

“RELATIONSHIP; NOT RELIGION” (?)

I recently read the statement, “Relationship; Not Religion,” while driving past a denomination’s lit message sign. Many different versions of this sentiment exist, but all attempts portray the same idea. The concept being promoted by denominations which post this message is that religion, or your beliefs, faith, and practice, are not what’s important here; what’s important here is personal relationships (i.e., social networking and interaction). This “doctrine” is one espoused by many in the religious world in order to “fill the pews” and increase the number in attendance on Sunday mornings. The message, “Relationship; Not Religion,” informs would-be visitors that they will not be “harassed” by anyone to conform to a single standard, which God says is the New Testament (John 12:48), nor asked any questions about their spiritual relationship with God. They will only be comforted and welcomed without any regard to their religious beliefs and practices. No individual attending our services has been or ever will be harassed or badgered, but we do humbly and unapologetically teach that Jesus is “*the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life” and no man can come to the Father without being obedient to Him (John 14:6, emphasis B.G.). The “Relationship; Not Religion” is, in and of itself, a religion that allows a congregation to accept gladly into fellowship anyone, including those who are living in adultery, those who have been Scripturally withdrawn from, and those who teach and practice things which are not in harmony with God’s Word. If this sounds eerily familiar, sadly, it is because some one-time faithful congregations of the church of Christ are now practicing this doctrine which is heavily publicized by the denominations. The denominational mind-set is that adherence to God’s Law is too burdensome (cf. Mat. 11:28-30) and should be replaced with the more palatable “do what you want as long as you don’t tell me I’m wrong” philosophy and “just enjoy the development of personal relationships and friendships while you are here.”

Relationship is extremely important in God’s plan, but not divorced from the teaching and practicing of the Truth (John 17:17). Our first priority must be to have a right relationship with God. The Bible teaches that one gets right with God when he obeys the Gospel – hear (Rom. 10:17), believe (Heb. 11:6), repent (Luke 13:3), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized (Mark 16:16). This is the plan God commands in order for one to be reconciled to Him (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19). The Bible also teaches that one stays right with God by remaining faithful to the commands and teachings of the New Testament (1 John 1:6-10; Rev. 2:10). All individuals who obey the Gospel are added by God to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47) and are all in fellowship with one another because of their obedience to God (1 John 1:7) and because “all speak the same thing,” there are no divisions in matters of **RELIGION** (beliefs and practice) and all are “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). This is God’s plan for relationships and religion. The denominational doctrine, “Relationship; Not Religion,” is foreign to God and is another tool of the Devil to separate men from the soul-saving Truth of God’s Word (Rom. 1:16).

- *Brad Green*