

Going Through the Motions

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Being familiar with my morning routine, the brethren at the Fruitvale church of Christ, will routinely send me an early morning text or email. Very rarely will one of them call early in the morning and on the rare occasion, when they have, it is generally not to report good news. However, on the morning of December 29, 2017, a community member called and informed me that the meetinghouse of the Fruitvale church was on fire. As I thanked him for the phone call, I must admit my heart sank.

Fast forward some 6 months, we had been meeting in the school cafeteria, the work of the church continued and in some ways, we were seeing growth, not numerically but spiritually. So to my surprise, following a Sunday morning sermon, a dear sister approached me and stated, "I'm glad to see you're back, your passion was evident this morning." Needless to say, I unsettled a bit by her statement, but upon further introspection, I came to realize she was absolutely correct; I had been going through the motions! And therein lies the danger, for I was unaware of my lackluster effort in service and worship of the God of heaven.

Going through the motions, I said the right things. As preachers we are commanded to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) and "speak the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). To the best of my ability I was trying to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). However, at least to one, it was evident that something was missing. As I ponder that reality, I admit that the events of December 29 had settled upon me and I settled into a "funk" of which I was unaware. When I consider what was missing, it is ironic that a fire put out my fire (Jer. 20:9)! I had lost my zeal - but I was still saying the right things.

Going through the motions, I was still doing the right things. As Christians we are commanded to study (2 Tim. 2:15), pray (Luke 18:1), worship (John 4:24) and work in the kingdom (Matt. 5:16). All of these things I did, yet because of the mental state I was in, did I do them in a truly beneficial, God glorifying way? Going through the motions, I was still doing the right things.

Reflecting upon this time in my life, I pray that now I am more cognizant of those in the church, who are saying the right things and are even doing the right things, but may have lost their zeal. Admittedly, it is difficult to stay on the mountaintop of spirituality. The devil is constantly trying to pull us away from God and devour us (1 Pet. 5:8), so we need to be constantly reminded that the one in us is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4).

Difficulties and trials in life are a part of our existence here (Jas. 1:2-4), but there is tremendous benefit in overcoming these difficult times. Having experienced these trials certainly places us in a better position to help those enduring such trials (2 Cor. 1:3ff; Gal. 6:2). I am indebted to a wonderful sister, who recognized I was "going through the motions" and lovingly brought it to my attention. Had I remained in this state, there is no telling how much damage I may have done to myself and to others, spiritually speaking. God deserves our very best, and just "going through the motions" indicates a loss of focus and dedication, whether intentional or not. I pray that all of us will be aware of this attitude in ourselves and in others as well, helping ourselves and them to return to God with a fire in our bones.

