

Title: **MY RELIGION**
Text: 1 Peter 3:15-16
Reading: 2 Peter 1:1-21
Subject: *The Characteristics of True Religion*
Date: Sunday Morning – August 15, 2001
Tape # W-57a
Introduction:

[1 Peter 3:15-16] But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: [16] Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

What is your religion? That is a question men frequently ask one another. At one time, it was a question commonly asked on most any employment application. Sometimes people ask, “What are the tenets, traits, and traditions of your religion?” I have even had a few people to ask me, “What is the difference between your religion and the religion of other people?”

These are questions I want to answer in this message. I am going to talk to you this morning about **MY RELIGION**. Following Peter’s admonition in our text, I want to show you the distinguishing characteristics of my religion. I hope that I may do so “*having a good conscience*” in Christ.

1. True religion is not outward, ceremonial, and ritualistic.

There are certain outward, symbolic ordinances which we conscientiously observe. Those ordinances, believer’s baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are essential parts of all true worship.

- Baptism is the believer's confession of Christ.
- The Lord's Supper is the believer's symbolic remembrance of Christ.

But these things are not the substance, or essence of true religion.

2. True religion is not merely doctrinal religion.

Doctrine is important. It is essential to true religion. But you can believe all the right doctrines and still not know God. You may hold to sound, orthodox, biblical doctrine, your creed may be thoroughly true to the Scriptures, and yet your religion may be altogether false.

Illustration: Saul of Tarsus believed the same thing that Cornelius did. But Saul was lost and Cornelius was saved. Saul knew the doctrine, probably better than Cornelius. But Cornelius knew God. Saul trusted his works. Cornelius believed God.

3. True religion is not a mere outward, religious behavior.

Christianity for most people is no more than an outward conformity to social standards of righteousness. Their confession of faith is -- "I don't smoke, drink, cuss, or chew; and I don't run with people who do." "*The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*" (Rom. 14:17).

Listen to me:-- Whatever true godliness is, it is not something that a lost, unregenerate man can produce. Godliness never changes. It does not change...

- With time.
- With location.
- With circumstances.

True religion is more than outward behavior.

4. **True religion is an inward, spiritual knowledge of the living God, as he is revealed in Christ** (John 17:3; Phil. 3:3).

[John 17:3] And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

[Philippians 3:3] For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Any natural man can, if he so chooses, understand and accept all the outward aspects of religion. He can understand and believe either Calvinism or Arminianism as a system of doctrine. And it is easy enough for anyone to perform the outward works of any religion. But the real, inward, spiritual aspects of true religion are things that are both foreign and offensive to all men and women by nature. No one will ever submit to, delight in, and walk in true religion who is not born of God.

Proposition: All true religion, all true Christianity, comes by divine revelation. It is the supernatural revelation of Christ in the heart. True religion is something a person experiences (Present tense!) in his soul.

Today, I want to share with you what I have experienced in my soul, what has been wrought in my heart by the Spirit of God. These are things I have learned, and am learning, over the past 34 years from the Word of God. I want to talk to you about and explain **MY RELIGION**.

I do not pretend to be a model of what a believer ought to be. I know that I am not. I do not claim to have a corner on the truth

of God. There is much in the Bible that I do not understand. But here are *seven things* that I do know. They have been wrought in me by the gracious operations of God the Holy Spirit. These are the things that make me what I am. These are the things that make me do what I do. I readily confess, from the depths of my soul, “*By the grace of God I am what I am.*” I say, with **John Newton**, “I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. And I am not what I hope to be. But, thanks be to God, I am not what I once was.” And what I am today, I am by God’s grace alone. This is MY RELIGION:

I. MY RELIGION BEGINS WITH WHAT I KNOW AND BELIEVE ABOUT GOD.

It is not what I know and believe about God’s law. It is not what I do or do not do. My religion begins with God’s revelation of himself in his Word, in his Son, and in my heart.

It is not possible for man to know God, unless God is pleased to reveal himself and make himself known. “*Canst thou by searching find out God?*” The knowledge of God begins with God’s revelation, not man’s decision.

[Galatians 1:15-16] But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace, [16] To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

When Adam was lost, God sought Adam. Adam did not seek God. God revealed himself, his purpose, and his grace to Adam. Adam did not discover God. I certainly do not know everything about God. He is great. I am puny. He is glorious. I am insignificant. He is infinite. I am finite. But I do know these *four things about God*. And I believe them with all my heart.

A. God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign.

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Psalms 115:3 "But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Psalms 135:6 "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."

Isaiah 46:9-11 "Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; *I am* God, and *there is* none like me, *10* Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: *11* Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it."

