

IS MY RELIGION REAL? IS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD REAL?

Do you have a religion? Sure you do, in spite of the fact that you may deny having one. Everyone follows a religion of one sort or another, but what type do you practice? Is your religion real? Before we look into whether or not our "religion is real," we must first determine what it means.

According to Webster's New World dictionary, Religion (a Noun) is:

1. Belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers, to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the universe
 - a. Expression of such a belief in conduct and ritual
2. Any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc. often involving a code of ethics and philosophy

The American Heritage dictionary gives a similar definition: Religion (a Noun) is:

1. Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe.
 - a. A personal or institutionalized system grounded in such belief and worship.
2. The life or condition of a person in a religious order.
3. A set of beliefs, values, and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader.
4. A cause, principle, or activity pursued with zeal or conscientious devotion.

Today, the belief and reverence for the Almighty GOD has been replaced with a "cause" or "activity" with no apparent spiritual values, such as the religion in entertainments, sports, habits, businesses, etc. Driving a bus or truck for a delivery company is considered a religion because it is driven with conscientious devotion; going to work is another form of religion because it is done with zeal; and worshiping people or idols are other forms of religion. Smoking, drinking, using cuss words and lying are acts of religion. Sinning against the Almighty GOD is a religion because sinners pursue it without regard for the consequences--the lake of fire. Religion today is any specific conduct or ritual undertaken on a recurring daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Other known religions are Buddhism, Gnosticism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pantheism, Paganism, Mormonism, Secularism, Humanism, Christian Science, Astrology, etc. All of these religions lead people away from worshiping our Almighty Father in Heaven as prescribed by God. What is your religion?

If your religion is based upon any other person or thing plus or minus the Lord Jesus Christ, then you don't have the true religion. While the religion you practice may appear to be real and honorable to you or in the opinion of the world, will it stand the test of time? Will your religion take you to Heaven? Will your religion earn you Eternal Life?

Because the true meaning of "religion" has been compromised, true Christianity is not just a religion; true Christianity is more than a religion. True Christianity involves a blessed, history-tested, personal or spiritual relationship and fellowship with God!

True Christianity involves our complete obedience and surrender to God's Will through grace and faith in Christ. It means worshiping God from our hearts in a personal way

as the Holy Spirit inspires us. Through the Holy Spirit's Power, we are gifted with the spiritual relationship and fellowship of GOD's Love, and the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Other religions practice rituals, but each true Christian has a personal relationship and fellowship with GOD.

Let us examine the true condition of our personal or spiritual relationship with GOD. In other words, what is my relationship with GOD? Here again, according to Webster's New World dictionary, "Relationship" (a Noun) is:

1. the quality or state of being related; connection
2. connection by blood or marriage; kinship
3. a particular instance of being related

Personal relationship involves two or more friends or relatives established as a result of mutual recognition, sincerity, interests and respect. In a personal relationship, each party knows the other, deals with the other, shares with the other and honors the other on a personal level without limitations or restrictions.

While there are so many relationships in the world, let us look into the matter of our personal relationship with GOD. Are we worshiping our Heavenly Father from the heart? How can we have a personal relationship and fellowship with GOD? What does it mean to have a personal relationship and fellowship with GOD? Who can have a personal relationship and fellowship with GOD? Finally, is our relationship with GOD REAL?

That sounds like a funny thing to ask, but we must make sure that if we have any relationship with GOD or hold an allegiance to our Savior Jesus Christ at all, we need to ensure that it is real.

Through His death and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ has already made it possible for each believer to have a personal relationship and fellowship with GOD by redeeming us from the bondage of sin and separation caused by Adam's sin.

