

True Spirituality

Isaiah 1:17-18

“Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.”
“ ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD,
‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.’” (NAS)

Writing in the 8th century BC, the prophet Isaiah lived during a time when people were religious in terms of cultic observance but devoid of care for each other. They would bring animal sacrifices to the Temple, expect to be forgiven of their sins, and then continue to mistreat their neighbor. In today's context, it would be like someone going to church, putting money in the offering plate, and then using illegal business practices during the week to cheat their customers. In response to the hypocrisy in Isaiah's day, God told Israel that God no longer desired their sacrifices but rather required that they demonstrate their faith through their care for the hurting in their midst. If they would take care of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger in their midst, then God would cleanse them of their sins.

We see this same idea echoed in the New Testament in a number of places, including the following: “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27 [NAS]); and “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20 [NAS]). While the world is a complex place and there are a number of opinions concerning what it means to be truly spiritual. In the Bible we are told that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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Point for Prayer:

In what ways have you been moving closer or further away from the commandment to love your neighbor? What are some tangible ways to live into this important biblical idea?