



E9. Q.5 - Regarding Religions and Covenants

Question 5. Regarding the Garden of Eden: Was there actually a covenant between God and Adam given and broken in the Garden? What is, in all spiritual reality, *the Tree of Life*? Is it a magical tree or, perhaps, a divine being? What is the spiritual interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden? What is the “hope” of Salvation?

One cannot really understand Biblical covenants, and especially the distinction between the Old Testament covenant and the New Testament covenant, without first clearly understanding the difference between two fundamental truths that may serve as the foundation for all covenants, and those are the principle of ‘*religion*’ and the principle of ‘*life*.’ Quite simply, religion is a bondage to a system of Divine worship, while life is spontaneous and the freedom to experience Divine fellowship; religion is what you ‘do,’ life is what you ‘are;’ Why is it so important to understand this distinction? It is because God and man covenants and their promises are given and fulfilled upon the basis of religion or life, and that the world as a whole has a propensity for religion while knowing little of the principle of life.

At one time I thought being religious was good, because religious people are devoted patrons of a godly belief system that seems to organize their life, giving them a sense of security and a degree of moral integrity. Their lives are often more disciplined. However, later in life I began to see that religion, even Christianity practiced as a religion, puts its believer into a kind of a box in which one is called into strict obedience to all its elements, including: rituals, doctrines, commandments, a specific nature of worship, of certain holy days and holy men or women, and of moral principles of do’s and don’ts that are contained in that box. We can call this a salvation “do-do” box, meaning, you better ‘do’ this and not ‘do’ that in order to fulfill its religious requirements.

Being religious makes one feel good about themselves. To the observer, the box is a safe place with walls for protection, and there is a sense of doing something right; and of conforming one’s life to some higher standard. Muslims and Hindus are extreme religious systems, but may also include Jews, Catholics and most Protestant denominations. If we examine this religion principle a little closer, we begin to see that religion is really just a shadow, or a physical model, of a higher spiritual reality. It is something that is tangible and practical that represents the man’s relationship with an invisible and intangible God. Supposing to be spiritual it is actually physical in nature. Religion is not the real thing itself but a kind of earthly organization that tries to simulate a spiritual heavenly reality. Though

often requiring much meditation, learning, and discipline; its focus is on the control of man's nature, his intellect, emotions, and touching upon all his natural senses.

Religion is a system of practice that is clothed upon from without, as in attempting to don oneself with a righteous garment; however, it is absent of having the "life" principle. The "life" factor is that which works internally to transform our souls and is not just an attempt to modify them. In the light of the sun, I cast a shadow; the shadow is not me, but only my darkened figure. My shadow cannot see or hear, nor understand or feel, or have any of those principles of life. It has no weight or substance. It is merely the absence of light telling of my presence. So too, religion tells the story of a weightier life but is absent of the ability to impart that life.

The Bible doesn't offer a single, explicit definition of "religion" as a specific term. However, we can extract some thoughts regarding religion from some examples. Take for instance the Old Testament (or Covenant) and its leadership, the Pharisees. The religious box of the Old Testament is known as "the Law." The Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the Law, most of which were the 613 commandments and ordinances contained in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, with perhaps some unwritten oral traditions added to it. Like all religions, it was all built upon a system requiring strict obedience to God and compliance to all these laws. It is a system built upon the principle of "if" and "then;" "if" the people were obedient, "then" they were blessed. "If" the people were disobedient, "then" they were cursed and disciplined. This covenant was initially set forth in Ex. 19.5-6,

"5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Thus, the Old Testament religion consisted as a set of moral beliefs and practices combined with the service and worship of God involving specific rites and rituals. This is a "**conditional covenant**" where the people must fulfill specific conditions of the Law before Divine promises are fully realized. If the conditions were not met, the covenant is broken and God's promises are not fulfilled. This is also true of the covenant God made with Adam in the Garden as well, involving stipulations for blessings and curses depending upon obedience and disobedience. We will consider the Covenant with Adam in a moment, after more fully comparing the elements of religion and the life principle.

The Pharisees often clashed with Jesus, who openly criticized their legalistic interpretations of the Law of the Covenant. For example in Mt. 23.23, note the difference between an explicit physical interpretation of the Law by the Pharisees, which is the shadow, and Jesus' more spiritual interpretation of the law of life; Jesus said to the Pharisees,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

In the context of religious law, the paying of tithe refers to the meticulous practice of carefully weighing out a tenth of one's harvest, like mint, anise, and cumin, and offering it to the temple. Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees was not about the act of tithing itself but upon their legalistic religious focus on the minor details of exacting the weights of each while neglecting the weightier intangible aspects of life itself, such as justice, mercy and faith. They observed the ceremonial precepts of the Law with all possible exactness, while they utterly neglected the eternal, indispensable Divine rules of righteous behavior: of *justice* in giving to everyone their just dues, of *mercy* in extending compassion and kindness, and of the indispensable element of *faith* or faithfulness in steadfast loyalty to God and to the brethren regardless of current circumstances.

