

Religion vs Relationship

Today is going to be a very interesting topic: is it possible to be religious and not have a relationship with God? Is it possible to be a good church goer and yet not be a Christian? What is the difference between religion and a relationship with God?

One reason this is such an important topic is because we live in a very religious community with a lot of churches, and yet how many really have a relationship with God? Let me make it very clear today that our topic is not meant in any way to slam a church or denomination. I prefer that no denominations are mentioned by name today. It is not about a specific church or denomination but rather our own hearts before God.

I want to begin by telling you a true story: there was once a boy whose father was a pastor. The boy was baptized as an infant and went to church every Sun. He became an acolyte and crucifer and tried really hard to live a good life. He was in the Christmas plays at church every year. He was even confirmed. He tried really hard to do what was right, to obey his parents and yet the Sunday church thing never really hit home. It was quite boring to him and he just didn't 'get it.' However, during his senior year of high school he began to attend a bible study with other teenagers. At this study he saw other teens excited about God, really getting into the bible and talking about Jesus working in their everyday life. So, he inquired as to what he was missing. The leader of this study explained to him the difference between being religious, which this young man certainly was, and having a genuine personal relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. It was soon after this conversation that this young man asked Jesus Christ to come into his life and take control. Immediately things began to change in his life. No longer was he just going through the religious motions but now he was experiencing a daily relationship with Jesus where the Bible was read and applied, where joy was a part of this relationship, and where God was helping him to overcome some personal weaknesses and sin he had. He went away to college the next year and found a church where people actually brought their bibles and where the sermon was relevant to his life and where people really got into the worship. To make a long story short, that person is now a pastor.

Well, listeners: the story that I just told is true because it is my story. That is the story of David Holt

So as you can see, our topic today is very personal to me, and I think may hit home for a lot of listeners in the 7 Rivers Region.

So let me explain the difference

Religion looks like this:

- Performing ritual that is not from the heart
- Going through the motions
- Doing good works in order to try to earn your way to God
- Repeating meaningless phrases and prayers and creeds but it not from the heart

Relationship with Jesus looks like this:

You receive Him into your life and yield your life to Him.

You seek Him daily

You love Him and receive His love

You do good works out of love and gratitude and not to earn something

You worship from the heart instead of just going through the motions

Religion

Worship that is merely external

Doing good to earn favor

Hoping to get to heaven

Built on our doing

Doing ritual and things from rote

Trying to work to God

External appearance

Environment of control & fear

Fearing punishment for sin

Thinking heaven = good bad

Relationship

Worship that is internal: from the heart

Doing works out of love for God

Knowing you are going to heaven

Based on God's doing

Relating to God from the heart

Receiving the grace and love of God

Internal heart

Environment of freedom and grace

Rejoicing that Christ suffered punishment for our us

Knowing heaven is based on Jesus' work for us.

Someone once said "Religion is spelled DO; Christianity is spelled DONE!

It is interesting to note that Jesus struggled the most with the Pharisees and Saducees, those who were very religious and yet did not know God personally. Here were the religious leaders ... they knew the OT ... they ritualistically worshiped regularly ... they thought they were really obeying God And yet Jesus saw through the external appearance of righteousness and he saw their heart and how their heart was not right with God.

Mark 7:1-13

7:1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and 2 saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. 3(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.'

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

9 And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Col 2:8

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.
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Matt 15:3-9

3 Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' 6 he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 "These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
9 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men."
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Gal 1:13-17

14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and I
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