

FELLOWSHIP FOR FULL-TIMERS

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE ONE: A RELIGIOUS LIVING VERSUS SPIRITUAL REALITY

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS LIVING?

When we speak of “a religious living” we are not speaking of other people, we are speaking of ourselves. Actually it should be a matter of great concern to us whenever we have a mentality of “us” and “them.” Our attitude in the Lord’s recovery should always be “we.” Our attitude towards other Christians should be inclusive: “we Christians.” We should not think in terms of “us” and “them.” This in itself shows us that we can be very subjective. To be subjective means to overly trust or rely on our own feelings and opinions. On one hand it is normal for Christians to be subjective. To love the Lord, for example, is a subjective matter. Yet it is also easy for us to become too subjective, which produces self-confidence. People who are too subjective always think that they are right. They think that they are clear about everything. For this reason we must be grounded in life, truth, genuine spiritual experiences and the proper humanity. Otherwise we will be too subjective in our handling of spiritual things, and this will lead to a religious living.

A Religious Living is Exclusive

Subjectivity alone is not that serious, but often subjectivity leads to exclusiveness. This can become very serious. Everyone who follows the Lord always faces the danger of being exclusive. A group of Christians may say that they are inclusive and that everyone is welcome in their gatherings, but they can still be an exclusive group. Inwardly they may feel that they are uniquely thinking about other Christians, “You are not part of us, therefore we have nothing to do with you.” Such exclusiveness is a sure sign of a religious living.

When the Lord Jesus spoke concerning the Pharisees He said a strong word: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Matt. 12:30). Why could He say this? Because these Pharisees were not saved. They were in the religious world. But when a man was casting out demons in the Lord’s name and the disciple John wanted to forbid him, the Lord said, “He who is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). This was the opposite of what He had said before. Shouldn’t the disciples have been happy to see someone casting out demons in Jesus’s name? This shows that they were exclusive. But what would our feeling be if we saw such a thing take place today? Perhaps we ourselves would not be so happy. We might ask, “How come I’ve never cast out demons?” Or we might say, “This person is so shallow. All he can do is cast out demons, but we have something much better.” When the disciple John saw that man casting out demons he asked Jesus, “Should we forbid him?” This is an exclusive question. It shows that John considered the Lord Jesus as *his* Jesus. John seemed to feel that the Lord only belonged to him and to no one else. But Jesus answered, “He who is not against us is for us.” This is not easy for Christians to practice. When we consider the Gentiles we should realize that “whosoever is not for us is against us.” This is because we are separated from the world. But when we consider our fellow Christians we should realize that “whosoever is not against us is for us.” We share the same stand as every other Christian. For this reason we should be very inclusive towards our fellow believers.

How do we know if we are religious? Firstly, a religious person is subjective, and secondly, a religious person is exclusive. Someone in a denomination may boast about their Christians works, and how they do more than other Christians. Such a statement is both subjective and exclusive. But again, we should not be so quick to judge others. Instead we should look at ourselves. Religion is in our very blood. We are religious people by nature, and we must be very careful. It is easy for us to think, “We see the truth, and no one else does.” Such a statement is exclusive and shows that we have a religious living.

A Religious Living can Produce Zealousness

The apostle Paul wrote that before he knew the Lord he persecuted the church according to zeal (Phil. 3:6). Why did Paul persecute the church? Because at that time he was in religion. A religious living can always produce zealousness. Whenever we see a brother who is extremely zealous we should not be so happy, because we do not know whether his zealousness is out of the divine life or just out of his own religion. Religion can cause people to be so zealous that they are willing to die for their cause. We can see this throughout history. For example, in the Dark Ages the Crusaders did many terrible things because they were zealous. They even murdered and plundered in the name of the Lord. The Crusaders used the Lord's name, but was Christ really involved? They were zealous in carrying out their purpose and pursuing their goal, which was to conquer for the Lord's sake. But was there any experience of the inner life involved? Of course not. There was nothing of Christ, nothing of the inner life, and nothing of the divine truth in what they were doing. There was nothing but natural human zealousness. They were willing to carry out their religious goal according to zeal, just as the apostle Paul did before his conversion.

