

Religion ... or Relationship?

by Jim Heitzman

Webster defines “relationship” as (1) connection; being related; (2) connection by blood or marriage; kinship. In light of the definition of this word and my own religious experience, I came to realize there is a great difference between having a religion and having a relationship.

I was born and raised in a Catholic environment. I attended Catholic elementary school and went to church services during the week and every Sunday. But, as I was growing up, I knew there was something missing in my life. I think all of us look for our purpose and the true meaning to life. We try to determine who we are, where we came from, why we are here and where we are going. We were created for a purpose and until we are doing what we were created for, there will always be something missing in our lives; no harmony, no peace and no contentment.

Upon reaching my teenage years, I stopped attending church because it wasn't satisfying. It never satisfied my inner longings. I had a religion, but I didn't have a relationship.

After high school, I joined the Marine Corps for four years with a tour of duty in Vietnam. After being discharged, I returned home to Louisville and got a job bartending in night clubs. I worked as a bartender off and on for approximately three years. Then I joined the Louisville Fire Department and I am at this present time still employed there.

I could go into great detail about the many different things I tried in my life to satisfy my inner longings, but I don't like to dwell on my past as much as I do the present. All I would like to say is this, the many things I tried satisfied the outer man but never the inner man. I felt empty. I kept searching for peace and the true meaning of life, but it always seemed to be just out of reach.

I will never forget the day I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. It was a day when I was working at the fire house. A fellow fire fighter witnessed to me about the saving, life changing power of Jesus Christ, and that day, behind the fire house, among the garbage cans and dirty mops, I knelt down and gave my heart to Jesus.

In all my church training, no one ever shared the simple Gospel with me. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” We are all sinners. Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...”, I deserve to die because I am a sinner. But thanks be to God that He loved me so much that He allowed His only begotten Son to pay the penalty for my sin and die in my place. If I would believe He died for me and receive Him as my Saviour, He would give me eternal life. Romans 10:9 says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” The word “believe” means to trust in, adhere to, rely upon. I'm sure you've heard the saying, “Don't put all your eggs in one basket.” In salvation, it is just the opposite. We are putting all our eggs (trust) in one basket and that basket is Jesus. I have said, “That if God does not take me to Heaven because

of what Jesus has done for me at Calvary, then I'm not going." I am not counting on church membership, baptism, prayer, good works or anything else to save me; only on the precious saving blood of Jesus which was shed for my forgiveness.

John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This verse says, "For God so loved the world (that's you and me) that He gave His only begotten Son." God is the greatest giver. When someone gives us something, does that make it ours? No, we must do something first before it becomes ours. We must accept it. John again writes in John 1:11-13, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as receive Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." By receiving Jesus as our Saviour, we are born again; born from above, born of God and we become His child. 1 John 3:1-2 says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (or children) of God: Beloved, now are we the sons (or children) of God ..." Did you notice what these verses said? It's not "I hope" to be a son of God or "I think" I'm a son of God, but right now "I am" a son of God. This is the assurance that we have when we receive Jesus as our Saviour. We become God's children and He becomes our Father. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:6, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." It is like a child when he first utters the word, da-da. It humbles me to think that the Creator of the universe places me in a position as His son and I can call Him Daddy, and all this happened automatically – the moment I placed my trust in Jesus.

I know this to be true because it happened to me that day behind the fire house. I said, "Lord God, maybe this is what I have been looking for all my life," and it was! I want to tell you Christ truly does satisfy. Christ is the answer. It doesn't make any difference what the question may be, Christ is the answer.

We were all created for a purpose. Jesus has given me a purpose in life and that is to fellowship with God. Until we are fellowshiping with Him, everything in life is out of place. We must give Jesus top priority in our lives and everything else falls into place. Jesus has given me direction. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 2:14, "...The fool walketh in darkness..." Jesus says in John 11:10, "If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." Jesus also says in John 12:35, "...He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." I liken my conversion experience to a man wandering in a dark cave. He wanders in one direction, bumps into a wall, then turns and travels in another direction. He walks a short distance; stumbles, gets up, turns and goes another way. Then he comes around a corner and sees a ray of light. He walks toward the light until he is out of the darkness and into the light. I came out of the darkness and into the light of Christ. Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:9 that we "have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light." Now I can see clearly where I am going. I have direction and purpose. Jesus is not only going to take me to Heaven when I die, He has changed the quality of the life that I am now living.

On the night I was saved, I remember lying in bed at the fire house praying. All the other nights I never prayed, but this night was different because I was different. II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (or creation); old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." As I was praying, my mind went back to Calvary. I saw a Man hanging

on a cross. His brow was dripping with sweat mingled with blood from the crown of thorns. Blood ran down His arms and fell from His elbows. The Scriptures state in Isaiah 52:14, “He was marred more than any man.” I looked into His face and said, “Why Lord Jesus?” He looked back at me and said “because I love you, Jim Heitzman.” That night, tears filled my eyes and I wept when I thought of what Jesus had done for me. It was hard for me to believe that someone could love me that much. In John 15:13, we read, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Among all of your friends, Jesus is the One who died for you. So now, I serve Jesus, not because I have to, but because I want to. I can say with the Apostle Paul, the love of Christ constrains me, urges me, impels me to serve. I want to say thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for me and giving me eternal life.

The Apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians 13:5, to “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you...?” If you have a religion and you are still empty, with no inner peace, it is time to examine yourself and see if you have a relationship. It may be that all you have is a dead religion with no relationship.

So in closing, I would like to say, Jesus gave His life for you. So if you haven’t given your life to Him, do it today. Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time. Do not wait until tomorrow, it may be eternally too late.

Remember that salvation is:

- (1) By Grace: Grace means the unearned (you can’t do anything for it), unmerited (you don’t deserve it) favor of God (Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- (2) Man is a sinner and because we are sinners, we can’t save ourselves (Romans 3:10, 11 and 23).
- (3) God is love. Yes, God loves us and seeing that we could not save ourselves, He provided the way through His Son, Jesus (I John 4:8; John 3:16). When Jesus died at Calvary, He bore my sins, your sins, and the sins of the world. On the cross, Jesus endured the wrath of God, even the sun hid its face and God had to turn His back on His only begotten Son. When the last sin had been paid for, Jesus said, “It is finished” and then He died (John 19:30).

The Greek word used here for “It is finished” is “tetelestai” which means the debt is paid. Romans 6:23 says, “the wages of sin is death” and Jesus paid this debt with His own life.

- (4) We receive the gift of salvation by faith in Christ. Jesus said “verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life (John 6:47).

If you will bow your head and say these words and mean them with all your heart, then God will save you.

Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner; I repent of my sins. I thank You for dying on the cross for me. I receive You now as my Saviour and Lord and I give my life to You. Please take full control of my life and help me to live for You and be a faithful Christian ...Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, I can say, from the Word of God, that you are now a child of God. Here are your first steps as a child of God:

- **Bible: read it daily –**
- **Prayer: do it continually –**
- **Worship: join a Bible believing, Gospel preaching church –**
- **Baptized: by immersion –**
- **Fellowship: be around God's people; share your life with them –**
- **Witness: share the good news of Jesus with others –**

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