

Good morning! Do you think of yourself as a religious person? When I was growing up I never considered myself or my family to be especially religious. It seems strange to me now, looking back, because we were always in church. My Dad was a Trustee and Council Member. Mom was in a Bible Study. We attended Youth Group, Sunday School, Lenten mid-week services, and sang in the Youth Choir. My brother and I went to Father/Son Cook outs with Dad and my sisters went with Mom to Mother-Daughter Banquets. When nothing was going on, we were still at church, cutting the grass, polishing the floors. My parents put out the monthly newsletter, The Messenger, using a printing press in our basement. Dad did the sound engineering from the choir loft. At home, we celebrated Advent with devotional services around the dinner table every night. During the summer all of us kids went to Caroline Furnace Lutheran church camp and went to Lutheran winter youth events at Massanetta Springs. We did a *lot* of religious stuff! This morning, let's see what the Bible has to say about all of this religious activity, as we read two passages—one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament:

The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. **Psalm 146:9**

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James 1:27

In our first passage, the psalmist tells us that *“The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow.”* In the second passage, James tells us that the religion that God accepts as “pure and faultless” is, *“To visit the widows and the fatherless.”* It seems to me that a lot of things that you and I think are religious don't mean very much to God. And yet there are other things, things that we neglect, which are very important to God. God cares for the alien. He cares for the widow. He cares for the fatherless. In the Old Testament and the New Testament God consistently emphasizes that He cares for the alien, the widow and the orphan. Not only that, He challenges us to share that concern. If God has put His Spirit in us and is transforming us and renewing our minds, we should share that same compassion and concern. No matter how many programs you join, how many religious activities you do with your church group, if you're not caring for the ones God cares about, your religion is not acceptable to God. This morning, let me challenge you to consider how you can demonstrate your concern for those who are in need. You don't need to be more religious...just care about the things that God cares about!