

“Religion Never Works”
August 1st 2010



Eg How many would consider themselves Religious?

- Who brushes their teeth same time everyday in the same way?
- Who takes a shower everyday at the same time?
- Who eats three meals a day at approximately the same time?
- Who drives to work the same way everyday?
- Who visits the same restaurants when they go out?
- Who puts their kids to bed the same time everyday?

So we're not religious but we do all adopt religious practices?
Some of which can actually be good.

Eg - Every morning the first thing I do when I awake is go straight to my bible & spend time with God in devotions & journaling.

Every Wednesday night - I am doing life with a group of people at Lifegroup.

Every Thursday afternoon - I have my G3.

Every Sunday I love to be in worship, fellowship & hearing the Word of God every opportunity available, at present that is 3 experiences across a weekend but as we grow & have to add extra experiences I will be there.

Does that mean I am Religious? - No not at all, it just means I have adopted some religious practices & or spiritual disciplines that are working to help me grow in my relationship with God. To others looking on it could appear religious but it doesn't feel religious - to them it still has a sweet smelling attractive aroma about it. A dichotomy!

However - when religion & religious practice is marked by a legalistic, judgmental, manipulative condescending I am better than you spirit. The stench people smell is that of death all who come in contact with it withdraw away. I have to tell you when it comes to judgmental self righteous religious people Jesus referred to these kind of practices. They love to make:

- Loud prayers in Public to show how much more holy & spiritual than you I am,
- Sit in the best places at church to feel important, I'm part of the in crowd,
- Be seen to be making significant financial contributions to be given honour, status & preferential treatment,

These people use their *religious practices to manipulate people & circumstances for their own plans & purposes not God's.*

People who have yet to come to Christ refer to these people as religious biggets & hypocrites - they find them repulsive & a turn off for coming to Christ & His church.

- Religious People hate Jesus Christ -breaks up the charade,
- Lost People Love him, - he was a friend to sinners!

EG - Paul was a religious man perfect in obeying all the things of the law without fault. In fact he was so ingrained in the Law they he set out to destroy the work of Christ because his religious practices were coming under threat by the freedom found in Christ. This actually caused Paul to go persecute & kill Christian's with a passion & in fact he was the one who gave the approval to the stoning of Stephen.

However Paul's religious nature came to an abrupt end when he was confronted by the power of God on the road to Damascus. It was in this place that he discovered the power of grace through faith realizing that Jesus has done it all, this lead Paul to adopt a whole new lifestyle! Paul went from killing Christ followers to the lifelong journey as ambassador for Christ & defender of the essential truths of the gospel.

In Galatians - Paul is addressing the issue of false teaching coming into the church buy the Judaizers (these were Jewish converts to Christianity who starting in grace through faith but after awhile ended up returning to old practices of the Law as a supplement to the gospel & they are now projecting that the

Gentiles who were never under the Law needed to add to their relationship with Jesus Christ certain religious practices from the Law of Moses. Essentially in their adding of old religious practices to the pure gospel of freedom & grace! They were robbing the gospel of its power! In fact Paul said what you are doing is negating the gospel, but adding to it you have turned it into no gospel at all. Paul knew that he was called for such a time as this.

Paul, an apostle-sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead-and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Galatians 1:1-5

Essentially

RELIGION - MAN'S ATTEMPT TO PLEASE GOD BY ADHERING TO RULES AND REGULATIONS.

But rules & regulations are often very confusing to people to those outside of faith.

Who wrote Galatians? Paul

When was it written? 49-56 A.D.

Why was it written? Correct false teaching

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-which is really no gospel at all. Galatians 1:6-7a

Metatithemi – in the process of transporting, or changing sides, deserting.

To add rules & regulations to your faith is to desert the gospel of grace...

Eg Kingdom Partner Agreement... It can happen so easily. As

the pastor I know I have the responsibility of providing the infrastructure to help us all together mature in our faith, but the implementation of such structure is where if you are not careful it can turn into rules & regulations needed to accompany salvation. So honestly this stuff takes a lot of seeking God for wisdom on how to create structures & systems that bring life & freedom and not bondage. Please pray about stepping into being a kingdom partner as we are looking to develop this team as our next tear of committed Christ followers that we can seek input & counsel from concerning future plans we are working through with the Holy Spirit.

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION...

WHY ARE MANY DRAWN TO RELIGION?

1) PROVIDES A SYSTEM OF MEASUREMENT. - if i do my devotions everyday, if i fast & pray 3 days a week, if i give my 10% like the Israelites had to do under the law I will be OK. Let me tell you these guys were giving their 10% dodgy as it was they were doing it but they were far from OK.. God was not happy with them at all because their religious practice was devoid of life & love, it had become duty & obligation. These people say they love me with their lips but their hearts & actions say something completely different. Religious practice made them feel like they were ok, but in reality it was doing them no good at all!

Eg - Luke 18:9-14 *The Pharisee says I thank you Lord that I am not like all this other sinners, I fast twice a week & give a tenth of all I have to the poor. A religious biggot, the other guy a tax collector stands a distance & just humbly hangs his head saying God have mercy on me a sinner. Which one does God accept? The Tax Collector not the Religious Pharisee!*

2) PROVIDES A FALSE COMFORT. - in our Aussie culture this is very prevalent. Sure I'm ok & going to Heaven because, I was christened as a baby, or I was confirmed as child, or I was baptised in water 13years ago, or I said a prayer at one stage of

my life, God wouldn't send good people to hell...this why so many people a C/E Christ followers - that means Christmas & Easter, I come twice a year to gain comfort from my religion. Nobody who treats God like this will ever make it into heaven. Scriptures are clear in **Hebrews 9:28** (NIV) so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Those, waiting, watching, allowing the Holy Spirit to prepare them...salvation comes when Jesus returns a second time. **EG** Prodigals need to be re-engaged & get back on the narrow road home.

