

Which Religion Will God Retain in the Millennium?

Fred R. Coulter—January 29, 1999

Greetings brethren! The two that I did on *Why God Hates Religion* has stirred up kind of a storm. That was in reaction to those people who wanted to retain ‘religion’ and felt that I was really hard on James. I said some things in James, which was not quite exactly right on dead center mark. One man even said, ‘Well, Fred you are a Job basher.’ We need to address those things and see if that is so and see *about* ‘religion.’ But I want to ask the question this way. I want you to think about it. Which ‘religion’ will God retain when Christ returns and sets up the Millennium and the Kingdom of God? Let’s think about that for a minute.

- Will He retain witchcraft? *Absolutely not!* That’s pure Satanism. We can eliminate that. Witchcraft is a ‘religion!’

- Will God retain Masonry? *No!* Because Masonry is a ‘religion’ and also worships the ‘religion’ of the ancient Baal worship!

- Will God keep Hinduism? *No!*

That is Baal and Ashteroth worship!

- Will God keep Buddhism? *No!*

It’s got all the idols and it’s all the self of man!

- Will God keep Catholicism? *No!*
- Will God keep Eastern Orthodox? *No!*
- Will God keep Armenian Christian? *No!*
- Will God keep Muslim? *No!*
- Will God keep Animist ‘religions’? *No!*
- Will God retain the Christian religion?

I want you to think about that before you answer, because the truth is that ***Christ is not going to retain*** what is normally called ***the ‘Christian religion’!*** We’ll see that in just a minute, but let’s first of all understand something of what ‘religion’ is in the world. ‘Religion’ in the world is defined as a *form* of faith, a *form* of worship, which entails ritual and works and so forth.

Let’s go to the book of James and let’s see what James was saying and to whom he was saying it. Let’s ask some questions about the places where it says *religion* and then we will examine ‘pure and undefiled religion.’ I think James 1 is a good place for us to start. Some people misunderstood when I said that James was writing to unconverted people. I should have said that a great majority of those to whom James was writing were unconverted people. However, within the scope of whom he was writing to, there were converted people.

James 1:1: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, which are in the dispersion: Greetings!” Are all of those in the

twelve tribes converted? We would have to conclude, *no!* It’s like saying today: Are all of those who are in the Protestant religion,’ the Catholic religion,’ the Jewish ‘religion’—who diligently attend church every week—converted? *No!* Within general parameters of how the world looks at the Christian religion,’ they don’t know where to place us, because we keep the Sabbath and we keep the Holy Days. They don’t know if we are Jewish or if we are Seventh Day Adventists. They certainly understand we’re not Protestants. They have a hard time defining, with the world’s definition of ‘religion,’ where we fit. First of all, we need to understand that those to whom James was writing, the greatest majority were probably not converted.

James 2:1: “My brethren, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons.” He’s talking to brethren here who believe in Christ. But are all of those who believe in Christ *really converted*? In our lifetime, we’ve seen how many people *profess* belief in Jesus Christ, but really were not converted! We’re going to see a little bit later that even demons understand why Jesus came. We need to really take things in a broader perspective.

Verse 2: “Now then, if a man comes into your synagogue [assembly]...” *Assembly* here in the Greek is ‘sunagoge’—*synagogue*. Were all those in the synagogue believers in Jesus Christ? *No!* Here he is talking to brethren who believe in Christ; within the synagogue you actually had a small Church. You had the Church within the synagogue; the synagogue being the greater number of attendees and then those who were *called* and *believed* and were still attending at the synagogue at this time. He’s talking to them. We have this combination of whom James is writing to.

Let’s come back here to James 1:19: “For this reason, my beloved brethren...” You can check out in the book of Acts: *beloved brethren* can refer to brethren within the Church, but Jews talking to other Jews are also called *brethren*. Where Paul stood up in a synagogue (Acts 13:14), his first time there and the ruler of the synagogue said to Paul and Barnabas, ‘Men and brethren, do you have any exhortation for the people?’ So, the Jews commonly refer to each other as *brethren*. Then we also find where Paul referred to the other Pharisees as *brethren* (Acts 23:5) and he used it not in the sense that they were converted, but so he could turn the Pharisees against the Sadducees and upset their trial

and accusations against him. So, not exactly everywhere where it says *brethren* does it necessarily mean converted people with the Spirit of God.

Verse 19: "...let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger: Because man's wrath does not work out God's righteousness. Therefore, having rid yourselves of all filthiness and all *the* abounding of wickedness around you... [All the works of the flesh. He's addressing those who, if they are converted, are just newly converted or those who are still practicing a 'religion' within Judaism. He's trying to reach both of them.] ...then in meekness accept for yourselves the implanted Word, which *is* able to save your lives" (vs 19-21). That can be said to converted people and unconverted people. To the converted people that they may grow in grace and knowledge; to the unconverted that they may repent in meekness and accept Christ and go forward.

Verse 22: "Then be doers of *the* Word... [God requires *all* people to keep the commandments of God—doesn't He?] ...and not only hearers, deceiving your own selves... [He's talking to people then, who are *hearing* the Word, who weren't *doing* the Word and deceiving themselves. He's encouraging them to receive the Word and go forward with it and be doers of it.] ...Because if anyone is a hearer of *the* Word and not a doer... " (vs 22-23). He's also speaking to those who are just hearers, those who are not converted or just newly converted or if we could say, marginally converted.

