

# The White Flag Of Grace

The subject of God's grace permeates every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation ("atonement") between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world (Luke 14:15-24).

The word 'grace' itself is described by one author as "the last, best word" in English, remaining unspoiled over the years in its meaning. Its many usages still retain some of the glory of the original, with words like *gratitude*, *gratuity*, *congratulations*, and *gratefulness* all carrying the idea of something that brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.

## The White Flag Of Grace

The word 'grace' in the Bible (*chen* in Hebrew, *charis* in Greek), literally means 'favour', with the idea of bending or stooping in kindness to another, together with graciousness in manner or action. The Old Testament use of the word includes the concept of those who "show favour" by undertaking gracious deeds, or acts of grace, such as being kind to the poor and showing generosity. Examples of God's graciousness are also seen throughout the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 7:8, Numbers 6:24–27, Psalm 119:29 and Psalm 27:7.

In the New Testament, the word grace has many layers of meaning, including the deepest and most transformative – God's saving grace, as defined by Ephesians 2 – the gift of eternal life, freely given through Jesus Christ. In God's language, His grace gives us what we don't deserve and cannot earn. This is why it is so frequently contrasted against the Law of Moses, which still condemned every man or woman, no matter their sincerity or good deeds.

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23, ESV*

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8, NIV*

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” – John 3:16-17, NIV*

We see God's love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God's grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him.

## **God's Grace Is A Gift**

Paul the apostle frequently described God's grace as a gift because he, of all people, understood how easy it was for Christians to be deceived into believing they could earn God's love or forgiveness. Paul, previously known as Saul, had been an extremely zealous [Pharisee](#). He was strictly religious, scrupulously lawful and he actively persecuted the new Christian religion (believing them to be heretics) – consenting even in their murder, in the misguided belief that he was doing God's will (Philippians 3:5-7).

Yet Paul was confronted on his way to Damascus in a very real way by the [risen Jesus](#), who made it clear to him that God's grace is something that is given freely, not earned.

The truth is, we cannot “earn anything” from God and we don't “deserve anything”, apart from the sentence passed on humanity for [Adam and Eve's disobedience](#) in the beginning – mortality.

Yet God generously offers us something quite different, something undeserved – forgiveness and life, **as a gift**. God has, in effect, raised the white flag of grace, enabling a way for us to be reconciled back to Him.

*“He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” – 2 Timothy 1:9, NIV*

God’s call to saving grace has been echoing down the centuries, appealing to any who would listen. Isaiah 55 likens this call to the provision of thirst-quenching water, free of charge, to those who are dying of thirst.

*“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1, NIV*

## The Spirit Of Ungrace

Grace is, perhaps, the easiest concept to speak about in the enthusiastic language of a born-again believer (John 3:1-21) but, in reality, the hardest virtue to assimilate into our Christian lives. Legalism, not grace, is one of the first lessons we learn in life; that all things come with a price and that nothing is given for free. We can tend to persist in this mentality after our conversion, even on an unconscious level, viewing God and each other in this light.

Yet, the concept of grace flies in the face of what we perceive to be deserved or fair and offers a completely different way of seeing things – less like ourselves and more like God. Jesus taught in his now famous prayer, known as “the Lord’s prayer”, that we should ask God to forgive us **as we forgive others** (Matthew 6:9-13). Peter later tried to clarify exactly what Jesus meant by this, asking him to specify how

many times he was required to forgive (Matthew 18:21). Peter hadn't grasped the 'unreasonableness' of grace, as God sees it. We are to forgive **as God has forgiven us**. Wholeheartedly and without reservation.

Peter's question prompted Jesus to tell another story – that of the *ungrateful* servant (Matthew 18: 21-35). Despite having been forgiven a massive debt of some several million dollars by his master, the servant proceeded to demand repayment of a debt owed to him by a fellow servant, of only a few dollars. When the fellow servant was unable to immediately repay, he had him thrown into prison, 'until he could repay the debt' – which would have been practically impossible from his prison cell. The master soon heard of the ungrateful servant's behaviour and the conclusion of the tale is sobering:

*"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."* [Matthew 18:32-35, ESV](#)

The parable was designed to impress upon the listeners the importance of their attitude towards each other in response to the forgiveness they had received from God. Keeping score or imposing limits of forgiveness simply do not find a place in Christian behaviour. God has already forgiven us a debt so mountainous that any person's wrongs against us shrink to anthills in comparison. How can we not forgive in the light of what we ourselves have received?

