

Title Page

Religion By Any Other Name

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Introduction

Religion is a *funny* word. For many, it smells like mothballs and antique furniture. For others, it's a cause for consternation due to years of scorn received by devout family members steeped in a certain sect of it. There are also many who find their niche in life under the auspices of religion, having failed by world standards - religion is their refuge. And then there are those who seem to give it no special place, less or more, than what the Holy Scriptures allow for. Here's what the New Testament has to say about religion:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

— **Colossians 2:20-23**

Paul defended true religion from man's desire to abide in "*self-made religion*", a perversion that caters to the flesh. James, Jesus' brother, also spoke of religion plainly:

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and

undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

— **James 1:26-27**

Like anything man's flesh has gotten its grubby mitts on, religion has been perverted and has therefore artificially received a poor name for itself. Religion is not to blame, man is. This book investigates why man is intent on ruining something so pure, how others have unwittingly joined the fray, and what the Bible has to say about it.

By the way, religion is ancient - its beginnings trace all the way back to the Garden and a pair of fig leaves...

Chapter 1 - The First Two Religions

Religion (Merriam-Webster):

: the belief in a god or in a group of gods

: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods

: an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group

Religion is a construct, a framework meant to facilitate the typical goings-on of those who subscribe to it. In a perfect, godly environment, there's really only one religion. That religion was evident in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Like any identifiable religion, even today, Adam's religion was comprised of willful obedience to the Father's will and structured by religious ordinances. Being righteous meant being perfectly religious - it was a beautiful scene.

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**" Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall*

be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

— **Genesis 1:26-31**

That may not seem like much of a religion, but nonetheless, it existed. It was rather simple, devotion to God-given activities being the fundamental tenet. After creating Adam and the woman (she hadn't yet been named), God proceeded to give them His commands, namely the very first ordinances of religion, "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...*" For a time, their religion was wonderfully fruitful. After all, that is the divinely ordained reason for religion in the first place - to glorify God through perfect obedience, as an expression of unadulterated love for Him. As Solomon wrote so many years later:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

— **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

If religion is the cup, then obedience is the means by which it is filled. Since godly obedience is something a believer accomplishes by grace, God is ultimately responsible for fulfilling His own desires regarding religion, ultimately bringing glory to Himself. Humans are merely vessels through which He performs this good work. "*And He did so to make known the riches*

of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory” (Romans 9:23).

We can rightly conclude that the very first religion in human history was righteous and good, as were its adherents, Adam and the woman. This first religion continued for some untold period of time until the Fall, which introduced the second religion, the perverted one. Its seed is evident in what most people call “religion” nowadays.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

— **Genesis 2:15-17**

Fast-forward in The Book of Genesis, past the account of the serpent’s temptation, to the Fall, where we see the first man-made religion in human history:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

— **Genesis 3:6-7**

After the Fall, Adam and the woman “*made themselves*” a solution. In other words, contrary to the first religion, where perfect grace provided every solution, mankind had chosen, in his new fallen state, to step into God’s shoes and attempt to fill his own cup. Two specific perversions are evident after the fall. First, man constructed a new religion where loin coverings were necessary. Second, man obeyed the flesh in fulfilling said religion. Every single form of errant religion throughout all of human history traces back to this second religion. Figuratively speaking, the seed of religious unrighteousness is traceable all the way back to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden.

The first two religions in human history are ancient, though no less alive today than they were back then. Since the Fall, only one man, Jesus Christ, has ever been able to abide in true religion His whole life. Believers are able to abide in true religion, but it is a daily battle, as Paul discusses in **Romans 7**. He even alludes to the same death that the Lord God warned Adam of back in the Garden, “*but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die*” (**Genesis 2:17**). Spiritual death was the keystone result of the Fall.

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

— **Romans 7:12-15**

One of the serpent's greatest devices is to confuse our language - to twist it (like dishonorable defense attorneys often do within the court of law). By using the same terminology and even doxology in perverse religions, man is easily led astray. The very concept of religion is hard to pin down. And with the advent of advanced communications technologies, religions are popping up all over the place, as per popular demand. It's merely an issue of economics - where there's a demand, there'll be a supply. Without a demand, supply chains would shrivel up and fade away. However, there is a demand, an increasing one as the world accelerates away from true religion towards a countless number of perversions.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

— **2 Timothy 4:3-4**

Chapter 2 - Religion Is Not Optional

Everyone is religious. It's just a matter of which of the first two religions in human history a person identifies with. By definition, anyone who holds "*an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important*" is acting religiously (see **Chapter 1**). Furthermore, everyone obeys someone or something, whether or not it's God. An atheist might take offense to the title of this chapter, but that means nothing. "*For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth*" (**2 Corinthians 13:8**). It's even possible a well-intentioned believer might be offended, too - but the same applies. The Bible isn't mistaken when it calls out sound religion as something good. It also isn't mistaken when it deems anything else a sin.