Even the desire to carry out positive things may be religious because it produces a kind of zealousness. We may be very strong to do something for God, even though what we want to carry out is without Christ, without the Lord's leading, and without the Lord's presence. Yet we still want to do it. Do we preach the gospel out of our zealousness, or because the Lord has led us? We would probably say that our preaching of the gospel is not without the Lord, nor is it fully one with the Lord. This means that we recognize we are still somewhat in the principle of religion. A religious living means that we want to do many things for Christ, and we think that by doing these things we are serving God. Yet these things are without His presence and leading. This is why Paul could be so extreme before he was a Christian. He was a scholarly person, but in his zeal he could make things happen. He could travel far and wide to arrest, persecute, and even kill the Christians.

We all must be very aware of the danger of being zealous. Zealousness can be a sign that we are in religion and are not serving according to Christ.

A Religious Living Can Become a Movement

Throughout history one movement after another has been generated by religion. In America in the 1960's and early 1970's there were two movements. First there was the hippie movement, and then there was the "Jesus movement." What was the difference between the two? The hippie movement came first, and it was void of Christ. Then the Jesus movement followed and utilized Christ among the hippies. Many people were genuinely saved. In some high schools the entire student population got saved. In those years when we went out to preach the gospel on a college campus we found out that so many of the young people were already regenerated. Even though this was truly something of the Lord, and something of the Spirit's working, in the end it became a movement. In principle no movement can last. So many people were saved during the Jesus movement, but where are they today?

A movement usually ends up with almost nothing. It is possible that today many people who were saved in the Jesus movement would deny that they ever became a Christian. There should be many in this country who were saved during that time. But again, where are they today? We might ask, "Then was this the Lord's move?" Yes, it was, but it became a movement. When the Lord's move is carried out in the principle of religion it quickly becomes a movement and disappears. It cannot last. When we look back after so many years and wonder about all those people who were saved, we would ask, "Lord, what happened? Where are they now? What difference did it make?" There was something of the Spirit's move at the beginning, but it was turned into a movement by human religion. The Lord's move became a trend. To believe in the Lord became a fashionable thing to do.

Young people believed in Jesus because everyone else was doing it. Then this very movement stifled the freedom of the Spirit. For this reason we must be careful of our zealotry. We shouldn't look for big numbers in our meetings or big numbers of people getting saved. We shouldn't necessarily be happy if we attract a large crowd. The Lord's work can easily become a movement when it is carried out in the principle of religion. We need to ask for the Lord's mercy that He would keep us in life and that we would be able to cooperate properly with His move.

A Religious Living Is Able to Match and Work with Man's Natural Being

A religious living fits us by nature. It makes us feel quite comfortable. How do we know if something is in religion? Because it fits us. This is the reason that there are so many different kinds of religions in the world. These religions fit all kinds of people. Some religions are demanding, and some are relaxed. Some religions are individually spiritual, and some are socially interactive. All of these expressions of religion meet different people's needs, as opposed to meeting God's need. A religious living matches the natural man. When something fits our natural man we must be careful. For example, some saints only like certain kinds of meetings, because those meetings fit them. Other saints like only a certain kind of speaking, because it fits them. When our natural man is comfortable then that can become a religion. A religious living is able to match and work with our natural being.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL REALITY?

Spiritual Reality is Able to be Substantiated in Our Spirit

Now we must ask the question, what is spiritual reality? How is it different from a religious living? First, spiritual reality is “spiritual.” This is simple and obvious, but it is essential to realize. Spiritual reality must be spiritual, which means that it is able to be substantiated in our spirit. This requires us to know our spirit. A person who does not know his spirit can never have spiritual reality. Why does a brother quit his job in a respectable profession to become a full-time serving one, spending all of his time begging people to love the Lord? To others it seems foolish, but this brother has no choice, because he has experienced something in his spirit. He can say, “I have experienced the Lord in my spirit concerning this matter. I have seen a revelation about how I should live my life, and it has been substantiated in my spirit. I have the spiritual reality concerning what my life is really for. I cannot deny it. I will never give it up. Formerly I heard the truth about how I should be absolute for the Lord, but now this truth has become so real to me in my spirit! It has been substantiated in my spirit! Now, in my life, there is not only truth and revelation, there is spiritual reality!”

