

Christianity:

A Religion or a Relationship?

*Taken from a sermon preached
at Charity Christian Fellowship*

When we see statistics that place Christianity with other world religions, our hearts cry out, “No! No! You don’t understand! Christianity does not belong on that list! It is so much more than a religion. It is a relationship with the God of heaven through the person of His Son Jesus Christ!” Sadly, to many people Christianity is simply a religion, a personal or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices. In the book of Matthew it speaks of those who profess to know Him and who do many wonderful things in His Name, but were turned away. They said that they had cast out demons in His Name, healed people and a long list of other things. But in the end God turns them away and says, “Depart from me! I never knew you!” These verses grip our hearts. How is it that they did all these things in Jesus’ name yet God says, “I never knew you!”? If you would have asked them during their lifetime whether or not they knew God, they would have probably said that they did. Yet He said, “Depart from me! I never knew you!” Does God know you? Is your name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life? Your Christian life must be more than a religion. It must be a living relationship.

WHAT IS A FRIEND?

What comes to your mind when you think of a friend? I mean a special, best friend. A friend is

Christianity, the largest of the 19 world religions is divided into 34,000 different groups.

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someone you are not afraid to share your heart with, someone you have a committed and loyal relationship with, someone who really knows the intimate things of your heart. These are some definitions of what a friend really is. The Bible says, “There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24b. “A friend loveth at all times. Proverbs 17:17a. “A friend sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Proverbs 27:17. This is what we may expect from a close friendship. There are many examples of friends in the Bible.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

1 Sam 20:17 reads, “Jonathan caused David to swear again because he loved him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.” David and Jonathan were friends. They knew each other intimately. They cared for each other. They spent lots of time together.

RUTH AND NAOMI

“And Ruth said, ‘Intreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee for whither thou goest I will go and whither thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God.’” Ruth 1:16. There was a friendship there that was in-

separable. Ruth was determined to follow Naomi no matter where she went or where she lived.

JESUS CHRIST

“Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friend.” John 15:13. Jesus did exactly that for us. He laid down His life for us. He loved us when we were in the ditches of sin and despair. He made the first step to pursue us and become our friend. If it were not for Him dying in our stead there would be no way that we could ever become the friend of God.

JESUS EXTENDS HIS LOVE

Jesus is extending an invitation of friendship and close relationship to each one of us. John 15:15 reads, “Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what His lord doeth. But I have called you friends.” He is not even looking at it as a relationship of servant and master, but of friends. The thought that we can be friends and have an intimate relationship with the God of Heaven is incredible!

All other religions have a fear of the god they serve. This is not a friendship. There is no intimacy at all. They must do certain things or obey certain rules so that the wrath of their god does not come upon them. We can have so much more. We can have a relationship. The following story illustrates the concept of being willing to die for a friend as Jesus did for us:

There was a boy whose sister had kidney failure and needed blood after a transplant. Since his blood

type was the same as hers the doctors asked him if he would be willing to give his blood for her. While they were taking the blood from him he began looking faint. The doctor asked him if he was OK.

He said, “Yes, I feel fine. I am just wondering when I am going to die.”

He was under the impression that if the doctor took his blood he would actually die so that his sister could live. This is the way Jesus gave His blood for us. He actually died so that we could live! Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said that he is going to go to prepare a place for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have

everlasting life.” John 3:16. Not only did Jesus die in our stead so that we can enjoy the pleasures of being a Christian here on earth, He also is preparing a place for us to spend eternity with Him.

Jesus wants to be your friend through difficult times in life. “Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?” Romans 8:35. None of these can separate us from the love of Christ. Jesus will be

there to go with us through whatever comes. No matter what may come our way. No matter the difficult situation you may find yourself in now or in the future. Remember that Jesus has walked the road before and will walk it with you.

When it feels like God is far away and we cannot see two sets of footprints in the sand, it is His footprints that we see. He is carrying us. He is such a

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faithful friend that He would not only take us by the hand and lead, but he would pick us up and carry us through those difficult times. Jesus is a faithful friend! We can trust Him. He is there and He is extending that friendship to us. Will we accept it? "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5b. "Even in your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Is: 46:4.

INVITATION TO FRIENDSHIP

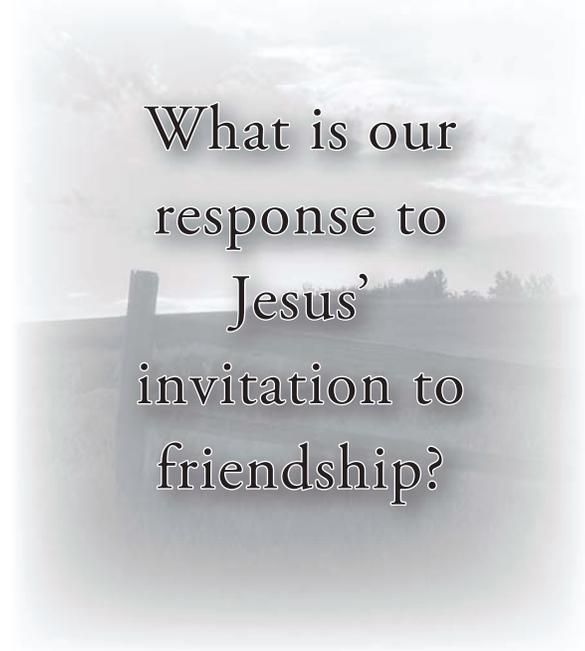
What is our response to Jesus' invitation to friendship? We can respond like people in other religions do. They believe they must do certain things because it is required of them. We can respond like this or we may respond with a sincere desire from a heart of love.

ACCEPT HIS FRIENDSHIP

Before we can be a friend to Jesus, we must be born again. We must initially accept the gift of His blood as payment for all our sins. If we refuse Him on that point, our sins will keep us from that friendship. If, after we are Christians, we love our sin or love the world, we cannot be friends with Christ. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4

OBEDIENCE: CHRIST'S LOVE LANGUAGE

Jesus says, "Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14. Obedience is Jesus' love language. He says that if you love Him, you will obey His commandments. This must not be done with a "Do I have to?" attitude. Christ's love enables us to want to! This is what is missing from other religions. They do not have that love relationship that motivates them to do it out of a heart of love. We want to obey Jesus in all His commandments. If you look at the Bible this way, it can revolutionize your Christian life. Sometimes people struggle with "dos" and "don'ts" and look at the Bible negatively as a lot of things they cannot do. But as we accept His friendship all those negative things just fall to the side and we love to do what He wants us to do.



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SPEND TIME IN HIS WORD

To have a living relationship with Jesus is to spend time with him. Spend time in His word. Spend time in prayer, seeking his face. God had the Bible written as a letter to us. From cover to cover we can see His heart for us. It is one of His ways of communicating to us. In turn, we can get to know God and Jesus intimately by spending time in His word and prayer. As we go through the remainder of our lives, let's be friends with God. Let's have that loving relationship that is alive. Let's take the time to spend in God's word and keep our Christian lives a relationship, not a religion.