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

— **Romans 14:22-23**

The simple fact is that everyone is religious somehow. Religion is not an option. Whether or not an individual chooses to join a named religion (e.g., a denomination) isn't the issue. If a person goes to Yellowstone National Park and is unable to explicitly identify the Latin name for every wild creature they see, does it mean those animals don't exist? Of course not. Likewise, religions do not require names to be just as real (and potentially hazardous) as those with names. In fact, the most destructive religions are often the ones that go unlabeled. Satan would certainly prefer it that way

because it makes it easier for him to slink about through the shadows of religion when it exists in the realm of darkness.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

— **Ephesians 6:12**

If religion is not an option, then what is it to the ignorant? It is the very breeding ground for sin, the very place where the flesh is able to thrive uncontested by the world. It is where human faith flourishes, as opposed to God-given faith referred to in **Romans 12:3b** “...God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” Religion affords man’s flesh the ability to walk unaccosted through life, even by his own seared conscience; as long as a person follows a creed, he is respected. This is the lever that society uses to clear the way for man in his “self-made religion” (**Colossians 2:23**), despite God’s persistence and patience with him.

Except for true religion, religion is very dangerous. It ought to be approached and treated as such. The father of all ungodly religion is Satan, the serpent. He is a venomous creature. “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (**1 Peter 5:8**).

Chapter 3 - Identifiable Religions

As described in the *Introduction* of this text, religion is a funny word - not “ha, ha” funny, the other kind. It’s queer. It’s filled with misdirection and distractions from the truth in the inspired Word of God. If we remove the one true religion from the equation, we are left with a vast expanse of error. It’s like looking out over a landscape of carnage after a hard fought battle, jaw agape, and someone standing next to you saying, “Here’s a pen and paper, describe in one sentence what you see.” It’s an impossible task, describing myriad perversions of death-sowing religion. Yet, man has devised a scheme and most have accepted it. Man’s flesh loves to hyper-categorize things by jamming the infinite into tidy little boxes. He does this by defining things in such a way that he feels a sense of control. With each definition, the flesh achieves a greater level of comfort regarding its surroundings.

Some of these religions are so well thought out, organized, and subscribed to by the world that they’ve been given names. For the sake of brevity here, we might distinguish between them as “Christian” or “Non-Christian”. Unfortunately, many of the so-called Christian religions have hijacked true religion, confusing the issue terribly, making even well-intentioned believers anxious about what to believe. Whatever the case may be, whether a religion has been given a denominational name or not, “Christianity” is a mess. It is tragic because something as simple as the Gospel, itself, has been hacked into pieces, sometimes oversimplified, other times overcomplicated, but all too often made confusing. Hence Paul’s statement, *“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to*

Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). The core doctrine of true religion, the Gospel, ought never be confusing, but it is made so by human flesh. Satan loves it.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

— 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Satan loves it when man gives religion a name because he knows it appeals to man's flesh. The flesh desires nothing more than to be superior to its peers. Naming something often facilitates a means to an end. It also hates to be judged by anyone that assumes superiority, like God (recommended reading: *Covert Arrogance* by Edward J. Collins). Give a religion a name and it possesses the foundation for distinctions between congregants from other named religions. Paul had to deal with this in the early church as the flesh reared its ugly head in the churches, desiring to stratify based on which pastor they studied under (this is primitive denominationalism).

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

— 1 Corinthians 1:12-13

There are no denominations articulated in the Bible. Denominationalism

is a man-made construct that has caused many divisions in the Body of Christ. Why? Because inevitably a person joins a denomination in order to establish an association with it. As a pastor, I can't count the number of times I've had a conversation with someone who says, "Oh, I'm an XYZ (name of denomination)" but that person has very little idea of what the Word of God has to say about true religion. Sadly, in most cases, all I see is the flesh clinging to something ungodly - nothing more than a subtle ploy that has kept such a person out of "hot water" with their parents and/or grandparents when asked about their faith. In any case, the flesh loves the idea of denominations for the same reason most people like professional sports teams - it gives them a sense of belonging, even if it has nothing really to do with Christ. Victory in Christ is supplanted by pseudo victory in religion.

For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

— 1 Corinthians 3:3-11

Non-Christian religions share a vast landscape as well, and many are named, of course. The names and the multitude of ideologies don't matter, strictly speaking. What matters is the Gospel truth. We ought not get too hung up on the nuances of this or that denomination - they are mentioned here to prove a point, that man is wretched in his wanton desire for creature credit, to be "better" than his peers, regardless of endeavor. In the end, what truly matters most is as Paul states:

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

— **Philippians 1:15-18**

Chapter 4 - Unidentifiable Religions

What happens in the darkness? Who can say? Does every religion *need* to have a name? Is it any less real if it doesn't? Well, for starters, we might go back to the Fall in the Garden (see *Chapter 1 - The First Two Religions*) and ask these same questions. The second religion in human history (the first perverted one) did not have a name, yet its very seed has propagated throughout human history ever since. In fact, it's *because* it has remained nameless that our enemies have been able to exploit it all the more. It's difficult to fight an enemy so covert that it doesn't even have a name. Soldiers are trained up to make war with their enemies by first identifying them, then characterizing them by observing their time-honored strategies, and then learning to fight based on those realities. When the enemy is unidentifiable, the battle becomes undeniably more difficult. Just ask the British soldiers who had to fight the colonial militia during the U.S. Revolutionary War or the U.S. soldiers who had to fight the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War.