In fact, there is a direct correlation between our professed love for God and our love for our 'fellow servants'. John puts it this way:

*"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is*

*a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” 1 John 4:20, NIV*

## **Forgiveness Is An Act Of Faith**

*“One day I discovered this admonition from the apostle Paul, tucked in among many other admonitions in Romans 12. Hate evil, Be joyful, Live in harmony, Do not be conceited – the list goes on and on. Then appears this verse, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” At last I understood: in the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God’s hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy. When Joseph finally came to a place of forgiving his brothers, the hurt did not disappear, but the burden of being their judge fell away. Although wrong does not disappear when I forgive, it loses its grip on me and is taken over by God, who knows what to do. Such a decision involves risk, of course: the risk that God may not deal with the person as I would want. (The prophet Jonah, for instance, resented God for being more merciful than the Ninevites deserved.) I never find forgiveness easy, and rarely do I find it completely satisfying. Nagging injustices remain, and the wounds still cause pain. I do so because the Gospel makes clear the connection: God forgives my debts as I forgive my debtors. The reverse is also true. Only by living in the stream of God’s grace will I find the strength to respond with grace toward others.” – [Henri Nouwen](#)*

The long and short of it is this: if we cannot show even the slightest resemblance of grace in our lives to one another,

then we have totally misunderstood who God is and what exactly it is that He has done for us.

Grace teaches that God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are. Therefore, we choose to show that same attitude of grace in our behaviour to others. Showing grace isn't because we **should forgive**, it's because we're reminded that we **have been forgiven**.

*“And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus....” Romans 3:22-24, BSB*

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## Who Moved The Stone?

That [Jesus](#) existed, there is no doubt. There is a great deal of written historical evidence, both from Christian and non-Christian writers, supporting the fact that Jesus was a genuine historical figure, living at the beginning of the first century AD. When applying the standard criteria of historical investigation, virtually all New Testament and Near East historians assert the historicity of Jesus as certain.

[Dr Michael Grant](#) (1914-2004) wrote “Jesus: An Historian’s View of the Gospels,” published in 1977. In it, he applied the standard disciplines of the historian’s profession and reached the conclusion that the four Gospels are sufficiently reliable to deserve the utmost respect. Subsequent discussions about the historical Jesus widely reference his work.

*“If conventional standards of historical textual criticism*

*are applied to the New Testament, we can no more reject Jesus' existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned."* – Michael Grant, Historian

Nearly all modern scholars are also in agreement about two key events in Jesus' life, which they consider to be accurate and certain – that of his baptism and of his crucifixion.

*"There is a consensus of sorts on the basic outline of Jesus' life" in that most scholars agree that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, and over a period of one to three years debated Jewish authorities on the subject of God, gathered followers, and was crucified by Roman prefect Pontius Pilate who officiated 26–36 AD."* – [Amy Jill Levine](#)

The [criterion of embarrassment](#) is used as the metric for establishing events such as Jesus' baptism and crucifixion. Both events are considered to be accounts which would cause a high degree of embarrassment to the author and would therefore have no reason to be invented. Christians simply would not have invented the painful death of their leader, nor the baptism of Jesus by John, as it is a story in which John baptised for the remission of sins and Jesus was viewed as without sin. The conclusion then is that these events are historically accurate.

## **The Resurrection of Jesus – Who Was He Really?**

The debate therefore is not whether Jesus existed, but whether he was who he said he was. He claimed to be the son of God (John 5:25, John 10:36, John 1:4, John 17:1). He claimed to be the promised deliverer of the Old Testament (John 11:25; Luke 4:17-21, John 18:37, Luke 24:27). Not only that, he claimed that he would be betrayed, put to death and after

three days would be resurrected to life again.

*“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.” – Mark 9:31, NLT*

It is easy to discount these claims as the words of a highly charismatic Jewish prophet, who met a cruel death at the hands of Roman power.

*“That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be, since both [Josephus](#) and [Tacitus](#) ... agree with the Christian accounts on at least that basic fact.” – John Dominic Crossan*

What is more difficult to explain is how Jesus could have orchestrated his own death in such a way so as to corroborate with prophecy, or, more to the point, why he would even want to.

