

# Freedom from Religion

SPECIAL MESSAGE

THINK ABOUT IT.

The investment of time it will take to read these pages could get you your small group homework checkmark for this week; or it could press your heart toward a greater, more vibrant relationship with the love of your life, your Lord Jesus Christ. You are free to choose which it is. Either way, you must be honest.

**WE WILL FACE IT AT THE START:** *Christianity that makes little or no difference in the way you live or think or act is not a true faith in Christ at all.* Doing spiritual things gets you no where if your motivation is to just look the part. Two kinds of people fill our churches: the ones who pretend to love God, and the ones who really do. Ask yourself: *which am I?*

The pretenders look so “religious.” They do and say the right things but inside, their faith hasn’t changed anything about them. They go through the motions, some sincerely hoping the real thing will kick in but not too bothered as long as no one knows they’re faking.

But that’s not the case if you love and follow Christ. You don’t want to be “religious.” You don’t want to see yourself in any way differently than God sees you. You don’t want to be blind to your true condition. You know and believe that only God’s Spirit, using the mirror of His Word will reflect your genuine motivation.

It’s time for a self-examination. Make Psalm 139 your prayer:

SEARCH ME, O GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART! TRY ME AND KNOW MY THOUGHTS! AND SEE IF THERE BE ANY GRIEVOUS WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING!

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Read Luke 18:9-14 and consider why did Jesus tell this ‘story with a purpose’? To whom does verse 9 say He told this parable? “Those who \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_, that they were \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ others.

Ask yourself: *Is this story for me?* What is God’s heart for me in this issue?

FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION:

Why do so many people in the world examine the lives of “religious people” and walk away saying they don’t want anything to do with Jesus? When someone is a sincere lover and follower of Christ, what is the attraction?

“What I dream about for our church more than anything else is a growing quality of discipleship--that we would have in our hearts an increasing love and passion for Jesus Christ. That we would be moving away from “form without function” religious observance into a:

growing  
personal  
dynamic  
non-repetitive  
heart-felt  
genuine  
sincere

relationship with Jesus Christ.

**That’s what I dream about.**

If God gives us that, everything else will fall into place. I believe that if we are increasingly on fire for God, and in love with Jesus Christ and digging deeply into His Word to feed ourselves and doing the things that real disciples do vs. the religious nonsense that so grieves the Lord, as we are increasingly this kind of people, all the things that we dream about doing for God together will come so easily for us. I dream about being the kind of church God wants us to be.” --Pastor James

**MEMORY VERSE: LUKE 18:14**

**EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, BUT THE ONE WHO HUMBLLES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED."**

## SPECIAL MESSAGE : FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

SEARCH ME, O GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART! TRY ME AND KNOW MY  
THOUGHTS! AND SEE IF THERE BE ANY GRIEVOUS WAY IN ME,  
AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING!

1. What have I thought is required of me to be considered righteous? What habits or practices? How have I measured up compared to others? My own expectations? How hard have I tried? What level of satisfaction have I felt?
2. According to Romans 3:10, have I spent my life trying to be something that God has said no one could ever achieve on their own? (What word describes that goal?)
3. How do I compare myself to others (Christians or otherwise) so that I come out on top based on my "Christian" standards?
4. How do I pray or serve or act in such a way that others would be impressed with how "spiritual" I am? Did I right now think of someone else who has a problem in this area?
5. Do I practice spiritual disciplines (prayer, fellowship, Bible study, small group, service, etc.) because it's what is required of a Christian to be considered "good and faithful"?
6. Have I "outgrown" a passion to do what God asks in exchange for doing it for the checkmark? In what areas?
7. When was the last time God brought me to my knees with the weight of the unfinished business in my relationship with Him?
8. Do I feel a sense of incompleteness when I think about how God would like to grow me up in Christ?
9. Do I struggle to forgive people who hurt my feelings or don't give me the respect I believe is due me?
10. Am I proud of the progress I have achieved in the Christian life? Or am I bothered by that question? Why?