Unidentifiable religion is something bad made worse by darkness. It is further exacerbated by those who think they are abiding in the light when they are not. *"But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness"* (**Matthew 6:23b**)! The truth is that there are a *lot* of people out there who haven't yet even identified their religion. For example, a religion might be a person's ongoing adherence to self-promotion, where everything and everyone in their life has been neatly and systematically ordered to facilitate the end goal of self-righteousness. Idolatry is a massive religion, though most believers, even, fail to recognize it; and since they fail to identify, they see

no need to address it as an issue. Interestingly, the Apostle John, at the end of his life, after all his wisdom was consummated, finished his magnificent first letter with, “*Little children, guard yourselves from idols*” (1 John 5:21). John knew the power of religion and that idols are among the clearest indicators of it.

If we broaden the scope of religion to include all areas of life that fit its base definition, we are forced to include the most popular social topics - things like professional sports, for example. Go to any popular sports bar in America and you’ll see signed plaques, jerseys, big-screen televisions streaming multi-billion-dollar sporting events, etc. For some, proper religion has been supplanted by something as meaningless as professional sports. They have their idols and they literally fight in parking lots before the game in defense of them. Relationships are formed and broken over the “religion of sports”. Would anyone involved in such a thing likely call it their “religion”? Probably not; however, by definition, it certainly is.

Just because a religion doesn’t have a formal name doesn’t mean it’s any less treacherous. The unidentifiable ones are arguably at an advantage over the identifiable ones. In terms of severity, the further a religion is from having the true Gospel of Jesus Christ at its core, the worse it is.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

— 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

False Gospels

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

— **1 Timothy 6:3-5**

Nothing has caused more of a raucous in this world than the Gospel. It all started when God, Himself, became a man.

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

— **John 1:9-13**

“God is love” (**1 John 4:8b**). Love presented itself to the world in the form of the Messiah, the Savior, the unique One, Jesus Christ. The world didn’t

want Him. It's one of the great seemingly paradoxical truths found not only in the Bible record, but also as recorded in human history books. One would think that perfectly manifested love would be welcomed with open arms, not hung on a cross. Yet, ultimately, that is what mankind did to its own Redeemer. The human flesh is vile and arrogant, and when faced with grace and truth, its response is predictably to bite and claw at it in an attempt to destroy it. There's no one more repulsive to the flesh than Jesus, Himself. Therefore, as history has shown, no one less worthy has ever been more attacked than Jesus Christ, *"the author and perfecter of faith"* (**Hebrews 12:2**). Nothing has been more ridiculed and scorned than His Gospel.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

*"I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."*

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

— 1 Corinthians 1:18-21

Salvation is not a concept reserved for Christians only, or any religion for that matter. There's a whole other side to salvation that many Christians never ponder. It is the product of counterfeit religion. The distinctions evidenced in the Garden of Eden at the Fall (see *Chapter 1 - The First Two Religions*) are the same that are applied even today. In brief, true religion's salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Counterfeit

religions' salvation is void of an accurate Gospel, sometimes including the name Jesus, often times not; however, in all cases, salvation is through something manmade, be it an idol, or a false god, or even other human beings. Whatever the case may be, false religion typically carries with it some form of counterfeit salvation.

Salvation (*Merriam-Webster.com*):

- 1) in Christianity: the act of saving someone from sin or evil; the state of being saved from sin or evil
- 2) something that saves someone or something from danger or a difficult situation

Furthermore, religion always contains some concept of a "higher power". This phrase seems to be gaining popularity in the twenty-first century, as myriad religions abound. Said higher power may range from a false god, to oneself, and even to science. Someone or something is always proffered by the human flesh as "savior" or deliverer. In truth, since man has been created by God to "be saved", he has an intrinsic need for it. Outside of the provisions of the true Gospel, man invents ways of being saved, either through his own ingenuity or through a false god. Remember, the "god of this world" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**), Satan, gladly provides the means to this end.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

There are loads of people in this world who say they believe in God; however, many of them do not believe in the true God of the Universe. Their faith is in vain since it is placed in a counterfeit gospel. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, society has deemed the true Gospel as one of many “options” that lead to Heaven. If this were true, then Jesus was a liar, “*Jesus *said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’*” (John 14:6). If Jesus was wrong on this one central point of doctrine, then we can’t trust anything He said, and our own faith is in vain. Jesus was never a fan of political correctness, nor was He ever intent on making His Gospel more acceptable to man. In fact, He knew His Gospel would be offensive to the world, knowing that it’d be the cause of His own death, yet He preached it without reservation or apology. True Christians are called to do the same.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

— Matthew 28:18-20

Protocol Religion

Human relationships require our personal attention. Repeat: human

relationships require our personal attention.

