



The Cure for Religion

“I just feel guilty,” she sighed. “I mean, my husband and I both grew up in [that church] but we now believe it’s nothing but a lot of unbiblical stuff. But my parents are telling me that our son’s eternity is hanging in the balance if we don’t go to their church with them.”

It seemed she needed to identify and isolate the reason she was feeling guilty. “Have you considered where your guilt is coming from—what’s its source?” I asked.

“Well, that’s probably the heart of the matter,” she admitted. “Academically we know that we will never go back to all that fear and intimidation. That church and its teachings and practices had a *spiritual death grip* on us. But I was taught all that religious stuff growing up as a young girl (even though I have rejected it now), and sometimes I still feel guilty if I don’t conform to those standards.”

After we had finished our conversation her phrase (*spiritual death grip*) kept ringing in my ears. She nailed it. Oppressive, Christless, legalistic religion is a spiritual grim reaper. It is a spiritually transmitted virus, a virus that thrives in religious places, a virus that causes emotional sickness and can imprison people in spiritual death camps.

About 20 years ago, following my first knee surgery, I had only been home from the hospital a few days when I noticed a painful rash beginning to spread across my legs and up my back.

I hobbled on my crutches into my dermatologist’s office. He told me that I had picked up a staph infection in the hospital. Out came a huge needle with penicillin, which, after I bent over for its administration, turned the tide. End of staph infection. If only spiritual viruses could be dispatched so quickly!

Powerful bugs thrive in hospitals—according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention hospital bugs kill almost 100,000 people each year. My experience

with staph infection was 20 years ago. Now, anti-biotic resistant strains of new “super-bugs” account for two-thirds of all infections associated with health care.

What irony! You go to a hospital for treatment and/or surgery, and you leave with a new malady you didn’t arrive with. Staph infections within a hospital environment are one of the enemies of physicians who have taken the Hippocratic Oath, which, among other things, commits a doctor to “First, do no harm.”

Authentic Christians who express the character of Christ can comfort and assist those who are hurting as Jesus heals those afflicted with the spiritual diseases of Egypt (Deuteronomy 28:60).

But not everyone who claims to be a healer represents the Great Physician. Like their medical counterparts, religious professionals are ostensibly committed to “doing no harm” and to be of help as Jesus invites us to give him our burdens and enter into his rest.

But it’s possible to go to a religious address that uses the name of Jesus and leave more weary, depleted and sickly than you were when you arrived for spiritual help.

The religion industry—the business of religion—has attempted to package, promote and proclaim God. In many cases, a religious institution will claim that it has the sole right to franchise God here on earth, but in reality all it does is construct an iron curtain of legalism and authoritarianism within which its idea of God is confined.

The lady with whom I was talking enjoyed a wonderful, personal relationship with God. She had left religion behind, but pangs of guilt directly attributable to her past religion continued to haunt her. Even though she knew better, she was still worried that God would be mad at her if she wasn’t in step with her past religious regimens, restrictions, rituals and regulations.

She had been healed, but the virus of legalism lingered. Many people experience

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CHRISTIANITY **Without**
the Religion

commentary

guilt and shame caused by their failure to toe some arbitrary line in the sand drawn by religion. Their emotional guilt and shame continue even though they have logically

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realized religion's bankruptcy and, by God's grace, left religion behind.

Jesus, of course, is the cure for religion. He is the divine prescription, the medicine, the panacea, the spiritual penicillin that stops religion dead in its tracks. Not only is

Jesus the healing balm, but he is the Great Physician who administers himself to us. The heavenly environment within which he "operates" on us is completely sterile,

absolutely germ-free. The heavenly places God seats us in by his grace (Ephesians 2:6) are free of spiritual toxins.

When we speak of being spiritually healed, we're not just talking about something that happened a long time ago. Jesus, as he lives

within us, continually immunizes from the virus of religion.

Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is risen, he is alive, he lives within us. The healing life of Jesus unites with us and thrives within our souls. As we trust in him completely, Jesus keeps us safe from the onslaught of religious toxins and disease.

Make 2008 a year when your relationship with Jesus grows and flourishes (2 Peter 3:18)—make it a year when you continue to trust in Jesus without reservation, continuing to walk away from religious spiritually transmitted viruses. □

—Greg Albrecht