

Do You Leave Your Light On?

It seems Christianity has been reduced to whatever takes place on a local level, saying, “The church is doing this,” or “The church is doing that,” as it applies to various programs or projects underway. Now, don’t get me wrong, I understand there is a place for the local church and its work. To the church at Sardis, it was said, “he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die; for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God.” The church at Sardis had works, but they had not completed any of them: the consequences of which were serious, the scriptures saying, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Revelation 3:1-3). And concerning the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul said, “Now ye are the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Nevertheless, the church that Jesus built, the church comprised of all saints, the “one body” of which the Apostle Paul wrote, saying, “There is one body” (Ephesians 4:4), very rarely, if ever, crosses the mind of our society’s religiously minded population. The evidence of this conclusion is based upon a general observation that a small percentage of religious practitioners actually practice their faith outside of the church house doors.

So many will affirm, “I love Jesus!” and will adamantly affirm they are Christians: they go to church, almost every week, they give of their means although the sum does not even come close to what is spent on recreation, and indulgences of the flesh. All-in-all, there is a general misunderstanding of one key principle: Jesus said, “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

When James wrote “to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion” he was addressing Jewish Christians that were living in other lands in the midst of pagan oriented societies, and living, as it were, in exile. Although James recognizes a collective, he predominately addresses their individual and personal lives, using such terms as, “If any one of you” (1:5), “let not that man think” (1:7), “let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate” (1:9), “Blessed is the man” (1:12), “let no man say” (1:13), “But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (1:19), “For if any one is a hearer” (1:23), “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves” (1:22), and “Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (1:27).

This theme of individual Christianity in doctrine and practice is embedded throughout the entirety of the writing: James emphasizes the responsibility of daily Christian living, and the fulfillment of obligations and duties based upon relationships, whether secular, saying, “Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (5:4), or peculiar to them as saints, i.e., “Is any among you suffering? let him pray. Is any cheerful? let him sing praise” (5:13), they are indicators of the light that dwelleth in the child of God, and thereby expressions of true religion, i.e., “If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man’s religion is vain” (1:26).

Remember the words of the Lord, saying, “Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).