

Religion: The New “Dirty Word”

A bumper sticker recently viewed said, “I’m not religious, I just love the Lord.” What in the world does that mean?

This strange expression probably is a reaction against the hypocritical conduct of lots of so-called Christians and many of their pretentious leaders. You don’t have to be terribly perceptive to realize that there are a lot of folks out there in the religious world who “say and do not” (Matthew 23:3). These are the sort who received Jesus’ strongest condemnations. He called them “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” and “whited sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones” (Matthew 23:15-16, 27).

But shall we delegate the word “religious” to the realm of “dirty words” simply because there are those who act this way? Absolutely not! James 1:27 speaks of “pure religion and undefiled before God.” The verse goes on to describe this type religion: “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Now think about the bumper sticker again — “I’m not religious, I just love the Lord.” Taken literally, this means that the car owner which displays this logo does not “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” and does not “keep himself unspotted from the world.” Gets a little crazy, doesn’t it? The dictionary says that to be religious is to be “pious, devout, and godly,” and thus it is impossible to truly “love the Lord” without being “religious”!

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