

# **ARE YOU RELIGIOUS?**

---

by Robert P. Myers

## **RELIGION IS EVERYWHERE!**

We live in an age when people everywhere practice some kind of religion. In America, religions called “Christian” are in the majority. We can walk down a street, or stroll through a store or shopping mall and almost everyone we meet would tell us that they practice some sort of religion, if asked. Most of them would point to a Christian religion. We are at a time in human history when religion has come to be viewed as a way to gain eternal life. Some people almost use the two ideas interchangeably. That is, for some, to be religious is to have eternal life, or at least it is the way to be sure to be in favor with God and to be granted eternal life when they die. Nothing could be further from the truth! To show this, we will take a small tour through the bible; the textbook of Christian religion. While on this tour we will look at the truth about the difference between religion of any kind and the spiritual experience that gives eternal life to a human.

But first, let’s look at a few definitions of religion by Webster and others:

- 1) Belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator(s) or ruler(s) of the universe
- 2) expression of this belief in conduct and rituals
- 3) any specific system of belief..
- 4) a state of mind or way of life (that expresses love for or trust in God)
- 5) the practice of religious observances or rites

## **RELIGION IS WRITTEN ABOUT IN THE BIBLE**

The Apostle Paul practiced the Jew’s religion and was successful in it before he made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:4). The group of Jews called Pharisees was the most strict sect of the Jews religion (Acts 26:5). Paul was a Pharisee before salvation.

Knowing that the Pharisee’s religion was the most strict of its time, we can look at their practices and discover the difference between religion and salvation. We should be able to learn that:

- 1) Religion is NOT salvation
- 2) Practicing religion DOES NOT bring salvation
- 3) Salvation comes to us from some other source than having or practicing religion

In the bible, in Matthew, Chapter 23, verses 1-34 Jesus speaks at length about the Pharisee’s religion and we can learn about the pitfalls of practicing religion as a way to appease God, to try to earn His favor, or to try to get to heaven. In His talk, we learn that He is not against religion in its proper place and as something for which it is intended. I would recommend that you get a bible and read the chapter. In it you will be told that:

- 1) The Pharisees religion had things in it that Jesus would want humans to pay attention to and to do if they were going to practice a religion, (v. 3) but,
- 2) Religious practitioners who talk a big religion, and want everyone to do what they say, but do not practice the religion they preach are rejected of God (vv. 3-4),
- 3) Religious practitioners who do religion for show are rejected of God (v.5),
- 4) Religious practitioners who expect to be treated like they are really important are rejected by the Lord (vv. 5-7),
- 5) Religious practitioners who take advantage of people by pretending things about religion that aren't in agreement with the word of God shall receive greater damnation (v.14)
- 6) People converted to this kind of religion are twice the children of hell as their teachers (v. 15). Remember that this kind of religion was the strictest form of the Jews religion in the days of Jesus Christ;
- 7) Religious practitioners of this type often focus on emphasizing even the smallest of works above consideration for truly spiritual things (vv. 23-24),
- 8) To religious practitioners of this type, appearances are everything, regardless of the corruption inside them (vv. 25-28),
- 9) Religious practitioners of this type would have no conscience about killing the servants of God (vv. 32-34), and
- 10) Religious practitioners of this type cannot escape the damnation of hell (v. 33).

### **WHY PRACTICE RELIGION AT ALL?**

When we think about how Jesus condemned the way the Pharisees practiced religion, we may be wondering why people would practice religion at all. The answer is: if you intend to practice religion in the same way the Pharisees did, there is no reason to practice it at all! I say this because:

- 1) The Pharisees were practicing religion to gain approval from men
- 2) They were practicing religion as a kind of works that they were trying to present to God as something good and worthy of approval
- 3) They practiced religion with the idea that it would give them salvation
- 4) The religion they were practicing was made up of things that had once been spiritual in form, but they had twisted them by their own man-made inventions, attitudes, and reasoning.
- 5) They had lost sight of the spiritual aspects of their religion;
- 6) They were practicing religion without any **spiritual knowledge** of God and Jesus Christ

### **IS THERE A SIMILAR THING GOING ON IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY?**

Yes. With all the religious denominations in our culture, there are many people who belong to them and observe some part of that denomination's practices in order to make men respect them more and to at least look like they are upstanding and righteous. These individuals aren't always totally conscious of the fact that they are modern-day Pharisees.

