

Lose Your Religion: Don't Buy the Lies

Glen - Apr 29, 2018

Series Big Idea: Religion is responsible for wars and hate, bigotry and exclusion. It is known for being superstitious, hypocritical, judgmental and more. But even worse, it misses God and who he really is and what he is all about. Religion is man's attempt to be good by following rules and rituals. Then we are tempted to use our right beliefs and right actions to judge others as to whether they are in the "right" place. Religion actually causes us to judge rather than love. Religion steers us away from the heart of God who is love. Only Jesus can change our heart and move us from rules, arrogance and judgment to love and relationship. Jesus didn't come to found a religion. He came to free us from religion to love like God.

Message Big Idea: The story of Adam and Eve is our story. We too choose to buy the lies of the ancient serpent that God is not enough to provide enough of what we need. So in mistrust we push God out and take over. It is not a pretty picture. We rejected God's primary control in our lives and we now live in a world of want. We are never satisfied. We seek to fill the emptiness with things that will never fill us. Sometimes we even try to find satisfaction in religion. In religion we are forever trying to be good and only come up short and the guilt and shame grows and we feel the condemnation. The curse is reversed only in Jesus. In Jesus, there is now no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). In Jesus we re-discover that God is enough to make us more than enough.

Main Idea: Lose your religion because God is enough.

Main Text: Romans 8:1-2

Supporting texts: Genesis 3:1-5; Romans 3:10-12

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. What part(s) of your life do you struggle fully trusting God with (money, relationships, telling the truth, etc.)? Why is it hard for you to truly let God have control of this part of your life?
2. One of the lies the devil told Eve was that God was not trustworthy, that God was withholding something they needed and deserved. Share a time when you bought that lie. Tell about a situation when you felt like God wasn't there for you; you doubted that God was enough or he might not come through for you or had your best interests at heart.
3. The second lie the devil told Eve was that she deserved more. In what area of your life do you often feel like there is something is missing. Where do you look, other than God, to provide for and fill the void, need or emptiness?
4. What do you need to do to come back to God in full trust?

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Main Idea: Lose your religion because God is enough.

Message:

We are continuing our series *Lose Your Religion*. If you are just joining us in this series, you might be surprised that I would suggest that we lose our religion. I know, it sounds crazy that a pastor would urge a church to abandon religion! Here's why I'm saying we should lose our religion. I believe religion is a replacement for and a very poor substitute for having a relationship with God. Further, religion actually interferes with our ability to be loved by God and to love him and love others. That's why we need to lose our religion. I know this from my own experience.

Growing up my mom had multiple sclerosis. She was bed ridden and in a nursing home by the time I was 14. My brother died at birth from complications from the MS. She had a series of miscarriages after that. So I was an only child. My dad was our only source of income. So that left me taking care of both my mother, our household and myself. I grew up very fast. I grew up being self-sufficient and independent. I grew up being very responsible and trustworthy. In my teens a few adults commented that I had an "old soul."

When I came to faith, I truly fell in love with Jesus. But in those early years, I too, like many of us, took the path to faith through religion. That's what the church taught me back then. And it was so natural! I applied my basic approach to life to my new found faith. I had to be responsible. I had to learn and do what was right. I had to be good for God. For far too many years I had bought the lie that my faith was all on me. If I believed the right things and acted the right way, then and only then, God would be pleased with me. I worked hard to make God smile at me. And I was wracked with guilt and shame when I failed.

But here's the problem. While I in fact became a better person in some ways, I also failed to really grasp God's love and grace. I was trying to earn God's love. As I worked hard to be religiously good, I missed a real relationship with Jesus. I always felt like I didn't do enough. I always felt like I came up short. I always felt like God was always noticing when and where I failed and sinned. I felt like God had a hard time smiling on me. Even though I worked hard to be good, I always felt like I was being condemned.

Maybe you have or are experiencing that too? Where does that come from? I think it goes clear back to Genesis 3:1-5 (pg. 2 - NIV) - ***Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"***
2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

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4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Satan disguised himself as a serpent. Satan is a liar and uses lies to accuse God and people. If you look closely, you'll see in what we just read two main lies the devil told Eve to ruin her. He keeps telling us these same lies today to destroy us.

