

## IS YOUR RELIGION FAILING YOU?

Is your religion failing you? Are the neighbors of your life un-neighborly? Is the church letting you down? What is the religion of Jesus Christ good for? Is your religion more of a weight on your back, rather than a stimulus to your soul? Jesus said, "**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**" (Matthew 11:29-30 ESV) Are you rejecting the easy "yoke" of Christ for the heavy weight of worldly religion?

Hello, I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

You have probably heard about the Pharisees and Sadducees? These two groups were the major religious movements of Jesus' day. There was a lot of room for criticism of those religious groups. When John the Baptizer saw Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the place where he was baptizing, John cried out, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" John was not happy with the Pharisees and Sadducees! The religion represented by those people was popular among the elite, but their religion was not serving the common people spiritually. Those groups bound heavy burdens upon the spiritual backs of its people; they were not showing the way to live for God. Jesus said the common people were like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Today, is the religion of Jesus Christ in its modern forms helpful to the common people of the world?

Let us first consider the idea of "religion." What is it? What does it do? Why does everybody have one? Well, you may wish to say that not everyone has religion. However, consider its definition. "Religion" is "seeking your highest values." That's right! Every person has his or her "highest values." When you consider that your "religion" is what is most valuable to you then everyone is a worshipper! Everyone is religious.

You can see this in the lives of people on a Sunday morning. To Christians, the day called Sunday holds special significance. It is what the New Testament calls "the first day of the week". The Jewish feast called Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week, therefore, the church started on the first day of the week. First century Christians gathered together on the first day of the week "to break bread" (a reference to the observance of the Lord's Supper). (Acts 20:7) Early Christians called that day "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10). And so, the first day of the week was held in high esteem by Christians as a day of worship.

But of what value is this day to you? To some it is a day to stay in bed and rest. To others it is a time to load the four-wheelers and go riding in the woods. To others the First Day is a time to visit cemeteries to show respect for the dead. To others the Lord's Day is a day of fishing, or a Day to seek whatever else makes for and gives you relaxation. To others it is just another day to work and make a living. What is your highest priority? How do you use the Lord's Day? What are the things you value the most? These are the objects of your worship, the symbols that represent your highest values.

Jesus' knew His highest value at twelve years old: He told His mother and step-father: "Do you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ([Luke 2:49 MKJV](#))

Years later, when Jesus was asked **which** was the great commandment in the law, Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." ([Matthew 22:37-40 MKJV](#)) To Jesus, the highest of values was the love of God, a love that consumes the heart, soul, and mind of every person. This love can only happen in an individual! A church or a group cannot "love" for me! I must obey this command; I must love God. This was Jesus' highest of values.

But Jesus said there was something else that He valued. That value was expressed in what Jesus called the **second** great commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus commented, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The night before His crucifixion Jesus gave a third commandment to His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." ([John 13:34-35 ESV](#))

So Jesus' triad of core values was contained in three commandments, two of them very old, and then a new one. Each value is an **expression** of LOVE. Each value is a **direction** for LOVE. Friends love is the greatest thing in the world. Love is the highest of values! **What** do you love? **Who** do you love? Do you love yourself above God? Do you love things more than your neighbor? Do you love others more than the disciples of Jesus Christ? Do you despise the Lord's church? So, let me ask again these questions: Is your religion failing you, or are you failing your religion? Is your neighbor rejecting you, or are you rejecting your neighbor?

Is the church letting you down or are you letting the church down?

What is your religion?

Jesus had many debates with Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus found their religion wanting. Whereas those people gave some lip-service to the great commandments, they were not good at obeying them! In fact, rather than make them better people, their religious practice of those great commands was full of error. Even today religious people can have their highest priorities out of step with Jesus' highest priorities.

Consider what is happening in the world of Jesus' religion. Believers can find no "fire" within their souls? They are restless. They want something new. They are like the Athenians of the first century; they always have itching ears for something NEW. It seems that worship services have wilted down into rituals, ceremonies, and entertainment. Sermons are spiritless homilies on current events. Some sermons are filled with meaningless religious jargon that does not communicate with the people. The teachers produce myths in an effort to say something new. The teaching produces speculation and generates questions rather than answers and assurance. (1 Tim 1:4)

The people in the pews are not satisfied...they are not fed a spiritual diet that leads to the love of God, of neighbor, and the church. They feel empty because they have been trained to seek fulfillment in sensual, fleshly ways. And that fleshly appetite can be fulfilled on motorcycles, horses, and fishing boats. Therefore, the services tend to become more and more sensual, fleshly, so as to become more and more satisfying. The people seek goosebumps and ecstasy. Of course, eventually this too will become old and engineered. It will become habitual and then they will again go after something newer. Many of these people will grow weary of church and its preaching. They "will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." (2 Timothy 4:3-4 ESV) Finally they may quit! They have come to believe that their "private" faith is what can save them. They have given up on the church.

What is the religion of Jesus Christ good for? Is the religion of Christ become a weight on your back, rather than a stimulus to grow love? What is the church of Christ good for?

Sinful individuals need two things. First, they need God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness has been provided by the crucifixion of His only begotten Son, Jesus

Christ. Forgiveness is now available and is advertised by the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, the good news of salvation. The first sinners who heard the Gospel were prompted to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The preacher then replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37, 38) The record says that "...With many other words [Jesus' apostle Peter] bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:40-41 ESV) Those baptized people were added to the church by the Lord himself. (Acts 2:47)

Secondly, saved sinners need the church. Why does Jesus add us to His church? Jesus knew that we need each other. We need the climate of love, nurtured in the greenhouse of the church's love. We need the love of one another.

Loving one another gives us "worth." We are somebody in the church of Christ; we are brothers and sisters in the family of God. We feel the value that God has placed upon us. You are God's child! God loves you. Jesus died for you! The church's love gives us "worth."

Loving one another gives us "security." That's right! It was said of those first Christians that they "were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." (Acts 2:44-45 ESV) That church was even taking care of the physical needs of the family of God. The church's love was their "security."

Loving one another in the church gives us "hope." The church is the recipient of the Lord's promise. It was to the church that he said, "I will be with you always, till the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20) It was to the church that He said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:2-3 ESV) It was to the church he said, "In the world ye shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) The church's love and the Lord's promise give me strength to face the troubles of life. Life events can be so unfair. They can be so disruptive and shake us to our foundation. The church helps me cope! The church helps me to be persistent and steadfast.

This is the church Jesus is building one person at a time all over world, and perhaps now in your community. No, the church is not perfect because its members are still in flesh and blood and struggling with Satan every day. But yet, within the church we can grow in our supreme task of loving God with all our

heart, soul, and mind. Within the church we can have a healthy love for ourselves, our neighbors, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the church we can anticipate the second coming of our King from Heaven. Yes, in the church we can be trained "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and [challenged] to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." ([Titus 2:12-13 ESV](#))

Visit a church of Christ near you and become a valuable member of Christ, pursuing love, the highest value, throughout the world, in every community.