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Romans 5: 1-2

⁸"But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only that, but we shall also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Romans 5: 8-11

Prerequisite for a Personal Relationship with GOD

Before a person can have a personal or spiritual relationship and fellowship with GOD, the following conditions must be met: We must first confess and repent of our sins. We need to understand that we must first REPENT of all known sins, and evil ways of living in the past. We must admit that we are a lost sinner, who deserves punishment and death, and that there is no human hope for us:

1. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have love, pity, and mercy for him, and to our GOD, for He will multiply to him His abundant pardon." Isaiah 55: 7

We must accept and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior by faith:

2. "So they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' Acts 16:31. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:37-38" Romans 10:9 (21st Century King James Version Bible)

Upon our profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as evidence of our changed heart in Christ, we must submit to water baptism:

3. "Jesus answered, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of GOD." John 3:5. "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What doth hinder me from being baptized?" ³⁷And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." Acts 8:36-38

After a person accepts Christ and is baptized, the Holy Spirit creates a new life in the Christian and the new believer begins to experience a spiritual, Christ-centered relationship with God on a daily basis.

Most importantly, our relationship with other people must equally be Christ-centered. Anyone who loves Christ, and claims to be obedient to God, but resents or hates his fellow man or woman is living a life of lie and rebellion, and cannot claim a personal relationship with God unless he or she repents, genuinely forgives from the heart and reconciles with them.

Knowing GOD Through Love

Obedience to GOD's Word brought biblical men and women spiritual relationship with GOD. Therefore, let us, by GOD's Grace, ensure that our relationship with GOD is real in the way we express Christian love and mercy to other believers. We are especially to pray that unsaved souls would be converted through repentance, and acceptance of Christ as Savior.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of GOD; and everyone who loves is born of GOD and knows GOD. ⁸He who does not love does not know GOD, for GOD is love. ⁹In this the love of GOD was manifested toward us, that GOD has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved GOD, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if GOD so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Seeing GOD Through Love

¹²No one has seen GOD at any time. If we love one another, GOD abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of GOD, GOD abides in him, and he in GOD. ¹⁶And we have known and believed the love that GOD has for us. GOD is love, and he who abides in love abides in GOD, and GOD in him.

Perfection of Love

¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. ¹⁹We love Him because He first loved us.

Obedience by Faith

²⁰If someone says, "I love GOD," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love GOD whom he has not seen? ²¹And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves GOD *must* love his brother also." 1st John 4:7-21 (New King James Version Bible)

Beginning of a Personal Relationship with GOD

When we are in right standing with GOD, He starts the personal or spiritual relationship and fellowship with us, similar to the love we experience from our parents after our birth. Our Heavenly Father initiated this blessed, personal or spiritual relationship with our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden before they fell.

²⁷So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. ²⁸And God blessed them, and God said unto them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Genesis 1:27-28

After Adam and Eve disobeyed by sinning, their personal relationship with GOD was broken, and they no longer benefited from the fellowship that they previously had in the Garden.

In spite of their sin, GOD continued the relationship with Adam and his descendants, and during a wicked generation, God saved Noah and his family from the flood while men, women, children, animals, and birds in the world perished. ⁸But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. ¹⁸But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee." Genesis 6:8,18

In addition, GOD had a great relationship with (Abram) Abraham, and he was called the "Friend of GOD." "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed GOD, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of GOD." James 2:23.

With that relationship, GOD gave Abraham these assurances: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's

house, unto a land that I will show thee. ²And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. ³And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. ⁷And the LORD appeared unto Abram and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." And there built he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him." Genesis 12: 1-3 and 7

Another great prophet whom we all know had a special, personal relationship with GOD was Moses. "And the LORD spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he returned again into the camp; but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle." Exodus 33:11. "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." Deuteronomy 34:10.

King David was an ordinary shepherd who had personal relationship with GOD. He earned this relationship as a young boy who studied the Scriptures as he cared for his parents' sheep. David understood GOD's commandments, accepted them by faith and trusted in GOD's Words wholeheartedly. He was not afraid of bears and lions because of the assurances he obtained from studying God's Words. GOD protected and blessed David.

³⁴But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, ³⁵I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷Moreover David said, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." 1st Samuel 17: 34-37 (NKJV)

Who in this world can have such confidence, unless they have a special relationship and fellowship with the Almighty GOD? Moreover, King David's heart was always yearning to doing GOD's Will.