## **People Are Practicing Religion to Get a Record of Good Works and Find Favor with God**

There are many people in America today who are practicing religion because they believe that doing so allows them to tally up a record of good works which will give them favor with God. Some of these people are not even aware that they are making God more angry at them every day, because, in their minds they think that those good works make them better than others. God wants people to understand that there is nothing good in them and that they are not really seeking Him but rather are seeking to look good before Him (see Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:10-12 and Romans 10:3).

## **People Are Practicing Religion to Earn Salvation**

Many people, by practicing religion, think that they are earning salvation. They do the things that the bible seems to tell them to do and that their religion approves of and they think that doing this kind of “righteousness” will “earn” them salvation. But, they do not understand that salvation cannot be earned (see Titus 3:5 and Ephesians 2:8-9).

## **Some People Are Practicing Religion That Agrees With the Principles of the Bible**

Some people are practicing religion today which actually agrees with things in the bible that God tells people they ought to do. They are doing such things as going to church, being good to neighbors, trying to avoid breaking any of the Ten Commandments, giving of their means to help others, etc. On the surface, these practices seem to be exactly the right thing to be doing. However, all people who practice these kinds of religious observances when human philosophies, reasons, and inventions have corrupted them are practicing such religion in vain. As with the Pharisees in Matthew 23, God rejects any such practices which are done for the wrong reasons, or when the original spiritual principles within the practices have been corrupted by man’s devices. Ritual and ceremony without spiritual meaning is despised by the Lord.

## **People Who Are Practicing Religion for the Wrong Reasons Do Not Know God**

All people who practice religion as a means to impress someone, either humans or God, or who practice religion to get favor with God, or to “earn” salvation are without any true spiritual knowledge of God. First, we can’t impress God with anything we do when our spiritual relationship with Him continues to be built on the wrong foundation. A proper relationship can only exist if it is built on having favor with God because Jesus Christ has settled the conflict between Him and us. That can only be done if our sin debt is paid. That sin debt is not paid if Jesus Christ does not represent us as our Peacemaker before God. He does not represent anyone as Peacemaker who has not been born again.

We are brought into a right relationship with God when we see our sinfulness, see a need to be forgiven, see Christ as the one who has paid our sin debt and as the only one who can forgive us, believe that He died for our sin, believe that God raised Him from the dead as proof of His power over sin, ask Him to forgive us, and then believe that He has (Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9-10). This inward process is a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit, and godly

sorrow for sin is experienced when the process starts (2 Corinthians 7:10). When the new birth experience happens, we accept that Jesus Christ became sin for us that we might be made righteous in Him through believing (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When we have repented of our sin and trusted Christ, God transfers to us the same righteousness that Christ has. In fact, it is the righteousness of Christ that He gives us credit for. That is the reason we are then accepted by the Lord. When that happens we become a creature that can do things that please God. It is at this point that we can begin to have our works accepted by the Lord as something that He approves of and gets glory from. We will not be doing works in order to get credit toward righteousness, or to earn anything. We are able to understand that we have been created new creatures in Christ Jesus, appointed to do good works for His glory (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14).

### **A LAST CHALLENGE**

How have you been handling religion in your life? Have you been using it like the Pharisees of biblical times? If you have, you should know now that something more is needed. If you realize that, it is time to take a long look at your soul, your life, your inward condition. What are you going to do about the fact that you are at enmity with God? Would you risk facing eternity in that condition? I don't think so!

If you have not felt godly sorrow and repentance at this point, read the tract again. Ask God to give you understanding. Pay close attention to the section entitled, "**People Who Are Practicing Religion For the Wrong Reasons Do Not Know God.**" Then, ask God to save you. He is a very merciful God. No sinner who has ever called on Him from the heart has ever been turned away. You won't be either!

For more information visit our website at: <http://www.Harmony-MBC.com>

For a personal consultation about your spiritual needs or to share your spiritual experience as a result of reading this tract, contact Pastor Bob Myers at Harmony Missionary Baptist Church by e-mailing: [HMBCCamdenTN@aim.com](mailto:HMBCCamdenTN@aim.com), or phone 731/584-3480. You may also mail the church or Pastor at: Harmony Missionary Baptist Church, 4395 Hwy. 641 N., Camden, TN, 38320.