

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • TV185A

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Philippians 3:7-10

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

We are turning for our Scripture reading today to the book of **Philippians**. I am going to read two or three verses from the **3rd chapter of Philippians**.

Here is the subject; I am speaking on: **“THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION,”** the substance and heart of true religion.

I realize that it is a big subject but I believe that using the Word of God, if the Spirit of God gives me some wisdom and gives you some interest and understanding, that when we get through today, (at least in our heads), we will understand what is the heart and substance of true religion.

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now, let's read **Philippians the 3rd chapter**, beginning with **verse 8**: Of course, you know that the apostle Paul is speaking here and says: "*yea doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung (rubbish) that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ the Lord, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection (his resurrected life).*"

Now; there are three statements in there that I believe contain the substance and heart of true religion. Paul says, "*I count everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*" Then he says, "*That I may win Christ and be found in him.*" Then he says, "*That I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection.*"

Now, what is the heart, the essence and substance, of true religion?

My friends, religion is not hard to find; religion is everywhere. Where you find men you find religion of some sort. In fact, if you will go back to man's beginning, the first murder, the first quarrel, as far as we know, the first shedding of human blood was a religious battle.

It was a religious quarrel. It took place between two brothers. There was Abel who approached God by grace, free grace, through the blood sacrifice, and Cain, who chose to approach God on the merits of his own efforts and works.

These two systems would not blend; they could not live together. They fought and Cain killed his brother Abel. The first murder on this earth was over religion.

Then, you find religion when God confused and confounded man's language (there was a time when everybody spoke the same language). God confused and confounded men's language and gave them several languages.

Why? They were in the midst of a religious effort to build a tower to heaven. They wanted to come to God their own way, by their own efforts. They were going to try to build a tower to heaven.

Then, there was Israel in the wilderness. They left the worship of God but they didn't leave religion. They refused the leadership of God but not religion. When they turned from the worship of the true God they built them a golden calf to bow to.

So, wherever you have men, even those who depart from the worship of the living God, they have to have something to worship. They have to have some sort of refuge. They have to have some sort of hiding place.

Then, the men who delivered Jesus Christ into the hands of the Romans to be crucified were not drunks. They were not blasphemers. They were not harlots and they were not men and women of the streets; they were religious people.

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • HENRY T. MAHAN

They were men and women of the synagogue, men and women of the temple, and men and women of theology. They were religious leaders. Religion is everywhere.

Even to the pagan philosophers of Corinth; the apostle Paul stood on Mars Hill and declared these words; *“ye men of Athens.”* No more of a pagan city existed; a city of philosophy, a city of orators, a city of much worldly wisdom and learning. *“Ye men of Athens; I perceive that in all things that you are most religious.”*

So, religion is not hard to find; religion is everywhere. True religion is hard to find for true religion is not found in temples and cathedrals. True religion is not found in material objects of pagan worship and idolatry.

True religion is not found even in books, creeds, and catechisms. True religion is not found in confessions and statements of faith. True religion is not found in altars, rituals, and ceremonies. True religion is not found in Holy Days and Sabbaths, rules and laws.

True religion is found in the heart; it is heart worship. God is Spirit and *“they that worship God worship him in spirit and truth.”*

True religion is found in the heart of a regenerated believer; that is where it is found; it is always heart worship. It is always a heart work; it is always a heart relationship which can do without any material object except the Word of God.

“My son, the Lord says; give me your heart, give me your heart.” God looks not on the *“outward countenance.”* This is what God said to Samuel when he would anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king of Israel, a man that was not of God’s choosing.

He said, *“Look not on his outward countenance, Samuel; do not be taken up with the beauty and strength of this man. God looks not on the outward countenance, God looks on the heart.”*

He said through David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel; *“the Lord is nigh unto them of a broken heart. The Lord saveth such as be of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”*

You see, true religion is not found in temples, it is not found in books and it is not found in ceremonies and Sabbaths. It is not found in Holy Days. True religion is not found in the bending of the knee or even the bowing of the neck.

True religion is not found in the crossing of the hands; true religion is found in the heart. It is a heart experience and it is a heart relationship.