THE PROBLEM WITH RELIGION

1) RELIGION BRINGS CONFUSION .

Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:7b

Eg - church we have got to eliminate all religious practices that are barriers to people coming and exploring a relationship with Christ. We need to do it corporately & individually! It is perfectly natural to be spiritual & it is perfectly spiritual to be natural! We do not want to confuse people with religious traditions of men!

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! **Galatians 1:8***

Did you get that the person who adds to the gospel religious practices so that it ends up becoming not gospel at all - they end up consecrated & set apart of destruction. Now I am not all that bright but I know that cannot be a good thing:)

Anathema – consecrated to complete destruction. (set aside for destruction)

2) RELIGION FOCUSES ON MAN'S WORKS.

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would

not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:1

- **Religion is spelt “do.”** (listen to me pray, look at my offering, I'm on that leadership team)
- **Christianity is spelt “done.”** - Its Jesus + Nothing! (dancing, speaking in tongues, King James bible, raising of hands, devotions) - its Jesus plus nothing they are just wonderful spiritual disciples the Holy Spirit uses to mature you in faith once you have accepted God grace through faith.

- **Religion is man's attempt to reach God.**
- **Christianity is God's attempt to reach man.**
- **Religion focuses on the external.**
- **Christianity focuses on the internal.**

God looks on the heart, he wants to know what is the motivation for what is taking place. *Eg Life Skills for Leaders - Ps Wayne refers to as scrubbing our heart motives clean. So much of what we do can come out of insecurity, pride, fear trying to prove that we are someone.*

So is all Religion Wrong?

As I said up front if religious practices are drawing you & others around you closer to God they are fine. However if your religious practices are causing other people to shun you & Christ & his church then that is not fine at all...

So how can I tell if my religious practices are coming from the right motivation?

Why are you doing what you do?

1. Are you engaging in them to try and gain God's approval?
2. Are you engaging in them in them from an overwhelming response of His love for you?

What does the bible say is TRUE RELIGION?

James 1:26-27 (NIV) If anyone considers himself religious and

yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

1. The ability to control ones tongue so that we only build people up & not pull them down
2. To Look after Orphan's & Widows,
3. To keep oneself from being polluted by the World, **Eg** Devo. Lifegroup, G3, Serving, Exp
4. To take care of ones own family. Parents & Grandparents,

1 Timothy 5:3-4 (NIV) Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

So how do we engage in true religion?

1. Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength,
2. Love your neighbour as yourself,

In that order God first & then out of an overflow of his love for us we now go & serve others!

Religious practices can be helpful providing they come from a love response to God out of our salvation & not a feeble attempt to try and please God is gain or hold my salvation!

If you become religious to earn or keep your salvation then you have walked out of the gospel of grace & truth into no gospel at all. You are back under the bondage of self help!

Every Faith / Religion - on planet earth has at its core the need to conform to certain religious practices in order to prove yourself worthy of acceptance of God & entry back into heaven. It is based on earning your salvation.

Christianity is the complete opposite - God initiated himself coming to earth from heaven in the form of a human being, he choose to suffer & die on the cross as a sacrifice for sins in yours & my place, it was by his own power that he again raised Jesus from the dead to secure our salvation. We had no part of it! It is the gift of salvation & there is not a religious practice anyone can do to earn it. It is the free gift of God offered to whosoever wants to receive it.

So what good are religious practices - they are of much value indeed if they are motivated out of our love for God & a desire to please him. The Holy Spirit uses them to teach us how to become a true disciple, he uses these disciplines to transfer Jesus character & nature within us.

These practices do not effect God love for us, however they do effect his pleasure in us which is an whole other message indeed! Eg Kids / always pleased with them?

In Closing let look again at what Paul is trying to say...

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. **Galatians 1:11,12**

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. **Galatians 1:13**

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles... **Galatians 1:15-16**

They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they praised God because of me. **Galatians 1:23-24**

HOW ARE YOU WORKING TO GAIN GOD'S APPROVAL?

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN "ADDING" TO CHRISTIANITY?

Some of you have been doing things trying to get in God's good books so to speak & God wants you to know your already in his good books because of what Jesus has done.... when it comes to your faith it is Jesus + Nothing!!!

It doesn't mean you need to stop doing what you are doing, it just means you need to make sure you live life empowered by the revelation of freedom that is found in the pure gospel of grace through faith in Christ.

Stop being religious - you do not need to defend God, you are not the watchman of the old covenant they are dead & gone from a by-gone era.. Like everyone else you are just a soul on the journey of being prepared for heaven by the Holy Spirit.

Salvation - eternal life is found in no-one else but Jesus Christ. Only those who stop trying to earn there own salvation & simply put their faith & trust in him will make it back into heaven. God has given his all for us to receive salvation & now he expects our all so that we stay on the road of salvation. God calls us to give our lives completely to him holding nothing back & then he sends his spirit to reside within us to give us the strength to develop the necessary *spiritual disciplines or religious practices to take us on the journey of being conformed into the image of Christ. So what about, it there anyone here this morning who knows that God is calling them to start the journey home? Anyone tired of being religious & trying to earn your way back to God? If so then surrender all to him right now, ask Jesus Christ to come into your life by his spirit & be your Lord & Saviour, tell him you want to start the journey home being mentored & coached by the Holy Spirit.*