



**Amir Tsafati**  
**It is Not About Religion Brother**  
<https://youtu.be/Fz31Z3n0hbA>



Good morning from the city of Rome, and behind me is the Vatican City. It's actually not just a city, it's a state. This is the smallest state in the world by population and by landmass; a hundred and ten acres only, a thousand people are citizens only, and this is a country that is not even a sovereign country because the sovereign of the country is the Holy See, the Pope himself. Actually, this is the only country on planet Earth that is not run by a government but by a church. And that, of course, brings us to that very large rotunda, that large dome of the famous St. Peter's Basilica, a sacred place for 1.3 billion people worldwide making it one of the most sought-after and most visited locations on planet Earth. This is, by the way, not the first St. Peter's Basilica. The original St. Peter church was built here in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by the first



Christian Emperor, Constantine. It took him 30 years to build a beautiful Basilica-shaped church, a church that lasted nearly a thousand years. We're talking about a church where all the coronations of the different popes took place in it, including in the year 800 AD. On December 25<sup>th</sup>, the coronation of King Charles I, who was the first king of the Holy Roman Empire. And I know it sounds strange to some of you, but when the Roman Empire disintegrated and when it was gone from the map—for about 500 years we don't hear about it—then we hear about it once again in the year 800 AD when King Charles unified parts of Italy and Germany and France and created for the first time after the fall of the ancient Roman Empire, once again the ruling of one Western European leader to rule over Western Europe. And thus, the name the Holy Roman Empire was

given because the coronation was done at the older church that was standing here, and that was of course at the year 880 AD and lasted until 1806. Ladies and gentlemen, it was only Napoleon who abolished the Holy Roman Empire.

Now many of you may not know that but, the heart of the Holy Roman Empire was Germany of today, and it is considered to be the First Reich, the First Reich. Everybody knows that Hitler started the Third Reich, but nobody stopped to think, wait a minute, what about the first or the second? Well, the first one was the one that lasted more than a thousand years, and it started here in the city of Rome. And the reason why it's important that I mention that is because in many of my teachings, I'm talking about the future world leader that is going to be from the revived Roman Empire, and is going to be from Western Europe, from the region of where I believe even Germany is today. So, we're definitely in the heart of Western Europe in a very significant place.

Now this particular church that we see behind us was built starting from the mid-1400s,



and for the next 120 years, different popes and different architects and different artists would be engaged in the construction of one of the most amazing structures that the world had known in those days. The first pope that actually started

thinking that there has to be a new one (church), the old one is falling apart, is Pope Gregory V. And Gregory V never lived to see the construction of this church, but he did live to see the creation of the foundation of it.

And now comes a very interesting detail. In order to get building material—there was a shortage of building material in Rome in those days—and in order to get that he ordered the dismantling of the Colosseum. And today when you visit the Colosseum and you see that almost

half of it is gone, it's because Pope Gregory V managed to bring across the Tiber, 2,500 carts loaded with stones from the Colosseum.

Now it's very interesting because when you go to the Colosseum, you know that it was originally, constructed in 72 AD, it was built from the spoils of war. That's what Caesar Titus himself acknowledged, from the spoils of war, the war that he had just about a year and a half earlier was the war against the Jewish people in Jerusalem in which he not only destroyed their



temple, but also took all of their treasures. And he managed to make it very clear to the whole world that he did so by placing the arch of victory of Titus (Arch of Titus) just across from the Colosseum. And it's interesting because in the inner part of that arch, the entire procession of Jewish slaves carrying the treasures of the temple were taken to the Colosseum. What I'm trying to say is this: the Colosseum was built from the sack or from the spoils of war in Jerusalem. And later on, believe it or not, nearly 1400 years later, the Vatican's Basilica is constructed from stones taken from the Colosseum. My point is clear, you can even find a direct line between the fall of Jerusalem and the rise of this particular Basilica just by ways of the building material itself.

