

From Where I Sit . . .

"IS YOUR RELIGION RELEVANT?"

Religion needs to be relevant in order to be beneficial. It seems sad to think that an individual could wander through an entire life's span without ever really understanding why religion should play such an important part in one's life. Unfortunately, it appears that there are many people who have a form of religion who hardly understand why, or wherefore. As if in a trance, some are merely going through the motions. We ought to be able to think of religion as a source of comfort, or as a power which enables us to face life and its responsibilities nobly and victoriously instead of something that must be performed and endured.

Religion is loosely defined as one's devotion to God or, for those in the world, to "gods." The expression of religion can be either vain or pure as per the teaching of 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."*

From the text above, real religion is an applied religion. It takes on relevance to our manner of living and makes a difference in who we are. It takes much thought, feeling and prayer to attain to the level of pure religion described therein. Notice, however, that real religion isn't about goose pimples, tears, euphoria, but about relevant, practical issues (self-discipline, purity, and benevolence). One may feel many wonderful emotions as a result of a relevant religion for God equipped us with the ability to feel emotions, but emotional religion is not relevant if it is not transforming. Religion changes lives!

These verses would be similar in thought to the stirring reminder in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers . . . Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."*

Furthermore, these practical or relevant changes in our lives, coupled with our expressions of devotion and praise in worship, are to be *"before God and the Father"* (James 1: 27). The fact that we do these things "before God and the Father," and do them from the heart and not as a mere ritual, separates such expressions from mere humanism where man is his own God, and the source of all that is good.

When Jesus becomes the focus of our lives our acts of worship take on relevance and significance to us, and our service becomes a natural outgrowth of this religion. Otherwise we make a mere ritual out of the observance instead of a truly religious expression of devotion to God. It is, however, a vain gesture if it doesn't transform; if it isn't relevant to where we live.

The Expression of Devotion Coupled with the Transformed Life, Makes Our Religion Relevant.

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