



*Breaking the Rules: Trading Performance for Intimacy with God*, 220 pages, hardcover, 978-0-8308-3537-9, \$22  
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## Is Your Faith in God or Religion?

The tragic truth is: My religion lied to me. It lied when it told me that the best way to live was with rules, systems and formulas. It misled me when it reduced following Jesus to religion—a system where performance is substituted for faithful trusting, where rules take precedence over grace. It lied when it declared that being a Christian depended on me. It deceived me when it suggested that living in relationship with Jesus demanded that I become a better person. It failed when it didn't make clear that life with Jesus is more about him and less about me.

The most lethal thing about my religion is that it offered assurance it did not provide. For that reason, as strange as it may seem, an atheist may have been in a safer position than me. At least the atheist would not have been living a lie, falsely believing he or she is in a relationship with God. The deadly mistake religion led me into was relying on it to give to me what it could not offer.

I now recall with delight an agonizing night, nearly twenty years ago, when I finally decided that I could no longer live this way. I was fed up and disgusted with my fraudulent life and was determined to change. Once again, in a nearly broken-down state, I asked God, "Have I ever really known you? Do I have a relationship with you, or is it simply religion that I have known?"

For years my allegiance was to good moral habits and churchly routines. Consequently, thinking that I was building a bridge to God, I instead erected a wall between myself and God and wound up living in the illusion that this constitutes a relationship with God. What I couldn't imagine is the truth that God's sole interest is our hearts, not our trivial expressions of reverence and respectability. What my religion prevented me from realizing is that God wants a relationship, and the only alliance that God enters into is one in which God is the total giver and we are the receiver.

The problem with religion is that it saddles us with an impossible task: mending our own errant ways. Religion leads us to believe that on our own we can achieve a relationship with God by doing something impossible: keeping all the rules and being very, very good. Therefore, and tragically so, people who make an apparent success of the religious life are often in the gravest danger of missing out on the gift they are striving hopelessly to obtain. Especially when they make the horrendous mistake of thinking that God and religion are the same, and in the end they make religion God.

—Adapted from chapter 1, "Is Your Faith in God or Religion?"