

Religion v Christianity

Some people, who have not looked closely at what it really means to be a born-again Christian, make an assumption that Christians must be “religious” people. Undoubtedly *some* Christians do behave in religious ways, but this is not a consequence of having a meaningful relationship with God. On the contrary, it is more likely to hinder the relationship with God than to help it to grow!

All religion, whether nominally Christian or not, is rooted in human effort, manipulation and control, bringing condemnation on individuals and communities alike. This is in complete contrast to the message of freedom through the death and resurrection of Jesus that is central to the Christian gospel.

The Bible draws many distinctions between being religious and being a Christian.

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
...full of guilt and shame	...freedom from condemnation	<p>Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10²²</p> <p>For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3¹⁶⁻¹⁸</p>
...self-righteous	...admitting my mistakes	<p>To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18⁹⁻¹⁴</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
...a ritual	... a relationship	<p>Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions...These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2^{18 & 22-23}</p> <p>Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." John 17²⁴⁻²⁶</p>
...bound by the past	...released and healed	<p>Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. Galatians 2²³</p> <p>He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53⁵</p>
...a burden	...finding rest	<p>Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Luke 11⁴⁶</p> <p>Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11²⁸⁻³⁰</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
<p>...trying hard to be good enough</p>	<p>...knowing I could never be good enough</p>	<p>Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Galatians 3³</p> <p>This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3²²⁻²⁴</p>
<p>...doing my best to gain eternal life</p>	<p>...knowing that I already have it</p>	<p>I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Philippians 3⁸⁻⁹</p> <p>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." John 11²⁵⁻²⁶</p>
<p>...keeping the rules</p>	<p>...living life</p>	<p>Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Matthew 23²³⁻²⁴</p> <p>Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. Colossians 2¹⁶</p> <p>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10¹⁰</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
...reaching a certain standard	...belonging	<p>A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2¹⁶</p> <p>You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1Peter 2⁹</p>
...empty and meaningless	...having a purpose	<p>Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations - I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Isaiah 1¹³</p> <p>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8²⁸</p> <p>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2¹⁰</p>
...trying to please others	...being accepted	<p>Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2²⁻⁴</p> <p>You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1Peter 2⁵</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
...self-promoting	...putting others first	<p>An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all - he is the greatest." Luke 9⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸</p> <p>Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. 1Corinthians 10²⁴</p> <p>Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5²¹</p>
...going nowhere fast	...the only way to go	<p>I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5²¹⁻²⁴</p> <p>Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14⁶</p>
...looking out for myself	...standing up for the poor and needy	<p>These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm - shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted - twice dead. Jude 1¹²</p> <p>If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 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. James 1²⁶⁻²⁷</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
...trying to look good	...freedom to be myself	<p>Everything they do is done for men to see...they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' Matthew 23⁵⁻⁶</p> <p>It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5¹</p>
...false and hypocritical	...being real	<p>Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Matthew 23²⁷⁻²⁸</p> <p>You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8³²</p>
...doing things out of duty only	...doing things out of love for God	<p>Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2Corinthians 9⁷</p> <p>We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1John 1¹⁹⁻²¹</p>
...performing for others	...for an audience of one	<p>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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 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. Matthew 6⁵⁻⁶</p>

Differences

Being religious is...	Being a Christian is...	What the Bible says
<p>...what I can do for God</p>	<p>...what Jesus has done for me</p>	<p>Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Matthew 7²¹⁻²³</p> <p>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12²</p>
<p>...all about me</p>	<p>...all about Jesus</p>	<p>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Philippians 2³</p> <p>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28¹⁸</p> <p>There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 1Corinthians 8⁶</p>