

POISONOUS Pt. 4: The Poison of Religion

Metrocitychurch.tv Pastor J. Schossau 03.10.18

It's funny sometime when people ask me what I do for a living. I can say one of two things. I can tell them I am a builder and that I build and remodel houses and buildings like this. Or I can tell them I am a Pastor. If I tell folks that I am a general contractor and I build things people will often engage that and be interested in that and they will talk about it. But if I tell them a Pastor it's like, OH, THAT'S NICE. And the conversation is CRASH AND BURN. Like on a plane, the person will just go, oh, that's nice and they pick up their book telling me the conversation is over.

So I've been working on a new approach to this whole thing. When somebody asked me what I do for a living I've been thinking I should say, "Well, so glad you asked. I actually work for a GLOBAL COMPANY." Now picture how this conversation would go... What do you do...I work for a GLOBAL COMPANY...

Do you? Yes, I do. It's really out of this world. We've got outlets in every country of the world and we're sending out more and more representatives all the time.

Really? Yes, we've got hospitals and hospices and homeless shelter and feeding stations and schools and orphanages. We do marriage work and family reconstruction.

You don't say? Yes, WE DO ALL SORT OF HUMAN JUSTICE WORK. BASICALLY, WE LOOK AFTER PEOPLE FROM BIRTH TO DEATH and we mainly deal in the areas of emotive, cognitive, relational and behavioral modifications.

Now that would be a good conversation!!!

Let's be honest, much of the world isn't too into RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. I try to explain to people what I'm going to try to explain to you today and that is that JESUS DID NOT COME TO MAKE PEOPLE RELIGIOUS.

Don't get me wrong though. Not all religion is bad. The word **RELIGION comes from the LATIN word: ReLigare. Ligare means: to bind, to connect, to have reverence. Re mean: to go back. to do again. Religion literally means: to re-bind...to God, to re-connect...to God, to have reverence again...for God.**

In my spiritual journey I've been guilty of doing what so many people in the world do. I've said, religion is bad. Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Because so much of religion has been bad and hurtful, I've been immature in my understanding of the idea of

religion. It's good for people to have a way to RE-CONNECT with God...don't you think?

But the problem is the way that we think of religion. Often, we think of it as mindless and meaningless. We think of it as sterile and non-engaging. And it is true, when you look at the life of Jesus he WARNED US OVER AND OVER of the dangers of religion when religion gets in front of God. He warned us over and over against thinking that RELIGION CAN SAVE YOU. That being part of a religious system, even a place like Metro, can somehow make you right with God.

In fact, while Christianity is a world religion, but in practice, in its essence, Christianity is not a religion. In its essence it is a relationship with a living God. Jesus, the Son of God, did not come to make people religious. He sent Jesus to reveal Himself to us so that we could know Him, be transformed by Him. In its essence, Christianity is not a religion, but instead it is a relationship.

We're in this series called POISONOUS and we've been talking about those things that are IN US, that race through our veins that are POISON to our soul. Those things like a negativity and greed and lust and jealousy and anxiety...that if we are not careful, will kill us...that will suck the life God wants for us and from us RIGHT OUT OF US. And today I want us to talk about THE POISON OF RELIGION.

If there is anything containing poisonous material capable of causing serious sickness or even death. If there is anything causing all sorts of spiritual sickness around the world today, it is the kind of religion that Jesus warned about. It's the purity of the message of God perverted and polluted by religion. So, let's talk about it. You ready for this?

So, here's what I'd like to do. I want to invite everyone, at both campuses...to get out of your seat and on your knees. I know that this is weird to some of you. And you might be new to this God stuff but just do this with me. When we get on our knees before God it shows that we are humble. It positions our hearts to hear from God! So, let me lead you in prayer and we're going to ask God to speak into our hearts about this potential poison of broken religion.

PRAY

I want to show you one of the most powerful examples of poisonous religion. Let me give you the context. The Apostle Paul was a church planter. He would go into a community, he would lead people to Christ, he would raise up leaders, he would start a church, he would empower them. They would carry on the church and he would go and duplicate what he did there in other communities and he would check on them and write letters to them.

