

GIMME RELIGION

The title of my sermon this morning is: "Gimme Religion."

And I want you to know that I'm preaching this sermon with a certain degree of apprehension.

- a. My apprehension is not because I have doubts about the validity of what I intend to say.
- b. But I am concerned that I will not be able to say what I need to say in the very best way.

1. In an effort to avoid any misunderstanding, I want to begin by acknowledging and emphasizing the fact that there is great reward in serving God.

Moses knew this.

- a. Heb 11:26 – "Moses ... esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

David also knew this.

- a. Psa 23:1, 6 – "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want ... 6 Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life ..."

Jesus also spoke about receiving blessings from God.

- a. Matt 5:12 – "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven."
- b. Lk 18:28-30 – "Then Peter said, 'See, we have left all and followed You.' 29 So He said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life.'"
- c. Lk 6:35 -- "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great ..."

The apostles also encouraged Christians with the promise of blessings from God through serving Christ.

- a. Col 3:23, 24 – "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ."
- b. Heb 10:35 – "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."
- c. 1Tim 6:6 – "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

The Bible even tells us that, in order to please God, we must believe that He blesses those who seek Him.

- a. Heb 11:6 – "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

So, it is clear in the Bible that (1) there are benefits and blessings we receive from serving God, and (2) it is not wrong to desire those blessings from God.

2. But there is, in our world today, an erroneous concept of God, and of the blessings God gives, that I must warn you about.

I'm talking about a concept of our benevolent God that has fostered a wrong attitude toward God and toward religion.

- a. The erroneous concept and wrong attitude I'm talking about is sometimes seen even in members of the church.
- b. I'm talking about a concept of God, and religion, that might be called "gimme religion."

What I mean by "gimme religion" is an attitude toward God that basically says, "Give me this ... give me that," "Do this for me ... do that for me" – and rarely thinks in terms of doing anything for God and for other people.

- a. It's a concept and an attitude that fosters a form of religion that is wrong at its very core.
- b. True religion is GOD-centered.
- c. But the concept and attitude I'm talking about produces a religion that is altogether SELF-centered.

3. An extreme form of this "gimme religion" is sometimes seen in those who are called "the unchurched."

The kind of person I'm talking about is the person who believes in God, but he sees God only in terms of what God can do for him.

- a. His thoughts of God never rise higher than thinking of God merely as a Dispenser of favors.

Several analogies come to mind that pretty well describe the concept this person has of God.

- a. Analogy #1 – the vending machine analogy.
 - ▶ He may never say it outright, but he sees God as a heavenly vending machine.
 - ▶ When he's not wanting something, he just ignores God.
 - ▶ But when he wants a snack, he thinks a quarter's worth of prayer is supposed to activate God to drop down whatever he wants.
- b. Analogy #2 – the vacuum cleaner analogy.
- c. He treats God like a vacuum cleaner -- he keeps it out of sight in a closet until he needs it to clean up a mess, and then he puts it back in the closet.

A person with this kind of religion seldom, if ever, thinks about serving God; and he never thinks about making sacrifices for God.

Most of the people of ancient Israel, for most of their history, practiced this kind of “gimme religion.”

- a. Moses had taught them: “For what great nation is there that has God so near it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” (Deut 4:7)
 - ▶ But, at that same time, Moses had warned them:
 - ∞ “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you” (v1).
 - ∞ “Only take heed to yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren ...” (v9).
 - ▶ It's clear that Moses was teaching them that God was always near, and would hear their prayers, and would bless them with good things if they kept Him in their hearts and served Him faithfully.
- b. But they perverted what Moses said in Deut 4:7, and for most of Israel's history they thought of God only in times of trouble, when they were desperate for help.
- c. In Jer 2:32, God said: “My people have forgotten Me days without number.”

There are many people in the world today who give no thought to God until they want something from Him, or until they need His help.

- a. They think of God only in terms of what He can do for them or give them.

4. One of the problems with “gimme religion” is the way it inevitably leads to disappointment and disillusionment.

The disappointment occurs when God doesn't do for him, or give to him, in keeping with his expectations – and that inevitably happens.

Since he thinks God is supposed to be constantly at his beck and call (even though he ignores God most of the time), he feels cheated when something goes wrong in his life.

- a. He wonders: “Why didn't God keep this from happening?”
- b. He thinks God fell down on His job.
 - ▶ God was supposed to be doing things for him and making his life so comfortable that he could live day by day without even thinking about God.

Then when God doesn't fit into his concept of God, instead of reconsidering his concept of God, he begins to doubt God's goodness -- he may even begin to doubt His existence.

- a. In fact, the reason some people don't believe in God today is because they had this kind of “gimme religion” and they were disappointed when God didn't give them what they thought they were supposed to get from Him.
 - ▶ This is what people are saying when they say, “I used to believe in God, but God didn't keep bad stuff from happening to me -- so I decided God doesn't exist.”

It never occurs to people like this that their concept of God may be one-sided ... or shallow ... or just plain perverted.

They never seem to consider the possibility that God may have reasons for allowing the problems, and setbacks, and suffering to come into someone's life.

