

The Role of Faith

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The Role of Faith:

Much of what people call religion is a game that pretends to be real.

I genuinely believe in a spirit world, but much of the way people practice Christianity traditionally is a game of outdoing each other.

Denominations per se, the fact that there are so many, promotes freedom. So, I'm not against denominations. People should be in a church where they agree with what is happening.

The problems lie in systems that are so rigid you can't voice disagreement. There is false consensus instead. This issue characterizes the majority of denominations in my experience.

When these groups disagree, they sometimes talk about how stoical or not stoical the other church or denomination is.

Alan Watts once said, "One very significant game we play with each other is the game called 'My game is more interesting than yours'". He seems to use that theory to explain the origin of all forms of spirituality. I don't believe that all forms of spirituality or even most evolved from that.

I've seen historical texts and evidence that corroborates miraculous events and prophecy to an extent that convinces me of the miraculous. Many historical texts, drawings, and religions have similar writings about spirits and worldwide floods even if they disagree on which spirit is the creator or how to become reconciled with the creator or universe.

I've also known people who have had miraculous experiences I've seen in person, such as our bus being pulled out of a snowy ditch in the middle of nowhere by someone, who then vanished sometime after we stopped paying attention to him or where he came from, when we started back on the long gravel road to a winter retreat. In that instance, we assumed that the vehicle was from the camp since we weren't visible from the road. However, they said that they knew nothing about it, and we began to question the physics of how a small pickup truck, rather conveniently with a power winch, pulled a bus sideways out of a ditch.

There are other experiences which have to do with individuals and perceptions I've had. The perceptions align with what the Bible calls the spiritual gift of "discerning spirits". The perceptions were often verified later by events or things the person told me about their dealings with spirits or similar spiritual experiences.

Sometimes, when I was in High School, people would tell me, "Being a Christian is hard". I'd tell them that Jesus said, "My yoke is easy" "my burden is light". They'd reply, "But it seems hard," and I would say, "Life is hard". Though they'd often agree to some extent, I was missing a big factor. The factor was that the religious system that we were in added obligations and impersonal experiences which could give the impression that spirituality was just a system of control.

Baptist churches, in the 80s, 90s, and perhaps now, have redefined terms to ensure they can't easily be confronted.

The main terms are related to church practices: Pastor, Communion, the lord's table, the gathering together to worship, legalism. They've defined legalism as a belief that following Old Testament (Torah) laws result in salvation. However, even the Old Testament (Tanakh) doesn't take this view, such as in Isaiah 61:1-5 and many passages that Jesus and other New Testament authors quoted.

However, defining legalism that way made the legalistic churches safe from being called legalistic, in their eyes. As George Orwell pointed out, the misuse of language can lead to the corruption of politics (in other words, a shift in power). Though the Bible doesn't specifically use the term legalism, it clearly points out some specific problems.

As I read the Bible, I discovered that the application of law that Jesus condemned has always been:

- * finding loopholes for one's self while condemning others (tithe herbs while ignoring weightier matters; stoning the adulteress)
- * adding additional regulations to the law of God (pharisees devour widows houses on the premise it is required ["Corban"] by the law)
- * now that you are a Christian you must follow regulations (not: you must follow the law to become a Christian) – such as in Galatians 2:14 and context, where the works are forced on people, but are not mentioned as a requirement for Salvation.
- * following regulations such as do not handle, do not taste, do not touch (Colossians 2:20-23)

The Pharisees followed the law, but Jesus said they were of their father, the Devil. The above list is what I would consider Christian legalism. If there is some other definition, I wouldn't consider it a

useful definition, since the points above are the points that the Bible says are problems. Even the modern theological definition (overemphasis on mosaic law) is too narrow but not so specific as to indicate works=salvation nor mosaic law = salvation.

Therefore, any other definition of legalism is useless for Christians, except in usage that, as C.S. Lewis put it, "theology is man's desperate attempt to defend himself against the Bible". This is true of the other words they redefine above to justify hierarchies and a human instead of Christ having headship over a church.

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