Personal attention implies giving of oneself to another in a variety of ways. Jesus Christ is a person, as are the Father and the Holy Spirit, comprising the Holy Trinity (aka "God"). Unlike our relationships with other persons, God doesn't *ask* us for our attention, He *demand*s it, especially of His born-again and saved children. This creates a bit of a stir in the soul of man for one particular, fleshly reason. That is, man is inherently selfish. Personal attention, at the purest level of love, implies selflessness. For example, *you, personally*, were on Jesus Christ's mind when He decided to humble Himself and die on His Cross. That is the pinnacle of giving, as Jesus, Himself, described, "*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*" (**John 15:13**).

A religion without love as its primary fruit is a warped religion.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect

comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

— 1 Corinthians 13

True religion implies symbiotic love and respect between God and His creatures. Consider the first religion, before the Fall (see *Chapter 1 - The First Two Religions*). Adam and Eve enjoyed unadulterated fellowship with God, not only adhering to His will, but also enjoying the process. Life was truly good. However, after the Fall, Adam and Eve made loin coverings for themselves, having lost the purity of love and respect that characterized their very existence prior. In essence, mankind's first response to depravity was a protocol. We might describe it as follows: since they were ashamed at their own nakedness, they invented a protocol solution, that was, don a fig leaves in order to cover themselves whenever they felt ashamed. In other words, do something physical to cover up something spiritual. This fleshly response was expected, given the depravity sown at the Fall, as God described it in His original warning to Adam, "*for in the day that you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely [die spiritually and die physically]*" (**Genesis 2:17**). Adam's shame was a spiritual issue; his fig leaf was a physical solution, a protocol religion. It didn't work, of course, but it represents the prototype pattern of religions today that promote physical activities as the solution to spiritual problems.

Physical activities, or protocols, are never the answer to the issue of

spiritual death. True religion is a heart issue. *“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world”* (**James 1:27**). The flesh loves protocols for the simple reason that it removes the demand for selfless giving that is inherent to true love. Protocols become man’s solution to spiritual problems. The more protocols a religion is wrapped in, the more insulated the human heart is from true love. In effect, the more protocols in a religion, the colder the heart.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

— **1 John 3:16-22**

The simplest protocol of all is the same one that computers use - binary. Binary, in computer speak, means “1” or “0”. Binary is like a light switch, it’s either on or off, with nothing in-between. This is called a two state finite state machine (FSM or just “state machine”). The next simplest would be a three state FSM, and so on. By definition, an FSM is: a device that can be in one of a set number of stable conditions depending on its previous condition and on the present values of its inputs. In layman terms, this

means that any given state of the FSM is predictable and deterministic. In other words, an FSM gives its designer absolute *control*. Given the fact that the human flesh is a control freak, a religion that “controls” God by imposing protocols on Him through manmade FSMs appeals to the flesh. Some readers are possibly already confused by this, but that is to be expected, given the alternative truth that Paul wrote of, “*But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ*” (2 **Corinthians 11:3**).

“Protocol religions” cater to the flesh. They promote a number of perversions in the churches: human achievement above relationships, regimen over love, overly harsh judgment, inordinate competition, cold-heartedness, distance from the very love of God, and the list goes on.

Whether or not a believer realizes it, protocol religions are direct results of Gospel perversions. In other words, if a person steeped in protocol religion truly seeks truth, what they will find in scripture is that the root cause for their own misguided theology is a baseline perversion of the Gospel, itself. That endeavor may take some time for even the most honest disciple, but scripture will make it clear.

Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

— **Ephesians 5:11-13**

History has shown that man, in his flesh, is a great inventor. The greatest so-called inventors are often the furthest from God. Scripture reveals that man, left to his own devices, without Christ, is a famous speculator

regarding spiritual matters.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations [inventions], and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

— **Romans 1:21-23**

Protocol religions are the brainchildren of fleshly inventors. Unfortunately, the lines are blurred between truth and error because many religions hold fast to portions of truth. One of the greatest errors ever to perpetrate the Church involves the Holy Spirit's ongoing ministry in the Body of Christ. Protocol religions have hijacked His precious ministry, leading many believers right back into bondage, in direct contradiction to Jesus' intention for His sheep.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

— **Galatians 5:1**

As described in the following sections, the most mature protocol religions are comprised of highly organized collections of otherwise unrelated scripture. This is a most dangerous practice that many unsuspecting believers fall prey to. The fundamental issue is often that those presenting said protocols are the so-called "leaders" in the churches,

the so-called “educated” folks. Since even the most well-intentioned believers often do not possess the level of intellect and training that some of these individuals do, they doubt their own human spirit and are led astray. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit will convict a humble person of the error in their theology and deliver them from such a situation.

