

Lesson #5 – The Principles Related to a Correct View of Religion.

Introduction

- A. We cannot escape being influenced by what we believe. In fact our attitudes and actions are directly related to whatever we call "truth".
- B. It is in the area of "religion" that sin has had its greatest effect. The Apostle Paul referred to this when he described the non-Christian.

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk (live) not as other Gentiles (non-Christians) walk (live), in the vanity of their mind.

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

*Who being past feeling (having ceased to care) have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.
Ephesians 4:17-19*

- C. God in His mercy has not left us in this state. He has revealed himself to us. Through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we now understand something of our lost condition, the love of God, and the provision that has been made for us in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Savior.
- D. It is vitally important, if we are to grow as believers, that we understand the Biblical plan of salvation as well as the instruction and provision for the Christian's life and service.
- E. Many Christians continually fail in their daily life because they do not know the Biblical material relevant to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" nor do they know how to thoroughly and correctly answer this question.
- F. The basic text for this lesson is found in Matthew **5:20** and 7:20-29.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works.

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them. I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house **upon** a rock.*

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand,

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine.

For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

I. The Character of True Religion, Matthew 5:20.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A. True religion is not characterized by the externalized form of righteousness so descriptive of the Pharisees.

1. This was a religious way of living whereby the Pharisees believed they could earn salvation. It was a salvation by good works.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Romans 10:3,4

2. The Apostle Paul confessed he once had lived a religious life - attempting to be saved by works.

And be found in him (Jesus Christ), not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Philippians 3:9

3. This form of religious belief (salvation by works) is a denial of the truth in two very important areas.

a. It is a denial of man's sinfulness which results in his inability to earn salvation.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags Isaiah 64:6

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. Romans 3:10

- b. It is a denial of the Biblical provision of God - salvation by the free gift of God's grace.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:24

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23

For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, Not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8,9

B. True religion is characterized by an inward,, spiritual transformation which forms the basis for a righteous life.

1. The provision for this spiritual transformation is found in the representative work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. Jesus Christ came to obey the law of God which we did not obey.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Matthew 5:17

For as by one man's (Adam) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (Jesus Christ) shall many be made righteous.
Romans 5:19

b. Jesus Christ came to die under the curse (penalty) of the law, which penalty we could not pay.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. Galatians 3:13

c. All the value of this work of the Lord Jesus was given to us as a gift - when we received Him as our Lord and Savior.

1) We have been given the gift of perfect righteousness.

Therefore, being justified (declared righteous) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1.

2) We have been given the gift of perfect forgiveness.

In whom (the Lord Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.
Ephesians 1:7

2. The description of this spiritual transformation is presented in the Bible as a reversal which results in all things being made "new".

a. This reversal of salvation reveals the power of the gospel.

1) We were once dead to God -- but now we are alive in Him.
(Eph. 2:1) (Eph. 2:5)

2. We were once unrighteous -- but now we are justified (righteous)
(Rom. 3:10) (Rom. 5:1)

3. We were once guilty -- but now we are forgiven
(Rom. 3:23) (Col. 2:13)

4) We were once defiled - but now we are cleansed.
(Is. 64:6) (I Cor. 6:11)

5) We were once alienated - but now we are accepted.
(Eph. 4:18) (Eph. 1:6)

6) We were once enemies of God - but now we are adopted.
(Rom. 5:10) (Eph. 1:5)

7) We were once enslaved - but now we are free.
(John 8:34) (Gal. 5:1)

8) We were once in the kingdom of darkness - but now we are
(Col. 1:13)
in the kingdom of God's Son.
(Col. 1:13)

b. The "newness" of salvation extends to all the areas of our life.

1) We have been made a new creation in salvation, II Cor. 5:17.

Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away, all things are become new.

2) We have been given a new nature in salvation, Eph. 4:24.

