



NEW LIFE

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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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LORD'S DAY 12 NOVEMBER 2006

Pure Religion

Dear Readers,

"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" (James 1:27).

There is a controversy in this verse. It is a controversy that many conservative Christians experience. This controversy may be simply expressed in the question: "Should Christians engage in social work?"

Many years ago, I heard a sermon in a large conservative church in which the preacher said to the effect: "Leave the social work to the world. The church is not called to do social work, but to evangelise. We should not waste time and energy on social work!" But when we come to a verse such as in our text, we are immediately confronted with a totally different idea, and with that idea comes a challenge that is new to many of us.

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. What is James saying? What he is saying is quite clear, but let us study it phrase by phrase to see what the Spirit of Christ would have us learn from it.

1. Pure Religion

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...

The word 'religion' carries all sorts of connotation. After our conversion, many of us did not like to use the word 'religion' to speak about our new-found faith because we see Christianity as being so different from the world's religions. So we speak of Christianity as a relationship with God in contrast to the religions of the world. We understand religion to mean rituals, ceremonies and actions of worship. And we are repelled by the word. But there is nothing wrong with the word itself. Whether we like it or not, Christianity is not just a relationship, it is a religion. It involves acts of worship as well as a way of life and good works in response to God's love toward us.

However, there is such a thing in Christianity as formalistic religiosity or religious formalism. What is religious formalism? Well, it is what a professing Christian has if he simply attends worship and performs all the religious acts that are required and regard that as sufficient. So he goes for all the worship services; he sings when he is required to sing; he stands to pray when he is called to stand; he listens to the sermons dutifully. He may even extend that to his private life: He prays for 10 minutes and reads a chapter of the Bible every morning. But that is all to his Christianity. For the rest of his time, he is no different from a gentlemanly unbeliever. What this man has is religious formalism. If you are like this man, you have religious formalism. James condemns those who have this kind of religion as being hearers only, deceiving themselves (v. 22); and he insists that their faith is a dead faith. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" he says (Jas 2:17). This is why he speaks of 'pure religion.'

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Pure religion contrasts with 'impure religion' or corrupt religion. Religious formalism is essentially a corrupt religion. It is a defiled or faulty religion before God. If you leave your religion behind when you step out of the church or when you get out of your closet, then you do not have "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father."

You have a go-through-the-motion religion; or you have a mouth-religion,—even the religion that is condemned by the Lord when He says: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Mt 15:8). Pure religion, on the other hand, opens a fountain of love in the depth of the heart which overflows throughout the day. The heart of the believer is a leaky heart. It leaks of love. This is the kind of heart James is seeking to cultivate. This is the kind of heart in which pure and undefiled religion lives. This is why James says:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,...

2. To Visit the Fatherless

Notice what he is saying. He is telling us what is pure and undefiled religion in contrast to impure, polluted or dead religion. What does he say?

'Pure religion and undefiled before God is to faithfully attend all the means of grace'? No, no; he does not say that. If all you have is attendance at the means of grace, what you have is a ritualistic observance or religious formalism. Or does he say: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God is to keep all the laws of God'? No, no; James tells us that it is impossible to do so: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Or does he say: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God is to pay your tithes and to contribute to the poor'? No, no; that may be included, but James does not say that. Or does he say: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God is to go to the streets to witness for the Lord'? No, no; that may be included, but James does not say that either.

What then does he say? He says: Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, What is he saying? Now, obviously he cannot be saying that so long as we visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, we would have pure religion. No, no; what he is saying is that pure religion must involve doing good works such as visiting and helping orphans and widows. Pure and spotless religion is more than attendance at the means of grace. It is more than keeping ourselves from breaking the law. It is more than being a witness for the Lord with our tongue. It is a life that overflows with good works which can be seen as good works by anyone who observes.

In the parable of the sheep and goat (Mt 25:31ff), the Lord speaks about feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, showing hospitality to the stranger, clothing the naked and visiting the prisoners (v. 35-36). He tells us that those who do so are His sheep who would inherit the kingdom of God; while those who do not do these things are the goats who are reserved unto everlasting fire. The Lord is obviously giving examples, just as James is obviously giving examples by speaking about visiting and helping orphans and widows. But is it not clear that what James and the Lord are referring to as good works, are works that are visibly good works? Or in other words, works that even the world will acknowledge as good works; or more generally social work or works of benevolence! Now, beloved brethren and children, I don't know if you grasp the implication of what we are seeing in the Word? For years, many of us have been taught that good works are not necessary. We are saved by grace through faith and not works; and so, as long as you are faithfully attending the means of grace or having your daily devotion, and trying to keep the Law, you are fine. We are told that the Buddhist and Roman Catholics and Jehovah Witnesses need to do good works because they believe that they are saved by works and that is why they are motivated to do good works.

But really these good works are not necessary. But is it really true that good works are not really necessary? Granted that many if not most of the members of legalistic religions like Buddhism or Roman Catholicism do good works in the hope of attaining to heaven or to nirvana.

