

(Basics) 13. Religiosity and Spirituality

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen explores the critical distinction between religiosity and spirituality, emphasizing the need for genuine inner transformation over mere external conformity to religious practices.

Duration: 12:44

Scripture: Matthew 22:37, John 6:63, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:5

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Religious Deception"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the difference between religious form and spiritual power. He refers to 2 Timothy 3:5, which warns about people who hold onto a form of godliness but deny its power. The preacher compares Satan's deception to giving someone a glass of milk with a few drops of poison, highlighting that Satan often disguises himself as an angel of light. He explains that being religious and following external religious practices does not necessarily make a person spiritual, using examples from Jesus' teachings and the Pharisees' behavior. The sermon emphasizes the need for inner transformation and a genuine love for God, rather than just outward religious observance.

Transcript

And we want to consider today something about the difference between being religious and being spiritual. Perhaps you have never thought about it, but the difference is very important for us to understand. We read in God's word, in Paul's second letter to Timothy, in chapter 3 and verse 5, that in the last days there are going to be a lot of people who hold to a form of godliness, but having denied its power.

Just like someone who wants to poison another person would not give him a full glass of poison, but would give him perhaps a glass full of milk with maybe just two or three drops of poison in it, and that would be enough to kill the man. In the same way, when Satan wants to deceive people, he is not going to give people what is obvious error. He is not going to come preaching sin and unrighteousness.

The Bible says in 2nd Corinthians, in chapter 11, verse 14 and 15, that Satan comes like an angel of light. There are many forms in which he comes. He comes as a lion, the Bible says, as a dragon, as a serpent.

And when he comes in these forms, as a lion, as a dragon, as a serpent, we can easily recognize him. He may frighten us, but he cannot deceive us. You are not frightened.

You are not deceived when you see a lion or a serpent or a dragon concerning their intentions. But you can be deceived when you see Satan coming as an angel of light and when his servants are servants of righteousness. And so, Satan, in order to fulfill his purposes, to lead people astray from the true God and from the truth, has invented so many religions and has also invented versions of Christianity which are different from what we see in the scriptures.

We use the expression nominal Christians. That means people who are born into a Christian family, whatever denomination they may be, but who have not come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. And yet, many of these people can have a form of godliness.

And even those who have accepted Christ as their savior, if they don't distinguish between religiosity and spirituality, it's possible that they may develop in becoming more and more religious and not spiritual. Religiosity is a human thing. Spirituality is divine.

It's from heaven. The Old Testament law, for example, could not make anybody spiritual. There were people in the Old Testament who rose above the standards of the law, people like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and who became spiritually minded, knowing the heart of God.

But the law itself could not make anybody spiritual, because the law only demanded that you conform to certain standards externally. If you kept the Ten Commandments, in other words, if you did not have any other god and you didn't worship idols, you didn't take the Lord's name in vain, you kept the Sabbath and you honored your father and mother, you didn't commit adultery, theft, murder, or bear false witness, or covet something which is your neighbor's, you were okay. Externally, the law could not find fault with you.

And if you kept all the commandments given concerning the ceremonial law, you were accepted as a person in very good standing. You would be an outstanding Jew in Israel. But you need not be spiritual.

Now the same thing can happen today. A person can go to the meetings regularly, he can conform to the external demands of a particular Christian denomination or church, and have a good standing there, even be a board member or an elder of that church, and not be spiritual at all, because he may be only religious. And he would be the equivalent of the Pharisees in Jesus' time, who conformed to all the requirements of the law externally in the eyes of the people, but who were not devoted to Jesus Christ in their hearts.

They were not spiritual, they were not devoted to God, they did not love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind. They loved money, we read in Luke chapter 16. That's just one example.

