

Religion vs. Faith



Is there a difference? I've wrestled with this question for years.

With spiritual stuff in particular, the words you use should be carefully explained so that there aren't misunderstandings. Unfortunately, that rarely happens. We all walk around with our own experiences and bias and knowledge often blithely unaware how uniquely each of us understand and think about things. For topics we are passionate about, we develop "hot buttons" that immediately get our blood pressure up or passionate opinions flowing. Like-minded people will congregate so they can agree with each other. Those with opposing views not so much. Whether you're at a sports event, a political rally, or a religious service rarely are opposing views encouraged or welcome. *Get outta here now, I mean it.*

Religion is a "structured system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and worldviews that connect individuals to a higher power or ultimate reality." (Thanks, AI.) Spiritual faith is a complete trust or confidence in someone. Religion is the road you travel to get to the Someone you trust with your life. During Jesus' time, there wasn't much of a distinction between faith and religion. Your religion was the center of *everything*. If you were Jewish, your religion influenced what you ate, what you wore, how you performed at work, who you hung out with and who you avoided ... There was no aspect of your life in which religion was not influential.

But what if religion got off track from the desires and wishes of God? Could that happen? Jesus insisted it could and it did. You might be surprised to know that Jesus' opinion regarding many of the religious leaders at the time was not positive. He condemned all those who saw themselves as superior and all-knowledgeable – religiously or politically. He identified them as hypocrites ([Matt. 23:13](#)), twice as bad as the worst individual they counseled ([Matt. 23:15](#)), and greedy and self-indulgent ([Matt. 23:25](#)) ... to name a few!

Jesus said that [what God wanted was very simple](#): to be loved with all of a person's passion, prayer, intelligence and energy *and* for each of us to love others as we love ourselves. It wasn't what you showed; it was how you loved. It wasn't what you said, it was what you did. It was all about internal transformation, not external flash and flair. Many who listened, recognized the truth, love, and hope in Jesus's message. They chose to believe and, in doing so, shifted their faith to a God-sent savior.

This was true spiritual faith.

Now we all have faith of some kind or another about one thing or another. (C.S. Lewis pointed out that a huge percentage of all we believe is rooted *only* in faith – something we have *chosen* to believe even though we have never really witnessed it in reality. Think about that.) [Hebrews 11:1](#) says, "*Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*" It's believing in advance what will only be proven when we can look at it in reverse. I will add, that in my experience, faith can start small ([as small as a mustard seed](#)) but then grow to a point

where you believe you can move mountains! In fact, Jesus insisted that faith makes anything possible. (Think about *that*.)

Jesus roundly rejected the attitude that established “us” and “them.” Religion, at its best, is meant to shape and guide faith – not replace it. It’s not the destination, but the map to get there! He insisted that every single one of us was in the same boat: lost at sea in serious need of rescue. When religion becomes about comparison instead of rescue, it misses the point. The first step was acknowledging the truth of that reality, the second step was recognizing the need for forgiveness and transformation, and the last step was believing that Jesus offered The Perfect Way to accomplish all of this. *That* kind of faith is what religion is meant to serve.

Jesus taught:

- You’re all in trouble, but I can save you. ([John 14:6](#))
- Stop judging and focus on your own integrity. ([Matthew 7:1-5](#), [16-18](#))
- The best thing you can do is love God and your neighbor. ([Matt. 22:37-39](#), [Mark 12:30-31](#))
- Yes, loving your neighbor means even your enemies. ([Matt. 5:44](#), [Luke 6:27-35](#))
- If you want to be forgiven, you have to forgive others. ([Matt. 6:14-15](#), [Matt. 18:33](#))
- You want greatness? Be a humble servant to others. ([Matt. 20:26-28](#), [Luke 9:48](#))
- Say you’re sorry and be heartfelt about it. ([1 Jn. 1:9](#))

I am the spiritual person I am because of religion. It taught me Scripture, prayer, and the joy of being a friend of God. Religion has also caused me heartbreak, but it has not interfered with my relationship with God! (It might have even brought me closer to God ... which might need to be another post!) The question isn’t whether you’re religious. The question is: What – or Who – are you trusting? It a question only you can answer. Think of it as important as if your life depended on it ... which it does.

Scripture to maybe check out:

- Did you check out all the Scripture references I linked in the above blog? Would you have interpreted them the same way I did? Would you have added more to the list of Jesus’ teachings? It’s important that you develop your own opinions about all this important stuff...!

P.S. For this post, I used the New International Version of the Bible put out by Biblica, Inc. in 1973, 1978, 1984, and 2011. Feel free to check these passages out in whatever Bible version you prefer—almost all of them are available on Bible Gateway!

P.P.S. I mentioned C.S. Lewis in this post. He was a wonderful biblical scholar who wrote lots of books (including the Chronicles of Narnia!). His book *Mere Christianity* is very powerful. Looking on Facebook or Instagram, you can find pages that focus on his many spiritual quotes which is a great place to start if you’re interested.

What are your thoughts about this post? Email me and let me know!
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