Spiritual Reality is Full of a Humanity that Comes Out of the Divine Attributes

If we want to know whether a person has spiritual reality, we need only ask, “Is he human?” Often one who thinks he is spiritual is actually religious, while a person who is very human is genuinely spiritual. How do we measure the degree to which we are in spiritual reality? We should ask ourselves, “Is my spiritual exercise according to the humanity of Jesus?” If our exercise is short of the Lord’s humanity then we are in the principle of religion. For example, if we use the Bible or spiritual writings to accuse each other, that is surely religion. Even if we have seen something of the Lord or are trying to fight for the truth, our exercise is short of the humanity of Jesus.

As saints who are following the Lord we should love one another. It is possible for all of the truths and riches we have enjoyed in the Lord's recovery to be exercised without the humanity of Jesus. When we are short of the Lord's humanity it means that religion is present with us.

We should not consider this an insignificant point. The spiritual reality is full of a humanity that comes out of the divine attributes. The divine attributes are constituted in our being and produce the healthy humanity. When the divine attributes of love, light, righteousness, and holiness are constituted into us, then it issues in a certain kind of virtuous living. This kind of living is different from a religious living. It is a healthy, attractive, and profound humanity that comes from the divine attributes being constituted into our being.

When the divine attributes operate within a person, that person lives out the healthy humanity of Jesus. This is spiritual reality. So how do we know that a person has spiritual reality? We only need to ask if he has a healthy humanity. We should all learn to constantly examine ourselves according to this realization. Any time we begin to operate beyond a normal humanity we are entering the realm of religion. For example, suppose you are taking the lead in a weekly young people's meeting, and one night very few young people show up. Then you get mad and rebuke those who are there. This shows you are in religion. But then suppose that a number of young people come late, and you feel, "Well, it's better they come late than not at all." This is also religion. Why? Because you don't really care about the young people, you only care about your meeting. The Lord's humanity cares for human beings, not for how many people are in the meetings. If you are in spiritual reality you will care for a person's well-being must more than you will care for his activities.

The healthy and proper humanity responds to the needs of other human beings. That is how the Lord lived. As long as He was on the earth His whole existence was in response to so many human needs. This is what made Him spiritual and not religious. Humanity is the decisive factor that determines whether you are in spiritual reality or in a religious living. All the other symptoms of religion can easily cheat you. For example, you can be very subjective but still feel that you are quite open to others. You can be very exclusive and not realize it. But when you operate as a serving one you can tell whether you are religious by considering your humanity.

If the saints in the church can uplift their humanity the church will be so blessed. Many times new people come among us and eventually feel that we are short of humanity. They are not even looking for the humanity that comes from the divine attributes; they would be happy if we were simply normal human beings. People have commented that when they met with us they found us to be a group of Christians whose talk was so high but whose humanity was so cold. We didn't actually care for them as human beings. We didn't express a proper and healthy humanity, a humanity that looks out for other people's well-being. Our lack of such a humanity exposes that we are often in religion.

Spiritual reality is a living which is full of the divine attributes. The divine attributes must be constituted in our being to produce a healthy humanity. The churches today need such a humanity. The full-timers and all the serving ones need more of the humanity of Jesus. If you serve the Lord without this humanity then you can only do a work. Every person you serve will become the object of your labor. People will become merely numbers and statistics to you. Should we be happy if a church grows to 2,000 saints? Of course we should, but that alone is not what the Lord wants. Perhaps a certain church has only 30 saints, yet that is exactly what the Lord wants because these saints are genuinely spiritual. They have a proper and healthy humanity, and they know how to care for one another.

We are not after more numbers, and we are not after a certain result. In our exercise we must be after spiritual reality, which has everything to do with a proper and healthy humanity that comes out of the divine attributes.

**Spiritual Reality is the Revealed Spiritual Truth
That is Enjoyed, Partaken of, and Participated in By Us**

Our response to spiritual truth can show us whether we are in religion. Do we have a response of enjoyment when we consider spiritual truth? Usually when we talk about “the processed Triune God” there is not much of a reaction. This means that to us it is something religious. It is not so real. But when we consider our family and we talk about our own children there is a strong response, because we love our children. They are so real to us. If we talk about the Person of Christ in the same way that we talk about our own son or daughter, then we know that this truth is not religious to us. We are in spiritual reality. There is an excitement, an enjoyment, a stimulation. But when spiritual truth is not revealed to us we can have no such enjoyment. The truth just remains as something outside of us. Furthermore, when we talk about the truth to the saints we serve we should desire a healthy response from them. When the truth is properly revealed to the saints it should cause them to be full of enjoyment. They should be able to partake of and participate in the revealed truth. This can only happen when something of the truth has been unveiled in their spirit, and they can therefore partake of and participate in that spiritual reality.

