



“Religious Activity or Regenerate Heart”
Judges 2:6-10

Idea: God desires a regenerate heart not religious activity.

Intro: How much of God’s blessings do you want in your life? I bet your answer is similar to mine... “As much as I can get.” How much of His power do you want in your life? Again... “All of it.” How much of His goodness do you want? Come on... “Pour it out on me until there’s no more room.” We want God’s provision. We want His goodness and generosity to flow upon and through our lives. What about this question: How much of God do you want in your life?

I believe Wilbur Rees rightly answered this question for most people.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.

I don’t want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not

transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. No, no, not the flesh and blood one...He will keep me from my appointment with the hair dresser and make me late for the cocktail party. He will soil my linen and break my strand of matched pearls. I can't put up with pundits from Persia or sweaty shepherds trampling over my nylon carpet with their muddy feet. My name isn't Mary, you know!

I want no living, breathing Christ – but one I can keep in its crib with a rubber band. That plastic one will do just fine.

How much of God do you want in your life?

If we answered this question honestly, we would be embarrassed. The truth is, much of the time, we really don't want God. We want what God can provide. We are very much like the Israelites during the time of the Judges. Israel wanted God to give them control of the land, provide rain for their crops, and bless them with good health. They wanted what His hand could provide. But they weren't concerned with knowing God and having Him in their lives, as their quick departure from Him indicates.

Read Judges 2:6-10.

Inquiry: These verses are paralleled in Joshua 24:28-31. Last week I stated that chapters 1 and 2 are two sides of one coin, whereby we see both a report and an interpretation of what has happened. Therefore, following the angel's message to Israel in 2:1-5, the historical account moves back to Joshua.

Before Joshua died he summoned the elders, heads, judges, and officers of Israel (Joshua 23:2). He reminded them of all that the Lord had done for them (23:3). He told them that the Lord would continue to fulfill His promise to give them the Promise Land (23:5). He called them to remain faithful to God and His

law (23:6-13). He also warned them of the dangers of straying away from the Lord and chasing after the gods of the nations (23:15-16).

Then Joshua called all of Israel to Shechem and reiterated what he had told the elders. He called the people to faithfully follow God (24:14) by putting away their idols. And he called the people to choose that day which god they would serve, the idols of their fathers, the idols of the land, or the Lord God of Israel (24:15). The people chose to follow God, and they renewed their covenant with Him (24:16-27).

Joshua dismissed the people, and they returned to their tribal inheritances. They continued the conquest of the land (Judges 2:6). The author informs the reader that Israel served the Lord during the days of Joshua and his contemporaries. This first generation of those who entered the Promise Land served the Lord and took possession of the land given to them.

Following Joshua's death and the death of his contemporaries, a second generation arose who did not know God or His work for Israel. They forgot God. Likewise, the third and following generations forgot and walked away more and more from God. They forgot about how gracious He had been in calling them to Himself and bringing them out of Egypt. Thus, they forgot about God and their obligation to serve Him. When people lose sight of God's grace, they lose sight of God and the sense of any obligation to Him.

Verse 10 always troubles me. I can't fathom or grasp how the children of a faithful generation could walk away from the faith of their fathers so easily. This was not a slow fade in their faith. It wasn't a slow erosion of their doctrinal beliefs. This happened in one generation. Unfortunately, this departure from the faith is not isolated to the annals of biblical history. It happens all too often today in our churches. Grandpa and grandma, dad and mom love the Lord and serve the Lord faithfully, but somehow and in some way their faith in the Lord

Jesus fails to get passed on to the subsequent generation. Why is that? How does that happen?

Before we tackle the “how,” there is a truth we must know. God has no grandchildren. Search the Bible from cover to cover, and you will never find any mention of God having grandchildren. He only has children. You see every generation must enter into its own living, spiritual experience; it cannot continue in the spiritual strength of its past heroes. Every individual must come into his or her own living, personal relationship with God through the Son, Jesus Christ.