"...this one is like a man considering his natural face in a mirror Who, after looking at himself, went away and immediately forgot what he was like. But the one who has looked into *the* perfect law of freedom, and has continued in *it*, this one himself has not become a forgetful hearer, but is a doer of *the* work. This one shall be blessed in his actions" (vs 22-25). We also have two forms of blessing with that—don't we?

1. the *letter of the law* blessing, which if the Jews would keep, they would be blessed
2. the *Spirit of the Law*—doing—which those who are converted are to do the Spirit of the Law

This can apply to either one. What you need to do is also go back and read some of the prophets, where God continually said, that 'You didn't hear My voice, you didn't hearken to My words.' He was talking to unconverted people. As we can see there is a mix of converted and unconverted.

Verse 26: "If anyone among you considers himself to be religious... [here's one of the places where 'religion' is used] ...and does not control his

tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one's 'religion' *is* vain." Even in the *letter of the law* of 'religion.' Most people—when they start coming to the knowledge of the Truth—are into a 'religious' type mode. When God first calls people, He calls some out of Catholicism, some out of Protestantism, some out of atheism, which is a 'religion.' When He calls them, the first thing that they do is begin looking for the right church, i.e. the right 'religion,' because they believe that 'religion' is the way that God wants it to be. That's where they start.

It would be fair to say that 'everyone who's a beginning Christian, begins as a 'religious' type person.' Is that all that God wants? Does God want us to remain 'religious'? *or* Does He want us to grow to the full grace and knowledge and stature and measure of Jesus Christ? I think the answer is obvious: ***He wants us to grow to the full measure and stature of Jesus Christ!***

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." When you're talking to a Jew, he can keep himself unspotted from the world if he would follow the things that he was taught in the *letter of the law*, which could be called a 'religion.' But what we're going to see is that every time people stray from God, they get into 'religion' and are leaving God. What we're dealing with here is that James is talking about the 'religion,' which is the *outer works*.

A *religious person* in the Greek is called 'threskos'. *Religion* is 'threskeia'—*the outer works; that which someone else can see*. It has nothing to do with the inner worship of God. None of this has to do with prayer or study or growing in grace and knowledge, growing in Truth and understanding. What he is talking about here with 'religion' is the ***outward works***, which is called 'religious.' It's better to be 'religious' in the world and carnally speaking, than it is to be in the world and not believing in God and not doing any good at all whatsoever. However, does this bring you salvation? We'll answer that question a little later, but let's just keep that in mind.

Things that you do out here, that other people see, you may be doing 'good': visiting the fatherless and the widows and helping those in need and keeping yourself from going into the world to become worldly. Even Protestants talk about that—don't they? Don't they talk about people and bring sermons of repentance for backsliding? *Yes!* This is what we are dealing with here—we are not dealing with a way of conversion—the outer works, the things that other people see. If people know us, they may have an understanding from their point of view

that we are 'religious.' If the world wants to define us as 'religious,' that's all right. But does God want us to be 'religious' or into 'religion'?

Let's look at a couple of other places where 'religion' is used. Acts 26:5 will also show you that Pharisaism was a 'religion' and Paul was 'religious.' As far as the *law of the Jews* is concerned, the Apostle Paul was nearly as perfect. Some may object to that, but part of being perfect in Judaism was also destroying the enemy. He was killing and persecuting the *true* Christians who actually should be called *true believers*, those who are the firstfruits of God, those who are going to be in the first resurrection and are going to be the bride of Christ.

Even though we are called Christian, even though we refer to ourselves as Christian, even though the Bible refers to us as Christian, our Christianity is different than from what the world understands. We're going to see that our Christianity is *a way of life*, moving on from 'religion,' growing out of 'religion,' and *growing into the true relationship with God*.

Paul is saying to the Jews, Acts 26:4: "The manner of my life from childhood, which from *the* beginning was among my nation in Jerusalem, all the Jews know... [they've understood me since I was a little boy]: ...Who knew me from the first, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I formerly lived *as a Pharisee*" (vs 4-5). *Pharisaism is a 'religion.'* Paul was 'religious' before he was called.

Let's understand what Paul later said about this. How did Paul view his 'religious' past? How was that in relationship to Jesus Christ? How did he count that? Galatians 1:13 "For you heard of my former conduct when I was in Judaism... [the *Jews'* 'religion'] ...how I was excessively persecuting the Church of God and was destroying it; And I was advancing in Judaism... [*profited in the Jews'* 'religion.']. ...*far* beyond many of my contemporaries in my *own* nation, being more abundantly zealous for *the* traditions of my fathers" (vs 13-14). Do the *traditions of the fathers* save? The traditions of the fathers constituted 'religion'?

Let's let Jesus answer that question. Let's see what the Jews and the Pharisees did concerning Jesus Christ and the disciples. Here we are talking about the kind of worship that 'religion' has; the *outward show* of it.

Mark 7:1: "Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem came together to Him. And when they saw some of His disciples eating with defiled hands (that is unwashed *hands*), they found fault.... [There's one thing about 'religious' people: they look at the physical things and find

fault and judge, because that's what 'religions' are all about.] ...For the Pharisees and all the Jews, holding fast to the tradition of the elders, do not eat unless they wash their hands thoroughly. Even *when coming* from the market, they do not eat unless they *first* wash themselves" (vs 1-4).

Would you go to the market and buy things at the market and you come home, would you consider your hands filthy? *No!* You could probably be at the market, and you're buying apples and one of them looks really good to you, you reach down and you take it and you eat it. A 'religious' Jew could not do that, because he would have to first go home, wash his hands and wash all of the food and then he could eat, because that made him 'right before God.' Jesus said a little later on that *that did not* make them right before God.

