

Religious or Spiritual?

Introduction

- People say, “I’m not religious, I’m spiritual”.
- Why they say it:
 - Aversion to religion
 - Religion (especially “organized religion”) has left a bad taste in people’s mouths.
 - Religion throughout history has been
 1. Full of corruption and hypocrisy
 2. Used to manipulate and oppress.
 - Desire for spirituality
 - Rejecting corruption in religion, however, doesn’t mean they want to reject belief in God or a connection with a higher power.
 - So there is an inclination to reject religion, and just focus on a personal spiritual connection with God.
- People in the Christian community also think this way
 - Famous “spoken word” on YouTube: “I Hate Religion, but Love Jesus”.
 - The “Christian” world has been full of corruption as well, and many believers in Jesus want to reject that corruption, but hold on to a relationship with Jesus.
- Purpose of this lesson:
 - Understand what the Bible says about religion and spirituality and answer the questions, “Do we need to be religious?”, and “What does it mean to be spiritual”?

Our Cultures Understanding of Religion & Spirituality

* *This is just my attempt to represent common ideas that are represented by these words. These aren’t the definitions of the words, and each person may mean something different when they use these words.*

- Religion:
 - Dictionary definition:
 - The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.
 - A particular system of faith and worship.
 - Culture’s definition:
 - Action based with and focus on the external.
 - List of rules, regulations, requirements, and ceremonies.
 - With the idea that all of these things are man-made and used to control and manipulate, as opposed to being from God to liberate.
- Spirituality:
 - Dictionary definition: the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.
 - Culture’s definition:

- Thought and feeling based with a focus on the internal.
- This is more about the mind, and heart. There is a greater focus on intention rather than action. It's more about being a generally positive person rather than fulfilling specific requirements or expectations.
- With the idea that this is more profound and is about a direct connection to God rather than relying on men as mediators.

What Does the Bible Say About Religion?

- The Greek word and English word are the same: “system of belief and worship”
 - Acts 26:5: *since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.*
- Lots of negative religion in NT:
 - Not all religions are created equally, and many forms of religion are condemned in the NT.
 1. Hypocritical religious ceremony (keeping all the external religious law, without true personal transformation)
 - James 1:26: *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.*
 - Mat 15:8: *This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.*
 - Mk 12:40: *Beware of the scribes ... who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.*
- * We reject religion because there are many religious hypocrites. The Bible and Jesus has been rejecting religious hypocrisy from the beginning.
 2. Self-made / man-made religion: people making up their own religion rather than obeying God.
 - Worshipping other gods:
 - Col 2:18: *Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the **worship [religion]** of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.*
 - Making our own religion of the true God:
 - Mat 15:9: *But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.*
- * We reject religion because it is man-made. Well if it's a man-made religion worshipping anything besides the true God, or if it's a man-made perversion of worshipping the true God, Jesus and the Bible reject it too.
- * We think we are clever when we are so spiritual that we can reject religion. It's more like, “welcome to the party”. It's been going on a while.
- * However, these are rejections of bad religion. Does that mean all religion is bad?
- True religion in the NT:
 - James 1:27: *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*
 - Is all religion bad?

- There is a religion that is pure and undefiled.
- So no, not all religion is bad.
- False religion is bad. *True* religion is good.
- What is true religion?
 1. It's the religion that comes from God as opposed to man.
 2. It's a religion that is sincere:
 - Visiting the needy.
 - Being unstained from the world.
 - These aren't the religious ceremonies that win us fame and adoration.
 - These things are only done from a sincere heart to please God.

- * Why should all religion be bad?
 - “System of faith and worship”. Is it bad to have a system of faith and worship?
 - Should we not believe in God? Aren't there specific things we are required to believe about Him?
 - Shouldn't we worship God? Aren't there specific things we do to worship Him?
 - Religion is used positively:
 - Acts 25:6: Paul is speaking positively of self when calling himself religious (even though his religion was wrong).
 - Acts 17:22: Paul is complementing the pagans when he calls them religious (even though their religion was wrong).

- * Jesus was religious
 - Born in religious family:
 - Lk 2:21: circumcised on 8th day.
 - Lk 2:22-24: redemption of first born sacrifice
 - Lk 2:41: pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover.
 - He practiced religion:
 - Lk 3:21: Jesus was baptized.
 - Lk 22:8: Jesus partook of Passover
 - He told others to practice religion:
 - Mat 8:4: after cleansing leper, He told him to go to priest to present cleansing sacrifice.
 - Mat 26:26-29: Jesus told His disciples and us to partake of Lord's Supper.