What is more confusing and unexplainable is the effect that Jesus' death had on his followers. If, as history supposes, Jesus was a common man who lived a somewhat extraordinary life, it is hard to explain the complete explosion of the Christian faith in the years that followed. It was, after all, founded on the basis of “a risen Christ”. If this was a fabrication, the rulers only had to produce the body to prove the assertion to be false. If the disciples themselves had stolen the body, it seems psychologically improbable that their story, or their conviction, would be believable or maintainable, they themselves knowing it to be false.

We have the account of Thomas, the doubter, Peter, the denier, a small group of fishermen, a gathering of a few women – simple and ordinary people without status or connections who, within a relatively short passage of time (only some six or seven weeks), were completely transformed by a profound



conviction.

*“The actual position is peculiar and, I believe, quite unique in history. It is that the whole party, including the nine men who had fled at the arrest, and certain independent persons who have not previously come into the story, were convinced that something had occurred which changed their entire outlook. It turned their dejection into triumph and their sorrow into an intense joy.” – Frank Morrison*

Despite perhaps wanting to believe otherwise, the story of the arrest, death and resurrection of Jesus carries a strange ring of authenticity. Nothing can account for the strangeness of the narrative in the Gospels. The moved stone, the empty tomb, the baffled religious leaders, the transformed disciples – let’s be honest – *“by the ordinary standards of human reasoning, the mystery attached to the person of Christ ought to have terminated with his death and burial”* (Frank Morrison).

It isn’t our intention in this post to prove conclusively the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is simply to bring the reader’s attention to a subject, which on first glance, is assumed by many to be fabrication, but on closer inspection seems to arrive at no other explanation than that which is claimed – that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, as asserted in the Bible!

## **Who Moved The Stone?**

This article is an extremely condensed summary of the excellent book by Frank Morrison, entitled *“Who Moved The Stone?”* For anyone with a genuine interest in examining the historical accuracy of the Bible’s claims regarding the resurrection of Jesus, this book is highly recommended.

Frank himself confesses that he set out to write quite a different book. He first began to study the life of Christ as

a young man and did so with a very definite feeling that the history of Jesus rested on very insecure foundations. He wasn't wrong in his concerns – there was an entire school of thought throughout the 'nineties that denied even the historical existence of Jesus. Frank Morrison didn't find himself in this group at all – he says that *“for the person of Jesus Christ, I had a deep and almost reverent regard.”* but he wanted to write an article, more for his own peace of mind than publication, about the supremely important and critical phase in the life of Christ – his last seven days. Ten years later, the opportunity fully arrived to study the subject as he had first wanted, and *“slowly but very definitely the conviction grew that the drama of those unforgettable weeks of human history was stranger and deeper than it seemed.”*

The Christian faith hinges completely on this key doctrine of the literal resurrection of Jesus. Without the veracity of this event, Christianity falters. [The Gospel](#) isn't the good news of anything and we would have to concede that the world had been duped by one of the great delusions in history.

Of course, this conundrum is for every person to consider and decide for themselves. However, there are certain questions and discrepancies that cannot be easily explained away. We believe that an honest examination of all the facts leads to an irresistible logic of their meaning.

*“Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as the resurrection. If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it – if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of bare-faced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ – sheer fabrications if there's no*

*resurrection. If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever...but the truth is, Christ **has** been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries." 1 Corinthians 12-20, MSG*

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To purchase "Who Moved The Stone" by Frank Morrison, [Click Here](#)

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## Traditions: Good Or Bad?

One of my favourite movies is *Ever After* with Drew Barrymore and Anjelica Huston. It has all the right ingredients for a great story – humour, romance, drama and a feel-good ending. When I think of this movie, I have a few favourite scenes that top my list, but the one where Danielle's father leaves to go abroad and stops at the gate to wave often plays through my mind. Perhaps because it's such a bittersweet moment. As the audience, we know what's coming but Danielle doesn't. Perhaps because it speaks so clearly of the love of a parent for their child and the pain that separation from each other brings. And perhaps, also, for the line that Danielle quotes as she waits for what she expects her father will do:

*"Wait! It's **tradition**. He always waves at the gate."*

# What Are Traditions?

Our lives are full of traditions; from cultural and religious traditions to social and family traditions.

