

Easy Religion

The concept of religion is defined by Wikipedia as...

1 *Religion is any cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, ethics, or organizations, that relate humanity to the supernatural or transcendental. Religions relate humanity to what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has referred to as a cosmic "order of existence"*

This seems like a wordy way of saying that religion is man's attempt to seek out, worship, and have a relationship with what they are calling the...

2 *"Order of Existence"*

The Bible defines this "Order of Existence" as...

3 *GOD*

1 Cor 8:4-6

4

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. *5* For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, *6* yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

God, the creator, the source of; salvation, grace, mercy, love, righteousness, eternal life, it is God that defines the very universe that we live in. He is truly, the "Order of Existence." Religion is that which brings man close to that God, or is at least supposed to. That is the real question that needs to be answered...

5 *Will the religion that I have chosen actually bring me close to God?*

Note this excerpt from the internet, and we all know that if it is on the internet it must be true...

6 *According to some estimates, there are roughly 4,200 religions in the world. The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with "faith" or "belief system", but religion differs from private belief in that it has a public aspect.*

It stands to reason that with so many different religions in the world today that there will be differences, and in most cases major differences, in the doctrine that each individual one accepts. That said, do they all accomplish the goal of bringing man into that relationship with God that he seeks? How could that be possible since they all, for the most part, teach something different?

1 Thess 2:13

7

13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Paul makes a powerful statement here to the Thessalonians. He speaks of the Word of God that they accepted, received, believed, and responded to, but notice what he says...

8 *"You accepted it not as the word of men"*

This point is vital to understanding this idea of religion, and that is what Paul is emphasizing with the Thessalonians, you didn't accept these words as the words of any man...

9

"But for what it really is, the Word of God"

We now come back to our original discussion of religion. Religion, any religion, demands, by its very existence, a standard which governs the behaviors and beliefs of those who choose to follow it, remember, that is the definition of religion. With 4,200 different recognized religions, or belief systems, throughout the world, it stands to reason that some of those belief systems are going to be extremely difficult to abide by and others are going to be at the opposite end of the spectrum and have close to no impact whatsoever in a person's life.

In this lesson we are going to look at...

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John 2:13-22

11

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. **15** And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; **16** and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."

12

18 The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" **21** But He was speaking of the temple of His body. **22** So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Jesus had been raised by His parents, Mary and Joseph, to observe the proscriptions of the their religion, their accepted system of beliefs, as found in the Law of Moses. That Law required that it's follower's come to Jerusalem for 3 feasts a year. Mary and Joseph kept the Law.

Luke 2:41

13

41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

I want us to note what the impact of this verse really is. It is about 90 miles by foot, 65 by air, from Nazareth to Jerusalem, one way. Every year, we are told that Mary and Joseph made that journey at least once. 90 miles is about a 5 day walk. That means at least 4 nights on the road, and they probably didn't have a Motel 6 at every stop, at least not yet. Look at the effort that they made to keep the Lord's commandments.

This is the first time that the scriptures record that Jesus was at the Temple...

Luke 2:46

14

46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

The second occasion recorded by the scriptures is found in the passage we began with from John 2. The point I am trying to make is that the Law of Moses could never be seen as being an easy system of beliefs to faithfully follow what with the sacrifices, the trips to Jerusalem, the food restrictions, the marital restrictions, there just isn't any way that this system of beliefs could ever be

thought of as easy. The commandments and restrictions that are seen in the Word of God were never intended to be a walk in the park. Coming to God through Christ is a commitment to an attitude, an acceptance of the tenants of the Word, and an expression of love for God and what He offers to anyone who will accept Him and His Word.

Matt 7:14

15

14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Christ points out the difficulty that being a faithful follower of the Word presents. But the point here isn't that the tenants are so difficult to complete, we don't have to walk 90 miles one way to worship God the way that He has told us to, but the difficulty being presented is to be found in our hearts. Remember the definition of religion; it is a system of beliefs that to be viable must be accepted, believed in, and obeyed. That is the real understanding of what religion is. Anyone can come up with a system of beliefs and even claim that they will bring one to God and eternal life. Seriously, that is the easy part, the hard part is getting people to believe it. That is what makes any system of beliefs a religion is that someone somewhere accepts that it will bring them closer to God. The perversion of religion is that man decided that God's commandments were too difficult to bear the way that God decreed so he decided to make his own system of beliefs that were easier to follow.