"And when He had removed him [Saul], He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after Mine Own heart, which shall fulfill all My Will." Acts 13:22

Time will not permit us to list all the wonderful relationships and blessings that the patriarchs and others had with GOD. From Abel, Enoch, Methuselah, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Deborah, Jehoshaphat, Prophets Nathan, Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Jeremiah, Hezekiah and Nehemiah; Queen Esther; Apostles Peter, John, Paul to Timothy, and many others.

We must not forget the extra blessings and protections that Prophet Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) enjoyed because they obeyed and trusted GOD wholeheartedly in the face of death.

¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said unto them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that ye do not serve my GODs, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? ¹⁵Now if ye be ready so that at the time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute,

harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, it is well; but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is that GOD that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not fear to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷If it be so, our GOD whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy GODs, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

¹⁹Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Therefore he spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated. ²⁰And he commanded the most mighty men who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

²¹Then these men were bound in their coats, their breeches, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²²Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste and spoke, and said unto his counselors, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said unto the king, "True, O king." ²⁵He answered and said, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of GOD. Daniel 3: 14-25 (21st Century KJV)

Any true Christian can have this personal or spiritual relationship with GOD if they surrendered their life and lived in obedience to GOD's Words.

"But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of GOD, *even* to them that believe on His name." John 1:12

Is My Relationship with God Real?

We need to really and truly ask ourselves this moment: Is my relationship with GOD real? Am I worshiping the Heavenly Father in spirit and truth as requested by our Savior? What do I mean when I use the word "real?" I mean that which is GENUINE, and SINCERE, and HONEST, and AUTHENTIC, and VALID, and UNADULTERATED, and THOROUGH. I mean that which is not base, and hollow, and formal, and fake and false. I mean a relationship with GOD that is not counterfeit, and sham, and nominal.

Real Relationship with God

"Real" relationship with GOD is not mere show, and pretense, and skin-deep feeling, and outside work. It is something inward, solid, substantial, living and lasting. We know the difference between base coin and good money; between solid gold and tinsel; between plated metal and silver; between real stone and plastic and glass imitation. Let us dwell on these things as we consider the subject of our relationship with GOD being REAL.

If by GOD's Grace and Mercy, our hearts are real in worshiping Him in the old-time Bible way, Eternal Life and a crown await us. But if we are careless, GODless, worldly and disobedient, we shall pay the consequence, unless we repented of our sins.

What Is the Character of Your Relationship?

Again, what is the character of your relationship with GOD? Is it real? It may be weak and feeble, and mingled with many infirmities. That is not the point before us. The question for you and me is: Is our relationship with GOD real? Is it authentic? The times in which we live demand our urgent attention to this subject because it has eternal consequences.

A vast number of religions in our present world lack a true ring of reality. Poets have told us that the world has passed through four different stages: we have had a golden age, a silver age, a brazen age, and an iron age. How far this is true, I do not stop to inquire, but I have little doubt about the character of the age in which we live. It is universally an age of base metal and alloy.

If we measure the religion of the age by its apparent quantity, there is much of it. But if we measure true relationship with GOD today by its QUALITY, there is very little around. On every side we want more reality. I want to ask each of you another question, "Do you have the least desire to go to Heaven when you die?" Let me ask a few more questions: "Do you wish to have a relationship which will comfort you in life, give you good hope in death, and abide the judgment of GOD at the Last Day? If you desire all of these, then, do consider calmly, whether your relationship with GOD is real and true, or it is base and hollow.

All men and women, I shall be told, are fully convinced of the importance of reality. But is this true? Can it be said indeed that reality is rightly esteemed among Christians? I deny it entirely. The greater part of people who claim to admire reality, seem to think that everyone possesses it: They tell us that everyone has a good heart, that all are sincere and true in the main, though they may make mistakes.

Good Heart and Morally Decent?

