

Is Our Religion Relational?

Man has all kinds of definitions for what religion looks like; what it is; how it works; and what its greatest purpose should be in the world.

For the most part; religion in the world of men is a mass consumers market of ultra-legal to ultra-liberal personal choices – A continuum with no clear beginning or end. To the far right of this continuum; we encounter an ‘*unquestionable belief*’ in the embrace of religious systems. To the far left; a ‘*questioning doubt*’ of all that calls itself religious.

Some people move right; others move left - Each calling what they have chosen, *acceptable to God*. Yet when relationship is called for from either end of this vast continuum; the result most often proves to be divisive, not divine.

Like anything and everything else in life, talk is cheap. Religious talk is even cheaper, because it is easy to say what you believe, but another thing altogether to live it. It is easy to ‘go to church.’ Yet another thing to be the living Body of Christ...*His hands, feet & heart*...to an imperfect and undeserving world.

The Jesus who descended from heaven to give His life for us was intimately fitted into a living, imperfect humanity. When Jesus chose to become one with us, He identified with our person in love. He didn’t love a something... He loved a someone.

That choice bridged every separating boundary between God & man. And it is this same chosen love (the laying down one’s life) that has the power to cross the myriad theological boundaries of every religion known to the world today.

Jesus is the literal Way. And a genuine relationship with Jesus will cause you to live beyond the fantasy frontiers of today’s so-called Christian religion. Jesus holds to no borders; be they those of Catholicism, Protestantism, Evangelicalism, or for that matter; any other ‘ism’ which exist in the world. Without exception, His love reaches past these borders on a mission to love any ‘whomsoever’ who will have Him.

There is no law against THIS LOVE and there is nothing that can stop it. There is no ‘ism’ that can contain it or claim it as its own, for it is a law unto itself – The Law of Love that never separates spiritual need from natural need, but instead; embraces both at once with its relational essence! And by doing so, it sets souls free by crucifying fear.

Pure Religion

What exactly does the Bible have to say about religion? Or for that matter, what did Jesus Christ Himself specifically say about any measurement of religious works?

The Bible mentions the word ‘religion’ five times in the New Testament (and not at all in the old) The Greek word used is *thrēskeia* which means: a religious discipline or ‘**a habitually-repeated behavior.**’

The terms 'religion & religious' are found seven times in the Bible. Five out of these seven times these words refer to the empty vanity of any religion that spends the greatest majority of its time lifting up, centering upon, or focusing inwardly upon itself as a systematic lifestyle. Acts 26:3-5, Gal 1:13-14

In the Book of James, the Bible presents a **Negative Truth** directly beside a **Positive Truth**. In doing so, it defines exactly what an acceptable or unacceptable religious life is in God's view:

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue,
but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this:
To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, **[and]**
to keep himself unspotted from the world

James 1:26-27

The word **[and]** in the brackets does not exist in the original manuscript. Thus, this verse may well be read: If you wish to keep yourself unspotted from the world (holy), then visit (look after in order to benefit them) the fatherless and widows in their affliction. *Selah*

In support of such a belief, read the scriptures below and what they say concerning who will qualify to inherit the future Kingdom of God and by what kind of works: (See also the study scriptures listed below)

And before Him (Christ) shall be gathered all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth His sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

[By what measurement?]

For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink:
I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me:
I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came to Me.

Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered,
and fed Thee? Or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?

When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in?
Or naked, and clothed thee?
Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them,
Verily I say unto you,
**Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren,
ye have done it unto Me**

Jesus' Religion

Jesus said that we would know men by their fruits. He said it would be possible to tell, by outward evidences beyond words, just what sort of people they were.

Jesus related to men intimately. Fully knowing their sin, He still gave His life away for their benefit. He knew they needed what He had. He knew they didn't deserve it. Yet He gave His life for them anyway, because God's highest justice is the execution of mercy.

That merciful, unconditional laying down of His life was the undeniable measure of Jesus' love for us. It was not first that He taught truth; that He healed; or even that He accomplished miracles. Beyond all else, Jesus' free-will choice to embrace the cross is what made Jesus, *Jesus*.

