

Why People Hate Religion

Introduction. The Orlando nightclub shooting on June 12, 2016 that claimed 49 lives and injured 53 is a chilling reminder of a quote by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal: “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”

In a 911 call shortly after the attack began, Mateen swore allegiance to the leader of ISIS. Only a couple of short weeks later, on June 28, three ISIS operatives bombed Istanbul’s Ataturk Airport, killing 42 and wounding 238. Just last Friday, at least seven Islamic gunmen took hostages in a restaurant in Bangladesh. After a 10-hour siege, 28 people were killed.

I can understand to some degree the unbeliever’s criticism of religion when you consider Islamic terrorism, holy wars through the years involving Protestants and Catholics, the sexual scandals among Catholic priests involving young boys, the fake healers that prey on the weak hoping for a miracle, and the televangelists who beg for money for ministry while living lavish lifestyles. This is why people hate religion.

Political pundit and comedian, Bill Maher once opined: “We are a nation that is unenlightened because of religion ... I think that religion stops people from thinking. I think it justifies crazies. I think that flying planes into a building was a faith-based initiative. I think religion is a neurological disorder.” Maher went on to say he was including all religious people. He said religion “is a crutch for weak-minded people.”

However, while the actual word is not frequently used, there is a biblical view of religion. It is one that if people are properly instructed, they will not hate. James provides this perspective in 1:26-27 and the religion of which he speaks is founded by Jesus Christ. There are four elements of proper religion from these two verses that need to be learned by every Christian who will attempt to teach others.

I. Jesus’ Religion Is Pure

- A. It is unmixed and uncontaminated by the self-promoting religions of men. By definition it is ethically free from corruption, depravity, and selfish desires. There is nothing vile, evil, or heinous about the religion of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:8; John 15:3; 2 Timothy 2:22).
- B. Pure religion demands:
 1. Fear and respect of God (Deuteronomy 10:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13).
 2. A love of God (Deuteronomy 10:12; Mark 12:29-30).
 3. A knowledge of God (Hosea 6:6).
 4. Humility (Micah 6:8).
 5. The new birth (John 3:3, 5).
 6. Being doers of the word (James 1:22; 2:18-20).
 - a) Some dislike religion because it emphasizes rules. Some have argued that because we are under grace, we have no law (Romans 6:14-15). However, we are under “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).
 - b) Not only did Jesus teach and command His apostles to teach obedience to His commandments (Matthew 28:19-20), He outlined what to do when brethren disobeyed the law (Matthew 18:15-20).

II. Jesus' Religion Restricts Our Baser Desires

- A. True religion is not the vehicle for out-of-control evil doers. To enjoy pure religion, Jesus calls for self-control, self-discipline, and self-mastery of the works of the flesh (Romans 6:6, 12; Galatians 5:16-17, 24-26; 1 Peter 2:11; 4:2).
- B. This means that we will not try to kill or coerce others with our religion. It means that we will have control over our sexual appetites. It means that we will not be covetous and desire "filthy lucre" (1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2). Baser desires also mean that we will not seek revenge or retaliation for wrongs done (Matthew 5:38-41; Romans 12:19-21).
- C. This is taken even to the point of moderating the very words we speak. The tongue is important and it is so easy to mishandle what say (Matthew 12:36-37; Ephesians 4:29; 5:4; James 3:5, 8).

III. Jesus' Religion Produces Ministry Toward Others

- A. Pure religion commands a love for ourselves and for our neighbor (Romans 13:10; Galatians 6:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:13). It cares, feels compassion, and shows concern for the less fortunate. Compassion means "to feel passion with someone" or "to enter sympathetically into one's sorrow and pain" (cp. Acts 28:2). James specifically mentions "the fatherless and widows."
- B. Real religion helps instead of hurts (Hebrews 5:1-2; 10:34; 13:3; 1 Peter 3:8). It builds instead of demolishes. It saves instead of destroys. The religion of Christ lifts the fallen, serves the needy, and provides for the disenfranchised.

IV. Jesus' Religion Is Validated By A Virtuous Lifestyle

- A. It is different from the world. It is unspotted, untainted, and unstained. "Unspotted" means being without what might mar one's moral character (2 Peter 3:14). We need to be uncorrupted, unpolluted, and untouched by the world.
- B. Those who have been converted to Christ have been cleansed by His blood and free from the impurity of sin and its associated motivations. True Christians seek to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12).
- C. To many people, living virtuously is equivalent to "legalism" or "Phariseeism," but Christ commanded that the righteousness of a Christian has to be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).
 - 1. The Pharisees were very loose in their personal moral code of ethics. The contrast between the standards of Jesus and the Pharisees is apparent.
 - a) Jesus shows that they looked pure but were altogether different inside where God sees their true character (Matthew 23:3, 25-26).
 - b) Jesus shows that they were often dishonest in their dealings (Matthew 23:4). Furthermore, they did not care about the lost (Matthew 9:11).
 - c) They ignored the Law of Moses on key moral issues like keeping oaths, murder, and covetousness (Matthew 23:16-22, 27-33; Luke 16:14).
 - d) They brought a woman guilty of adultery before Jesus but could not throw a stone because they were guilty themselves (John 8:3-4).
 - 2. When people claim to love God, but hold to loose moral standards, they are Pharisees. Strict moral standards were never criticized by Jesus, and therefore cannot correctly be called "legalism" or "Phariseeism".

Conclusion. Do not be deceived by false religion or discouraged by corrupt religion, or even dissuaded by the downfall of some Christians who fail to be faithful disciples. Religion is not bad when you believe, obey, and fully embrace the religion of Jesus Christ. I have no problem with a Muslim who tolerates religious liberty and does not seek to subjugate those who disagree with him. I believe Islam to be false, but there are Christians who have corrupted their religion as well. When they do, they forfeit the possibility of eternal life. Instead of being one of them, repent and follow the precepts of pure and undefiled religion.