"...And there are many other things that they have received to observe... [that's what it means *to hold*] ...*such as the* washing of cups and pots and brass utensils and tables. For this reason, the Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, 'Why don't Your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?'" (vs 4-5).

Let's see what Jesus thought about 'religion.' I want you to understand something here. You can get out your concordance and you will not find the word *Christian* and the word *religion* together—you won't find it. You will find *religion* and *tradition* and outward things such as the tradition of the Pharisees—they were 'religious.' Paul said he was of the strictest sect of the 'religion' of the Jews, the Pharisees.

Notice how Jesus answered with Scripture, v 6: "And He answered *and* said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites...'" Hypocrite means *sanctimonious pretender* when it is referring to 'religious' leaders, because they *pretend* to be 'religious' but are not. They say one thing and do another thing. They are hypocrites before God because they put *their* traditions and *their* laws and *their* rules and the enforcement of those above the laws and commandments of God.

"...hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors Me with their lips..." (v 6). A 'religious' outward expression. Don't a lot of people do that? *Yes!* They honor God with their lips!

It's like this atheist: He was out fishing in Loch Ness and all of a sudden the Loch Ness Monster showed up and was coming full-bore to eat him and sink his boat. The Loch Ness Monster came, knocked him out of his boat and he was flying through the air. The atheist said, 'Oh, God, help me.' And God answered back, 'I thought you didn't

believe in Me.’ He said, ‘I didn’t, and I didn’t believe in the Loch Ness Monster until now.’ Honoring God with your lips is only when you think you need God, or you are good enough to do something for God. They honor God with their lips. We’ll see a little bit more of that later on. “...**but their hearts are far away from Me**” (v 6). Brethren, there is the whole key.

What is it that we have learned concerning the love of God, which is the basic foundation of true, Scriptural, New Testament Christianity, being firstfruits for the first resurrection and the bride of Christ? What did Jesus say? ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself*—on these two hang all the Law and the Prophets.’ God did not give the Law and the Prophets to have a ‘religion.’ He gave them as a *way of life*, both Old Testament and New Testament.

But what have men done with *their* traditions, which is their religion? *They have superimposed it upon God’s way!* In doing so, they reject God. Though they profess with their lips, their heart is far away. God is interested in the heart, because in Acts 15 God is called ‘*the heart-knowing God*.’ That’s what it is in the Greek. It says there in the English, ‘And God Who knows the heart.’ But it really means, ‘*the heart-knowing God*.’ God is concerned with what goes on in your mind and your heart and your inward parts, because then the *outward* will be clean, as Jesus told the Pharisees concerning their religion.’

Verse 7: “But in vain do they worship Me... [outward worship] ...teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.” Let’s understand something very clearly: All ‘religion’ basically is following man-made rules, even though James said, ‘pure and undefiled religion’ is an *outward* thing. That has nothing to do with the worship of God. That has nothing to do with your heart before God. That is an *outward expression*, though it may be in agreement with part of the Word of God. To do that does not necessarily mean that you are converted.

Let’s look at those who are in the world for just a minute. Do they not every Thanksgiving and Christmas, feed the poor? Give gifts to the children? Are they converted? Did they do something good in helping the widows and the fatherless? *Yes!* But are they on the road to salvation because they have done it? *No!* That’s the kind of ‘religion’ that is being spoken of here in the New Testament.

Verse 8: “For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men...” All I have to do is refer you to any other ‘religion’ in the world and you will see that is absolutely true. As a matter

of fact, the Catholic Church is based upon the *traditions of the fathers*. Muslims are based upon the *traditions* of Mohammed. Buddhism is based upon the *traditions* of Buddha. Hinduism is based upon the *traditions* of Vishnu and all of the thousands of gods that they have. All of these are the *doctrines of men*, which reject the commandments of God.

We’re going to see that almost all ‘religion’ is *carnal or satanic*. You need to understand that. If I’m going a few oxen because you want to keep your ‘religion,’ and *you think* that you are truly Christian, *you think* that you are converted, well, let me encourage you to grow up out of ‘religion’ and **grow into a relationship with God, based upon the love of God.**

Verse 8: “For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, *such as* the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.’ Then He said to them, ‘Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your *own* tradition” (vs 8-9).

The Jews have done this with the Sabbath—haven’t they? They have *their own traditions* on how to keep the Sabbath and what to do and what to eat and when to come in, when to go out, what to wear, what not to wear, when to breathe, when not to breathe, when to hold the lamp, when not to hold the lamp. They’ve destroyed the Sabbath.

Catholics have their tradition of Sunday, which the Protestants follow right along, because they never finished the Reformation. What do they do? *They have their own traditions that they do on that day!* They lay aside the commandments of God or they take some of the commandments of God and they do them in a carnal minded way, which then is a ‘religion.’ We’re going to see that God also hates that. We really need to understand and define this.

Verse 10: “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘The one who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man shall say to *his* father or mother, “Whatever benefit you might receive from me is *corban*” (that is, *set aside as a gift to God*)... [That is a gift to the temple. Oh boy! How many ‘religion’ have said, ‘If you give money, if you give it to this ‘religious’ cause, you’re going to be blessed’?] ... (that is, *set aside as a gift to God*), he is not obligated to help his parents” (vs 10-11). In other words, he doesn’t have to honor his father and mother. He doesn’t have to carry out his obligations to his mother and father, because now we have a *tradition* that supersedes the Word of God.

