



Thru God's Eye: Life in the REAL World

What About Religion? Can It Meet Your Most Basic Needs?

Crossroads, October 23, 2011 - Mark Bickel



TEACHING NOTES

Intro:

Colossians 2:6-15

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

PRAY

Opening Questions (<5 min.)

- **Why is it people do not go to church?** (or decide to leave the church?)
 - Hypocrites / hateful
 - Not connect to real life / describe a 'fairy tale' life unlike mine / no good answers
 - Disenchanted / bad experience
 - Not make sense anymore
 - Boring, same thing over again
 - Each church have one specialty, none have multiple positives
 - All about money
 - Friends not interested / thing it crazy.
- **What is it people are looking for when they decide to 'get spiritual', or 'become religious'?**
 - Crisis in life
 - Desire for greater purpose
 - Connect to something larger in the universe
 - Need for community / social network
 - Guilt

1) What is Religion? How do You Pick One? (>5 min.)

- **Basic Definitions:**

- **Dictionary.com – Religion**
a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.
- **WikiPedia.con – Religion**
Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that establishes symbols that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature.
- **Sociologist's Definition** – focus on the effect common beliefs have on culture
- **Psychologist's Definition** – focus on the effects on our self-identify if we believe in something bigger than ourselves
 - Example: 12-step programs realize it helps to believe in a “higher power”
- **Scientist's Definition** – physical, mental, genealogical descriptions of belief
- **World Religion's Claims** – belief will lead to enlightenment, happiness, peace, purpose in life, eternal life, reincarnation, appeasing the gods, oneness with God, becoming a god ...

- **How do You pick one?**

- **Charts starting with how many God's you want ... Articles on determining what “Flavor” of religion you want**
- **Beliefnet: Belief'o'matic:**
 - Even if YOU don't know what faith you are, **Belief-O-Matic™** knows. Answer 20 questions about your concept of God, the afterlife, human nature, and more, and **Belief-O-Matic™** will tell you what religion (if any) you practice...or ought to consider practicing.
- **eHow.com**
 - Investigate if it is a fun religion.
 - Psychoanalyze the collective personality of the followers.
 - Evaluate the track record of the religion.
 - Probe to find out if the religion has a power structure
 - Assess the culture of the religion.
 - Study the beliefs of the religion.

- **The Problem with Religion**

- True Faith requires belief in the God who created the universe

- **Hebrews 11:1-3, 6**

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. **By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible... And without faith it is impossible to please him, **for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him***

- True godliness needs to power of God Himself

- **2 Timothy 3:1-5**

*But understand this, that in the last days **there will come times of difficulty**. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power**. Avoid such people.*

- Many people want benefits of religion, but without encountering the true God!
- But without the power of God religion is worthless ... in that regard atheist right – if there is no God then it is foolish, even dangerous to have religion!
- But the God of the Bible, in addition to claiming the role of creator and God, also demands more than simply religion, rather he calls us to give him all our heart, soul, mind and strength ... transforming not just our 'religious practices but all of life!

- **Application:**

- Religion is utterly worthless without God, and vitally critical to all of life in light of God

2) Does Religion Meet Our Most Basic Need? (~5 min.)

- **How do religions describe our need?**
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- **How do religions try to meet our need?**
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- **What does the Bible say?**
 - Need is not money, sex, power ... or better life, better planet, better world ... or equality, dignity, empowerment ..
 - Need is not to have purpose in life, or contentment, or enlightenment ...
 - Need is not even “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”
 - Need is to worship, serve, know and love God of the universe
 - And thus most fundamental need is to address the fact that we have turned away from, rebelled against, and are under the righteous judgment of that God
 - Romans 5:6-11 – while sinners, Christ died for us ... justifies and redeems us
 - **Romans 5:6-11**

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*
 - Bible is **ONLY** religious book that offers this drastic a statement of the problem and this amazing of a solution ... all other religions fall far short of true reconciliation to God
- **Application:**
 - Critical to first **define the need correctly** before we can ask what religions meet the need
 - Once need is truly seen and felt, **no solution other than Jesus Christ** can come close to meeting it
 - For self, and for reaching others, there **can be no good news without grasping the bad news!**
 - Fortunately, **God’s Spirit is in the business of convicting** and showing people sin!

3) False Christianity (~10 min.)

- Legalistic, self-made religion

- Colossians 2:22-23

*If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed **an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion** and asceticism and severity to the body, **but they are of no value** in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

- Galatians – why start with gospel of grace and then try to live by works?
 - Jesus says his burden is light, yet we put burdens on ourselves and others
 - And **non-Christians** end up seeing God as an angry rule-maker and party killer

- Permissive, worthless religion

- James 1:22-27

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

- Jesus constantly challenges people to take practical steps to live out their faith
 - And **non-Christians** see right through our hypocrisy when we claim things about God and Christianity that they do not see in our own lives

- Application:

- **{2 hands illustration}** – on one hand we have salvation, on the other we have living out the Christian life ... Dangers are either **inverting the hands** assuming life gets us salvation / favor with God, or **separating the hands** assuming we can freely get salvation apart from changing our lives. **Bible says both are connected, but connected in a specific order.**
 - **"Christian" cults** tend to fall into these two categories – either very legalistic, or very permissive, or both (legalistic in some areas, and disregarding Scripture in others)
 - **We need to look at our own heart and life** ... do we see God as rule maker and judge ourselves and others on a self-made checklist ... or do we see God as Santa Claus handing out fire insurance with no cost or change of life necessary and religion as fun times of friendship, music and happiness with no concern for what God is most concerned about

4) Authentic Christianity (~8 min.)

- **Seeing God for who He is**
 - falling before Him in worship
- **Acknowledging our sin, rebellion and self-worship**
 - confessing and repenting
- **Coming to Jesus**
 - freely receiving his gift of Salvation
 - knowing we did not and cannot earn it, but that God has graciously covered every sin and fully redeemed us
- **Seeking to live out of that redemption**
 - not judging ourselves and others by some religious list of do's and don't
 - but also not simply claiming Christ and living for ourselves...
- **Offering all our lives in love of God ... and through Him in love of neighbor**
 - resulting in time and effort spent getting to know God,
 - care for the church
 - practical actions of love for the poor, needy, widow, orphan, and lost of the world
- **Trusting in God's promises**
 - to meet all our needs
 - to give us deep, abiding joy and peace even in the midst of suffering
 - and an eternal life with him free from all cares and concerns
- **Giving God all the glory**

Conclusions and Applications – Questions for each of us this week

- How authentic is your Christianity?
- Is your religion self-made or worthless religion, or is it the religion God desires?

Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore, **as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him**, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Pray

Recommended Reading:

World Religions in a Nutshell by Ray Comfort

So What's The Difference? A Look at 20 Worldviews, Faiths and Religions and How They Compare to Christianity by Fritz Ridenour

AMG's Handi-Reference: World Religions and Cults compiled by John Hunt with Dan Penwell

Kingdom of the Cults by Walter Martin with Revi Zacharius

Rose Publishing Resources – World Religions, Cults and Denominations all have pamphlets and powerpoint files. Several specific religions also have pamphlets and some have powerpoint files.

NEXT WEEK: Does Love Really Win? Heaven, Hell and the End of Life as We Know It.