He did this in Greek/Roman city Galatia, which is a city that was located near the present-day capital of the country of TURKEY. Paul started this church in the hotbed of the pagan world. And it became a great church, it was thriving. People were coming to Jesus like crazy. People were taking their next steps toward God and with God.

It was an amazing movement but not long after Paul leaves to start another work a group of people that were known as the Judaizers came in and started to teach something different than what Jesus taught. What they did is they basically said, 'Well Paul, you know he's okay, but he doesn't understand the whole message like we do and so the Jesus thing that he told you, that's good and everything, but to be right with God you need Jesus PLUS some other things.

Does anybody remember us talking about this around here...that there are always people in the church world that say, it's Jesus PLUS something else makes you right with God. Some people say it's Jesus PLUS the way you dress. It's Jesus plus knowing all the church language. It's Jesus plus your good works and deeds that will save you. There are always people out there that say it's Jesus PLUS some sort of RELIGIOUS DEVOTION that will make you right with God.

And in this church, the GALATIAN CHURCH, Galatian chapter 1, Paul hears that these people, these JUDAIZERS were coming in and saying...what you guys have going on here is good...we love Jesus too. We believe that he is the way to God, BUT it takes something more than FAITH ALONE TO SAVE YOU. You need JESUS plus the Jewish traditions and faith system.

And in particular, YOU NEED TO BE CIRCUMCISED and you still need to obey the Jewish Law. But the problem was these guys weren't Jewish at all. They had never obeyed any part of the law. They didn't dress like Jews. They didn't eat like Jews. They didn't have the political or religious pecking order of the Jews AND THEY WEREN'T CIRCUMCISED LIKE THE HEBREW PEOPLE.

Men in the room. We live in a culture where most baby boys are circumcised at birth and thank GOD for that because I don't remember anything about the first couple years of my life. BUT MEN, can you imagine if you really loved Jesus and you really did want to be right with God and you were just learning all this and the church leaders that you trusted all of a sudden, they say...ALL RIGHT...HERE'S YOUR NEXT STEP WITH GOD. ALL YOU ALL NEED TO BE CIRCUMCISED.

How do you think that would go over? And if you don't know what circumcision is...I don't want to explain it to you...ask your momma. This created, as you can imagine, a lot of tension for every grown male, non-circumcised guy alive! To me, I'm thinking of this from a very practical standpoint, I mean I would just hate to have to introduce that into our church culture.

I mean gentlemen let's just be honest, it's difficult to get most of you to even be baptized! I mean, it's hard enough to get you into a pool of water where you are going to get wet! Imagine at the end of the service today I'm like, "Okay men, you want to be right with God?" I pull out a scalpel, "Come on forward, drop them and I will help you get close to Jesus!" It's a lot of tension!

So, Pastor Paul, is furious and he's unleashing on the Galatians, 'Why are you believing on these false religions?' Here's what he said, Galatians 1:6-7, he says:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7

In other words, 'I'm just shocked because YOU KNOW THAT IT IS BY GRACE AND GRACE ALONE that you are SAVED and MADE RIGHT WITH GOD. You can't do something on the OUTSIDE OF YOU to MAKE THE INSIDE OF YOU RIGHT WITH GOD. Giving money doesn't make you right with God. Doing good deeds doesn't make you right with God. Serving at MetroKIDS doesn't make you right with GOD. IT SHOULD. If anything should make you right with God, it should be serving in the kid's area of a church like ours...BUT IT DOESN'T. AND circumcision nor any other outward thing that you do or say or wear or eat makes you right with God.

This is the POISON OF RELIGION. Paul uses the word PERVERT. Did you catch that? It comes from the - **PERVERT GREEK WORD: metastrepho (met-as-tref'-o); to pervert, to corrupt, to distort or to POISON.**

It's taking what is good... they were taking the purity of the Gospel and poisoning it with religion, Christ plus something else.

