

One of the most effective ploys ever perpetrated by him who is the "father of all liars," Satan himself, is the notion that being religious is tantamount to being acceptable to God. I say effective, because so many have embraced this view and rest in the "assurance" it provides.

Because of the popularity of this thinking one would suppose that surely the Bible, if not explicitly, then most certainly implicitly, sets forth this concept again and again. Nothing could be further from the truth! [In fact, as we shall see, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that men can be devoutly religious and at the same time be lost.

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus stated: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Such statements emphasize the need for each to examine his religion in the light of God's word. In view of this let us notice some examples of people who may be religious and at the same time lost.

Those Who Serve The Wrong God

In Acts 17, when Paul was in the city of Athens, he acknowledged that the people there were "very religious" (vs. 22). However, we learn the nature of their religion. When it is stated that "the city was given over to idols" (vs. 16) and that Jehovah was to them "the unknown God" (vs. 23). The apostle endeavored to correct their ignorance by declaring to them the "God who made the world and everything in it." He later observed that in the past "these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (vs. 30,31).

In Matthew 4:10 when Jesus was responding to one of the temptations of Satan, he said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." The Athenians were clearly in violation of this principle of acceptable religion and thus stood condemned. Surely all who respect the Bible as the word of God will admit that no matter how religious one might be, if he worships and serves the wrong God he is thereby lost.

Those Who Don't Believe In Christ

On the other hand, one may be religious and even believe in the right God, but be lost by rejecting Jesus Christ. I know that it is "politically incorrect" (or should I say "religiously incorrect" as men view correctness) to suggest that our Jewish or Muslim or other such friends stand condemned before God, but no truth comes through clearer in the New Testament than the necessity of accepting Christ if one would be saved.

It was to a Jewish audience that Jesus declared that "if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:2-1). In John 14:6 He clearly affirmed. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Consequently, some years later, when the apostle Paul penned the Roman letter, he wrote that "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom.10:1-4)

When Jesus was speaking to his apostles in the upper room, he said that "he who receives whomever I send receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:20). Now if the one who receives or accepts Christ receives or accepts God who sent him, then what about the one who rejects Christ? Christ spoke to that in John 12:48 when he said. "He who rejects Me, and does not

receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, was given "that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life ." (John 3:16) Hence Peter boldly proclaims, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Although he was devout, God-fearing, benevolent and prayerful, Cornelius needed salvation, and was told to send for Peter, "who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved." (Acts 11:14) The Ethiopian eunuch had traveled a thousand miles to worship God in a way he believed to be right, but still needed to hear "Jesus" preached that he might obey his commands." (Acts 8:26-39) Even though Saul of Tarsus "lived in all good conscience before God" he described his condition before he obeyed Christ as "chief of sinners." (1 Tim. 1:8,9)

No matter how religious one may be, therefore, apart from "the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (7 Tim. 2:5), one is tragically lost!

Those Who Don't Obey The Gospel

There is a close connection between this point of our study and the preceding one. In the foregoing discussion we especially had in mind those who have not come to a belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God and Savior of the world. Now we wish to address the condition of those who, for whatever reasons, have not acted upon their faith in the Christ by obeying the gospel, i.e., submitting to the conditions of salvation set forth in the New Testament.

That one might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and yet not be saved is clearly taught in the word of God. During the life of Christ we are informed that "even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise

of God." (John 12:42,43) Surely none would contend that such had a right standing with God, even though they believed in His Son. Faith without obedience has never rendered anyone acceptable to God, whether it be in this age or any other. (Heb.11) James wrote that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26) Paul affirmed that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith which works by love." (Gal. 5:6--emp. mine)

The primary thought we wish to convey is that those who have not obeyed the gospel are still in their sins and their eternal prospects are hopeless. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 we are told that when the Lord returns at the last day he will "in flaming fire take vengeance on those--who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes in that Day." (emp. mine)

This is true whether the failure to obey after coming to faith in Christ is due an unwillingness to do so or whether it is the result of being deceived as to what the Lord requires for salvation. The tragic situation in the religious world of our day, among those who profess faith in Christ, is that most have been deceived by a "perverted gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9), at least as far as the divine conditions of salvation are concerned.

As an example of this, I have a little booklet entitled "Steps to Peace With God," which is published by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Under the heading of "How to receive Christ," after stating that one should believe Jesus died and rose again, the following instruction is found: "Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit. (Receive Him as I Lord and Savior.)" Then there follows a specific prayer to be prayed, with the assurance that when one has prayed this prayer he has been saved!

My friend, consider this. Never in the New Testament was a sinner outside of Christ, an alien I who had never been redeemed by the blood of Christ, instructed to pray for his

salvation. This instruction is not of God, but of man! It is a human substitute for a divine requirement. Jesus warned of "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9) When Peter, an inspired apostle, was instructing believers as to what they should do to be saved, he said. "Repent. and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When Ananias, a messenger sent by the Lord to Saul of Tarsus, instructed him as to his salvation. he said, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 2:16)

Isn't it strange, in the light of the preceding verses that the aforementioned booklet,-purporting to give "steps to peace with God." makes no mention whatever of the ordinance of baptism? And yet such teaching is consumed by millions who are thereby deceived. Whom will you believe, Peter and Ananias, men inspired and sent of God, or Bill) Graham and other preachers who ignore the plain teaching of the gospel?

Read again Matthew 7:21-23 and ask yourself if Jesus isn't describing religious people who have been deceived by the teachings of men. Study for yourself and "do the will of the Father in heaven," for simply being religious is not enough. You must be religiously right!

West Allen Church of Christ
1414 lf. Exchange Pkwy.
Allen, TX 75013

Visitors are always welcome!

Lost RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

By
Foy Vinson

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. " (Proverbs 14:12)

The Bible Has The Answer.'