Verse 12: “And you excuse him from doing anything for his father or his mother, nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition

which you have passed down; and you practice many *traditions* such as this” (vs 12-13). We’re going to look at some of these ‘such as this’ things that they do. We’re going to see how it is. ***It is vain! It is a vain ‘religion’!***

Let’s see what ‘religion’ does to a person internally when you have all of these dos and don’ts. You can memorize them and you can do them and you can say them. Judaism is the epitome of it, because there is something—a law, a tradition, a command—that you need to do every single minute of every day, from the instant you wake up until the instant you go to bed. If you’ve never read the book: *Code of Jewish Law* by Ganzfried and Goldin, get one and read it and you’ll understand what I mean. Then go to a Catholic store and buy a Catechism. What they need to do whenever they confess their sins to the priest—which is against the Word of God—and do *hail Marys* and *our fathers* and do so many laps around the beads. Isn’t it interesting that all ‘religions,’ being carnal—even the Muslims have little beads that they use; Buddhists have little beads that they use; Catholics have the beads that they use; Orthodox have the beads that they use—***all physical things***.

What happens internally when you are a good, righteous and diligent ‘religious’ person? And this is what causes so much trouble in the Church. As Bob Hunnicutt said, ‘*Religious* people have caused problems in the Church.’ We’ll talk a little bit more about ‘religious’ people in the Church. Have you ever been judged by someone unto condemnation? Someone in the Church? Someone who appeared righteous? Maybe even a deacon, an elder, a pastor or evangelist—condemn you and run you in the ground? Here’s what happens to ‘religious’ people.

Luke 18:9: “And to some who trusted in themselves... [Who are we to trust in? *Jesus Christ!* When you have *traditions* you trust in yourselves; this is a Pharisee.] ...that they were righteous, and despised others...” That is always what happens in religion.’ The Catholics do; the Muslims do; the Eastern Orthodox do; the Protestants do; the Hindus, the Buddhists; they despise others, because *they consider themselves to be right*.

As a matter of fact, the Muslims consider themselves to be so right that if they kill someone who is an ‘infidel’ they give glory to God. Furthermore, there is a sect of the Muslims who believe that if one of their relatives does something against their ‘religion’ that they have the right to kill them—whether it be a mother or father or sister or brother—those who trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others.

- What kind of righteousness are *we* to have?
- Are we to have the righteousness of the exterior things that we do?
- Are we to have righteousness because we keep the Sabbath?
- Because we keep the Holy Days?
- Because we tithe?
- Is that righteousness that God wants us to have?

These things are not wrong.

- What is the righteousness that God wants us to have?

God the Father imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That’s the righteousness we are to grow to, not this self-righteousness.

Verse 9: “He also spoke this parable: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray... [right before God] ...the one *was* a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.... [A publican was a tax collector, the most hated person on earth. An IRS agent—you could name them today. You wouldn’t want an IRS agent knocking on the door and saying, ‘Hello.’ No you wouldn’t.] ...The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself in this manner...’” (vs 9-11). Why? *Because he trusted in himself!* He wasn’t trusting in God, but he used God’s name.

- All ‘religious’ people use God’s name.
- All ‘religious’ people quote some kind of ‘religious’ thing, even quotes from the Bible.
- ‘Religious’ people are the ones who take the Scriptures and use them deceitfully.

If you don’t believe that, go to any Catholic service or any Protestant service some Sunday morning for an education and find out. They are trusting in themselves. ‘And he prayed thus with himself’ He really wasn’t praying to God, because in his own mind who was his god? *Himself!* ‘The elders of Israel have set up idols in their mind’ (Ezek. 14) That’s what this man was doing here. That’s what this Pharisee was doing. He was idolizing himself, but praising God.

Verse 11: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men... [Comparing yourself among yourselves and those who compare themselves among themselves, Paul said *are not wise*.] (he goes on and enumerates some of the worst sins): ...—extortioners, unrighteous... [*unjust*—how can he be just if he despises others? *There’s no justice in that!* But he himself *thinks* that he is righteous. Looks down on other people, ‘they’re unjust’.] ...adulterers—or even as this tax collector.... [Notice all the good works, the ‘religious’ works,

exterior works]: ...I fast twice in the week...” (vs 11-12). That’s a lot of zeal and diligence— isn’t it?

Go back and read in the book of Zechariah: He said, ‘all these years when you fasted in the seventh month and the tenth month, fasting twice a week; were you fasting unto Me to repent of your sins? *No*, you were fasting to do your own things.’

Verse 12: “‘I fast twice in the week, *and* I give a tithe *of* everything that I gain.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself on *the* chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner’” (vs 12-13). Here was an attitude that was going to *change the heart*.

The ‘religious’ attitude did not change the heart. The ‘religious’ attitude alienated him from other people; actually *alienated him from God*, because he was not praying to God but to himself and using the name of God. *That’s what all ‘religious’ people do*. The publican *repented!* What is the key here? *God is interested in repentance!* He is not interested in ‘religion.’

Jesus said, v 14: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified...” *Justified* means *put in right standing with God*. So, the publican who repented was put in right standing with God, but the Pharisee—the other—was not justified though he had done all of these things. God required all those things to be done. We’re going to see a little bit later that Jesus told the disciples, ‘When you have done everything that you have been commanded to do, say we’re unprofitable servants, because we have only done that which was commanded to be done.’ *God is interested*

- in your heart
- with repentance
- with change
- with loving God

He’s not interested in these *outward* things like the Pharisee had done here.

