

Relationship, Not Religion

By Jeff DeVine

The Christian life is not a religion; it is not about your works or performance. It is a relationship!!!

What do I mean when I say religion? Religion is the rituals, customs and procedures that people go through, in an effort to impress or be accepted by God. It is the specific methods and ways by which people think they must approach God. It could even be church attendance if you are doing it thinking that it makes you accepted by God or that God is only pleased with you because of your church attendance.

Acts 17:28

In Him we live and move and have our being, (in whom?...In Him)

Many professing Christians have assumed that their salvation is nothing more than a ticket to heaven. It is true that if you are a child of God that you have eternal life.

So, what IS eternal life? Is it, living forever? Is it, going to heaven some day?

Well, the Bible defines it for us, in fact, Jesus himself, gives us the definition of eternal life. Look at-

John 17:3

(3) And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

So, by the very definition that Jesus gives us, we see that eternal life is a relationship. Knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ whom He sent. Notice it says, "Knowing God the Father AND Jesus Christ. Many people say they "know God" or they say, "I believe in God." but they don't acknowledge Jesus as well. They might simply say, "I believe *in* Jesus." or "I believe Jesus was a great prophet, or teacher", etc...

To believe in God, but not accept that Jesus is the Son of God is basically to have no real relationship with God at all. You see the only way to the Father is through Jesus.

Let's look at **John 14:6**

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. NKJV

You also cannot go to Jesus without the help of the Father. Jesus said in **John 6:44**

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" NKJV

So you see, it is impossible to have one without the other. People that claim to have a relationship with God, but do not accept Jesus are actually deceived and in reality have NO relationship with God at all.

God the Father and Jesus are inseparable.

As I said, some people will say, "I believe in God" or "I believe in Jesus." but is just believing in God or Jesus all there is to having a relationship with God. What about doing great things for God? Does that establish our relationship with God?

Look at **Matthew 7:21-23**

(21) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' (23) And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

So we see that doing great things for God does not mean we actually have a relationship with Him.

And what about believing in God?

The Bible also tells us that even the demons believe in God....

James 2:19

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble!
NKJV

You see, the demons believe there is one God, they believe in Him, but, they do not acknowledge God as their Lord. They do not follow Him and honor Him.

One must, not only believe in God, but also submit to Him and be in an active relationship with Him.

I believe in the King of Thailand, I know he exists. I have read about him, I have seen him on television and I have seen many pictures of him; but I don't know him personally, I have no real personal relationship with him.

My relationship with my wife is very different from my relationship with the king of Thailand. Of course I know my wife, I know for sure she exists, however, my knowledge of her does not stop there. I know my wife intimately and personally. I know everything

about her and she knows everything about me. We spend time together every day. We talk about everything and there are no secrets between us.

Now before we go any further, let me address a common misconception.

Will having this kind of personal relationship with God stop all problems?

Well the Apostle Paul had a personal relationship with God and he certainly had problems.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

He says he was "in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."

You see, Paul certainly had problems. He was persecuted for his faith. This is something all believers can expect. **2 Timothy 3:12**

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. NKJV

Why is this? Jesus said in **John 15:18-19**

(18) "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. NKJV

Paul also tells us how he felt about the problem he suffered in 2 Corinthians 4:15-18

(15) For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. (16) Seeing the Invisible Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul had an eternal prospective and never took his eyes off of Jesus, the author and finisher of his faith. In fact, he said in verse 17 that all his problems were just a "light affliction" just a minor problem. All his problems sure sound serious to me, certainly more than anything I have experienced.

Paul endured hardship like a good soldier.

2 Timothy 2:3-4

(3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (4) No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. NKJV

So what does God offer us to equip us for this life and how do we obtain it?

2 Peter 1:3-4

(3) as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, (4) by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

You see, God *HAS* given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. Everything..Jesus provided everything 2000 years ago on the cross, it's all included in His sacrifice for us. Forgiveness of our sins, salvation, eternal life, healing, peace, provision, strength to accomplish all things, (Philippians 4:13) everything, already ours. So, you might say, "Well, why don't I see some of these things in my life?"

How do we receive anything from God? How do we receive salvation?

Through faith.... Look at Ephesians 2:8-9

(8) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. NKJV

Not by works, but through faith.

Some say I can't be good enough, go to church enough, perform enough. It is obviously not about your performance;" it's not what you know, or what you do, it's **who you know.**"

Do you know Jesus?

Abraham was righteous before and apart from the law because he believed God.

(Romans 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23)

James 2:23

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

So we have established that we need to know God AND Jesus Christ in an intimate personal relationship.

Now how do we go about having that? By going to church? We can certainly benefit from going to church, because we have fellowship with other believers. We can encourage and pray for each other. Hopefully we can hear teachings that help us understand the word of God better, however, church alone will not establish a great relationship with God.

Like the example of my relationship with my wife, if I only spent time with her once a week for a couple of hours, we wouldn't have a very good relationship, would we?

Is our relationship with God established by our good works? As believers, as born again Christians, we do have works and good deeds that we do. But those things are **not the root of our relationship with God, but they are the fruit of it.**

So how do we grow in our relationship with God, if not by church attendance or our good works?

1- By reading the word of God; the Bible.

2- By praying, and not just praying for the things you want, but having conversation with God. That means listening too.

Again, if I only go to my wife and give her a list of things I want from her and I don't listen to her, how good would our relationship be?

3- Meditate on God's word. We should be reading God's word daily and then thinking about it all during the day. This causes God's word to come alive in our hearts and our faith gets stirred up. Romans 10:17 *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. NKJV*

Psalms 119:15-16

(15) I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. (16) I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. NKJV

So finally.....

Philippians 4:8-9

(8) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things. (9) The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. NKJV

If you don't have the intimate relationship with God and Jesus Christ like we have been talking about here. You can have that today....

1-First, acknowledge that God exists.

2-Acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that He came to this earth to pay the penalty for mankind's sins so that all might be reconciled to God.

3-Repent, which means turn from living life your way and turn to God and be willing to live life God's way.

5- Renew your mind with the word of God. You cannot know what and how to change in your life unless you learn from God's word.

4-Forsake all other Gods.

5-Admit that you are a sinner and surrender your life to Jesus Christ as your personal savior and the Lord of your life. Receive salvation from Him by faith.

If you do this and truly are sincere, your spirit will instantly be born again, changed and made new and you are now a child of God.