Now I want you to understand that what we're looking at right here is an amazing structure

that is situated right across from another amazing structure that used to be the tallest building of



Rome until Saint Peter's Basilica used to stand, and that is of course St. San Angelo, which is the Holy Angel, basically. We're talking about the archangel Michael



whose statue was situated on top, the bronze statue was situated in the 1700s in memory of Pope Gregory, who in the fifth century had a vision that the archangel Michael is the one who put an end to a very severe plague that afflicted Rome and killed many. And you can see that that angel over there is sheathing his sword as if,

“I just finished putting an end to that plague right now.” In memory of that vision, that angel is there, but originally this whole structure is actually a structure from the second century. This is the mausoleum of the Caesar who destroyed Jerusalem in the second century. Once again, you see the destruction of Jerusalem somehow connected even to this structure.

Caesar Hadrian (also spelled Adrian) who reigned in the middle of the second century is the one who leveled Jerusalem. Now he's not the one who destroyed the temple, the temple was destroyed in 70 AD by Titus, but he's the one who destroyed the *city* of Jerusalem, leveled it to the ground, and built on top a city called “Aelia Capitolina.” And Caesar Hadrian is the one who even coined the name Palestine. The name Palestine was not a name that anybody ever used [except by] the land of the Philistines used in the Old Testament to describe the Philistines. It is Adrian who decided to name the land of Israel after the Old Testament foes of the Jews in order to humiliate the Jews because the Jews somehow dared to rebel against him between 132 and 135 AD. In fact, this particular coin that I'm wearing on my necklace is a coin that has the palm tree



on it. This is a coin minted by the Jewish rebels in the second century rebellion against Caesar Hadrian. And so, you can clearly see that not only that we know that there was a rebellion, not only that we know that Caesar Hadrian quenched it, but we are even having today tons of artifacts

from that time. And Hadrian himself, his ashes are buried right here, the ashes of his wife and of his adopted son and, of course, of other Caesars that came after that including Caesar Caracalla, who is the one, by the way, to build the largest bathhouse in Rome of those days. A bathhouse, by the way, that inspired the architect of Penn Station in New York City, and I'm talking about the old Penn Station that was destroyed in 1963. So, we're talking about a very significant building that later on, once this particular building was erected in the 1500s, it changed into a castle and also a refuge place for popes. And how will a pope in a time of trouble get from St. Peter to San Angelo? There was the Passetto, the 800-meter-long passage. The Passetto at least on two occasions served as an escape route for popes in danger. Pope Alexander VI crossed it in 1494 when Charles VIII invaded the city and the Pope's life was in peril. But the more famous one is, of course, Clement VII that escaped to safety through this passage during the sack of Rome in 1527 when troops of the Holy Roman Emperor, the one that originally was crowned here in 800 AD, but this time it was Charles V massacred almost the entire Swiss Guard on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica. So, we understand that these two buildings carry a very significant role in the history of the Holy See here in Rome. And we understand that they are connected with that Passetto, which stands up until today.

Now today, we didn't come to talk just about the Vatican or San Angelo or the passage between the two; we came to talk about the fact that over 1.3 billion people belong to a religion that claims to be the real true Christian Church. We're talking about a religion that claims that its leaders are the descendants and the successors of the Apostles, and its top leader is the successor of Peter himself. And that, of course, is why we call the church St. Peter, and in the inner part of the rotunda, the verse is from **Matthew 16:18**, "...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church..." They took that literally as if Peter is the rock, and upon Peter, the church will be

built, and of course, this church is marking the place. A very important detail is that the Vatican today is situated in the area known as Trastevere, which is [literally], “across the Tiber.” In the ancient times, this would be the poorer side, and in many cases, outside of the Aurelian City Walls, which means it’s outside of ancient Rome and away from the center of government of Rome at the time of the republic.