“...For everyone who exalts himself... [That’s what ‘religion’ does. This past week the pope visited Mexico and then came to St. Louis in the United States. Very ‘religious’! What did it gain him? *He had his reward!* Everyone saw him. Was he preaching his traditions? *Yes!* Was he preaching his ideas? *Yes!* Was he exalting himself? *Yes!*] (Jesus said): ...shall be humbled...” (v 14).

Let’s look at how Paul viewed his ‘religious’ life before he was converted and then after he was converted. Before he was converted he was exactly like the Pharisee here in v 14: “For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled...” We’re going to see that applied to the Apostle Paul in a very dynamic and profound way. Was he

exalting himself when he was taking the orders from the high priest and going out and persecuting those who really believed in Jesus Christ—the true believers? Was he exalting himself in rising up in Judaism because of what he was doing? *Yes, he was*. Was he abased? *Instantly!* He was knocked off his donkey on the way to Damascus. You know the story about how God called him and converted him. He was abased.

“...and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted” (v 14). Just the opposite of what people think in ‘religion.’ ‘Religion’ *exalts* people!

Let’s see how Paul thought of his ‘religion’ *before* he was converted and *after* he was converted. When people are called into the Church of God they may have come from an upstanding family, been ‘religious,’ gone to Sunday school, even read and studied the Bible. Their folks may have been very good. Their grandmother and grandfather may have been upstanding people. But let’s understand something: *They weren’t converted!* They may be sincere. They may be ‘religious.’ They may be good people in the world, but

- human goodness *does not equal salvation*
- human goodness *does not equal repentance*
- human goodness *is not going to force God to bring salvation to anyone*

You need to realize that.

These people may very well, without a doubt, qualify for the second resurrection. But the first resurrection is *a calling*, regardless of your past life. All of the good things that you *thought* that you did, even the motivation behind it, from a carnal point of view was *for self* in many cases. When we get done here we’re going to go back and we’re going to look at Job. We want to look at it properly, *through the eyes of God*, so we can understand that all the goodness that we can do—even though in the *letter of the law* God may require it—your own works will not bring you salvation—period! We do have good works here, which we are to do, but those are to be motivated from the Spirit of God *from within*; from the love of God to us *from within to without*—not that we do something good to make us better.

Every year when you see the news and they feed the poor on Thanksgiving and Christmas or do these things—they ask them: ‘How did you feel in doing this?’ *Oh, I felt wonderful! I felt good!* That is purely all human. When you come to repentance, you don’t feel good at all, because you are viewing your life through eyes of Jesus Christ and your own sins. When you do the things that are good, you are not to ‘let your right hand know what your left hand

is doing.’ In other words, motivated by the Spirit of God *from within* to do those things *without*.

Ephesians 2:2: “In which you walked in times past according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...” Satan has his goodness that looks good. He appears as an angel of light and so do his ministers. But **that good comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**. That is not the good that comes from God the Father and Jesus Christ.

“...the spirit that is now working within the children of disobedience; among whom also we all once had our conduct...” (vs 2-3). Every single one of us—even though we may have been good upstanding people, even though we may have never committed any really heinous crimes—lived in the world controlled by Satan the devil and were part and parcel with him. If you kept Sunday, Christmas and Easter, you are worshipping God with the tools of the devil. You need to understand that. God does not accept that worship.

- Are people sincere in those things? *Yes!*
- Do they *feel good* when they do those things? *Yes!*
- Do they have the righteousness of Jesus Christ? *No!*
- Does this ‘religious’ endeavor of *being good* make them righteous before God? *No!*

As a matter of fact, *God won’t even accept it!*

“...we all once had our conduct in the lusts of our flesh, doing the things willed by the flesh and by the mind...” (v 3). All of this has to do with to develop the self, to educate the self, be better and good and strive and discipline. You don’t even have to be religiously ‘religious,’ but you can have your own ‘religion,’ not believing in a god of any kind:

- but helping yourself to be better
- to have more power
- to have more personality
- to have more strength
- to have a better body
- to have a disciplined mind

—all of that is *a desire of the mind*. All of that is *carnal!* That is *carnal goodness*, which then must be repented of because it is *vanity*. We need to realize that.

This thing of the difference between ‘religion’ and the true way of God is a profound thing that God is granting us understanding to realize, because God loves us and God has called us and God has given us His grace and knowledge and understanding, brethren. Yea, He’s given His Son Jesus Christ as **that personal sacrifice for each one**

of us, that our sins may be blotted out, that we can be in right standing before God, through the grace of God. This is what Paul is going to bring out here. “...and were by nature *the* children of wrath, even as the rest *of the world*.” (v 3).

That’s why God is going to bring His vengeance even upon those so-called ‘good and sincere people,’ because they are ‘good and sincere’ *in their own eyes*. They are ‘good and sincere’ *in the carnal way* in the world. **They are not repentant and converted before God!** There is a vast difference! It’s very hard for some people to tell the difference between those two, because they are still hung-up on ‘religion’ and they are still into ‘religion’ rather than into God and a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. {see sermons: *Created Relationships*}

Down through the years as God has granted us understanding and knowledge, we have grown in grace and knowledge—*all of that goes to God*—that’s not saying that we are something special or that we discovered these things on our own. When we began to realize that God doesn’t want a hierarchy, that God doesn’t want an *Invisible Idol/Visible Man* {see sermons by that title} with the control and authority of ‘religion’; then we began to understand that **God created us to have a relationship**. That is defined as a **created relationship**.

