What Is Religion?

Intro: To this question the world will return three answers. 1. The psychologist says, “Religion consists in thinking, it is what you think.” 2. The emotionalist says, “Religion consists in feelings, it is how you feel about things.” 3. The sociologist say, “Religion consists in acting, it is deeds not words.”

The mistake is that each one considers his answer complete in itself, whereas the Bible teaches that religion consist in all three of these things. Example: James 1:26 “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiteth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” (“seems to be religious” ASV is “thinketh himself to be religious” is thinking. “Bridleth not his tongue” is acting. “Heart” is feeling.)

When a man is religious in the New Testament sense, he passes through an experience which is made up of thinking, feeling, acting and thus gives himself wholly to the service of Christ.

I. THINKING IN RELIGION.

A. Some peoples religion consist solely in “I think.”

1. The Bible’s teaching means very little or absolutely nothing to them.
2. They make their own intellect their Bible.
3. They make themselves God.
   a. Psa. 50
   b. Rom. 1:21-25 “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”

B. Man is often mistaken in what he thinks.

1. God’s ways are not man’s way.
   a. Isa. 55:8-9 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. 9For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
   b. Pro. 14:12 “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”
   c. Jer. 10:23 “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”
2. Bible examples.
   a. Jud. 17:6 “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”
      (1) When Israel came into the promised land, the people were ruled by judges.
      (2) Often following the death of a judge the nation would forsake Jehovah as their God and turn to the gods of the idolatrous neighbors.
      (3) This written here is what eventually caused the downfall of Israel.
   b. 2 Kin. 5:11 “But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.”
      (1) Naaman, a leper, came to Israel to be healed.
      (2) Elisha sent a messenger who told Naaman to go wash in the Jordan seven times and he would be clean.
(3) Naaman became mad, and if not for his servants would never have been cleansed.

c. John 16:2 “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”
d. Acts 26:9-11 “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.”

C. What is right thinking in religion?
1. Thinking in accordance with Christ words.
a. He has all authority in religious matters.
   (1) Mat. 17:5 “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”
   (2) Eph. 1:22-23 “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”
   (3) Col. 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”
   (4) Heb. 1:1-2 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;”
   (5) Mat. 28:18 “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

b. His words will judge us; John 12:48-50 “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. 49For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father wh ich sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”

2. Thinking in accordance with the scriptures.
a. They are given by God.
   (1) The apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit.
      (a) John 14:25-26 “These things have I spoken unto you, being ye present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”
      (b) John 16:12-13 “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”
   (2) The apostles spoke that the Holy Spirit gave them.
      (a) Mat. 10:20 “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”
      (b) Mark 13:11 “But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, whether ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.”
   (3) The apostles wrote that which God through the Holy Spirit gave them.
      (a) Paul equates the spoken and the written word; 2 Thes. 2:15 “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”
(b) Eph. 3:3-4 “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ‘Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ’)

(c) 1 Cor. 14:37 “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

(d) John 20:30-31 “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

   i) Written to produce faith (that which we think)
   ii) Rom. 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

(e) 2 Tim. 3:16-17 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

b. They are the standard of judgment.
   (1) Rom. 2:16 “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”
   (2) Rev. 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

II. FEELING IN RELIGION.

A. Some people’s religion consist solely in their feelings.
   1. They think that their salvation is based on how one feels.
   2. They say, “I know I’m saved because I feel good.”
   3. These make their feelings their god.

B. But, man may be mistaken in what he feels.
   1. Pro. 28:26 “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.”
      a. Why is he a fool:
      b. Because the heart can be deceived.
   2. Bible Examples
      a. Gen. 37:32-35 “And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son’s coat or no. 33And he knew it, and said, It is my son’s coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. 34And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. 35And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.”
      b. Acts 23:1 “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”
      c. 1 Tim. 4:2 “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;”
      d. Tit. 1:15-16 “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. 16They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

C. What is right feeling in Religion?
   1. Feeling proceeds from our thinking.
      a. Wrong thinking will produce wrong feelings.
      b. Right thinking will produce right feelings.
2. Examples.
   a. When I believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, my feelings will change.
      (1) His birth.
         (a) Instead of being a story of the birth of a poor man’s son:
         (b) It becomes the virgin birth of God’s incarnate Son to save our souls.
      (2) His death.
         (a) Instead of being a pathetic death of a martyr for his cause:
         (b) It becomes a grand vicarious sacrifice for sin in which God’s love is demonstrated.
   b. Sin.
      (1) Instead of being a joyous, pleasurable thing:
      (2) It is an offense of the holiness of God that will damn one’s soul in hell.

III. ACTING IN RELIGION.
   A. Right thinking and feeling must result in action.
      1. If they do not result in action then the right thinking and feeling will quickly pass away.
      2. When this happens nothing is left.
   B. This principle is clearly taught.
      1. Negatively.
         a. Jam. 2:20, 26 “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?... 26For as the
            body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”
         b. Acts 24:25 “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix
            trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for
            thee.”
         c. Acts 26:27-28 “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28Then
            Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”
      2. Positively.
         a. Heb. 11:
            (1) Heb. 11:4 “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he
                obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet
                speaketh.”
            (2) Heb. 11:7 “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear,
                prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became
                heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”
            (3) Heb. 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after
                receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”
            (4) Heb. 11:17 “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received
                the promises offered up his only begotten son,”
            (5) Heb. 11:23 “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because
                they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”
            (6) Heb. 11:28 “Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that
                destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”
            (7) Heb. 11:29 “By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians
                assaying to do were drowned.”
            (8) Heb. 11:30 “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven
                days.”
            (9) Heb. 11:33 “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained
                promises, stopped the mouths of lions.”
b. Steps in our conversion.
   (1) Believeth.
      (a) Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
      (b) Here is our thinking.
   (2) Repentance.
      (a) Luke 24:47 “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
      (b) Here is our feeling.
   (3) Baptism.
      (a) Mat. 28:19 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:”
      (b) Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
      (c) Here is our action.

c. Continued obedience.
   (1) Rom. 6:4 “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
   (2) 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”
   (3) To the end.
      (a) Mat. 10:22 “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”
      (b) Rev. 2:10 “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Conclusion: Let us make sure that we get our thinking in line with God’s Word and bring our feelings in line with it, then act according to what God says.