

Dear friend,

I am writing to you today from Haiti. We have come here believing for a word from God to strengthen pastors who have had to cope with their own losses, while still ministering to those entrusted to their care. There are many stories of outstanding spiritual courage here. The one thing I am able to say with certainty is that those who have walked in truth have been sustained by an incredible grace and presence of Jesus.

The tent cities we've been in have such a hopeless outward appearance that I imagine if hell had a waiting room, this is close to what it would physically look like. There is such misery and despair—except for one distinct thing. Many people here are still praising God! It is like walking back into history where people praised in the Roman arena, and as the text of Hebrews says: "*Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions...*" (Hebrews 11:33). This is the fruit promised to those who walk in truth.

I am humbled by being here and deeply challenged to rise to the levels of faith that my eyes have seen. I truly believe that with God, all things are possible.

Be encouraged. Jesus will never fail you.

Yours in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

WHEN SIN AND RELIGION BECOME FRIENDS

by Carter Conlon

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"
(Matthew 6:22–23).

What did Jesus mean when He said, "If the light that is in you be darkness?" Taken in context, we see that He was speaking about the impossibility of serving two masters at the same time. He continued, "...either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus used the example of money here, but He was illustrating a much deeper principle—a struggle that all of us face from time to time. It occurs when we come to even a minimal understanding of the ways of God, yet in our own hearts think we know a better way. For instance, when we believe we can secure a better future if we simply follow our own reasoning. Or when we believe we can achieve greater happiness if we don't take the pathway God has prescribed, but instead take an easier and more attractive one. In other words, it is the constant struggle between either serving God or serving ourselves as god.

It is possible to have a clear vision of what is of true value, yet still choose to set our affections on something we

know to be potentially harmful. It is possible to sit under the Word of God, to know what He is saying, but inside still wonder, "How close can I get to the fence before I am outside? How close can I walk to the line before I am rejected? How much do I really need to obey God?"

■ CHOOSING ANOTHER PATHWAY

In the book of Ezekiel, a prophecy was given to the king of Tyrus; this is believed by many to actually refer to the fall of Satan and his subsequent corrupting of the human race. The Lord said through Ezekiel, "You have been in Eden, the garden of God, and every precious stone was your covering. You had an anointing, and you were put in an appointed place. You walked in the presence of God—in holy places with an unhindered view of who God really is. You were perfect in your ways until the very ability which I gave you corrupted you" (see Ezekiel 28:13–15).

Satan was in the presence of God and had an unrestricted view of the perfect Light. The Scriptures seem to bear witness that there was a specific beauty about Satan. He was granted great gifts and was perhaps one of the finer created beings in heaven at that particular moment. However, these very gifts from God corrupted him, which we see occur in the human race over and over again.

For example, people with brilliant minds become absolutely corrupted

by that intellect, using the thought process to stray farther and farther away from the kingdom of God.

Just as Satan had an unrestricted view of the Lord, we as children of God have the Holy Spirit within us, enabling us to understand the Scriptures and discern between right and wrong. So in another measure, we too have an unrestricted view of God. That means if we want truth, we can have it; if we want freedom, it can be ours; if we want life, it is promised.

Even with the pureness of that Light before him, Satan chose another pathway, following his own reasoning. He began to chafe at what he considered to be narrowness, convinced that he knew a better way. He mistakenly believed that he could be his own god, create his own reality, and live by his own concept of right and wrong. That was his downfall.

Cast out of heaven, Satan then came down to Adam and Eve and sowed his own logic into the human race. “Listen, God created you and put you in this garden tending these plants and naming a few animals, but don’t you think you were created for more than this? If you just do it my way, you can become as gods, knowing what is good and evil. I know God says that certain things are good and certain things are evil, but you don’t have to live in this narrow way.”

