

RELIGION

Then the Lord said,
“Because this people draw near with their words
And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from Me,
And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,
Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous;
And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
And the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.”

(Isaiah 29:13, 14)

There are many religions in the world, and they have one common denominator—man reaching out to God in an effort to please Him. But religion can never satisfy God. It can neither remove sin nor is it able to change our sinful nature. I don't need to point a finger at any specific religion; my heart goes out to all men and women who are in the clutches of religion, for religion is like a poison.

Religion: Keeps one bound and shackled
 Keeps many from God
 Turns many away from God
 Blinds people to the truth
 Confuses and misleads
 Is based on outside performance
 Produces artificial fruit
 Hurts people
 Kills people
 Sends people to hell

My God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Creator of all, the Author of the Scriptures—the Bible. He is the God I believe, love, worship, praise and serve.

Many claim to be spiritual. They recognize the supernatural, but the word “spiritual” can mean almost anything. The last time I heard someone claiming to be “*very* spiritual” it turned out to be a person casting spells and poking needles in dolls. There are many different spirits and many different religions. There is nothing we are not capable of worshipping: all the heavenly hosts (sun, moon, stars . . .) or anything on earth (earth itself, fire, water, stones, animals, *self* or other people, images—anything created by human hands . . .) We sure let our imagination run wild in creating our own gods. Many try to worship the true God, but not in accordance with knowledge. It may surprise some, but there is a Christian religion devoid of the Holy Spirit. Jesus addressed these people, when He said,

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?”

And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

(Matthew 7:21–23)

To do the will of God is to put faith in Jesus.

The religious person is functioning on his own—without the leading of the Holy Spirit, and he or she is producing artificial fruit. That is all that people devoid of the Holy Spirit can do. They substitute true Christianity with religious activities: church services, ceremonies, traditions, sacraments, rituals, etc. Even a lost person can pray, attend church services, sing, read the Bible, teach the Bible, give money, witness, etc. These activities are good, but they are not proof that the one doing them is a true Christian.

So what is the visible proof of being a true Christian? Beloved, let us go to the Word of God for the answer. In the letter to the church in Galatia we read these verses:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

(Galatians 5:22–25)

These attributes are the results of abiding in Christ Jesus—walking in the Spirit. Jesus Himself produces in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We have to look at these qualities from God’s perspective. I will use love, joy, and peace as an example:

- **Love** that Jesus produces in us is God’s love—unconditional love. It is love which says, “I love you.” Period. No conditions, and no strings attached. God’s love is an act of will. Forgiving others from the heart is a by-product of God’s love and His total forgiveness.
- **Joy** is deep seated. It doesn’t waver. The truth that we are children of God, whose eternal life is guaranteed by God Himself, produces this kind of joy in us. It is joy that lifts us above **all** our earthly circumstances.

- **Peace** that God produces in us can be found only in Christ Jesus. It is peace in the middle of turmoil, because we are keeping our eyes on Jesus.

Religious people cannot produce this kind of fruit, no matter how hard they try and how much they like to convince themselves and others of their success. Once again, it is God who produces this kind of fruit in His children. Religious people may produce good works, they may be moral persons, but they are the most to be pitied. They are people steeped in religion, but never born of the Spirit—never born of God, never born from above.

Religious Person as Contrasted With a Christian

Religious person:

Substitutes religion for God

Is reaching out to God in effort to make himself righteous in His eyes

Tries to live life he doesn't possess

May have a zeal for God, but not according with knowledge

Works for his salvation

Is the biggest threat to truth; he is converted in his mind, but not in his heart

Is legalistic, self-righteous, proud and often without compassion and mercy

Produces artificial fruit

Never drank the living water of which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well and said that the one who drinks it will never thirst again.

He is always thirsty, always looking for something new.

Christian:

Has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ

Knows that God has reached out to him in Jesus Christ

Surrendered all rights to Jesus and lives through Him

Is indwelt by God and is getting to know his Father

Works out his salvation

Has the truth in him—Jesus

Is humble, loving, forgiving, and compassionate

Bears fruit; God produces the work—His work

Drank the living water—Jesus—and is satisfied

Will take the Word of God and work his own desires into it. Often for personal gain.

Reads the Word of God and lets the Holy Spirit lead him into all truth.