Let me give you several things here that I think will be helpful, they are at least to me.

First of all: True religion consists of a right knowledge of God.

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now, when our Lord spoke to the woman at the well, she said; *“our fathers worship in this mountain. You Jews say that Jerusalem is the place to worship.”* Our Lord replied; *“You worship and so do your fathers (ancestors) worship, but you worship you know not what.”*

We know what we worship. The apostle Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed.”* So, true worship, true religion, first of all, consists of a right knowledge of the living God.

God is Holy. You cannot worship a God you do not know; God is holy. Isaiah said, *“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.”*

God is not only holy, but God is sovereign. They said, *“David; where is your God?”* David said, *“Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Whatsoever the Lord pleased that did he in heaven, earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.”*

Our God is sovereign, almighty, and omnipotent. Our God is righteous. *“God will be no means clear the guilty. The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die.”* Our God is righteous; *“Shall not the judge of the earth do right?”* He is righteous; He is just and He is exact. God is righteous and holy.

Our God is love; *“He is plenteous in mercy. He is rich unto all that call upon him. He delights to show mercy. God is love.”* Yes, He is omnipotent; He is omniscient, and He is omnipresent.

True religion begins with a right knowledge of the living God. That is what our Lord said about eternal life. Read **John 17: 2 and 3**; *“Eternal life is to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”* It is to know God.

Secondly: This may be helpful; true religion consists not only of a right knowledge of God, but true religion consists of a right knowledge of us. A right knowledge of God leads to a right knowledge of us.

For example, I mentioned Isaiah’s experience. He said, *“I saw the Lord high and lifted up. His train filled the temple. The cherubim’s and seraphim’s cried; holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.”*

Then he replied; *“Then said I; woe is me; I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”* That is what Isaiah realized when he saw the Lord. He came to a right knowledge of God, His power, His holiness, His greatness, His majesty and his righteousness.

When he did, he saw himself. God is love and man is hate. God is light and man is in darkness. God is truth and man is error. God is truth and man is a liar. Everything God is, we are the opposite. We are to the other extreme.

David said, *“When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the stars, the moon, the sun, the things that thou hast made, what is man that thou art mindful of him?”* That is my reaction. When

I consider God's power and holiness and greatness; my next question is; *"what is man that thou art mindful of him?"*

Job said, *"I have heard of the Lord by the hearing of the ear and now mine eyes seeth thee, wherefore, I hate myself."* Yes sir, man's dignity fades into nothingness in the presence of God's majesty. Man's pride fades into nothing in the presence of God's glory.

What are we? *"What do we have that we didn't receive?"* Man's righteousness and merit; do we dare talk of our merit? Do we dare talk of our righteousness? Do we dare talk about our holiness when we stand in the presence of God who is holy? God is holy.

Then we talk about a person that is a "holy man," *"there is none good; there is none that seeketh after God. There is none that understandeth; all have sinned and come short of God's glory. Man at his best state is altogether vanity. Our righteousnesses are filthy rags. We all do fade as the leaf."*

Dare we tag the title, "holy" on any man and "godly" on any man? God is holy. *"All flesh is grass and the glory of man as the flower of the field. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth for the spirit of God bloweth upon it."*

"Cry," God said to the prophet, "cry." And he said, *"What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass."* That is what you cry; you cry, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts."* Then, with the other breath, you cry; *"Ungodly, unclean, and guilty is fallen man."* This is true religion, I'm not talking about religion; I am talking about true religion.

Thirdly: True religion arises from a sense, an understanding of the great, mighty, and merciful things that God has done for fallen sinners by His grace through Christ Jesus.

David said; *"Who am I and what is my house that you should show mercy unto me?"* Now, you think about that when you consider the greatness of God, His majesty and holiness, His independence, and His sovereignty.

When you consider the filthiness, guiltiness, and corruption of man by nature and by will and by choice and by practice, who am I and what is my house that God should condescend to even look my way, much less to reach my way, must less to give me strength to lay hold on him.

Ephesians 2: verses 2 through 4 says; *"In times past, we all walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air."* That is Satan; he was our leader. We had our conversation, citizenship and behavior in the *"lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."*

That's our condition; that is what we were. That is what we are by nature. But, the next two words, *"But God."* We didn't move His way, He moved our way. We were dead, depraved, and helpless. We didn't want God.