*‘Traditions’ are described as inherited, established, or customary patterns of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom) or a belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable.” They can also be “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction”, “cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions”, or “characteristic manner, method, or style”. – Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

The word “tradition” derives from the [Latin](#) tradere literally meaning to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping. Traditions are, then, often important customs, stories or information, passed down from generation to generation as a means of safekeeping those beliefs or customs. They may have been originally passed through oral communication including methods such as storytelling and poetry, rhyme and alliteration.

Sometimes the meaning behind a tradition becomes lost but the tradition or custom remains. Sometimes a greater meaning becomes attached to a tradition than was originally intended or implied. The following is an lighthearted story highlighting how traditions or customs sometimes come about:

*A woman was preparing the evening’s roast dinner and divided the large piece of meat into two smaller, equal portions, placing them in separate trays in the oven. When her husband asked her why she did it that way, she replied that she actually didn’t know – it was just the way her mother had*

*always done it. That got her thinking and later that evening, she phoned her mother to find out the reason behind the two trays of meat. Her own mother didn't know either, it was just what **her** mother had always done. They decided to phone the woman's grandmother and, when asked what was so important about dividing the meat, she laughed and replied. "oh, nothing. I just never had an oven large enough to fit my entire portion of meat on one rack. Dividing it in two simply meant I could fit it all in my oven at the same time."*

In this situation, practical requirements had, by the third generation, become something of a tradition within the family without any actual particular significance behind the tradition.

Even amongst the animal kingdom, traditions can be observed. Behavioral traditions are seen in groups of fish, birds, and mammals, such as orangutans and chimpanzees. In fact, chimpanzees will actually transfer traditional behavior from one group to another (not just within a group).

Human beings are hyper-social animals, albeit a lot smarter (most of the time!) than the animal world but even we come together through shared practices, traditions and rituals. These traditions form a social glue that binds groups within our society and often provides benefits such as increasing family bonds and forming a strong group identity. Traditions often offer a sense of belonging for individuals.

## **Traditions: Good Or Bad?**

Traditions can sometimes be viewed in a negative light. They are also frequently used in political or religious discussions to establish the legitimacy of a particular set of values. However, it's important to remember that traditions, in themselves, are neither good or bad. Just because something is replicated or repeated, doesn't mean it **isn't** of value or

importance. Conversely, just because something is replicated or repeated doesn't mean that it **is** important or valuable.

Traditions matter when they relate to important human values, such as faith, freedom, integrity, education, personal responsibility, a strong work ethic or selflessness. They provide context for thoughtful reflection and a deeper appreciation of the things that matter in life. Traditions are a language unto themselves; with a meaning that conveys something deeper.

## What Does The Bible Say About Traditions?

[Religion](#) is a place when traditions abound and they often form a rich tapestry in the life of a religious person. They are often drawn from history and have meaning and symbolism behind them. In the Old Testament, traditions and symbols actually pointed forward to a greater truth regarding Jesus, [his work as Saviour](#) and God's [relationship with humanity](#).

Jesus himself instituted the tradition commonly known as The Last Supper, a fellowship meal where his followers would eat bread and drink wine 'in remembrance of him' (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13). This tradition is still observed today, some 2000 years later.

Many cultures have traditions at the heart of their spiritual and religious worship and Christianity is no different. The Bible never condemns traditions of themselves but Jesus' words in Mark 7:6-8 tell us clearly that traditions shouldn't ever supercede God's will.

*"He (Jesus) replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions." (Mark 7:6-8), NIV*

Christ's words indicate that He was not condemning human tradition, but *those who place human traditions, laws, or demands before God's will* expressed in the commandments.

The letter of Paul to the believers in Colosse confirms Jesus' words:

*"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."*  
– Colossians 2:8, ESV

The Old Testament dealt with this problem too, where rituals had replaced righteousness and justice:

*"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."* – Amos 5:21-25, ESV

Traditions or rituals shouldn't come before our relationship with God and customs should never supercede God's commandments. When a tradition forms a valuable and significant part of our worship, spiritual life and our human experience, then it's good that it's observed. But when traditions are human traditions, unrelated to our relationship with God, then their significance and priority is not always important and their observance is neither required nor expected by God in our spiritual life.

