

## What Is Being A Christian About. The Real Deal!

You've probably heard it before: Christianity is about a relationship, not a religion. But what exactly does that mean? Why is it important, and does it really make a difference?

At the heart of the issue is motivation. What motivates you to pray, or read your Bible, or help others? Often, we go along doing what we do without really examining why we do it. Are we motivated to do these things out of fear? Or are we doing them out of love?



Over the years, people have come to see Christianity and religion as the same thing. After all, religious people go to church, they follow certain rules that set them apart from the rest of society, and they believe in God. Christians do the same things!

But there's a real difference in someone who is going to church, following the rules, and acting a certain way because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't...and those who are doing the same things because they love God, realize that He loves them despite their imperfections, and desire to be like Him in their heart and actions.

### Religion is about fear

Religion feeds on fear. It's a list of do's and don'ts that must be followed in order to earn God's love—and (sometimes without realizing it) we follow those rules out of fear that, if we fall short, God will punish us.



Certainly, there are a lot of organized religions that operate in this way...setting out strict rules and either stating outright that followers will lose God's love and protection if they fail to measure up, or giving the impression of this without saying it upfront. Religion sets out a list of things that have to be done correctly in order to reach heaven—and the fear of this motivates people to follow these rules. Often, however, even if we don't belong to a church that emphasizes religious rules, we can find ourselves slipping into that mindset. It's something we need to guard against in our own hearts as well.

It's good—and right—to fear God. But God doesn't want to rule over us with fear. He wants our fear to drive us to Him...where we can rest in true safety in His protection! Someone who rules over people using fear of punishment or the fear of withdrawal of love is not a good father.

Children who are raised in this way often end up rebelling the moment they're out of their parents' sight, being cruel to others in an effort to feel better about themselves, and becoming resentful of authority. They also tend to follow the rules carefully while their parent is watching out of fear of being punished, but act entirely differently when they don't think their actions will be noticed.

### Relationship is about love

A relationship, on the other hand, is about love. A good father might punish a child who has been naughty, but he won't relish doing it. His rules will be in place in order to protect the child's best interests, and he will make his expectations clear.

A good father will love his children no matter what they do, and although the rules he's set for his household might not tolerate certain behaviors, he will never punish those behaviors by threatening to withhold his love. A good father leads by example, showing his children how to love by loving them first. He demonstrates the compassion, right behavior, and proper way to live by his actions, and his children look up to him and follow his lead—not because they fear punishment, but because they want to be just like him.



A good father spends time with his children, and his children long to spend time with him. They learn to do good things simply for the joy of pleasing their father—and they grow up loving others and treating them fairly because they've spent years following their father's good example.

### The love of a Good Father

God is the ultimate Good Father. He loves each of us, and He has offered to adopt us as sons and daughters through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Once we've accepted that offer, God becomes our Father and He watches over us jealously, wanting what's best for us and longing for us to follow Him alone. His home is now our home, and He desires to teach us, guide us, and see us share with others the love He lavishes so freely on us.

We now have the protection, rights, and provision of a Father who loves perfectly! After all, God loves perfectly because He Himself is love (1 John 4:8). We can have a relationship with God, directly, as children relate to their father. We don't have to fear losing His love, even though we will (like all children) make mistakes from time to time—God will always be there, ready to guide us back into following His example.

### Perfect love casts out fear



The beautiful thing about being in a relationship with God is that you can always trust His love. You don't have to work hard to earn His love, and you don't have to fear losing it! God's love is perfect, and when you spend time concentrating on your relationship with Him, you'll become more and more like your loving Father every day. Rather than the dry, self-focused routine of religion, the relationship made possible through Jesus is joyful, life-giving and free!

Take a moment to think about your relationship with the Lord, and identify areas where religion and fear might be creeping in. God is a Good Father, and we can rejoice in His steadfast love!

#### *You Will Know Them by Their Fruits*

**16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Matthew 7:15-20**