

Is it a Relationship or a Religion?

A person's answer to this question about Christianity will depend on how they view Christ. The personal relationship a Believer can have with Him is the reason why many Christians reject the claim that Christianity is a religion, and passionately declare, "Christianity is a relationship—not a religion!" Which stance is right? Is Christianity a relationship or religion? That's a much-debated question, isn't it.

Let's then first gain a better understanding of why some are adamant the Christian Faith is a religion while others insistently claim it's a relationship by taking a look at the dictionary definitions in the side box below¹. When we do, we find there's a distinct difference between the two.

We can readily see *Religion* is putting into practice an organized personal belief system about the supernatural world and God, while a *Relationship* is being related or connected to another *living entity* in some way. **A system is impersonal while a living entity is relational.**

From these definitions, we can understand how from the perspective of those *without Christ*, Christianity meets the definition of being a religion. But hold on. Before you think, "Oh no it's not!" Note what I emphasized. This is how those WITHOUT CHRIST see it... not those who personally have Christ *in their life*. Scripture tells us that Satan blinds the unbeliever to Christ, the Light of the world.²

"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they may not see the light..."

Since they are not able to comprehend the reality of Christ that means they cannot see how anyone can have a relationship with Him. And a religious system *without a personal relationship with Christ at its center* is like any other religion with its own set of dogmas to live by.

Jesus Christ makes the difference!

Yes, it's true. Foundational to the Christian faith is Jesus. For those of us who have experienced the second birth and been "born again," like



Nicodemus secretly met with Jesus one night, and they talked about what it meant to be "born again", the second birth, which enables us to have a personal relationship with God.

Religion:

"The belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers, regarded as creating and governing the universe.

"A particular variety of such belief, especially when organized into a system of doctrine and practice."

Relationship:

"The condition or fact of being related; connection or association.

"Connection by blood or marriage; kinship.

"A particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other."

Jesus explained to Nicodemus, we've been birthed into His family and became a child of God, which makes an ongoing relationship with Him possible!

Just like children are physically born into this world and become connected to their parents by blood or adoption, a special bond of relationship exists between them for the rest of their lives. This is also wonderfully true spiritually when we experience our second birth. When we are born into the world of God's Kingdom... we've become connected by the shed blood of Christ... and we develop a special bond with our Heavenly Father which no one will ever be able to break.

Sadly, from the unbeliever's mistaken perspective, Christianity is just another religion. To them you cannot have a "relationship" as claimed with someone who doesn't exist, or is now dead. To them it's simply a foolish notion. In I Corinthians 6:14, the Bible tells us "foolish" is exactly how they see it too.

*"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, **for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**"*

Since those still living in darkness are unable to comprehend the presence of Jesus and spiritual things, this means they are unable to understand how the Christian faith is much more than a religion, for it's centered around having a relationship with one who is still very much alive.

Yes, He is truly alive; He was born and lived among us for a time before dying on a cruel cross to break the curse of sin that had separated us from God. And on the third day He was **resurrected**, proving He was sent by God and lived again among us as witnessed by hundreds of people in the days that followed, until a few of His faithful disciples saw Him taken up into heaven, returning again to God's Kingdom to be with the Father.

No other religious faith is based on a relationship with the one they follow or serve like this one.

So, can we now settle the question?

What do YOU think? Is Christianity a religion or a relationship? ***It depends on what a person believes about Jesus Christ.***

After giving these definitions and scriptures deeper thought like we did, we can now understand why to those who HAVE NOT yet come to believe and accept Christ, it's just another religion to *them*... while it's a true relationship to those who believe and HAVE accepted Him as both their personal Savior and the Savior of the world, and are committed to following Him.

*CONSIDER THIS: When talking to others about this question, and to avoid getting caught in a fruitless debate, it might be best to explain when Christ enters our life, he changes our own futile **religious** attempts to reach God into a very real, productive and special **relationship** by Him first reaching out to us!*

¹ Definitions from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition; as of March 2021.

² 2 Corinthians 4:4