In his own mind, Satan had become god, the same danger you and I face today. He sowed into all of humanity this desire to be as God—to create our own concept of good and evil. An example of this would be when we refuse to forgive a person who has wronged us and conclude, “It is fine that I have not forgiven him. I know what God says, but this person just does not deserve to be forgiven.” Or when we steal in the workplace and say, “They don’t pay me enough, and last year I did not get that vacation I deserve, so this is good.”

All the while we are well aware that the Scripture says no thief will inherit the kingdom of God.

Beloved, there is no deeper darkness than when sin and religion become friends. There is incredible power in this deceptive state. The Bible tells us that Satan succeeded in taking one-third of the angels with him in his rebellion, and he is still at work today attempting to incite a similar rebellion among those who claim to be followers of Christ.

There is no greater darkness than when that which is inwardly corrupt takes on a covering of religion.

■ A COVERING OF RELIGION

As the apostle Paul put it, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness*” (Romans 1:18). In other words, they hold the truth with a heart that is not surrendered. They read God’s Word but will not obey it, even when it is plain and clear.

“...they worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator... and God gave them over to a reprobate mind...” (Romans 1:25, 28). A reprobate mind means corrupt thinking, a crooked mind. You and I should always pray that we never reach such a point! Unfortunately, I have met people like this—sitting in the house of God with all kinds of practices that are very clearly prohibited in Scripture. Yet after years of refusing to obey God, it is almost as if their thinking cannot

be straightened. They choose instead to worship the thoughts of their own hearts, and sin and religion eventually become friends, bringing them to a place where they begin to call evil good.

There is no greater darkness than when that which is inwardly corrupt takes on a covering of religion. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?*” (Matthew 23:33). In other words, “You have so covered yourselves in corruption and religion that you have bought yourselves a ticket to hell. How will you escape? How will you change? You have embraced this corrupted reasoning of Satan, covering death and decay with fine clothing and sweet religious words, but inwardly you hate God!”

At another point, Jesus also said to them, “*You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning...*” (John 8:44). He basically told the Pharisees, “I know that you are going to kill Me. I have come to you with words from God to bring you into freedom, but you have fallen for the deceptive strategy of Satan. Now you are entrenched in a wrong way of thinking, leaving you with two alternatives—either you will repent of your sin, or you will kill the voice that has been sent to draw you to the presence of God.”

It is amazing when sin and religion combine. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “If the light that is in you be darkness—if you have sat under truth but embraced a lie—how deep that darkness is.” It would be better to be the most overt, reprehensible sinner and know it; at least then you would have a chance to be redeemed. Unfortunately, many people reach a place where they sit in the house of God, having put on a covering of religion while embracing a wrong view of God and His ways.

■ KORAH'S REBELLION

The Lord gives us another picture of this intertwining of sin and religion in the book of Numbers. As Moses was leading the people of God through the wilderness, a man named Korah succeeded in rousing two hundred and fifty of the Israelites to stand in opposition to divine order and God's leadership through Moses.

Do you understand the power of your own heart to deceive you?

As Korah assembled those in rebellion, *"So they each took his own censer and put fire on it, and laid incense on it; and they stood at the doorway of the tent of meeting..."* (Numbers 16:18, NASB). There they stood, each holding a censer—a type of prayer and holy devotion to God—completely unaware that they were about to be burned by the presence of God. Notice that the Scripture says they were men of renown! How did they get to that state?

Recall that God supernaturally brought the children of Israel out from slavery in Egypt, and along with the deliverance imparted giftings and leadership ability. However, this led to an inner corruption, and all it took was for Satan to use that strategy once again and say, "This is too narrow! Think of the glory that could be yours! You are meant to lead, you are not meant to follow!"

Do you understand the power of your own heart to deceive you? Each of us has an inner capability to walk away from God and develop completely corrupted scriptural reasoning around it. Bear in mind that it was the most religious nation on earth that cried out for the death of the Son of God. They had the Scriptures and a revelation of God if they had

wanted it. They chose, instead, to form a religion to cover their inner corruption. Jesus looked at the leaders and said, "You appear righteous but you are full of death inside. You clean the outside of the cup, but inwardly there is simply decay" (see Matthew 23:25). Just as they had a choice, today you and I must decide either to believe God and what He says, or to embrace ourselves as God, considering our own covering as sufficient.

