

The Christian and other Religions

Religion is man's quest for God; the gospel is the Saviour God seeking lost men. Religion originates on earth; the gospel originated in heaven. Religion is man-made; the gospel is the gift of God. Religion is the story of what a sinful man tries to do for a holy God; the gospel is the story of what a holy God has done for sinful men. Religion is good views; the gospel is good news.

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Romans 10: 1 – 4 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

1) Viewing Religion from a Kingdom Perspective

- There are only two domains active in the world – the Kingdom of God and the domain of darkness
 - Colossians 1: 13 – 14 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
 - All religion falls in the domain of darkness
 - Religion is that which binds up
- Religion is part of the systems of this world
 - It is man's endeavor to set a moral standard of righteousness in the world
 - Although man is fallen and separated from God there is still a degree of God consciousness within man causing man to put a system of laws and rituals into place to please God according to their own understanding of who God is.
 - It could even be a misinterpretation of the laws that God Himself had set and adding or taking away from it.
- Looking from a kingdom perspective there is the relationship with God in the kingdom of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ and there is religion in the domain of the world – darkness
 - One religion isn't better than another
 - We cannot start comparing religions to decide which is better as there is no difference – ALL are in the domain of darkness. ALL have tried to establish their own righteousness rather than submit to God's righteousness
 - We cannot say that Islam is better than Hinduism or Judaism is better than Buddhism
 - There is no difference between an unbelieving Muslim and an unbelieving Jew or even an unbelieving Christian i.e. not believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour
- In the Kingdom of God there is loving submission to the king – Jesus – to hear His voice and walk in living obedience to Him rather than adhering to a set of prescribed rituals and laws

2) The Christian and Practises of other Religions

- Even though we understand that we are in the world but not of the world we are practically confronted with other religions on a regular basis
- For a Christian to participate in other religious practises is basically participation in worldly practises that is under the dominion of darkness (using the terminology from Colossians 1)
- Some practises are blatantly obviously wrong whilst other are more subtle in nature and need wisdom on how to deal with them
 - Let us take into account that that Satan uses the subtle and not the obvious to deceive people
 - 1 Corinthians 11: 14 – 15 For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness
- Let us look at a few practises of other religions that the Christian needs to be aware of:
- Idolatry
 - Exodus 20: 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything

- Idolatry is not only the adoration of images . . . but also trust in one's own righteousness, works and merits, and putting confidence in riches and power.
MARTIN LUTHER
- Food that we eat
 - We don't have to be legalistic in what we eat as all food is clean for the Christian
 - Mark 7: 18 – 19 "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")
 - 1 Corinthians 10: 31 – 32 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God
- Marriage
 - 2 Corinthians 6: 14 – 16 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?"? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?
- Prayer
 - Matthew 6: 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words
- When dealing with other religions we can ask ourselves of the practises:
 - Is it godly? i.e in line with the Bible e.g. hospitality
 - Is it fallen? E.g. idolatry
 - Is it demonic? E.g. Astrology
 - Is it neutral? i.e. not promoted nor condemned in the Bible e.g. Dress code
 - The godly and neutral can be practised but the fallen and demonic need to be thrown out

3) The Christian's response to other Religions

- As Christians living amongst other religions in this world we are to have Kingdom responses to the other religions and not worldly responses
- So many Christians are quick to judge other religions and the adherents of those religions when Jesus has very clearly commanded us not to judge them
 - Matthew 7: 1 Do not judge, or you too will be judged
 - John 3: 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.
- God would have us love people of other religions and respect them as people created in His image and likeness and people for who Christ died.
 - Matthew 22: 39 Love your neighbor as yourself
- Does this mean that we ought to respect their religion as well?
 - No. We respect them as people but not their religious system
 - We must remember that the religious system is a system of the world and we don't respect that which is fallen
 - However, we don't belittle or condemn the religious system out of love and respect for the system so that they may be won for Christ
- The Apostles never condemned other religions but used them to communicate the Gospel
 - Whilst Paul was in Athens in Acts 17 he did not condemn the Athenians but remarked on how religious they were as a starting point to present the Gospel (v. 22)
 - Whilst in Ephesus the city clerk commented that the Apostles had "neither robbed temples nor blasphemed their goddess".
- With the modern trend stating that all religions are one and that all roads eventually get to God we need to make a stand that it is only through Jesus Christ that God is known and eternal life is received.
 - Acts 4: 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved
 - Acts 14: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me