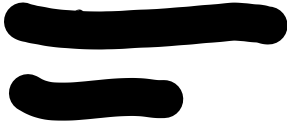


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American Christianity: Emotional Experiences Over Theology

Christians are often viewed as hypocrites. Much of this is because many of them lack knowledge of what they believe in, yet still call non-believers out for sin. One may wonder why some Christians do not really know their own religion. In fact, 52% of Evangelical Christians stated that while humans do sin, most people are good by nature. (PR Newswire). This directly conflicts with the Bible. (*NKJV Bible*, Eccles. 7.20). Many American Christians value emotional and religious experiences over theology; this is due to many American Christians idolizing American ideals over Christian values. While emotional and religious experiences are important to religion, especially Christianity, theology is just as much so.

To understand where the issue of emotion over theology stems from, it is important to turn to history. The Second Great Awakening was a period of Protestant revival in the United States, taking place in the early 19th century. “Though more Americans came to see the Bible as the inspired word of God, fewer and fewer seeming interested in knowing what God had to say.” (Prothero, pg. 265). Instead of focusing on God or the Bible, people began viewing their emotional experiences at sermons as the fuel for their faith. Instead of focusing on the Bible itself, many preachers would focus on the emotions of the crowd. They made use of persuasive and emotional language to re-light the passion for Christianity, but in doing so created something very dangerous to the Christian faith: a heart-driven culture.

Ever since the Second Great Awakening, many American Christians have been driven more by religious experience than theology. Christianity in America today is still heavily influenced by the Second Great Awakening. Many people who say they are Christians are driven by emotion and religious experiences. They pick and choose their beliefs based on society and the emotions they feel; this is problematic as it goes directly against the Bible. “But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” (*NKJV Bible*, James 2.9-10). It is true that since the Second Great Awakening, many American Christians have shifted away from reading the Bible and more towards gathering at churches for sermons. Instead of following the book of the religion and learning about the theology, they focus on the words of preachers and the encounters they have in church.

The biggest factor contributing to the majority of American Christians having an emotion-fueled faith comes from America itself. Many American Christians view American values as Christian values; this is not the case. Values like patriotism, individualism, and materialism are American values that do not correlate with Christianity. Christians are devoted to the Kingdom of God, not to any nation on earth. Additionally, individualism eventually puts individuals at the center of their own universe; this also goes against Christian values. American materialism is one of the biggest contributing factors to this heart-led Christian lifestyle. Famous televangelists promote the “health and wealth” gospel, saying that faith in God will heal and make rich. (Chapman, pp. 552-553). Christians who follow this gospel are driven by emotions; they may have a loved one who is ill, or they may be looking for money. However, the Bible states that trials and tribulations will come, and that having faith in God does not spare Christians from these troubles. (*NKJV Bible*, 2 Cor. 6.4-5, James 1.2-3).

Although relying on an abundance of religious and emotional experiences for the Christian faith is bad, when some experience is paired with a vast knowledge of theology, it can be very good. Emotional experiences can be part of the fuel for Christianity. After all, the Bible has many stories of miracle after miracle. Along with miracles, experiencing worship and fellowship with other Christians can make a Christian feel closer to God. On the other hand, theology is crucial to the Christian faith. Without the Bible and knowledge of the religion, Christians struggle to prove their faith to non-believers, outside of personal stories. Knowledge of Jesus' life, the Trinity, as well as historical proofs are very important for Christians. When both experiences and theology are paired together, Christians seem like they both understand their faith and have experienced it. Backing up experiences with religious literacy makes a Christian sound competent and trustworthy. Knowledge of theology and religious experiences paired together is what makes Christianity what it is.

Since the Second Great Awakening, a majority of American Christians' faith is fueled by experience over theology due to American principles. Materialism under the "health and wealth" gospel is one of the biggest contributing factors to the experience over theology that makes up so much of American Christianity today. While some religious experiences are healthy to fuel faith, theology is also necessary. When one lacks the other, a crucial part of the foundation of Christianity is missing. When studying Christianity, it is important to view not only the followers' experiences but also what the Bible says the followers should do and believe. For if someone calls themselves a Christian but does not follow the Bible or the Ten Commandments within it, are they truly a Christian?

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