Those who settle for religion have a problem seeing the truth. Satan is the master of deception, and he creates religion. He is an expert in labeling the fundamental truths as lies. He blinds people to the truth and always surrenders truth with confusion. Then he presents the truth as a big lie. He will use anything and anyone to create doubts and chaos.

What I see to be a big problem is the fact that most Christians start “working” for God immediately after their conversion, and before they get to know their heavenly Father, and embrace His ways, His thoughts, and His desires.

As a brand new Christian I was asked to teach the Sunday school in the church I started to attend. To my response that I don’t know much yet, the minister assured me that “they” would tell me what to say. Well, if “they” would teach the truth, then I would be passing on the truth. Right? But if “they” would be bound in errors, I would be passing on errors. How would I ever know at that point, as a total babe in Christ? I passed on that offer, but it didn’t take too long for me to be involved in an evangelical crusade as a counselor, sing in a choir, and be a part of a witnessing team. I was on fire for Jesus. And no wonder; I just came from death to life, and I wanted to share Jesus with everyone. I am still on fire, but now I know the truth, and I am free, indeed!

Two years from the time I received Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior, I was more confused than at the beginning of my “Incredible Journey with Jesus.” The confusion came from the fact that on one hand, I was listening to people and their interpretation of the Word of God—being a part of religion—and on the other hand, I was reading the Bible and being taught by the Holy Spirit.

I wanted to start all over again. I prayed that God would remove from me everything that is not of Him. I went into seclusion for a few years, and God became my only teacher. I have always been a truth seeker, and one really has to diligently seek the truth, for many errors are already established as truths. That is why we have so many Christian denominations. **It is the error that divides us; the truth unites.**

Religious person promises people certain “things” and raises their hopes, which so often come crashing down. People may get mad at God because He didn’t “deliver.” Religious people tell you that if you do “this,” or “that,” or if you give enough money, that God will bless you. **If you are a true Christian, you are blessed already.** Keep that in mind.

Through the years as a Christian, I met and talked with many people claiming to be Christians. I don’t think anything can surprise me anymore. The statement “I cannot read the Bible for more than five minutes a day” came from a woman who answered my question, “How long have you been a Christian?” with “What can I tell you? I am a deaconess in the church; I was born with Jesus.” The same person called the apostle Paul a “women hater.” Mercy!

What stands out in my mind is a statement in a newsletter I received once from a church my husband and I were attending at that time. The following are the exact words:

“Every time our church door is open and you are not here, you are casting your voice against Jesus.” Mercy!

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

(1 John 2:27)

Discussing the above verse with our pastor and missionary friend, I received two different answers. The first time I was enlightened to the fact that this verse is only for men and not for women. Some time later I asked again and was told by the same teacher of the Bible that only mature Christians can be taught by God. Mercy!

I read of a man who believed that he was a Christian because he saw the face of Jesus on the moon once. Mercy!

One of the biggest atrocities coming from a religious person is a story about a man who was blind. Every Sunday upon entering the church he was attending for years, a Bible was put into his hands with words: “Maybe today you will have enough faith.” Mercy!

Zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge!

By now, I think, I have either heard or read it all! Nothing can surprise me, coming from us—humans! I could go on and on with stories similar to the ones I mentioned here. Let me just say one more thing. Don’t ever put people on a pedestal. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

So, What Is True Christianity?

We, the Christians, are people who heard the Good News (God reached out in love to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and provided a way for us to be with Him eternally), and by faith received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The gospel message is that Jesus accomplished the forgiveness of our sins when His blood was shed on our behalf, so He can offer His eternal life to us as a gift. Upon receiving Jesus and His resurrected life, we have received the forgiveness of sins. From then on we stand in the righteousness of Jesus. We are righteous, because the Righteous One lives in us. We have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and we live by faith in Him.

We, as Christians, are under “construction,” and in different stages of our walk with God. Jesus and His kingdom are not of this world, not of this realm. It takes time to grow in the knowledge of God, to grasp His unconditional love, acceptance, and total forgiveness. God has to renew our mind and teach us the spiritual meaning of His Word. It takes time for us to believe it; it takes more time to act upon it. We should never judge God by His people.

And [Jesus] said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honors Me with their lips,

But their heart is far away from Me.

But in vain do they worship Me,

Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’

“Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

(Mark 7:6–8)

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

(James 1:26, 27)