

THE RELIGION TRAP

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RELIGION VERSUS RELATIONSHIP

BY CARMEN MENEFFEE



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*In loving memory of my parents, Mrs. Dorothy W. Green
and Mr. Worth E. Green, Thank you for the good seeds
you sowed in my life.*

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FOREWORD

The *Religion Trap* is an enlightening and insightful book that should cause every believer to reevaluate his church affiliation and every pastor their motives and tactics in dealing with God's people. Some may consider the material to be controversial, but it makes one look at the ethics, etiquette, and protocol from a different perspective that is quite provocative.

Minister Carmen Menefee has drawn from the Scriptures and from personal experiences to create practical, applicable advice. Every reader will constantly ask himself the question, "Do I have a true relationship with Christ, or am I simply religious in a church?"

This book defines religious traps and boldly goes into many of our pulpits of today, challenging what we call a worship experience and defining it as a trick of the devil. Her writing addresses issues that many will not dare even mention. This book is a must for every individual who belongs

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to or plans to affiliate with a church. In this book, Minister Menefee exposes the tricks of the devil and uncovers the traps that so easily ensnare us.

Minister Carmen Menefee, I applaud you on your efforts. Thank you for reminding us of the integrity of ministry and for stimulating our interest in having a relationship with Christ and not just religion in a church.

Bishop Antonio C. Richardson
Pastor of New Life Evangelistic Center, Inc.
Jacksonville, Florida

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was inspired by God to challenge you to examine the place Jesus Christ holds in your life. Each chapter has a unique message that will minister to your heart concerning the question, “Am I religious, or do I have a relationship with God?”

I thank my heavenly Father for his faithfulness in placing the desire in my heart to help others to understand better the purpose of the church. I am truly grateful for the support and encouragement from my family and friends during the writing and publishing of this book.

To Larry, my wonderful husband; Lawrence, my gifted and handsome son; Momy my beautiful daughter-in-law.

Special thanks to my angels on assignment, my grandchildren whom I love so much. Sydney and Jarin, you are “the little people who have taught me big lessons.”

To Stephanie, my friend, you are a true example of Proverbs 17:17.

Special Thanks to my son Lawrence Johnson, Jr.
for the book cover design.

INTRODUCTION

When Jesus was asked by one of the scribes which is the first of all the commandments, he replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment....And the second is like namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28–31 KJV). On these two commandments hang all the commandments of God. Jesus’ reply left no question about what was most important in the kingdom of God. Religion, however, has always tried to replace Jesus’ message with the religious message of the Pharisees, which is keeping the letter of the law. But Jesus was referring to a higher call of obedience through love.

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

(John 14:15 KJV)

This book uncovers the fallacies and deception that exist in the power of religious worship. Many people have devoted years of their lives to churches in faithful service only to find a void still exists that church attendance cannot fill. This void can only be filled through experiencing an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Religion in the church is the outward performance of keeping rules, rituals, and traditions to compensate for the lack of knowing God through his Son Jesus. This form of worship is idolatrous and legalistic. Although we all hear preaching about God and participate in the formalities of religious worship, many people never experience having the constant fellowship and companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Religion blocks our trust in God and creates a dependence on works of the flesh by causing us to focus on outward righteousness rather than inward regeneration. Scripture clearly gives us the requirements for true worship. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24 κϋν). Our knowledge of God comes through revelation of his Word by the Holy Spirit and demonstration of the Word by Jesus Christ.

For many years I have been concerned about the state of the church in this generation. There is a lack of representation of Christ in the lives of those who claim to know him. It appears that people who don't know him don't want to know him. I sought God's counsel on this matter. He responded, “The reason you don't see more people coming to me is because of the presentation.” In other words, people aren't really being presented with a true picture of who God

is and what Jesus Christ means to this world. Our job as disciples is to represent Jesus to the world by the way we live daily, through our love for one another, through sharing the good news with those who are without hope and meeting the needs of the poor.

Our nation is battling to fix social issues such as abortion, crime, political corruption, church corruption, sexual promiscuity, declining family values, and many other issues destroying humanity. But the real problem is with the sin nature of mankind. This sin nature is at the root of all of our problems. Religion is man's effort to "fix" these problems, but it yields no true and lasting success.

Practicing religion is Satan's plan to destroy the effectiveness of the church and its foundation without using obviously sinful acts. Nothing else in the history of mankind has been able to do as much damage to the progression of the kingdom of God as religion. Religion is the effort of man to please God based on merits rather than through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many potential believers have been deceived by a presentation of what they are made to believe is the "gospel" only to find themselves trapped in a myriad of dos and don'ts, unfulfilled dreams and desires, and unbalanced and unhealthy lifestyles full of pretense and condemnation.