Religious people can pray, read the Bible daily, attend all-night fasting and prayer meetings, they may tithe their income. But along with that, they will also seek honor from men, live for themselves, love money, be interested in gossiping, etc., and they don't seem to see that there's a contradiction between these two aspects of their lives. One, which is the religious aspect of their life, where they pray and read the Bible and go to meetings and preach and give out tracts and attend all-night prayer meetings, and on the other side, gossip and backbite and love money and live for themselves and selfishly seek their own gain, there doesn't seem to be a connection between these two.

On one side is the form of godliness, but on the other side, the inner power that delivers a person from a selfish, self-centered life and makes him really godly is not there. These are some examples. For example, if you are more interested in the opinion of men, in what men think about you, than in what God thinks

about you, the chances are, my friend, that you could be just religious.

You know, it's good to face up to it. We're not saying anything to insult anyone, but when we expose our life to the scan of the word of God and God's word shows us that our Christianity is only superficial, it's good to face up to it. It's good to recognize it now, rather than when Christ comes again and we stand before him.

That's too late. If we recognize today that we're only religious and not spiritual, we can do something about it. A spiritual man is one who is more interested in God's opinion of his life than the opinion of all men.

A spiritual man is more interested in living a godly life than even in attending the meetings. His attendance of meetings is only to help him to live a godly life, but the godly life is more important than the meetings. The way he behaves with his wife and children at home is far more important to a godly man than whether he preaches on Sunday morning in the meetings or not.

And there you can evaluate yourself. If you're very careful to prepare your sermon for your Sunday morning message, but not careful in the way you speak to your wife at home, you're probably just religious, not spiritual. There's a lot of difference.

It's people who have a form of godliness, who've got a reputation that they are very holy people, but who are not really spiritual. If a person's satisfied that he fasts and prays and tithes, but he doesn't seem to be bothered whether he can control his tongue in his speech during the day, or he's not disturbed by the fact that he's a lover of money, then he's religious. A person could be interested in evangelism, reaching out for the lost, which is a very good thing and a very necessary thing.

But if he's not along with that, interested in personal sanctification, he's just religious. A spiritual man will be interested in both. It's not just the external form.

A lot of these activities that religious people are involved in are very, very good, but it's a question of priorities. Priorities is what makes a man spiritual. A religious person is very often interested only in the written word, the letter of the law.

2 Corinthians 3 says, the letter of the law kills. That means God's word, if you take it just according to the letter, without understanding its spirit, it won't bring you life. It'll kill you.

Have you thought of that? It says that in 2 Corinthians 3. The letter kills, but the spirit brings life. If we can understand that, that whole passage, particularly verse 6, the last part, he says, we are servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit, because the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. Do you remember once when Jesus told people that you've got to eat my flesh and drink my blood? A lot of people got offended with Jesus.

We read in John chapter 6, they thought Jesus was teaching cannibalism. And they got so offended that they went away and they never walked with him anymore. Jesus said one last word to them before they left.

He said to them in John 6 and verse 63, the words I speak to you are spirit and life. The flesh profits nothing. And so, what Jesus spoke was spiritual.

And you can take the word of scripture, the letter, and obey it down to the last detail and just be a religious person. Not spiritual at all. It takes more than just keeping the letter of the law.

It takes a hard attitude towards God, towards his word, for a person to become spiritual. Our goal in life should be to be spiritual. A religious person like the Pharisees of old are more interested in justifying themselves before men, in proving to men that what they are standing for is right and what they are doing is right.

A spiritual man is not really bothered much about what people think about him. Jesus never lived wondering what people were thinking or saying about him. He lived only to please the Father.

And a spiritual person cares for God's opinion. Religious people can often meditate for years on the words of praise that somebody has said about them. A spiritual person, on the other hand, refuses to receive testimony from men.

They know that other men do not know the corruption that is in their own heart. And they know that the praise of men is worth less than nothing. And so they live for God's opinion.

They live to please Him. And if our goal in life is to please God, and that's not easy, we have to fight a battle to say, Lord, I do not want to please men. I want to please You.

And if that is our determined goal, then we will find that the Spirit of God shows us the way to be truly spiritual. And then we will have not only the external form of godliness, but the inner power as well.

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