



Religion—Where Is the Love?

Why do we speak about “Christianity WITHOUT the religion?” The answer was well-summarized by a slogan on a T-shirt I recently saw someone wearing: “*Religion—Giving Hope to a World Torn Apart by...Religion.*”

Religion, as it is known, believed and practiced throughout this world is a contradiction.

- *It promises hope, but delivers fear.*
- *It promises peace, but delivers violence and bloodshed.*
- *It promises freedom and faith, but delivers authoritarian legalism.*

Why do we proclaim Christianity WITHOUT the religion? Because we are serious about Jesus, the founder of Christianity, who said in John 13:35, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

We say Christianity WITHOUT the religion because we carefully look at the fruit produced by religion, including huge Christian institutions, and it is difficult to find the love of God.

We say Christianity WITHOUT the religion because religion defines itself by deeds one must do to please or appease God—and such a teaching is in direct opposition to the gospel.

We say Christianity WITHOUT the religion because religion says it is giving hope to the world. Really? Religion is our hope?

How can we have hope in religious institutions that wind up condemning each other, hating each other and sometimes going to war with each other?

How can institutions that produce injury and destruction—

who spiritually abuse their own members—bring about hope?

In the 17th century there was a French explorer named Samuel de Champlain. Champlain often reported back to the old world in Europe about many of his experiences while exploring North America, most particularly Canada.

In his writings he told one story about a community in Nova Scotia that was served by a Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor.

Champlain did not detail the exact nature of the doctrinal disputes between these two religious professionals, but he did explain how they resolved their difficulties. At regular intervals, these two men would engage in a public fist-fight. Apparently big crowds of people would gather at the center of the village or town to cheer on their favorite combatant.

We don’t know what the pastor and priest were fighting about, but we do know they fought regularly. This story is an example, in a nutshell, of the fighting and destruction which inevitably follows in the wake of religion.

If religion is our only hope, then we have no hope—because religion either starts or winds up deeply involved in the bloodshed and carnage around this world.

Don’t fall for the idea that some religion is better than no religion at all. Some believe all religion is good just as all water is good.

When water is like the rivers of living water Jesus spoke of, water can refresh and it can cause plants to grow. But water can also be a destructive flood or tsunami, or a toxic, polluted river that brings death and destruction.

Jesus spent much of his earthly ministry helping people to discern healthy faith from toxic faith. He spent much of his ministry revealing the Father, because people of that day had such a horribly contorted idea of who God is—and people still do!

Religion says all those who do not follow its dictates will burn in hell, forever, even while being eternally conscious. *Where is the love?*

Religion says the world must be made over in its image so the whole world will, one way or another, through violence if necessary, become part of its teachings and beliefs. *Where is the love?*

Religion teaches its followers to be skeptical about all outsiders—and through its passionate preaching religion urges judgment on all outsiders. *Where is the love?*

The historic inquisitions of Christendom were founded on the premise that virtually any act (even torture) was permissible if the final end was the conversion of an unbelieving outsider. The end justifies the means, says religion. *Where is the love?*

The world of religion so quickly moves away from expressions of love as primary goals and soon is wallowing in a sea of legalistic swill, a pig pen of trivialities that are meaningless and irrelevant—while justifying abusing, torturing and killing others in the name of God. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for the complete message “Religion—Where Is the Love?” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of February 12, 2017.