- * Let's cast off all the false religion (man-made and hypocritical).

- * But just casting off all “religion” (even religion prescribed in scripture) to form your own spirituality is actually just making your own man-made religion. How is that better?

What Does the Bible Say About Spirituality?

- Definition:
 - Greek word = pneumatikos
 - From pneuma = spirit
 - Relating to the invisible realm of the spirit (as opposed to the physical, flesh / earth)
- 1. Refers to non-physical beings that inhabit the spiritual realm.
 - Some spiritual beings
 - Good beings like angels.
 - Evil beings like demons and satan (Eph 6:12).
 - Even humans:

- We have a spirit
- We will soon receive a spiritual body (I Cor 15).
- God (*the spiritual being*)
 - II Cor 3:17-18: *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*
- He is the Spirit.
- Jesus is the life-giving spirit (I Cor 15:54).
- This means
 - Everything spiritual relates back to God.
 - God defines spirituality

* We don't get to define our own spirituality

- We might think it's spiritual to go out and connect with nature, but nature is physical. Connecting with nature in a spiritual way is paganism.
- God is Spirit. We need to connect to Him (we can do that by appreciating the creator of nature).
- We have to look to Him for Him to tell us what it means to be spiritual.
- And according to II Cor 3:18, being spiritual is being like Him.

2. Refers to things that emanate from God.

- Spiritual gifts:
 - Whether miraculous (I Cor 14)
 - Or not (Rom 12)
- Spiritual blessings (Eph 1):
 - Such as redemption
 - Being God's adopted children
- Spiritual wisdom:
 - Col 1:9: *For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*
 - Spiritual wisdom is knowing God's will. Why? So we can do it.
- Spiritual teaching:
 - I Cor 2:12-13: *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*
 - The Holy Spirit revealed the mind of God to the apostles, and they taught all of that to us through spiritual words and teaching.
 - This spiritual teaching can only be found in the Bible.
 - I Cor 9:11: *If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?*
 - What are the spiritual things sown by Paul among the Corinthians?
 - Teaching
 - I Cor 10:3-4: *and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.*
 - This is the being sustained by the words of Christ.
 - These words are only found in the Bible.

* The word of God is spiritual!

- It comes straight from the Spirit, and reveals to us the will of God the Spirit.

- How can we be spiritual without knowing it? Studying it? Obeying it?
- If the word of God reveals spirituality, we can only be spiritual when we obey it. And it the Bible tells us things that we have to do, then doing those things makes us spiritual.
- The Law is spiritual
 - Rom 7:14: *For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.*
 - We know that the Law of Moses is a religion.
 - It is a clear example of a set of beliefs and worship.
 - And yet, the Law, being the true Law of God, is spiritual because it comes from the spiritual God.
 - We see that the
- 3. Refers to spiritual people who are governed by God's spirit.
 - Rom 8:5: *For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*
 - Spiritual people set their mind on the things of the Spirit.
 - His word & His will.
 - Rom 8:14: *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*
 - We need to be led by the Spirit.
 - Do what the Spirit tells us to.
 - Things that the Spirit tells us to do:
 - Make our brother's sins our concern
 - Gal 6:1: Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
 - It is not considered "spiritual" today to be a "judge" of your brother, but trying to lead my brother to repentance is God defined spirituality.
 - Accept all apostolic teachings:
 - I Cor 14:34, 37-38: *The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says... If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*
 - It is not considered "spiritual" today to uphold gender distinctions, but if God's Spirit says we need to, then that's spirituality.

Conclusion

- * It is very easy to be religious, but not spiritual, but it is impossible to be spiritual if we are not religious (where religion = believing and obeying as prescribed in God's word).
 - Let's avoid the mistakes of the religious hypocrites in Jesus day.
 - And pursue His true religion found in the Law of Liberty (James 2).
- * Being spiritual = focusing on the words of the Spirit & obeying the words of the Spirit.
 - This includes religious ceremony
 - Lord's Supper
 - Baptism
 - This also includes heart felt worship
 - Heb 13:15: *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*
 - This also includes loving each other

- Heb 13:16: *And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

- * Being spiritual means being a boring regular old Christian.
- * We can't throw away the Bible just because people pervert religion. Jesus didn't throw away the Law of Moses.
- * We can't use false spirituality as an excuse to ultimately do whatever we want.