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

3) We can come to God in a new and living way through salvation Hebrews 10:19,20.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new a living way, which he hath consecrated (newly made) for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

4) We have a new song to sing through salvation, Rev. 5:9,10.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth.

5) We have a new covenantal relationship with God in salvation, Matthew 26:28.

For this is my blood of the new testament (covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

6) We have a new commandment to obey through salvation, John 13:34,35.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Summary: All of this, and there is much more, is an indication that God starts with us as a person - within us - and in the gift of salvation brings to us a spiritual transformation.

II. The Evidence of True Religion, Matthew 7:21-25.

A. The evidence of true religion is not found in mere doctrinal confession.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven Matthew 7:21

1. The acceptance of the doctrines of the Bible regarding the Lord Jesus Christ - is not, in itself, an evidence of salvation.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well, the devils also believe, and tremble. James 2:17,15

2. Salvation is a believing in or on the Lord Jesus Christ as a person - and a whole-hearted trust in Him. It is not merely believing truths about Him.

And (the jailer) brought them (Paul and Silas) out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved Acts 16:30,31.

- B. The evidence of true religion is not found in mere religious emotion.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven Matthew 7:21

1. The repetition of "Lord" in these texts may indicate a high degree of religious fervor. A spiritual experience, in itself, is not an evidence of Biblical salvation.

Let not man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Col. 2:18

2. Salvation is. itself characterized by emotions. However, these emotions are directed toward the Lord Jesus Christ and express love, faith, and hope.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Matt. 22:37

- C. The evidence of true religion is not found in merely the use of religious gifts.

1. It is possible for non-believers to have unusual gifts which may be used in a religious manner. Such activity may also be a counterfeit of true spiritual gifts.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:22,23

2. We are warned, in the Bible, of false teachers who are enabled by Satan and who may therefore, do many wonderful works.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works, II Cor. 11:13-15.

D. The evidence of true religion is found in simple obedience to God as understood through the Scripture.

1. The explanatory statement, Matthew 7:21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

- a. It must be carefully pointed out that this verse does not teach that we qualify for salvation by doing the will of God. What it does teach is that everyone who is saved, and going to heaven, will live a life that is basically characterized by the doing of the will of God. The spiritual transformation which makes all things "new" slowly changes how a person will live and causes an inner desire for righteousness.
- b. This is a message that is clearly taught throughout the Bible. For example, note these verses from I John.
 - 1) The true believer will live a life characterized by obedience, I John 2:3-5.
 - 2) The true believer will live a life that is not characterized by loving the world, I John 2:15-17.
 - 3) The true believer will live a life characterized by freedom from known sin, I John 3:9.
 - 4) The true believer will live a life characterized by loving the brethren, I John 3:14.
 - 5) The true believer will live a life characterized by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, I John 3:24.
 - 6) The true believer will live a life characterized by an understanding of spiritual things, I John 5:20.
- c. The Biblical summary of "the will of God" is related to the one great central message of all Scripture - that the all- inclusive plan of God the Father is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he (the Lord Jesus) is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn front the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.
Colossians 1:18,19

- d. All of this comes down to a simple application in the life of the believer. The true Christian will be characterized by a desire to live so that his life will glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean sinless perfection - the Bible condemns that profession (I John 1:8,10). The desire to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ will find expression in a daily obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Scripture.

2. The explanatory illustration, Matthew 7:24 -27.

- a. The person who obeys the words of the Lord Jesus - is called "wise" and his life is likened to a house built upon a rock.
- b. The person who does not obey the words of the Lord Jesus - is called a "foolish man" and his life is likened to a house built upon the sand.

Conclusion

- A. We must now ask ourselves whether our "religion" is one of mere external activity.
- B. The test of genuineness is quite simple - it has to do with the general characteristic of our life - do we desire, from within, that the Lord Jesus Christ would be exalted and praised and is this desire manifested in our basic choices of life? If this is so - then we see the evidence of divine grace - and know we are true believers.