

A young coed being interviewed on television about her religious beliefs said, "Oh yes, I believe in God, but I'm not nuts about Him." According to the Gallup Poll that is a good description of how most Americans feel about God. **94% of us believe in God. When it comes to translating that belief into action, however, most of us are clearly not nuts about Him.**

We have something in common with the Pharisees. Jesus once summed up the Pharisees chief problem like this: ***"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."***

For the Pharisees religion was primarily external. It was a badge of accomplishment, not a gift of grace. It was a means of dividing society into layers, not uniting it in love. It was a means of putting other people down, rather than a motivation for lifting them up. **God on their lips but not in their hearts.** Are there people today who have such a faith? Yes, there are.

First, there are the traditionalists. These are people who have substituted tradition for WHAT THEY CALL "FAITH." This was the sin of the Pharisees. They no longer needed God. They had a tradition, a law, a ceremony for every situation. As long as they could hold on to their traditions they felt secure, virtuous.

Years ago, Harry Emerson Fosdick told about a church in Denmark where the worshipers bowed regularly before a certain spot on the wall. They had been doing that for three centuries -- bowing at that one spot in the sanctuary. Nobody could remember why. One day in renovating the church, they removed some of the whitewash on the walls. At the exact spot where the people bowed they found the image of the Madonna under the whitewash. People had become so accustomed to bowing before that image that even after it was covered up for three centuries, people still bowed.

Tradition is a powerful thing. The Pharisees had learned to substitute tradition, custom, habit for the presence of the living God. **Traditionalism rears its head in many ways, in many times and in many places.**

There was a bill introduced in one of our State Legislatures many years ago to buy an electric chair for death killing. **One traditionalist was irate.** He stood to the floor of the House and eloquently spoke against buying an electric chair. He said to that August body, "Hanging was good enough for my daddy and hangings good enough for me!" Well, he may have been right.

Jaroslav Pelikan once said, ***"Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."*** There is a sense in which we can keep God in a ***"safe Place" so he is there when we need him,*** through the use of tradition. We can keep other people at a distance as well. And when that happens, when we get comfortable with our rituals and procedures and schemes of doing things, were no longer open to Gods moving and liberating spirit. **God then remains on our lips, but not in our hearts. The traditionalists.**

There is a group kin to the traditionalists that we might call Christian Secularists. This group is made up of most folk who are committed people who fill the rolls of most churches today. They bring their children to Sunday School. They use the church to marry and bury. They visit us at Christmas and at Easter. They are not atheists or agnostics. They, like that young coed, believe in God, but they're not nuts about him. They give to the church, but not so much that it really hurts--not so much that it causes any inconvenience to them or to their lifestyle. They want to be identified with the church when their obituary is printed, but they don't really want to buy into what the church is trying to do in the world. You know who I'm talking about.

Back in the 40's, right after the creation of the state of Israel, there was a Quaker meeting, the International Friends Group. There was a great need during that turbulent time to find a top of the line person to be mayor of Jerusalem. They needed someone who was respected and who had a reputation as a peacemaker. They needed someone who could bring reconciliation and a sense of fairness to all the parties. Clarence Pickett, Executive Secretary of the American Friends Committee, was just such the person. Still the question was asked in that meeting, ***"Whom shall we send? Who will go for us? Who will face the dangers of acting as mayor of***

Jerusalem?" Finally, after those questions had been asked many times, one attendee rose to his feet and turned to that great body. He spoke in an impressive, booming voice, **"Here am I," he said, "send Clarence."**

Well, we have a lot of people on the rolls of the church who are ready to answer, "Here am I, send Clarence." Christian secularists, people who want to stick their toe in, but who will never be ready to plunge in all the way in Christian commitment. **YES, God on their lips but not in their hearts.**

There's a third group we ought to acknowledge. We might call them the walking "WOUNDED PEOPLE" within the fellowship of the church who have a deep hurt in their lives. Even though in their best moments they would go all the way with Christ, this hurt stands as a barrier. Perhaps deep within the recesses of their soul they blame God for some real tragedy they have experienced. Maybe somebody in the church, a pastor or a Sunday School teacher or some other member, disappointed them. But they've stuck it out, they're still here. Sometimes, though, they feel like they are just going through the paces. There is some hesitation brought on by their hurt.

