

Jesus And Religion

Joe Slater

“Religion won’t save you. Only Jesus can save!” This saying frequently makes the rounds on social media and church signs. I understand the point, but it’s not entirely accurate to say the least.

Religion isn’t a bad word! It comes from a word having to do with reverent worship. Some people have an aversion to “worship” too, but God commends worship. In fact Jesus Himself said that God seeks people who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Not all religion meets God’s approval. James wrote, *“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. 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”* (1:26-27).

So yes, religion can be useless (vain, empty). Jesus quoted Isaiah saying, *“In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matthew 14:9). But worship (religion) can also be pure, undefiled, offered in spirit and in truth, and thus pleasing to God.

No doubt about it, only Jesus can save. Yet we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). Our souls are purified by obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22). Baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21). All of these pertain to when and under what conditions Jesus saves.

Saying “religion won’t save you” feeds into the false narrative that your relationship to God is strictly personal. The fact is, Christians are members of Christ’s body. There is both an individual and a corporate aspect of our religion (worship). It isn’t “either/or,” it’s “both/and.”

Are You Taking The Right Medicine?

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22 ESV).

While speaking with my son on the phone, recently, he asked what I had been doing lately. My response was that "I have been making, and keeping, doctors' appointments." He asked what the problem was. Was I sick? I told him, “No, only regular old age maintenance."

We laughed, but the fact is that there are a lot of things that can go wrong with our bodies. The good news is that there are lots of medications that we can take to deal with, and sometimes eliminate, our illnesses. Naturally we don't like the idea, nor the cost (and sometimes the taste), of medications that must be taken.

We should be thankful to God for those who have the competence to develop and manufacture such needed medicines. We can also be thankful that we have the avenue of prayer whereby we can ask Him for healing, and He may grant our petition, even without the use of man-made medicines.

But, let me move on to another type of medication, to something other than pills and prayer; it's something that we often forget about. That is a joyful heart.

Solomon, most famous for his wisdom, tells us that a joyful heart is good medicine. In his book None of These Diseases, Dr. S.J. McMillen says, "No one can appreciate so fully as a doctor the amazingly large percentage of human disease and suffering which is directly traceable to worry, fear, conflict, immorality, dissipation and ignorance to unwholesome thinking and unclean living."

The point being made was that the things listed by the doctor, and more could be added to the list, are things that prevents one from having a joyful heart, thus leading to a crushed spirit and drying up of the bones. In short, these bad things will steal away the good medicine of the heart.

There are numerous mentions of "good medicine" in God's word, such as, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4:8-9). These are some things that will bring joy to the heart.

--Roy Allen Crutcher (Mt. Carmel, IL)

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THE FISH NET

When Jesus began His ministry, He told a fish story (of sorts). Not really a fish story, but an occasion where experienced fishermen worked all night and were about to return to shore having caught nothing. Jesus saw them; they were somewhat downcast as a result of an empty night. The Lord then told them to cast their nets over the side for a catch. Somewhat doubtful, they did. Amazed at the catch, Peter presented himself to the Lord humbly (Luke 5:8). This, as far as Luke presents it, was the beginning of Jesus’ mission to the Israelite nation.

When John finishes his gospel, we are again at the lake and, again, Jesus tells the fisherman to cast their nets over the side for a catch. They do so and the catch is great (John 21:1-8).

At the beginning of the Lord’s mission, He taught His disciples how to catch men. The net used would be two parts. First, it would be the Lord’s message taught; second, it would be the Lord’s message lived. Some, unfortunately, are better able to teach than live. In such cases, the net has “sprung a leak”! Let us be sure to patch our nets so that we can teach and live the gospel.

--Ron Thomas (via *Bulletin Gold*)