

BibleTalk Radio



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Christ for the Philippines Mission

What Is Religion?

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June 6, 2017

Tonight's Bible study is "What Is Religion?" Have you ever had that question, dear listener? What is religion? What religion is the correct one? Why are there so many religions in the world? There's everything you can think of. And so, I hope that after tonight's Bible study you will get just a little bit more familiar with this topic.

I'll take you to the dictionary. The current Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines religion as "a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices; a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith." That's what the dictionary says about religion. That's kind of like, I guess, a secular definition point of view of religion. But what exactly is religion?

Ms. Ypille, I think many people equate religion with God. Is that not true?

[Ms. Ypille:] Yes, in fact, people don't understand. A lot of people think that, if you don't have religion, you will not have God.

Any idea where something like that would come from?

[Ms. Ypille:] Oh, yeah, it would come from the teaching that you will go to Heaven based on what you do. It's from that. And that notion is not only popular here in the Philippines, but it's popular all over the world, really, America, Europe, Middle East. So that's why they think that religion and God are synonymous.

One of the things the dictionary definition said here was it's an institutionalized system of religious attitudes or beliefs and so forth. "Institutionalized system" sounds quite organized, quite manmade. One of the things that we need to realize, dear listener, is that there is a complete difference between religion and God. God is not religion and religion is not God. It's one of the things we have to get out of the way because we have to start there or else. Even if we continue to try to see what the Bible says, if we don't start there by stating already the fact that religion is separate from God; God is separate from religion; religion is not God; God is not religion, then we will go forward with the right attitude because some people would even continue to think that God and religion are one and the same even as we try to discuss what the Bible says.



What does the Bible say about religion? The word “religion” itself actually appears five times in the Bible. Four out of those five times are not in a good context. Jesus talks about the religion of the Pharisees. Most people in Christian circles know that the Pharisees were not really good people. Jesus always clashed with the Pharisees, and so Jesus refers to the religion of the Pharisees, also referring to the religion of the Jews. I’m talking about the Bible in regards to religion of the Jews. Only one time in the Bible is the word “religion” mentioned where it’s in a good light. And I want to show you that. I want to turn to that first.

If you wouldn’t mind, dear listener, turn in the New Testament to the book of James, Chapter 1. It’s very important that you have a Bible because the only truth that you get in your life is going to be from the Word of God, not from me. So if you don’t have a Bible, please text me here at 0999-862-7223, and we’ll be glad to send you a Bible of your very own.

James Chapter 1, and I’m going to start in verse 26, which actually is the fourth mention of the word “religion,” and then the fifth mention is in the following verse, verse 27.

James 1:26: *If any man among you seem to be religious... It’s a variation of the word “religion”... and bridled not his tongue... in other words, doesn’t control his mouth... but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.* What is the meaning of vain, Ms. Ypille?

[Ms. Ypille:] It means wasted.

Yeah, good for nothing. Verse 27, here is the only time in the Bible where it’s used in a

positive light, and even here, it’s only used as an example. *Pure religion and undefiled...* What is “undefiled”?

[Ms. Ypille:] “Undefiled” means no taint.

Pure religion and undefiled before God... Notice there, who is the one that needs to be impressed?

[Ms. Ypille:] God.

[A]nd the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. That’s a big area to keep oneself unspotted from. “Visit the fatherless and widows,” what does that mean? It’s talking about taking pity upon those who are powerless or of less power than yourself.

[Ms. Ypille:] Charity.

Love, yes, compassion. There’s a very big lack of compassion. I can talk about the States all day long if I wanted to. I’m from there, so I’m very familiar, but that won’t do anybody any good here. We’re in the Philippines. I’ll give you a little observation if I may, not to criticize because I’m a foreigner here. I respect where I am. I did not come here to criticize, but to make an observation.

I have noticed in the Filipino culture that there are many here who have means. In other words, they have money; they have things. And many of them that I have observed just in the streets are very uncompassionate towards their fellow Filipinos. Many of the rich here seem to really look down on those who have less than they.



Then there are those who don't have very much and still look down on each other. But many people here claim to be very religious. So here in verse 27, the Bible is completely destroying the notion that most people may have about what religion is, because to many people religion is going through some ceremonial motions, lighting some candles, doing some sacraments, going to an ornate building and singing some songs and listening to a preacher.

But the Bible here is very clearly stating to us that to have what we would call pure religion is to have compassion on those that are less fortunate than you and not only that but to keep oneself unspotted from the world. So "unspotted from the world," that's a very large scope, and also, it's very difficult to understand what that means unless you know what the Bible says about the world.

