

Identifying Religious Attitudes That Put Out Your Fire

I remember years ago when I was young in the ministry and a woman came to me for counseling. She had recently accepted Christ as her Savior, and while she was talking, it became clear to me that she was living with her boyfriend.

I was just waiting for her to finish talking so I could tell her that was wrong, but God stopped me. He spoke very clearly to my heart and said, “No, you’re not going to do that. I will tell her at the right time, when she’s ready to hear it.”

This was a powerful lesson for me because it helped me understand that people have to be grounded in God long enough, and love Him enough, that they are willing to give up the things that are wrong for them. And a religious attitude that is judgmental and critical toward others can be worse than the issue we feel we need to “correct.”

First Samuel 16:7 says, “For the Lord sees not as man sees. For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” The truth is God cares most about what’s going on in my heart—why I do what I do—more than anything else. And the best thing I can do is keep my focus on Him and make sure my heart is right with Him.

Understanding Your Inner Life and Your Outer Life

We have two lives—an inner life and an outer life. The inner life is what we think and feel and the attitude we choose to have. It’s our soul, which is our mind, will and emotions. Our outer life is what we see on the outside—the way we look, what we have and what we do. Both are important, but God is more concerned with our inner life and why we do what we do. He is

looking at our hearts.

As believers in Christ, we belong to God; His Spirit lives in us and works in us to make us more like Jesus. When the changes in our heart show in the way we live, we're living from the inside out. That's when others can see the righteousness, peace and joy that we have in Christ operating in our lives.

Romans 14:17 says, "For the kingdom of God does not mean eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." God wants us to enjoy our everyday lives, even the ordinary, sometimes mundane daily routines that we can become tired of doing. And a religious, judgmental attitude—like the one I had toward the woman who came to me for counseling—only steals our joy and peace.

Going Through the Process

We have to learn how to live this way, and the first thing God wants to change in us is the way we think. He wants us to learn to think the way He thinks.

Romans 12:2 says we will know "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" when we've been "transformed by the renewing of your mind." Transformation takes time and is a process that happens gradually. God is still working in my life to transform me into His image, but I know I've made progress because I recognize more quickly now when I have "stinkin' thinkin'."

I can feel it inside ... something isn't right and I've lost my peace and joy. That's when I need to stop and think about what I'm thinking about and what I'm talking about. I've gotten to the point where I was in the middle of a conversation and God brought conviction to my heart because I was saying something I shouldn't. So I stopped myself, apologized and said, "God just corrected me. I shouldn't be talking about this."

The way we think and speak determines our reality. If we want to live for God—with righteousness, peace and joy—we need to adjust our attitude when it's not good. I know there are times when we want to say, "Well, I can't help the way I feel." But we *can* help the way we think and talk, and we can choose our attitude.

Feelings are fickle and most people live by the way they feel too much of the time. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves: I can't always help how I feel, but I don't have to act according to my feelings. God created us with a free will, and we can choose to do what's right as we trust Him for the grace and strength to do it. We may not be able to choose how we feel all the time, but we can decide not to let our feelings determine how we will live our lives.

This is the key to overcoming the things that steal our joy in everyday life, such as a critical, judgmental attitude. I want to encourage you to make a determined decision to live for God and make it your No. 1 priority to have a right heart with Him. Then, even when your circumstances aren't joyful and peaceful, you can have joy and peace because they are in your heart. When you have life in Christ, it's so wonderful to live from the inside out!

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