There are certain traditions, though, relating to faith and morals that Christians are commanded to keep and obey:

*"I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold*

*fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you.” – 1 Corinthians 11:2, CSB*

*“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.” – 2 Thessalonians 2:15, ESV*

We can therefore view traditions as beautiful and meaningful additions to our human life, perpetuating things that matter and ideas that are worth conveying through the generations. But these traditions should never be confused as being superior to the traditions that God is actually looking for in the life of a Christian person; the traditions of “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

*“There is a real beauty to be found in tradition – a beauty that may not propel us forward in the sense of quantifiable “progress” or change, but that does propel us forward as human beings in life wisdom, understanding and even emotional intellect. Indeed, aside from the more obvious – albeit equally important – function of tradition as a way to pass on the values, morals, customs and culture of one generation to the next, tradition also teaches us something about life, where we came from and who we are as people.” – [Huffington Post](#)*

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# True Religion

Religion is defined as “a cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organisations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.”

Yet, there is no actual consensus among scholars as to what precisely constitutes a religion.

Nearly 85% of the world’s population identifies as being religious, claiming affiliation with one of the five largest religions; [Christianity](#), [Islam](#), [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#) or forms of [folk religion](#). These different religions all have distinct rules, regulations and beliefs that form part of that particular religion.

Christianity is the world’s largest religion, with over 2.4 billion followers. Growing out of Judaism – its earliest converts were Jews who were followers of Jesus Christ in the first century – it quickly spread from Judea into Asia Minor and then further abroad. By the fourth century, Christianity had become the official state religion of the [Roman Empire](#). Christianity has, in fact, played a major role in the shaping of western civilisation.

## What Is Religion?

When the [Latin](#) word *religio* found its way into the English language as *religion*, around the 1200s, it took the meaning of “life bound by monastic vows” or monastic orders. It eventually came to distinguish the domain of the church and the domain of civil authorities.

Yet the ancient and medieval world understood the word *religio* quite differently. For the ancients, it carried a meaning of *individual virtue of worship*, never as doctrine,

practice, or actual source of knowledge. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, there is no precise equivalent of the English word *religion*. The Greek word *threskeia*, used in the New Testament, is sometimes translated as religion, however, the term was more correctly understood as 'worship', well into the medieval period.

In the Quran, the Arabic word [\*din\*](#) is often translated as religion in modern translations, but up until the mid-1600s, translators expressed *din* as law.

Religion, in itself, is a modern, western concept and it was understood in quite a different way by those who lived in the ancient world. Today, religion would perhaps be explained as a system of rules or practices governed by certain beliefs. The ancient world would have viewed this concept as *law* and saw *religion* quite differently; as the idea of worship or reverence of God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things and piety, or diligence.

## Religion Has A Bad Reputation

Discussion about religion is often long, complex, divisive and inconclusive. It doesn't come as any surprise that the IPSOS Global Poll released in 2017 shows that a majority of Australians (63%) believe that religion does more harm than good. Only one in four Australians say religion defines them as a person.

Religion has been much maligned – and [\*perhaps with good reason\*](#). Unfortunately, when men and women get their hands on religion, it is often for the purpose of control and manipulation of others. Many [\*terrible acts\*](#) have been committed 'in the name of religion' and supposedly with a divine blessing – yet God is often furthest from the minds of those perpetrating such acts. In reality, God is often the last priority; intolerance is the driving force behind many actions that claim permission on religious grounds.

*“Christianity itself has a long history of such intolerance, including persecution of Jews, crusades against Muslims, and the Thirty Years’ War, in which religious and nationalist rivalries combined to devastate Central Europe.” | [The New York Times](#)*

## What Is True Religion?

The aim of this article is not to impress on any reader the ‘rightness’ of our particular beliefs or doctrines. Whether a man or woman chooses to be religious, or not, should be a deeply personal consideration, without manipulation or coercion from others.

Rather, it is intended to be an honest examination of what ‘true religion’ should be for any committed Christian, professing belief in Jesus’ saving work and God’s divine plan for the world.

If we have accepted Jesus as our saviour, our beliefs and our practices must line up and work together in harmony. We must profess and practice true religion, not merely an inadequate form, which hasn’t touched our hearts. Timothy warns against a form of godliness, which appears righteous from the outside but in reality denies the power that godliness has to radically transform us (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

The word *religion* is only used a few times in the Bible. But the concept of religion, as it was originally understood, actually permeates the entire Bible. True religion, at its core, is about the relationship between God and ourselves and how this transforms us from the inside out.

