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You may believe in all the churches in the world, you may carry in your head all the sacred books ever written, you may baptize yourself in all the rivers of the earth, still, if you have no perception of God, I would class you with the rankest atheist.

*It’s good to be born in a church, but bad to die there.*

And you may have never entered a church or a mosque, nor performed any ceremony, but if you feel God within yourself and are thereby lifted above the vanities of the world, you are a holy person, a saint, say what you will.

As soon as you stand up and say that you are right or your church is right, and all others are wrong, you are yourself all wrong. You do not know that upon the proof of all the others depends the proof of your own. The test of true religiousness is love and charity for the whole human race. I do not mean the sentimental statement that all men are brothers, but that one must feel the oneness of human life.

So far as they are not exclusive, I see that the sects and creeds are all mine; they are all grand. They are all helping men and women towards the real religion. I will add, it is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die there. It is good to be born a child, but bad to remain a child. Churches, ceremonies, and symbols are good for children, but when the child is grown, he or she must burst the church themself.

*You have to realize truth and work it out for yourself according to your own nature.*

We must not remain children forever. It is like trying to fit one coat to all sizes and growths. I do not deprecate the existence of sects in the world. Would to God there were twenty millions more, for the more there are, there will be a greater field for selection. What I do object to is trying to fit one religion to every case.

Though all religions are essentially the same, they must have the varieties of form produced by dissimilar circumstances among different nations. We must each have our own individual religion, individual so far as the externals of it go.

...He who only studies books for religion reminds one of the fable of the ass which carried a heavy load of sugar on its back, but did not know the sweetness of it.

The whole point is to discipline the mind. That truth which you swallow from others will not be yours. You cannot teach truth from my mouth; neither can you learn truth from my mouth. None can teach another.

You all talk [about] and get distracted over losing your “individuality.” You are losing it every moment of your lives by this eternal swallowing. If any one of you believes what I teach, I will be sorry. I will only be too glad if I can excite in you the power of thinking for yourselves... My ambition is to talk to men and women, not to sheep. By men and women, I mean individuals.

*The test of true religiousness is love and charity for the whole human race.*

You have to realize truth and work it out for yourself according to your own nature... All must struggle to be individuals – strong, standing on your own feet, thinking your own thoughts, realizing your own Self. No use swallowing doctrines others pass on – standing up together like soldiers in jail, sitting down together, all eating the same food, all nodding their heads at the same time. Variation is the sign of life. Sameness is the sign of death.

*Faith in Ourselves*

The idea of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practiced, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of humanity, if any one motive power has been more potent that others in the lives of great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great.

Let a man go down as low as possible, yet there must come a time when out of sheer desperation, he will take an upward curve and learn to have faith in himself.

But it is better for us to have that knowledge from the very first. Why should we have all these bitter experiences in order to gain faith in ourselves? Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so, and as I grow older, that faith is becoming stronger and stronger.
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Never say “no,” never say “I cannot,” for you are infinite.

These are the principles of ethics; but we shall now come down lower and work out the details. We shall see how Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life...For if a religion cannot help a man or woman wherever they may be, it is not of much use.

...The old religion said that he who does not believe in God was an atheist. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of Oneness. It means faith in all because you are all. Love for yourself means love for all — love for animals, love for everything, because you are all. This is the great faith that will make the world better. I am sure of that.

~From *Jnana Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda

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