It’s interesting because if you go back to the first century, the Vatican never existed, Catholicism did not even exist, there was no Catholic Church; if anything, we know there were roughly five *synagogues* in this area. There was a great Jewish community living in Rome and at the time, that would be the area where they lived. Trastevere, across the Tiber, in that area. So, when we come to talk about the letter of Paul to the Romans, you need to keep in mind he is not talking to a church that was something that evolved or something that was the root of the Catholic Church. He’s actually talking to people that have the knowledge of the Law, the Law of Moses. In fact, in **Romans 7:1**, Paul says, “**Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?**” Paul talks to the people of Rome, to the church of Rome, with the understanding that the church of Rome is actually made of predominantly Jewish people who became believers in Jesus as Messiah as a result of the exposure to the gospel, and these particular people know the Law. They understand the Law of Moses. Bear in mind, Gentile pagans did not have a clue about the Law of Moses, and bear in mind for them in those days—and we’re going to touch that when we talk about the unknown god of the pagans in Athens—for them, there is no one God. For them, there is no creation; there is evolution. And for them, if there are any gods, they’re far, remote, and they are not in any direct contact with us human beings. So, my point is this: throughout the entire letter of Paul to the Romans, we must keep in mind there was no St. Peter here. There was no St. Angelo here. There were synagogues

in this area. There was a Jewish community in this area. And Paul makes it very, very clear that he wants them to understand the message of the Messiah. It's as clear as it can be. And Paul had a big problem with religion.

The title of the message this morning is "It's Not About Religion Brother." And it's because Paul, who came out of the Jewish religion, who was a Pharisee, who was someone who persecuted, who the Bible says created havoc, he had a problem with religion. Why is it? By the way, the word religion, just so we understand, does not appear in the Bible; not at all. Religion is a man-made thing. It's a way that man created to somehow express his faith or his belief in a higher entity. But that word does not exist in the Old Testament at all. So, there was no Jewish religion at the time, and of course, Christianity was never meant to be a religion also, but rather a way of life. In fact, the Bible says in **Acts 9:1-2**, "<sup>1</sup> Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or woman, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." It wasn't a religion; it was a Way. They were called the Way. He could have mentioned, "...if anyone who belonged to the newly founded world religion, Christianity, then get them bound to Jerusalem." But no, it wasn't so. In fact, they didn't even talk to them as if they are no longer Jews. They are Jews who now are taking the Way. That's interesting because now we may understand why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and life." (John 14:6) He didn't say, "I'm the founder of a new religion; believe in me. Now I'm the new thing." No. "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

And when Paul is writing to the Romans, in **Romans 3:1-4**, he's telling the Romans, "<sup>1</sup> What advantage then has the Jew," Why would Paul talk to the Romans about the Jews? "...or what is the profit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were

**committed the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup>For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? <sup>4</sup>Certainly not!”** Paul is telling the Romans, listen, you must understand that the Jewish people are not to be replaced nor to be ignored. They do have a great advantage [because] to them were committed the oracles of God. And I was wondering what [are] the oracles of God? By the way, the Greek word is the *logia*, which means from the *logos*, the Word of God. And it’s interesting because the oracles of God are the Word of God and they appear in Acts 7:38, in Hebrews 5:12, in 1 Peter 4:11, in Romans 3:2, what we just talked about, in Deuteronomy 4:7-8, and in Psalm 147:19 and 20. In fact, allow me to read from the book of Psalms, **Psalm 147:19-20**. The Bible says, “<sup>19</sup>**He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. <sup>20</sup>He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His judgments, they have not known them.**” In other words, no other nation on planet earth received the Word of God to keep and then it later on to deliver. It was one of the roles of Israel, for which Israel was chosen.

It’s interesting because the entire focus is not about religion; it’s about the Word of God. The question is: what is it that you are doing with the Word of God? Not, what is it that you’re doing with your tradition, what is it that you’re doing with your “thing”; what is it that you’re doing with the Word of God? Now isn’t that interesting that when you not only know the Word but also understand it, that’s when everything makes sense. But the question is do you really know and understand it?

