

1.

# Empty Religion

It is safe to say every man, woman, and child possesses a desire to worship something or someone. Even those who say there is no God worship something. Some worship themselves.

There are many religions in the world. It is proper that we should ask how many are right. Are there many gods? The Bible straightly informs us there is only one true God. That true God has revealed Himself in the Bible. He has used words we can understand. Even so, it is possible to have only **EMPTY RELIGION**. That is not new. **Isaiah 1:10-20** shows that hundreds of years before Christ men needed to be warned.

*10. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.*

*11. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.*

*12. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

*13. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.*

14. *Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*

15. *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

16. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;*

17. *Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

18. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

19. *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:*

20. *But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

Isaiah, the spokesman for God, lays out several penetrating **CONSIDERATIONS** to help us avoid practicing only empty religion.

**CONSIDER RELIGIOUS FORMS WITHOUT PURPOSE** is the first challenge to meaningful religion. It is quite true; in the Bible God required sacrifices. He asked for the best. The offerer was not permitted to bring the maimed or the diseased animal as a part of the sacrifices. They were to be the choicest of the flocks and herds.

The order was very carefully set forth. They were to bring the sacrifice to the priest and he was to offer it upon the altar of burnt sacrifice. The blood was very important. It was the giving of a life to maintain life. God required sacrifices.

God required presence. There were certain yearly feasts according to the law of Moses. At those yearly feasts every man was to present himself before God in Jerusalem in the temple, the place of sacrifice.

There were also monthly feasts, new moons, and sabbaths. There were High Holy Days that God had prescribed. But in Isaiah's text the Lord says, "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts."

Why would God make such a statement in the days of Isaiah when in the days of Moses He required sacrifices and required their presence in the Holy City? This is the reason: they went through their religious forms without any purpose. Yes, it is possible to carry out the finest detail which has been prescribed by God, only for it to be empty. It makes no difference how elaborate the religious forms may be, if they are without purpose they're just empty. Ponder, my friend: religious forms without purpose is a practice of empty religion.

**CONSIDER LONG PRAYERS WITHOUT PURITY** as another challenge to acceptable religion. God desired prayer. King David once said, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" Psalm 55:17.

God desires His people to pray. It is an open door to the throne of God's grace. God has opened that door and we can come to Him in prayer. Right now I'm reminded of the prophet Daniel when he was in the court of the king of Babylon. He knelt down three times a day and prayed and God heard his prayers. Yes, God desires prayer. People who really know God pray regularly.

God also desires purity. Who shall come into the presence of God? "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24); he is the one who comes before God. But sin closes the eyes of God. The Prophet Isaiah reporting for God said that He would hide His eyes from them. "When you spread forth your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you."

Sin closes the ears of God so He cannot hear. The prophet said, "When you make many prayers, I will not hear." Why? Because their hands were full of blood. God urges them to

change their conduct, to cease from doing evil, to do good, to seek judgment, and treat the oppressed justly. It makes a difference.

Empty religion is prayer without purity. God desires both. Those who come to God must know the cleansing of God. It makes no difference how long those prayers may be, if they are prayed without purity, God cannot hear. It is simply practicing empty religion.

**CONSIDER PERSONAL EFFORT WITHOUT PARDON** as a related challenge to meaningful religion. God offers grace. Praise God! Sin separates from God. Sin requires an act of God. That act is the cleansing of God.

God requires repentance. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

God calls for repentance, and obedience brings blessing, great blessing. But disobedience results in destruction. Personal effort can be very diligently engaged in. But that does not bring pardon. It does not bring peace. God is able to bring peace when we follow His counsel and do as He instructs us here in Isaiah.

Empty religion is effort without pardon. It makes no difference how sincerely you are going about it your own way, it is simply empty religion.

So, my friend, empty religion is the result of futile activity. Any religious forms must have heart purpose in them to be more than empty. Any prayers must have a life of purity behind them to be heard and answered by God. Any effort must turn to God for pardon if there is to be any peace. Make certain your religion is not empty and futile. God longs to be real to you. Acknowledge that you need Him.

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*This is a sample of “Isaiah Speaks to Us” from [heraldsofhope.org](http://heraldsofhope.org).*