This understanding began early on in the book of Genesis, where men began to call on the name of God (Genesis 4).

*“Now men began to worship God, not only in their closets and families, but in public and solemn assemblies. The*

worshippers of God began to distinguish themselves: so the margin reads it. 'Then began men to be called by the name of the Lord' – or, to call themselves by it. Now Cain and those that had deserted religion had built a city, and begun to declare for irreligion, and called themselves the sons of men. Those that adhered to God began to declare for Him and His worship, and called themselves the sons of God." | Benson Commentary

Another commentary has this to say:

"The name of God signifies in general 'the whole nature of God, by which He attests His personal presence in the relation into which He has entered with man, the divine self-manifestation, or the whole of that revealed side of the divine nature, which is turned towards man'. In Genesis 4, we have an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of God. Those of the family of Seth began, by united invocation of the name of God of grace, to found and to erect the [kingdom of God](#)." – Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament

True religion – pure religion – is the acknowledgment of our need for God's mercy, our worship of Him and what He has done for us and the application of His character in our lives, because of our thankfulness.

True religion is the seamless unity of believing *and* doing and it's demonstrated throughout the Bible by countless examples of [faithful men](#) and [women](#). (Hebrews 11:1-40). It's an **active faith**, shown by both word and deed and not just empty talk.

"Anyone who sets himself up as "religious" by talking a good game is self deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster

*before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless ('the fatherless and the widow') in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world." – James 1: 26-27, MSG*

Jesus put it in another way:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39, NIV*

And again, in Hosea:

*"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." – Hosea 6:6, BSB*

## **What True Religion Isn't**

True religion isn't rules-based or rituals-based but is instead firmly rooted in faith. Faith, in response to God's action in our lives, [alters everything about us](#); our daily relationships, our perspective on life, our interactions with family, neighbours, friends and community. When God is present and completely sovereign in our lives, when we adhere to God and declare for Him and His worship, God calls us His children and part of His family. This is religion in its purest and most true form.

God's gift of freedom is easily perverted and often squandered by men or women placing religious burdens and rituals on their fellow man. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day for exactly this, commenting that *"they tie up heavy, burdensome loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them..."* (Matthew 23:4).

God is not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways. He is a deeply real and loving Father who invites us into a personal relationship with Him. It is always an invitation, never coercion or guilt-driven; we are given space and freedom to answer His invitation. [Through Jesus](#), we have been set free and are invited to participate in God's saving work with humanity.

How important it is for any sincere and genuine Christian to constantly promote this extraordinary message of God's grace and ensure we don't unwittingly return to a life of rule-keeping, which God finds no pleasure in.

What people need to see and experience from us is **true religion** – active, transformative and inspiring. The kind of religion that Jesus demonstrated every day.

*“Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, **then Christ died unnecessarily.**” | Galatians 2:21, MSG*

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The modern concept of the meaning behind the word religion is an abstraction that involves distinct sets of beliefs or doctrines. Its usage, in this way, began with texts from the 17th century, resulting from events such as the splitting of Christendom during the Protestant Reformation and globalisation in the age of exploration.

However, the word religion, from the Latin *religio*, meaning ‘to bind’, is a word which in the ancient and medieval world was used to refer to *individual virtue of worship; respect for what was sacred, and a reverence for the divine*. It described an attitude of *being* rather than *creed*.

You may be interested to read more in the article: [From Religion To Cruciformity](#).

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## Building Resilience

Resilience can sometimes be mistaken for indifference, unaccountability or emotional disconnection but in reality, resilience is the complete opposite of these things. It is the ability to truly face reality, to be responsible for our actions and to be emotionally vulnerable, if necessary. It is the inner strength that enables us to bounce back after facing unexpected challenges or setbacks. Resilience can be equated to mental fortitude and it lives in the small moments, as well as the large ones.

