

The Work Of True Religion

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Philippians 1:6

The word "religion" occurs five times in the New Testament. It is translated from two words: *loudaismos* and *threskeia*. The first word is used in Galatians 1:13-14 and referred to the Jews' religion. The second term is used in Acts 26:5 and James 1:26-27 and means, "Appropriate beliefs and devout practice of obligations relating to supernatural persons and powers." It is thought that the word was originally derived from the Latin which means "to bind."

True religion is from the heart. True religion cannot simply be a system of beliefs. It cannot be merely a public profession. It cannot just be a set of external virtues. Please keep in mind, everyone of these items combine to form true religion, but it must primarily be a work in the heart. A sinful man is separated from God because there is sin in his heart. Therefore, a true religion must base its work within the heart. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."* If religion cannot change the heart, it cannot change the life. Paul's prayer for the Philippians is that God will continue to perfect their true religion.

There are several accomplishments of true religion. True religion sheds light upon our understanding. True religion enlightens us with truth, which influences our judgment. True religion is a work of love which softens our attitudes. True religion is a work of holiness which cleanses us from guilt. True religion represents grace by which we are saved. The one who makes true religion possible is God. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:6, *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* God calls us by His word and justifies us by His grace (Luke 11:28; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Paul described true religion as being "good." What is it good for? It is good for ourselves because we have remission of our sins. It is good for our friends because they have an example to follow and perhaps will heed the warning. It is good for the world because the world needs a pure and saving influence to help its corruption. It is good for death because it saves the

child of God from an eternity spent in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Could anything be more good than this?

True religion must also be progressive. Peter tells Christians that they must *"grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18). It is obvious that anything which does not grow will die; therefore, growth is essential to life. Religion is the same way. In the scriptures, religion is exemplified by many "growth" metaphors. It is compared to the progress of the grain growing in the earth; the light of the day; the growth of a child; and to the erection of a building. Peter also exhorts Christians to grow in virtues which should accompany the child of God (2 Peter 1:5-11). Growth in the virtues would help one to gain an abundant entrance into the kingdom of God.

Too many people today are worried about how to change the world. True religion must first change man's heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, *"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* After man has a change of heart, the rest will come naturally. Gone are the frustrations of everyday immorality and ill-will. Gone are the burdens of government which attempts to correct all of society's problems. The problem lies in an incorrect focus. As people turn to the Lord, their hearts will change. That is the one unmistakable result of true religion.

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