

# Christianity - a Life-Changing Friendship

Christianity is not a "religion" which is added to one's life. It is a relationship involving a change in one's heart and a growing friendship with God.

- This change is made possible because of God's kindness (grace) and mercy - 2 Timothy 1:9 & Titus 3:5
- This change enables a person to grow in friendship with the God of the universe!
- Only with this change - only after we have become friends with God - can *God-honoring religion* exist.

This religion is *our expression of love* - both for God and for people. Most people think "religion" is something people do to *gain* God's favor! They try to do "religion" without first becoming friends with God. This is *backwards...* and it doesn't work!

## **FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD**

### ***EXAMPLE:***

**James 2:23** - God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham trusted that God would keep his promise. And so God considered him a friend.

### ***APPLICATION TO US:***

**John 15:13-15** - We can be Jesus' friend if we follow his example of love. (Remember: Jesus is both God and man. If we are Jesus' friend, we are God's friend.)

### ***WARNING - WE MUST CHOOSE:***

**James 4:4** - We can't be God's friend if we want to be a friend of this evil world.

## **LOVE FOR GOD**

**READ 1 Peter 1:8-9.** The love mentioned in this passage is the "commitment" type of love: "I have given myself to Jesus, and nothing is going to change that!"

This is the way our love can be. For some, it might not get to this point all at once. Love and friendship must grow. We must be willing to take time to build our friendship. Lasting friendships don't always happen overnight!

*If your love for God isn't there yet, don't give up.*

- Peter was writing to people who had gone through some difficult times in their lives. God kept his promise to use *all* things - including bad situations - to accomplish good in their lives. (Compare to Romans 8:28+) Because they had trusted God to keep his promise, they were able to experience God's love for them. And that strengthened their love for *him*. We, too, can be encouraged by the fact that God can express his love to us in everything that happens to us!

## **RELIGION**

As our friendship and love grows, we will grow in our desire to do things in a way that pleases God. This is our "religion." We do it because we love God, not because we're trying to "work" ourselves into his favor!

**James 1:26-27** - Our religion involves purity and love:

- A desire to live pure and holy lives. Because we love God, we want to become like him. We don't want to be sinful.
- A desire to show love and kindness to others - even to the most helpless and neglected of people. Because God loved us, we want to love others. This love will affect both what we say and what we do.