



Sermon Series: Questionable Cliches, Part 3

Sermon Title: "Christianity is a Relationship Not a Religion"

Speaker/ Date: Scott McCrea, April 25, 2021

We can't just accept clichés as true just because they sound good and are familiar to us. And that goes for this week's cliché - *Christianity is a relationship, not a religion* **James 1:27**

There are places in the bible where it seems that Jesus is against religion. Jesus boldly confronted the Pharisees and the other religious leaders in Israel, calling them out for their heartless religion. **Matthew 23:27, Matthew 23:4**

It seems that even Jesus was speaking out against religion but, that's not the case. Jesus was a Jew, and He was devout. He was very religious. But what Jesus did hate is *false* religion – the kinds which say that *"in order to get right with God, you need to do A, B, and C."* Jesus rejected false religion, but Jesus is not against real true religion.

God defines true religion in the bible. He describes it in **James 1:27**

Big Idea: Embrace Christianity as both a relationship and the true religion

James 1:27 is describing the natural outcomes that flow from having a relationship with Christ. Simply put, true religion is the part that others observe coming from our relationship with Christ. Christianity's aim is to worship, serve, know, proclaim, believe, obey, and organize around this Jesus – but it's not doing those things IN ORDER TO HAVE a relationship with God, but to do them BECAUSE OF our relationship with God ... communion, baptism, and gathering together - we don't do them TO BE SAVED – we do them BECAUSE WE ARE SAVED.

Relationship is at the core of the Christian religion. Christianity is absolutely about a relationship with Jesus, but not to the exclusion of religion.

We need to examine three actions that make the Christian religion true.

1. REACHES UPWARD because it recognizes God as Father

James 1:27

It begins recognizing God as Father. There is only one way to have God as your Heavenly Father, and that is to have Christ as your Savior. God is only the Father of those who have been saved. If you have never put your trust in Jesus as your Savior, then God is not your Father. If you don't have a relationship with Him - you have a different father. [John 8:44](#)

God invites everyone to come to Him. [John 1:12](#)

2. REACHES OUTWARD because it demonstrates value for others

Religion that is pleasing to the Father reaches outward. James uses the example of visiting widows and orphans during troubled times. "To visit" here is the idea of taking care of and looking after someone in need. True religion that is pleasing to the Father demonstrates love and compassion. [1 John 3:16-18](#), [John 13:35](#)

Followers of Christ will reach out to those in distress just as Christ reached out to us and met our greatest need when He took the wrath of God in our place. [Romans 5:8](#)

True religion follows God's example that says we will grace people who have nothing to offer back to us. Our Position, standing, and quality of life will GAIN NOTHING by investing in someone else, but we do it anyway.

3. REACHES INWARD because it Pursues God with a whole & undivided heart

James 1:27

Christians will strive to keep themselves from being corrupted by the world. James is talking about acting in accordance with the unchristian VALUE-SYSTEM of the society around us. [1John 2:16](#), [James 4:4](#)

The danger of believing that Christianity is ONLY a relationship and not a religion is it can lead to the belief that you're going to walk your Christian life alone – without others – and that is not how Jesus designed His church.

The Christian religion is designed for community. Christian Community is vital not just because we're commanded in the New Testament to regularly gather together, but because - we are made to live out our faith in community – not independently. [Hebrews 10:24-25](#)

We are called to be baptized before our church family; we take the Lord's Supper together as a community, we give financially together so our local churches can still operate. We support each other to become more like Christ.

Christianity is a relationship with God, but it is also a religion. But it is not a false religion that puts heavy burdens on people so that they can be right with God. True religion is not one that burdens us down – but frees us from the burdens. **Matthew 11:30**

Discussion Questions:

- What about the sermon stuck with you this week? What part challenged your thinking?
- Why does this cliché resonate so well with Christians?
- What are some of the side effects of viewing Christianity as only a relationship?
- What are ways that the world tries to corrupt Christians, and how can we avoid being corrupted?
- When you hear that Christianity is a religion- what is your initial reaction? Do you agree or disagree?
- Do you have any personal experience with false religion? Explain
- Jesus said that those who do not put their faith in Him have the devil as their father. Is that teaching too harsh? Would you ever say that to an unbeliever? Why or why not?
- Describe ways you've seen Christians selflessly meeting the needs of others

BIBLE VERSES

Matthew 23:27 You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. NIV

Matthew 23:4 "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger." ESV

James 1:27 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. ESV

John 8:44 "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." NIV

John 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ESV

1 John 3:16–18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. NIV

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. NIV

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. NIV

1 John 2:16 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. NIV

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. NIV

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. NIV

Matthew 11:30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.