



Toxic Religion

Pastor Bill West
(October 3, 2019)

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

(Luke 18:9–14)

The Danger of Toxic Religion.

Self-righteous Superiority.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable... *(Luke 18:9)*

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.” *(Luke 18:12)*

External Focus.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. *(Luke 18:12)*

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. *(Matthew 23:25–26)*

Label and Exclude.

The Pharisees were indignant. “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?” they asked his disciples. *(Matthew 9:11)*

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” (**Luke 15:1–2**)

The Difference of Gospel Grace.

Humble Confession of sin.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (**Luke 18:13**)

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. (**1 Timothy 1:15**)

Simple Trust in Jesus

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (**Ephesians 2:8–10**)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)

Reach Out to Invite Others,

So his master said, “Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.” (**Luke 14:23**)

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (**John 20:21**)

Bottom Line:

Religion is about ME; Christianity is about JESUS!

1. Do you see a difference between religion and Christianity? If so, how would you describe that difference to someone outside of the church? How has bad religion affected our world? Can you give some examples of it?
2. **Read Matthew 23:25-26 and Luke 18:9-14** Why did the Pharisee feel superior to the tax collector? How does the church sometimes demonstrate that same attitude today?
3. How can you deal with spiritual pride in your life and develop a spirit of humility?
4. **Read Romans 3:20-22.** This passage tells us that we cannot obtain righteousness by observing the law, but rather through faith in Christ.
5. How can “toxic religion” lead us to label and mistreat others? Have you ever seen this?
6. **Read 1 Timothy 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9:** How does Paul’s attitude relate to the tax collectors? How does understanding gospel grace help us to see our need for a Savior? Why is it often so hard to see our own sinfulness?
7. How does understanding the gospel leads us to invite and include others, not label and exclude? Why does religion do the opposite/
8. Pray for us to have a true understanding of the difference between toxic religion and gospel grace.