In 1985 there was a celebration in New Orleans. New Orleans is a town known for celebrating, but this was a special kind of celebration. Sponsored by the city, it was a celebration at the municipal pool in New Orleans. The city's life guards and support personnel were commemorating the first summer in memory with no drownings in the pools of that city. Two hundred people showed up for that party; one hundred of them were certified life guards. They had a great time, but as the party broke up, and the four life guards on duty for the occasion cleared the water, they found a fully dressed body in the deep end of the pool. Jerome Moody, age 31, had drowned right in the midst of the celebration. They tried in vain to revive him.

When I read that, **I wondered to myself if it might be possible, right here in the body of Christ, right here with all the certified life guards, Teachers, officers of the church, choir members, pastors and all, could it be possible that there is someone who is drowning?** Someone who is hurting so inside that there has come a barrier between them and God. **THE WALKING WOUNDED.**

Well, what do you do if you belong to one of those three groups? What do you do to get God into your heart? There are (3) three things that are almost essential:

FIRST OF ALL, WE ALL NEED TO FACE THE NEED THAT THE WORLD HAS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ON FIRE FOR CHRIST.

In Revelation the angel said, **"I see by your works that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were hot or cold, but because you are lukewarm I will spew you out of my mouth."** Why so harsh? It is because change in this world is only made by people who are on fire.

William Lloyd Garrison was the greatest abolitionist this country has ever known. He was a publisher of a newspaper called the Liberator, an antislavery publication. Garrison was an angry man, angry with indignation caused by the unbelievably inhumane treatment many of the slaves experienced. He hated slavery with everything that was in him. One day one of his best friends, Samuel May, tried to calm him down. He said to Garrison, "Oh, my friend, try to moderate your indignation and keep cool. Why, you are all on fire." Garrison replied, "Brother May, I have need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice around me to melt." **Well, the only way any of us can melt mountains of ice is to be on fire.**

The only way Christ can use any of us is when we are driven by a great passion, when we feel or hear his voice within our heart showing us a great cause that needs to be championed. Nothing is accomplished in this world by people who have no passion. That's one reason we need God in our hearts as well as on our lips.

SECONDLY, WE NEED TO ADMIT THE SADNESS OF LIVING HALFHEARTEDLY.

Do you ever get bored? Some of you have remote control and cable for your television. I've noticed that there are a lot of people who sit in front of the television each night with their remotes and punch 25 to 30 channels

an hour. Are you in this group? The discouraging thing is to hit all those channels and still not find anything worth watching. **Aren't you bored? Don't you sometimes wish there was something more to life? Well, there is something more.**

In 1974, the top college basketball player in the country was a young man by the name of Bill Walton. At six foot eleven, he dominated college basketball. He took his team, UCLA, to their third consecutive NCAA championship, and in his senior year went on to the NBA. Bill had some adjustments to make in the NBA, and he didn't make them very well. Then abruptly he left the game. He said his heart was no longer in his playing.

After some time went by, Bill Walton came back. This time his heart was in his game, and he played like it. He led the Portland Trailblazers to their first NBA championship. Then he moved on to the Boston Celtics. Now he's a television basketball announcer.

It makes all the difference in the world if your heart is in what you're doing! A lot of us are trying to live our lives with our hearts in nothing or, we should say, with nothing in our hearts.

We have Christ on our lips, but he's never made that journey further down. That's why we are bored. How do we move Christ from our lips to our hearts?

#1: by facing the world's great need for people on FIRE.

#2: by confronting the boredom, the feeling of emptiness that halfhearted living brings.

FINALLY, WE DO IT BY SIMPLY RESPONDING TO CHRIST'S INVITATION.

For 30 years Mother Teresa has worked in the slums of Calcutta, India. She has worked among the most forsaken people on earth. You and I would recoil from most of the people that she touches every day. The dispossessed, the downtrodden, the diseased, the desperate. And yet, everybody who meets Mother Teresa remarks on her warm smile. How, after 30 years of working in conditions like that does she keep a warm smile on her face? Well, it's interesting. She says that at age 18 she left Yugoslavia to become a Christian servant. She said, "When I was leaving home, my mother told me something beautiful and very strange. She said, **You go put your hand in Jesus hand and walk along with him.** **And that's was the secret of Mother Teresa's life and her success and happiness.**

Most of us here have good jobs. And we live in nice homes, and we have easy situations. But we don't have the warm smile on our faces that this little nun working in the most desperate situation imaginable has on her face.

What's the difference?

-It may be that we've never put our hand in Jesus hand.

-It may be that we have Him only on our lips.

The world desperately needs people who are on "FIRE FOR CHRIST." Halfhearted living means emptiness and despair.

Why don't you make a new start and accept Christ's invitation?

Put your hand in Jesus hand and begin anew.

Amen.