- a. Of course, the Bible teaches that's one reason God sometimes let's bad things happen to good people: adversity can work to our benefit, spiritually.
 - ▶ • Example: Paul's thorn in the flesh.
 - ∞ 2Cor 12:7-10 – “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the

revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- b. The problem is: People with this kind of "gimme religion" usually aren't interested in what the Bible says.
 - ▶ They have already developed a concept of what they want God to be, and they aren't interested in hearing what God says about Himself, or what He says about anything.

And it never occurs to them that, by their day-after-day indifference toward God, they have given up all claims to God's special care.

All they ever think of, when they think of God at all, is what God is supposed to do for them -- no matter how they live their lives.

- a. It's like the old song: "If they didn't have a "gimme religion" they'd have no religion at all."

5. But before we congratulate ourselves because we are church people, and we are not like that, let me tell you how church people can have a "gimme religion."

This kind of "gimme religion" isn't exactly like the irreligious kind I've been talking about.

- a. The irreligious kind of "Gimme religion" I've been talking about primarily involves a certain attitude toward God.
- b. But the "gimme religion" that's practiced by some church people primarily involves a certain attitude toward the church (the congregation).

What I'm talking about is the way church members can slip into selfishly thinking only in terms of what they "get" from the church – with very little thought about how they need to be "giving" to the church.

- a. And when I talk about "giving to the church" I'm not particularly talking about money.

I'm talking about the person who expects other members to do things for him, but he seldom thinks of what he can do for others.

- a. If he's in the hospital, he feels slighted if nobody comes to visit him – but he never visits other members in the hospital.
- b. If he has a personal problem, he feels deprived if others don't rally to help him – but he never even tries to help others with their problems.
- c. If he is discouraged, he wants and expects others to give him encouragement – but he never tries to encourage others.
- d. If the sermon, or the material studied in the Bible class, doesn't address what he thinks his "needs" are, he feels he's wasted his time.
 - ▶ And you'll probably hear him say: "I didn't get anything out of it"
 - ▶ But he never thinks of the fact that the sermon that was preached, or the Bible class discussion, was just what was needed for the Jones family and the Brown family.

The kind of person I'm talking about is a "taker" – and rarely a "giver."

But please understand: I'm not saying a person like this is a bad person, or an evil person.

- a. The kind of person I'm talking about may be a good person, basically.
- b. But it's just the fact that he has become so self-absorbed that he sees others as servants to him, but he rarely sees himself as a servant to others.

What that amounts to is a form of "Gimme religion."

Another kind of religion that's not at all uncommon among church people is "token religion."

- a. There is some involvement in the work and worship of the church, but it's token involvement.
- b. The person who practices this kind of religion isn't really committed to doing the work that needs to be done for the Lord and for the church.
 - ▶ He may be good at talking religion, but he can't be depended on to do much religion.
- c. If he does anything for the church, it will be only something that is convenient for him to do.
 - ▶ To get anything more out of him requires considerable prodding and coaxing, and pricking his conscience – and if you succeed in getting him to do it, his heart won't be in it and it will be obvious.

- d. But that's another sermon and I'll say more about that another time.

6. As I bring this sermon to a close, I want to remind you that I haven't forgotten that God intends true religion to be a blessing to those who have it.

That's why I took the time at the beginning of the sermon to stress the fact that all real Christians "get" blessings from God, both now and in eternity.

- a. Furthermore: God intends for Christians to enjoy blessings from other Christians.

But God doesn't intend for us to see Him merely as Someone who gives us blessings, but as our Creator, our Lord, our Savior, and our Judge – and we are to love Him and serve Him.

Furthermore, God doesn't intend for us to see other Christians merely as "being there for us" but He wants us to see other Christians as brothers and sisters, and He wants us to show our love in every practical way.

Conclusion.

"Gimme religion" and "token religion" are both opposite to true religion.

- a. **Jas 1:27** tells us what true religion is: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
- b. Jesus imprinted the nature of true religion on the hearts of His apostles by His own example on the night of the last supper – **Jn 13:1-15**.
- ▶ **Matt 22:36-39** -- "'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"
 - ▶ **1Jn 3:18** – "but love must be in deed and in truth, (NIV: "with actions, and in truth,")
- c. The Scriptures everywhere make a connection between rendering service to God and other people, and receiving blessings from God.
- ▶ **Matt 6:3, 4** -- "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."
 - ▶ **Matt 10:41** -- "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."
 - ▶ **Matt 10:42** -- "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."
 - ▶ **Matt 16:27** -- "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."
 - ▶ **Lk 6:35** – "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High."
 - ▶ **1Cor 3:8** -- "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor."
 - ▶ **Col 3:23** -- "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."
 - ▶ **2Jn 1:8** -- "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward."
 - ▶ **Rev 22:12** -- "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

I challenge you to look deeply into your own heart at your attitude toward God and toward the church.

If your religion really is a "gimme religion," I urge you to stop thinking only in terms of yourself.

- a. We need to gratefully think of the ways God blesses us, but we need also to think of the ways in which we can serve God.
- b. We ought to be able to count on other Christians "being there for us," but we need also to make sure we're "being there for others".