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I-800-611-8080 / [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)  
PO Box 54621, Tulsa, OK 74155-0621

## But Is It Christianity?

**There are some two billion Christians and two thousand varieties of Christianity. Is your belief authentic?**

by James McBride

Since man was created he has had the ability to express heart-felt joy and gratitude. It is part of our inborn nature, shared with all mankind of all faiths and none.

Christians recognize this in the Psalms and in those passages of Scripture in which the Israelites approached JHVH in His Temple. There was expression of true joy, thanksgiving, prayer and worship as they bowed before the great Creator of the Universe.

This may, perhaps, be a puzzle to some. Think about it. For how does this differ from Christianity? We may worship the same Creator. We pray to Him. We use the same Scriptures and claim the same 'fathers'. We draw on the same prophecies of a Messiah, and of future events. And there is like joyful praise and thanksgiving.

There is no reason to assume that believers of other faiths - Islam, Hinduism, Judaism *etc* - are any less sincere in their worship. There are varied styles of worship but each bows before their own understanding of 'God'. Festivals, especially, are times of joyful celebration.

Each 'God' impresses its own form of worship. There are, for example, the 'five pillars of Islam' which includes universal prostration in every mosque, shoes off, a turning towards Mecca at specified times daily and Friday worship. Each faith, too, has its annual round of festivals - for Muslims there is Ramadan, Eid *etc*.

### Changed Belief

Perhaps more than any faith other than Hinduism, forms of worship in Christianity vary widely. It appears that with the Christian God 'anything goes'. Take for example the specified worship days. The foundations of the Christian faith are in the Old Testament Scriptures - the same as for Judaism. Yet for Christians God has apparently permitted radical change.

The seventh-day Sabbath has been, in Christianity, replaced by Sunday. The divinely revealed 'Sabbaths of the LORD' - *see* Leviticus 23 - have been replaced by Christmas, Easter, All Souls' Day, Advent *etc*. Failure to observe the holy days for Israel brought divine censure. For presumptuous Sabbath-breaking God even prescribed a capital penalty. And yet He tells us '*I don't change*'.

Through the prophet Jeremiah God indicted Israel: '*Has a nation changed its gods, and they were not gods? But My people have changed their Glory without profiting*' (Jeremiah 2:11). The people of Israel had embraced religious practices from the nations around them. Does He, I wonder, also indict modern Christianity? Have we not imported practices foreign to those revealed in Scripture?

### Faith Once Delivered

We must, therefore ask the question, 'Are these fundamental changes driven by the Spirit of God?' Has He recorded them for our instruction in Scripture? To be logical, consistent, we need to assume so. For the apostles 'closed the book': '*...the faith once for all delivered to the saints*', wrote Jude. Yet none of the above changes may be gleaned from the New Testament writings. If God the Father has not authorised these changes - along with many others that feature in modern Christianity - we must surely question its validity.

Yet - do not Christians experience commitment, joy in their faith? Do they not profess to worship the God revealed through the Old Testament? Do they not have that essential indwelling holy Spirit?

Jesus quite clearly required of his disciples not only commitment to himself personally but also to his teachings. He said to the Pharisees: We should apply this to our own faith!

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*“Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites; as it has been written: ‘This people honors Me with the lips, but their heart is far away from Me; and in vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’ For forsaking the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men...”* (Mark 7:7-8)

What you believe, he says, is very important and adds:

*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many works of power? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; ‘depart from Me, those working lawlessness!’* (Matthew 7:22-23)

Wrote the apostle Paul:

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecies, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give out all my goods, and if I deliver my body that I be burned, but I do not have love, I am not profited anything* (I Corinthians 13:1-3)

Mighty deeds, knowledge, prophetic skill - ‘giving your goods’ to the needy, or even martyrdom - it is not these which mark out Christianity, but ‘love’ - total commitment, submission, to the will and Word of God and not some sentimental attachment to a notional concept of what it means to be ‘Christian’.

Simply because we mouth Christian-sounding words - ‘salvation, love, justified, holy, Lord’s Supper, good works etc’ - does not mean that we are ‘Christian’ and converted, that the Spirit dwells in us - no more than that the children of Israel were converted under Moses.

Recall that they - as with Christians - were to ‘...love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul and strength’ (Deuteronomy 6:5). They, too, were urged to ‘good works’ and to ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18). This is *Old Testament*, remember.

Such behavior clearly did not require ‘conversion’. Just simple obedience to God’s revealed Word.

### Word of Power

As with the people of God throughout the ages prior to Christianity, association with the revealed word of God in the Scriptures can ‘rub off’ as worship, as ethical behavior, as joy, as ‘good works’, as thanksgiving. But such are

common to those of other faiths and of none - not unique to Christianity.

