

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELIGION

Adapted from - Burned Out on Being Good
by Steve Mosley, Pacific Press, 1998

Used by permission of the author.

Healthy Religion - What we Pursue	Unhealthy Religion - What we Avoid
<p>Centers on seeking God "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek" (Psalm 27:8). "I am afraid that your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).</p>	<p>Centers on avoidance "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? . . .Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:20, 21,23).</p>
<p>Concentrates on what blesses us "Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanks-giving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (Timothy 4:4, 5).</p>	<p>Concentrates on what defiles us "They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving." (1 Timothy 4:3).</p>
<p>Creates a devotion that fills us up "Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength with all your mind" (Luke 10:27).</p>	<p>Creates a dangerous vacuum "When an evil spirit... finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first" (Luke 11:24-26).</p>
<p>Focuses on the good "I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil (Romans 16:19). So not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).</p>	<p>Is always reacting against the bad "The people there [in the Samaritan village] did not welcome [Jesus]....When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (Luke 9:53, 54).</p>

Healthy Religion - Identity in Christ	Unhealthy Religion - Identity in Behavior
<p>Focuses on what God knows "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24). Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place" (Psalm 51:6).</p>	<p>Focuses on what other people think "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). "Many even among the leaders...would not confess their faith...for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (John 12:42, 43).</p>

<p>Majors in relationship "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21).</p>	<p>Majors in appearances "Everything [the Pharisees] do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long" (Matthew 23:5-7). "When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets" (Matthew 6:2).</p>
<p>Gets identity from whom it knows "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).</p>	<p>Gets identity from what it's not "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself; "God, I thank you that I am not like other men- robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like this tax collector" (Luke 18:11, 12).</p>
<p>Gains a secure position "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6).</p>	<p>Always struggles for position "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in the flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets" (Luke 20:46).</p>

Healthy Religion--Qualities	Unhealthy Religion--Quantities
<p>Nurtures qualities "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:17, 18). "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:12, 14).</p>	<p>Hopes in quantity "The multitude of your sacrifices--what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals" (Isaiah 1:11). "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7).</p>
<p>Expands life immeasurably "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ" (Colossians 2:9, 10). "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of [Jesus]" (2 Peter 1:3).</p>	<p>Constricts life "The Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat' " (John 5:10). "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46).</p>
<p>Expresses something great about God "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).</p>	<p>Sinks into pettiness "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you" (Galatians 4:9-11).</p>

<p>Results in transformation "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Galatians 6:15).</p>	<p>Simulates holiness "You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matthew 23:25).</p>
--	--

Part II

Healthy Religion Seeks Wisdom	Unhealthy Religion Seeks Argument
<p>Acknowledges weaknesses "God have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).</p>	<p>Has to be right "If you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God;...if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark....because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth - you, then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" (Romans 2:17-21).</p>
<p>Sees its need "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).</p>	<p>Never sees its real need "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free" (John 8:33).</p>
<p>Appreciates true wisdom "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first pure; then peace-loving, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).</p>	<p>Deifies personal opinion "Do not let anyone who delight in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head" (Col. 2:18,19).</p>
<p>Engages in winsome conversation "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6).</p>	<p>Is compelled to argue "He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind" (1 Tim. 6:4, 5).</p>

Healthy Religion Understands	Unhealthy Religion Distorts
<p>Understands what is most important "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front to the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23,24).</p>	<p>Can't make fine distinctions "The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrite! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?' " (Luke 13:15,16).</p>

<p>Emphasizes what the New Testament emphasizes “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).</p>	<p>Gets off on tangents “Command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversy rather than God's work, which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:3,4).</p>
<p>Develops insight “This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best” (Phil. 1:9,10).</p>	<p>Lacks perspective “You are looking only on the surface of things” (2 Cor. 10:7).</p>
<p>Gets its bearings from the gospel “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Rom. 5:1,2). “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).</p>	<p>Distorts the gospel “I declare to every man who lets himself to be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace...For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:3,4,6).</p>

Healthy Religion Keeps Learning	Unhealthy Religion Keeps Blind Spots
<p>Is teachable “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (Psalm 24:4,5).</p>	<p>Cannot take criticism. “And [Jesus] said, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers. The chief priests and the teachers of the law...began looking for a way to kill him.” (Mark 11:17,18). “You are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth...You are doing the things your own father does. “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. ‘The only Father we have is God himself.’ “ (John 8:40,41).</p>
<p>Listens “The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakes my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back “(Isaiah 50:4,5).</p>	<p>Never really gets it “They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear. (Ezekiel 12:2) You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” (Matthew 23:24) “The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not understood it “ (John 1:5).</p>
<p>Sees God working good out of imperfection “Some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry..But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Phil. 1:15,18).</p>	<p>Sees a supposed imperfection ruining the whole “Philip found Nathaniel and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about...Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ “ Nathaniel asked (John 1:45,46).</p>