To live the religion of Jesus and be found in His image, we are called to 'follow Him' in relational works – Works which exceed all our ecclesiastic ceremony; doctrinal declarations; and religious-sounding talk.

What doeth it profit, my brethren,
though a man say he hath faith, and have not [these relational] works?
Can faith save him?

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, Be ye warmed and filled;
not withstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful to the body;
What doeth it profit?

Even so faith,
if it hath not [these relational] works, is dead,
being [separated from relationship, it remains] alone

James 2:14-17

The Bible says that faith 'worketh by love.' (Gal 5:6) Like pure religion, a pure and righteous love must be lived-out relationally in realistically measurable ways; exactly the ways which the scriptures above outline to us. And these works are both understandable and do-able by our faith, because they are '*tangibly measurable*.'

Understanding them however is not the impediment to actually doing them. The problem is that doing these works cost us more than going to church. Doing these relational works requires sharing pain. It cost something of our own lives that we don't want to give; because to walk in these works of love, *we must sacrifice something*.

Either we chose to live this kind of relational 'touch-you' form of unconditional love towards other human beings, or we don't. Either we love other people in their needs by sacrificially laying down our own lives for them in ways which literally touch Christ...*or not*. Really, it is just that simple.

One day, the present choices of our lives will be measured; not in the scales of men, but of God. We would do well to consider the scriptures listed here, for they will be a large part of how our lives are judged.

Relational Religion & Child-Like Faith

Beyond all the libraries and universities full of books on Christian theology; Jesus' own words clarify to me beyond all doubt how He measures the works of my life. Those simple, instructive words may not, (in and of themselves), be sufficient for the faith of many scholars. Yet to the faith of a child, they reveal the entirety of God's purpose, heart, and love in the earth...as well as in eternity.

Verily I say unto you,
Except ye be converted, and become as little children,
ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child,
the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven

And whosoever shall receive one such little child in My Name,
Receive Me

Luke 18:3-5

May our eyes and hearts be opened to hear these words

The following is a mini-study of further scriptures which you may thoughtfully consider regarding the future 'measurement' of your life by Christ. Meditate upon them in the foundational context of 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 16:27; & Revelations 22:12

- Note the contrast between the works of 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and the works of Revelations 2:1-5. Can you see the difference between relating to 'works' and relating to 'persons'? (Specifically other brethren & Christ)
- Compare the works of Hebrews 13:16 & Matthew 25:35-40 with the works in Matthew 23:1-7, 23 & 27-28. Note the focus of each. (Loving others or a religious self-centered focus upon self righteousness)
- Compare the attitude of Jesus in John 15:11-15 with the attitudes in John 8:39-40 & Mt 7:20-23. Are we to be more focused on the power of god or the Person of Jesus? (See also the attitude of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:18-22 compared to the attitude of King David in Psalms 27:4 & 8)
- Note the contrast between the light of 1 John 1:6-7 & 2:9-11 with what Jesus said in Matthew 6:23. (Being religiously active does not equal being a living, spiritual light)
- Compare the living faith of 1 John 3:14-18 with the deceitful religion of James 2:14-20. (How does James 1:25 tell us to escape this spiritual deception?)
- Note the connection between the spirit behind Micah 6:8 and 1 John 4:10-11 & 4:20-21. Compare this with John 17:21-23. (Can we actually love God beyond the degree we love other men?)

- Consider the spiritual sacrifice of Mark 12:32-34 within the context of the New Testament sacrifice of Hebrews 10:5-9. How does this apply to Romans 12:1 in your life? Can you measure the way your life is 'presented' daily to God?
- Compare the righteous sacrifice of 1 Peter 1:22 & 2:5 with the evil sacrifice of 1 John 3:12. Would God have you care for lives around you or labor to produce a sacrifice?
- Note the '**outward-focused**' doctrine of works in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 compared to the '**inward-focused**' doctrine of 2 Timothy 3:1-5 & Titus 1:15-16 (Self-less vs Selfish) . On a sheet of paper, list side-by-side the efforts and expenses of your life which are focused inward toward your church verses those which are focused outward toward the lost; the poor; the lonely. *Seek a balance.*

I wish you Peace