## Resilience Isn't Endurance

It can be easy to think that resilience and endurance are alike but they're not really the same thing. While they both require mental or physical fortitude in moments of crisis or challenge, endurance simply hunkers down and waits for the worst to pass. Endurance is employed somewhat momentarily – once the crisis or challenge is over, things return to normal. Resilience, however, says, "I will get through this and come out the other side stronger, perhaps wiser and having gained something of value. Things will have changed, because of this experience." Resilience sees the challenge or crisis is an opportunity for growth and moves confidently towards it.

We don't get to decide if we will deal with life's challenges; they arrive whether we want them or not. But we do get to decide how well we'll get through them and what lessons we'll learn from them. Learning to be resilient means learning to be open, resourceful and accepting of those challenges or changes

as they come.

It would be very easy to endure all kinds of trouble and yet learn nothing from it or remain unchanged by the experience. Resilience is what develops from these experiences, if we allow it. We all have the capacity for great resilience yet, like every acquired skill, it needs to be practiced and challenged in order to grow and develop.

The idea of growing resilience is commented on by James, the brother of Jesus, when writing his letter to the believers in his time.

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” – James 1:2-4, NIV*

James confirms that challenges are not meant to be just endured; they are meant to change us. We’re being developed into [our authentic selves](#) in Christ and these challenges form part of that process.

## **Resilience Is The Enemy Of Fear**

Learning to be resilient actually means learning to be unafraid of things like failure, rejection, embarrassment or abandonment. At the core of resilience is the ability to be realistic about the potential for things to go wrong, coupled with positive optimism that things will go right. It’s being grounded firmly in the here and now, in reality, but hopeful of better things. It’s learning to deal with all the challenges we encounter with a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset. Resilience is the difference between “I can’t do this”, and “I can’t do this yet”. Resilient people don’t just endure challenges, they’re proactive about moving through them and coming out stronger. Where resilience lives, fear cannot



flourish.

## Resilience And Faith Are Friends

Hebrews 11 is known as the great chapter on faith. Yet it's also a list of a great number of individuals who, in essence, had developed resilience in their life and, because of that resilience, were able to undertake great things.

*"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies." – Hebrews 11:32-34, NIV*

We realise from reading Hebrews 11 that resilience and faith are intrinsically linked. When we choose to believe in God's existence and His plan for us, we choose to put our faith in something greater than ourselves. This faith forms a large part of accepting God and embracing what He is doing for us. It also gives us a great of comfort that we are not alone and that God is working in our lives to bring about our good. Perhaps one of the best ways to start growing resilience, or at least begin our pursuit of it, is to acknowledge that we have worth to God and that He has a purpose for our lives. Continually reinforcing to ourselves how much God really loves us and that our lives are infinitely precious lays down a positive foundation for beginning to build resilience.

*"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed." – 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NLT*

# How To Build Resilience

There are certainly many practical ways to grow resilience and learning those skills and developing inner strength doesn't happen overnight. Here's some ways to start developing your inner strength and learn to face your challenges with confidence:

**Get Friendly With Failure** – your ability to cultivate resilience relies on your ability to acknowledge failure, without allowing it to cripple you. We all make mistakes, we don't always get things right the first time. But learning from our mistakes and growing through them is a key aspect of developing resilience.

**Use Empathy** – taking the time to consider another person's life or situation can really help when dealing with difficult situations or experiences. Instead of reacting in emotional ways, we should try to see things from their point of view and work to support and encourage them. Learning to deal with these people or situations, despite the challenges, develops our own level of resilience and inner strength.

**Exercise Forgiveness** – forgiveness allows us to move fully beyond a setback or disappointment and leave it in the past. It doesn't mean that we forget the situation. However, instead of feeling victimised or indulging in bitterness or self-righteousness, forgiveness give us an opportunity to learn from the experience and constructively try to resolve the setback. Forgiveness is first and foremost a gift to ourselves. Coupled with learning to forgive is also learning to apologise to those we've hurt or mistreated. This is a crucial aspect of developing our own sense of accountability for the choices we make in our life.

**Don't Compare** – remember that we are all created as unique individuals and, despite what we may see on social media or how we perceive other's lives to be, everyone has their good

days and their bad days! Not only that, we all have different talents and skills, different personalities and different cultural backgrounds. God doesn't require us to be as good as someone else – just the best version of ourselves.

*“I know how to live humbly, and I know how to abound. I am accustomed to any and every situation—to being filled and being hungry, to having plenty and having need. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:12-13, BSB*