

Seeking God's Face

So many people are inclined to the ritual aspect of religion. There *are* certain things that we *usually* do, but that doesn't make them a ritual. This includes things like testimonies and singing, but we are not afraid to alter the service when it is appropriate to do so. Neither do we think that there is grace imparted to us to cover our sin by any part of how we "do church." Those who rigidly depend on religious forms for grace emphasize ritual to the level of superstition. They believe that the motions they go through ward off evil spirits and impart grace to themselves. They do this while they maintain the sinful attitudes and doing whatever it takes to survive in their everyday world. They do this mostly without even being aware of it. And then, they go to church and falsely believe that the rituals make everything right. While there are some churches that are very given over to this, there are people who will treat *any* church in this way. Speaking of religion, though, in a generic way is *not* bad. James uses *religion* to speak of how we *apply* our faith.

Jas 1:26-27 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The word *religion* is used so much that it has come to have an unbiblical definition. Some come to think that their religious *works* will pay for their sins even though their heart is far from God. When other people say, "I have a relationship, not a religion," they are *sort of* right *and* wrong. Yes, we are saved only because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ once we have prayed to be born again. For the next part, "not a

religion," you can say no *or* yes to. No, I don't depend on religion to save me. But also yes, I strive for *pure* religion where I apply my faith to the fatherless, widows, and sanctification.

1. Genuine religion -

Genuine religion is more than empty rituals. Genuine faith is made up of devotion *and* responsibility. These two go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. If you have only responsibility, you will develop a works based salvation instead of a proper faith based salvation. If you genuinely love God, you will take on Christian responsibility.

There is a temptation to live out our life of faith focused on the behavioral aspects of Christianity to the exclusion of intimacy with God. There is an equal temptation to attend to personal devotion to the *exclusion* of Christian service. This is best illustrated in the life of two disciples of Christ, Mary and Martha.

Lk 10:38-42 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

As we look at this passage, we have to be careful to notice that Christ does *not* tell Martha that she was wrong. We are also told in the Scriptures to work

hard as if we are working for Jesus.

Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do,
do it heartily, as to the Lord, and
not unto men;

Eph 6:5-7 Servants, be obedient
to them that are *your* masters
according to the flesh, with fear
and trembling, in singleness of
your heart, as unto Christ;

6 Not with eyeservice, as
menpleasers; but as the servants
of Christ, doing the will of God
from the heart;

7 With good will doing service,
as to the Lord, and not to men:

On reading this passage, I don't know that Christ is necessarily saying that Mary has it altogether either. There are two parts to what believers should be concerned about in the Christian life. One is serving and the other is maintaining a close relationship with God. Christ says that Mary chose her devotion to attend to. It's as though He is *only* reminding Martha that the good part that Mary is attending to is *also* necessary. Notice that He only says that she has a *part*, it is a *necessary* part, it is a *good* part...but still, it is only *one* part. The problem is that Martha was not wrong, then, but that *she* was only *partly* right.

We call these two aspects of our spirituality devotion and ethics. Ethics, in the context of work we do because of our devotion to God, refers to the moral principles and values that guide our actions, decisions, and conduct in a way that reflects our faith and commitment to God's will. It involves living and working with integrity, honesty, humility, and a sense of responsibility, striving to honor God in all that we do. Devotion and ethics go hand in hand. In our devotional life, we seek to know God and build up the strength of our faith through knowledge of *and about* Him. However, as we build up that relationship, there are ethical obligations that we must *also* attend to. Some people, like Martha, only attend to the

ethical. Others, like Mary, only attend to the devotional. We can see pretty easily that we must not be only like Martha, but we had also better be careful that we be like Mary, too.

2. Devotion -

Ps 42:1-2 As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

Are we *panting* after God?

One of the most devout prayers of Judaism is called the *Shema* and is based on Deu 6:4-9:

Deu 6:4-9 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Jesus quoted vs. 4-5 when asked by a scribe what the greatest commandment was. To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind is supposed to be primary in our heart and the basis for our society. Being a Christian is not:

- a hobby
- an option
- a pastime interest

- extra-curricular activity
- something you do if there is time left over
- something you do to kill time until something better comes along
- a phase, or a fad, or a passing fancy, or a temporary interest
- it is a curiosity or an amusement
- an add on to a busy life, if and when you can fit it in

Being a Christian is *what you are*. You love God with all your heart. You can set aside a hobby or an interest, but you can't set aside your heart. Just as your heart beats you are in communication with God. Your Christian faith should inform every decision you make. This had to be deliberate and conscious, or else it is not likely to happen.

Matt 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Col 3:2-4 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

As we study and increase our knowledge of God we become stronger in our faith-life, or devotion to Him.

- Study God's face.

1Ch 16:11 Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually.

To seek God's face does not mean that we just want to experience Him. The mystical presence of God in our lives doesn't happen just by osmosis. All of the times that the Bible speaks of seeking God's face there is more than just a desire *feel* His presence. In serious times we actually *study* a person's face to

see if we can read what they are betraying through frownings, raising of the brow, rolling of the eyes, gleams in the eye, twitches, or tightening of the jaw. While I preach I try to glance at faces to see if I am getting through to each person. We need to read God's face. There is always some sense of focused communication and especially an indication that we are to know Him intimately through His revelation of Himself to us.

Ps 27:8,11 *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

Ps 105:4-5 Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore.

