

In the last number of years there has been a real blurring of the lines of religion — where the ecumenical services that we have seen have given the impression that we are all one — that it doesn't matter which religion you follow as long as you are sincere about it, because they are all leading us to the same place... that it doesn't matter how you have access to God as long as you are sincere and follow the rules of your particular religion.

For example, with the disaster in Haiti, we have seen a number of religious groups send aid and religious workers. John Travolta, a well known Scientologist flew his own plane filled with supplies to Haiti, along with a number of Scientologist ministers.

We know Scientology as a cult. It is less than 75 years old. That alone should tell it's adherents something, because what it really says is that everybody has been wrong for 6000 years, or at least 2000 years since the time of Christ.

We also know that there are a number of religions and cults out there, and they all have one thing in common — they are not based entirely on the revealed Word of God — The Bible. Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses — while they use parts of the Bible, they go outside the Scriptures for what they believe.

Islam has the Koran, Mormonism has the Book of Mormon, which is called another Testament of Jesus Christ, and Jehovah's Witnesses have the writings of the Watchtower Society.

However, what we as Christians believe has it's foundation in the Holy Scripture — it is, as we say, our sole rule of faith and practice... it is beginning and the end of what we believe.

While most non-Christian religions have a wrong interpretation of the Bible — they don't compare scripture with scripture... they take passages out of context — We can generally say that what they have done is one of two things — they have either added to the Scriptures or they have taken away from them — a clear violation of the last words of Revelation 22:18, 19 where we read: *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

As a side note, The Episcopal Church USA leaves those two verses out of their lectionary readings — they have the verses before, they skip those two, and then conclude the Book of Revelation. That is why they can hold to and teach some of the things that they do.

What we believe is that direct revelation from God ceased with the close of Scriptures. There is no new revelation. Those such as Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Islam and other cults, such as the Branch Davidians of David Koresh, etc., have departed from this truth — and have additional writings that they follow. And in many cases, such as with the Book of Mormon or the Koran — these writings supercede the Bible.

But we — that is, Christians — are a people of the book, as it were. We believe the Bible to be God's Word to us and it is the Bible that we follow because we believe this is where God has revealed Himself to us.

Throughout the Scriptures were we read phrases such as “*according the scriptures*” or where we see references to the scriptures themselves, or as we see in our Gospel lesson this morning from Luke 18, concerning the things that were prophesied about Jesus — that is, that Jesus told them “*all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man.*”

Turn with me to Luke 18 — looking at just verses 31-33 (READ). What do we read?? Look closely at verse 31 — “*Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.*” Jesus told his disciples many things about himself and what would happen to him.

One thing that Jesus did not do was make everything up — and everything that he told people was verifiable by the scriptures — they had already been written about him — and so we read that he told them *all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man*. The Old Testament Prophets... with some of the prophecies occurring thousands of years before Christ — are those which told of Jesus — what he would do... where he would be born... how he would die, etc.

Now, think about what Jesus taught his disciples at this time — even though they did not understand it. And we would note that this is the third time he did this, as recorded in the book of Luke.

The first part of verse 32: “*For He will be delivered to the Gentiles...*” To the Jew, a Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew. We know that Jesus was not put to death by the Jews, although they were the ones that engineered his arrest — but also because they were unable to put Jesus to death because they were under Roman rule and did not have that authority. And so the fact that Jesus would be put to death by the Romans is something that we see in the Scriptures.

In Psalm 22 we read what happens during a crucifixion — what actually happens during a crucifixion — and some of the events that happened at the cross.

We read in Psalm 22, beginning at verse 6-8: “*But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" ...*

Those familiar with the Biblical account of the crucifixion, know that this is exactly what happened to Jesus — at the cross they ridiculed him and said those words. In Luke 23:35 we read: “*And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."*

Then in verses 14-17 of Psalm 22, we read the actual physical suffering of Jesus: *“I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet, I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me....”*

Again, those familiar with such things tell us that this is exactly what happens to the body during crucifixion — and we know that it happened to Jesus. And when they nailed him to the cross, they did pierce his hands and his feet.

Then we read of another event that happened at the cross — verse 18: *“They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”* We know that those conducting the crucifixion gambled for the clothing that Jesus wore as the gospel record tells us.

The thing that we find interesting is that these words in Psalm 22 were written about a 1000 years before Christ — before the Romans even invented crucifixion as means of execution... a means of execution used almost exclusively by them. And so when Jesus told his disciples that he would be handed over to the Gentiles, he knew that he would be fulfilling prophecy.

Then Jesus told them that he *“will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him.”* Again, events surrounding his arrest, trial and crucifixion. We read in Isaiah 50:6: *“I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.”* And then in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah we read some of the most telling words — and I would encourage you to read the whole chapter — but we read in 53:5: *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”*

Again, these prophecies about Christ were written over 700 years before his birth. And there are a multitude of other prophecies about these events in the O.T. scriptures that were fulfilled in the life of Christ.

And then the last thing that Jesus prophesied, that the prophets spoke of was: *“And the third day He will rise again.”* In Psalm 16:10 we read, referring to Jesus: *“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

We know that Jesus rose from the dead — the validity and truth of the Christian faith rests on this fact — if Jesus has not risen from the dead — then we are still in our sins and there really is no Christianity. 1 Corinthians 15 makes this very clear.

The point of all this is that there is a consistency to our faith... there is foundational truth that has not changed. A look at all the other religions finds that there are many contradictions in them — and especially as they relate to the Scriptures and other writings that they follow.

Some would have us believe that Allah, the God that the Muslims believe in, is the same God that we read in the Scriptures. However, he is not. Their God – Allah – is fickle and needs to be

appeased... their God created both good and evil — and there are a variety of other inconsistencies. We don't find that in the Scriptures.

We know that all that we need has been revealed for us in God's Word — the Holy Bible. It is the only "book" we need. As we read in the 6th Article of Religion (of the 39 Articles): "*Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.*"

God says in 1 Peter 1:3 that "*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...*" We don't need other writings... we don't need other things in order for us to gain access to God.

In some ways God has made it rather easy, while the others have made it difficult — adding to what God has revealed in His word. God has made it simple. In answer to the question of the jailer who came to Paul and Silas we read: *And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

While we realize that there are things associated with this — belief in the Lord Jesus Christ means that we will love him... that we will worship God... that we will serve Him. We don't find things such as having to pray 6 times a day towards Mecca... or having to make a trip to Mecca... or having to go out on Missionary service as the Mormons require... or not drinking caffeine or smoking as the Mormons also require. God has made it simple — *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*"

Most, if not all of us have been approached at one time or another by JW's or Mormons. We usually try to avoid them — but we should simply say to them that God's word — the Bible — is all that I need.

So yes, there is a difference between Christianity and all the other religions. And one of those differences is that we are people of the Book — we have standard from God — not from man which to follow. And so for that we need to be thankful — thankful that God has revealed Himself to us in a special way through His Word.