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • HENRY T. MAHAN

We loved our sin. We lived our hog waller. We loved our darkness. *“But God (but God!), who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith, he loved us.”* We didn’t love him; He loved us. *“Herein is love, not that we loved God; he loved us, for his great love, wherewith, he loved us even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace are ye saved.”*

John 3:16 says; *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.”* In **Galatians 4: 4 and 5**, it says; *“In the fullness of time God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were born under the law.”*

Yes, true religion consists of a right knowledge of who God is, His holiness, His majesty, His righteousness, and His justice. It consists of what man is by nature and by practice. Then, true religion consists of the great thing God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord, by his grace.

Fourthly: True religion produces something; it produces. It is not lifeless; it produces something; it produces a well-grounded hope, based on the Word of God, of our own interest in His mercy.

Men who have true religion not only have a knowledge of who God is and what they are and what Christ has done for them by his grace and by his blood and death, but they have a well-grounded hope and assurance based on the Word of God of their own interest in that Gospel and in that grace.

John said, *“We know that we have passed from death unto life.”* Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed.”* Job said, *“I know that my redeemer liveth.”* David said, *“The Lord is my shepherd.”*

Peter said, *“For as much as you know that you are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ as of a lamb without spot or blemish.”*

Paul said, *“He was made sin for us.”* He knew no sin. *“He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* Isaiah wrote; *“He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed.”*

We know, we have confidence and assurance. John wrote in **1 John 5**; *“this is the record; (this is God’s Word; this is true), that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in his son: And he that hath the son of God hath life. He that hath not the son of God shall not see life,”* hath not life, hath not life.

Fifthly: True religion produces. It produces and consists of knowledge. It produces and consists of awareness. It produces a principle of sincere love to God.

That’s exactly right: True religion is not a side-line. True religion is not a hobby. True religion is not a vocation; it is an experience; it is a state of being; it is a condition of life that continues. It produces a principle of sincere love to God, not pretense, and not just a profession.

I kind of dislike the term “profession of faith.” I don’t know how but it just smacks of something that a fellow shows off that really doesn’t exist at all. Christ said, “*Peter, do you love me?*”

Peter said, “*Lord; you know that I love you.*” Christ said, “*Feed my sheep.*” Again he said, “*Peter, do you love me?*” He said, “*Lord; you know that I love you; then feed my lambs. Peter, do you love me? Lord; you know all things; you know that I love you; feed my sheep.*”

I will tell you this, my friend; true love produces service to Christ, and worship of Christ. True love leads men to serve Christ. True love motivates and constrains us to walk with Christ. True love casteth out fear; it produces, it always produces.

In fact; Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13**; now you listen to this and this stresses the importance of a sincere love for Christ, a sincere love for Christ. It’s not a love for self but a love for Christ, a dedication, a consecration to Christ, an obsession with Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 13; listen to it: He has been talking in the previous **chapter 12** about the gifts of the Spirit. A lot of folks today are making a whole lot of that now (about the gift of tongues, the gift of discernment, the gift of healing, the gift of faith, the gift of knowledge, a word of knowledge). But in **1 Corinthians 13**, right after he gets through talking about this, Paul says; “*though I speak with tongues of men and of angels, and have not love; I am become as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.*”

There is nothing emptier than a sounding brass. There is nothing more nerve-wracking and miserable than a tinkling cymbal and that is all we are. He said, “*Though we speak with these tongues, though we have these gifts; we are nothing; we are nothing but a sounding brass.*”

“*Though I have the gift of prophecy and though I have the gift of faith and the knowledge and I understand all mysteries, and have not love; I am nothing,*” Mr. Nothing, Mr. Nothing. That is what he is saying.

“*Though I bestow my goods to feed the poor, (though I tithe my income, though I give my designated amount), though I even give my body to be burned (as a martyr for the principles of law and religion of which I stand) and have not love; it profiteth me a big nothing.*”

Now you think about that! So, this true religion is a heart experience, it is a heart relationship with the living God. It’s not just pretense or profession, it is a heart condition. It produces a sincere love for the living God. It is sincere.

