

Did Yeshua Destroy Religion?

John Lennon famously sang – imagine there’s no heaven, no hell below us...and no religion too. He did so in a song that must have reached thousands of millions and certainly has charmed them with not only its melody, but with its irreligious sentiment as well. Sadly, it isn’t just secular men and women who love imagining there is no religion. Far from it. The same sentiment is echoed by countless modern Christians, including some believers that otherwise seem to respect God’s Word. It is an odd sentiment to see come from believers in our Savior, but it is practically endemic – an ideology, and countless repeated claims, that in Yeshua, there is no religion. Or even that Yeshua came to destroy religion. Now why would countless little sons of God say this? Shouldn’t they know better?

One of the reasons for the irreligious sentiment among believers today is the gross distortion of several key New Covenant teachings. Another reason is an overall anti-authoritarian sentiment which has arisen in the West, and been absorbed by Christians, who seem to imbibe their culture more commonly and with more joy than they imbibe their faith. Or should I say, their religion. This claim that Yeshua ended religion, beyond being a mere false claim, is also incredibly harmful to our Savior’s sheep; it leaves them without an understanding of what He taught us. It leaves them also without clear guidance and discipline in living life in the Savior. The false claim accomplishes in a sense what it claims to do – it does great damage to religion. This, my friends, is satanic.

But rather than examining all the reasons here, or examining all the consequences, I’d rather show you clearly and without a doubt just how false this ridiculous claim is. Because little is more transparently false than the statement that Christians do not have a religion. Now to show its falsehood, let me just take a few reasonable steps here; I’m going to look at the dictionary definition of religion, in its various components; then I’m going to look through the *Brit Chadasha* (New Testament) to see if we find those elements of religion taught, commanded or demonstrated there. I believe you will see, as easily as I do, that Yeshua did not end religion, but rather taught religion, as did His apostles who founded the *Kahol* (Church). Religion is all over the *Brit Chadasha*.

Here’s a definition of religion from Merriam-Webster online:

noun re·li·gion \ri-'li-jən\

: the belief in a god or in a group of gods

: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods

: an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group

Let's look at the key characteristics here so we can check and see if Christians have them. Do Christians believe in a god or gods? Do Christians have a set of beliefs, ceremonies or rules relating to that worship? What do you think we're going to find?

We'll go in order, and see if we find the belief in a god or gods in the *Brit Chadasha*:

: the belief in **a god or in a group of gods**

Belief in God

Mark 12:20 *Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, **the LORD is one***

1 Corinthians 8:5-6 *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), ⁶yet **for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.***

1 Timothy 2:5 *For **there is one God** and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,*

There are more scriptures to look at, brothers. But I think we can see clearly with just these three short passages, that the New Covenant includes this key element of religion – the belief in a god or gods. Not only that, but it comes straight from the mouth of Yeshua. That's religion from the mouth of the Savior.

How about the next three elements?

: an organized system of **beliefs, ceremonies, and rules** used to worship a god or a group of gods

Beliefs:

Nature of Yeshua

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.*

Colossians 2:9 *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*

Philippians 2:6 *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,*

Wow. These verses reflect powerful beliefs about who Yeshua is. They talk about His godhood and His incarnation. To believe these truths, brothers, makes you a profoundly religious person.

Forgiveness

Acts 5:31 *Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*

Ephesians 1:7 *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*

Here is another “belief” straight from the New Covenant. That’s the belief that there is forgiveness of sins in Yeshua. If you believe that, you are religious.

Prayer

Acts 14:23 *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 *pray without ceasing,*

James 5:16 *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

You could classify prayer as a ceremony too, even if it's not always done ceremonially. I am calling it a belief. This is the belief that we should pray to God, that we should do it regularly. Whether belief or ceremony, prayer is religious.

Confession

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Confessions (which we also see above in James 5), is another one we could call belief or ceremony, depending. I just want to remind you that if you get on your knees and confess your sins to God and ask forgiveness, it seems very silly to tell someone you're not religious. A person seeing confession, then hearing you say you're not religious might just smile and nod, the way you'd do with someone who's a bit loony. It's just a bit loony to say such a thing.

