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Religious But Lost

I was reading a testimonial from Pastor Ron Van Hee which I thought you might find interesting in regards to this subject. He has been in church all his life, taught Bible study classes and was a chaplain's assistant. While attending the University of Montana, he realized he was religious but lost and then trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He preached 25 years before God saved him. This is no isolated case. This might shock you but there are students coming out of theological schools today who don't know Christ and go into the ministry – the lost preaching to the lost. To them it's a job.

The apostle Paul was a great theologian and a great preacher writing a good portion of the New Testament; but he loved to give his testimony. Paul tells us that, "As a young man I was religious and zealous for the traditions of my fathers and I persecuted the followers of Jesus and I wanted to destroy the Church of God." Paul tells us this in verses 13 and 14 of Galatians Chapter 1. Twice he speaks of Judaism. Saul of Tarsus (later re-named Paul by Jesus) had a very strict, religious upbringing, and he was familiar with all the teachings, the rites and ceremonies and the traditions connected with the Hebrew economy: look up Acts 26:5; yet, in spite of all his religious background and his religious convictions, Saul was an unsaved, spiritually dead and blind to the things of God. There are many people like that – religious, but lost.

Just because a person is religious, it is not a sign that he or she is saved. Satan has pulled his blindfold over the eyes of the average individual, thinking that is, that every individual who is religious is saved, but let me say that just because a person is a preacher, a Bible teacher, or an outstanding member of a given church, it is no

evidence at all that such a person is saved. One of the reasons our churches are filled with unsaved individuals is that an unsaved preacher cannot tell a sinner how to be saved. They may preach the Word of God, but they cannot preach the Gospel unless they are redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, and the reason for it is, they do not know the Gospel. They may talk about Christ and tell us individual things about Christ, but they can't preach Christ to the salvation of that sinner. Simply, you cannot tell something you don't know, and if you have never met the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have never come to know Him, you can't preach Him.

There is more said in God's word warning religious sinners who are lost than is said about those who are saved. It is amazing, as we study the Scriptures, to note God's warning to religious men. Take the book of Hebrews. It was written with this intent to warn religious men of their impending doom. The apostle Paul sets forth two things in the book of Hebrews: First, he tells the believer what he has in Christ; second, he warns religious men that they have missed Christ. I wish you would read the book of Hebrews with those two thoughts in mind, because in every chapter the apostle Paul warns religious men of their doom.

Religion is a futile attempt by people to reach up with their self-effort for the purpose of trying to please God. But redemption is the successful conclusion of God reaching down to people with love and acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world not to establish a religion, but to give LIFE; "... *I have come that they may have life....*" Only the body of believers, born again of the spirit, can receive the hope of eternal life. Those who die "*in Christ*" are absent from the body and present with the Lord (read 2 Cor. 5:8). Unfortunately, religion sometimes hardens people's hearts from getting into a relationship with our Creator, because God's intention all along has been to bring man back into a relationship with Himself.

World of religion

Religion, strife, wars and conflicts; that is why man simply does not know the way of peace! This is evidenced in a blood stained earth through 6,000 years of human history. Throughout time and history, the world's religions have been the greatest cause of evil and human suffering.

One of the harshest realities people can face is to learn that they have been lied to about their religious beliefs; that they have been deceived. People instinctively defend their beliefs because they are foundational to their entire outlook on life – the core of their decision making process in all matters in life.

Is there a God? Then, if so, who is He? Different religions have their own gods. So, did many gods create the world? No! There can't be hundreds of gods. If so, then who is the true God? Does He have a spokesman on earth? Do Catholics, who make up over 1 billion people, represent the true God? Is the Pope the true spokesman for God on earth? Or do the 1.3 billion believers of Islam have the true knowledge of the one god they call Allah? What about the 1 billion believers in various denominations who make up "traditional Christianity?" What about the faith of nearly 1 billion in Hinduism, or the 400 million in Buddhism, or the 14 million that compromise Judaism?

What is the truth? We all know we have a big problem in answering the question about one true belief. It has to be abundantly clear to us that there are billions of people on earth who are deceived. If there are hundreds of separate organizations within "traditional Christianity" that differ greatly in doctrinal belief, then only one, if any, can possibly be true.

