



THE REFLECTOR

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Is God Satisfied With Your Religion?

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"I am a _____ and I am satisfied with my religion", is a common response when we approach people to talk about religion. I am sure that these people mean what they say. They find a great deal of satisfaction in their religion. They are happy and feel that the religion they have chosen meets their needs. If they are happy, content, and satisfied, should that not be evidence enough that their religion is right for them?

Personal satisfaction is not really the standard by which we should measure religion. The real question is, "Is God satisfied with my religion?"

The only way to know what satisfies God is for Him to say so. He revealed His mind through the Spirit to the Apostles. (1 Cor. 2:7-16). The apostles wrote what the Spirit revealed to them, in the New Testament, so that we can read it and understand their knowledge of what God has revealed. (Eph. 3:3-4). If one wants to know what satisfies God in religion, he should read the New Testament.

How do you know that God is satisfied with your religion? Do you say, "I really feel deep down in my heart that I am right with God?" Or, do you say, "My conscience tells me that I am right with Him?" Did not Paul feel the same way while still a Pharisee? Do not many who

do not even believe in Christ around the world feel the same way about their religion?

Paul spoke concerning his feelings while he was still a Pharisee: "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." (Acts 26:9). Was he a hypocrite? No. Was he sincere? Yes. Was he satisfied? Yes. Was he doing what he felt deep down in his heart to be right? Yes. Was he right? No.

How do you know that God is satisfied with what you call yourself religiously? A Christian? A Baptist? A Methodist, A Catholic? A Presbyterian? Or something else? Or a combination of some of these? Can you read in the New Testament your answer to this question? If not, how do you know that God is satisfied with it?

How do you know that God is satisfied with what you did in order to be saved? Did you just believe in Jesus? Did you just repent of sins? Did you just call on the name of the Lord? Did you just be baptized? Did you just pray to God for forgiveness? Did you do more than one of these things? If so, which ones? Can you read about what you did in the New Testament? Can you read everything you did? Did you do all that you can read in order to be saved? How can you be sure

that you are saved unless you have read and done everything the New Testament says in order to be saved from past sins?

How do you know that God is satisfied with your worship to him? Can you read what you offer to him as worship in the New Testament? What do you offer as worship? Do you pray to Him? Do you sing praises to Him? Do you play on a mechanical musical instrument to Him? Do you eat the Lord's Supper? When do you do it? What ever you may do, do you know that it pleases God? How do you know? Is by the way you feel about it? Or is it by what you have read in the New Testament that God has said about it?

My friend, think about all of this. Should you not examine your religious beliefs and practices by what the Bible says rather than how you may feel about

it? Should you be satisfied with your religion before you have examined the Scriptures to be sure that God is satisfied with it? Should you not be able to say, "I am a _____ or I do such and such in religion and I am satisfied with it, because here is the book, chapter and verse that shows that God is pleased with it?" Or had you rather say, "I am a _____ or I do such and such in religion, because I know how I feel in my heart and that shows that God is pleased with it?"

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, And according to the fruit of his doings." (Jeremiah 17:9,10)

"Let God be true but every man a liar." (Romans 3:4)

Restoring New Testament Christianity -- Have we succeeded?

JOHNNY HOOKS

In years gone by it has been the effort of churches of Christ to restore New Testament Christianity. The idea of restoring something is to put it back in the exact order as it was at one time. So the plan has been made and the efforts have been executed to restore the church to its original design. Great emphasis has been placed on putting the work and worship of the church back into proper perspective. The overall aim is to have an institution that is exactly as the one read about in the Bible. In Heb. 8:1-5 the writer reminds us of the warning that Moses received on the mount concerning the building of the tabernacle. His application is clear. The tabernacle built in the wilderness was a shadow/copy of the true tabernacle that the Lord pitched - the church. There was a pattern that Moses was to follow in the building of the tabernacle. If, then, the following of the pattern was so crucial, what does that say about the image casting that shadow? It is upon this premise that many battles have been fought and won. God's pattern for the church as revealed in the New Testament must be followed. It is then, by the efforts that have been put forth and the successes that have been achieved

by standing on God's word, that there is a church today that has the characteristics of the one we read about in the Bible. We can and should stand proud of these accomplishments, but before we say the war is over let us heed the warning given by Paul to the Corinthians in his first epistle chapter 10 and verse 12. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed let him fall." There is one battle that is constantly overlooked and greatly neglected that comes home to each one of us, and that is the restoring of New Testament Christianity on the individual level.

Jesus said that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24). In our efforts to establish the New Testament pattern, we have found that the Bible has set forth five acts of worship: the Lord's supper, singing, praying, laying by in store and preaching the word of God. When we engage in these acts of worship, in the manner described in the New Testament, we have fulfilled the half of the Lord's statement that tells us to worship in truth. But, do we worship God with the same spirit that the New Testament Christians did? If we leave this side of worship undone we have done no more than the Pharisees of

not run as deep as it did then.

