



Reflections of a Zealot

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Scripture: Acts 26:9-18

Idea: Religion exists to control you. Jesus came to restore you.

Introduction

1. This summer, I was at Starbucks and a gentleman walked up and introduced himself. He attends Browns Bridge. He said, “I don’t want to disturb you, but I just want to say that the church has changed me. Growing up I had some real problems with organized religion and the church. But you have really helped me get past all that.”
2. I’m curious. How many of you and how many of you have a family member that had a bad experience with organized religion to the point that you walked away from church or had a difficult time coming back?
3. Religion is under attack. And understandably so.

I. Religion has brought about its own demise.

- A. Religion has been the fuel behind every imaginable human rights violation.
 1. From the Jewish land grab in the Old Testament to Christian Crusades in the Middle Ages and the Spanish Inquisition to the Muslim extremists of today. Cults.
 2. Child abuse. Abuse of women. Genocide. Torturing people to get them to renounce trivial religious practices. Torturing scientists. Burning heretics.
 3. “God wills it” has been used to fuel murder, torture, rape, and abuse. And all the major world religions are guilty.
- B. In the U.S., religion, and Christianity specifically, is equated with arrogance and intolerance.
 1. Christians think they are right and everybody else is wrong.
 2. Christians think they are superior morally/ethically.
 3. Christians are against everything, especially gay people.
- C. In hindsight, when evil or intolerance is perpetrated in the name of religion, the issue is power, control, dominance.
 1. It is always an attempt to manipulate for the glory or pleasure of the religious icon: king, pope, pastor, priest, cleric, imam.
 2. Somebody wants to sell us something.
 3. The issue is **never** really God’s righteousness or his glory. Though religious leaders hide behind that.

And as critical as we are of those who use religion/faith/God for selfish ends, our desires are often distorted by a desire to harness the power/truth of God for our own benefit. I want God to bless my family and me and keep them safe. And I want to be successful. I want my team to win.