This would really dovetail into a very large Bible study if we were to go into it, but I John 2:15-17 very clearly states, *¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

We could talk all day long about the things that are in the world. He talks about everything that's in the world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life are not of the Father but of the world, and everything of the world passes away, but he that does the will of the Father abideth forever. Those are those three verses more or less paraphrased, but the whole point of that is: What is the world? And what is in the world?

The world has its entertainment. The world has its TV shows; the world has its music; the world has its sports; the world has its styles;

and we could go on and on. But to be honest, one needs to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ to even begin to understand what it means to be separate from the world. Here we see already in the Bible there are five mentions of the word "religion" in the Bible. Four of them are in a bad context. The fifth one is in a positive light, but it's only used as an example. If anybody wants to be religious, you have to have some compassion.

People here, nobody opens the door for each other. Everybody's trying to be the first one in. There's simple courtesy that's even missing here. How much more compassion is missing here. When I see what they call compassion here, it's really all an act. If there was an Academy Award to give out, there would be Academy Awards given out every minute here. There's no real courtesy or compassion.

The Bible is very clearly teaching that, if we want to seem pious or religious, that's the very least requirement. But many don't even want to keep ourselves unspotted from the world because the world is fun. Also, the justification that many people use is God understands. No, God doesn't understand any of it. God's very clear in His judgments and His decrees and His commandments. So God doesn't understand any of it.

Now, let's talk a little bit about ourselves. As I've mentioned here several times in the broadcast and even earlier, as I said, I'm the pastor of Midway Baptist Church and all the pastors whom I had greeted earlier were from a Baptist church. What does that mean? Does that mean that the Baptist religion is correct? No. In fact, it's not quite what you think it is. But let's go with what the Bible says. That's what the whole show is about, what the Bible



says. Does the Bible say that Baptists are the correct religion? We have to do what the Bible says and this is a place where many fail.

The Bible has actually two names that are also used today for what the world would call religion. There are only two names in the Bible that are given. I'd like to direct your attention to Acts 11:26. Ms. Ypille, I'll let you read that.

[Ms. Ypille:] *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

So this, of course, is taking place during the time of the apostles, and after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Gospel message had already begun to spread, and this particular verse begins to show us that when they gathered themselves together there was a group of people that were gathered together, people who were followers of Jesus Christ.

It says here that they were called something. What was the name that they were called here?

[Ms. Ypille:] Christians.

Christians, and this is actually in the Bible. So if you want to know what is a name for the people who follow Christ, it's "Christian." It's interesting what the word "Christian" is. The underlying word in the Greek is *Christiano*. The literal actual meaning of that is "little Christ." Most likely, the people who were calling them little Christs, Christians, which is translated Christians in English, was not because it was a nice name. They were probably saying something like, "Oh, look at those

people over there. They're acting like a bunch of little Christs. They think they're like that Jesus guy from Nazareth who called Himself Christ."

[Ms. Ypille:] As if Christ.

But that's actually a good testimony, because those people were so much like the Saviour that that's what the people called them.

[Ms. Ypille:] Even though it was to deride them.

So that's a name that is found in the Bible. Some people think that Christian is a religion, but here we see in the Bible that it's not a religion. These people were followers of Christ and they were called something. You've got to find a name or delineation for everything or everybody, and these people were called Christians.

[Ms. Ypille:] Labels.

Yes, labels.

Let me take you to another place in the book of Acts, if you go a little further to Chapter 26, verse 28. In Acts Chapter 26, the apostle Paul was actually apprehended. He was arrested, and he was appearing before some very important people. In fact, he was appearing before a king here named Herod Agrippa, and he was presenting his case. Paul was presenting his case before King Agrippa and he was witnessing to him about how he followed Jesus Christ, who Jesus Christ was and what He did, and why we follow Him.

By this time, the people, including Paul, who were the followers of Christ already had a label



sticking to them. They were not a religion. They were simply followers of Jesus Christ, and they had a label that was stuck to them.

Here in verse 28 is where we read that: *Then Agrippa said unto Paul...* after Paul had spent this long time explaining to him... *Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* “Paul, you are almost convincing me to be a Christian.” So there’s that label again, “Christian.”

So we start to get an idea that maybe what the world is calling religion is not quite a religion after all, but it has a label. By the way, let’s keep in mind that Satan is a deceiver and a corrupter and a counterfeiter. Remember that, because it’s going to be important five minutes from now.

Let me take you to another place in the New Testament, the book of I Peter, Chapter 4. The apostle Peter here is giving some instruction to the followers of Jesus Christ, and he is explaining how to live the Christian life. He is teaching many of the ordinary teachings of the New Testament, love thy neighbor, stay away from fornication, stay away from corruption, stay away from idols, things like that.