Are all these religious groups throughout the world worshipping the same God? No! Their very beliefs and doctrines represent different

teachings about God and who He is. All of them can't be true. If they were true, then they would be in agreement with one another, but they're not. Isn't it confusing? It's no wonder that the world is in such chaos. One only has to look at the religious wars throughout the centuries and the billions of lives lost in the name of religion. Look at the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, religious wars in Ireland between the Catholics and Protestants; the Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants with nearly half of central Europe's population wiped out. Then you have ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Croatia, genocide in the various countries throughout the centuries mainly caused by religious factions. We also have Moslems fighting Moslems, Shiite fighting Sunni. Does the Church of England or the Catholic Church recognize the same government of God? No! Is the Shiite or Sunni correct in their interpretation of Allah? Do those who follow the ideals of Al Qaeda have Allah on their side? Who is right? What is the truth? Do Mormons believe in the same God as the Baptists or the Seventh-Day Adventists or the Jehovah's Witnesses? Do reformed Jews believe the same God as the Orthodox, or vice versa? All of these religions believe they are true and right before God, yet their doctrines and basic beliefs are often vastly different. So, who is right? What is the truth?

During World War II, how is it that priests of the Catholic Church blessed German and Italian soldiers who were going into war to kill Americans and Canadians, who had themselves been blessed by their priests in the Catholic Church? How can such things be? Is there not hypocrisy in such things? So what is the truth? Do you see the dilemma? Do you see why people are so confused? Do you see why so many people get TURNED OF by religion and preventing them from reading and studying the Scriptures and having a personal relationship with the one true God, through His begotten Son Christ Jesus?

God did not come down to earth to start a religion but to have a relationship with His creation. That's why He created us, so He could fellowship with us and have a relationship with us.

So ask yourself, "Is there really a Creator, a God of this earth?" If so, which one is he? Who is right? Why is there such diversity and vastly opposing views of God among religious beliefs? Is God so small and so weak that He cannot make the truth known? There's a lot of deception and confusion going on in this world due to the "prince of the airwaves" or "the god of this world" – Satan.

Religion is his forte. The root of religion and of all religions in this world has its start in Satan. He is the root cause of religion and it was started by him in Babylon and the Tower of Babel. A city and a tower were built in order to prevent people from scattering through the earth, in direct defiance of God's command. This tower which was built for the purpose of worshiping a deity may also picture fallen man's ceaseless effort to reach heaven by his own works instead of receiving salvation as a free gift of grace. The Lord judged the people by confounding their language. This was the beginning of the many different languages which we have in the world today.

One of the reasons that Jesus came to earth was to do away with religion. Religion is an unnecessary burden, a blockage, a firewall that comes between you and God. Religion is a firewall invented by Satan so he could come between you and the one true God diverting your attention away from God and His word and getting you focused on religion and separated from God.

Satan will do everything in his power to get you focused on religion and keep you from getting to know our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. Satan is the most religious entity there is on the earth and his desire would be to get you to "go to church," instead of "being the Church, the body of Christ;" to offer praise to God with your lips while your heart is cold. Carrying a Bible in your hands

will not save you. Satan will do everything in his power to keep you “RELIGIOUS” and “LOST.”

You know there is a persistent and ugly problem that rears its head in a religion, wherever religion goes. It's the attempt by the few to gain control over the many. The ugliest manifestations of this are found in the cults of this world. But there is also an enormous amount of damage that's done to peoples' lives in much more subtle ways in churches, sometimes single churches, sometimes church organizations, that oppress people with rituals, rules, laws, and false doctrines to control them.

Many people do not want to believe in a God who demands righteousness and morality, so they invent a God who makes no such requirements. Many people do not want to believe in a God who declares it impossible for people to earn their own way to heaven. So they invent a god who accepts people into heaven if they have completed certain steps, followed certain rituals and rules, and/or obeyed certain laws, at least to the best of their ability. Many people do not want a relationship with a God who is sovereign, all-powerful and omnipotent. So they imagine God as being more of a mystical force than a personal and sovereign ruler.