This is what God wants us to do: Step across the threshold of ‘religion’ and leave that behind and **enter into a true, loving, spiritual relationship** with God the Father and Jesus Christ. **That’s what God wants!** You’re going to understand once you cross over that threshold and you leave the ‘religion’ behind, that you love God with all your heart, mind, soul and being and you have this relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ

- through prayer
- through study
- through God’s Spirit within you
- through yielding to God
- desiring God’s way
- loving God
- loving His way

your whole life is going to change. To overcome in a ‘religious’ sense is to beat the flesh. **You** discipline your mind. **You** discipline your body. All of that is *carnal* and **you can’t accomplish spiritual things with carnal means!** You must be led of the Spirit of God. You must grow in the grace and knowledge of God. This is what Paul is talking about here.

Verse 4: “But God, Who is rich in mercy... [God understands all these things that I’ve just related to you.] ...because of His great love with

which He loved us.” You didn’t come and find God because you were ‘good.’ You didn’t come and find God because you attended the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Episcopalian, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Muslim or whatever other ‘religion.’ **God called you because He loves you!** God has a special thing for you particularly and individually. He wants you to enter into that relationship that He has established by *grace*.

Verse 5: “Even when we were dead in *our* trespasses, has made *us* alive together with Christ. (For you have been saved by grace).” {see sermon on *Salvation is Creation*} There are three steps to being saved:

1. You **have been saved** from Satan the devil in this world now.
2. You **are being saved** if you continue in the Gospel.
3. You **shall be saved** at the resurrection when Jesus returns.

You need to understand that. This is not saying ‘once saved, always saved.’ But it does mean in the Greek: *having been saved by the gracious action of God in your life!*

Verse 6: “And He has raised *us* up together and has caused *us* to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, So that in the ages that *are* coming...” (vs 6-7). That’s when we are going to sit in the heavenly places; not now. The most heavenly thing that we have now is the Holy Spirit of God within us, which comes from heaven. That is true. That is a heavenly thing. We have the love of God and God’s Word. Those are heavenly things that God has given us.

Verse 7: “So that in the ages that *are* coming He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness [graciousness] toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith...” (vs 7-8). The greatest thing you can do is believe in God and believe His Truth and believe His righteousness and believe in Christ—not all these *exterior* ‘religious’ works that people can do, even though on the surface it may even appear to be Christian as other people view it.

“...and this *especially* is not of your own selves...” (v 8). All ‘religion’ is **from self**, from within, motivated from the carnal mind. You need to have the Spirit of God come in, *circumcise the spirit of your mind*, and then let that motivation from within be the Spirit of God and not from self. We saw how the Pharisee was all motivated from self: prayed with himself, invoked the name of God—didn’t he? *Yes!* It didn’t do him any good—did it? *No!*

“...and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God” (v 8). Why is it that people think that the *exterior works* that they can do will bring them salvation when God has to give it? God gives it freely through Jesus Christ because you believe with all your heart, mind, soul and being. It’s a whole different prospect. That’s why God hates religion,’ because people come along with all these *exterior works* and substitute for the true conversion within. You have an *exterior goodness*, but there is not an *interior goodness*. But the grace of God and the gift of God, which He can give, will bring that with the Spirit of God.

Verse 9: “Not of works, so that no one may boast.” As I have mentioned concerning the Sabbath; what if there was a law which said: if you keep the Sabbath perfectly 1,000 Sabbaths in a row, you will earn salvation, but you have to do all 1,000 and they all have to be in a row? What if you did that 999 times and you died before the next Sabbath came? You’re resurrected and Christ looks at it and says, ‘Well, you’ve got a pretty good record here. Your works show that you kept the Sabbath perfectly 999 times, but you died before you could do it 1,000 times. Therefore, you can’t have eternal life, because the law said 1,000 times and you didn’t do it.’

That’s why *it’s not of works*, “...that no one may boast.” Think of the one who did it 1,010 times. If he were granted salvation and he would say, ‘Right on Lord! I know how hard it is to do it 1,000 times and I did it 1,010 times.’ That person is deserving to go in the Lake of Fire. That’s why:

- it’s not of *works*
- it’s not of *self*
- it is not of *religion*

We are going to see how this applies to Job in just a little bit. Here is the key, v 10: “For we are **His workmanship**...”

- Is God the Father and Jesus Christ molding you?
- Working with you?
- Is Christ being formed in you?
- Are you developing the mind of Jesus Christ?

All of those things are not ‘religious.’ All of those things are *the work of the Spirit within you*. “...we are **His workmanship** created in Christ Jesus...” (v 10). Brethren, we have the Spirit of God. We are the children of God.

- Are you going to let God, with His Spirit within you, create Christ in you?
- Are you going to be the workmanship of God the Father and Jesus Christ?

or

- Are you going to have your own ‘religious’ works that you want to hold up to God and how good you are?

or

- Would you rather have the good works that God does to you and through you and being His workmanship?
- What is it that you want?

That’s where the line is drawn, sharp and clear between ‘religion’ and *God’s way*.

Verse 10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *the good works...*” What are the true good works that we do? ***The true good works are those things that are motivated from love from within,*** not a ‘religious’ work that is out here. We may do ‘good’ for people. That’s fine, but

- we don’t do it to exalt ourselves
- we don’t do it to be thought of as good
- we don’t do it because we feel good or to make us feel good

We do it because

- we love God
- we see a person in need and have love and compassion upon that person
- to help and serve in whatever way

Totally different! Thinking nothing of what you’re going to gain or nothing of what you’re going to get, but to exalt that person before Christ. That’s what true service is all about

Notice these good works: “...that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them” (v 10). That is *faith and hope and love*. Those are the ‘good works.’ ***If*** you are loving God, everything else will flow in your life the way that it should.

