

Encounter Church
Sunday January 04, 2026

Lighten the Load
The Load of Religion

Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)-“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

TODAY WE ARE GOING TO TALK ABOUT TAKING OFF THE LOAD OF RELIGION!

Religion is mankind’s attempt to be accepted by God, and it can be summarized in one word: “DO”.

Every religion, except for biblical Christianity, demands that an individual do some works to gain acceptance (a right standing) with its god or gods.

Philippians 3:6 (NLT)- “I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.”

PAUL (SAUL) WAS A RELIGIOUS ZEALOT! BY HIS STANDARD HE WAS IN RIGHT STANDING WITH GOD!

I've been “doing” right and that has made me right with God!

In fact, I'm so right with God that I'm going to go out and persecute those who now claim to have a relationship with God through this man called Jesus. THIS because they've haven't been “doing” what I'm “doing” to be accepted by God!

PAUL HAD ACTUALLY CAST JUDGEMENT ON THESE NEW BELIEVERS!

HOW ZEALOUS FOR THE LAW WAS PAUL (SAUL)?

Acts 9:1 (NLT)- “Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers.”

RELIGION IS SO HEAVY IT CAUSES A SPIRITUAL DEATH!

SOMETHING HAPPENS TO SAUL (PAUL)!

Acts 9:3-6- (NLT)-“As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, lord?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

(Jesus might take his church a little more personal than we thought!)

After Paul's encounter with Jesus!

Philippians 3:9- “I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.”

If there's anyone who knew the difference between religion and a relationship with Jesus Christ it was this man Paul!

One minute Paul is the greatest opponent of the church and after an encounter with Jesus Christ he becomes the churches biggest advocate!

Transformation took place in Paul's life as he no longer depended on fulfilling the law but he put his faith in Jesus Christ and experienced the GRACE OF GOD!

Paul experienced transforming grace!

Paul's transformation did not come through obeying the law!

Galatians 3:1-4 (MSG)- “You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a spell on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has happened, for it’s obvious that you no longer have the crucified Jesus in clear focus in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough. Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God’s Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren’t smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it? Did you go through this whole painful learning process for nothing? It is not yet a total loss, but it certainly will be if you keep this up!”

If my transformation started with grace, it continues with grace and it ends with grace!

Some will say it this way. “***I was saved by grace but I stay saved by works.***”

THAT'S HERESY! A LIE FROM THE ENEMY!

Romans 11:6 (NLT) “And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God’s grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.”

IT’S ONE OR THE OTHER FRIENDS!

ONE IS RELIGION AND THE OTHER IS RELATIONSHIP!

This Christian life is not about a bunch of religious “do’s” and don’ts”

It’s about a relationship with our Heavenly Father through His Son Jesus Christ!

Galatians 2:19-21 (NLT) “For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.”

IT’S BECAUSE OF GOD’S GRACE WE ARE TRANSFORMED!

THREE THINGS YOU AND I NEED TO KNOW TO UNLOAD THE WEIGHT OF RELIGION.

1. Religion empowers sin.

1 Corinthians 15:56 (NLT)- “For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power.”

The law points out right and wrong! The law is overbearing, fault finding, critical and judgmental. It’s eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!

The law actually gives ammunition to the accuser, Satan!

The law cannot empower you to do right, it can only point out what’s wrong!

2. God’s Grace forgives sins.

Ephesians 1:7 (NLT)- “He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.”

Romans 4:7-8 (NLT)- “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin.”

Doing right does not forgive sins! God’s grace forgives sins!

3. Grace, not religion transforms us.

Titus 3:3-7 (NLT)- “Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But— When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

***Religion (doing right) doesn't give you confidence that you will inherit eternal life!
GRACE GIVES YOU THAT CONFIDENCE!***

CONCLUSION: What is the Holy Spirit saying to you through this message?

Many people are trying to impress Jesus by keeping a good relationship with the law.

Some say that if you preach too much on grace people are going to go out and sin.

GRACE DOES NOT PRODUCE SIN. GRACE PRODUCES RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Ephesians 2:8-9- “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

UNLOAD THE BAGGAGE OF RELIGION TODAY. LIGHTEN THE LOAD!

MAKE 2026 A YEAR OF FOCUSING ON GOD'S GRACE!

IT BEGINS BY COMING TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR PERSONAL LORD AND SAVIOR!