



Christianity Without the Religion

Authentic Christianity lives for a time when institutionalized religion can be put out of business.

From a biblical perspective, history is sandwiched between two idyllic gardens. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, records the paradise that existed in the Garden of Eden before the fall (or call it the crash, if you prefer). Another biblical paradise is described in the last book of the Bible. In the city of God, the new Jerusalem that descends from the new heavens, there will be no need of a temple, because the Lord himself is its temple (Revelation 21:22). Apparently neither garden allocates space for temples, synagogues or churches.

Jesus did not come to our world in order to start another religion—he came to save us from oppressive, legalistic religion. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that paradise doesn't include oppressive religion. The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about Christianity *without the religion*.

What is Christianity? It is the belief that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross is all that is necessary for our salvation. Christianity is good news because it proclaims that God saves us by his grace on the basis of Jesus' perfect work on our behalf. The center and foundation of Christianity is the life and work of Jesus. It's all about him.

What is the popular connotation of religion? It is the idea that human effort and accomplishment—the performance of spiritual duties and responsibilities—will either convince God that we should be saved, or at the very least contribute to our salvation. All religion, with the exception of biblically-based Christianity, teaches that our works can gain us a higher standing with God than we would have otherwise enjoyed. The foundation of unbiblical religion is the life and accomplishments of human beings. It's all about us.

When human-centered religion and all of its legalisms invades the purity of Christianity, it perverts and pollutes. Our focus is gradually directed away from Jesus and concentrated instead on a religious menu of rites, restrictions, rules, regulations and ritu-

als. That's why we need Christianity *without the religion*. Consider what religion can do to the activity called evangelism.

Religious Evangelism

There's nothing wrong with telling others about your faith—as long as what you believe is centered in and on Jesus Christ. Telling others what you believe simply because you believe it can be one of the worst things in the world—if your ideas about religion are completely screwed up, then you, the blind, will lead the blind into the swamps of *Bad News Religion*.

Unfortunately, some activity that is promoted as Christian evangelism is not the act of telling others about Jesus. Of course the name of Jesus is often used, but the real agenda seems to be an attempt to persuade others to join our club, to start behaving just like we do. We humans are convinced that the world would be happier if everyone behaved just like we do—so off we go to evangelize.

The target demographic of such religious evangelism is those who are lost—easily identified because they don't do the things we do (remember, religion is all about us). These unsuspecting souls are subjected to zealous attempts to evangelize. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus scolded the leadership elite of the *Bad News Religion* of his day, telling them that their tragic attempts of religious recruitment made their converts “twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15).

Jesus wasn't against the Christian church, of course. A few chapters earlier he clearly said “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). But we can rest assured that the church he promised to found was not a replication of religious procedures, prescriptions and potions he condemned a few chapters later. The church Jesus founded was portrayed by the apostle Paul as the body of Christ, a group of people who follow and obey Jesus alone, who defy denominational boundaries and who transcend religious brand names.

The universal body of Christ means that no sect, group, denomination, church or spiritual entity has the exclusive right to claim that they alone have the right to franchise the kingdom of God on earth. God alone determines when and where and with whom he will work. Our resurrected Lord lives his new life in all those who accept and trust in him, regardless of and in spite of religious labels. God is more than religion—he always has been.

Resisting Religious Inclusions Into the Church

The problem with the church is that imperfect people are its leaders, and imperfect people are its members. So what do we do with the church until the new Jerusalem descends? How do we, the body of Christ, the church, resist the incursions of religion into the body of Christ?

I believe we North Americans can start by forsaking any get-religiously-rich-quick ideas about “growing” the church. Some who are busy “building the church” seem to regard small churches and ineffective Christians (generally those who are impoverished, feeble, impaired or disabled) as spiritual embarrassments. Religious awards and accolades are accorded to financially successful, healthy individuals (and churches) who are counted as “successful” because they are driven, especially with “purpose,” definitely not among those who will be “left behind.” They’re growing and seem to be making the church look good. One problem—real Christians can actually be embarrassing, and sometimes real Christians don’t make the church look good at all.

Authentic Christianity may wax—or it may wane—but neither condition is evidence that Jesus is either present or absent. When Christianity allows itself to be overcome by playing the numbers game, when the primary goal of Christianity becomes the preservation of the status quo, the enrichment of itself, we have missed the boat.

The primary goal of Christianity is not about perpetuating itself. Authentic Christianity lives for a time when institutionalized religion will be put out of business. The goal of Christianity is that glorious time when a “closed” sign will be placed on all houses of worship.

Losing Our Religion

Until such a time, the body of Christ is best served by continual and often radical Christ-centered reformation. Of course, all churches need to grow, but not necessarily numerically. All churches, and all individual Christians, need the growth that reformation alone will bring. Initially, reformation will usually make a church smaller and more compact. Sometimes Christ-centered reformation will actually mean that a congregation or church will go out of business, at times deservedly so.

Reformation does not come easily, for implicit within the idea of reform is the idea that some who are in power and who have control will lose it. Christ-centered reformation means the loss of religion. That’s part of what Jesus had in mind when he said “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

I have experienced, both on the giving and receiving ends, the ravages of religion as it seeks to control, grow, accumulate and institutionalize. I have also, by God’s grace, experienced the freedom that Christ alone gives. Because of his grace I realize that religion does not save us—only Jesus does that.

The real question facing you and me is not a religious issue at all. The question we must face is simple—do we have a relationship with the Lord of our lives? Are you willing to forsake all—including your religious traditions and trophies, to follow him?

If you need to lose your religion to accept a relationship with him, then ask him to help you start that radical reformation today. □

—Greg Albrecht

CHRISTIANITY Without the Religion

with Greg Albrecht



Beginning February 19 at www.ptm.org

Join Greg Albrecht, beginning Sunday, February 19, at www.ptm.org for a new and revolutionary kind of worship service. You’ll find the freedom of authentic, pure and genuine Christianity—Christianity without walls or denominational barriers—Christianity without humanly imposed rules, rituals and regulations. In short, you’ll find *Christianity Without the Religion*—a fresh, new approach to weekly worship. Here’s just a sample of what you’ll experience on *Christianity Without the Religion*.

The Week of February 19

Only God Can Make us Holy. We often attempt to become holy by doing holy things—but the only source of true holiness is God.

The Week of February 26

Grace Without Works. Isn’t there something we have to do to please God—to make him happier with us? Or is God’s grace totally and unconditionally free?

The Week of March 5

Sinful Temptations. Where can we go and what can we do to overcome sin?

Be sure to join us for worship services anytime that’s convenient for you. *Christianity Without the Religion* is available 24/7 at www.ptm.org.