

# PLAIN TRUTH<sup>®</sup>

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION<sup>®</sup>

## Religion: Where Is the Love?

By Greg Albrecht



The message on a T-shirt worn by a man walking past us in our local shopping mall intrigued my wife and me: *Religion—Giving Hope to a World Torn Apart by...Religion.*

I suspect the man wearing that T-shirt and I might come to different conclusions about the solution, but we absolutely agree about the problem.

Religion is a contradiction—it promises hope but delivers fear. Religion promises peace but delivers violence and bloodshed. Religion promises faith, but delivers authoritarian legalism.

- How can we put our primary hope in religious institutions that wind up condemning and hating each other—and sometimes going to war with each other?

- How can institutions that promote and produce injury and destruction (spiritual, and even in some cases physical abuse of their own members) bring about hope? Spiritual pollution is pouring from the smokestacks of religious institutions. Religious factories are belching out noxious, toxic hatred and condemnation.

- You've heard the old definition of insanity, no doubt? *Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again hoping for a different result.* How can institutions that continue to follow the same prescriptions and procedures, the same ceremonies and customs, the same rituals and regulations which time and time again produce endless heartache, misery and suffering bring us any hope?

### Religious Professionals Doing Battle

Samuel de Champlain was a French explorer who lived in the 17th century. Champlain often reported back to the old world in Europe about many of the sights he experienced while exploring North America—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 irrelevance of religion on the one hand and the hatred, fighting and destruction which inevitably follows in its wake.

*If religion is our only hope, then we have no hope*—because religion either starts or winds up deeply involved in bloodshed and carnage around this world. The soil of this good earth is soaked in blood, in the name of God.

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If Jesus tried to attend a church, or a synagogue or a mosque, would they let him in? If Jesus ran for president, would he win? And if he won, how long do you think it would be before a political/religious machine would have him assassinated?

Authentic, pure, uncorrupted and unadulterated Christianity is a spiritual way of life—a lifestyle Jesus lives in and produces through the lives of those who trust him and follow him.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*—John 13:35

Love is the most beautiful, most profound illustration of what God produces in the life of a Christ-follower. For centuries religion has been assuring us that it is all about love and peace. For centuries Christ-less religion has been telling us that it is the world's best and perhaps last hope.

Religion is bringing us hope? The reality is lampooned as that message on the t-shirt I mentioned earlier: *Religion—Giving Hope to a World Torn Apart by...Religion.*

### Just Any Old Kind of Water Won't Do

Christless religion at large is bankrupt, its message is counterfeit because it insists that human performance of the right rules and rituals will gain a higher standing with God than one would have otherwise enjoyed. Religion is without spiritual value because its foundational teaching is completely at odds with the gospel of Christ. The gospel insists that God's love is *in-spite-of love*, not *because-of love*.

Don't fall for the idea that some religion is better than no religion at all. The distinction between Christ-less religion and Christ-centered faith is like the difference between pure and polluted water. Water can bring life or it can bring misery, suffering and ultimately death. When water is like the rivers of living water Jesus spoke of, water can refresh, it can be life-giving and

it can cause plants to grow—or water can be a flood or a tsunami, or a toxic river that brings death and destruction.

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

Jesus tells us that *he is the way and the truth and the life* (John 14:6). He alone is the way, the life and the truth. And Jesus tells us clearly that if he is living his life in us, we and others will see the love of God.

What does Christ-less religion say and what does religion produce? Religion says that it (the religion) is the highest value. Religion insists that its followers go into the world and make more followers of that particular religion.

Sure, within Christendom the name of Jesus will often be used, but what Jesus are they talking about? Many have so redefined, reinvented and perverted the name of Jesus that little of Jesus is left when his name is used.

### Where Is The Love?

*By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.*—John 13:35

Religion says that all those who do not follow its dictates will burn in hell, forever, even while being eternally conscious. Christ-less religion says that God will send people to hell to be tormented and tortured forever because he loves them!? **Where is the love?**

Religion says that the world must be made over in its image—so that 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 and suspicious about all outsiders—and through its



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passionate preaching religion urges condemnation and judgment on all outsiders. **Where is the love?**

The historic inquisitions of Christendom were founded on the premise that virtually any act, even of violence and 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 at large so quickly moves away from expressions of love as primary goals and objectives and soon is wallowing in a sea of swill, a pig pen of trivialities that are meaningless and irrelevant—but apparently worth abusing, torturing and killing others.

All those who call themselves Christians should take careful note: Jesus clearly articulated our identity as being the love which he would live in us and would be evident to one and all.

Yet, go to a building with a sign outside that identifies it as a church. Go to a website that sells so-called "Christian" books. Turn on your radio or television and listen to and watch a program that calls itself "Christian."



*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35*

What will you hear and see? In many cases you will hear messages about self-help. If you hear all about becoming and remaining rich, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are encouraged to do all you can to get more people to attend that building, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are warned and threatened about hell, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

If you are given instructions about all the things you can do to fix your life and the lives of others so you can have a *breakthrough* in your health, a *breakthrough* in your finances, a *breakthrough* in your relationships, ask yourself, “**Where is the love?**”

Christ-less religion will tell you what to believe and how to think—and in many cases, how *not* to think. Christ-less religion will tell you how to vote. Christ-less religion will tell you how to watch out for outsiders, who may pollute you. Christ-less religion will do its best to control you. But “**Where is the love?**”

### **God’s Love By Grace = Christianity Without the Religion**

In the midst of this upside-down world that is so addicted to religious ideology that it cannot recognize the love of God, people

by the billions—who are confined in religious cages into which they have been placed by Christ-less religion—yearn for the presence of God in their lives.

Billions of people ask, one way or another, many of them silently for fear of what would happen to them if they dare to question their religious leadership, “**Where is the love?**”

It is in this world that Christianity

WITHOUT the religion sounds a clear and unambiguous invitation. It is in a darkened, abused and addicted world that Christianity WITHOUT the religion proclaims the love of God, without apology and without the paralysis of religious limitations and dogma.

Without God’s love we would be nothing. We can spend our entire lives amassing religious deeds, creeds, accomplishments, rituals, ceremonies and performances **but they mean nothing if we do not have God’s love.** In 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul said that all our efforts to please and appease God are meaningless—an annoying sound, like a clanging cymbal. In *The Message Bible*, Eugene Peterson translated “clanging cymbal” as *the creaking of a rusty gate.*

Religious contrivances and manipulations designed to earn his grace and favor come closer to annoying God than they do pleasing or appeasing him! God’s love is given by his grace, not in return for something we do. God’s love is not

about balancing the books so that we pay him what we owe him. God’s love is not given in exact proportion to how well we behave.

If that love is not lived in us through Jesus, by the grace of God, then can we truly call ourselves Christians? Can we assume we are disciples of Jesus, if his love is not present in our lives?

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.—John 13:35*

### **What God’s Love Looks Like**

God’s love looks like Jesus. If you are looking for love in religion, you’re looking in all the wrong places. If you’re wondering where the love is, then focus on Jesus.

Focus on his teachings. Read the Sermon on the Mount. Read Jesus’ parables. Read how Jesus lived and revealed the love of God the Father.

**Where is the love? What does it look like? It looks like Jesus!**

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.—1 Corinthians 13:4-7* □

*...our efforts to please and appease God are meaningless—an annoying sound, like a clanging cymbal... or the creaking of a rusty gate.*