In other words, what good is it to measure out to the finest weight possible the tithe of herbs if the weightier spiritual matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness are absent from the heart? The first action is religious legalism, or what you "do," the latter action is a matter of "life," or what your "are." How does it matter if I tithe all my income but my life is absent of love, patience, self-control, goodness, and so on? Will fleshly tithing compensate for a corrupt soul? Of course not.

Jesus said, Jn. 10.10 "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*" This life happens as an inward impartation in the heart and grows outwardly until seen in the whole man. Religion can only mimic *life* but is powerless to give life. Life does not, and cannot, come from legalistic religion, but from the exceedingly higher position of a spiritual relationship with God. One cannot earn life, as a baby cannot earn its right to be born into this world but is simply born of the will of the parents. So too, one cannot earn '*spiritual life*' but can only be born into it by the will of God, as noted in Jn. 1.12-13,

12"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: *13*who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

In order to emphasize the importance of this spiritual birthing, I am obliged to add one additional scripture at this time, 2 Cor. 5.17-18,

*"17*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. *18*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ..."

Thus, this life of which we speak is not of the natural realm but is God given, is not earned but is freely given to those in Christ, is not temporal but eternal, and comes as a seed implanted into the heart and grows from there.

Herein is the promise of life defined by Jesus Himself, Jn. 17.3 "*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*" To really believe this spiritual truth, and to receive it into your heart, is life-altering. In the most simplistic way Jesus is saying that to the degree that one can enter into an '*experiential*' relationship with

God the Father and Himself, it is to that degree divine “life will be imparted into their soul. Thereafter, what you ‘are’ defines what you ‘do.’

Experiential relationship. Thus, to truly know God and Jesus Christ is to have an ‘*experiential relationship*’ with them, and to have an *experiential relationship* with them means to have a deeper, intimate connection with them that strengthens the bond between us. An experiential relationship is not an emotion of feelings like joy, bliss, fear, or guilt; rather it is a shared life, much like a marriage between a man and woman which may involve emotions, but experiencing the relationship is much higher than sharing emotions. The prophet Amos wrote Amos 3.3 “*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*” Whether referring to man and woman in marriage or to a spiritual union with God, we must first be in agreement that we are on the same road together and have the same destiny in mind. Without such harmony or agreement there can be no true communion with one another; and without such communion there can be no true friendship; and without such an interpersonal bond of friendship there can be no true fellowship.

Jesus told His disciples, Jn. 15.15 “*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*” A servant does not know what his master is doing; he receives the command from his master without knowing the reason why it is ordered. This is the order of a servant, not to know the counsel and plans of the master. It is the privilege of friendship to be brought into the heart of one another, to be made known the plans, wishes, and wants of the friend. The proof of friendship with Jesus is His personal revelation of the mysteries of God and of the kingdom of God, nothing being withheld.

The experiential relationship emphasized in the scriptures quoted above is well illustrated in the Luke 24 passage of the two disciples walking home on the seven-mile road to Emmaus following the crucifixion of Christ. As they walked, they “talked together” as friends do, of the events that had just happened, trying to get a grasp of things. While they conversed and reasoned, Jesus, as the resurrected Christ, drew near to them and walked with them. It is written, 16“*But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.*” The two disciples walked the same road with Jesus as He joined Himself to them, wanting to reveal something to them something the human mind could barely comprehend. Though Jesus was physically walking the same road towards Emmaus with the two, He wished to share with them a higher destiny as only a friend would do.

Jesus began by bringing into their understanding the prophetic events that had happened, verses 25-27, 25“*Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” 27And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” But bringing all this to their remembrance was not His goal, for He had something even higher for them to experience, something beyond mentally understanding the recent events of His life.

Upon reaching home, the two disciples invited Jesus to stay with them for the hour was late, so He did. As Jesus sat at table with them it is written, 30"...*He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.* 31*Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.*" *Their eyes were opened and they knew Him!* This specific "knowing" is beyond just recognizing Him, because this word "knew" here is derived from the Greek word *epiginosko*, meaning **experiential knowledge, knowing through a first-hand relationship, interpersonal knowing**. All of this meaning they touched upon the reality of the resurrected Christ. The road they walked together was no longer a physical road but a spiritual, nor was the destiny a physical location but a spiritual place in Christ, the Kingdom of God.