Let's look closer at the first lie. The very first false accusation made by the accuser and believed by Eve was that God was not trustworthy. The lie included that God was not in fact completely good. The accusation was that God was withholding something really good and valuable from them. In essence he was saying; “You can't trust God.” **Lie #1 - God is not trustworthy.** If they ate from the forbidden tree, then their eyes would be opened and they would be like God! And if they had the knowledge of God, they could be independent and not have to rely on God.

Notice how crafty Satan is. When the serpent told this lie, he didn't say God was evil. He didn't even tell them to avoid God. He just got them to believe that God wasn't trustworthy and therefore he wasn't enough! They came to question if God was really good. Did he really care for them? Did he really love them? I believe they still loved God. I think they still respected God. They fondly remembered all the walks and talks they had with God. But now there was this level of doubt that God wasn't enough. He had his limits. He might not come through for them. They better take things into their own hands.

And when Adam and Eve, and when we buy this lie, we move to a very dangerous place. We start taking the role of God. We take over to make sure we will be okay. We think we know what is best for us. So, like Adam and Eve, we push God aside and take control.

This is key. We don't push God all the way out of our lives and we have to find a way to deal with him. So we have to create a way to both be in control and be okay with God. So humans create religion which is made up of the right rules, rituals and beliefs. We want both - to be in control and to be okay with God. And all this is based on a lie that God alone is not good enough to be fully in control of our lives.

Now, let's look closer at lie number two. Of course this is connected to lie number one, but it goes further. Lie number two is the accusation that Adam and Eve were missing something. They were being denied something they deserved and needed! **Lie #2 - Adam and Eve deserved more.** They could be smarter, wiser and more discerning. They could have a knowledge and ability to make the judgments of God. They were missing something that would make them like God. The lie of the devil is that their loving face-to-face connection with God is not enough! The devil tricked them to believe that they needed more than what God had provided. They needed more... to really be alive. The lie created dissatisfaction and no human can live in a place of dissatisfaction.

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When we are tempted by this lie, Satan creates in us a level of dissatisfaction. We feel like something is missing. We look for something or someone other than God to provide for and fill the need. We think we have to find the thing, person or situation that will make us happy. We look everywhere, but to God, and keep coming up empty. We try to fill the void with the love or affection of a person or group. We try to fill the emptiness with a career, hobby or achievement. We over work or try to find a hobby or invest in things to distract us. We try to fill the void with material things and keep accumulating more and more because the stuff doesn't satisfy us. We engage in things that take away the emptiness for a short time like sex, drugs, alcohol, eating, TV, music or whatever, but we come back to the same empty place. We keep searching and we keep looking in all the wrong places. We forget to come back to God. For he alone can fill our emptiness and what we lack.

Now, this is when religion kicks in. We pushed God aside based on the two lies. Some of us tried the sex, drugs and rock and roll path and it ruined us and we discovered it left us empty. Some of us just figured out the sex, drugs and rock and roll path was not all that appealing. But we gotta have something. So we try to replace God with religion! Religion and its right rules, rituals and beliefs can make us feel good and feel in control for a while. We will do this, we won't do that, we'll believe the right things, we'll work hard and that will make up for what God lacks and what we lack. But eventually, as in any religion, we hit the wall. Religion relies totally on my human effort. The rules, rituals and judgmental beliefs leave us tired, worn out, burdened, guilty and empty.

But there's even more bad news. I know, I haven't given any hope yet. I'll get there. Hang on! But honestly, we need to face the reality of life and religion and it is bad news. The bad news is this: no matter how good we try to be, we still fall short. In Romans 3:10-12 (pg. 769 - NIV) the Apostle Paul reminds us what the Bible says: ***10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*** What we just read was written to people who knew God! This was written to religious people! Just like Adam and Eve after they sinned, none of us are right with God. None of us get it. None of us consistently seek God first. All of us, to some extent, have turned away from God. None of us are good - not one of us. And that includes all religious people! In religion we are forever trying to be good, fool ourselves into thinking we are better than others but still come up short and the guilt and shame grows. Religion only reminds us of the lies - that God is not enough and we are missing something we deserve!