One cannot help but wonder when he learns of Christians that want to limit themselves on how much of God's word they hear. Some think it outrageous to be expected to be at all worship services and the weekly Bible studies. Others complain when the preacher goes into "overtime" with his sermon. Recognizably, some are only kidding with such complaints but what of those who deep down inside are annoyed by this? These two or three times a week are about the only time that they subject themselves to God's word at all and they want that limited to just a small amount of time. Where have our priorities gone? In Acts 20:7 we find it said to Paul that he "...discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight." Someone says, "Yes, but we don't know when he started." We've missed the point of what is said here. The word "prolonged" suggests that this was not one of the 20 minute mini-sermons that many today have grown used to. Can we not see the zeal that Paul had and the desire that his audience displayed? Paul had something to say -- his audience wanted to hear it! While it is true that many today complain if the speaker goes five minutes

"overtime", there are plenty of others, attentive and actively turning to the passages, who feel that the sermon was all too short. It ought to be obvious to all that the latter attitude is one of zeal and enthusiasm.

How then can we improve our attitude (spirit) in our services? We could begin by taking time to prepare ourselves before hand for our classes and worship periods. Then when we get there concentrate on what is being done and follow along in our Bibles or song books. This will keep us from being distracted and will focus our attention on what is being taught. Be enthusiastic! Don't display an attitude of, "I have to", but rather, "I want to." Arrive early, show children and others how eager you are to serve God. It is amazing what a positive mental attitude can do for our outlook. David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of God." (Ps. 122:1) We can improve our spirit of service away from the assemblies by the same frame of mind. Instead of leaving God at home, take Him to work or shopping with us. Simply put, allow God to be the most important thing in our lives. This is the only way that we can worship Him in both spirit and in truth.

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ATTEND OUR NEXT SERIES OF MEETINGS
September 25-17, 1987
JEFF SMELSER, Speaker

Schedule of Services

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|-------------------------|------------|
| Sundays: | |
| Bible Classes | 9:45 a.m. |
| Worship | 10:45 a.m. |
| Worship | 6:00 p.m. |
| Wednesdays: | |
| Bible Class | 10:00 a.m. |
| Bible Classes | 7:30 p.m. |

Jesus's day did. They were guilty of emphasizing the letter of the Law and leaving off the spiritual aspects of it. Paul wrote on this subject to those at Rome. In chapter two and verses 27-29 he said, "and shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not the letter; who praise is not of men but of God." Paul certainly was not de-emphasizing the need of obedience to the law of God, but was showing that mere obedience without the proper spirit was to no avail. By the same token, men today may worship God according to the letter of the law, but if the proper attitude or spirit is missing then the worship has been empty and vain and has availed nothing. Just as the mere fact that a person had been circumcised did not make him a Jew, the mere fact that one may engage in the acts of worship found in the Bible does not make one justified in the eyes of God. Let us realize that we must worship in both spirit and truth to be pleasing in the sight of God.

Jesus condemned the Jews of His day for the practice of being concerned with the "action" of obedience and not looking at the heart. In Matt. 23:23-24, for example, Jesus refutes the Pharisees' practice of tithing of the smallest herbs in their garden, yet not being concerned with the more weightier matters of the law such as justice, mercy and faith. These come from within, from the heart. Often times today, we fall into the same condemnation. In our worship, whether it is in the designated services or in our everyday activities, we place so much emphasis on the correctness of the action that we forget about the heart.

Jesus, in His sermon on the mount, pointed out the true meaning of serving God (See Matt. 5-7). He showed, for example, that one can be guilty of murder by being angry with his brother (5:21,22), a man may commit adultery in his heart without every actually engaging in the action (5:27,28) and He also taught that a person could perform the "actions" of worship and still not please God (6:1-18). It is important for us to remember that God looks upon the heart of man.

Our service to God is incomplete if we do not worship in both spirit and truth. If we emphasize the "letter" of the law, being only interested in the correctness of the act, we have done no more than the Pharisees of Jesus' day. If we emphasize the spirit of our actions, being only interested in the "sincerity" of our actions, we have done no more than those that Paul wrote of in Rom. 10:1-3, who had a zeal of God but not according to knowledge. Thus, ultimately, they established their own standard of righteousness, leaving the righteousness of God undone.

When one even casually reads though portions of the New Testament he can't help but to be impressed with the zeal, conviction and desire to serve that the Christians of that day had. Notice a few passages: "And they continued STEADFASTLY in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42); "And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts 2:46); In a prayer after the apostles had been threatened by the council, "And now Lord, look upon their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants to speak the word with all boldness." (Acts 4:29); "But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). One cannot deny the conviction that these Christians had. Their desire to serve God was so strong that everything, including their own lives, came second. This fact was demonstrated by the zealousness in which they served. It is unfortunate that, in many cases, this same type of desire and zeal is not present in the lives of Christians today. This is probably because the conviction of many Christians today does