Throughout the entire Bible, God, on one hand, gave the people of Israel oracles, His Word, His commandments, but at the same time He kept telling them that obedience is better than sacrifice, obedience is better than sacrifice. God is telling the people of Israel then, as much as he is telling the world today, sacrifice means nothing when our heart is not right. **Isaiah 1:11-15**, the

prophet Isaiah is telling the people of Israel, he is telling: ““<sup>11</sup> **To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?**” says the LORD. ‘**I have enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of the fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.**’<sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before Me, who has requested this from your hand, to trample My courts?

<sup>13</sup> **Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of the assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.**

<sup>14</sup> **Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates;...”**

Can you imagine as a Jewish person going to synagogue every Saturday or every holiday; for me, when I read Isaiah for the first time—in Isaiah chapter 1—to read what God says to the people of Israel: I hate your Sabbaths, your New Moons, your festivals. “Wait a minute; what do you mean You hate? You gave it to us! You’re the one who said, ‘I want you to keep the Sabbath; I want you to keep the holidays.’ So, what is it that You hate?” God says, “Well, you guys, you understand; I do not delight in this, when your hands are full of blood.” He says, “I don’t need all of this.” God is not a God that sits on the throne and needs some sacrifices all day long from people [whose] heart is not right before Him. And with all due respect, you see that in Judaism of those days, as much as you see that in Judaism of today, as much as you see that in Catholicism of today, as much as you can see that also in any other religion of today. Corruption is everywhere. When the people do not follow the Word of God, but they don’t know God personally! And it’s interesting because God says, to the people of God whom He chose, “I do not want you to celebrate those things when your heart is not there.” He says to them, ““<sup>14</sup> **Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.**”<sup>15</sup> **When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.””**

Wow! God is telling the people of the world even today, going to church will not make you a Christian just as much as standing in your parking lot will not make you a car, or being in a chicken house will not turn you into a chicken. It's not about where you go and what you say and how you behave. Everyone can act; people are actors nowadays. On social media everybody is his own director and actor at the same time. Ladies and gentlemen, God told His people: "I'm God, unlike man, I don't look at the outer appearance. I look at the heart." When He sent Samuel to anoint a new king to Israel, and Samuel, of course, goes to all the brothers of David, he doesn't even think for a second that David is the one. God says to Samuel, "Samuel, stop looking at them by the way they look. This is not Me. The people chose Saul as king because he's tall and handsome. I'm looking at the heart, and as far as I'm concerned, David, that little boy who is a shepherd..." Nobody likes shepherds in those days, they stunk. "...he is the one; he has a heart that I like and in David, him I know; I know David." By all means, David would have been condemned by religious people today. David would have been stoned to death for what he did by religious people today. But God understands that it's not about perfect people. God, by the way, never looked for perfect people because there's none. The Bible says, the Lord looks from heaven, looks down at man, at the sons of man. Is there anyone who is righteous? Not even one. So, God already understands from Genesis 2 and 3 that men are fallen creatures and they need salvation, they need redemption obviously. And David, what made him so great is not that he was perfect, it is the fact that he understood and acknowledged his imperfect nature and the understanding that he needs the Spirit of God not to leave him, that he needs God, that he wants the intimacy with God more than anything else.

**Psalm 51:5-14, 19**, David acknowledges his sinful nature. He says, "<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity. And in sin my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in

the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.<sup>8</sup> Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.<sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.” And David concluded this song by saying, “<sup>19</sup> Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.” Only once our conscience is clean, only once we acknowledge our sinful nature, only once we [have] repented, and only once we [have] received the Holy Spirit and are enjoying the joy of His salvation, only *then* God will accept our sacrifices.

And it's very interesting because I've seen a lot of churches across the world, and I've seen a lot of big structures. Millions of U.S. dollars were poured in construction of church buildings, and nice bands and nice, you know... but somewhere, at some point, you see that a building will not necessarily have the Spirit of God in it. God was okay with the Jewish people building a temple. He never asked them too, by the way, but He said, “Okay, David, do you want to build a house for Me? You can't do it, but your son can.” And Solomon immediately did that. But did you know that shortly after, the Bible says in the book of Ezekiel that the Spirit of God departed from the house of God. They kept serving God. They kept slaughtering animals and sacrificing animals. They kept doing all that the rituals every year, every month, every week; God was not there. God

left the house of God. Structures such as this, such as the one in Jerusalem are not impressive to God if the people inside do not worship Him in spirit and in truth. They could be still standing, yet the Spirit of God is not going to be there because it's not about religion. It's not about sacrifices.



