

## True Religion

*Counterfeit goods abound. There are fake Rolex watches, Nike shoes, and Armani clothes. There are counterfeit money, Microsoft operating systems and music CDs. In a world where fakes abound, we expect to find also counterfeit religions. Identifying the real religion has become important. People use the name of religion to fight wars, to terrorize communities, to bind people's conscience and to make money. In the religious marketplace, many beliefs are being offered on the shelves. Some are current, others are ancient. Some focus on the good life here, others call us to live for eternity. Some hold to the belief that there are many gods, others believe that there is only one God. Which is the true religion?*

Let me help you through this maze by presenting to you a few essential tests.

### **1. The test of worship**

Is the religion only concerned about the good life? Does the religion merely teach what life is and should be, and exclude the need to worship a personal God? If the religion lacks the worship factor, it is only a philosophy. It is not a religion. True religion must bring us to worship God. The Bible says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Revelation 4:11) True religion must fill us with a sense of God's greatness and His awe and wonder in worship.

### **2. The test of God's revelation**

Does the religion reveal to you all that you need to know about God? Does it tell you about His existence, His nature, His works of creation and providing for the world? Does it tell you about His control and involvement with the world that He has created? Does it tell you about how we can know Him and approach Him? And if it does, what does the religion tell you about God? Is he an unseen force that has no personal character? Is he merely an enlargement of what man should be? Is he a god because our ancient forefathers had decided to promote one of their heroes to a position of divinity? The Bible tells us many things about God. Here are two statements. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding." (Isaiah 40:28) "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4)

### **3. The test of reliability**

This is a crucial test. A true religion must be reliable. What it says about God must be reliable. In addition, what it says about the world, about man, about history, and geography and science must also be reliable. If it is not reliable, everything it says about God and man cannot be believed. Obviously if a religion depends on oral tradition, that is, word of mouth, to continue its beliefs, it cannot be reliable. Being human, we are sure to err when we use only verbal communication to pass down our message from one generation to another. There must be, in other words, a written source of authority. How did the religious book or books come about? This is a crucial question. Is the religious book a collection of human religious encounters and

experience, or is it a self-revelation of God so that the sacred book originates from Him, is inspired by Him and is about Him? The Bible says, "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:20-21)

#### **4. The test of life's purpose**

What does the religion say about man? Does it say that we came about by evolution or by an act of divine creation? Or does it even leave such a basic question about the origin of our life unanswered? Besides the question of man's creation, a true religion must also give a definitive answer to the issue of our life's purpose. What is the meaning of human life besides eating and working? If it does not tell us about where we come from, and where we are going, and give us a clear statement about our life's purpose, then it is a useless religion. More importantly, it must give us a clear explanation of our relationship to God. How are we related to God? What if we do not have God? The Bible says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

#### **5. The test of man's salvation**

A true religion must address our most basic spiritual need. As fallen human beings, our spiritual lives are ruined and damaged by sin. Man is not what he was when God first made him. At first man was perfect. But after sin has entered into mankind by the disobedience of our first parents, man comes under the power of sin. He lies, he cheats, he is self-centered, and ignores what God says to him about how he must live. A true religion must take man out of this miserable condition, and convert him to become a new person. A true religion must give him a new spiritual power so that he can be translated from a life of sin to a life of freedom from sin. If a religion does not provide such a change and conversion, it is powerless. How does the religion address the sin issue? Does it avoid it? What does it say about how we can overcome the sin nature within us? What does it say about how salvation can be found? The Bible says that man needs salvation because of his sinful nature and condition. And because man has become sinful, he has no spiritual power to become a new person. As such, God takes the initiative to save man out of his misery. Only God can turn a sinner to become a new person. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:8,9) "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9) "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."(2 Corinthians 5:17)

#### **6. The test of ethics**

Does the religion promote a consistent standard of spiritual and moral virtues? In this world where vices and violence abounds, a true religion must give the world a true standard of righteousness that brings peace and love to humanity. A true religion, however, recognizes that such good works cannot save man. However, it must maintain a high level of good works and ethics. This is because true faith must result in a changed life. And a changed life must be

characterized by love for God and others. The Bible says, "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (1 John 4:21)

## **7. The test of our future destiny**

The final test of true religion concerns our future destiny. There are many philosophies about what happens to man after death. Some say that man will evolve to become another creature. Others say that man will enter into a condition of soul-sleep and simply cease to exist. Others say that he will be reborn to take on another personality in another life. A true religion must be consistent. If it begins with the core belief that there is a Creator, and that He has made us, then at the end of our life, we must return to face the sovereign Creator. He alone possesses the power to determine what our lives will be at the end of our journey. A true religion must address the issue - how can we spend eternity with our Creator after we pass from this earthly life? Since the Creator lives in heaven, and dwells in a place where sin does not live, and where pain and tears are not found, true religion must answer the question - how can I go to heaven to be with God, my Creator? This is a crucial question, to which every true religion must give an answer. If we do not have any knowledge to guide us to heaven, we will lose our lives in hell. The Bible says, "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)

Concluding thought Do you have the true religion that saves you?

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