

"THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR RELIGION"

By Dr. Tom Wallace

" . . .after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."--Acts 26:5.

At this time of the year, religion is a very popular subject. Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday will draw great throngs of people out to church. Before his salvation experience on the road to Damascus, the Apostle Paul was one of the most religious men of his time. In Acts 26:5 he states, " . . .after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." All of us know, of course, that he was not a Christian. In fact, he was anti-Christian and anti-Christ, committing to prison and even murdering those who followed after the Lord Jesus. His testimony, as recorded through the Scriptures, tells us that he was very, very religious.

Of course, the world is plagued with religion. Religion is a bigger tool to prevent people from going to Heaven than it is for getting them there. Man is basically a religious creature. He is going to worship something or somebody. The Hindu has his Shasta. He worships cows, rivers and creatures. The Persian has his Zend-Avesta. The Hebrew has his Talmud. The Chinese has his Confucius or his Mao Tso-Tung. The Japanese has his Shinto shrine or Buddha god-shelf. The Roman has his Sybiline. The Mohammedan has his Koran. And the Moslem bows toward Mecca. In these last months, we've seen the rise of the Moonies, the Hari Krishnas, Herbert W. Armstrong with his World Tomorrow and Radio Church of God. The Mormons are everywhere. Jehovah's Witnesses always beat the Baptists to the mission fields of the world. The Seventh-day Adventists, the Christian Scientists and all the others mingle like leaven through bread in our society.

Religion is broken down into hundreds of different denominations. There are Jews, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Church of God, Church of Christ, Nazarene, Unity, Apostolic, Reform, Anglican, the Gay Church, Church of Satan and dozens of different kinds of Baptists. There are the American Baptists, German Baptists, Swedish Baptists, Southern Baptists, Conservative Baptists, General Baptists, General Association of Regular Baptists, Old Regular Baptists, Hard-shell Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Missionary Baptists, Independent Baptists and even Lily Baptists.

Now, which is the right religion? Religion is mentioned only five times in the Bible. (1) in our text, (2 and 3) in Galatians 1:13,14 and (4 and 5) in James 1:26,27. In reality, it's found only in three places, but the word itself is used five times. Ezekiel said, " . . .for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness . . .they hear thy words, but they do not do them" (33:31,32). Paul tells us in Titus 1:16, "They profess that they know God, but in words they deny him." Again, in II Timothy 3:5 he says, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Jesus told of those who love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corner of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matt. 6:5).

The world seems to want a religion that will accept them as they are, without challenge; a religion that goes along with what they already believe; a religion that will not object to what they now do; or a religion that will let all men be brothers and still believe whatever they want to believe. Popular religion today is one that does not insist, does not involve, does not interfere and does not include.

I. RELIGION THAT DOES NOT INSIST

A religion that will be popular and cause folk to rally around it will be one that does not insist on . . .

1. Repentance. Remember, Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Want something to go along with me)
2. Regeneration. This will not be included in the popular religion, but the Bible insists that, "Ye must be born again."
3. Restitution. The popular religion will not insist on making right the wrongs or straightening out those things you've done that can be made right again.
4. Retribution. It will not insist on retribution and eternal Hell at the end of a sinful life.

A lot of people will come as long as there is not "insist" in your religion.

II. RELIGION THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE

The popular religion does not include . . .

1. Book Without Error. Our Bible is the infallible, inspired, inerrant Word of God. Many people would like to have it be just a manual of religion.
2. Blessed Hope. The Bible teaches the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is involved in God's type of religion, but not man's.
3. Blood Atonement. The lamb died in Eden; Cain's offering was rejected, while Abel's was accepted. Abraham offered Isaac and God substituted the lamb. "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11). ". . .ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . .but with the precious blood of Christ" (I Pet. 1:18,19). The Bible teaches that redemption involves blood atonement.

III. RELIGION THAT DOES NOT INTERFERE

Popular religion does not interfere with pleasures, customs, habits, jobs, families and plans. If you can come up with a religion that will let man be, do, and go when and where he wants to, without having any interference, it will be popular. In other words, most people want a religious coat that they can put on when they go to church, take off and hang on the closet door when they get home, and never bring it out again until the next Sunday, or maybe next Easter or Christmas.

IV. RELIGION THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE

Religion will be popular if it does not include obligation and responsibility. David said, "Shall I make sacrifice of that which doth cost me nothing?" There is

responsibility in true Christianity, but great religious systems are so glad to have people join with them that they are perfectly willing to put up with anybody and anything.

We are responsible for . . .

1. **Cleanliness.** Bible Christianity includes a clean heart, clean mind and clean hands.
2. **Concern.** God expects us to have burden and interest in others.
3. **Conduct.** Our behavior is based on what we believe.

In closing, let me point out that the person who accepts these basic steps of responsibility will find the truth of the book of Hebrews: "The commandments of the Lord are not grievous." Christians rejoice in being able to serve, sacrifice and surrender their rights to those of God as taught in the Bible. The most popular religions of the world are just that--religions of the world, not religions of the Bible or of God.

There is a great need today to preach the true Gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross and shed His blood to provide a plan of redemption to save our poor, lost souls. Turn to Him today, if you don't already know Him as your Saviour.