Granted that we do not need to contribute one thread to our garment of salvation. Granted that good works will not bring us to heaven. But is it true that good works are *not* necessary for us? If it is *not* necessary for us, why does James tell us that pure religion and undefiled is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; and why does the Lord teach us that *only those* who feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, show hospitality to the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the prisoners will inherit heaven? Oh beloved brethren and children, I think many of us have over-reacted to works-religions and cast out good works altogether. No, no; good works will not get us to heaven; but what James is saying is that if we have true faith we will have good works. "Faith without works is dead!"

But wait a minute! What about the apostle Paul? Did he not say: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph 2:8-9). Yes, he did. But did he rule out good works? Let's turn to the passage—Ephesians 2:8-9. Look at verse 10 - *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Eph 2:10).

Do you see what Paul is saying? We are saved so that we can do the good works which God has ordained for us to do. And good works is not just keeping the Law or attending the means of grace as we have seen. It includes things which the world would regard as good works. "Should Christians engage in social work?" "Should the church be involved in any kind of social work?" I think the answer is quite obvious. In fact, it is so obvious that our Confession of Faith devotes a whole chapter on good works. Our Confession teaches us that good works do not refer to those superstitious acts of penance etc, which are required by Rome. But good works are those commanded by God's word, which include surely the works of benevolence (*WCF* 16). These works, our Confession teaches us:

These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life (*WCF* 16.2)

This is the pure religion that James is referring to. But the apostle James does not end there. He says...

3. Keep Himself Unspotted

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. Pure and undefiled religion does not only involve visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction. It involves also keeping ourselves unspotted for the world. In other words, it involves striving to be holy as God is holy. It involves not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Now, tonight, it is not my intention to focus on this second aspect, though it is equally important.

My focus is on good works; so I would like to apply the second part of this verse to the focus of our study, - to good works. And I would suggest to you that this second part of the verse teaches us that we may not join hands with the world to do good works. There are some who teach that we should sharply distinguish between worship and works of benevolence, and we should have no qualms working with the Roman Catholic or with Satanist to do good works. But James while advocating good works, reminds us that we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world. And one of the ways to keep ourselves unspotted from the world is to refuse to join hands with the world on the any social work.

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The apostle says:

"¹⁴ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel" (2 Cor 6:14-15).

We must remember that when we do good works we are not to do it in our own name, but in the name of Christ. If it is not done in the name of Christ, how does it contribute to pure and undefiled religion? And if it is done in the name of Christ, how can we join hand with Christ-haters to do it. No, no; beloved brethren, Christians must do good works, but we must not join hands with the wicked to do it.

Conclusion

What have we learned tonight?

We learned have we not, that our religion is not adorned with ceremonies, but with charity as well as purity? If we have true faith, we will do good works when we have the opportunity to. Well, brethren and children, we have had very little opportunity to do so hitherto. But now the Lord has set us in this very needy neighbourhood. And we have this property that will facilitate our doing some good works. Shall we not make use of the opportunity?

The church does not only have a mandate to preach the Gospel. We have a mandate to shine forth for Christ. We must shine forth for Him not only through the Gospel, but through the good works for which we have been redeemed to do. We must therefore have a ministry of benevolence. We must do good to the saints. We must also do good to the unconverted. Christ our Lord fed the 5000 and the 4000; and most of them were reprobates. He did not feed them so that they would follow Him. He fed them out of compassion for them; for He withdrew Himself when they tried to follow Him. So too when we do good works, we must *not* do it merely as a means to an end. We must do it with a compassionate heart, as a grateful response to the Lord for saving us.

Let us be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves.

Let us seek the Lord's help that we may do so individually and as a church. Amen.

—JJ Lim

(Adapted from sermon preached at PCC evening worship service on 29 January 2006)

Q&A

Can you comment on Prophet T.B. Joshua, who is coming to Singapore end November for a series of healing and prophetic meetings at the Indoor Stadium?

Jesus warned us of false teachers in the last days (Matt 24:3,4,24 and Matt 7:21-23). There are strange supernatural claims and activities over the years by all kinds of speakers and so-called healers, writers, movie makers in the name of Christianity and many have fallen for it (i.e. godless laughter by Howard Browne and false teachings of the word of faith movement, the defective gospel of the alpha course by Nicky Gumbel, blasphemous Hollywood movie on the Passion of Christ by Mel Gibson, the heretical Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown, the unsound new age writings and teachings of Deepak Chopra and other gurus, animal blessings by some pastors, dancing during worship and yoga classes practised by some churches). Beware of the latest teachings on healing in the Lord's Supper (i.e. that one of the purposes of the Holy Communion is to "heal us of our sickness" – it is an incredible claim! (See 1 Cor 11:23-28) and the prosperity and health gospel (i.e. a Christian should be rich and healthy if not, he or she is dishonouring God – an amazing statement! Consider Job, Paul and others who were afflicted physically, approved of God! See 1 Tim 5:23 and 2 Cor 12:9) locally as well anyone who claims to have healing powers for supernatural healing as sign gifts for the apostles have long ceased (1 Cor 13:8-11, 2 Cor 12:12 and Acts 5:12) by the end of the first century with the end of the apostolic era (while God answers prayers of the sick according to Jas 5:14-18 in accordance to His will) and so-called tongues speaking (i.e. unintelligible utterances which is totally unbiblical, see Acts 2:3-11) and prophecies about the future. It amazes us that present day Christianity is so gullible and so easily deceived by the wiles of the evil one. Read 1 Thess 5:21,22, 1 Tim 6:20 and Mt 24:3-6, 24 and 2 Pet 2:1-3 and be careful of these in the end time ecclesiastical declension and spiritual deception.

