

ARM Prison Outreach International

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GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 10th email message of 2003 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. In this age of skepticism and technology, the return to New Testament Christianity is more important than ever. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

Deut. 6:1-9

A man went shopping for his wife's birthday present. They had been married for somewhat over 30 years and decided to have a few of their good friends over for an informal birthday party. He saw some cute music boxes. Thinking this was a good idea for a gift, he picked up a red one and wound the spring. It played the "Happy Birthday" song and he was delighted. He started to the check-out counter, then stopped. "That blue one is more her color," he thought, so he put the red one back and bought the blue one. After the birthday dinner, he presented her the beautiful blue music box. She wound it up and as all their friends looked on, the box began to play: "The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be...."

Some, unfortunately, have drawn the same conclusion concerning the OLD TIME RELIGION, saying that the old time religion "ain't what it used to be." But the GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS STILL THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION! The old time religion is still as true, vibrant, and powerful as ever!

Sadly, the baton of faith is not always passed. Too often the truth of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is rejected by the upcoming generation. How many children are abandoning the faith of their parents? How many no longer walk in the spiritual footsteps of their mom and dad? That isn't necessarily bad if it means that man's traditions are being set aside for the truth of the Bible. But if it means the truth of Christianity is rejected by the skepticism of a new generation, we need to declare the eternal relevance of the "Old Time Religion."

There are some basic aspects of the old time religion, the first century Christianity, if you please, that we must emphasize and must elevate. Some of its best aspects are actually pointed out in a classic Old Testament passage. Read with me the first 9 verses of Deut. 6.

Deut 6:1-9

- 1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,
- 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.
- 3 Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.
- 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
- 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (NIV)

I. THE OLD TIME RELIGION IS HEAVEN SENT! Deuteronomy 6:1-3

It came from God! The point of origin is so important. We can rejoice that the Bible faith we seek is based in a book that does not record man's quest for God, but tells of GOD'S SEARCH FOR MAN!

Moses could say with certainty, "THIS ISN'T MY IDEA, ITS GOD'S IDEA!" Heaven sent. Jesus made it clear that His teaching was from heaven itself.

John 5:17-19 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (NIV)

John Wesley reasoned this way: WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM? There are only five possible alternatives:

1. Good men
2. Angels
3. Bad men
4. Demons
5. God

GOOD MEN OR ANGELS could not possibly have been responsible for writing the Bible. The Scriptures make repeated claims to be the direct revelation of God. If the Bible is not directly from God, the men who wrote those words were liars and hence could not be good men or angels.

BAD MEN OR DEMONS would not have written a book that forbids all sin, commands all duty, and condemns the souls of sinners to a burning hell. This Book which provides mankind with its highest patterns of virtue could not possibly be the work of bad men or demons. CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE IS FROM GOD!

The old time religion is good enough for me BECAUSE IT IS HEAVEN SENT. It originates with the Creator Himself.

II. THE OLD TIME RELIGION IS HEARTFELT! Verses 4-6

"These words shall be upon thy heart!" This heaven sent faith is a heartfelt faith. PERSON TO PERSON! We live in an age of depersonalization! CREDIT CARD, MEMBERSHIP CARDS -- NUMBERS .. BUT GOD HAS AUTHORED A HEART RELIGION! From His heart to yours and mine!

WE SUBSTITUTE OUR FEEBLE EFFORTS AT RELIGION:

A. "Head religion." Thinking is all that counts. In this perversion of true faith, the person is encouraged to think correctly and to expect that to be the sum total of his religious devotion.

PHARISEES: John 5:38-40 Intellectualism, studious, right answers, NO FAITH, NO COMPASSION, NO HEART. The priest who walked by the bleeding victim had the right answers, but his religion was of the head, not heart.

B. "Hand religion." Doing is all that counts. As long as you warm your pew at the right time and place, as long as you throw in your dollar bill on time, as long as you follow the general moral code, you're ok. The heart is left out.

The rich young ruler: Luke 18:18-23. He was a stickler for the outward code of conduct; that's good, BUT HIS HEART WAS NOT TOUCHED BY HUMAN NEED, HUMAN COMPASSION!

Head religion is insufficient, hand religion is not enough. HEART RELIGION IS WHAT GOD TALKS ABOUT.

"GIVE ME THY HEART says the Father above, no gift so precious to Him as our love..."

Heart religion is enough because WHEN HE HAS OUR HEART, HE HAS OUR HANDS, OUR HEADS AND ALL OF US. HE HAS OUR INTELLECTUAL POWER, OUR PHYSICAL POWER, ALL OF US!

When does the team do its best? When its heart is really in it. When does the employee perform at optimum level? WHEN HIS HEART IS IN IT. When is a church member really a Christian? Heaven sent, heart felt...

III. THE OLD TIME RELIGION IS HOME TAUGHT! Verses 7-9

This was hinted at in verse 2 ... GENERATIONAL PERPETUITY! In other words, teach the sons who'll teach the sons, who will teach the sons. The church is a generation away from extinction -- or distinction? Ephesians 6:4; II Tim. 2:2

Statistics are rather alarming in that it is not all that certain that we are winning our own children, let alone really reaching the unsaved in the world.

THE OLD TIME RELIGION IS HOME TAUGHT. Not to the exclusion of Sunday school, not to the exclusion of lessons on spirituality in schools, BUT IT IS BASICALLY HOME TAUGHT. Maybe we should rephrase that: HOME CAUGHT. Christianity, some point out properly, is CAUGHT (by example) as well as taught by precept. IT TAKES BOTH, BROTHERS.

Parents can tell, but never teach, until they practice what they preach. Parents are in great position to teach! Who are the kids' heroes? In one survey, students were asked to name their heroes. The largest single choice was one or both of their parents!

HOW MUCH BIBLE TEACHING DO YOUR KIDS, DO YOUR GRANDKIDS, GET IN THE HOME? Even EVERY WEEK SUN SCHOOL -- what a fanatical thought that is -- will not BEGIN TO DO WHAT DAILY DEVOTIONS AND BIBLE STUDY IN THE HOME WILL DO!

That's why God said what he did in 7-9! Take time to tell the kids what God says in His word. A HEAVEN SENT AND HEARTFELT RELIGION WILL NEVER FIND ITS WAY INTO THE NEXT GENERATION UNLESS AND UNTIL IT IS HOME TAUGHT!

We don't have enough spiritual training in the home. All the Sunday school classes and scout troops and youth groups in the world won't hold a candle to the power of parental love and teaching! We've mistakenly come to depend on these extra curricular reinforcements as if they were the basis of the spiritual education. They are not. The home is the base!

Have you gotten in on the old time religion? The one delivered by God Himself thru his own son?

Christianity is HEAVEN SENT, HEART FELT, AND HOME TAUGHT.

Do you need to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38)? Have you let Jesus into your heart and home? Do you need to decide today to be more than a hand or head Christian? Do you need to restore Christ to the role of head of your home, injecting spiritual truth into your family's daily routine? What will you do with Jesus and His Word?