So how did this departure from God happen? I believe there are at least two possible reasons the second generation walked away from God:

- 1) The first generation failed to properly teach the gospel to their children.
There is no way for us to know exactly how they did or did not teach the Word of God to their children, so we want to be careful in our speculations. We do know that God had instructed parents to teach the Word to the children (Deut 11:18-21).

We do know that the Word was taught to the children because after each time of apostasy and the resulting servitude, the people cried out to God. Then after God’s deliverance they returned to proper worship for a period of time.

- 2) The first generation failed to properly model the gospel to their children.
Perhaps in some way the first generation failed to demonstrate the priority of walking with the Lord and how He transforms a person’s life. It could be that the children did not see a stark difference in the lives of their parents. When they observed the lives of their parents, they didn’t look much different than the pagans around them. Sure, there was outward religious activity, but for them it did not seem to make any

internal difference in a person's life. Thus, it didn't seem to make any eternal difference in them either. As a result, the second generation did not prize God or put their faith in Him.

Most likely it was a combination of both failing to teach and failing to model the gospel that led to the second generation walking away from God. Those children grew up under their parents' faith, but it never became their faith. They had religious activity, but it did not equate a regenerate heart.

What is the difference between religious activity and a regenerate heart?

Read John 3:1-6, 9, 14.

Nicodemus was a high-ranking Pharisee; as such, he was religiously active. And he came to Jesus one night seeking to know more of His message. The Lord pointed out to Nicodemus that his religious activity was not enough to bring him salvation. God, as a way to both teach and model the need for forgiveness of sin, instituted the sacrificial system. It foreshadowed what Christ would accomplish upon the cross. Jesus told Nicodemus that his religious activity was insufficient; he needed to be born again by the Spirit of God.

Religious activity – “A person's trust in religious practices and behavior with the hopes that it will please and appease God.”

The person who is just religiously active says:

- I attend church regularly.
- I am active in my small group.
- I walked the aisle at my church and prayed the sinner's prayer.
- I have been baptized.
- I serve in the nursery.
- I teach a class.
- I love to go on mission trips.

- I love Christian music.
- I am a deacon.
- I serve on a committee.
- I love the Bible.

All of these statements are good; there're just not good enough. They focus on what the individual is doing for the Lord.

A regenerate heart – “A person’s trust in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of his or her sin. The work of Jesus on the cross satisfied the wrath of God the Father against the individual’s sin. Thus, he became spiritually alive to God.”

A person who has a regenerate heart says:

- I understand that my sin has separated me from God.
- I understand that religious action can never be good enough to overcome my sin.
- I have placed my faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work upon the cross.
- My sin has been forgiven, and I stand clean before God because of the blood of Jesus that has been applied to my life.
- I have a relationship with God.
- I serve the Lord and others because I have a relationship with God.
- I have been baptized as a testimony of the change that Jesus has brought into my life.
- I am a member of this church because I have a relationship with Jesus.

These statements focus on what Jesus has done for the individual. Service then flows out of the spiritual work that Jesus has done in a person’s heart.

God always calls us to a relationship with Him and never to religious activity directed toward Him. I want to share with you four realities derived from the failure of the first generation to pass their faith onto the second generation.

1. A regenerate heart comes from a divine encounter with Jesus rather than a religious experience at church.

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. – Matt 11:28

Jesus did not say, “When you come to the end of yourself and realize you cannot fill the void in your life, then go to church.” No, He never directs us to merely become religious. Instead, Jesus always calls us to Himself. He always calls us to find life in Him.

12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. – 1 John 5:12

I’m not trying to devalue a person’s experience at church. As Christians we are called to be active members of the local church. And as we worship and serve in the church, we will have “spiritual experiences.” They, however, are not life transforming. You can have a thousand “warm-fuzzy” feelings from worship music, but they will never change your sinful heart. Only Jesus can do that.

