

# QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry  
for the Christian community*

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## Christianity - religion or relationship?

In a recent Quantock Ministries Bible study (“Living in a world of fear” – first published in August 2023 and available to download freely on the QM website), we looked at the fulfilment of Jesus’s prophecy in Luke 21 v 26: “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world”. We saw that fear on a global scale would be a major sign for Christians to recognise as marking the beginning of the events leading up to the Lord’s return. In that study we also looked at the great changes that have occurred in the Church in recent years, giving urgency to the need for Christians to concentrate on displaying the fruits of the Holy Spirit – the character of Jesus – as a means of witness and evangelism. Our Christlikeness would be the primary source of our power and authority.

Leading on from that thought, this study continues to look at the duty of the Church in the time of this apocalyptic fear in the world all around us. As well as the growing likeness to our Saviour, another major part of the “lifting up our heads” sought by the Lord in Luke 21 v 28 is seen in the answer to the question raised in the title of this study. We are to show that at its heart the true Christian faith is not a religion but a relationship each individual believer has with the Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him with God the Father. So, in this study we will briefly consider what we mean when we refer to a “religion”, and then explore the nature of the relationship which anyone enters into when they give their life to Jesus through genuine faith in Him.

### What is religion?

A simple definition of religion would be along these lines: “A belief in a higher power or interest which invades an individual’s mind, emotions and behaviour, all subject to the rites and duties of that system of belief, usually under the guidance or control of an authoritative human agency. Fully embraced, a religion will demand the wholehearted devotion and obedience of the individual believer, often taking precedence over all other duties, interests and relationships”. From this we can see that religion may be vaguely spiritual, but can embrace almost any system that a person wishes to devote themselves to, sacred or secular. “Religious fervour” can equally apply to a world religion, a cult, a hobby, a sport, a political position, any other interest group, or any all-embracing lifestyle choice. This is why in many people’s minds Christianity is a religion, and indeed seems to have evolved as such over many centuries. The historical institutionalisation of Christianity into international and national churches, denominations, doctrinal factions, messianic leadership, closed orders, and other traditions, have all dominated so much of the Christian experience over the years that it appears to have become mainly visible as a religion.

The world quite understandably could ask whether this is all that Christianity is, and if so, it is therefore on a par with every other world religion. The danger is that if we as Christians do not show quite clearly that religion is not what we are about, any opposition to religion – political, scientific, philosophical or social – will treat us the same as any other unpopular belief system. This has happened so often throughout the history of Christianity, and is certainly happening in many places today. One other danger can develop with a religion, and that is when it becomes so much part of a nation’s life that the religion becomes integrated into a nationalistic identity. Historically Christianity, for example, has been put in this position in a number of countries in various ways, and it then tends to lose its true nature as a spiritual and personal relationship with God. We are very aware that this has happened with other world religions, and with “religious” political movements such as fascism and communism. All too often the outcome leads to persecution, warfare and bloodshed.

### What is the relationship at the heart of Christianity?

#### 1. The human side.

Christianity is a relationship based on love and is available on a personal basis to every single human being who is willing to embrace it. It is just as valid if only one person should ever enter it, as it is for the untold millions who have done so over the past two thousand years. It does not depend on any group mentality, or coercion and control by another human agency. The relationship is totally adaptable to each individual’s personality, and indeed encourages each person to wholeheartedly engage with the life circumstances in which they find themselves, wherever they are, bringing to

those circumstances the ongoing lessons learnt from the relationship. The beliefs, understandings, opinions, interests, values and lifestyle choices brought along by each human who enters this relationship are then infinitely adapted and changed through a lifelong training programme towards the ultimate goal of becoming ever more like the other party to the relationship, Jesus Himself. This personal and individual training programme is administered not by any other human authority, but by the inward presence of the Holy Spirit within each person.