Note what Joshua has to say about that...

Josh 22:29

16

29 "Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn away from following the Lord this day, by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering or for sacrifice, besides the altar of the Lord our God which is before His tabernacle."

At a time when the people were wanting to build an altar to worship God, which on the surface sounds like a good thing, Joshua says NO, we cannot worship God in any way that is not what God wants. God had established the place of the altar for worship and any other altar would have been a desecration of the Word of God.

Matt 16:24

17

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Christ shows us the pattern for true religion, deny oneself and follow Christ. There illustrated is the difficulty we spoke of a moment ago. The most difficult thing any man will ever do is to deny himself.

That is the example that is seen in the coming to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Mary and Joseph denied themselves in order to come to Jerusalem to keep the commandment of God's Word. That is what Christ is saying;

18

The strength of one's commitment to their religion is determined by the degree that they are willing to give of themselves to it

Paul speaks of this in...

2 Cor 8:1-5

19

1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, **2** that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. **3** For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, **4** begging us with

much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

The Passover for the Jew was a sign of the strength of the commitment that they had made to the Lord. When Christ arrived at the Temple and saw what was taking place there with the money changers and how the Temple was being desecrated by them, He became angry and He cleared the money changers out of the Temple. Jesus was no different than we are. He had all the same feelings and emotions that we do. He got angry.

Mark 3:5

20

5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart,

What I find interesting is what made Him angry here...

21

"Hardness of heart"

This is a direct reference to their response to His Word. They wanted to trap him, to discredit Him in front of the people. Does this sound familiar? The world today does just exactly this. It seeks to trap the scriptures, to discredit them and everyone who chooses to follow them. The world paints the Word as being restrictive, cultish, legalistic, it paints the Word as being difficult, too difficult for anyone to follow, and the world wants the easy way. So it perverts the Word, changes it, dilutes it, makes it easy. The World hardens its heart and tries to make religion easy. That is what makes our Lord angry, our refusal to accept and follow His Word, all of His Word.

The Passover feast was to commemorate the tenth plague when the angel of death killed the first born of Egypt passing over only those homes that had blood on the lintel and door posts. That plague was the final catalyst that caused Pharaoh to finally release the Israelites. That is what they were remembering. In Exodus chapter 12 the Lord gives Moses the instructions that were to be followed for the celebration of the Passover...

22

- A) Unblemished lamb
- B) Roasted, not raw or boiled, even the entrails
- C) Completely eaten
- D) Burn anything left over
- E) Must be eaten while dressed for flight

Now probably on the night following the Passover, the feast of the Unleavened Bread started...

23

- F) Leaven to be removed from the house for seven days

Now note just how important following the Lord's instructions are...

Ex 12:19

24

19 'Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land.

It was as important for them to exactly follow the proscriptions of the Law in their actions as it is for us today.

Shortcuts, half-way measures, ignoring the Word, these are the things that make the Lord angry and cause the unfaithful to be cut off.

Paul sums this discussion up in...

Rom 8:5-8

25

5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The contrast Paul makes is faith vs flesh. There are things of the Spirit, these are the things of faith, the things that that make someone of the Spirit, of the faith. But the contrast is the flesh, just as with the Spirit there are things that are of the flesh, things that call to the flesh of man. Paul's point is that if the choice is made to be part of the flesh, then you cannot please God.

Heb 11:6

26

6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

God has always rewarded faithful obedience and punished those who aren't. That hasn't changed. God still rewards faithful obedience.

This is the point of this lesson. The world of religion is looking for the easy way out, it wants God but only on its own terms. The concept of doing what God wants the way God wants it turns people away. That is what they consider to be too restrictive.

If you are ever called "Legalistic," thank the one who calls you that. A true child of God strives daily to follow His Word, to the letter. Anything less than that means to fall short of His glory.

Don't fall prey to the allure of...

27

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It might seem to be less restrictive, less discriminatory, but it comes with a price. The deception of easy religion is that it gives a good feeling to one who is practicing it, it makes them think that they are doing what God wants...

Eph 5:6

28

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Easy is easy to find. But...

Matt 7:14

29

14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

So what are we looking for...

30

EASY or TRUTH