

## Are You Religious?

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What does it mean to be “Religious?” Many of you reading this that know me personally, might refer to me as being “Religious;” some of you would call me a lot of other things I am sure. I was brought up Catholic and Russian Orthodox when I was a child; nevertheless, I have found that the words “religion” and “religious” have different meanings to different people, even within the members of the various religions themselves. Someone caught my attention recently when they made the statement that “Christianity is not a religion.” Most people, when they think of religion, they relate to a group of people with specific beliefs and practices; this does coincide with the many descriptions or definitions one can find pertaining to religion, therefore, in order to be a member of a particular religion, that person would have to agree with, and follow the particular practices of that religion. Does that not describe Christianity? This is what caught my attention when I heard the statement, “Christianity is not a Religion,” as I am sure it probably got your attention as well, although perhaps from a different perspective. In order to understand the basis for this person’s statement, we must first analyze what many, if not most “Religions” have in common; then we must compare the differences between the various religions and what I will henceforth call, “True Christianity.”

Through the years, I have interfaced with people identifying with many various religions or “Faiths” as they are also sometimes referred to; these include those mentioned thus far, they also include Judaism, and the many variations of the “Protestant Faith.” I have also had discussions with people of the Muslim faith and Jehovah’s Witnesses as well although these deviate from the tenants of true Christian Doctrine. While all of these various religions have varying degrees of commonality, the question is, “Can the practitioners of these faiths, in fact be loyal to the practices of their faiths, yet not be what are considered to be True Christians?” While this is a simple question, it can indeed be a profound question as well! First we must define what it is to be a Christian. The term was first used in the book of Acts. **Acts 11:25-26 (NKJV)**<sup>25</sup> *Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.*<sup>26</sup> *And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.* Most people would describe a Christian as someone who believes in Jesus. While this is certainly true in a general sense, most people do not realize what the term “believe” means in the Biblical sense. Many, if not most people, use the term believe in a very superficial manner as simply acknowledging the existence of someone or something. The original Greek of the New Testament uses the following English words defining “Believe”: *commit unto, commit to (one's) trust, be committed unto, be put in trust with, be committed to one's trust* James Strong, Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch Corp., 2007) Therefore, when bible refers to one believing in Jesus, it means that they **trust in, cling to, rely on, have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.** The question we must ask ourselves regardless of what Faith or Religion we claim to follow, is “Do these definitions of belief apply to us when we say we are believers in Jesus, or do we rely more so on the traditions and rituals of our particular religion as opposed to faith in Jesus alone?”

**Selah... (Pause, dwell on that... think on that)**

While Judeo-Christian faiths “claim” our salvation is an act of The Grace of God towards sinful man, many impose strict rules on those who commit to their particular religion or faith, both before and after one might commit to said religion or faith. What does the Bible say? **Ephesians 2:8-10 (KJV)**<sup>8</sup> *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*<sup>9</sup> *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*<sup>10</sup> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Verse ten is eluding to “works” as being a result of knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior, not as a path to knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. So, is it possible that one can be religious, a person that adheres to the rules and regulations of a particular faith, yet not put their complete faith in Jesus for their salvation, even though their religion may indeed be rooted in Jesus and His provision for our salvation on the cross? The answer is yes; this unfortunately is what leads many people astray in their religious practices; they are taught that they **must do something** to earn what God has already completely provided as an act of Grace. What was one of the last things Jesus said before He died on the cross... “It Is Finished!” With that in mind, what is left to do?

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If any of us could earn our way into Heaven by adhering to rules and regulations, the question now is, "Why did Jesus die on the cross?" While most true Christian Churches will acknowledge that salvation is in fact a gift from God, even some of them go on to teach the following. "Ok, now you are reconciled with God, but in order to *maintain that status*, you must now do this-and that, or you will be out of fellowship with God, and / or He won't be able to use you." They impose more rules and regulations to a different end in this case! Some churches and religions go so far as to teach that one can lose their salvation if their rules, regulations, and traditions are not followed to the letter! I will conclude with a few Bible passages addressing these issues. Please read them for yourself then ask yourself if they agree with your particular religion, your beliefs, or church teaching. The Bible *is* the Word of God... it is **Truth** in its purest form. If what you believe, or what you are taught deviates from the Word of God, it then becomes simply a "Religious Teaching" not a Biblical Teaching. After you read the following, ask yourself the question I asked earlier... "is it possible that one can be religious, a person that adheres to the rules and regulations of a particular faith, yet not put their complete faith in Jesus for their salvation...?" Then, ask yourself, Am I a True Christian, or am I simply Religious... There is a difference!

### **(Jesus is the Only Way) John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### **(The Only Thing you must Do) Acts 16:30-31 (NKJV)**

<sup>30</sup> And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

### **(The Finished Work on the Cross) John 19:30 (NKJV)**

<sup>30</sup> So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

### **(Nothing left to do) Hebrews 10:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for *all*.

### **(You are Secure in Christ's atonement) John 10:27-29 (NKJV)**

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

### **(Religion is Worthless, It's about Relationship with Jesus)**

### **Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

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