Ignorance is not bliss (Hos 4:6). Be careful and vigilant and alert and search the word of God, the only inerrant, authoritative, providentially preserved and sufficient rule of faith to examine them with discernment and see if things were true like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. Read 2 Tim 2:15 and 2 Tim 3:16,17. Study and know the word well in your heart and apply it and be forewarned and forearmed of these spiritual charlatans and false prophets when they come. This is the only way to protect ourselves from falsehood and error and the corruption of the church. Hope this helps.

Rev Jack Sin

In Green Pastures Devotional Readings for Every Day of the Year

By J.R. Miller, D.D.

12 November 2006

MORNING

LUKE 10:29 "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?"

LOVE to our neighbour seems at first an easy lesson to learn. But when we begin to study it, it grows harder. There is more of the lesson than we thought. We like to pick our neighbours, and we are sure to choose people who are congenial.

How to love our neighbour is taught in the parable. It is easy to have a sort of universal love—a love for everybody, a love we can exercise in our quiet home, looking at people in the distance, but not coming near to anyone. It is not just the same, however, when we go down among the people, and find our neighbour in some disagreeable person we cannot like, but waiting for our help, or in some enemy in need. The Good Samaritan found his neighbour in a hated Jew bleeding by the wayside. He had to get down in the dust and stanch his wounds, and then carry the man to an inn and pay the bills. It often costs a great deal to love a neighbour. The lesson is written out in full at the close: "Go, and do thou likewise."

EVENING

KEEP THE IDEAL UNDIMMED

WE each have in our soul, if we are true believers in Christ, a vision of spiritual loveliness into which we are striving to fashion our lives. This vision is our conception of the character of Christ. "That is what I am going to be some day," we say. Far away beyond our present attainment as this vision may shine, yet we are ever striving to reach it. This is the ideal which we carry in our heart amid all our toiling and struggling. This ideal we must keep free from all marring or stain. We must save it though we lose our very life in guarding it. We should be willing to die rather than give it up to be destroyed. We should preserve the image of Christ, bright, radiant, unsoiled, in our soul until it transforms our dull, sinful, earthly life into its own transfigured beauty.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: STRIVING TO LIVE ABOVE OUR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS
IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:3)

Our **worship services** begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 12/11/2006	Next Week: 19/11/2006	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Alvin Chow	Seetoh Yong Chiang	
<i>Speaker:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	<p style="text-align: center;">NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evening Service: Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) <i>Q.146. Which is the tenth commandment?</i> <i>Q.147. What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?</i> <i>Q.148. What are the sins forbidden in the tenth commandment?</i> <p style="text-align: center;">Do stay back and find out the answers from the Word of God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of Service: For those who are interested to help in the kitchen ministry or post lunch washing-up and Library, please see Jonathan. • This morning we will observe 2 minutes of silence in remembrance of those who have lost their lives in the wars. <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">What Money can Buy You?</p> <p>Money will buy you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ a bed but not sleep; ❖ books but not brains; ❖ food but not an appetite; ❖ finery but not beauty; ❖ a house but not a home; ❖ medicine but not health; ❖ luxuries but not culture; ❖ amusements but not happiness; ❖ religion but not salvation; ❖ a passport to everywhere but heaven.
<i>Message:</i>	The Empty Tomb	Seeing Is Not Believing	
<i>Text:</i>	John 20:1-18	John 20:19-29	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Yanning Ding	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jeff Pun	
<i>Speaker:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	The Ninth Commandment	The Tenth Commandment	
<i>Text:</i>	WLC Questions 143-145	WLC Questions 146-148	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Feng Qian	Anthony	
Other Duties			
	Today	Next Week	
<i>Ushers</i>	John/Evelyn	Jeff / Constance	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Joyce	Carol Mok	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	YAF Group 2	YAF Group 1/ Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	Video	Video	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 9 Nov	7.00 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: BS Leader: Sharon Chan	
Sat 10 Nov	4.00 pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Spkr/C'man: Pr Mok	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering:	£498.41	Hospitality: £180.00 Lunch: £38.43	
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>The Lord's Prayer</u></h2> <p style="margin: 0;"><i>Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen</i></p>			