We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

— 1 John 3:19-22

Hijacking Spirituality

In his base desire to control God, man has made a mess of the spiritual life (life after salvation, to keep it simple here). Scripture tells us that the flesh remains a powerful entity in our lives, so we ought not be shocked by the things we see it promoting. In fact, as Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5**, it is good to see things just as they are, minus the rose-colored glasses that some religions propose one don after being saved. Life after salvation is indeed grander simply due to the fact that a person has been saved, given eternal life. However, many battles have just begun for the new convert.

There’s a pivotal moment in time for a new believer that Satan, himself, is very aware of. The big question for the new believer is, “What now?” Some religions respond with “You’re all set, see you in Heaven, my friend,”

proposing that there's nothing else to do once a person is saved. James, Jesus' own brother, would vehemently disagree.

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

— **James 2:14-20**

While some religions will promote absenteeism, others will err on its polar end, proposing that a person must *do* this or that, ad nauseam, often quoting the likes of **James 2:14-20** out of context to enforce a heavy handed approach to the spiritual life. This type of religion is akin to Pharisaism (see section in this chapter, *Frankenstein's Monster*). Wherever a religion falls on the spectrum, whether hyper-loose or hyper-structured, there's always a correspondingly severe encroachment on the Holy Spirit's ministry. A perfect example of this is regarding the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Satan knows that if he can motivate the construction of a protocol religion that leads its adherents away from the love of God, he has accomplished much in favor of his own purposes. Any religion that proposes alienation from the Holy Spirit in any way, shape, or form is a heinous misrepresentation of the truth in the Word of God. For starters,

God the Holy Spirit indwells every believer. *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own”* (1 **Corinthians 6:19**)?

Practically speaking, what could *possibly* make any child more insecure than believing that at any moment their Father would actually turn His back on them because they sinned? What could *possibly* be a greater insult to the same God who sent His own Son to be crucified for the undeserving than for someone to suggest that He’s petty enough to stop listening to our prayers because we somehow alienated His Spirit? Could there be a greater attack on the spiritual life than to devise a protocol religion that hijacks the Spirit’s ministry in our lives? You’d be hard pressed to top that.

Here’s a brief analysis of a protocol religion that has led some astray, albeit a contemporary perversion that’s still not even a century old. Nonetheless, the flesh loves religion, so it has clung to the likes of the following, and many are being misled by it, even today.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

— **Ephesians 5:15-21**

The context of the above passage is that Paul is addressing the Ephesians, who historically had a local problem with drinking and

proclaiming spirituality, not unlike some today claiming to have a transcendent experience with God while on drugs. He's stating that a higher state of spirituality isn't found in drunkenness; rather, it is a heart issue, as he describes in the ensuing statements found in **Ephesians 5**. Paul is not laying out a protocol, he's just saying that getting drunk isn't how a believer is filled with the Spirit. He was defending the church against a prevalent lie. There's absolutely no reason to add or subtract anything beyond the obvious.

The Golden Rule of Interpretation

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

— **David L. Cooper**

The flesh, and therefore its principle invention, protocol religion, is unhappy with simple issues of the heart (see section in this chapter, *Protocol Religion*). Heart issues imply relationship, the antithesis of protocol, which is an empty shell. Jesus called the especially astute religious folks of His day "*whitewashed tombs*". They invented and enforced many protocols in the absence of God's love.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you

clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

— **Matthew 23:23-28**

The Pharisees, like any fleshly human being, specialized in protocol religion. In effect, they took something beautiful and perfect, the Law, hijacked it and the Spirit's ministry in it, and made it something it was never meant to be - ugly and oppressive. It was void of true love, just like the Pharisees, as a group, were also. *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:22-23).* Protocols have never saved or delivered a single human soul.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

— **1 John 1:8-10**

At the end of the Apostle John's life, when he wrote his first epistle around A.D. 90, there was an upswing in Gnosticism infiltrating the churches, something that continued long after John died, into the 2nd and 3rd centuries. John took note and responded with a rebuttal to this heresy. He saw that Gnosticism was upsetting the churches that he had fought so hard to build up in grace and truth.

Gnosticism: a false set of ideas that perverted apostolic teaching; it asserted that matter was inherently evil and spirit was good; adherents to Gnosticism denied Jesus Christ's true humanity in an effort to preserve Him from evil; a so-called higher knowledge ("gnosis") was exclusive to those possessing some esoteric insight into spiritual matters; Gnostics concluded that sin committed in the body was divorced from spiritual things, therefore, sin was of no consequence, which promoted rampant sinning; some said that sin didn't even exist; Gnostics supposed a higher understanding of truth than even Holy Scripture presented.

