



Trespassers Will be Violated

Throwing his name around with the greatest of ease, Christ-less religion has embarked on redefining God. It's the ultimate market-driven promotion—Christ-less religion offers its followers a god who is who and what they want him to be.

The western world of this 21st-century is accustomed to using technology and people to get what it wants, and it's a small step to assure people God can be used in a similar way. Religion assures its followers that they can bargain with God, merit his favor, earn his love, impress him with religious gymnastics, appease him, manipulate him and maybe even trick him.

Like most wrong-headed thinking, this delusion starts with a flawed premise. We have been convinced that God is detached, far-off and irrelevant to our daily lives. We have been taught about a powerless, insignificant, disinterested, far-off god. The god most of us have learned about has been minimized, devalued and shrunk. *The god many within Christendom worship is too small.*

However, the God of your Bible is BIG. He is omnipotent, pre-eminent, sovereign, invincible, supreme and all powerful. God is the ultimate power and force and energy of this universe. He is the first cause, the Creator of all things, seen and unseen. Most of all, *God is love.* His size and power are only understood within the framework of his unconditional love for each of us.

This does not mean that God is indulgent or permissive. It is the gods of religion who can be managed and manipulated—it is the anything-goes gods of religion who are lenient, lax, passive and disinterested.

Religious gods are available for purchase in the religious marketplace, frozen in shrink wrappers—complete with expiration dates. Religious gods can be stored in our homes, ready for those emergencies that happen—ready for us when we need a god. Religion markets gods of our choosing—available in attractive, handy-dandy little containers we

can open whenever we need a little invisible friend. These are humanly produced and promoted gods—gods which have been created into our own image.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that when God transforms us, in Christ we become new. We are re-created. *We* need to be changed and transformed, not God. When God reforms, re-births, reconciles and renews us, we become a new creation. We are converted from who and what we were to who and what God wants us to be.

But the process of transformation does not take place in the way some say. Religious institutions assure many that they are “converted” or “born again,” but the only real change is the attempt to re-make God into a religious image.

Many North American church-goers have confused commitment to religion with devotion to God. Many assume that church membership guarantees them a healthy, positive relationship with God. But absolute affiliation and allegiance with any earthly power, be it civil or religious, is out of character with citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Citizenship in heaven is a God-given, heavenly passport—given to those who worship and serve Jesus alone.

Many North Americans who regard themselves as good, church-going Christians have been blinded by worship of the state. Forgetting that Jesus is the Prince of peace, and that he taught us to be peacemakers and turn the other cheek, many within Christendom wind up worshipping at the altar of military power.

But an authoritarian culture of repression (in the name of the state or in the name of a church or denomination) does not produce peace. It may bully and oppress those it attempts to control so that there is a brief period when armed aggression is absent. But occupying the geographical territory of another nation (or attempting to control another person's behavior, mind or emotions) doesn't produce peace.



Difficulties and worries about money consistently rank near or at the top of surveys about our biggest problems. There are some who insist that God is waiting to make you rich (if you just buy their book or join their church). Others believe that Christians should take a vow of poverty. What is the plain truth?

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Many North Americans feel comfortable when they retreat to religious clubs. Assured that their membership and obedience to the dogmas and creeds of their club is one and the same as allegiance to the one true God, they feel safe and secure. Members of religious clubs feel justified in condemning *the rabble* on the outside, even non-club members who claim to be Christians. Religious clubs assure their members that outsiders don't have the right doctrines, the right traditions, the right ceremonies or the right rituals.

In some religious clubs, outsiders are said to lack the right pedigree to join—a religious innovation that the world of Christendom has found attractive since the very beginning, when many Jewish-Christians were appalled that anyone other than someone of Jewish heritage, culture and race would be “allowed” as a member of the body of Christ. We can easily assume that our *paid-in-full, member-in-good-standing* relationship with a religious club is one and the same as our relationship with God.

God's family, the body of Christ, doesn't have special passwords, codes, insider knowledge, secret handshakes or exclusive ceremonies and rituals. The invitation to be a part of the body of Christ is open to everyone—even members of religious clubs who think they are already charter members!

One summer, nearly three decades ago, our now grown son and another young boy in our neighborhood decided to build their own clubhouse. After much hammering and nailing, the clubhouse was complete—well, almost. The final touch was a sign. While this wasn't a religious club, it was like all clubs in that it was designed to keep everyone else out. Our son and his friend had seen warnings designed to keep undesirables out, so their clubhouse sign announced dire consequences for outsiders who might invade their turf: *Trespassers Will Be Violated*.

Sadly, religious clubs do violate

outsiders, while assuring their own of comfort and tranquility. Those who have different opinions and perspectives, those who dress differently, those of a different race or culture, the poor, the disenfranchised, the abused, the hurting, the suffering—are all viewed as

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potential trespassers by many religious clubs. In order for the religious clubs to remain in business, such outsiders must be kept on the outside, looking in.

Religious clubs scapegoat the very kinds of people that Jesus hung out with. Jesus embraced and accepted the rejects of his society—women, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, fishermen, shepherds—and, of all things, those who were of the wrong race and wrong religion!

Christ-less religion has recreated the God of the Bible into its own god—a shrunken, diminished and devalued god. Religion assures its followers that God agrees with them, endorses their likes, frowns on their dislikes and, in short, is just like them. How convenient! Having God in your hip pocket is the ultimate weapon. Just tell those who disagree with you that “God told me” to do whatever it is that you have decided to do. How can anyone argue with a frozen god, right out of your freezer, ready to use after a few minutes in your microwave?

Don't allow religion to mess with your mind. Don't allow religion to devalue God. God is our loving, heavenly Father, who will stop at nothing to love us. But he will not be reformed into our image—we are the ones who need the transforming, and God, by his grace, is BIG enough to reform, re-birth, reconcile and renew us. □

—Greg Albrecht