

This is what we need to come to.

Verse 6: “Who, although He existed in *the* form of God... [that’s what *being* means] ...did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, But emptied Himself, *and* was made in *the* likeness of men, *and* took the form of a servant” (vs 6-7).

Christ did not come to establish a ‘religion.’ ***Christ came to establish the way of God the Father.*** Christ did not come so we could build church buildings and have fancy clothes and look ‘religious’ and do little rituals on the outside. ***He came because He wants your heart! He came because He wants you to be totally dedicated to Him, to love Him!*** He’s totally dedicated to you—isn’t He? That He did these things; that He emptied Himself of being God to come down here.

Verse 8: “And being found in *the* manner of man, He humbled Himself...” The great God Who created everything that there is, humbled Himself to be born of the virgin Mary and to live a life. Yes, *the* ‘religious’ hypocrites of His time killed Him. That’s why God hates ‘religion,’ they killed His Son.

“...*and* became obedient unto death, even *the* death of *the* cross. Therefore, God has also highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name which *is* above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord to *the* glory of God *the* Father. So then, my beloved...” (vs 8-12). That’s what it needs to be with the brethren, that we all love one another. We’re all beloved to God the Father and Jesus Christ and each other.

“...even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only... [because that’s what ‘religion’ is, an *outward* show.] ...but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God Who works in you both **to will...** [to give you the desire] ...and **to do...** [to practice] ...according to *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaints and disputes; so that you may be blameless and without offense, innocent children of God in *the* midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as lights in *the* world. Holding forth the Word of life... [The *Way of God*, the *Truth of God*—always remember: Jesus said, ‘I am ***the Way, the Truth and the Life.***’ And let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus.] ...that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, nor labored in vain” (vs 12-16).

Brethren, ***let’s not have ‘religion.’*** Let’s not try and make a ‘religious’ thing out of what God has given us. He’s called us with the greatest calling ever. God has given us a great and marvelous thing and that’s why God hates religion.’

All Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version* by Fred R. Coulter

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- 1) James 1:26-27
- 2) Colossians 2:18-21, 6-8
- 3) 2 Timothy 3:1-3, 5
- 4) Job 40:8-14
- 5) Job 42:1-6
- 6) Ephesians 1:16-19
- 7) John 14:6, 15, 23
- 8) John 10:1-5, 7
- 9) John 14:6
- 10) John 10:8-14
- 11) Matthew 7:13-27
- 12) Psalm 18:30-31
- 13) Psalm 25:8, 4-5
- 14) Proverbs 8:20
- 15) Proverbs 9:6
- 16) Proverbs 10:17
- 17) Acts 16:17
- 18) Acts 18:24-26
- 19) Acts 19:8-9, 23
- 20) Acts 22:1-5
- 21) Hebrews 10:16-17
- 22) 1 Timothy 2:1-2
- 23) 1 Timothy 3:16
- 24) 1 Timothy 4:6-8
- 25) 1 Timothy 6:3-6, 11-12
- 26) 2 Peter 1:2-7
- 27) Ephesians 4:22-24
- 28) Ephesians 2:8-10
- 29) Philippians 3:4-15
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FRC: sr
Transcribed: 8-20-09
Formatted/Corrected: bo—12-20-11