The existence of so many religious denominations is a demonstration of humanity's rejection of the one true God. Mankind has replaced Him with gods that are more to their liking. This is a dangerous enterprise. The desire to re-create God in our own image comes from the sinful nature within us; a nature that will eventually "reap destruction" and God's wrath (Galatians 6:7-8).

Do all religions lead to God? Actually, in a way they do! All but one, leads to His judgment. No matter what religion one embraces, everyone will meet God after death (Hebrews 9:27). All religions lead to God, but only the true body of believers will result in God's

acceptance, because only through His salvation through faith in Christ Jesus can anyone approach Him with confidence. The decision to embrace the truth about God is important for a simple reason: eternity is an awfully long time to be wrong and tormented day and night; separated from God. This is why a right way of thinking about God is so crucial.

Religion is not salvation

The word "religion" is found five times in the Bible, and the word "religious" twice. In almost every case they are used in association with works, religious ceremonies and rituals; not with faith. The Greek word most often used means a ceremonial service caused by fear and trouble. This is how religion is defined according to the Bible.

There are two gospels being propagated in the world; the gospel of works and the gospel of faith. God says salvation is the result of a work that has been DONE on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan teaches that salvation is by DOING works. The real difference between religion and a relationship with Christ is one of spelling. You spell your religion "DO" and I spell mine "DONE."

Why do people believe that we can be saved by our works and what we do? The simple answer is that salvation by works seems right in the eyes of man. One of man's basic desires is to be in control of his own destiny, and that includes his eternal destiny. Salvation by works appeals to man's pride and his desire to be in control. Being saved by works appeals to our desire far more than the idea of being saved by faith alone! Our inherent sense of right and wrong demands that if we are to be saved: our "good works" must outweigh our "bad works." Therefore, it is natural that when man creates a religion it would involve some type of salvation by works. All throughout the Bible we have examples of those who tried to be saved by good works and self-effort. When Adam and

Eve sinned, we read in Genesis 3:7: "*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.*" Instead of turning to God for mercy and forgiveness, they ran from the presence of God and sought salvation by their own good works. Man today knows that he is naked before God and needs a covering for his sins. So what does he do? He turns to religion and tries to provide a covering by his own efforts.

We can see the efforts of Adam and Eve to provide a homemade covering for sin has been perpetuated in all their off-springs to man today. Basically, man is a religious creature and worldwide he worships some kind of a god. In this way he seeks to quiet his guilty conscience and make atonement for his sins. Many such coverings are being worn right here in our civilized country. Many people try to go to church at Christmas and Easter but this religious show is nothing but a fig leaf covering. Most religious people plan on being saved by doing the best they can and by going through religious ceremonies, etc.

If you were to go out on the street and ask people this question, "*Are you a Christian?*" In most cases the answer is "*Oh, yes I am a Christian.*" Here are some of the answers you would probably receive: "*I am a Christian because I have been baptized.*" "*I am a Christian because I have been confirmed.*" "*I was christened as a child.*" "*I belong to such-and-such a church.*" "*I read my Bible and pray.*" "*I go to confession and to Mass and study the rosary.*" "*I was born into a Christian home.*"

Notice, there is one great omission in all of these answers. Not once is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned. How can a person be a Christian without Christ? How can a person be saved apart from the blood-atonement work which He accomplished for us on Calvary's cross? How can a person be a Christian who does not receive Christ as their own personal Savior?

The Word of God teaches us first of all that salvation is of the Lord. It is the work of God, not of man. God provided the sacrifice to cover the sin of Adam and Eve. And God has provided salvation for every sinner in the Person of His Son, Lord Jesus Christ. We are taught here in Scripture also that salvation is provided by the death of an innocent substitute. 1 Peter 2:24, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, says, "*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.*" Christ's death was a definite work of grace for the bearing away of our sins. God took our sins and placed them upon His sinless Son, never to be seen again. Christ is the last Adam, the representative man, and as such all the sins of the world were placed upon Him. As in the first Adam all of us were cursed by sin and death, so in the last Adam; the Lord from heaven, all who believe in Him are saved and made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

The cross was not an accident of history. Rather it was the working of an eternal plan and purpose of God. Revelation 13:8 speaks of "*the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" The atonement was necessary if man were to be saved from their sins. Man had broken the law of God. He was unable to pay his obligation to God. Christ, our Savior went to the cross and paid that debt. The atonement, made possible by the shedding of Christ's blood, guarantees our resurrection. "*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).*" The curse of death came through Adam, causing all of us to suffer spiritual death. Those who are in Christ shall live again on to eternal life. Praise God; for when Jesus died on the cross He thought of you and He thought of me because He was there as our substitute.