The influence of the Holy Spirit is not under any human control, but comes to us directly with the sole authority of the Lord Jesus, the “Living Word”. In this relationship we can continually confirm that this spiritual leading is indeed from Jesus by ensuring that it is completely within the authority of the “Written Word”, the Bible. We also have the inward witness of our conscience, which becomes more and more sanctified as the relationship develops during our Christian life – that is, it is increasingly sensitive as we seek to love and please the Lord. On the Christian journey we find ourselves in the company of others who are travelling the same pathway, and it is good and beneficial to learn from them and encourage them as they encourage us. We grow in the enjoyment of sharing our experiences, and especially when joining with others in worship and good works. However, we must never allow ourselves to be put under the control of another human being – that honour can only belong to the Lord Jesus. It is true that in joining with others in a local “church” situation there are those who bear some responsibility for our spiritual welfare and learning, but they are our servants, not our masters.

## 2. The divine side.

The One at the centre of the relationship is none other than God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who gives us the Holy Spirit, and brings us into a relationship with God the Father. In order to fully understand this Christian relationship, we must understand who Jesus is.

- a) The entire Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is three separate but totally united beings who are essentially spiritual in nature. The Godhead occupies the spiritual dimension, from which the whole physical creation arose. The spiritual dimension is foundational, and without it there would be nothing else. That means God is the source of all being, all existence, all purpose, all matter, energy, space and time. God is the First Cause, and is beyond all creation; God is eternal. The existence of creation proves there must be a higher source that first gave it that existence – that there is now something rather than nothing. To say that creation designed itself before it existed defies the laws of logic!
- b) The place of Jesus in the Godhead is central, and there are many important passages in the Bible we could quote. Here are just a few:
  - Colossians 1 v 15 to 20 – the centrality of Jesus as the purpose for creation, and its fulness;
  - Hebrews 1 v 3 – Jesus is the sustainer of everything;
  - John 1 v 1 to 4 – Jesus is the Logos (Word), a word which in Greek philosophy meant the source of all life, including the information that gives life (today we would say this information includes the DNA of every living organism). By using the word Logos, John was showing that Jesus is the answer to all mystery about the origin and purpose of the universe;
  - John 1 v 14 – Jesus added our human nature to His spiritual and divine nature. By this means He could die and rise again, offering us, human beings (each having an immortal spirit), victory over death and the assurance of an eternal existence with Himself.

## 3. The cosmic love affair.

The heart of the biblical understanding of existence and creation, is that the outcome of the whole process is the creation of an eternal companion for God the Son, the Lord Jesus – His bride and joint-heir. In the same way that all relationships need to be based on true love, so it is with this relationship. God the Father “so loved the world” that He gave us Jesus. Jesus Himself stated that in laying down His life for those who love Him He demonstrated the greatest of all loves. The bride is the complete body of those who have willingly come to accept God’s love in Christ, through faith. This is not based on their individual understanding of theology, or their perfection in life, or any national background. Rather it is because of their simple acceptance of God’s forgiveness for their wrongdoing in life, possible because of the sacrifice made by Jesus on Calvary. Their security is that God knows our hearts, and therefore knows whether a person’s repentance and faith are genuine, however simple these may be and whatever their background.

This love affair is truly enormous. God loved this world, and Jesus has only entered one created realm, planet Earth. He doesn’t require an infinite number of other “alien” brides; He died once, not multiple times on multiple planets. Following His return from Earth to the spiritual realms, He rested beside His Father, His work completed. The rest of the vast cosmos, the “Heavens”, is just there to declare God’s glory to us, and in these days at the close of the church age we know more about that glorious creation than ever before: “How great Thou art!” It could be objected that all this is beyond our understanding. Of course it is! As Paul reminded those clever Greeks in Corinth: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him”. In Revelation chapter 21 we have an inkling of what the “renewed” heavens and earth will be like, but it is so far beyond our present reality that, as with the best present relationships, we are to wait in happy and expectant anticipation.