Search me, O God

Notice these questions are not rated on a scale, as if we were being graded on a curve. As if, *a little of this would be OK, just don't cross the middle mark.*

Truth is... a religious person doesn't think that much about God. Their faith is more horizontal. Did I follow the rules? How do I compare to everyone else?

In what areas of your life have you tried and failed to do the Christian thing without God?

MAKE A LIST HERE OF THE AREAS OF YOUR LIFE THAT THE SPIRIT IS BRINGING TO YOUR HEART THAT HE WANTS TO FOCUS ON BEGINNING TODAY:



# Freedom through Grace

SPECIAL MESSAGE

REFLECT ON THESE FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS FROM PASTOR JAMES' MESSAGE THIS WEEKEND: I'M FREE FROM RELIGION WHEN . . .

A. . . WHEN I REFUSE TO BIND OTHERS WITH MAN-MADE RULES. (Review #1-2 on pg. 1)

In Philippians 3:7-10, read about the change that happened in Paul's life when he changed from being a religious person to being found in Christ.

Where had he thought righteousness came from? (Phil 3:4-6) \_\_\_\_\_

Where did he place his confidence now? \_\_\_\_\_

What about our relationship with Christ makes us righteous? See also Hebrews 9:14.

REFLECT: Do I compare myself to the world in order to feel like I'm better? *Look at how they act . . . talk...dress. I'm righteous and they're not.*

"IT'S NOT WRONG TO HAVE A SET OF PERSONAL STANDARDS...IN FACT, IT'S GOOD! THE PROBLEM IS WHEN YOU MEASURE OTHER PEOPLE BY HOW THEY LIVE UP TO YOUR STANDARDS. DON'T LET ANYONE IMPOSE A SYSTEM OF RULES ON YOU, AS THOUGH CHRISTIANITY WERE RULES. YES, GOD HAS PRESCRIBED A WAY FOR US TO LIVE, AND YES THERE IS CERTAINLY RIGHT AND WRONG. BUT TRUE SPIRITUALITY AND LIVING RIGHTEOUSLY, IN HIS STRENGTH AND POWER, OUT OF THE OVERFLOW OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM—THAT'S THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. LET'S CHALLENGE, STRENGTHEN, AND ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER TO DO EXACTLY WHAT GOD'S WORD EXPLICITLY SAYS IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF GRACE." Pastor James

*Lord—is this word for me?* Have I been sincerely working hard at being as righteous as I could but using the wrong standards? Have I measuring my righteousness by my own stick? Have I missed the whole point?

B. . . WHEN I REJECT EXTERNALS AS A SPIRITUAL YARDSTICK. (Questions #3-4)

REFLECT: Do I care who hears my prayer? Do I love the sound of my own voice, saying the things that sound so godly yet I'm really not that concerned about whether God is listening?

Do I want others to notice how hard I serve . . . or how much I financially give to God?

Do I measure others by a spiritual yardstick?

Do I look at people and ignore what God cares about most? Do I judge them on what is worthless and devalue what God say is priceless? (See also 2 Peter 3:3-4.)

*Lord, do I say in my heart, "Thank you that I'm not like them...?"*

Paul, one of the most devout, "religious men" says this after coming to Christ:

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."

Philippians 3:7-10

WHAT BOTHERS YOU MORE:

Arriving at church with your hair out of place, or arriving at church with your heart out of place?

WHAT BOTHERS YOU MORE:

Five days without a quiet time, or someone seeing your kids misbehave?

WHAT BOTHERS YOU MORE:

Your need for more money, or God's assessment of what you're doing with the money that you have?

WHAT BOTHERS YOU MOST OF ALL?

What is your greatest achievement? Of what are you most proud? Is it something you've done, or someone you've become?

*God, help me to reject externals as a spiritual yardstick.*

. . . Continued from page 3

**C. . . . WHEN I REVIEW MY WALK FOR FORM WITHOUT FUNCTION. (#5-6)**

The Pharisee in Luke 14:18 had being religious down to a science. He let everyone know that He fasted (more than he had to), and he tithed (more than he had to). It was his claim to spiritual fame. But sadly, it got him no where with God because his heart was far from it. It was the form of obedience, without God's intention being accomplished.