What I want to do for a few moments is talk to you about the two most common ingredients of POISONOUS RELIGION. Any time you see a poisonous religion you are going to see these two elements; the first one if you are taking notes, POISONOUS RELIGION - **FOCUSES ON THE EXTERNAL RATHER THEN THE INTERNAL.** It's an outward expression rather than an inward transformation, it's 'Look at how I perform'. IT'S LOOK AT ME AND SEE HOW GOOD I'M DOING AND HOW HOLY I AM AND HOW MUCH FURTHER ALONG THAT I AM THEN YOU ARE.

It's the whole idea that somehow, in some way, you can bridge the gap between you and God. It's thinking that you, in all your brokenness and all your sinfulness you can somehow, if you work hard enough, if you try hard enough, that you will be good enough for a perfect God.

It's reducing Christianity to a bunch of rules. It's bringing Christianity down to just a list of do's and don'ts, and this is just as common now as it was in the day of Jesus.

True story, this is terrible. I remember when I was a kid. Had to be about 17 years old. I had just become serious about my Christian faith and honestly, I was ON FIRE, as they say. You ever seen somebody who is on fire for God. THEY ARE WEIRD. I admit it. We can be weird, but I was on fire for God but not very mature with my faith. I was so concerned with people 'obeying what I thought were the rules of Christianity that I became the religious police enforcer. Back in the day, we didn't have IPHONES with ear buds to listen to music...no...the cool kids had BOOM BOXES. Anybody remember those? We'd load those suckers up with 8 D SIZED batteries and we'd take that BOOM BOX everywhere. Remember this? And they had TAPE PLAYERS IN THEM. CASSETTE PLAYERS. Long live the 80's!

So kids would come to youth group with these boom boxes and they'd be jamming DEF LEOPARD or POISON...the glory days...and along would come the self-appointed religious police...that would be ME... and I would say. Oh, so nice that you are at YOUTH GROUP. Do you even know what we talk about at YOUTH GROUP??? We talk about GOD at YOUTH GROUP. So, who are you listening to. And they'd say...DEF LEOPARD or they might SAY KISS. DO YOU KNOW KISS STANDS FOR...KNIGHTS IN SATIN'S SERVICE? That's what it stands for and I'm not going to have it at MY YOUTH GROUP. So, true story, I'm totally ashamed of this now...but I would take their little cassette tape out and I would literally pull the tape out and smash it on the ground.

And I thought I was being sooooo holy, but they thought I was being such a jerk face. And they were right. I probably owe 30 people KISS Cassettes.

There was a group of people in Jesus' day that were very religious, very outwardly expressive, they were known as the Pharisees and quite honestly, they lived a pretty upstanding life. As Christians, we have the 10 Commandments, the Pharisees, they had 613 commands they lived by. We have trouble with keeping the BIG TEN, but they memorized every single one of the 613 Jewish laws of faith and they did their best to outwardly live these commands. But the problem was, it was more of an external demonstration than an internal realization. It was more of an external show than an internal transformation. And Jesus despised this type of religion.

In fact, you can see Him unleash on the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25, He unloads and says: **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Matthew 23:25**

The Pharisees were all about the look. They would pray on the street corners, loud and long; 'Oh dear God! Listen to how righteous I am as I pray!' When they would go to the temple, they would take their offerings and hold it up for everybody to see before they put it at the altar, 'Look at how much money I give!' They would dress in such a way, 'Look at how holy I am!' 'Look at who I don't hang out with! I don't hang out with those people, you see, I am outwardly religious!' Jesus hated this!

As a matter of fact. One-time Jesus was entering the Temple...entering the church with some of his disciples. This is MARK 12, you can go back later and read this. But It says that as Jesus entered the temple he noticed a bunch of people giving money at the church. You have to understand they didn't take up offering like we do. We pass the little paint bucket around or we give on line. It's very simple here. But in the temple at Jerusalem it had become a money business. Jesus hated this. But as the people entered they had these GIANT HORN SHAPED metal shoots that people would throw their money into. They were shaped like a cone and the money would drop threw these cones, these trumpet things and they would empty out below into the lower floors of the temple, so people couldn't steel the money and all that. Pretty genius really.

