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THE BIBLE VIEW

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A Hindrance to Serving the Lord

Bill Brinkworth

The four books of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) echo a similar problem with which Jesus faced. This problem has also plagued countless Christians since. The difficulty Jesus and others faced, even today, is persecution for their beliefs.

Surprisingly, persecution does not always come from those that hate God directly and try to oppose Him. Those that often cause the most problems for one's living the way the Scripture commands are the "religious" crowds. This group often hides under the pretense of being godly and living God's way, but it is with outward appearance only. These are the people that troubled Jesus often. Their hypocritical lifestyle and practices proved they had unconverted hearts. They had "... a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof..." (II Timothy 3:5).

In John 5:7-9, we read of Jesus' healing a man who had an infirmity for 38 years (John 5:5). You would have thought everyone would have been so excited, especially those claiming to be followers of the one true God and His Word. Instead, it was they that found fault with Jesus. They murmured that God's Son, the One who is also known as the Word, broke a scriptural commandment.

They also judged that the healed man had broken the commandment because he had picked up his bed on the Sabbath (John 5:10). Their critical, perhaps jealous spirit, did not stop there. They were so angered at what Jesus had done on the Sabbath, a day that they were not to work, that they sought to have Jesus killed!

Wait a minute! Jesus healed a man who was ill for much of his life. Is not that a miracle? The "religious" should have been praising the Lord for what had just occurred, yet they wanted to kill Jesus for it.

Here were religious folk that were blind to God's hand in the matter. They were more concerned about their rules, religion, and traditions than they were about God's working.

Unfortunately, we have people with the same mindset alive today who hate the working of God. If an occurrence is outside their understanding of religion or against their organization's teachings, they most likely will oppose it.

“Religious” does not necessarily mean righteousness. There are a lot of people that call themselves “Christians” that do not know who God is or what His will and way is. They only have their understanding. Inadvertently, they are the enemies of God, as were the religious in this account in John 5, not supporters of Him.

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” Luke 6:46

“Religious,” But Not Righteous

Bill Brinkworth

Man has a natural desire in his heart to please God. To fulfill this innate desire, many serve Him their way, not His. Just doing what we think or feel is “religious” or doing what a denomination or religion says to do, does not make one right before God. There is only one God, and the only way into His Heaven is His way as commanded in His Word.

There are many “religious” people in the Bible that Christ knew were not righteous. They included:

Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a member of a very religious group known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in Hell, eternal life, angels, the providence of God, the law, and doing good deeds. Using man’s standards, this good man would surely seem to be heading for Heaven. Christ, knowing all about Nicodemus’ religious affiliation and his good deeds, knew something was missing in the Pharisee’s life. There was a connection missing between what the man knew, and what he understood, believed, and lived.

Christ knew that the Pharisees were hypocritical in many areas (Mat. 6:2, 5 & Luke 18:9-14) and that Nicodemus was no different. They obeyed the law but did not understand the principle the Scripture was teaching. They served their traditions and teachings rather than God.

When Nicodemus saw Christ, he did not recognize Him as the promised Messiah, but only as a teacher (“rabbi”). Others, who had less knowledge than the intellectual Pharisees recognized Christ as the Saviour and changed their lives to obey him in the future. The Pharisees’ pride kept them from humbling themselves and admitting they were not heartily serving God. It was to Nicodemus that Christ said, “... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The Saviour knew that the religious man obeyed God in His actions, but did not purpose in his heart to obey and serve God with love and devotion. Jesus saw through the man’s religion and knew just following the man-made religion was not obeying or serving God.

The religious. In several places, Christ lambasted those that claimed to be righteous. They were hypocritical despite their ministries, service, and education. He called them what they were — dangerous as poisonous snakes. These “religious” people were not obeying God, and they were leading others astray also.

In Matthew 23, Christ reminded the religious leaders and the intellectuals that they talked the talk, but it was they who were responsible for the death of many of the godly prophets and saints.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous ... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?...” Matthew 23:29-34

Later, it would be this group of “religious” people that succeeded in having the son of God killed (John 18:3). They looked righteous, but God knew that their hearts were wicked.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.” Matthew 23:25

Those that are ritualistic. Many did the right things, but for the wrong reasons. Jesus knew that some prayed only to be heard by others and that some fasted only to be thought “holy” by others.

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” Matthew 6:5

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” Matthew 6:16

After being reminded of these encounters Christ had with the “religious,” we see He requires more from us than just going through “religious” motions. Just going to a church, talking a “religiously correct” way, and going through “righteous” rites does not guarantee one is “righteous” before God’s eyes. There is a dead, godless form of “holiness” that we are to avoid. *“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” II Timothy 3:5*

Yes, it is important to go to church, live righteously, and do what the Bible commands. We are to do these things and more, but only if we do them sincerely to please and obey God.

As Jesus commanded Nicodemus, the first step in being sincere is to know one is a sinner, to be truly repentant of our commissions of sin, and to trust that Christ’s finished work on the cross was the only payment acceptable for our sins. Once we are saved, and not just following what others tell us God wants us to do, we will be righteous in God’s eyes.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” Titus 3:5

“Don’t stay away from church because there are so many hypocrites. There’s always room for one more.” — Adam

The Real Thing

John Bate

- One real dollar bill is worth a thousand counterfeits, however dim, wrinkled, and worn the genuine is.
- One good, healthy fruitful tree in an orchard is by far more valuable than scores of trees, which may have beauty, but no fruit.
- One genuine Christian, to God and the world, is worth a thousand hypocrites.
- One acceptable prayer to God does more than the million that He rejects, even if the righteous’ prayer is simple and unpolished.

“Hypocrites in the church? Yes, and in the lodge, and at home. Don’t hunt through the church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.” — *Billy Sunday*

When to Go

John Bate

Some people, when considering being saved, imagine that they will bring themselves into a condition of moral excellence before they seek salvation. This is like:

- A sick person waiting until he is well before he sees the physician;
- Or an invalid convalescent waiting until he fully recovers before he seeks a change of air and place;
- Or a hungry man waiting until his appetite is satisfied before he sits down to eat;
- Or a person shivering with cold waiting until he is warm before he lights a fire.

You go to the physician because you are sick, to the fresh air or different place because you need it, to the food because you are hungry, and to the fire because you are cold. In the same way, you should seek the Saviour, as you are because you have a great need.