Let’s compare that to what Paul thought of his ‘religion’ before he was converted, Philippians 3:3: “For we are the circumcision...”—the true *spiritual* circumcision. Remember what Paul said: Even if you are a Jew and you don’t do those things from the heart, ‘your circumcision in the flesh is made **uncircumcision,**’ because it is not the circumcision which is *outward*, but the circumcision which is *inward—the circumcision of Jesus Christ* to change our carnal minds. ***All ‘religion’ is carnal minded!*** That may come as a surprise to a lot of people, but it really is.

Verse 3: “For we are the circumcision, who serve God **in the spirit** and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in *the flesh...* [no confidence in ‘religion’] ...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*” (vs 3-4). He’s going to say, ‘Okay, if you want to look at the things in the flesh, let’s look at it.’ In Paul’s own eyes before he was converted, his ‘religion’ was pure and undefiled—*in his own eyes*, but not before God.

Verse 5: “Circumcised on *the eighth day*; of *the race of Israel*, from *the tribe of Benjamin*, a Hebrew of Hebrews... [Boy! Look at my genealogy!] ...with respect to law, a Pharisee.” The strictest sect of the Pharisees; ‘we disciplined ourselves. We had rigor that we had in our schedule. We prayed and we fasted and we did things and we made broad our phylacteries,’ which are like merit badges that they put along the borders of their garments.

Verse 6: “With respect to zeal, persecuting the Church...” How more zealous could you be than actively destroying the ‘enemy of God,’ as he viewed it through his ‘religion’ being a Pharisee.

“...with respect to righteousness that *is in law...* [in the letter of the law] ...blameless.... [pure and undefiled, no blame] ...Yet, the things that were gain to me... [talking about his ‘religion’] ...these things I have counted *as loss* for the sake of Christ” (vs 6-7). He had to repent of all of his ‘religion,’ all of his works, all of his do-gooding. He even had to look at the fact that even though he was of Israel—the tribe of Benjamin, all of those things—that unless he was converted and had the Spirit of God, that didn’t matter one wit. Remember what Jesus said to those Jews when they said, ‘We be Abraham’s seed.’ He let them know being Abraham’s seed is not going to save them.

Verse 7: “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...” (vs 7-8).

- Do you count that a loss?
- Do you realize and understand that when you are baptized, you are actually co-joined into the death of Jesus Christ?
- Knit together in that death of Christ?
- In a covenant pledge unto your death?
- That you will love God and be faithful to the end, through the power of God’s Holy Spirit?
- Do you understand that?

We are not in a ‘religion.’ ***We are in a covenant relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ***—our fellowship is with Them. Paul came to understand that. He wanted to have the ‘excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord.’

“...for Whom I have suffered the loss of *all* things... [Everything that was gain: power, prestige, name, wealth, reputation, all of my ‘religious’ buddies.] ...suffered the loss of all things... [How did he look at them?] ...and count *them* as dung...” (v 8). A pile of ‘skubalon’—stinking and smelling and fetid and filled with flies and maggots and vermin. That’s how he viewed all of his ‘goodness,’ all of the ‘goodness’ that he had ‘religiously’—a pile of dung!

“...that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him...” (vs 8-9). This is not a ‘religious’ thing. You are found in Him if you have the Spirit of Christ. If the Spirit that was in Christ dwell in you, He shall raise you from the dead. We’re to be *led* by the Spirit of Christ, be found in Him.

“...not having my own righteousness, which *is derived* from law... [All defined by tradition. Even the letter of the law is not going to save.] ...but that *righteousness* which *is* by the faith of Christ—the righteousness of God *that is* based on faith” (v 9)—imputed to you.

Brethren, let’s understand something very important, that is a great and marvelous gift of grace that God gives you: ***that He imputes to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ!*** So that *spiritually* you can become perfect in Christ. What can you do with a ‘religious’ *outward* ‘good’ work that’s better than that? *Not a thing!*

Verse 10: “That I may know Him...” through that personal relationship. Do you *know* Jesus Christ? Do you *know* God the Father? *or* Are you like Job? That you’ve heard by the ‘hearing of the ear,’ but you really don’t know Them? You need to think about that! If you don’t, then you ask God:

- to help you grow in *love*
- to help you grow in *faith*
- to help you grow in *hope*

—so that ***you know*** Them! That means you ***will keep*** Their commandments. That means you ***will love*** Them. But commandment-keeping is not, in a ‘religious’ sense, in the *letter of the law*. Commandment-keeping is that ***you do it from the heart***, spiritually, because you love and desire God’s way and God has made it possible for you to do so.

Verse 10: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection...” Brethren, what good is it going to do to try and make God’s way a ‘religion’ and then lose out on the resurrection? Have we seen a lot of ‘religious’ people do that? *Yes, we have!*

“...the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...” (v 10). Paul personally—because he persecuted, killed, destroyed and imprisoned those true believers before he was

converted^[transcriber’s correction]—now he understood the suffering of Jesus Christ, Who suffered so incredibly at the crucifixion. That he [Paul] is saying that he, in his life, needed to come to the understanding of the fellowship of His [Christ’s] suffering; so that he could realize and grasp what God the Father and Jesus Christ had done for him—and all of those that ***They call*** and all of those that ***They will call***.