Many people believe that if you are just morally good, and do the best you can, that is all that is needed to get you to Heaven. This is evident at the funeral services of some religions where the minister's eulogy includes praising the dead person for acts of generosity to their church or community. They claim that for a good moral heart and the love extended to others, the dead should be memorialized. Many forget that we are saved through Grace by faith in Christ. ⁸"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God-- ⁹not by works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

People call you uncharitable; they say you are harsh and judgmental if you censor or doubt anybody's goodness of heart. The fact is most religious people believe that almost everyone has a good clean heart. They claim that the morally good people are trying to do the best they can, and that is good enough! But the truth of the matter is that this is the most widespread delusion. No one examines the dead person's spirituality, and whether or not they faithfully served GOD.

The truth of the matter is that reality is a rare and uncommon principle than is commonly thought. I want you and everyone else to understand that UNREALITY or

false profession of Christianity is one of the great dangers of which Christians ought to beware.

But what do the Scriptures say about all of this? After all, if we want the correct answer, we must go to GOD's Holy Bible, for the Bible is the only judge that can try the subject. Therefore, let us prayerfully examine our Bibles diligently, and see whether or not our Bibles teach that our relationship must be REAL.

Let us first turn to some of the parables that our Lord Jesus gave. Observe how many of our Lord Jesus' parables are intended to put in strong contrast the TRUE BELIEVER from the sham, counterfeit, nominal, so-called disciple or professed believer.

Prayerfully consider the Lord's Parables about:

The Sower in Matthew 13:3-9:

³Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Wheat and Tares in Matthew 13:24-30:

²⁴Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' ²⁹But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

The Draw-Net in Matthew 13:47-50:

⁴⁷"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The Two Sons in Matthew 21:28-32:

²⁸"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' ²⁹He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of *his* father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of GOD before you. ³²For John came to you

in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw *it*, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

The Wedding Garment in Matthew 22:1-14:

¹And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ²"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.'" ⁵But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*. ⁷But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' ¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests. ¹¹"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹²So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴"For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

The Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13:

¹"Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. ³Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶"And at midnight a cry was *heard*: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' ⁷Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise answered, saying, '*No*, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ¹¹"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' ¹²But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

The Talents in Matthew 25:14-30:

¹⁴"For *the Kingdom of Heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. ¹⁵And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. ¹⁶Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. ¹⁷And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. ¹⁸But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. ¹⁹After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰"So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.

Enter into the joy of your lord.’²² He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’²³ His lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’²⁴ Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.’²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.’²⁶ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.’²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.’²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.’²⁹ For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.’³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The Great Supper in Luke 14:15-24:

¹⁵ Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, “Blessed *is* he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of GOD!”¹⁶ Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many,¹⁷ and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’¹⁸ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’²⁰ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’²¹ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’²² And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’²³ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled.’²⁴ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”

The Minas (Pounds) in Luke 19:11-27:

¹¹ Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of GOD would appear immediately.¹² Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.”¹³ So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Do business till I come.’¹⁴ But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We will not have this *man* to reign over us.’¹⁵ And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.¹⁶ Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’¹⁷ And he said to him, ‘Well *done*, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’¹⁸ And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’¹⁹ Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities.’²⁰ Then another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief.’²¹ For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’²² And he said to him, ‘Out of your own mouth I will judge you, *you* wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and

reaping what I did not sow. ²³Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give *it* to him who has ten minas.' ²⁵(But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.')

²⁶For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ²⁷But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me.'"

The Two Builders in Matthew 7:24-27:

²⁴"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ²⁵and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ²⁶"But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ²⁷and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Obedience (Reality) vs. Disobedience (Unreality)

All of these parables have one great point in common: they bring out in striking colors the difference between reality (obedience) and unreality (disobedience) in our relationship with GOD. They all show the uselessness and danger of any Christianity which is not real, thorough, and true.

Again, let us read a few more passages of Scripture that reveal the destination of those who claim to know GOD, but are not producing fruits of the Spirit.

"*People* will call them rejected silver, because the LORD has rejected them." Jeremiah 6:30.

"And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs." Mark 11:13

Notice that Jesus looked for fruit on the tree, but there was "nothing but leaves." When GOD looks into our hearts what kinds of fruits does He see? Does He see spiritual or carnal fruits?