We must tell the Lord, “Lord, I don’t want to just talk about the divine and mystical realm, about organic salvation, or about the processed Triune God. I want to have a healthy and sweet response to Your revealed truth. I want to enjoy and partake of all these items so that I can be in the spiritual reality. And I want to bring the saints I serve into such a reality.” If we pray this way we will not be in religion and we will not just indulge in spiritual talk.

It is too easy for us to speak one way in the church meetings and to behave another way in our daily life. We must enjoy and partake of the revealed spiritual truth until it becomes who we are. This is to have spiritual reality.

Spiritual Reality is Composed of our Spiritual Experiences

Spiritual reality is composed of all our spiritual experiences. Whatever spiritual experiences we have will become our spiritual reality. For example, how much do you trust the Lord in the matter of personal finances? How many spiritual experiences do you have which would cause you to say, “I trust in the Lord and not in my money”? If you have not had such experiences then you will always be anxiously looking at your checkbook and your bank account. You need to experience the joy and privilege of trusting the Lord with your finances. When that happens you will no longer be in religion concerning this matter. Brother Watchman Nee had the experience of being completely penniless, yet he didn’t tell anyone. He didn’t worry at all. He trusted God without an ounce of anxiety. He had the spiritual reality because in the matter of finances he had experienced something before the Lord. One day a large amount of money may come to you, but you will not know how to spend it properly if you have never learned to have spiritual reality with regard to your finances. Money is only one example, but in principle this is true of everything.

Suppose you have given yourself to serve the Lord full-time, and one day you get a job offer from some company. That offer might cause you to be thoroughly depressed. Do you have enough spiritual experience to say, “I have the spiritual reality. I am not even considering a job. I am completely out of that realm of temptation.” Spiritual reality is made up of spiritual experiences. You must experience the Lord and learn to trust the Lord in one thing after another. Eventually there will be a constitution of spiritual reality within you. The more you know how to experience Christ, then the more you will have spiritual reality.

Spiritual matters are not something for you to merely talk about. Telling others to be absolute for the Lord will not make them absolute. Your speaking will only have impact if you yourself are absolute. If you have never experienced consecration, and you teach others how to be consecrated, then the most you can do is produce a religious movement. Many people may respond to you and say, “Yes, we give ourselves to the Lord,” but it will not last. Only those who have truly given themselves to the Lord and experienced the reality of consecration can cause others to be consecrated. Whatever you genuinely experience of the Lord will become your spiritual reality, which in turn will generate spiritual reality in the saints you serve.

Spiritual Reality is Able to Be Substantiated in the Present and in a Fresh Spirit

Spiritual reality must be substantiated in the present and in a fresh spirit. Regarding your spiritual experiences from the past, can you say, “They are still real to me”? We shouldn’t tell people, “Three years ago I loved the Lord, just like you do now.” They might ask, “How is your love for the Lord today?” It doesn’t matter how many spiritual experiences you have accumulated already. Spiritual reality always demands “now.” At this time, do you have reality? Are you still able to apply your experiences? Spiritual reality is a present reality. Furthermore, your spirit must be fresh for spiritual reality to be with you. If you speak to people with a fresh spirit you will be speaking about *now*. Even your past experiences will be fresh because the living and present Christ is with you. Spiritual reality, which is comprised of all your spiritual experiences, must be substantiated in a fresh spirit.

May we all pray to the Lord, “Lord, I don’t want a religious living. Save me from being so subjective and exclusive. Save me from producing zealotry or any sort of movement. Save me from being comfortable in my natural man. Lord, I desire the spiritual reality. I pray that I would experience You in my spirit. I pray that I would have a healthy and proper humanity that comes from the divine attributes. I pray that I would not just talk about the truth but that the truth would be revealed to me and that I would enjoy, partake of, and participate in this very truth. I pray that I would have many spiritual experiences, and that these experiences would be substantiated even now, in a fresh spirit.” May the Lord have mercy to save us from a religious living and keep us in spiritual reality!

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