Given the context of John's first epistle, it's easy to understand what he was addressing, why he did so, and the precision of his language. John was simply stating that sin is real and man ought to "confess" (agree with God) regarding its presence in his life. It had nothing at all to do with Paul's aforementioned fight with "drunken spirituality" in the church at Ephesus. Yet, some have taken the likes of **Ephesians 5:18** and **1 John 1:9**, tied them together into a perverted doctrine that substantiates an equally perverted protocol, and then concluded that a person cannot be spiritual at all until they confess their sins and are "re-filled" with God the Holy Spirit. It's an abomination of scripture that has resulted in a categorically-organized

protocol religion. Because the flesh loves such things, this particular perversion has gained some traction over the past century. One of the most interesting facets about this religion is that it doesn't have a formal name. Many of its adherents simply call themselves Christians, or oftentimes "doctrinal Christians".

There are many other ways to pervert truth. Man continues to invent new doctrines and construct new religions as a result. The saddest reality is that people who have every right to be enjoying the love of God are bound up in some form of hijacked spirituality. They live in fear of offending God, anxious about whether or not they are on good terms with Him, constantly scouring their lives moment by moment for sin, lest their prayers go unheard. Ugh. What a horribly debilitating mistake, what a waste of time; but that's what religion typically is for most - an abyss.

If God can hear the cry of a repentant unbeliever, He can certainly hear one of His own children!

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

— Luke 18:9-14

The spiritual life is about humility, not protocol.

Frankenstein's Monster

There's a brutal force within man that literally hates God. That's right, man's flesh hates God and when it speaks plainly, as it sometimes does through human mouths, it denounces God's commands as worthless trinkets of some antiquated attempt by man to explain the unknown. Natural man is literally unable to understand the spiritual things of God.

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,

"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,

AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,

ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we

also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

— **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**

As described in *Chapter 1 - The First Two Religions*, there are really only two meaningful categories of religion, the one true religion and all the rest. “All the rest” comprise any and every attempt by God’s creatures to usurp His authority to lord over them. Man is so intent on accomplishing this in his flesh, that he even tries to “one up” the God of the universe by adding to His Word. This, of course, flies in the face of His Word at its most fundamental levels.

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

— **Deuteronomy 4:2**

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

— **Hebrews 13:8**

As unbelievable as it may sound to a believer reading this book, it is absolutely true that man’s flesh regularly attempts to “out-religion” God

Himself, the Creator of true religion. His religion is pristine, perfect, unalterable, and impeccable, like His Son, the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, *“the author and perfecter of faith”* (**Hebrews 12:2**). With Jesus Christ as the center of true religion, He being the fullness of God, there leaves no real space for the flesh to thrive. So, man creates “space” by altering true religion, though slyly adhering to it by its accepted name (e.g., “Christianity”), resulting in an abomination. This process is analogous to Victor Frankenstein’s attempt at creating life. True religion is a function of eternal life. Anything resembling life that man creates apart from eternal life is like Frankenstein’s monster...destined to burn.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

— **John 15:6**

If true religion and God’s Law are knit together in eternal life, then practicing lawlessness refers to that breach in religion the Bible assigns to the Pharisees and the religious Jews during Jesus’ earthly ministry. At face value, religions often appear very religious; however, therein lies the deception. More laws doesn’t mean more religious and somehow better. In fact, the more manmade laws added to a religion, the further it strays from the only true one. What Jesus saw was the same thing we might observe even today - false religion clinging to remnants of true religion for the sake of acceptance. But the resultant religion leads people down the broad way that leads to destruction.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the

gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

— **Matthew 7:13-16**

Jesus stated that His disciples would know the false teachers by their fruits. In other words, if what they taught resulted in a separation from true religion, with an emphasis on self-righteousness over Christ-righteousness, then it would be obvious. This same pattern exists in churches today, where errant pastors teach Pharisaical-like ideologies that promote self-righteousness. These pastors have overcomplicated the spiritual life by adding to the Word, placing thousands into bondage to doctrines that don't even exist in the inspired canon of scripture. There's an air of intellectualism that dominates their pulpits. It is the flesh that has hijacked these ministries. I wonder what these teachers of false doctrines would've had to say to the so-called "uneducated" disciples of Jesus, had they lived during that time? I suppose it'd be similar to what the so-called "intellects" of His time had to say.

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

— Acts 4:8-13

It's untenable that some churches with the name "Christian" on their doorposts or their websites have a heart more akin to the Pharisees' than Christ's. The human flesh has no problem leveraging all that it can to elevate itself, even if it means standing on the shoulders of Jesus Christ, Himself. Whenever man adds to the Word of God, it always results in disaster. It's arguably the ugliest thing man could ever do, yet he does it all the time, being heartily complimented by other fleshly "Christians" seeking self-righteousness. They say "all the right things" and often cast "all the right scripture" at the feet of their challengers, but they aren't fooling a soul in Heaven.

