

# IS IT JUST BY RELIGION?

Religion or being religious means different things to different people. Cultures and people hold varied and sometimes opposing views when it comes to religious issues. It is puzzling that rather than a peace-loving society emerging from the ethical convictions which most religions claim to have; religions have caused more trouble and left people more confused.

## What is religion?

The Greek word for religion is 'theskeia' which means 'ceremonial observance'. I've met a lot of people and when I ask them, 'Do you believe in God?' Some would reply, 'I'm not a religious person'. This response gives a good insight into how people perceive religion. Believing in the existence of God does not necessarily make you religious. Just as the fact that some people practise some kind of religion or appear religious does not necessarily mean they believe in the true living God. In fact, some religious belief system has nothing to do with God.

So, this is the way I define it. Religion is a pious, outward observance of rules by man trying to reach up to God. Religion is man trying to earn God's acceptance by his own good work or certain acts. In a broader sense, anything or ideology that takes your devotion and loyalty could become a religion. There is a wide range of religions that people practice, with associated diversity in belief system. We have Christian religion, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Jehovah witness, Humanism, etc. The list is endless.

## Where do most people stand?

Different people have different attitudes and understanding regarding the issue of religion. Michael Green in his book titled 'But don't all religions lead to God? Navigating the multi-faith maze' give a good range of people's attitudes towards religion. Some people don't want to talk about it. Possibly, because they don't want to be drawn into an argument or maybe it makes them uncomfortable. Some quickly defend the issue by saying 'it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.' Some people believe all religions are much the same. Yet some other people even believe that all religions lead to God. Some folks would say, 'just believe in yourself; religion is a matter of heart.' Where do all these lead to?

## God's Perspective

Religion is never God's ultimate goal. He has always wanted a genuine relationship. God's established religion is a way of getting Israel's attention and to teach them devotion and obedience that would lead to a genuine relationship which would help them to willingly serve and obey Him out sincere love for Him. Of course, it turned the other way. Our religious ceremony and rituals become empty and hollow when our heart is not right with the living God or when is devoid of an attitude of love and obedience. That why he said, '.... Does the LORD delight as much in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.' 1Sam.15:22 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available) 2Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)

God wants our heart not outward performance. We're dealing with God who is all-knowing, nothing is hidden from Him. He knows every hidden motive, and that's why nobody can win his approval by just being religious. When He revealed himself to Abraham, it wasn't because Abraham was religious, but planned to reveal himself to the entire world. Then He started with a man. He said to him 'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you.'

From Abraham came the lineage of David and then Jesus Christ, the descendant of David. So, God reached down to us in the person of Jesus Christ who showed us everything about God's character that can be conveyed in human terms. God's standard is high, solid and pure. He is a holy God. Unlike us, He neither lowers nor compromises His standards. He relates and operates on the basis of love and faith, not religion. Religion, even with the purest of motives cannot attain His standard. So, God reached out to us by Himself.

### **Religion: issues you should care to know**

Firstly, when we move away from grace and faith, what is left is religion. God started with the law when he brought the Jews (the descendants of Abraham) out of Egypt and gave them a system of laws to follow. The outward rituals, rules, and ceremonial preparations became an established religion, because they have to be able to keep those laws to attain God's moral standard and righteousness, but they failed woefully to keep those laws. So, the system of laws could not achieve its purpose. In fact, it actually revealed man's weakness and complete inability to attain God's moral standard of righteousness by his own efforts. Then God did something amazing. He replaced that old system of laws and rules with a new system of grace that makes it possible for man to attain his moral standard of righteousness without our own work, struggles or efforts. That GRACE is only available in Jesus Christ whom He sent. So, if God says something is no longer useful, why then are we working hard to remain in the religion of any kind? Secondly, when a belief system is premised on just dogma and devoid of true experience, the hollowness it professes is called religion. Thirdly, when you are Zealous without a genuine change of heart, what it leads to is religion.