Daniel 4:34-37 "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: *35* And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? *36* At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. *37* Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of

heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

Either God is in control, or he is controlled. Either God rules, or he is ruled. Either God is sovereign over all things, or something, or someone is sovereign over God. The Bible declares that God is totally sovereign over everything and everyone. And he exercises his sovereignty at all times. When you boil it all down to its essence, when I declare that God is sovereign, I am saying that God can either save me, or damn me. It is up to him. I am in his hands (Rom. 9:11-23). "***SALVATION IS THE LORD'S!***"

[Romans 9:11-23] (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) [12] It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. [13] As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. [14] What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. [15] For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. [16] So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. [17] For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. [18] Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. [19] Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? [20] Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? [21] Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? [22] *What* if God, willing to show *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath

fitted to destruction: [23] And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Illustration: The Potter's House (Jer. 18:2-6).

[Jeremiah 18:2-6] Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. [3] Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. [4] And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make *it*. [5] Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, [6] O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

B. God is holy, immaculately holy.

Psalms 111:9 "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend *is* his name."

Isaiah 57:15 "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

He says, "*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*"

1. All that God is is perfectly holy.
2. All that God does is perfectly holy.
3. All that God receives, accepts and rewards is perfect holiness

Psalms 24:3-5 "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

Because God is perfectly holy, it is obvious that the only way a sinner can ever be received, accepted, and rewarded by him is in the Person of Christ, through the merits of the perfect Substitute.

C. God is just, inflexibly just.

- *"Justice and judgment are the habitations of thy throne."*
- *"The righteous Lord loveth righteousness."*
- *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

The Almighty will not pervert justice. God will never do anything that is contrary to justice.

Those are facts. They are true. Whether I like it or not, the one true and living God is absolutely sovereign, immaculately holy, and inflexibly just. These three facts would drive me to utter despair, were it not for the fact that I also know that...

D. "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16).

[1 John 4:8-10] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. [9] In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. [10] Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

[1 John 4:16] And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

John does not say, God is a God of love. He says, “*God is love.*” Apart from God there is no love. All that God does is consistent with his sovereignty, his holiness, and his justice. And all that God does is consistent with his love. Because “*God is love*”...

1. He is merciful - “*He delighteth in mercy!*”
2. He is gracious.
3. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

He found a way to ransom, redeem, and save his people (Job 33:24). And God’s way of salvation, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ fully reveals his sovereignty, his holiness, his justice and his love (Rom. 3:23-26).

My religion begins with what I know and believe about God.

II. *Second*, MY RELIGION COMPELS ME TO FACE AND CONFESS THE TRUTH ABOUT MYSELF (Rom. 3:9-19; Ps. 51:5).

A. This is my confession and my daily, painful, bitter experience: **I am a sinner** (Matt. 15:19).

[Matthew 15:19] For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

[Romans 3:9-19] What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; [10] As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: [11] There is none that understandeth,

there is none that seeketh after God. [12] They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. [13] Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: [14] Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: [15] Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: [16] Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: [17] And the way of peace have they not known: [18] There is no fear of God before their eyes. [19] Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

[Psalms 51:5] Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

- B. **I stand before God's holy law guilty and justly condemned by nature** (Ezek. 18:20).
- C. **I am, by nature, spiritually dead, totally depraved, utterly incapable of changing my heart, or ever performing a single thing that is truly good.** -- "*There is none that doeth good.*"
- D. **I am a sinner forgiven and without sin before God** (Isa. 43:25; Rom. 8:1).

III. Third, MY RELIGION RECOGNIZES THE PRE-EMINENCE AND GLORY OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Colossians 1:18; 2:9-10; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 5:9-11).

God the Father has given all pre-eminence to the Son. God the Spirit gives all pre-eminence to the Son. The Bible, the Book of God, gives all pre-eminence to the Son. And all the people of

God give all pre-eminence to the Son. All the glory of the triune God, all the fulness of the eternal Godhead, and all the blessings of grace are in Christ alone. “*In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*”

[John 1:1-3] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

[John 1:14] And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

[John 1:18] No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

[Colossians 1:18] And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

[Colossians 2:9-10] For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. [10] And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

[Hebrews 1:1-3] God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, [2] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; [3] Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

[Revelation 5:9-11] And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; [10] And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. [11] And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

Let me show you what the glory of Christ is. -- As the God-man, the only Mediator between God and men, he is able to do for sinners what neither God nor man alone could do. God could not suffer; and man could not satisfy; but the God-man, our Mediator both suffered the penalty of the law and satisfied its demands in the room and stead of his people for the glory of God and the salvation of his chosen.