The Dead Church - "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of GOD and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ²Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before GOD. ³Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." Revelation 3:1-3.

Let us look for another principle: the language of our Lord Jesus Christ about the Scribes and the Pharisees. We find that in one single chapter, the Lord Jesus denounces them as "hypocrites," and with ringing words of severity. Matthew 23:33 is one example: "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

What may we learn from these tremendously strong expressions? How is it that our gracious and merciful Savior used such cutting words about people who at any rate were better morally, and decent than the publicans and harlots?

False Profession in Christ

It is meant to teach us the exceeding abominableness of false profession and mere OUTWARD religion in GOD's sight. Open and reckless living and wilful obedience to fleshly lusts are no doubt disastrous sins, if they are not given up, and confessed.

But there seems nothing which is so DISPLEASING to Christ as hypocrisy and unreality as our relationship with GOD, professing, but not taking it seriously or living it. Do you know that there is hardly a single grace in the character of a true Christian of which you will not find a counterfeit described in the Word of GOD?

Unreal Repentance of Sin

There is not a feature in a believer's countenance of which there is not an imitation. Give me your attention and I will show you this in a few positive ways: Is there not an unreal repentance? Do you believe that everyone who claims to repent of their sins, that their repentance is genuine? We must be careful about this deception of fake repentance. There are so many far-fetched and distorted ideas of what true repentance really means. Yet the Word of GOD tells us that without genuine repentance we can never be saved, or brought into the family of GOD.

The only commandment which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to the entire world - that is to every individual, is to repent.

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17. "And saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of GOD is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:15

Heart Repentance

When we see a person doing wrong, we usually try to get him/her to change their conduct. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not go about it in this way. He was more interested in a change of mind, a change of the heart, a change of the inner disposition of life. It is a fact that we do as we think; we act in accordance with what we are, and no one can deny this fundamental truth. Yet when we seek a remedy for evil doing, we put the cart before the horse. In order that we may cease to do evil, we must cease to be evil.

We cannot act differently unless our inner beings, our inner thoughts and heart are changed. This inner change the Lord Jesus called "repentance." Proverb 23:7 says: "For as he (man) thinketh in his heart, so is he."

A lot of people think if they get rid of a few bad habits, give them up, they have repented. But suppose you should apparently succeed in breaking off one or another of these bad and unscriptural habits, you would still remain a naturally sinful man.

We Have All Sinned and Need to Repent

Repentance involves an afterthought of the past. And anyone who is honest with himself will recognize that his past is not sinless.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD." Romans 3:23. "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Psalm 14:3.

The Shedding of Christ's Blood

Now the Bible declares that in order for past sins to be cleared, blood must be shed; for "without shedding of blood is no remission." Hebrews 9:22. Your blood and mine could not atone for sin. Only the blood of a sinless and Perfect Individual could do that. Such was Jesus Christ--GOD who became Man that He might die in order for men and women to live.

To repent means to look back and to realize you are lost, that you cannot possibly save yourself, and that the only One who can save you is the One who paid the only acceptable penalty for sin, the shedding of His blood--the Lord Jesus Christ.

New Nature, New Heart

In order to please Him and enjoy a real relationship with God, you must have an entirely new nature; you must become a new man; and only Christ can give you a new heart. The message of Christ, His first and only message to sinful man, is his need of repentance. Very interestingly, the Lord Jesus did not say that man should repent of one or another of his sins and evil habits, but just simply and plainly said "repent". Christ does not preach to the thief to stop stealing, because he cannot do it. He does not preach to the adulterer to stop committing this particular sin, because she cannot. The Lord Jesus realizes one fundamental fact of life: that to get rid of the symptoms, one must erase the cause.

The sins of man, which separates us from our fellowship with GOD are the direct result of Adam's sin, and we can only rid ourselves of them by genuine repentance. The Bible shows us the way to confess our sins and receive forgiveness through our repentance. ⁹"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." 1st John 1:9-10

Christ did not come to make us quit our sins, but to enable us to acquire a new disposition, a new nature that is not inclined to sin, but rather runs away from sin.