2. Religious activity is devoid of any life transforming power and deceptively leads a person to believe he or she is right with God.

“Atheism is an empty cup crying out to be filled, while most religion is an empty cup appearing to be filled.”
– *Lord Foulgrin’s Letters*, pg. 201

Humanity was created to worship God. Sin destroyed the purity of that worship, but it did not remove the desire for it. Sin severed our relationship with the God who created us. We are all born spiritually dead and cut off from God (Eph 2:1), yet we still are worshipers. Therefore, we create religious actions that are supposed

to make us more pleasing to God. The problem is that we are still dead and cut off from God.

There are at least two reasons why religious activity has no power to transform a person's life.

- It has no power because the person is dead. How can a dead man do anything to bring Himself back to life? He is dead and cut off from God...powerless to change his situation.
- It has no power because the person is totally depraved. Sin has corrupted every aspect of man. There is no righteousness or anything that is pleasing to God in anyone (Rom 3:10-12). Therefore, no amount of religious activity, no matter how sincere it is, could ever be enough to make up for the sin and rebellion in the human heart.

Still, we are easily deceived into thinking that our religious activity means that God is pleased with us.

3. Religious activity, because it lacks any transforming power, is often set aside and forgotten.

Children many times are more discerning than their parents. They spot the hypocrisy in their parents' belief system. The children understand that there's nothing life transforming about their parents' religion; therefore, they set it aside.

When your understanding of church is more in the line of a social club, don't be surprised when your children no longer prioritize church in their lives and families.

When your understanding of worship is an event to be attended rather than the value you ascribe to God, don't be surprised when your children no longer value worship in their lives and family.

When your relationship with God is characterized by your outward religious activity rather than a vibrant personal walk with Jesus, don't be surprised when your children decide that the Christian faith is not enough for them.

I realize that many of you setting here today have children who are not walking with God and are not in church. In no way am I casting stones at you. There decision to walk away from Christianity could have nothing to do with you because you did everything possible to point them to Jesus. At the same time, the fact that they have walked away from the church should cause you to reexamine your life and faith. Perhaps, you are the reason they don't value the gospel and the need for Jesus and His church.

4. A regenerate heart seeks to know God rather than being satisfied to know about God.

Walter Martin in his book *Screwtape Writes Again*, a sequel to C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, provides some insight into how we can become satisfied with knowing about God rather than knowing God.

Screwtape says to Wormwood, "If you can obscure these facts, there's a good chance that he will embrace what hell considers to be the perfect synonym for true religion – churchianity. In this marvelous imitation of the Enemy's church everything looks and sounds right and good, but the Enemy's Spirit is conspicuously absent. You must arrange to make him a devout Methodist or Anglican or Baptist or Presbyterian or what have you. Make him that. He must come to accept the church as a type of religious social club where people congregate. Nothing more. In a word, Wormwood, help him to become more religious, but for hell's sake, not more Christian!"

I am confident this was the spiritual problem of this second generation of Israelites. They were satisfied to know about God, but they had no desire to know God.

Conclusion: How much of God do you want to buy? Do you want just enough to give the appearance of godliness, or do you want all of Him?

Are you satisfied with simply knowing of God? Are you satisfied with merely being involved in religious activity? Or are you only satisfied by knowing and pursuing God? It is so easy for us to become satisfied with the shadow rather than the substance.

If you have been satisfied with the shadow and appearance of God, if you have been satisfied with being merely religiously active, then there is a good chance that the greatest need in your life today is salvation. Has your life ever been changed by the Lord Jesus? Today, you don't need more religious activity. You need a regenerate heart.

If your children and grandchildren have walked away from your faith, what are you doing about it? Have you properly taught and modeled the gospel to them? Are you praying for their salvation? Are you actively engaging them with the gospel? Do you need to repent of the sin of focusing on religious activity rather than a regenerate heart?

God desires a regenerate heart not religious activity.