

True Religion

The Well Church Ministries

Pastor Tim Vanderwater

tvanderwater@thewellchurchministries.org

May 17, 2015

1 Introduction

When People think of Religion, what are some things that come to mind?

- A church building
- Corporate Readings & Prayers
- Performing certain ceremonies
- Obeying certain laws
- Avoiding certain foods
- Rituals

1.1 Why Is This Important To Some

- People like consistent routines
- People feel they have some control over their eternal destination.
- Some feel they can earn favor with God
- This type of religion often creates a self-righteous mind-set

1.2 One Definition of a Ritual:

A ritual "is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence." Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. Rituals are characterized by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance

1.3 Form of Religion – Man Made to Conform God To Our Ways

- Religion – Attempting to change God instead of self
- We want God to conform to us, rather than us to conform to God

Many people do not want to believe in a God who declares it impossible for people to earn their own way to heaven. So they invent a God who accepts people into heaven if they have completed certain steps, followed certain rules, and/or obeyed certain laws, at least to the best of their ability. Many people do not want a relationship with a God who is sovereign and omnipotent. So they imagine God as being more of a mystical force than a personal and sovereign ruler.

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/so-many-religions.html#ixzz3aK81ZU9E>

1.4 So which is right and which is wrong?

- Are religious rituals themselves bad?
 - Depends on the purpose

- Religion has been with us since the first born of Adam and Eve

Genesis 4:3-5 (NIV)

3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

- From the very beginning of the Bible and to the end, we can see a pattern
 - Man used rituals as a form of elevating self
 - Cain gave God his best – Loves God
 - Able gave God his left-overs - Loves Self
 - God used rituals as a form of lowering ourselves.
 - To recognize our fallen state
 - To recognize His sovereignty and holiness

- We want to change God's heart – Conform to us
- God wants us to change our hearts, transform to Christ
- When we use Religion to Glorify and praise God, it is all good.

1 Corinthians 10:31

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

- Close Look at Religion and Rituals -

2 A Review of Jewish Rituals

God prescribed many rituals to the Jews in the Old Testament

- Leviticus
- Recognizing our Fallen State & God's Grace
 - Chapters 1 – 3
 - Burt Offering

- Grain Offering
 - Fellowship Offering
 - Sin Offering
- Chapters 7
 - Guilt Offering
- Chapter 16
 - The Day of Atonement
- Recognizing God's Holiness & Supremacy
 - Chapter 8
 - Priestly Ordination
 - Tunic
 - Sash
 - Robe
 - Ephod
 - Ceremonial Washing
 - Chapter 11
 - Clean / Unclean Foods
 - Chapter 21
 - Rules for Priests

- Chapter 23
 - Appointed Festivals
- Chapter 24
 - Olive Oil and Bread Set before the Lord
- Chapter 25
 - The Sabbath Year
 - The Year of Jubilee

3 The Purpose Of These Rituals

Romans 5:13

13 To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law.

- These laws are God's way of demonstrating our fallen state under sin.

Romans 3:20 (NIV)

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

- They are meant to lead us into repentance and recognition of the need of a Savior

Romans 5:20-21

20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4 Religious Rituals

Catholicism

The Rituale Romanum

- The Holy Sacrament
- The Sacrament of Baptism
- The Sacrament of Confirmation
- Holy Eucharist
- Penance

- Anointing of the Sick
- Matrimony
- Holy Orders: Priesthood
- The Seven Penitential Psalms and Litany of the Saints
- Liturgy for the Faithful Departed
- Blessings and other sacramentals, introduction and general rules
- Processions
- Exorcism
- Litanies
- Blessings formerly reserved to religious orders

4.1 Mormon Rituals

- Temple Ordinances
- Temple Garments
- Baptism for the Dead Baptism for the dead by proxy

4.2 Buddhist Rituals

- Buddhist Mantras
 - Sacred sounds that are believed to possess supernatural powers.
- Meditation
- Om Mani Padme Hum
- Spinning Prayer Wheels

5 Rituals = Spiritual Bondage

- Rituals and Religion alone = Spiritual Bondage
- When devoted to elevating & worshiping God = Freedom

Hebrews 10:1-3 (NIV)

10 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers

would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins.

6 True Religion – Honoring to God

James 1:27 (NIV)

27 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.

- True Religion is about the Heart
- It is about honoring God and others over self
- False Religions = Self Righteous Attitudes
- False Religions = Works based faith
- True Religion = Selfless Attitudes, Repentance, Grace

Examples

Matthew 6:1 (NIV)

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Mathew 6:2-4

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- Jesus is saying – Don't give for self gain, give for God's

Glory

- When we give to lift ourselves up
 - Giving for wrong reasons
- If we give for a tax right-off,
 - giving for self gain

- When we give to show people what we have done,
 - Giving for self-righteousness

Matthew 6:5-6 (NIV)

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- Jesus points out that our prayers should be sincere and heart felt
- Not babble that elevates ourselves
- Said in humility to elevate God
- Shows our dependence on God
- Elevates Him

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)**Fasting**

16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- Once again, Jesus is pointing us to elevate God and lower ourselves

6.1 Law Vs. Heart

- Jesus taught that we have corrupted God's law
- It has always been about giving our hearts to God
- Not about how well we obey rules,
 - but rather how our hearts reflect the heart of Christ

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest

happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

- It isn't about our outward appearance
- It is completely about honoring God with our hearts

6.2 True Worship

John 4:23-24 (NIV)

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

6.3 Religion Is Not About Activity

Revelation 2:1-5 (NIV)

To the Church in Ephesus

2 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have

endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

- Many Christian Churches start off in the right direction
- End up forgetting why they are there in the first place

- Get bogged down with:
 - Too much growth
 - Trying to please too many people
 - Become inward focused

True Religion requires a heart of compassion for God and others based on pure selfless love.