There is no frustration like that of continually doing something the same way and expecting different results. This is commonly referred to as insanity. Man alone *cannot* please God; yet religion persuades people to believe that by doing certain acts and adhering to legalistic traditions, God's requirements will be met. Let's be real! Religion and

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all the formalities that accompany it cannot fulfill the need for an inward change in our lives. Our sin issue requires much more than worthless religion. The Christian life is not sin management; it is deliverance from the power of sin through the grace of God.

Much of the deception that thrives in the church is simply because people refuse to take responsibility for themselves by studying and meditating on the Word of God, rather than relying solely on someone else to feed them. I believe it is necessary for us to be taught by those who have been called for this purpose. I don't believe we should neglect our responsibility to study for ourselves by depending on Sunday morning sermons, however. We are all held accountable for our decisions in life, and making right decisions is based on knowledge of God's Word and an understanding of how to apply it to our lives.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

(Hos. 4:6 KJV)

The Religion Trap examines the evil forces behind organized religion and exposes the modern spirit of the Pharisees in local assemblies. My prayer is that you will understand how dangerous a life of practicing religion is to your own soul.

Chapter 1

RELATIONSHIP VERSUS RELIGION

What is religion, and what is a relationship with Christ?

Religion is man's response to meet God halfway. "No, I won't give you all of me, but I'll meet you halfway. I will work in the church, attend regularly, pray sometimes, pay my tithe sometimes, and try to treat people right." None of these acts make you a Christian, even though all are good deeds. This is the attitude of many people in churches. Why do we offer to do works rather than surrender our lives? People do not understand that the problem is not with the outward acts; the problem is in the heart of man. This is the spirit of man, the place where God communes with man. The heart is the center of all mankind's issues.

Solomon wrote, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23).

Let's examine the differences in the two positions—relationship versus religion:

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Relationship	Religion
Freedom	Controlling
Righteousness through Christ	Self-righteousness
Conviction	Condemnation
Dependence on Holy Spirit	Dependence on doing works
Temperance	Unbalance
Directs	Drives
Gives	Takes
Forgiving	Judgmental and critical
Transparent	Pretentious
Promotes spiritual growth	Stagnates spiritual growth
Focuses on grace and mercy	Focuses on rules and tradition
Transforms	Conforms
Life	Death
Promotes love and oneness	Promotes division and pride

We can conclude that religion focuses on outward appearances or actions. Religion is a man-made form of worshipping God through vain traditions, doctrines, and rules. Anything that is man-made brings no fulfillment to the spirit of man. The only way for us to be totally fulfilled is through a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We must seek to know the Creator and not just the things he created. A relationship with Christ generates from the inner man, the heart, the center of what man is really all about.

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Jesus explained that the purpose of his coming was to fulfill the law not destroy it (Matt. 5:17–48). He explained the superiority of his message to that of the law of Moses. The Old and New Testaments do not contradict each other. The New Testament is the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual intention of the law.

The law had degenerated into legalism among the Pharisees, who had an outward observance of righteousness. Jesus took the law beyond outward observance to the inner spiritual intention of God. The law was never intended to be a burden on man but rather to convince men of their need for a Savior. Jesus introduced an entirely new dimension of the law, which is fulfilled by love rather than works. The absence of love for God and for mankind is what promoted the legalism of the law. The law forced people to obey the commandments and rituals, or they were punished severely.

Examine carefully each example based on Scripture to identify the heresy of religion.

- Religion condemns; salvation liberates (2 Cor. 3:6).
- Religion never satisfies; relationship is fulfilling (1 Cor. 15:57).
- Religion charges a price that can never be paid regardless of how much you do, how much money you give, and how much you serve and sacrifice. Religion never fulfills. “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:1).

Jesus has already paid the price for our freedom. One spotless, blameless sacrifice has fulfilled the requirements for God to forgive us forever. There is no need for us to work for forgiveness of our sin debt. Jesus' blood paid it all!

Religion causes you to trust in yourself and your talent, ability, and knowledge rather than trusting God. If you trust in yourself, you can't trust God. This is why condemnation arises. We see our efforts fail, and Satan reminds us daily of our inability to meet God's standards. Of course, Satan would never tell us that God is not impressed with our works of righteousness. He accepts us based on our acceptance of his Son.

Religion places blinders over our eyes and prevents us from seeing the truth clearly. When Jesus touched the blind man (which represents being in darkness), he asked the man, "What do you see?" The man replied, "I see men, but I see them as trees." Being the loving Savior that he is, Jesus did not want the man unable to see clearly. He touched him again and asked, "What do you see?" He replied, "I see men as they are." Using this as a natural example to explain a spiritual concept, we can see the importance of having our lives touched by Jesus to remove the darkness that religion brings.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything? He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

(Mark 8:23–25)

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His newfound sight enabled him to see that all blind men need a touch from Jesus. The first touch did not give him the sight he needed. He would have needed to add more to what Jesus had done. In today's language he might have needed to wear eyeglasses or contacts to see clearly. The second touch, however, gave him sight that made him complete and whole without anyone's help. This is what religion seeks to do—provide help with what Jesus has already done.