Man's Need for Afterthought

Christ demands that every man have an afterthought about his own life. Many people think that in order to come to Christ we must cease to exercise our mental powers. Faith is taken to be the irreconcilable opposite of reason. But this is not Scriptural teaching. The first thing that the Lord Jesus Christ asks us to do is to think, to reflect, to perceive, to know, and to reason. He asks us to use that which He has given us. This commandment is addressed to man because only man has the capacity to think logically and to realize that he is not the product of mere chance; that there must be an Intelligent Creator Who has not divorced Himself from the world which He has created.

The invitation to have a personal relationship with GOD is still open: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16-17

The first step to repentance is directing our thoughts toward GOD our Creator. This is what Christ came to tell you and me. Will you think? It is only the fool who does not think, and he alone says that "there is no GOD", Psalm 4:1. If you are not a fool, you must believe there is a GOD. But is that enough? Men and women believe many things without first thinking them through. But beliefs that will stand the test of time that we can depend upon, that we can successfully defend, are those which we have thought through and tested for ourselves.

Why Born In Sin?

The recognition of your sinful and lost state does not necessarily mean that you have to understand fully how and why it all happened before you can cry out for help and salvation. A man once came to a preacher and asked, "How is it that I was born with an evil heart? Is that fair that I should inherit the sin of Adam?" The preacher replied, "That's a question which does not concern you so much as another, namely, how to get rid of your evil heart. You have an evil heart which renders you completely unfit for the Kingdom of GOD; and you must have a new heart or you cannot be saved; and the question which now most deeply concerns you is, how shall you obtain it?"

Why Born With Wicked Heart?

But the man insisted, "I wish you would tell me how I came by my wicked heart." "I shall not do that at present," replied the preacher, "for if I could do it to your entire satisfaction, it would not in the least help you toward obtaining a new heart. The great thing for which I am desirous is that you should become a new creature and be prepared for Heaven." Then he continued, "You are like a man who is drowning. Along comes his friends to save him, but he insists on being told exactly how he came to be drowning before he will consent to being rescued." The man started to think. The preacher was right.

One man who was very wicked and worldly, a real hell-raiser, came to a meeting one time out of curiosity. The message of the preacher touched him, and he came forward to speak to the minister after the service, promising to turn over a new leaf. "I'll cut out the booze and drinking." The minister said, "Good; what else?" "I guess I'll quit swearing and using bad language." "All right, that's fine, what else?" "Of course, I'm a gambler; I'll quit gambling and I'll never touch a pack of cards." "All right; what else?" said the Pastor. "I'm a bad man, and I'll live a clean life." "Good, what else?" He said, "If I quit these things, I think they cover about all. I'll quit drinking, swearing, stop gambling, and I'll quit being impure." The preacher said, "Good. Give me your hand and say you'll accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and surrender your will for His Will." The man said, "No, I won't. If I stop those bad habits, I won't need to accept Jesus Christ as my Savior, and surrender my will for His Will."

Is that really so? Is that not man's way of salvation? Those are simply resolutions. Resolutions have to do with the present and the future, but they cannot affect the past. Suppose you owed a grocery store manager \$20 and you went to him and said "I've made up my mind that I'm going to pay cash for what I get from now on." "Good; I'm glad of that resolution." The manager would say, "But you still owe me \$20; what about that?" "Oh, if I pay cash from now on that will make us square," you would respond. No! Resolutions to reform are not what the Lord Jesus meant by the command to repent.

Thinking Is Not Enough To Believe

Thinking is not enough to enable a man to believe and be saved. Part of believing is thinking, but part of thinking is not essentially believing. The primary step to repentance is for man to think about himself, his origin, his destination--to think, period! But this thinking only leads us to the conclusion that we did not make ourselves, that there must be a GOD who is The Ultimate Creator.

