

# Practicing Pure Religion

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**By Tony Stith**

ZIMMERMAN, Minn.—According to James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to . . . mumble, mumble, mumble . . . keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Striving to stay unspotted from world. Being zealous to overcome sin. Yep, got that one down, baby! Rejecting worldly teaching and immorality and holding onto Truth? Check that! That's my life, man! That's what I really care about!

What's that? Oh, that little part I mumbled through? Let's see: "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble."

Yeah, well . . . yeah, I suppose that's there too. But let's get back to that Truth thing! That's where it's at! That's what God really cares about!

Really? Because it looks to me that serving those who are in need, reaching out to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction, isn't ranked somewhere way down at the bottom of some spiritual to-do list. It's right up there. It's one of two things that God says are equally important in identifying those whose religion is pure.

For every place in God's Word where we are exhorted to love and obey His law, to seek after truth and reject the things of this world, you can find another where we are commanded to give selflessly in service to others.

In Isaiah 1:17, one of hundreds of scriptures like it, we are commanded to "seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."

Scriptures like this one make it abundantly clear that becoming like our Elder Brother isn't measured solely by our progress in mastering a list of dos and don'ts. It's about developing His heart and mind within us. It's about caring passionately about the things He cared about.

You want to get to know the Lord more fully? You want to be more like Him? Get passionate about the things He was passionate about.

Passionate about Truth? Yes, of course.

But also passionate, big time, about people, especially the needy among us.

"A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5).

You can't overlook them and think you're are becoming like Him. You can't go to church on the Sabbath, read your Bible, share a few platitudes over coffee and cookies with your friends and then go home and think you're walking in the footsteps of your Savior, 'cause you're not.

Serving the less fortunate around you in your communities, in your church, isn't simply something you do once in awhile at a weekend church activity. It's not something you do if and when you have the time, resources and inclination. It not an optional part of the program. It is *the* program. And whether we're fully engaged in that program or not has eternal implications.

"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me . . . Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' " (Matthew 25:34-40).

My prayer this Sabbath for myself and the rest of God's people is that the Lord will help us to be more like Him. That He will put just as great a passion in our hearts for serving the widow and fatherless as we have for holding onto His Truth. That we will be as zealous for defending the needy as we are for defending His Law. That each of us will give ourselves fully to practicing pure religion.