How to Pray

Matthew 6:8-13 *"Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. ⁹In this manner, therefore, pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.*

¹⁰Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Here we are in prayer once again. I cite this second passage about the disciples' prayer to point out that this includes not just instructions to pray, but also instructions on how to pray. Perhaps this could be called alternately belief, ceremony AND rules.

Salvation in Yeshua

Acts 4:12 *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

John 5:24 *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

Here is another belief for you; the belief that Yeshua is the savior of mankind, and that without Him we are lost. This is a profoundly religious thing to believe. Are you getting the idea, just like me, that maybe Yeshua did NOT destroy religion? I hope you are.

The Judgment

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before **the judgment** seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Romans 2:3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape **the judgment** of God?

Any faithful little Messiah believes that God will judge the world. This is one more belief that fits under the definition of religion.

Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Acts 24:15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust.

Do you really men to tell me you believe that every human soul will be raised in a new body at the end of the age and that you are NOT religious? Again, I think the average stranger hearing that would just smile and nod nicely.

Ceremonies:

Aha! Here is one of the elements most associated with religion; the ceremonies. Let's see if worshippers of Yeshua have some of these?

Communion

Luke 22:19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

If we take the body and blood as Yeshua instructed, we are performing a ceremony. That ceremony is related to the worship of God. We are involved in a religion.

Baptism

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Just as above, if Christians baptize new believers as Yeshua and the apostles instruct, they are performing a ceremony. Performing a ceremony for God is religion.

Let's look at a few more:

Anointing

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Fasting (that Yeshua mentions)

Mark 2:20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

21-22 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*."

1 Corinthians 7:1,7 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman....For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

So tell me this, if you claim that Yeshua ended religion: Do you actually pray, anoint people with oil, fast from food and fast from intimate relations as part of your worship of God and somehow do not practice religion? If this is so, you have possibly invented a new definition for the word.

By the way, notice that Mark 21-22 above speaks allegorically of old religious elements being left behind and new religious elements appearing through the example of old and new wineskins. It does NOT talk allegorically about religion disappearing, through the example of no more wineskins. Let's move on.

Did Yeshua and the new Covenant destroy rules?

Rules:

Obey Commandments

1 John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

John 15:14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

Ah, the commandments. That's mitzvot in Hebrew. True, a lot of people have trouble keeping them, and they're not very popular in parts, but the need to obey the commandments is all over the *Brit Chadasha*. The commandments are rules, you know. That is religion.

Orderliness

1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Reverence

1 Corinthians 11:26-29 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

²⁷Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.²⁹For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's²⁷ body.

Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

Titus 3:10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Here we have instructions for orderliness in worship, reverence in worship and Church discipline. In only a handful of verses we see quite a few rules, and if we looked through more we would find more.

Qualifications for leadership

1 Timothy 3:1-7 This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ²A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;³not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence ⁵(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. ⁷Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The qualifications for elders are another set of rules, given in some detail. Qualifications for deacons are also given in some detail. These, brothers, are rules.

Marriage

Matthew 19:8-9 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her

remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

These are some very unpopular and difficult rules about marriage; the born again man and wife are together for life. Should they ever separate, they need to either remain celibate or reunite. These are a very high standard of rules. Moreover, notice once again that some of them come from the mouth of Yeshua, whom some claim ended religion. Here Yeshua teaches religion it instead.

Role of Women

1 Timothy 5:14 Therefore I desire that *the* younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Titus 2:4-5 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

1 Timothy 2:12-15 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.¹⁵ Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

These scriptures represent another set of unpopular scriptures in which the *Brit Chadasha* clearly has rules. These are rules that teach woman's submission as well as her role in the home and with children. Most believers won't say it today, but the Bible has rules to keep women in her place, which by the way is a glorious one.

: an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group

This latter part of the definition of religion I take to encompass non-revealed religions, or openly man-made ones if you like. It would cover humanism, atheism and others. They share major components with religions which speak of a personal God, and with Christianity itself. However, that form of religion is not important to this essay. We're naturally going to skip it.

So what do you think? After we've gone over all of the above and compared the definition of religion to many scriptures from the New Covenant, did Yeshua get rid of religion?

