

WHAT KIND OF RELIGION?

Scripture reading for today is from James 1:26-27. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. " All religion is not acceptable to God. Some religion is vain. In particular, the writer stresses here that if a man bridles not his own tongue, his religion is vain. In contrast, true religion calls for charitableness and purity.

In view of the fact that He is not pleased with all religion, we want to study what kind of religion the Lord wants. It really makes little difference as to what WE may like or want in religion. But what God wants is altogether important. It is vital, therefore, that we understand what kind of religion is pure and undefiled before Him.

First, we must recognize that religion should be ANCIENT -NOT MODERN. This may sound strange in view of man's constant pursuit of progress. But true religion does not need updating. It needs no modernization program. The "old-time religion" of the New Testament is just as good now as it ever was. To think that man can improve on God's original design is a foolish and dangerous notion. The following words from Jeremiah the prophet can be profitably heeded in our own times. He said: "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16) The old paths are good-not because they are old; but because they are reliable. We know the religion of the apostle's pleased God.

We must understand also that true religion must be HEART-FELT-NOT OUTWARD FORMALISM. This is not to say that there are no prescribed forms of services. To the contrary, we must serve God in the way He commands. But our service must be from the heart. Simply going through the motions is not enough. Jesus demanded: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46) Worship must be "in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) God wants our religion to be heart-felt.

We must caution, however, against confusing this with religious revelry or uncontrolled emotionalism. The Bible directs that all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40) God is not pleased with disorderly conduct in worship, even when it is supposed to be the result of sincere feelings.

Another characteristic of the religion God wants is that it must be FULL-TIME-NOT PART-TIME. The hypocrisy of Sunday-only Christians is too well-known to need much comment. The fact is that you can tell more about the religion of a man on Monday at the job, than you can tell on Sunday at worship.

Finally, notice that true religion is GOD-CENTERED-NOT SELF-CENTERED. There is too much religious selfishness. It is manifested in such phrases as "What I like;" or "It seems to me." It is seen in the inclination to do as we please about God's commands. True religion, however, is concerned about what GOD wants and what pleases HIM. This is brought out in the text we read at the beginning. It is "pure religion and undefiled BEFORE GOD THE FATHER." It looks to Him first of all. Service to our fellow man follows as they are HIS creation. And we keep ourselves unspotted from the world unto his glory.