Jesus then vanished from their sight, and the two disciples reflected on what just happened, 32*"And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"* More accurately stated, *"Was not our hearts burning,"* implying a continuous burning and not a momentary act that quickly subsides. It brings to mind in Ex. 3.2 where an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses *"in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed."* This fire was not a physical burning but a spiritual burning that continued on during their entire discourse_ Personally, I believe the burning in the heart never did subside but continued on through the whole of their lives.

This burning is NOT an emotion! All too often short-term emotions are taken as some spiritual happening. No indeed, something of life was being ignited within the two disciples, as light entered their souls as never before. Spiritual things, heavenly things of great importance were made very clear to them, opening their understanding. A fire was built in them, and they would never be the same again. This is the value of friendship with Jesus, this is the value of living in a harmonious relationship with Him, and this is spiritual life emerging out from an experiential relationship with Christ, walking the same road, sharing the same destiny, caught up with the same plan and purpose of God.

O' how this is opposite of religion. Jesus did not leave them with a list of commandments carved in stone, and with ordinances full of regulations, codes of action, and moral rightness. Instead, Jesus' goal was to impart life, a life that would inherently bring forth a holy and righteous behavior, as was prophesied in Jer. 31.33 *"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* (See also Heb. 8.10) An added important point must be made here regarding this "*house of Israel*," prophesied of old. You must understand that there is a physical earthly Israel and there is a spiritual heavenly Israel, of which we believers are. Take for example it is written of a New Covenant and a newly created people in Gal. 6.14-15,

14*"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* 15*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.* 16*And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."*

This is not describing two distinct sets of people, described first as the “*many as walk according to this rule*,” and secondly as “*the Israel of God*.” By “*Israel of God*” is meant here as the “spiritual Israel,” not just converts from Judaism to Christianity but all who are in Christ. The Jews claim to be a people of God because they are born physically of the seed of Abraham. But the true seed of Abraham is not a physical seed but the spiritual seed of Christ, as it is written in Gal. 3.15-18,

15“Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. *16*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. *17*And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. *18*For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”

Thus the covenant made by God, of a seed to come from Abraham, who is Christ, was a promise of God, and that promise superseded the Old Covenant of the Law. Furthermore, it is written in Rm. 2.28-29 of the clear distinction between physical circumcision of Judaism and the spiritual circumcision of the heart of Christianity,

Rm. 2.28-29 *28*“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; *29*but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

So, do you understand that following the promises made to Abraham, there are two distinct covenants? The first covenant, the Old Covenant, is a physical covenant to a people born of the lineage of Abraham, a covenant conditional to obedience to an endless set of laws and ordinances, rituals and sacrifices and moral standards, all of which are impossible to keep; and being so it brings to light the continuing need of a Savior. And there is a second, or a spiritual New Covenant cut upon Jesus Christ, born the Son of Man after the lineage of Abraham and as the Son of God after the Spirit. This covenant is conditional as well, based upon the requirement of becoming a “*new creation*” born of the seed of Christ in which there is life, life eternal.

Thus, all covenants are conditional, whether based upon faith as with Abraham, or upon obedience to the Law and with Israel and the Old Covenant, or upon becoming a new creation, being born again of the Spirit of Christ into spiritual life. God is forever faithful to fulfill His part of a covenant, and man is given a free will to keep his part of the covenant, or to decide for himself how he desires to live out his life.

Next time we will consider more fully the covenant made with Adam and its significance and ramifications down through the ages.

S5.E9. Q5. Questions for Discussion

1. Explain and give examples of how the principle of religion may be compared to living in a box.
2. Compare religion represented as a “shadow” with life represented as “spiritual reality.” What is the most fundamental qualification to enter into “life”? Explain Jn. 1.12-13 and 2 Cor. 5.17-18.
3. Explain what is meant by an ‘experiential relationship’ and how it pertains to life and not religion. How does the discourse between Jesus and the two disciples walking the road to Emmaus show Jesus’ eternal friendship with the disciples and His desire to walk a higher, spiritual road with them?
4. The particular Greek word to “know” is *epiginosko*. It is used in both Lk. 24.31 and in John 17.3. What is the significance of using this word, *epiginosko*, rather than using another word that is interpreted “to recognize.”
5. Describe your journey as you walk the road of your life and its intended destiny; how you have walked with others, friends, joined together; and how Christ joined your walk to bring it to a higher destiny.
6. Exactly what is the New Covenant and explain how it is distinctly different than the old Covenant of the Law.