In I Peter 4:

[Ms. Ypille:] *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

There’s that label again, so even Peter is talking about living the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. If you live the life that’s a follower of Jesus Christ, truly, you will suffer, because the world and Jesus Christ are incompatible. That’s

why most people don’t truly want to follow Christ. They would rather follow a religion.

Here, Peter is saying, “You’re probably going to suffer if you live for Jesus Christ.” And it says here in verse 16 that, if you suffer as a Christian, see, there’s that label again, then don’t be ashamed, because ‘Christian’ means Christ-like. Instead glorify God because of this suffering as a Christian.”

These are the three times in the Bible where the word “Christian” appears. Isn’t that interesting? The word “Christian.” Now, I’m hoping, dear listeners, that as you’re listening to this, and if you’ve been following along in the Bible, you get to see that we have not been talking about a religion. We have simply been talking about followers of Jesus Christ. These followers were given a label.

There’s another label in the Bible. It’s in the Bible. Remember this show is what the Bible says. It’s not just a label. This was actually the title of a particular person. I would like to direct your attention to Matthew 3:1. There’s a title that appears here that appears fifteen times in the New Testament. We saw “Christian” how many times?

[Ms. Ypille:] Three.

Three times, but this title appears fifteen times in the New Testament. Matthew 3:1, Ms. Ypille, would you please read that.

[Ms. Ypille:] My pleasure. *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.*

The label there is John’s label, “the Baptist.” The word “Baptist,” the label or the title



“Baptist” appears fifteen times in the New Testament. And I will be honest with you, in all those fifteen renderings, it’s the title for John, John the Baptizer, so John the Baptist.

Here we have a title that’s given to a particular man, but what’s really interesting is that it happens to be a title that’s there fifteen times, and it happens to be a title that’s carried by people today.

Just to give you a little bit of background, those Christians that we saw in the Bible earlier, those three examples. They were first called Christians; you almost persuade me to be a Christian; if any man suffer as a Christian... Christ-like, follower of Christ.

One of the things that Christ commanded us to do besides preach the Gospel to everyone in the world, there was one other thing that He commanded us to do. Do you remember what that is in the Great Commission? He commanded us to preach and teach and then baptize. So those of us who follow Christ, we’re very concerned with baptism.

Once a person gets saved, once they receive Jesus Christ, the first step would be, and it’s very important, baptism. Over the years, the group of Christians who, most of them, not all of them because never is there really an absolute with this, but most of them, the large percentage of those Christians, the Christ followers who were labeled Christians who held very tightly and strictly to what the Bible says and who insisted on proper baptism. In other words, they wouldn’t accept baptism from a foreign or alien religion. To join the church you would have to be properly baptized by a Bible-authorized church.

From all of that re-baptizing, that insistence on proper baptizing over the last few hundred years, many labeled these people from Christian to Baptizers or Baptists. Not all of them. Some of them are still Christians, but I’m saying the large majority of them.

And there’s a long story behind all that, too, but just to kind of bring it forward quickly, that’s where we get our title from when we say we’re Baptists. We’re not a religion. We are simply coming from a long line of people that, from the time of Christ, we have very strictly followed only what the Bible says.

We’re not a religion. We have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We’re not perfect people, nor are we better people than anyone else. We are simply sinners who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ by His love for us.

He’s the one that died on the cross for us, according to the Scriptures; He was buried; and He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. We have received Him and accepted Him as our personal Lord and Saviour.

Because of that, He has promised, as He said, *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*, Romans 10:13. And because of that, we are born again. We are saved. And so we identify ourselves as Baptists, not because we have chosen the Baptist religion because there’s no such thing as a Baptist religion, we have chosen the way of the pure Bible. We have followed the same way that those people that you saw first called Christians in a place called Antioch, which is in Syria today. We come from that line.



Our Bible comes from that line. The Bible that we use comes directly from that particular city of Antioch. The way, the following of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from that line. So even we Baptists also call ourselves Christians because we strive to be Christ-like.

But as far as, when we put a signboard on one of our churches, we put “Baptist” in our signboard to publicly let the world know we are of the line that follows that way of Jesus Christ from the time that He was here.

So, what is religion? Religion is a waste. What counts in eternity is not religion, dear listener. It is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know for sure if you died today, are you 100% sure? Are you 90% sure that you will go to Heaven? If you’re 90% sure, I’ll tell you right now, gravely, very delicately, it’s not a good place to be. You need to be 100% sure. You cannot take a chance with eternity.

So, dear listener, if you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and you put your trust in Jesus Christ, Him alone, not on yourself, not on your religion, not on your works, but only on what Jesus Christ did for you, that He died on the cross and took away your sins. If you place your trust on that, on Him, you will be saved. So what is religion? It really counts for nothing.