■ IF YOUR EYE IS SINGLE

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:4–5). It is important to realize that the light shone in a religious darkness—that was the darkness that didn't comprehend it. Isn't it strange that the lepers comprehended it, the prostitutes responded to it, and even the dead could hear it? Yet religion has a certain death about it, making it almost impossible to hear the voice of God.

"...if your eye be single, your whole body will be full of light" (Matthew 6:22). You will not be in darkness if you are singly focused, standing before God, saying, "Lord, whatever You say is wrong, I will regard as wrong; and whatever You say is right, I will follow. By Your Spirit I will do what You ask me to, and wherever You lead me, I will follow."

Paul spoke these words regarding Israel, *"But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 3:14). Religion had blinded their minds, and they had created a system operating outside of truth.

"But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:15–16).

Yes, a day is coming when Israel will turn to the Lord, but this is also a principle that applies to us today. When we turn to the Lord, the veil that hinders us from the fullness of life that God offers us is taken away. *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 3:17–18). Here the meaning of "liberty" is generosity. As we are willing to surrender with an honest heart before God, we suddenly become aware of His incredible generosity. The Lord says, "I am willing to give you a new heart and a new mind. I am willing to put love, joy, and longsuffering inside of you. I am willing to give you peace in the midst of the storm; strength in the midst of your weakness. I am willing to do what cannot be done apart from My strength within you."

What is God telling you to forsake, and what is He calling you to go toward?

We are changed from glory to glory as we behold Him, and the veil of incomplete religion and deceptive reasoning of the human heart is taken away. Our hearts are changed, and the whole focus of our lives is to honor God and see fallen men brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is a miraculous life that we enter into. Religion is obnoxious and ultimately leads to death, but in Christ is life, joy and peace.

"If your eye be single, your whole body will be full of light." In other

words, every chain, every wall, every enemy, and every power of hell begins to be broken. You will be given strength that can come only from the Lord, and your body will be a declaration of His keeping power. Your whole body—everything you are, all that you say, whatever you touch, everything you do—will become an expression of God. Your entire body will be full of light if you choose to do things God’s way.

I encourage you today to do what you know God says is right and to forsake all that you know to be wrong, no matter how difficult it may be.

■ WHAT IS GOD SPEAKING TO YOU?

So now the question arises: What is God telling you to forsake, and what is He calling you to go toward? There is a distinct call to each of us, and this is where we will either cover sin with religion, or throw off that false garment and move toward a holy God, saying, “Lord, I am going where you are calling me. I will not create a religion in my own heart that allows me to move in the direction of death, thinking it is life. I will walk the pathway that You have set before me.”

Beloved, don’t fall into the religious trap of becoming your own god and justifying wrong. Don’t put off what

God has called you to do, for the more you put it off, the greater the chance that you will make peace with it and eventually call it good. If you are under conviction, if you are reading your Bible and the Holy Spirit has His finger very clearly on an area of your life, don’t harden your heart to His voice! Over time you will end up making peace with it—covering it and calling it holy, as is the habit of our fallen nature.

I encourage you today to do what you know God says is right and to forsake all that you know to be wrong, no matter how difficult it may be. We all are going to need the strength of Christ to get through the coming days. We will need our inheritance in Christ, which God desires to give to us—but everything that is a reproach to God must be put away. As we make the choice to do things God’s way, allowing no friendship between sin and religion in our lives, the absolute outworking of it will be joy and strength, direction in the storm, provision in famine, victory in the battle. Hallelujah!

Carter Conlon
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This newsletter is an edited version of “WHEN SIN AND RELIGION BECOME FRIENDS” a sermon given on **October 17, 2010** in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. You are welcome to make additional copies of this sermon for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission existing copyright laws apply. This sermon cannot be posted on any website or webpage without permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the King James Version.

CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	