

True Religion and False Conversion

by Ron Smith

I heard a television preacher say, "Jesus did not have a religious bone in his body." I have heard others say that we should not be "religious." Does the Bible really teach this? Our spiritual forefathers did not use that kind of language. Neither does the Bible or the dictionary. God's word speaks of true religion and false religion. As preachers of God's word, maybe we should be careful about reinventing the English language. What gives us the right to say that words mean something other than what the dictionary says they mean? If we keep doing that, the world will soon not know what we are talking about.

The dictionary defines religion as "a belief binding the spiritual nature of man to a supernatural being, as involving a feeling of dependence and responsibility, together with the feelings and practices which naturally flow from such a belief." 1 Did Jesus not bind Himself to the Father? Did this not involve a "feeling of dependence and responsibility?" Then He had religion. Every bone in His body was religious! He had true religion.

The Bible speaks of useless religion, self-imposed religion, and undefiled religion.

USELESS RELIGION

JAM 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's *religion is useless*.

UNDEFILED RELIGION

JAM 1:27 Pure and *undefiled religion* before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

SELF-IMPOSED RELIGION

COL 2:23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in *self-imposed religion*, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

King Saul only had "self-imposed" and "useless religion." Useless religion sacrifices, but does not obey. The prophet Samuel had told him to wait until he arrived before sacrificing. Saul got impatient and went ahead. Samuel then arrived and rebuked him. He said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. (1Samuel 15:22)

Outward religion involves sacrifice without obedience. Inward religion involves both. It is not a matter of obedience versus sacrifice. It is a matter of superficial sacrifice versus heart sacrifice. This is what David meant in Psalm 51 below.

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart--These, O God, You will not despise. (PSA 51:16,17)

HEART CIRCUMCISION

It is one thing to be circumcised in the flesh. It is another to be circumcised in the heart. According to the following verse, being circumcised outwardly only will bring God's judgment.

JER 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

EAR CIRCUMCISION

Our ears must also be circumcised. Those who take no delight in God's word, have uncircumcised ears.

JER 6:10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it.

The only way God's promises to us can become valid, is if we circumcise our hearts by humbling ourselves and accepting our guilt.

LEV 26:41 and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt--

42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.

HEARTS - NOT GARMENTS

When Jacob found out that his son was dead, he tore his clothes and put ashes on his head. This signified the anguish of his heart. This is what God requires of us in the following passage.

JOE 2:12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him--a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Notice that Joel says that the result of tearing our hearts will be mercy. That mercy will result in offerings given to God. True obedience does result in outward religion. But outward religion alone is like tearing our garment only. God wants our hearts.

VISIBLE CHURCH AND INVISIBLE CHURCH

"A church is a society of Christians, voluntarily associated together, for the worship of God, and spiritual improvement and usefulness. A visible church consists of visible or apparent Christians. The children of visible Christians are members of the visible church, though in a state of minority. A visible Christian is one, who understands the doctrines of the Christian religion, is acquainted with a work of God's Spirit in effectual calling, professes repentance from dead works, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and subjection to him as a king; and whose life and conversation corresponds with his profession. Sealing ordinances ought not to be administered to such as are not visible Christians²

BURNT OFFERINGS AND MERCY

MIC 6:6 With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

SACRIFICE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

HOS 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

According to the following passage, outward religion without inward religion is futile and is an abomination to God. It is considered as "trampling" the courts of God. The sacred meeting is called "iniquity." God promises not to hear our prayers if all we have is outward religion. That kind of religion by itself makes God weary and is troublesome to him. We are to wash ourselves by putting away evil. We are to return to reason.

*ISA 1:12 "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to **trample My courts?**"*

*ISA 1:13 Bring no more **futile sacrifices**; incense is **an abomination to Me**. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies--I cannot endure **iniquity and the sacred meeting**.*

*ISA 1:14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; **they are a trouble to Me**, I am weary of bearing them.*

ISA 1:15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

ISA 1:16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,

ISA 1:17 learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

*ISA 1:18 "**Come now, and let us reason together**," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

ISA 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;

ISA 1:20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

ISA 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the **outward appearance**, but the LORD looks at the heart."

MAT 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed **appear beautiful outwardly**, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

28 "Even so you also **outwardly appear righteous** to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

ROM 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh;

29 but he is a Jew who is one **inwardly**, and circumcision is that of the heart, **in the Spirit, and not in the letter**; whose praise is not from men but from God.

2CO 10:7 Do you look at things according to the **outward appearance?**

1PE 3:3 Do not let your beauty be that **outward adorning** of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel;

4 but **let it be the hidden person of the heart**, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.