Christ told Paul when he was *called* that he was going to suffer for the Word of God and that his life was going to be one of great difficulty. He came to understand that. He came to accept that. He came to say that he wanted to have the fellowship, the participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ. That’s how deeply converted that Paul was. That’s how far away he threw the ‘religion’ of the past.

Can we do the same thing? *or* Are we going to struggle along and try and make a ‘religion’ out of God’s way? Because the truth of the matter is, to answer the question that I began with: ***God isn’t going to bring any ‘religion’ on over into the Millennium—none!*** He’s going to show the world *His way* to live.

“...being conformed to His death... [that covenant pledge of death] ...If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (vs 10-11). That’s why we are here, brethren. We’re not here to be ‘religious.’ We’re here to love God, love our neighbors, love the brethren as Christ has loved us, to help and serve one another—no question about that! The whole goal is that we might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Verse 12: “Not as though I have already received, or have already been perfected...” No, he understood the attitude of the Pharisee: ‘I thank You I’m not as other men. I am perfect. I’m not an extortioner or unjust or even as this publican down here.’ No, he [the publican] didn’t consider himself perfect.

- Perfection, brethren, comes day-by-day.
- Perfection comes through the Spirit of God.
- Perfection comes through the forgiveness of sin.
- Perfection comes with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

All of those are the acts and gifts of grace through Jesus Christ to each of us. It’s not an *exterior* ‘religious’ thing that we do.

Paul says: “...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...” (vs 12-13). Brethren, it is true, we have not attained until we die in the faith or are changed in ‘a moment of the twinkling of an

eye at the last trump' when Christ returns, if we are still living when that happens. We have not attained. We have not apprehended.

"...but *this* one thing I do... [This is why if you do this, 'religion' cannot be a part of your way of living before God.] ...*this* one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind..." (v 13). God has said, He forgives your sins and won't remember them. You remember them and you try and figure out what good thing you can do to compensate for it. When you do that, you're *rejecting the forgiveness and righteousness* of Christ. You are reminding God of your sins which He wants to forget. Do you understand that? Do you see where that conflict of 'religion' comes?

"...forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth... [stretching out, forward] ...to the things that are ahead" (v 13). It has to be that way, brethren, in all of our lives. What we did yesterday, last week, last month, last year, five years ago, ten years ago, twenty years ago, thirty years ago. Some of us have been in the Church 40 years now. Those things are all behind. Hopefully, they were all motivated by the Spirit of God and that is fine. But how about all the sins that we have done in the meantime? All of those are forgotten. Put those behind you. Let Christ put it away from you. He says in Psa. 103 that He removes our sins and iniquities from us 'as far as the east is from the west.'

Why do you want to go be 'religious' and bring those back and do 'good' works so you can compensate for what you didn't do? *You can't do that!* That's your own works! That's of yourself! You love God and let Him work *through* you and *in* you, then these things will come the way that Paul is talking about here.

"...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" (vs 13-14). That's what it needs to be. That is not a 'religious' statement. That is a whole *developing and continuous* relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and the calling that has been given.

- There is no greater calling than *to be called to receive the Spirit of God!*
- There is no greater calling than *to be in the first resurrection!*
- There is no greater calling than *to be a son or daughter of God!*
- There is no greater calling *to be the bride, as the first fruits of Christ!*

You look at all the paltry things of 'religious' deeds that people do and you compare that with this

calling. That's why Paul said all of this was dung! It is! It's outrageous when you really understand it.

Verse 15: "So then, let as many as *be* perfect..." You can be perfect spiritually with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God in you. ***Be perfect! Be thus minded!*** You go forward. You live your life with the love and Spirit of God and you *be thus minded*. Then you are in perfect standing with God with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ given to you. That doesn't mean you can go sin by any stretch of the imagination, because then you are not in perfect righteousness with God.

"...be of this mind. And... [here's a promise]: ...if *in* anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal even this to you" (v 15). For what purpose? ***That you may repent!*** That He may blot out your sins. That you may be able to then go forward as the Apostle Paul said.

Verse 16: "Nevertheless, *in regard* to that which we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, be imitators together of me, and bear in mind those who walk in this way, as you have us *for* an example" (vs 16-17). This is what we need to do, brethren. ***We need to walk in that way of God.*** There it is right before us.

Let's understand the very basic foundation of what God wants us to realize in our relationship with Him, John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, '***I am the Way...*** [He didn't say that through Me you have 'religion' He is ***the Way***. As we are going to see before we're done, it is the *way of God*, the *way of the Lord*, the *way of Truth*.] ...and ***the Truth***, and ***the Life***; no one comes to the Father except through Me.'" Not by 'religion,' not by human works, not by good endeavors that you yourself may do, but through Jesus Christ.

Which 'religion' will God preserve and carry over into the Millennium? I think we'll have a great understanding as to ***why*** God truly hates 'religion.' There will *not* be one single 'religion' carried on over into the Millennium.

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

Scriptural References:

- 1) James 1:1
- 2) James 2:1-2
- 3) James 1:19-27
- 4) Acts 26:4-5
- 5) Galatians 1:13-14
- 6) Mark 7:1-13
- 7) Luke 18:9-14
- 8) Ephesians 2:2-10
- 9) Philippians 3:3-17
- 10) John 14:6

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Acts 13:14-15; 23:5; 15
- Ezekiel 14
- Zechariah 7
- Psalm 103

Also referenced:

- Book: *Code of Jewish Law* by Ganzfried & Goldin
- Sermons:
- *Created Relationships*
- *Invisible Idol/Visible Man*
- *Salvation is Creation*

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