Now that the work of salvation has been completed by Christ, God offers it to us as a free gift. The apostle Paul said, "*For by grace*

you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph.2:8-9)." Let me ask you this; "What is a free gift?" Can you earn it? No, you can't! You have to either accept it or reject it. In the same way you have to accept Christ Jesus for what He accomplished for us on Calvary's cross or reject Him, but you can't earn your salvation by your own works such as: trying to live a good and moral life, trying to be a good neighbor, doing charitable works, being christened, baptized, confirmed, church membership, going to confession booths, taking communion, sacraments, following church traditions and religious ceremonies, etc., etc.

How ridiculous to think that any of our works of righteousness would be valuable enough to be able to purchase salvation. Men rebel at accepting a free salvation and will put forth every kind of effort to buy "salvation." It seems as though we want to put a price on salvation, a price that we can pay so that we can be able to say how much our salvation cost us. Probably this is one of the main reasons why the truth concerning the salvation of God in religious circles has been so twisted and distorted. A tremendous percentage of organized religion is nothing more than the effort of man to buy salvation.

Man needs to learn that salvation is free, but not cheap; it cost Jesus His Life. It is free, not because it is worthless but because the price has already been paid. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He paid it all with His own precious blood. The terrific price for our sins was the death of Jesus Christ. In His death He paid the price for every sin that you and I have committed or will ever commit and purchased salvation, thus enabling Christ, and Christ alone, to be able to offer unto us a free gift of salvation. You see it's all of what Christ Jesus did for us on Calvary's cross nearly 2,000 years ago and none of ourselves or what we do.

You have to seriously ask yourself this question: "Am I in a religion or am I in Christ Jesus?"

Spiritual robbers

Religious thieves are robbers of the worst kind. They would rob God of the great salvation He has provided for us in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. They would rob Jesus of His redemptive work for the remission of our sins.

The Bible speaks of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ as precious. The blood of Christ is precious because it is royal blood. In some mystical sense it was the blood of God (Acts 20:28; John 1:1, 14). Since God places such value upon the precious blood, it is of vital importance to the Christian life. Indeed, without it there would be no life. The one who rejects the blood rejects salvation. Through the blood we have redemption (Rev.5:9). Through the blood of Christ we have propitiation (Jn.2:2). Through the blood of Christ we have forgiveness of sins (Eph.1:7). Through the blood of Christ we have peace with God (Col.1:20). Through the blood of Christ we are sanctified (Heb.13:12).

Those who reject the blood atoning work of our blessed Lord are thieves and robbers. Why? They preach and teach another way into heaven. Take the "SINCERE" robbers! You have them all over the world. Their doctrine is that it doesn't really matter what you believe so long as you're sincere. So, what about the multitudes that have been sincerely wrong! Sincerity is important but it's not an adequate substitute for knowing the truth. All the sincerity in the world will not transform error into truth.

There's also the religious robber who says, "DO THE BEST YOU CAN." For trying to do their best they are failing in their effort to reach heaven on their own merits. Many spiritual robbers today trust church rituals and ceremonies, membership and service for

their salvation. If you believe that performing religious duties and ceremonies will take you to heaven, you're adding your own good works to God's salvation, and are taking away from the precious blood and **ROBBING** Jesus of all He has done for you on Calvary's cross.

Another well-known robber is the thief called "TRADITION." Tradition never has and never will save one's soul. Multitudes followed the customs of their parents and ancestors rather than the Word of God. Clearly 1 Peter 1:18, 19, distinctively warns us against following the ritualistic customs and traditions of our ancestors. My question to you is: "Do you expect your church, church's traditions and religious ceremonies to save you?"

