



### **Reflections of a Zealot**

Acts 26:9-18

**Message from Pastor Martin Hawley**

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**Bottom Line: Religion exists to control you. Jesus came to restore you.**

#### **Introduction:**

How many people do you know that had a bad experience with organized religion at some point in life and walked away from church, and if they ever came back, they had a difficult time doing so?

Religion is under attack, and understandably so.

#### **Religion has brought about its own demise.**

Religion has been the fuel behind every imaginable human rights violation.

In the United States, religion (Christianity specifically) is often equated with arrogance and intolerance.

When evil or intolerance is perpetrated in the name of religion, the issue is power, control, and dominance. It is always an attempt to manipulate people for the pleasure of some king, pope, pastor, priest, cleric, or imam.

Somebody wants to sell us something!

The problem is that we (people) want to leverage and use religion, faith, and even God for our own selfish ends.

- I want God to bless my family.
- I want God to keep us safe.
- I want God to make me successful.
- I want God to make my team win.

If you can show me how to get God to make any of this happen, I'll buy your book, attend your service, pray your prayers, chant your mantras, or even blow myself up.

### **In spite of all that, religion isn't going away.**

People want to know who God is. We know there's more to life than what we see.

We want to know where we stand with God, and we will believe and pursue just about anyone who speaks authoritatively in the name of God even if there's goofy stuff and strange things said.

### **But then, there's Jesus.**

With Jesus... You don't find any of the drama associated with religion.

- He was intolerant but only of religious hypocrisy.
- He leveraged His power but only for the powerless, the sinner, and the sick.
- He never used violence to further his message.
- He came to serve not be served.

In the first century, here's a story about a guy whose religious zeal led him to Taliban-type activities. Then, he lost his religion and became a follower of Jesus.

(Read Acts 26:9-18)

**Insight:** Religion is about *fitting in with a group* by buying into a way of thinking and behaving. Christianity is about *fitting in with God*.

This is why it does not begin with *doing* something but *receiving* something: Forgiveness.

What puts us at odds with God is unforgiven sin. Fitting in with God begins with forgiveness.

**Insight:** Religion often exists to **control** you. Jesus came to **restore** you.

Jesus came to answer the questions your soul asks:

- Who is God? *Father*
- Has he revealed himself? *In Jesus*.
- Does he know my name? *If he knows your sins, he knows your name. If he offers to forgive you, he will forgive you by*

*name.*

### **Conclusion:**

If you have given up on religion or continue to bounce around from religion to religion trying to get those three questions answered, I want to invite you to follow Jesus. Move in his direction.

Our mission is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Because that's what Jesus came to do. He came to extend the offer of relationships and restoration to God.

### **NEXT STEPS:**

- Memorize: Acts 26:18.**
- Pastor, today I have decided to follow Jesus.**
- Pastor, I want to learn more.**
  - Sign me up for Starting Point on Tuesday night.**
  - Sign me up for Community Group on Thursday night.**
- I will be here next week for part 2 of Losing Your Religion.**

### **NEXT WEEK— LOSING YOUR RELIGION: JUST IN CASE**

Jesus did not show up to give answers as much as to be the answer. Religion asks, "Who's right?" Christianity asks, "Who's Jesus?" Religion asks, "What's true?" Christianity asks, "What happened?"