But here's the problem. These religious people, these rich people would make it a big deal when they'd come to church. They would make an external show of it. They would dress up in their best fancy clothes and get this...this is absolutely true, they would hire people to play the trumpets and TAMBORINE...glory to God... as they would come in as a way of saying...HEADS UP EVERYBODY...SO AND SO IS IN THE HOUSE. And they would have all this fanfare and entourage all around them. And then when they got to these giving shoots they would take all their change, their coins, remember the currency of their day was all coins, and they would throw it up against these metal shoots so that everyone could hear the clanking of the coins going to God's offering. And everyone was supposed to be really impressed.

But Jesus was NOT IMPRESSED. As a matter of fact, it says that one day Jesus is going into church and he sees all these, and it says that he goes off to the side and sits across from where all this is happening. And he's just sitting there, and his disciples are saying, what are you doing. And he just says...watch this.

And it says that Jesus watch all these rich people come in and make a big show of their

giving. And these rich people threw in LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY... **but then he says...watch this. Watch this boys. Look at that little old lady. And she was impoverished. We learn that she is a widow. And they watch this lady drop TWO ROMAN MITES, two copper pennies into the offering. Just quiet. Just humble. Just grateful to God.**

Then Jesus called the guys together and said, LEAN IN BOYS. I'm going to only tell you this once. This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” Who do you think was right before God?

Friends, in so many ways, Metro CITY Church was born out of my reaction to outward religion. I grew up in that kind of external show. I grew up around churches that thought if you don't look like us and eat like us and dress like us and talk like us...you really aren't welcomed here. You're really not good enough to be a Christian.

I'm telling you right now, if you're not religious, YOU ARE WELCOMED HERE. And if you are religious; you are too. If you've got a lot of money or no money; if you have the right labels, the wrong labels, no labels at all; black, white, yellow, orange, purple skin; highly educated, not educated; you are welcome here, you are welcome here, you are welcome here! Tattooed or no tattoos. Pieced or not pierced... you can even come wearing a suit and tie for all I care. No problems at all, all sorts of kinds of problems! If you're squeaky clean or if you've been swimming in the mud for decades...you belong here.

You may say, 'Well, I don't have church clothes, I don't have church clothes', we have one dress code at Metro and that is...please dress! Cover your privates up, get yourself in here, Jesus is not about the external, He's about the internal! But when you slip into a religious mindset, it's all about the show! It's look at me! Listen to me! Jesus hated that! That is poisonous religion, and that is turning people away from God, when Christians misrepresent the purity of the Gospel. Jesus hated it and it is destructive.

Poisonous RELIGION FOCUSES ON THE EXTERNAL RATHER THAN THE INTERNAL.

The second thing it does if you are taking notes is this, it also: **PROMOTES SPIRITUAL PRIDE.**

I remember one time, I was at Wendy's for lunch after church. Right down the street here. And we're doing the lunch thing and I'm cleaning up the tray afterwards. And there is this older guy taking care of his mess and we start talking. And somehow, I can't remember, we start talking about church. Are you a Christian, Yes, I am. He asked me, are you a Christian. I MOST CERTAINLY AM. And we go back and forth a little bit. I ask him what church he was from and he says, 'Well, I can tell you that I won't go to one of those NEW STYLED CHURCHES WITH ALL THAT ROCK AND ROLL and VIDEO STUFF where the preacher doesn't even wear a tie. NO WAY.

Then he, sort of, leans in and says...HAVE YOU HEARD OF THAT METRO CHURCH.

And I'm like...yes, I have. Why? I hear that they don't even teach about Jesus. They don't even use the bible. And I'm like...I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT. Have you ever been there? No? Have you ever heard the preacher preach BECAUSE I HEAR HE IS AWESOME! NO. Have you ever gone online and listened to a message or two for yourself? NO...NO...NO.

Friends, A POISONOUS RELIGION that focuses on external things leads to SPIRITUAL PRIDE every time. It makes us feel like we are better than everyone else; we are right and everyone else is wrong. I know...I fight this. I battle this. Why can't people believe like me and live like me and get it right like me and be holy like me...