Groups of robbers are also on the increase today. They work as a gang. They teach that there is no such place as "Hell." They say, "A God of love would never send anyone to Hell." The fact of the matter is; God did not prepare Hell for us. It was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41). You are either a child of God or a child of the devil. You either serve God or you serve Satan, but you can't serve both. If you die as the devil's child, you must go to the devil's home which is a place called "Hell." If you die as a child of God, then you go to the place prepared for you by our Lord, which is Heaven. It's as clear as that: either you're in God's camp and following Him or you're in Satan's camp and following him. You can't serve two masters! At the end of the day, your eternal destination is going to be to one of those two places. God is a perfect gentleman and He will respect your decision to either accept His free gift of salvation or to reject it. Your eternal destination will be determined by your own choice. You need to know this truth of the Bible. It's a matter of **LIFE** or **DEATH**. Satan and religion try to hide this biblical truth from you!

What is a personal relationship with God?

The problem with religious people is that they use their religion as a substitute for a personal relationship with God. They break God's heart by hiding from Him in church, or even between the pages of His Book. Rather than using worship to draw near to the Lord, they merely go to church to feel better about themselves. At times a church is no more than a social club.

Such religion must sadden our Lord. They give Him their attendance, their gifts and their praise, but all too often they don't give Him their hearts. They, like Jesus' countrymen, draw close to God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him (Matt.15:8, 9). God has not forgotten them, but they have forgotten Him.

Relationships aren't built on rules. They are built on trust. The closer the relationship, the more trust you've got to have in one another and the more committed to one another you got to be. I urge you to cast aside religion and instead accept the life-giving relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. A personal relationship with God has many of the same characteristics that mark a personal relationship between two friends. These factors include some degree of:

- Mutual recognition – each knows the other.
- Mutual openness – each can approach the other.
- Mutual interests – each shares with the other.
- Mutual respect – each honors the other.

Another way of describing a personal relationship is to say that it is a mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart, decision-to-decision relationship.

A personal relationship means more than knowing OF or ABOUT

someone. It's one thing to know about the Bible and it's another thing to know the author of the Bible. It's one thing to know about Jesus and another thing to know Jesus. This is why Jesus said that the day will come when He will have to tell certain people who claim to know Him that He never knew them (Matt.7:23). He won't be saying that He never heard about them. His point will be that He doesn't recognize them as His own servants and children. He will know about them; but since He had never been invited home with them, He will not claim them as His friends.

Now just to recap what Matthew 7:22-23 said: Many religious people on judgment day will say to Christ Jesus, "*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And Jesus will say to them, depart from me, for I do not know you.*" What a sad day it will be when billions upon billions of churchgoers throughout the centuries who thought they were saved through their churches or religion find out that they have been deceived and will spend the rest of eternity separated from God and thrown into the Lake of fire. What a sad day indeed; they were religious but lost, believing in their religion and tradition to save them. What a travesty indeed!

The God who made the world is more than able to reveal the truth about Himself to the heart and mind of anyone who wants to know Him (John 7:17; Ephesians 1:17, 18). We can know God and be known by Him because He revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:9). It is through Christ that God revealed to us as much about Himself as we need to know to have a personal relationship with Him. So, not only is a personal relationship with God a spiritual relationship, it is a Christ-centered relationship.

It all starts with a choice: a "YES" or a "NO." Are you willing to enter into a relationship with God through Christ (John 1:12)? Are you convinced that you desperately need the forgiveness He offers (Acts 13:38, 39)? Can you see that Christ was not merely a man,

but that He was God in the flesh who died on Calvary's cross for our sins? Do you believe that He rose from the dead to intercede personally for all who trust Him as Savior and Lord (Rom.10:9-13)? This relationship is a gift: a spiritual, Christ-centered, mutually felt, shared gift of God.

Will you miss heaven by only 18 inches!

Is it all just in your head, but not in your heart? If all you have is head knowledge, then you are no closer to heaven than Satan's demons who also believe and tremble (James 2:19). It is interesting that in 2 Corinthians 4:4, it teaches that Satan blinds the MIND of unbelievers, but Romans 10: 9-10 teaches that a person is saved when they believe from the HEART. There is only 18 inches between the heart and the mind. For many it is the difference between heaven and hell.