Man's Sin Through Lack of Forethought

Why does Christ place primary stress in His commandment to repent, not on mere thought but on afterthought? The reality is that men rejected forethought in Adam Genesis 2:16-17: "And the LORD GOD commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Genesis 3:6,17: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. ¹⁷And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;"

When GOD created Adam and Eve, He commanded them to exercise forethought - to avoid sin by obeying Him. But they deliberately disobeyed GOD in their desire to elevate themselves in knowledge and power beyond the limits prescribed by Him, choosing rather to believe Satan's lie.

One sad result of not exercising forethought is the classic case of Father Abraham. The ongoing bitter conflict between Israel (Isaac) and Arabs (Ishmael) in the Middle-East today and elsewhere are indication in the wars, killings, and suicide bombings between brothers. If Father Abraham had exercised forethought to see what is happening today, he would not have agreed to marry Hagar with the resultant consequence of a son, Ishmael. Would anyone have thought that two brothers would be killing each other today? Let us take these unsettling events as a warning to exercise forethought in our everyday Christian life.

GOD meant for man to take forethought of the consequences of sin. But having failed to do that, man now needs to exercise "afterthought." Man in his fallen state cannot avoid sin, he cannot foresee sin; but he is called upon "to preview," "to after-see," "to recollect" and "to reflect" on sin.

Children of the Devil

In commanding man to repent, Christ calls upon man, you and me to look back and think. As we look back and think, we shall see what we once were in Adam--children of GOD, meant to live in eternal fellowship with Him without sin and its consequences. As we reflect upon what we were, we are made conscious of the difference between that condition and what we are now. And we see that the greatest loss man has ever suffered is the disfigurement of GOD's image in him. From being the children of GOD we became the children of the devil. That is why the Lord Jesus told the unbelieving people of His day the truth about their real father:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in

him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own for he is a liar, and the father of it." John 8:44

What a calamity we have brought upon ourselves by voluntarily exchanging the blessed relationship with GOD for the devil as our father! No wonder we are in such a mess!

Man's Self Desire to Overcome Sin

But to think back and to discover that we are not what we were meant to be, and therefore are unhappy does not help in any way. For example: here is someone who has fallen from a great precipice (i.e. fallen from a cliff). He realizes he is in danger, he is not where he ought to be, but what good does that do him? Let us say we found him hanging on to a little shrub he has grabbed onto as he fell over the cliff, dangling far below. There are only two alternatives for a man in such a predicament: one is to try to help himself out of his lost condition; the other choice is to cry out for help from someone else. Most people follow their natural inclinations by trying to do the first. Man thinks that he can conquer self or overcome anything in power. He is so accustomed to human efforts that he always thinks of what he can do on his own.

The most urgent thing for him and for you is not the full understanding of why and how you came to be what you are, but to rush to the Savior, to enable you become what you can be now--a child of GOD--you must surrender all to the Lord, and accept and believe in Christ. This is what it means to repent, to realize your lost condition and to rush to the shelter of salvation, to go to Christ.

Man's Way of Salvation

We have the instinct of self-preservation. When we realize that we are lost, we endeavor to find a way out. This is what is advocated by most preachers and most religions. This is a help-yourself, save-yourself style of religion. But it concerns itself only with the present and future. We may determine to do differently now and hereafter. But we must not forget that to "repent" means to recollect our failures before GOD. We cannot act as though we have merely the present and the future to reckon with, for we carryover a debt from the past.

Unreal Repentance

Is there not an unreal repentance? Beyond doubt there is. Saul and Ahab and Herod and Judas Iscariot had many feelings of sorrow about sin. But they never really repented unto salvation.

Unreal Faith - Fake Belief

Is there such a thing in Christianity today as an unreal faith? Beyond doubt there is. It is written of Simon Magus at Samaria, that he "believed," and yet his heart was not right in the sight of GOD.

¹³Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. ¹⁴Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of GOD, they sent unto them Peter and John, ¹⁵who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. ¹⁶(For as yet, He had fallen upon none of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them

money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." ²⁰But Peter said unto him, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of GOD may be purchased with money! ²¹Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of GOD." Acts 8:13-21 (21st Century King James Bible)

It is even written of the devils that they "believe and tremble." James 2:19.

