DON'T SETTLE FOR RELIGION

Don't settle for living a merely religious life. Live a life of love.

KEY POINTS

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

- "Religion" refers to a particular system of faith and worship (online dictionary).
- Although virtually every religion preaches love, harmony, peace and goodwill, the world has endured numerous wars because of "religion".
- This doesn't mean that religion is a bad thing in and of itself. On the contrary! If we live religious lives as James outlines above, we are doing well.
- In Acts 21 Apostle Paul reports to the elders in Jerusalem about the mighty works that God had done through his ministry to the Gentiles.
- The leaders then counsel him that
  …they [Jewish Christians] have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs (Acts 21:21).
- So they encourage Paul to perform certain Jewish rites, to reassure the Christian Jews that he is not "disrespecting" the Law.
- "Jews from Asia", however (who had not accepted the teachings of Christ), "laid hands on him… [took] hold of [him]… dragged him out of the temple, and…were seeking to kill him" by beating him to death (21:27-32).
- This is a strong reminder that religion without love quickly breeds hate and intolerance – the opposite of what God is trying to develop within us.
- Loveless religion leads to assumption, accusation, anger and ungodly, immoral and illegal behaviours.
- In the name of religion, pro-life activists have killed doctors; Christians have demonstrated hatred toward homosexuals; suicide bombers have killed innocent people; fathers have killed daughters they felt had left their faith. Sects of common religious systems have fought to the death over differences in doctrine and understanding.
- Please understand. Living beyond religion and living in love *does not mean* having no commitment, no absolutes, no backbone, no non-negotiable beliefs.
- It does not mean "anything goes", "everybody's right in their own way", or "all roads lead to Heaven". What it does mean, however, is that in spite of our differences, we must let the love of Christ supersede.

KEY SCRIPTURES: James 1:19-27; Acts 21:17-32: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

- We must be aware that, until Jesus comes, we'll have to deal with strong differences of opinion, strongly held positions and conflict among brethren.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is an important reminder of how love should work in and among us.
- It *is* possible to have unity without uniformity, harmony without homogeneity, acceptance without agreement on every point and respect without rigidity.
- And LOVE is what makes this possible!
- God doesn't just judge us according to our adherence to a code of conduct, rules and regulations, but according to the love we demonstrate to our brothers and sisters and those in our world outside of the Church.
- Let's not settle for mere religion. Let's truly and sincerely live in love.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. Read Acts 15:36-41. Also reference Acts 4:36, 9:27, 13:46, Galatians 2:1, 2 Timothy 4:11, the Gospels)? What do you learn from these brothers and this event?
2. Take time to reflect on the following, and as you feel comfortable, discuss as a group.
   - Is there someone you have treated in an unchristian manner due to their beliefs, religion, lifestyle, or simply because you haven't taken time to get to know them?
   - Do you harbour negative toward anyone because they don't follow church rules as they should, or because you feel they lack commitment and willingness to sacrifice with regard to worshiping God, or because they are "too strict/holy" for you?
   - Have you in love reached out to them, and/or have you prayed asking God to strengthen you and them and to draw you and them closer to Himself?
   - Has someone done that for you?

Prayer Time

Lord, I promise, with Your help, to pray for, show love to and extend a hand to help others; to move beyond religion to a place of love.

L.G. ice-Breaker: What does "love at first sight "mean to you? Do you believe it is possible, and/or that it is "true love"?

WEEK OF SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2018

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

(Reminds me/Confirms) (New idea) (Think about)

(Do this) (Speaks to my heart) (Must share)

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PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS

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