The divine revelation through the Christian Bible has been a powerful influence throughout the world, and has brought enlightenment into the darkness of a world sunk in superstition. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world it has in the past five centuries overthrown mediaeval religious darkness and shaped the form of religious, economic, social and political belief. Sadly, it is an influence that is waning sharply in all these spheres of secular and religious human activity.

Misunderstanding of the Bible has given us the Crusades, the Inquisition, book-burning and ‘human sacrifice’ (remember Cranmer and others), Rwanda. Association with the Bible and its benign culture and teachings is what influences many to a godly life. But that’s not all there is to Christianity.

### More Than...

To be Christian requires submission to every word of God, to His commandments, to His prescribed form and times of worship. The Spirit may ‘dwell with us’ - perhaps striving to evoke personal change. But will reside in us only if we: *...repent and be baptized, each of you in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins. And [then] you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call* (Acts 2:38-39)

### The Indwelling Spirit

The apostle adds that God gives His Spirit to those who submit to His authority (Acts 5:32). Only then will the Spirit of God take up residence in us: “...*the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He abides with you and shall be in you*” (John 14:17).

But for Christians, worship and belief is considered to be inspired by God’s holy Spirit indwelling the individual. Indeed the Scriptures boldly claim that ‘*without the Spirit of Christ you are none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

Yet ‘*the Spirit was not yet given*’ (John 7:39) to the people of Israel. Not until the resurrection of Jesus. Until then the holy Spirit influenced the faithful only externally.

‘Christianity’, as experienced today, is no more than a hodge-podge of non-Biblical beliefs and practices tacked on to the Name of the Creator. Not only are the divine times for worship changed, despised and replaced by overtly pagan practices (Sunday, Christmas, Easter etc) - but so, too, have fundamental Bible teachings been replaced.

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For example:

- the mortal nature of humanity is turned into the Satanic notion of '*an immortal soul*' (Genesis 3:4)
- human destiny is wrongly seen as either heaven or hell or purgatory
- heartfelt 'repentance' has been replaced by external conformity
- tradition replaces the Scriptures
- the notion of a 'trinity' has replaced the Bible view of 'God'
- half of professing Christians are sunk in superstition

If such variation from Scripture were seen in any other faith it would be classed as a different religion!

### Test of Faith

The eighth century BC House of Israel were evicted from their homeland for their failure to follow God's revealed way of life. The people who replaced them - non-Israelites - became known as Samaritans and were abhorred by the Jews. The Samaritans '*... feared Jehovah, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away*'. (2 Kings 17:34). Their faith was a mixture of truth and error.

In the time of Jesus the Samaritans were deceived by Simon the Magician. He later '*believed and was baptized*' but utterly misunderstood the true faith and was powerfully condemned by the apostle Peter (Acts 8). Later reports place him in Rome where he is reported to have introduced 'Samaritan' - *ie* Babylonian - practices to the church of God at Rome. These have gripped mainstream Christianity ever since.

Twenty-first century Christianity closely parallels the Samaritans in their acceptance of practices God has utterly condemned.

### Difference

The first Christians were in their general practice indistinguishable from the Jews. They worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath and on the Biblical holy days. They observed the Bible dietary instructions. They carefully applied the revealed moral teachings as summed up in the Ten Commandments and sought to resist the pulls of the superstitions that surrounded them.

But they were different, too.

Some Jews - and later the non-Jews - responded to the divine call to follow Jesus Christ - to death, if that were necessary to remain faithful to him and his ways.

God's Law was no longer an external imposition but '*written in the heart*'. Animal sacrifice was replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The Spirit of God resided in each Christian and did not, as with the Israelites, merely influence them from without. The indwelling Spirit motivated and empowered the Christian to obey the revealed will of God.

In sum, Christianity as seen today is far removed from the '*faith once delivered to the saints*'. Indeed the faith of Jesus survived, except for a few faithful, barely fifty years beyond the resurrection of Jesus. The history and characters in the Bible are unchanged. The terminology of the Bible is unchanged - though meanings are distorted. Jesus is exalted - though his message is garbled. The Kingdom of God is preached - but largely misunderstood. There is '*a different Gospel*'.

What passes as Christianity is certainly a powerful influence in the world because of its widespread propagation of the Scriptures, the very Word of God. But it must take its place alongside Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism as just another faith to be superseded by the true Word of God in His due time.

Perhaps you should ask yourself: are you a Christian - or a mere 'Christianist'? It's vital that we each 'test our faith'.

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