False Obedience is Not a Relationship

Is there not an unreal holiness among professed Christians today? Beyond doubt there is. This reminds us of Lot's wife. She was married to a Godly man Lot, and heard everything he said; she hosted angels, and listened to all they said. But when reality set in to test her obedience to the angels and her husband, and leave Sodom, we know where the passion was in her heart—her treasures. Sadly, she died in disobedience by looking back, and became a pillar of salt as a warning to generations.

"But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Genesis 19:26

Joash, king of Judah, became to all appearance very holy and good, so long as Jehoiada the priest lived. But as soon as the priest died, the religion of Joash died at the same time.

²"And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. ¹⁵But Johoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; a hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. ¹⁶And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward GOD, and toward his house. ¹⁷Now after the death of Johoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. ¹⁸And they left the house of the Lord GOD of their fathers, and served groves and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. ¹⁹Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. ²⁰And the Spirit of GOD came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith GOD, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaketh the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. ²¹And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord. ²²Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son." 2nd Chronicles 24:2,15-22

Judas Iscariot's outward life was as correct as that of any of the other eleven up to the time that he betrayed his Master, there was nothing suspicious about him. Yet in reality he was "a thief" and a traitor.

Personal relationship with God is still available to everyone until Christ returns for His Church. In order for you and me to regain this personal relationship with God, we have to repent of our old ways, surrender our life to the Lord Jesus Christ by obeying Him from our heart.

Quoting Scripture Is Not Enough Relationship

In closing, let me say this, if you would desire to know whether your relationship with GOD is real, try it by the place where it occupies in your inner heart.

1. It is not enough that your personal relationship with GOD is in your head. You may know the Truth (Bible from cover to cover), agree to the Truth, and believe the Truth, and yet be dangerously disobedient to Christ and sinful in GOD's sight because you have refused to surrender your will to GOD.
2. It is not enough that your personal relationship with GOD is on your LIPS. You may be able to sing hymnals, quote many passages of Scripture, and yet be unacceptable in GOD's judgment because you are holding on to an unrepentant sin.
3. It is not enough that your personal relationship with GOD is in your feelings. You may say "Hallelujah" and "Amen" to public prayer in church, and yet have nothing more than an outward fake religion, because you are deliberately disobeying God's Words.
4. You may weep under preaching one day, and be lifted to the third heaven by joyous excitement another day, and yet be dead to GOD because you have choked the seed or closed your heart to Christ's commandment about some sinful, worldly habits.
5. It is not enough that you are a pastor, a leader or "special" member; it is not enough that you have been going to church or listening to sermons for the past 50 years. You may be religious all your life, and yet may not have grown spiritually or learnt anything about the benefits of a personal relationship with God because you have deliberately refused to change your attitude to sin.

Genuine, Real and True Personal or Spiritual Relationship with GOD

1. Your relationship with GOD, if it is REAL, and given by the Holy Ghost, must be in your HEART.
2. Your relationship with GOD, if it is GENUINE, and given by the Holy Ghost, must occupy the stronghold.
3. Your relationship with GOD, if it is AUTHENTIC, and given by the Holy Ghost, must hold the reins (steering wheel).
4. Your relationship with GOD, if it is UNADULTERATED, and given by the Holy Ghost, must control your affection; it must lead your will.
5. Your relationship with GOD, if it is SINCERE, and given by the Holy Ghost, must direct your tastes.
6. Your relationship with GOD, if it is INDISPUTABLE, and given by the Holy Ghost, must influence your choices and decisions.
7. Your TRUE relationship with GOD, if it is SPIRIT-LED, must fill the deepest and innermost seat in your soul.

Are these your personal or spiritual relationships with GOD? If not, you may well doubt whether you are ready for Heaven and Eternal Life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Otherwise the judgment is obvious: "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of GOD." Acts 8:21

May GOD revive us today, and may we see the importance of ensuring that our personal or spiritual relationship with GOD is from our heart before the Lord Jesus Christ returns unexpectedly!

"The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of GOD, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with GOD successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

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