Okay, that's heavy. I know. But stay with me. My goal right here isn't for us to stay in this place of guilt and shame. Are you ready for some good news? I want to read for you the verses that God used to move me from my years of being stuck in religion to discovering a real relationship with God. Yes, it was these very verses that helped me actually quit living in guilt, shame and condemnation for that fact that I continually failed God. For many years I continually felt my guilt and shame for not being good enough.

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Let's read Romans 8:1-2 (pg. 772 - NIV) - ***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.***

Oh wow! There's so much here. Even though I'm a sinner, I'm a mess and have messed up and have pushed God aside time and time again - there is NOW no condemnation if I'm with Jesus. There's no condemnation in Jesus... period. None! In Jesus I'm not guilty even though time and time again I've not trusted him, disobeyed him, done my own thing my own way and neglected God. I'm forgiven fully. I'm fully loved in and through Jesus. I'm more than okay with God because of Jesus. Everytime God looks at me he's smiling! (pause) Maybe you've heard all that before, but even as I say these things, you are having a hard time really believing it and experiencing it?! I know!

But there's even more. Paul said that in Jesus, the living Spirit of God lives in me and gives me life. The living Spirit of God gives me what Adam and Eve had in the Garden - a direct connection with God. The Holy Spirit gives me all I need to live well and gives me eternal life. Sin and death no longer have power over me. Yes, I'll be tempted and sin, but they no longer have primary control over me. I'm never alone (even when I hide from God), and I'm never condemned! I'm alive!

So here's my point today. **Lose your religion because God is enough.** Quit trying to be good enough. Reject the lies that God is not trustworthy and that you haven't been given what you need and deserve. Quit living in the guilt and shame of falling short in your religious ways. You'll never read the Bible enough. You'll never pray enough. You'll never share Jesus enough. You'll never be good enough. You'll never be the spouse, parent and person you and God want you to be.

Our only hope is God! **You are worse off than you think, but more loved than you'll ever know!** You are loved so much God had to send Jesus. You see, the depth of our sin, the depth of our brokenness, the depth of how far we have drifted from God required God to take the most drastic of actions. God sent his one and only Son to die for our sins. It was the only way to remove the guilt, shame and condemnation. So when we decide we are ready to trust God again, we do that by trusting Jesus. God loves you. He sent Jesus to show you how much. God knows you. **Jesus loves you just as you are, not how you should be!** He knows our guilt and shame and he loves us in that guilt and shame. He loves you no matter what and he's not going to stop loving you no matter what!

Romans 8:1 says: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* No condemnation. Either that's true or it isn't. There's no middle ground. Jesus loves us and reunited us to God. There is nothing we can do make ourselves worthy to God. God, in Jesus, says we are more than okay. He loves us as we are. But in our religious place - we keep thinking we'll only be loved when we are who we should be! So to those of us who know God and know Jesus - lose your religion! The answer is so shockingly simple - cling to Jesus. Trust Jesus and the way of Jesus. There's only one

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real question. It destroys the complexity of religion and frees us from guilt and condemnation. This question reveals the simplicity of faith: **Will you let Jesus love you and take control?** That's THE question.

You can decide right now to let Jesus into your life. You can decide right now to trust Jesus and follow him and his ways. In Jesus there is NOW no condemnation for all your failures and shortcomings. In Jesus all your sins are forgiven. Jesus wants the best for you now and forever. Jesus loves you so much he was willing to give his life for you. That's how much you are loved. Faith is a decision to trust Jesus. Make the decision now!

When you make a decision to trust Jesus, then the next step is to make the commitment, the promise to follow Jesus. We make a vow to follow Jesus in baptism. When we are baptized in water we make a vow to let Jesus in and have control of our lives. We invite the very Spirit of God to live inside us. And we'll follow him where he leads us. Going into and coming out of the water is a symbol of huge life change and change of direction. If you are ready to be baptized, we are going to have that opportunity today. In a moment we'll sing a song and while we are standing and singing, come here, into the auditorium to the door near the stage to your left. We'll have people there to help you and we have private changing rooms, towels, clothes to be baptized in and all you need. Just come.

Please... **Lose your religion because God is enough.** Leave your old life of guilt and shame. Leave your old life of trying to fill or fix yourself. Refuse the lies about God and about you. Discover that God is more than enough. And know that he loves you as you are and is smiling at you. Come now as we stand and sing.

Song: Have It All