<p>Learns in humility “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4) “You are not to be called Rabbi, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8). “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2,3).</p>	<p>Is blinded by pride “They boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.” (Luke 16) “Some Pharisees...asked, ‘What? Are we blind too? Jesus said, If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains’ “ (John 9:40,41).</p>
<p>Absorbs truth on a deeper level “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Eph. 1;18)</p>	<p>Looks at reality through a filter “Their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts” (2 Cor. 3:14,15).</p>

Part III

Healthy Religion Rejoices	Unhealthy Religion Suspects
<p>Generates joyful fellowship “I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds” (2 Corinthians 7;4). I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (Philippians 2:17).</p>	<p>Cannot open up “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us” (2 Corinthians 6:11, 12).</p>
<p>Worships enthusiastically “Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob! Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre” (Psalm 81:1,2). “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things” (Psalm 98:1).</p>	<p>Suspects exuberant praise “The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples?’ “ (Luke 19:39,40).</p>
<p>Brightens life with a positive outlook "If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6:22).</p>	<p>Contaminates life with a negative outlook “If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matthew 6:23).</p>
<p>Overflows with thanks “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (Thessalonians 5:16-18) “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything” (Ephesians 5:19, 20).</p>	<p>Gets stuck in sorrow “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).</p>

<p>Is adaptable "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).</p>	<p>Remains rigid "Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. To this [the Pharisees] replied, 'you were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us?' And they threw him out" (John 9:32-34).</p>
---	--

Healthy Religion Opens Up	Unhealthy Religion Suppresses
<p>Encourages transparency "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you.... Open wide your hearts also" (2 Cor. 6:11, 13).</p>	<p>Conceals problems behind a nice facade "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).</p>
<p>Shares the personal "We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).</p>	<p>Plays with facts "Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen" (2 Timothy 2:14). "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9).</p>
<p>Experiences new life ". . . but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1). ". . . but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). "Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:38).</p>	<p>Experiences only theories "knowledge puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1). "For the letter kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6). ". . . always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).</p>
<p>Worships in many ways "Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet . . . With the harp and lyre . . . With tambourine and dancing . . . With the strings and flute . . . with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150: 3-6). "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (1 Corinthians 14:15).</p>	<p>Cannot worship from the heart "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13).</p>

Healthy Religion Builds Up	Unhealthy Religion Controls
<p>Doesn't have to control "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because if it by faith you stand firm" (2 Corinthians 1:24).</p>	<p>Has to control "They tie up heavy loads and put them on mens' shoulders, but they themselves are now willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4).</p>

<p>Leads by nurturing “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gently among you, like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thessalonians 2:6, 7).</p>	<p>Plays power games “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry . . . Supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains” (Philippians 1:15, 17).</p>
<p>Expresses confidence in others “I always pray with joy . . . Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:4, 6). “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (Romans 15:14).</p>	<p>Flatters in order to manipulate “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them...By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Romans 16:17, 18).</p>
<p>Helps others blossom “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you” (2 Timothy 1:6). “We proclaim [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).</p>	<p>Clings to position “They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them call them 'Rabbi'” (Matthew 23:6,7).</p>

Healthy Religion Welcomes	Unhealthy Religion Isolates
<p>Draws a wide circle of love “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you” (Thessalonians 3:12). “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).</p>	<p>Draws lines to isolate “Then they hurled insults at him and said, ‘You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses!’ “ (John 9:28). “Since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?. . . For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?’ “ (1 Corinthians 3:3, 4).</p>
<p>Minimizes outer differences “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11). “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 14:7).</p>	<p>Maximizes outward differences “The circumcised believers criticized [Peter] and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them’ “ (Acts 11:2,3).</p>
<p>Delights in people “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Philippians 1:3).” “I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you” (2 Corinthians 7:3).</p>	<p>Finds a way to show disapproval “The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating food with ‘unclean’ hands?’ “ Judas Iscariot . . . Objected, ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?’ “ (John 12:4).</p>

Shows confidence that God's way is best.

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12, 13).

Isn't confident that God's way is best.

"Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor" At this the man's face fell, He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:21, 22).

Adapted from - Burned Out on Being Good
by Steve Mosley, Pacific Press, 1998