



ARE YOU ON FIRE FOR RELIGION BUT LUKEWARM TOWARD GOD ? –

Religious rituals vs right living

Rites enable communities to stay connected to their roots and they give a sense of belonging to everyone for whom they make sense.

But as with other things, they can be misused and diverted from their original purpose. They can fall into insignificance, and become only an empty routine. We continue to practice them by habit, because "it has always been done", and we find there a certain sentimental satisfaction, but it is the only utility that remains to them. For example, we want to have a religious ceremony for a wedding, even if we do not believe in God. Or the most beautiful prayers (such as the Lord's Prayer, for example) can become an empty rehearsal that does not engage those who pronounce them.

The greatest danger in religious rites is to put our faith in the rite rather than in God, to attach more importance to the ritual than to the spiritual. It can be an act or a ceremony intended to direct God to do some action for us. It is believed that if the rite is performed according to the rules, with properly performed gestures and appropriate words, God is compelled to act on our behalf and we can be sure of getting the desired result.

But this is a diversion of faith. The rite has value only if those who do it do so in spirit and in truth, with a pure heart towards God, in a spiritual attitude of faith and obedience. We cannot force His hand, compel Him to act by doing such or such a gesture, or pronouncing this or that formula. It is in a relationship of trust and love with God that true spirituality is found.

If we don't live a life of obedience to God, our religion is nothing more than a vain show, and we deceive ourselves.

“Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). It is apparent that God's emphasis is not on religious rituals but on right living: to look after orphans and widows—referring to one's attitude of helping those in need -- and to keep oneself from being polluted—referring to one's character. A believer with God-pleasing 'religion' does not just follow ritualistic observances but he helps others in need and keeps himself 'pure and clean'. 'Pure and clean' does not mean to be perfect, but to strive every day to do that which is pleasing in God's sight.

All the rites and spiritual exercises are nothing without love for God AND for our neighbour, nothing without compassion. That is true spirituality and true religion.

The Lord warns us very sternly against the dangers of the mere outward observance of rites and rituals, and He condemns all hypocrisy in the people who are observing the laws. “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules. Thus you nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.” (Matthew 15 :7; Mark 7 :13)

True worship has nothing to do with a place or a time. God has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. We have to approach God with our hearts, not with our lips.

Some people are more devoted to the rituals of their religion than they are to the God toward Whom their religion is supposed to point them.

What God is looking for is not an external display of religiosity but a transformation of our hearts.

A genuine relationship with the Almighty God will affect the way we live our lives every day, in every area. That relationship must be on God’s terms and not according to the fallible ideas of men.

Rites are not at all an important part of God’s message, but sometimes it has become an obsession in the believer’s mind. The believer thinks he has to follow exactly some rites, but he does not become a better person after he has performed them. He keeps on being selfish and dishonest, he has no mercy in his heart, he is unloving toward others and treat them badly, he is mean and harsh words are in his mouth, he doesn’t hesitate to lie and cheat, all the while going through the rites of prayers. He repeats already made prayers, but these prayers have no effect in his life. It is just an obsession of form, praying for the sake of praying, but he has forgotten the essence of faith. So what purpose does it serve?

You can be lukewarm toward God and go to church all day long. You don’t think you are lukewarm, you think you are hot in your faith. But would your family and the people who know you say that you are on fire for God or that you are religious? You can be on fire toward religion and lukewarm toward God. True religion includes the transformation of our minds.

Some people are very religious but they have no peace. But if you have a close relationship with God, if you keep your mind on Him and if you are right with Him, He will give you perfect peace, peace that passeth understanding.

Take heed to yourself, examine yourself, make sure you commune with God, just you and Him, in quietness, and not just through regular religious practices because that does not do anybody any good.

In the Last Judgment, we shall be judged not by the way we follow religious observances, but by the way we loved God and others.