God wants obedience, not radicalism; a change of heart, not rituals. Finally, while it is very important to believe in oneself and to work hard to achieve one's goals, the trouble is that money, fame, work or pleasure can become gods to us when we concentrate so much on them for personal identity that we have no place for God. Bob Gass, the author of Word for Today, wrote: 'Religion without a personal relationship with God will leave you unsatisfied and unfulfilled. It's like drinking saltwater – the more you drink, the thirstier you get. Religion devoid of a relationship with Christ is like a pacifier that a baby works hard to suck on, but from which no real nutrition flows'

### **Who is Jesus Christ? What you need to know about him?**

There has never been anyone like Jesus. Jesus was not just a good man, neither was he a prophet or religious leader, he is God made manifest in the flesh. He was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a young virgin named Mary, and by this supernatural conception, Jesus who is wholly God also became wholly human.

Though Jesus is God, he chose to lay aside the privileges of his deity to live on earth as a man to save the whole world, to save humankind from sin and to offer us salvation that leads to eternal life. Have a look, see how The Bible described the sacrifice Jesus Christ made in becoming a man: ‘..he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross’. Phil 2:6-7Open in Logos Bible Software (if available). Think about this!

Jesus was not a religious man, in fact, he was hated and rejected by the religious leaders of his day; because his life and teaching did not fit into their dogma, but rather it exposed their hypocrisy. Jesus was a Messiah sent by God to save the whole world. His miraculous birth, his life and teaching, his miracles, and his triumph over death showed his true identity. His influence is far-reaching through all human history. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, walked upon water, storms, and wind obeyed him. He changed and influenced lives in their millions, and his name is still changing lives all over the world. Death couldn’t handle him, the grave couldn’t hold him, the Pharisees couldn’t stand him, and Pilate couldn’t find any fault in him. He has no rival; he has no equal. He offers hope, justice, and love to the poor, his arms are spread out to all people, the rich and the disillusioned, the old and the young, the proud and the suicidal. He changes them all: He does not threaten them or make them reject their culture-Michael Green

Jesus is the Gate, the Gate to God’s salvation for us, the only way to gain access to God. To access a building requires just one access code to gain entrance. This is what he said, ‘I am the door: by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture’ Jn 10:9Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)

### **Here is the good news!**

He gave his life as a sacrifice for our sin. He took our place, the guilty sinners, at the cross. ‘the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all’ (Isaiah 53.6Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)). On that cross, the full punishment for our sin was taken by Jesus Christ. The debts for our sins was paid in full. On the third day, he rose up from the death. It is our faith in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus that brings freedom and salvation for our souls not religious practices ‘Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ Rom5:1Open in Logos Bible Software (if available). Religion says you can work your way back to God. No, Jesus is the only way to connect to God. ‘Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ Jn14:6Open in Logos Bible Software (if available). Jesus is inviting you today to put your trust in him alone. He said. ‘Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest’ Matt.11:28Open in Logos Bible Software (if available).

Maybe you struggle with this question, ‘do I really need Jesus?’ Yes, you need Jesus badly because only him can save your soul. It’s only Him who paid the full price on the cross and made way for all of us to be forgiven. He loves you and me that is why He laid down His life on the cross -To pay the penalty that our sins deserve. He gave his life to purchase your freedom. He did not only die on the cross; He rose up again on the third day from the grave to secure your salvation.

I don’t know where you stand regarding the issue of religion, but now that you know the truth about it, I think what really matters is giving Jesus a chance by inviting him into your life. It is faith in Jesus

that brings us into the true relationship with God, not religion. God wants to interact with you. He wants to reveal himself to you through faith in Jesus Christ and to show you how much He loves you.

See! He has paid the full price on the cross by his blood for you to be forgiven. Do you believe this? Then what are you still waiting for? Don't let anything hold you back. The right time is now! Right where you are, you can say this prayer:

“Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned and need your forgiveness. I am sorry for my sins and turn away from my old life, and I turn towards you for I believe you died for me and rose from the dead. Please come into my life and be my Lord and Saviour. I surrender all to you.”

Congratulations for taking that decision to commit your life to Jesus. We'd like to hear from you and to send you a copy of New Testament Bible as a gift. Could you please kindly send us your name and address using our contact form [here](#)

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