I believe the answer is, unless you radically change the definition of religion, He most certainly did not. Religion is a belief in a god or gods. It is also a set of beliefs, ceremonies and rules related to the worship. We've seen above that Christians believe in God, believe in the godhood of Yeshua, forgiveness, prayer, confession, salvation in the Messiah, the judgment, the resurrection, communion, baptism, anointing, fasting from food, fasting from intimate relations, obeying commandments, obeying rules of orderliness, rules of reverence, rules about Church discipline, rules about choosing leaders, rules about marriage, rules about gender roles and if we spent more time with the Bible we could add to the list. Brothers, this is religion. Christians have it.

I appreciate you taking the time to go through all that with me. I realize I could have made it shorter, but I wanted to cover the subject. To finish, I'd like to quickly take a look at the very truths that believers distort in claiming they do not have a religion. After all, they are taking good and holy truths and simply abusing them. Let's look at what these biblical truths actually are:

1---Yeshua brings the end of the old Mosaic order, and the beginning of the New Covenant order. He then brings an end to something, but it is not religion as a whole.

2---Yeshua criticizes false teachings. Yeshua's criticism of false teachings are plentiful, but none of them amount to ending religion.

3---Yeshua criticizes the Pharisees for calling their traditions the Word of God. Uplifting traditions too high is a real problem, but to point that out in no way ends religion.

4---Apostle Sha'ul (Paul) powerfully demonstrates that we cannot justify ourselves before God through works of the law. This is core to the Christian faith, but in no way ends religion. It merely ends the illusion of self-righteousness.

5---Sha'ul also refers to his previous religious deeds as rubbish. Some would claim this as an ending of religion, yet that completely misses the point Sha'ul is making, which is essentially point 4 above; none of those deeds are useful in justifying ourselves before God. That doesn't mean they are not excellent things to do on another level, because often they certainly are. Driving safely, for example, is rubbish as an attempt to justify oneself, yet it is gold as a measure to protect human life.

6---Sha'ul refers to keeping religious days and times as not a mandate, and as not worth quarrelling about. This is very plain. Yet treating days and times as less than a mandate, as they were in the Mosaic covenant, is not the same thing as saying one should never keep any days and

times. It is merely putting them in perspective. After all, Sha'ul himself met for worship on the Sabbath as well as on the eighth day. That is keeping days.

7---Sha'ul tells us that there is life in the Spirit, and not in the letter of the law. This is a profound statement that you could really write a book about, yet nowhere does this critique of self-justification through law-keeping mean we do not practice religion. Nor does it say that we are not to follow the law. In fact, Sha'ul himself taught from that very same law, quoted its verses and praised its commandments. This is just one statement among many against self-justification and mere legalism. Keep it in that perspective.

These are some of the points that those who attack religion distort in order to make their case that religion is not of the New Covenant. The points are all important ones, and some are core to the new reality in Messiah, yet notice that none of them actually deny religion. And why should they? As we've seen above, the Savior and the apostles taught religion over and over again. These points merely critique aspects of false religion, as well as bring us to what is most core within it, which is faith, and the apostle quotes Habakkuk in supporting this truth – the just shall live by faith.

If you are personally involved with attacking the religion that Yeshua gave us, please take a step back from that teaching. Check it with the Bible, as I have just done, and see if you really want to continue. Please also consider the damage done when a truly anarchistic philosophy is taught to the sons of God. Could it be that teaching a religious version of society's do-what-you-feel philosophy has caused great error, encouraged sinfulness and the breakdown of the *Kahal*? Could it be that so many believers and sects cannot get along is in part because of this follow-your-heart version of the faith? If you're not involved with teaching an end to religion, please share this message with others, or if you don't like some of its particulars, feel free to adapt them. But communicate the message. Almighty God in saving a lost mankind provided us a faith. That is the knowledge and trust in Yeshua. He provided us a way of living also. He even birthed a sacred community with its own ordinances and leaders. If you like to imagine as John Lennon did a world without religion, then you also imagine a world without God, without Messiah and without salvation.

Thank you for listening.

Shalom u'Vracha.