

Pure religion and undefiled before God

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“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.” (Jas. 1:27)

When James wrote these words, he didn't mean to suggest that if a believer did these things, he did all that was required of him. Rather he was saying that two outstanding examples of ideal religion are to visit orphans and widows and to keep oneself pure.

We might have thought that he would have zeroed in on expository preaching, or missionary work, or personal soul winning. But no! He thinks first of visiting those in need.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders how he had visited “from house to house” (Acts 20:20). J. N. Darby considered visiting “the most important part of the work.” He wrote, “The clock strikes the hours and the passers-by hear it, but the works inside make the clock go, and keep the striking and the hands right. I think that visiting should be your substantive work, and take all else as it comes. I dread much public testimony: and especially so, if there be no private work” (from a letter to G. V. Wigram, Aug. 2, 1839).

An elderly widow, living alone, reached the stage where she depended on help from neighbors and friends. With time on her hands, she kept a diary of anything and everything that happened during the day-especially of contacts with the outside world. One day neighbors realized that they hadn't seen any signs of life around her house for several days. The police were called to enter the house, and they found that she had been dead for several days. For three days prior to her death, the only entry in her diary was “No one came,” “No one came,” “No one came.”

In the busyness of our everyday lives, it is all too easy to forget the lonely, the needy, the infirm. We give priority to other matters, and often to those forms of service that are more public and glamorous. But if we want our religion to be pure and undefiled, we will not neglect the orphans and widows, the aged and shut-ins. The Lord has a special concern for those who need help, and a special reward for those who step forward to fill the need.

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