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

— 1 Corinthians 4:5

Believers, especially, must beware of Frankenstein's monster. He may not appear repulsive; he certainly won't be to the flesh. The religious monster is insidious because it is attractive to most humans, an unholy beast that the human flesh can relate to without becoming agitated. False religion fosters the unholy growth of spiritual thicket in the lives of sheep.

And the longer it goes undetected, the more difficult it is to extract the sheep from it. If false religion were Frankenstein's monster in the flesh, it'd resemble its true father, Satan, himself.

*His speech was smoother than butter,
But his heart was war;
His words were softer than oil,
Yet they were drawn swords.*

— Psalms 55:21

Satan Loves Publicity

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

— Colossians 2:8

Satan loves publicity when it comes to religion because it confuses the masses. "The more religions, the better", might just be his motto on the subject. Although religion is but one of innumerable tactics Satan uses to distract mankind, it is arguably one of his greatest tools. We can't definitively say *the* greatest here because the fact is that there are things we just don't see that transpire daily in the invisible realm.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and

blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

— **Ephesians 6:11-12**

The more religions there are in this world, the more pertinent our Lord's words become, "*I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me*" (**Proverbs 8:17**). Satan loves confusion, so he promotes it in this world. God is just the opposite, "*for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints*" (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). God's desire is one true religion, where clarity is the order of the day, resulting in peace. Satan sows the seed of chaos, knowing that a confused person is a frustrated person, and a frustrated person is more likely to give in to the flesh. The fruit of the flesh is anything but peace.

With the advent of advanced communications technologies, Satan has been able to elevate his game, reaching more and more people through television, radio, smartphones, and especially, the Internet. False teachers may be at an all-time high simply because of the pervasiveness of communication. The "*god of this world*" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**), the master of deception, the "*father of lies*" (**John 8:44**), has used counterfeit religion to supplant the great commission that Jesus, Himself, has appointed to every believer.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

— **Matthew 28:18-20**

Adolf Hitler's public relations specialist, Joseph Goebbels, once made an eerily prophetic statement about the current pervasiveness of false religion in this world.

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

— **Joseph Goebbels**

The Gospel of You

True religion implies a savior. Under the premise of the true Gospel, Jesus Christ is the only savior. Counterfeit religions have "another" Jesus, sometimes by the same name, but it all depends upon the perversion. The Bible tells us also that demons ("*different [spirits]*") peddle false gospels with counterfeit saviors. These are the "*doctrines of demons*" (**1 Timothy 4:1**).

For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

— **2 Corinthians 11:4**

Many unbelievers take after their "father", Satan (**John 8:44**). Satan's original desire was to be "*like the Most High*" (**Isaiah 14:14**), like God. Jesus

Christ is God. God saves. To be like God is to be one's own savior, to be a "self-made man", so to speak. Under this premise, creatures assume that they can make themselves righteous in the absence of God; hence the common term, self-righteousness. Satan is the prototypical self-righteous creature, the first of his kind. His mindset pervades his domain, this world (**2 Corinthians 4:4**), and those who identify with it.

Consider worldly literature. It is filled with the so-called "creative types" that have placed themselves in God's rightful place in the Universe, as Lord over them. A perfect example of this is the famous poem by William Ernest Henley, *Invictus*, which is oft-quoted favorably, particularly the last two lines. The world embraces such ideologies as light, though they are filled with terrible darkness.

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

— *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley

To be inspired by such a poem is to be counted among the foolish.

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

— **Psalms 53:1**

If “self-made” implies self-generating, self-governing, and self-sanctifying, then where does that leave God??? If man can save and sanctify himself to himself, then he has no need for God. If man postures himself in the place of God, then most often he has articulated in his soul a way to save himself. His “gospel”, then, is the ‘gospel of self’, where he supposes himself the creator, savior, and deliverer of his soul, or as Henley writes, “*captain of [his] soul*”. This is satanic, yet the world promotes it in every way as “light”, or good. You see, this is just another instance of religion, even though it doesn’t have a name.

Oddly, the foolish often despise being categorized as “religious”. How often do we hear folks say, “I’m not religious”? Unbeknownst to them, to denounce religiosity does not imply one isn’t religious. Religion doesn’t require a name, nor does it need to be recognized as such, it only needs to exist in the soul of a person. Everyone claims some form of enlightenment. It just so happens that some consider themselves as the source of it.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

— 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Chapter 5 - False Teachers

But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

— 2 Corinthians 11:12-15

A brief analysis of Jesus' *Parable of the Good Shepherd* will suffice in describing the nature of false leaders in the churches. Jesus uses the well-known practice of sheep ranching to articulate the simple, ongoing threat of false shepherds influencing the sheep. The real shepherd of the sheep would hire a gatekeeper as an undershepherd to guard the gate when he needed to depart on personal business. While the shepherd was away, illegal entrance was gained either over the sides of the pen or as a function of an unqualified undershepherd.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.

