

The Differences Between Reform And Orthodoxy

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1. The Orthodox Jews believe that the Bible is the work of God. Reform Jews believe that the Bible is the work of inspired men and therefore subject to criticism.

2. Orthodox Jews believe that the ceremonial law and the rituals are as much of divine origin as are the moral laws, and therefore are mandatory. Reform Jews believe that the moral laws are of divine origin, but that the ceremonial law and the ritual were created by men for particular periods. Therefore, Reform Jews say that the moral law is mandatory and the ceremonial law is voluntary. Accordingly, we never say, "You must perform a certain ritual," or "God will punish you," but we urge upon our people that they observe certain rituals and ceremonies because they have ethical value, historical value, reminder value.

3. Orthodoxy stresses the fact that the fear of God is necessary and that He will punish you if you do not follow His laws. Reform Judaism stresses the merciful nature of God and His forgiveness. Reform selects that part of the tradition which is most meaningful to it. God is merciful and forgiving, also in the tradition, but Reform claims that God does not wish to punish at all and is not to be feared, but loved.

4. Reform Judaism generally follows the Biblical description of the festivals in terms of the days of observance, i. e., first and last days of Sukkos, Passover, and one day for Shavuos. Orthodoxy follows the custom of the Diaspora which is two days.

5. Reform emphasizes understanding of the service which is why so much of it is in English, and trims the service to make it more compact and absorbable in a meaningful way by modern Jews.

6. Reform emphasizes the need for action by men in solving their world's problems, while Orthodoxy stresses the saving power of God. Further again, it is important to point out that Reform has selected this emphasis from the midst of the tradition.

7. Reform emphasizes the universalistic aspects of our teachings, while Orthodoxy emphasizes the special relationship of God to Israel.