God says, “When you bring all of these things and your heart is not right, I’m going to hide My face from you. I’m not going to be there. I’m not going to listen to your prayers. I’m not going to look at you even. This is not what I want.

I want something completely different.”

In **Romans 3:21-31**, Paul is telling the people after he said that the Jews have an advantage by having the Word of God, the oracles of God, he says, “<sup>21</sup>**But now...**” Can you say that? “<sup>21</sup>**But now...**” In other words, Christ came to the world and, “...**now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,** <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over...” We just celebrated Passover, “**God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,** <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Nothing that religion will tell you will lead you to salvation [or will] ever save you. Salvation is a free thing that can only come by faith and faith alone. By what? Faith in the finished work on the cross 2,000 years

ago. You cannot cause God to love you more than He already loved you when He sent His only begotten Son to die so you will not die. And the Bible says, “<sup>30</sup> ...since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” (Romans 3:30-31) What Paul says is this: “I’m not giving you a new thing. The Word of God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I’m just explaining to you what it meant all along, and you missed it.” The Law was never meant to be fulfilled by men. We are unable to fulfill the Law. It’s impossible to fulfill the Law. Christ came to fulfill the Law so we will not be standing guilty anymore because He already did it. He already took the blame and took all of our sins on Him so we will not be blamed. We are now blameless. He presents us blameless before God as He sits at the right hand of God the Father.

Now the Jewish people who lived in Rome or in Jerusalem at the time, as much as they are today, the Bible says that they are blinded; blinded, by the way, by whom? Blinded by God. Why? Because they hardened their hearts. They didn’t want to believe at the time, as much as today, by the way, and so God is the one the Bible says in Romans chapter 11 who gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that cannot see, and ears that they cannot hear. So, blindness, in part, has happened to Israel, the Bible says. But the question is: Can a Christian be blind as well? Well, I believe so. The Bible says in **1 John 2:11**, “**But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he’s going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**” In other words, you cannot call yourself a believer in the Word of God and yet be contrary to the Word of God of loving one another. In other words, that blindness is, of course, from the enemy, and that hatred is, of course, from the enemy.

I would like to direct your attention to the Epistle, to chapter 2, of Colossians. Colossians is telling us something very interesting in regard to justification and legalism. **Colossians 2:16-23**, the Bible says this, and remember religion is all about do not eat this, do not eat that, do not do that, do not do that and look what it says, “**16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are...**” What? “**a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourself to regulations—...**” You see? It’s *against* religion and religious spirits, “**21 ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”**

So, we understand religion is certainly not the answer. And back to the Vatican, is that what Jesus had in mind when he sent the apostles? Walk into the Basilica, you’re going to see the throne of Peter. Last time I checked, Peter was a fisherman in Galilee. Last time I checked, the minute he walked into the house of Cornelius in Caesarea and everybody bowed down before him, he said, “Please don’t! Stand up! I’m not God! Don’t do it! Do not worship people, worship God!” So, you see the worship of Mary, and the worship of Peter, and so many rules and regulations and traditions that crawled into all, is exactly what Jesus had in mind when He preached the good news.

So, let's conclude the message. It's all about the Word of God, and the Word of God came to this world and became flesh and dwelt among us. He came and gave the good news of salvation, and whoever believes in Him receives the free gift of the Holy Spirit; and when you have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God inside of you, then you understand the Word of God and the nature of God, then you receive a new heart and you become a new creation. It's not about religion, brother. It is about relationship. You need the Holy Spirit. You need to be born again, and you need to become a new creation in Christ Jesus, Amen.



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\* *Scripture is taken from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise.*

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