A. The Lord Jesus Christ wrought out a perfect righteousness for us as our Representative (Rom. 5:19; Jer. 23:6).

[Romans 5:12] Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

[Romans 5:18-19] Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. [19] For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

[Jeremiah 23:6] In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

[Jeremiah 33:16] In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this *is the name* wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

He fulfilled all the law of God on our behalf (Rom. 10:4). It is this righteousness of God in Christ that is freely imputed to every believer. **There is no other righteousness in the world than Christ's righteousness; and we must have it.** Else we must forever die (Heb. 12:14).

B. Having fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf, Christ Jesus suffered the just and exact penalty of God's law against our sins (Gal. 3:13; Isa. 53:9-10).

[Isaiah 53:9-11] And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth. [10] Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. [11] He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

[Galatians 3:13] Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

Whenever you think about the death of Christ, remember these four things:

1. Christ's death was an act of his own sovereignty.
2. The death of Christ was an act of substitution.
3. Christ's death was a payment of full satisfaction to the law of God.
4. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was a complete success.

C. Now, God, in perfect justice, saves every believing sinner by imputing to us the merits of Christ's righteousness and shed blood.

This is what it means to be saved. We are justified! We are, in Christ, made equal to the demands of God's holy law.

IV. Fourth, MY RELIGION IS A BELIEVING, CONFIDENT COMMITMENT OF MYSELF TO THE CHRIST OF CALVARY AS MY LORD AND SAVIOR (Lk. 14:25-27, 33; 2 Tim. 1:12).

[Luke 14:25-27] And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, [26] If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. [27] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

[Luke 14:33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

[2 Timothy 1:12] For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

For most people, religion is like an artificial leg. There is neither warmth nor life in it. It may help you to hobble down the

road, but it never becomes a part of you. It is just something you have strapped on. But true religion is a matter of the heart. It involves more than words and works. It is more than a way of life. It is our life!

True religion produces that kind of faith that is revealed in the Scriptures. If my religion is true, I have the faith of God's elect. Let me explain faith to you in Bible terms.

A. To believe Christ is to trust him alone for my eternal salvation.

1. I trust his blood alone for the atonement of my sins.
2. I trust his righteousness alone for my acceptance with God.

B. To believe Christ is to commit myself to him.

Faith in Christ involves consecration and dedication to him. To exercise faith in Christ is to be sold out to the Son of God.

Illustrations: *Believer's Baptism*
Abraham - Isaac must be slain!

C. To believe Christ is to willingly submit to his sovereign dominion as my Lord.

1. We submit to his revealed will.
2. We submit to his providential will.
3. We submit to his eternal will.

Illustration: *"Chief give himself to Jesus."*

V. Fifth, MY RELIGION IS A LIVING UNION WITH THE LIVING LORD.

My religion is not a creed. My religion is not a system of theology. My religion is not a doctrinal position. My religion is not the ten commandments. My religion is not the Baptist church. My religion is a Person, a real, living Person (Gal. 2:20).

[Galatians 2:20] I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

- My religion is not what I say, but what I am.
- My religion is not what I do, but what I am.
- My religion is “*Christ in me, the hope of glory.*”
- My religion is the ruling principle of my life.

VI. Sixth, MY RELIGION PRODUCES WITHIN ME A PRINCIPLE OF GENUINE, SINCERE LOVE.

A. I have a sense and knowledge of God’s love for me shed abroad in my heart (Rom. 5:5).

[Romans 5:5] And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

B. I have a principle of love for God which motivates, governs, and guides me (1 John 4:19). – “*Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee.*”

[1 John 4:19] We love him, because he first loved us.

This love for God is the law and rule of my life.

C. I have reason to believe that my love for God is real and my religion is genuine because I love God's people (1 John 4:20; James 1:26-27; 1Cor. 13:1-13).

[1 John 4:20] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

[James 1:26-27] If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain. [27] Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

VII. Seventh, MY RELIGION CONSTANTLY PRESSES UPON ME THREE GREAT GOALS.

I know that these goals are not attainable by me, or anyone else, in this life. But these are the things I keep striving after, seeking, and pressing on to attain. These are the three great desires and ambitions of my heart.

Philippians 3:7-14 "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ

Jesus. *13* Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, *14* I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." **Here is the mark to which I press...**

A. Total commitment to Christ.

B. Total communion with Christ.

C. Total conformity to Christ.

Application: I am calling for...

1. Faith in Christ.
2. Commitment to Christ.

I am, upon the authority of God's Word, promising eternal life to all who do so commit themselves to Christ is faith.

¹ See *Miscellaneous Sermons* #918, 1230 & 1469 for similar messages preached at Danville 6-24-90 {PM}, Lawson NSW - Australia 4-15-91; American Ave. - Lexington, KY 7-18-90; and Wichita Falls, TX 4-11-96, Danville (AM) August 19, 2001.