

Are You Religious?

Religious activity is one thing that can keep us from hearing God.

Some people say, "God never talks to me." But I believe it's more likely that they don't listen, are not aware of the ways God speaks or have become desensitized to God's voice. Religious activity is one thing that can keep us from hearing God.

In the early days of my walk with the Lord I was very enthusiastic and eager to serve Him, so I signed up for everything that seemed even remotely interesting to me. One result was that I quickly discovered what I was not anointed to do.

Because of my busy life, I didn't take time to tune in to God's voice. As a result, I often spent frustrating time on works of the flesh. "Works of the flesh" are things we do without God's power flowing through us. They are difficult, they drain us, and they produce no joy or fulfillment. They are often good things but not God things.

People can literally burn out on religious activity as they struggle to serve God under the law. Religious people frequently follow formulas and do good works to earn God's favor but don't have a relationship with Him. Jesus did not die so we could have religion—He died so we could be one with God through Him, so we could have a deep personal relationship with the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus became very upset with the religious people of His day. He said: "'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, pretenders

(hypocrites)! For you are like tombs that have been whitewashed, which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and everything impure. Just so, you also outwardly seem to people to be just and upright but inside you are full of pretense and lawlessness and iniquity'" (Matt. 23:27-28, The Amplified Bible).

The scribes and Pharisees were the most religious people of their day, yet they were not pleasing to God. They followed all the rules and made laws for others to follow, but they did not attend to more important matters—such as helping people—out of right motives. God has always been more interested in the condition of people's hearts than the works of their hands.

The Bible says we must be born again (see John 3:1-8)—it doesn't say we must be religious. People can go to church for years and do religious things all their lives without ever knowing Jesus as Lord. It is frightening to realize that there are probably thousands of people sitting in churches every week who won't go to heaven.

As I often say, "Sitting in a church won't make a person a Christian any more than sitting in a garage will make him a car." We must let Jesus come into our lives and sit on the throne of our hearts to rule and reign over every step we take.

Jesus said: "'Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light'" (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV).

Religious rules and regulations can be harsh, hard and pressing. You can easily become overburdened if you don't do everything you believe is expected of you. But here Jesus is saying: "My system is not that way. It isn't harsh, hard and pressing. It is comfortable, gracious and pleasant."

If someone asks us, "What religion are you?" we should talk about our personal relationship with Jesus instead of what church we attend. I like to answer that question by saying: "Thank you for asking. I don't have any religion, but I do have Jesus."

We need to start asking people: "Do you know Jesus? Is He your friend? Do you have a personal relationship with Him?"

Before you become busy doing good works, take time to seek God about what He is leading you to do, rather than just doing things in an effort to please Him. Jesus leads us to a place that is comfortable, gracious and pleasant. It is easy to serve God—if we learn to hear from Him before we struggle to do things He never asked us to do.