Sixthly: True religion makes the goodness and grace of God to me, to be the motive and model of my behavior and attitude toward others.

Have you ever seen anything like it in our day, the crookedness of religious people, the materialistic attitude of religious people, the bad spirit, the bigotry, and the prejudice?

THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10 • HENRY T. MAHAN

They call the south the “Bible Belt” and you won’t meet anymore bigotry, prejudice, or anything like that, anywhere, anymore, than in what they call the “Bible Belt.” There is something wrong with this.

True religion produces, and it produces godliness and it produces grace. It makes the goodness and grace of God to be my motive and model and the spirit of my behavior toward others.

Listen to these verses: *“He that loveth not, knoweth not God. No man can hate his brother and love God;”* that is impossible. *“If any man say that I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar and the truth is not in him.”*

We are taught even to pray, *“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us.”* I am speaking on this next Sunday; *“be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”*

The motive and model of my behavior and my conduct and spirit toward other people depends upon my understanding of God’s mercy to me.

Do I want to learn how to love? I will tell you where to learn how to love; go to Calvary; *“God so loved that he gave.”* Do you want to know how to give? Go to Calvary; *“Father forgive them; they know not what they do.”*

Do you want to learn how to be merciful? Go to Calvary; that is where mercy flowed from his very veins, from his pierced hands and feet.

Last of all: The goal of true religion, where I started this message, the very heart and substance of true religion is to *“win Christ and be found in him, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”*

Paul said it; *“I count all things as loss, (all of my religious heritage, all of my religious accomplishments, all of my religious laws, duties, ceremonies, and traditions. All of my religious theology and orthodoxy; I count it but loss and rubbish and as nothing”* compared to that priceless privilege of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, he is saying; *“I will give anything to know Christ. I will give up anything to know Christ. I will forfeit anything to know Christ. I will despise anything to know Christ. And being brought to a vital, saving, union, with Him; that is my goal and aim and object.”*

That is the very heart and essence and substance of true religion. Paul says *“I renounce all earthly heritage; I renounce all worldly honor. I renounce all worldly possessions. I renounce all personal pride, merit, profession, and pretended piety, just to know Christ, and be found in him, just to win Christ.”*

This is the substance and heart of true religion. Is this my desire; I ask you today; is this your desire? If it is, our Lord promises; *“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness;*

they shall be filled. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and these things will all be added to you."

I want to give you this in closing, some questions that I read from the writings of an old, faithful, minister of the Gospel, by the name of John Flavel; he asked these questions:

He was preaching along this line with a desire to know Christ, a desire to know Christ. He asked these six or seven questions; I can give them to you in the brief time that we have left. He asked this question:

First of all: Are my desires of Christ genuine and sincere, are they genuine and sincere?

He is the bread of life and I must have him. He is the water of life and I must have him. He is the door through which I must enter. He is the rock in a weary land. Is my desire for Christ genuine and sincere? Do I know that He is all things and I covet him?

Secondly: Are my desires for Christ honoring to him? Will they bring glory to him?

You know; the hypocrite wants a divided Christ. He will take him as Saviour but not Lord. He will take His grace but not his government. He will take his love but not His righteousness, His benefits, but not His person.

Thirdly: Does my desire for Christ lead me to seek him?

We may say that we desire Christ, what are we doing to find him? What are we doing in our seeking? Are we seeking Him in his Word, in his worship, in prayer among the people?

Are my desires for Christ of a permanent nature or just a sudden fit of emotions, maybe because of some religious atmosphere that comes and goes by saying that sometimes I want Christ and sometimes I don't? The Psalmist said; "*Thy praise shall continually be in my mouth.*"

Fourthly: Will my desire for Christ find no satisfaction until I am found in him?

David said; "*I will be satisfied when I wake with thy likeness.*" That's the goal and the objective of my very being.

Last of all: Do my desires for Christ arise from a sense of a deep need?

Now, hunger makes bread necessary. Thirst makes water necessary. Sin makes Christ, not an option, but an essential necessity; I must have Christ; "*Oh that I may win Christ and be found in him!*"