



Religious Games

Way back in the late 1960s Joe South composed and performed a hit record called “The Games People Play.” Here’s a sample of its lyrics:

*Oh the games people play now,
Every night and every day now
Never meaning what they say now
Never saying what they mean...
People walking up to ya
Singing glory hallelujah
And they’re trying to sock it to ya
In the name of the Lord...*

When I first heard this song I had little idea about how profoundly true these lyrics were—by God’s grace I discovered those deeper meanings a little later in life.

Here’s a little bit about what I now know about **Religious Games**:

Performance-based religion can easily become a game when the followers/captives of a religious institution assemble like lemmings, being moved around like pawns on a chess board, following the dictates of the institution and its traditions.

Religious games can describe the routines or protocols of followers and captives who habitually gather in a place that an earthly and finite spiritual authority has declared to be holy, at a specific “holy” time that particular spiritual authority insists upon. Such followers arrive, dressed in clothing the religious authority mandates and demands, fastidiously obeying customs the religious authority has innovated and stipulated, while automatically saying repetitive prayers and singing songs, robot-like, that the religious institution itself has devised.

As Christ-followers we know that virtuous and good things we do and perform and participate in have no power to change our imperfections and flaws so that we become righteous and holy by doing those things—on the other hand we know our lack of participation in commonly accepted wrong, sinful activities has no power to make us righteous and holy either.

Here are four toxic products of playing religious games and the contrasting fruit of the grace of our Lord he produces in our lives:

1) Religious games keep records to remember wrong-doing. Christ-less religion attempts to count and calculate both what it considers as progress and sin—so that its followers are always in need of working harder, doing more and running faster in a vain attempt to earn the righteousness that religion pretends it can bestow.

God, who is quite capable of remembering everything, chooses not to remember our sins and failures. God does not count our sins against us.

Christianity is not *ipso facto, quid pro quo*, you do such and such and then God will respond in such a way. Christ-less religion is predictable and dogmatically insists when one does or does not engage in thus and such a behavior, then a certain outcome will follow.

Authentic Christianity is person-driven—and that person is Jesus. Christ-followers do not put their faith in programs and self-help books or seminars, but in the living, dynamic risen Lord who lives within them.

2) Religious games are about fear and oppression. Religion threatens those who fail to please its rigid

teachings with eternal torture in a fictitious hell it has fabricated to keep its followers in line.

Sometimes hell can be the experience we endure as slaves to physical and spiritual addictions. Hell can ironically be the hell we suffer at the hands of bad news religion. Jesus does not send anyone to a fictitious, fabricated eternal torture in hell.

3) Religious games are the sworn enemies of God’s grace. Christ-less religion teaches that one can gain a standing with God one never had on the basis of good deeds and works, or, if one already enjoys a relationship with God, then that relationship can be enhanced and improved by their deeds and works.

The grace of our Lord says that God loves us right now as much as he ever has or ever will because of his righteousness and goodness, not because of anything we have ever done or anything we promise that we will do.

4) Religion insists on its dogmas, its doctrines, its teachings, its customs and traditions. A religious fanatic is someone who won’t change his/her mind, won’t stop condemning people who do not agree with him/her and will never change any of their cherished traditions and customs. Religious fanaticism leads to oppression, violence, torture and executions... in the name of God.

The grace of our Lord leads to the peace of God and to rest in Christ. □

Join us for “Playing Religious Games” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of August 9, 2020.