In other words, 'I am right, and they are all wrong!' It's this religious, spiritual pride, 'I've got it figured out!' The problem with spiritual pride is it's almost impossible to see in the mirror because when you are convinced you're right, that everybody else is wrong and it's so easy to look down on everyone else. It turns people away from God all the time.

I just want to tell you one more story that comes out of the life of Jesus.

It is found in Luke 7:36-50.

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Remember that a Pharisee was a very religious person who tried to obey all the commandments of God's law. And this Pharisee throws a big party and invites Jesus. But this very sinful woman hears about it and crashes the party. Most people are convinced that this woman was a prostitute.

When this woman walked in, I'm sure it shocked everybody. She comes in carrying a very expensive bottle of perfume, AND JESUS' IS RECLINING AT THE TABLE. EXPLAIN THIS.

SO, SHE STARTS crying so hard that her tears drip on his feet and makes a big mess. So, she lets down her hair, starts wiping his feet with it and showers kissing on them. And then she opens the very expensive bottle of perfume and pours it all over his feet. I mean this is an extravagant expression of love for Jesus. Look at how the Pharisee reacts.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Makes sense, right? This woman is a prostitute, and she lets down her hair and starts kissing Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. Think about how weird it would be if someone you knew was a prostitute came in here and started doing that to someone. And the Pharisee looks at this woman and says: Why is Jesus letting this SINNER do this? Jesus knows what he is thinking and look at how he responds.

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

So here is the parable. It is known as the parable of the two debtors. This is God's story and it is our story, too. The question is, where are you in the story? We see that Jesus is the moneylender. The penalty for sin is the debt that is owed. So, the question is: Are you the one who owes the larger debt or the smaller debt? One owes 500 hundred denarii, and the other owes 50 denarii. Both debts were pretty large. A denarii was worth more than a days' worth of wages for a normal worker. And it says in the story that neither person had enough money to pay their debt. The moneylender could have had both people beaten and thrown into prison, but he forgave them instead.

Jesus asked: Who would love the moneylender more? The one who was forgiven the larger debt, or the one who was forgiven the smaller debt? And, of course, the answer is the one who was forgiven the larger debt. Then Jesus explains why he told this story.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this

woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

This is AMAZING! Jesus FORGIVES a prostitute for all her sins! This was a woman who everyone else looked down on. This was a woman that only the worst of people ever wanted around. She was dirty. She was perverted. She was sexually immoral. She was known to everyone as a SINNER. And Jesus lets her come right up to him. Jesus, the most religious and holy person around, accepts her. She went to Him and He even lets her touch him and doesn't push her away. He completely FORGIVES her and LOVES her! And because He loved her so much and forgave her for so much, she LOVED Him MUCH in return!

Here is the point of the story: **Those who are forgiven MUCH, love MUCH.**

AND WHEN WE MAKE RELIGION AN OUTWARD SHOW SPIRITUAL PRIDE WILL TAKE OVER AND WE WILL FORGET WHO WE REALLY ARE, AND WE WILL FORGET THAT WE.... YOU AND ME...NEED TO BE FORGIVE BY GOD AND WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO THINK THAT SOMEHOW GOD LOVES US MORE OR WE ARE BETTER OR MORE DESERVING.

THE ESSENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH is not religion...it is a relationship. It's not based on what you do or have done, it's based on what Jesus did. Christ's righteousness has become your righteousness. You are clothed with the robe and the righteousness of Christ when you believe. That's why it's the Good News. That's why it's not religion.

Christianity is all about a relationship with God your father through Jesus the son. Religion is all about my external works, relationship with Christ is all about His perfect work! You could spell religion DO, it's about what you do. Relationship with Christ is spelled DONE, He did it all! It's been paid for!

Relationship says, I obey God because He loves me! Religion says, If I work hard and perform for Him, then He might love me! Relationship says, I am who I am because of His goodness. Religion says, I'm trying to prove who I am by my performance! Relationship says I will serve Jesus and His cause in the world because I LOVE HIM.

Let's not die by the poison of religion. YOU WITH ME?