Systematically go over the spiritual details of your life, and look for these same blind spots. Ask yourself: *Have I followed into a "form without function" kind of life?*

**GOING TO WORSHIP SERVICE.**

**Purpose:** To pour out a river of heart-felt adoration to Jesus Christ in the way I sing, in the way I give, in how I listen and respond to God's Word.

**Form without function:** I show up. I stand and sit when I'm supposed to. My mouth says the right words. My hand even fills out the message notes. But nothing has changed when I walk out the doors.

What do Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:18, and Mark 7:6 all say about this empty routine.

**GOING TO SMALL GROUP.**

**Purpose:** To apply God's Word to my life and to minister to and pray for and with others.

It's an occasion to be intentional about the manner of my life in regard to these things, and to pray with people about their needs and for them to pray with me about my real needs, and to hold each other accountable in how am I doing in my walk with God.

**Form without function:** I get there most weeks. Most of the time I do most of my homework—except when I have to "reflect." I talk when I should. Share as little as I can unless I really have a personal issue with something. I may take long seasons off when I get weary of people being so hypocritical.

**PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY & PRAYER.**

**Purpose:** To feed my spirit everyday on what matters for eternity and to intentionally be with God.

**Form without function:** Check the schedule, what am I supposed to read today? Read it—think a little spiritual thought and say amen. Done.

**DISCUSS: HELP! WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I FEEL MYSELF FALLING INTO A "FORM WITHOUT FUNCTION" LIFESTYLE?**

**D. . . . WHEN I RETURN TO THE BASICS OF EXAMINATION AND CONFESSION. (#7-8)**

Could I be blind to the true condition of my heart? Do I really think I am genuinely spiritual, when in reality I could be really far off from God?

Am I heavy-hearted about what I have not yet become in Christ?

Resist the temptation to believe in microwave spirituality and shortcuts to Christ-likeness.

**READ THE QUOTE IN THE RIGHT COLUMN.** How does this speak to our topic of being "religious" vs. a sincere follower of Christ? Encourage each other in your progress of becoming like Christ.

**E. . . . WHEN I RENEW MY PERSONAL PURSUIT OF HUMILITY. (#9-10)**

Though He can and will do it if necessary, God asks us to humble ourselves. Here are some practical ways:

1. Embrace slights and overlook misunderstanding. Humble yourself and let them go. What do Proverbs 10:12 and 1 Peter 4:8 say is the motivation?
2. Hide your accomplishments. Look for ways to keep others from knowing about your trophies. What does Psalm 27:2 tell you to do?
3. Be the first to seek reconciliation. Say "I'm sorry" first. Describe the importance of urgency in Romans 14:19.

"FOR EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLE, BUT THE ONE WHO HUMBLER HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED." LUKE 14:14

Look for the delight found in the hidden disciplines of walking with Christ.

The Christian life is not based on high-level performance but on quiet faithfulness, not on impressive works but on deep relationships. God rescued us from our own little lists of do's and don'ts. He gave us what we did not deserve and could not earn. He freed us with grace.

Psalm 149:4 "For the Lord takes pleasure in his people." *Do I?*

Our sense of sin is in direct proportion to our nearness to God.

"To preach the gospel to yourself means that you continually face up to your own sinfulness and then flee to Jesus through faith in His shed blood and righteous life. It means that you appropriate, again by faith, the fact that Jesus fully satisfied the law of God, that He is your propitiation, and God's holy wrath is no longer directed toward you.... You can be sure of one thing, though: When you set yourself to seriously pursue holiness, you will begin to realize what an awful sinner you are. And if you are not firmly rooted in the gospel and have not learned to preach it to yourself every day, you will soon become discouraged and will slack off in your pursuit of holiness. —Jerry Bridges, *The Disciplines of Grace*, page 58