

Reasons for Religious Membership

Are you a Democrat or Republican? Whichever you are, there is a reason why you are. Do you like the Browns or the Bengals or some other team? There is a reason why you root for whoever. All of us are the products of a number of factors that contribute to who we are as individuals. This is also true of all people in a religious sense. Let us examine some of the reasons people are what they are in the religious sense.

1. Cultural Reason. One might consider that some countries have a state sponsored religion. This allows that religion to dominate and it is likely that an overwhelming majority will be whatever the state has willingly sponsored. In our country one may be of a certain religion due to its constituting a majority in a community. Others may be of a certain religion in order to have influence or opportunity socially and in business. Obviously, at the core of this is obedience to man, not God (Acts 5:29).

2. Family Reason. Some folks may be of a certain religion because that is what the rest of the family (including ancestors) are or have been. The religions that practice infant baptism are the most obvious in the promotion of this. Religion in such cases is a matter of inheritance rather than free choice. In other cases this reason is so ingrained that to leave the religion is tantamount to renouncing one's birthright! When family becomes the operating medium for religion, Christ is forsaken (Matt. 10:37).

3. Self-Interest Reason. Some are members of a certain religion due to what they perceive they will gain to their advantage. They are members because of the social activities for adults, but particularly for their children. Some are members because of a lack of Bible teaching especially in the area of their own involvement. Some are so vacant as to be members only so they can avoid some social stigma associated with not being a member of something. This blatant attempt to fulfill worldly desires is a shame (Phil. 3:19).

4. Romantic Reason. Some will become a member of some religion because a boyfriend or girlfriend is a member of it. In a few cases this is mandatory before a wedding can take place. It may then be deduced by a few that this religion needs to be maintained for the marriage to endure. Physical love is not equal to the value of a soul (Mk. 8:36).

5. Truth As A Reason. Some are what they are religiously because of what the Bible says. "And the common people heard Him gladly." (Mk. 12:37). We understand that not only did they hear Him gladly, but they believed Him and followed Him. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:44). It was the truth of Jesus' teaching that was the drawing power. "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). People were able to differentiate between the false and genuine article. Christians are those who are obedient to the truth (Rom. 6:17; 1 Peter 1:22). This obedience is entered willingly and cheerfully. It is the "keeping of commandments" (Rev. 22:14) that marks a Christian. The truth is viewed as a precious commodity by those who base all of their participation upon it (Jn. 8:32; Prov. 23:23). 1 Thessalonians 2:13 is an excellent passage at explaining this, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

Friends, Reasons #1-4 are used by far more than we may care to really consider. When you add to this the feeling of security that many have and you can see how the problem is compounded. The mega-churches that are becoming so popular today are cleverly crafting a platform where all of these reasons can be either exploited or woven in until there is no problem with membership in a mega-church as opposed to some of the older "stand-bys" of days gone by. This is what it may prove to be easier to teach a member of a mainline denomination than a member of a mega-church.

We need to be realistic and admit that Reasons #1-4 can also occur in churches of Christ. A failure to admit this is so much "sticking of the head in the sand." Perhaps at the onset someone may be baptized with these reasons in mind. It is hoped that with additional teaching the error of such thinking will become apparent and changes will be made.

There is simply no substitute for Reason #5. Paul describes those who are willing to have truth as a reason for being what they are "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:5-6). Let us all strive to have truth as our reason for our spiritual service.

~Terry~