



Religion or Relationship?

Religion is a set of formulas designed to please God; Christianity is God's pleasure in us because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

A pastor friend of mine sent me a list of the ten reasons why hell is better than a church convention. (As I share these with you, you can substitute your own denominational name. The 10 reasons fit all of us who are sometimes involved in church meetings.)

10. When you hear people preaching in hell, you know you are not supposed to enjoy it.
9. You already expect the music to be bad.
8. No lingering odor of hair spray.
7. People in hell do not look like they just returned from an all-you-can-eat buffet.
6. They don't vote on everything in hell.
5. You can act however you want. After all, where are they going to send you?
4. Fun conversations with science-of-the-mind people who don't believe they are there.
3. Fun conversations with televangelists who don't believe they are there.
2. You discover the roots of some Southern gospel music and polkas.
1. There are no offerings.

That list, of course, reflects the personal proclivities of the individual who wrote it. However, it does make a legitimate point about how most of us have felt at one time or another about a church meeting or convention.

I've often said that if I get to heaven and God calls a meeting...I've missed it.

God's view of the wrong kind of religious meetings is not humorous at all; "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.... Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of

your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24).

I love the church. That, of course, doesn't mean I like church meetings. If you genuinely enjoy those kind of events, I have the suspicion that the cheese may be falling off your cracker ...but I do admire you.

Meetings, as difficult as they are, are necessary for the ongoing work of God through his church.

But, can we talk?

I hate religion! I have preached and taught in more churches, church conventions, church organizations than I can remember.

I know how people are sometimes abused by churches, how pastors and leaders can be destroyed, how cold and uncaring some churches can be and how painful some church experiences are.

I once did an interview with Jim Warren at Moody Broadcasting. We were talking about religion and its dangers. The more I thought about it, the more I winced at the way we, the people of God, are seen by pagans.

Not only that, I thought about how often they are right in what they say about us.

Christianity is not a religion—it is a relationship with Jesus Christ. It's been said so often that it's become a cliché. Nevertheless, it is still true.

You see, religion is our effort to get to God—Christianity is God's effort to get to us.

Religion is a set of formulas that are designed to please God; Christianity is God's pleasure in us because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Religion is ritual, but Christianity is relationship with Jesus Christ.

But, still, the church is God's institution (Ephesians 5:27), and it is the

We have
a “burden”
we want
to “share”
with you
“just now.”



We have an article that’s been “laid on our hearts,” and we’re “coming up alongside” our readers to ask if they might be a help to us in our “hour of need.” And we truly hope that this will be a “blessing to your hearts.”

The subject of this upcoming article (as you may have already guessed) will be Christian clichés. What do you think of them? Do you avoid them—or do you find that your language is liberally sprinkled with them? Do you find yourself using them around “believers” (oops—there’s another one!) and avoiding them around “unbelievers” (and another!)—or do you find yourself using them around Christians and non-Christians alike?

Some say that Christian clichés and Christianese makes non-Christians (and some Christians) uncomfortable—or that it “hurts your witness.” Others believe that using special in-house words and phrases creates a bond between believers—kind of like a secret handshake. Do you agree? Let us know.

Most importantly, we’re looking for your favorite Christian cliché—and your least favorite Christian cliché.

We’ll summarize and share your responses in a future *Plain Truth* article. You can email us at managing.editor@ptm.org (put “Christian clichés” in the subject line), or send us a letter addressed to:

Christian clichés
Plain Truth magazine
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he asked me...

only institution that will be around forever. The service clubs, community organizations, para-church ministries, educational and philanthropic institutions are all going to eventually die.

The church of Jesus Christ, however, will never die. It will be sick or weak sometimes—it will do stupid and painful things. Sometimes it will be unfaithful and crippled, but it will never die. The church is his wife and he has promised.

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But I suspect that God does blush sometimes. It is possible for the church to degenerate into “religion” and for people to get hurt, for lives to be damaged and for the people of God to forget what we are really about.

That can happen, for instance, when we forget that the church is not about us, but about Christ (Ephesians 5), when doctrinal truth takes a back seat (2 John 9), when we forget that Christ called us to love and be one another’s cheerleaders (John 13:35) or when we forget about grace and try to be something other than beggars telling other beggars where we found grace.

My friend and colleague, Dr. Mike Glodo, once said that he had never seen an ugly bride. Then he paused and said, “well, maybe just a couple. But,” he continued, “I never saw a groom who ever saw an ugly bride.”

I still don’t like church meetings, but I love the church, and I am proud to be a part of it. The church is, after all, his wife.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown