

Self Made Religion Deceptive & Useless

The human heart is deeply rebellious against its Creator.

‘As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one”
Romans 3:10

The Bible says all people have a ‘sinful flesh’ that is against God.

‘We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted
garment.’ *Isaiah 64:6a-*

‘For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is,
in my flesh.’ *Romans 7:18*

When the sinful flesh is in control of people’s lives
they will:

- Act to be their own God.
- Not submit to God and follow his ways.
- Not acknowledge and face their own depravity and rebelliousness.
- Not face their own inability to make themselves right with God.
- Put forward beliefs and behaviours that seem ‘righteous’ & ‘godly’, but aren’t.

‘Why ... do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ... —according to **human precepts and teachings**? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting **self-made religion** and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of **no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**’ *Colossians 2:20-23*

Religious rules that tell you what to eat, how to dress, and who to avoid. How do these rules deal with the sinful flesh, that loves to feel separately holy and superior to others?

Religious rules that tell you how to purify yourself through rituals of washing. How do these man-made rules serve to ‘purify’ a person’s heart?

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” *Matthew 15:19,20*

Religious rules that say you are not to commit adultery, but which then also tell you that you can have multiple wives, (including pre-pubescent girls), enter into temporary marriages, divorce your wives, and have sex with your slaves. Are these not rules that simply support the selfish sexual lusts of men?

Religious rules that dictate acts of kindness toward others. How do these acts of kindness change the sinful heart that doesn’t truly love but wants to see itself as ‘good’, loves receiving the praise and thanks of others, or wants to earn God’s approval?

‘If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.’ *1 Corinthians 13:3*

Religious rules that tell you to attack unbelievers, pillage their goods, enslave them, put them in a degraded position underneath you (because they are all destined for hell anyway). These rules only

encourage the violent, hateful, prideful, dominating urges that arise out of the sinful flesh.

Religious rules that support rioting when God and his prophet are being dishonoured. On the surface this can look like a godly zeal to protect God’s honour, but in truth it is nothing more than a cover for the sinful flesh which is full of pride, and will not put up with any demeaning of itself. When people engage in ‘honour killing’ whose honour are they really seeking? Isn’t this just catering to the hatred and hostility carried by the sinful flesh?

Religious rules that tell you what to pray, and how to position your body in prayer. On the surface this can look like someone is submitting to God and worshipping him, but how often is this just a surface performance by which a person hides pride and a self-satisfied heart, deceiving both themselves and others?

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” *Matthew 15:7-9*

Religious teaching that says that if you are killed fighting for God (or blowing yourself up for God), then you will go to heaven and have endless sex with virgins. Is this not the height of being self-serving, and also a pandering to the sinful lusts of the flesh?

Religious teaching that says that if you recite certain words again and again, you will receive rewards, and forgiveness for sin. How does this teaching in any way address the deep level evil that resides in the human heart? How does this teaching lead anyone

into a state of true repentance, where a person is cut to the heart over their evil behaviour?

The evil and ungodliness of the human heart is central to Christian teaching, as is the total incapacity of people to clean up their heart.

This is because a dead person cannot make themselves alive again, and the Bible is clear that the human person in their natural state is 'dead' in their sin.

And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
Ephesians 2:1-3

A dead person cannot bring themselves alive, only **God** can and does. He does this by first sending his **Son** to pay the penalty of our sin by dying on the cross (Jesus takes our place and is punished for our sin), and then by sending the **Holy Spirit** to come and live within us. The Holy Spirit makes us alive to God. He gives us a new heart; he makes us a new creation. The sign that this has truly happened is that we are now believing in Jesus Christ, and putting our faith and trust in him, and the forgiveness he has won for us.

Having now made us alive to God, **the Holy Spirit continues his work in us** because although the Christian now has a new heart, he still also carries within him the 'sinful flesh', that old ungodly,

rebellious energy. The Christian, now alive, is called to 'keep in step' with the Holy Spirit (listen to and cooperate with the Holy Spirit), to keep daily 'putting to death' the energy of sin within. The Holy Spirit within will show the Christian the true depth of the ungodliness still remaining within them. The Holy Spirit will convict them and bring them to true repentance. He will bring about a true turning away from that which displeases God. *In all this the Christian will be greatly humbled because they will know they are nowhere near as good as they would like to think they are, and are totally reliant on the love and mercy and power of God at work through Jesus Christ, and at work through the Holy Spirit.*

Attempting godliness and goodness, outside of trusting in Jesus Christ and responding to the indwelling Holy Spirit, is self-made religion. Here the person remains 'dead' in their sin, 'dead' to God. Here the rebellious sinful flesh remains in control.

'For **the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God**, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**' *Romans 8:7-8*

'But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.' *Galatians 5:16-17*



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