There are those who have access to the churches that aren't real shepherds. Their intention is to rob the sheepfold for personal gain. Practically speaking, personal gain can mean

profiteering, or “sordid gain” (**Titus 1:7**). “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money” (**1 Timothy 3:2-3**). Sordid gain can be financial, social, or even sexual, among other possibilities.

“But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Jesus is the true Shepherd. His true undershepherds know Him, as do His sheep. Neither will frustrate the freedom of relating to Him, personally. To the contrary, false shepherds will hack at this beloved relationship in order to gain advantage.

“A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.

This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Jesus describes the heart of a good shepherd, namely His

own, as opposed to those whom He has not called as undershepherds, Himself. There are many so-called “shepherds” in the churches today, but they are not all ordained by God. They are the thieves and the robbers.

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.

Jesus points out that there are those who have been “hired”, but do not share His heart for His sheep. These are the false teachers, particularly identified in context here as the Jewish leaders of His day. They do not possess the fight in them that a true undershepherd does, like Paul, who said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith”* (**2 Timothy 4:7**). A false shepherd fights for himself, not for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

Jesus is merely speaking about the Gentiles here, in context - that they, too, can be members of His flock. In contrast, the

Jewish leaders considered Gentiles like dogs. Paul describes these false leaders as dogs much later, *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:1-3).*

“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

— **John 10:1-18**

As awful as a false teacher may be, blame for an individual’s damnation is not to be placed on their shoulders. The Word reveals that each person is responsible for themselves, particularly regarding their own salvation. A glut of false teaching is never a viable reason for unbelief. God demands every human being respond to the Gospel, whether positively or negatively. He also promises, in His integrity, that His own Spirit will convict every individual of the Gospel truth. To this, His Spirit inspired the following scripture, *“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).* Even an unbeliever knows the right thing to do is believe. However, in their arrogance, with their medley of inventions, they suppress the God of the Universe and His conviction upon them regarding His Son and His Cross.

The Good Shepherd’s sheep hear His voice and eventually follow Him, never satisfied with the works of false shepherds. In light of this, if a person

chooses to trounce God's grace and refuse the true Gospel, preferring the gospel(s) of Satan's ministers of darkness, then God will not draw them to Himself. False teachers may proclaim they know Jesus, even calling some to Him through them, but ultimately, it is all a sham, a lie from the father of lies, Satan.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

— **John 6:44**

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

— **Ephesians 2:8-9**

As was evidenced back at the Fall in the Garden of Eden, man has made it his practice, in the flesh, to take on the work of God. Nowhere is this more dangerous than when it involves salvation and sanctification. Ever since the failed experiment with the fig leaves in the Garden (man's first religion), man has invented religion after religion in order to meet his perverted objectives. The flesh desires to save and sanctify itself, by itself, for itself. This is the antithesis of true religion. Only God, through Jesus Christ, is able to save and sanctify man, and He does so to His own glory.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to

Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

— **Colossians 1:13-20**

The most insidious religions are the ones that go unidentified. Names mean nothing to our Lord's chief antagonist, Satan. In fact, in many cases, he prefers that his devices go unnamed. This way, he's able to slink around like the serpent that he is, undetected, undermining the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since grace is the lynchpin of true religion, it is relatively easy to identify counterfeit religions because they always pervert, if not completely remove, God's grace from their doctrines. To compensate for this, unholy religions posture that man is able to answer his innately sown realization, that he needs a savior, by becoming his own savior. He may denounce Jesus Christ or even God's existence, but the Bible reveals that he *will* be convicted of his need for a savior, and that *only* God can save him, at some point in his earthly walk. Otherwise, our God is a liar, which we know cannot be true, for, "*God...cannot lie*" (**Titus 1:2**).

False religions propose, in the absence of God's grace (by false assumption), that man is able to work out his salvation on his own, without the help of God; that man is, at least in part, responsible for saving himself and then sanctifying himself afterwards. Jesus spoke about this to the Jews, who were plagued by the religious leaders of their time.

"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them,

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

— **John 6:27-29**

The greatest work any man can do in time is receive God’s grace. True religion, from the very beginning, as seen before the Fall in the Garden, even, has its doctrinal foundation based on grace. Figuratively speaking, religions by any other name seek to build for themselves another way to Heaven, not through Jesus Christ, who said plainly, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6b)*. The Tower of Babel is a great example of how man’s ingenuity attempts to invent other ways to Heaven.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of

the whole earth.

— **Genesis 11:1-9**

Religion is as ancient as mankind.

Adam and Eve knew true religion, in their hearts and in their practice. It was perfect religion in perfect environment. Since the Fall, however, man has not known such perfection, save his brief experience as witness of Jesus Christ. Today, true religion exists between the new creature and God, for only the new creature, being made perfect in Christ, is able to rightly worship Him forevermore. However, until believers are made completely perfect, with a resurrection body, having shed "*this body of death*" (**Romans 7:24**), they won't experience consummate religion, where body, soul, and spirit function in the unified worship of God. This will be true religion, once again experienced by man, as it was originally intended.