5 Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;

Da 9:3-4 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

2 Ch 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

When I met Nancy, I didn't just want to experience love emanating from her. I wanted to get to know what her interests were and if they were

compatible with my interests. Did she have a vision for ministry like mine? Did she have a passion for Christ? I had to do that by talking *to* her and hearing *from* her. We need to not just sit near God and wait for a still small voice, we need to look into His Word to hear from Him. We need to pray, ask for His direction, and then be patient as we wait for it. Getting to know someone takes time.

The ironic thing about seeking God's face is that you can't find it: He is a spirit that we cannot see, even if we could enter heaven to look upon Him. This becomes a figure of speech. If you seek God's face that means you will continually be looking for His will and trying to understand it.

- Study to know God's passions and frustrations.

As you read the Bible, look to have an insight into what God is like. Experience God's passion and frustration. Sometimes we are impressed by someone's spiritual passion. That kind of passion is not conjured up. It comes from studying God's Word to know what *He* is passionate about and then study to see what there is to be frustrated about. As you contend with priests, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons, you will develop a real Godly frustration. As you work with addicts, the abandoned, the infirm, and seek to find meaning in Scripture, you will develop a Godly passion.

- Our love for God becomes a part of our Gospel message.

Our life should become one that is all about loving God and then reflecting that love to others. Our purpose of loving is not to deliver people from suffering here on earth, though that too happens. It is about delivering the Gospel, delivering people from the suffering of Hell, and delivering them to God. To that end, that kind of love to others is just as important a part of witnessing to them about the Gospel.

3. Ethics -

As we come to know God we become stronger in our sense of responsibility. It's like when you love someone and want them to marry you. When you get married, you want to take all the responsibilities of marriage *because you love them*. You should never say, "I love you honey, take the garbage out yourself. I love you honey, I'm going on vacation, be sure to clean up my messes. I love you honey, I'll be here on the sofa playing video games today while you are at work." Devotions and ethics go together and are inseparable.

- We *graft* God's word into our soul.

Jas 1:21-25 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

God intended His Word to be *engrafted*. It is not a natural part of us but when it is placed in us it becomes us; or, more theologically correct, *we* become *it*. But listen to the admonition of verse 23, "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Don't be fooled into thinking that you have God's Word if it you are not a doer of the Word. It's one thing to read a book about how refreshing a swim

can be, how much exercise you can get swimming, how you can fly through the liquid atmosphere of water — it is another thing to actually jump in the pool. Too many people read the Word of God and jump into the wading pool and splash around. You have to jump into the deep end and the next thing you know as you apply God's Word to your life you will be out in the middle of the ocean in a storm walking hand in hand with Jesus on *top* of the waves.

- We are debtors to preach the Gospel.

1Co 4:1-2 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful [***Anyone can be faithful***].

We are stewards who have been entrusted with the precious Gospel.

1Pe 1:18-19 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

The burden we have in bearing the Gospel is great.

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Ro1:14-15 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

I always have to explain how we are *debtors* with the Gospel. The Gospel

doesn't belong to us. It belongs to God. We are entrusted to deliver that great treasure. If we withhold it, we are defrauding both God and the ones He wants us to give it to. This makes us debtors in that we *owe* it to others to deliver it to them.

- Grace demands more of us.

According to the law, we are *required* to live for God. People can do the law without their hearts being in it, though. According to grace we *want* to live for God.

Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ps 40:8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

The law allowed for divorce, but grace enables us to stay married.

The law teaches the tithe, with grace we give according to our love for God (do you love God 100%!?).

The law places restriction on the priesthood, grace makes us all obligated as priests.

If any man asks for your coat, grace says give him your cloak also. If any man compels you to go a mile, grace compels you to go with him twain. If any man smites you on the cheek, grace tells you to give him the other also. Why? Because grace commands us to go further out of love and a desire to bless with the love of God in our hearts.

By coddling people, we do them great disservice. We might lovingly talk to everyone, but do it straightforwardly. There are too many who *only talk* about God. They might even say that they love God. I try to encourage them on, but God is not fooled, although they might think He is. If you love God, you will be

looking for Him genuinely without making excuses.

If you know that you should be turning to God, you can be sure He will not turn you away. He loved you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross to pay the judgment for you being a sinner. He rose again in victory over the grave to give you the same victory over the grave. If you come to Him without a true love and thankfulness, thinking that you will be given a get-out-of-jail-free card, you will be sadly disappointed. If you are self-centered and want to avoid responsibility, you will also be disappointed because you will be held responsible at the final judgment.

But, if you can put God first and seek Him and His righteousness, God will show you the wonders of His Kingdom. If you are saved but have not sought out to know God, you need to be *truly* in love with Him.

So many people are willing to acknowledge God but turn away from the fact that our hearts *and* service belong to Him. Or, they will say they love Him but turn away because they don't want to serve Him. This is why we characterize our service to Him as ethics. It is ethical because it is *right* to serve. We *owe* it to Him to serve Him. When you serve Him by ministering to others, you will see what God sees and it will grow your passion for both God and service to Him. Do you pray and worship but avoid service?

Jas 1:26-27

1. Genuine religion - Lk 10:38-42, Col 3:23, Eph 6:5-7
2. Devotion - Ps 42:1-2, Deu 6:4-9, Matt 6:33, Col 3:2-4, 1Ch 16:11, Ps 27:8,11, 105:4-5, Da 9:3-4, 2Ch 7:14
3. Ethics - Jas 1:21-25, 1Co 4:1-2, 1Pe 1:18-19, 2Co 4:7, Jer 31:33, Ps 40:8