

- **Romans 4:5 (the verse displayed at the end of the below video)**, A couple years ago, Jefferson Bethke became an internet sensation when he released a spoken word poem video entitled “Why I hate religion, but love Jesus.” This video quickly went viral and even became a common share among some within the Lord’s Body on Facebook. *(The video and lyrics can be found by Google searching the title)* A few of the things he says here I agree with. However, some of the things he said in this poem really caught my attention in a negative way. To ensure that I did not misunderstand any of the lyrics or misunderstand his meaning behind the lyrics, I watched a video of him explaining his thoughts behind this poem. As I watched his explanation it became very apparent that he defines Jesus and Religion quite a bit differently from the way that I define either term. Bethke is intentionally putting the terms opposed to one another and causing the individual to make a choice between either Jesus or Religion.
- Defining of Terms
 - Loving Jesus to him means focusing on...
 - Relationship with Jesus
 - God’s Grace
 - God loving and accepting you just as you are with all of your sin
 - He hates religion because religion stands for...
 - Legalism and Hypocrisy
 - Rule Keeping
 - Earning God’s love and grace through works and deeds
- I’ll admit that if these definitions were true... then yes we should avoid religion at all cost and simply focus on loving Jesus. However, I strongly disagree with the way that these terms have been defined. I want us to look at three thoughts that should be considered and examined before we begin to make a decision between Jesus and religion. The reasons I want to take the time to do this are...
 1. Those opposed to God (atheists, agnostics, skeptics) will sometimes use this type of outlook on religion to show that it should be avoided.
 2. This is the type of thinking that is becoming more and more prevalent in mainstream Christianity.
 3. The roots of this type of thinking are founded in Calvinism. Evidence: Bethke is a huge fan of Martin Luther.

3 Thoughts to Consider Before Choosing Jesus or Religion

I. Many don’t understand Jesus or religion.

A. Jesus’ purpose is misunderstood.

1. Many (including Bethke) say that Jesus came to destroy the Law of Moses and religion as a whole.
2. They say that Jesus is all about love and He doesn't condemn anyone. Jesus loves but religion condemns.
3. Jesus died for all people and that means that He did all the heavy lifting for us so nothing is required of us to have our sins forgiven. (perseverance of the saints kicks in at this point)
4. God’s grace will take care of everything so we just have to sit back and accept His grace.
5. Our whole purpose to just have a relationship with Jesus.

B. Religion is looked upon as such a corrupted and evil entity.

1. Many have this idea that religion is simply a man-made product.
2. Religion is man’s way of making religious people conform to their standards.
3. Religion is man’s way of earning God’s grace through doing of works and deeds
4. Religion stands opposed to a relationship with Jesus because religion demands action, but Jesus just wants your heart.

C. In reality, Jesus and religion go hand in hand.

1. Jesus didn’t hate the Old Law or religion. In fact, He said that He came to fulfill it and He kept it perfectly. **(Matt. 5:17)**
2. The terminology “relationship with Jesus” is commonly used in religious discussions, today. So you would expect then for the Bible to be filled with teachings about having a relationship with Jesus. However, the terminology of having a relationship with Jesus is more than scarce in the Bible.
 - Out of 7 major Bible translations (KJV, ASV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, NET, & NASB), 4 of them (KJV, ASV, NKJV, & ESV) do not include the word ‘relationship’ anywhere in the text.
 - The word relationship is only used a combined 15 times in the 3 remaining translations. (NIV, NET, & NASB)

- Out of those 15 times, 9 times it is used in the Old Testament. Out of the remaining 6 usages, only 1 time is the word used to describe the Christian's status with Christ. **(I Cor. 1:30 NET)**
3. While we might not find the term relationship often used, we do find the word fellowship used throughout the Bible. The word fellowship is used 91 times just in the NT, and what that tells me is that God is more concerned with fellowship than relationship. Fellowship is being of the same mind, being together as one, and having things in common. It is very possible to have a bad relationship with someone, but there is no such thing as bad fellowship.
 4. The word "religion" (belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power; a particular system of faith and worship) is made up of two words: "re" meaning again and "ligion" from the same root as ligament and ligature, meaning to bind. This makes much more sense when we consider God's desire to be in fellowship with us because he desires to be bound together with us.
 5. The only way to come into fellowship with the Father is through Jesus. **(John 14:6)**
 6. Jesus died to save those who would be obedient to Him and the Father. **(Hebrews 5:9)**
 7. Our heart is shown through our actions (obedience). **(Matt. 7:16-20)**
 8. You cannot have one while hating the other. Jesus and religion are a package deal.

II. Abuse of religion does not negate it's truth or validity.

- A. We must be honest and admit that religion has been misused and abused
 1. It is absolutely true that some people have done some very bad things in the name of religion.
 2. Many people have been killed and wars have been started in the name of some god or even in the name of Jehovah.
 3. There are many religious people who are hypocrites, and use religion as a veil for their greed and wickedness.
 4. Many would point to Jesus' rebukes of the Scribes and Pharisees as evidence that Jesus hated any practice of religion or religions actions. **(Matt. 23)**
- B. The fact that some misuse and abuse religion or do horrible things in the name of religion doesn't automatically mean that all religion is wrong.
 1. This type of thinking isn't accepted in other aspects of life...
 - Some teachers abuse their power so all education is evil! WRONG!
 - Some medicines can be abused so all medicines are evil! WRONG!
 - Some athletes abuse their fame and act wickedly so all sports and all athletes are evil! WRONG!
 - Some within the government abuse power and authority so all government is evil! WRONG! God instituted and empowered government to be a servant to the good and a punisher to the evil. **(Rom. 13:1-4)**
 2. Just doing something in the name of Jesus or God doesn't automatically make it right. **(Matt. 7:21-23)**
 3. Jesus did not condemn the Scribes and Pharisees for simply being religious, but He condemned them for hypocrisy, arrogance, and misuse of God's Law. **(Matt. 23)**

III. God's grace teaches us to possess true faith and practice righteous religion.

- A. God's grace does bring salvation to all people. **(Titus 2:11)**
- B. That grace teaches us to live in a certain way. **(Titus 2:11-14)**
 1. Deny ungodliness and worldly desires. **(v.12)**
 2. Live sensibly, righteously, and godly in this present age. **(v.12)**
 3. Look towards the hope of the great return of God and Jesus. **(v.13)**
- C. God gave us grace so that we would live pure lives for Him while being zealous for good deeds. **(v.14)**
- D. Doing good deeds for others and being godly is part of pure and undefiled religion. **(James 1:26,27)**
 1. Religion can be worthless. **(v.26)**
 2. But religion can also be good if it is pure and acts righteously. **(v.27)**
- E. Living righteously with a pure heart is all that Jesus would have for us to do. Keeping His commandments with a pure heart shows our true love for Him. **(John 14:15)**

Can people misunderstand Jesus and religion? Absolutely. Are Jesus and religion opposed? Not if the religion is pure and righteous by Jesus' standards. Are you religious? Is your religion pure and undefiled? Are you living a life that shows the effect that God's grace has had in your life? You don't have to choose Jesus or religion. God expects you to show your love for Jesus through your pure religion. May God help us to be a people that are simply pleasing to God through our hearts and our actions.