

## *Saturday "Sermon"*

David C. Stancil, Ph.D.

First Baptist Church of Bristol, Virginia

[dave@fbcbristol.org](mailto:dave@fbcbristol.org)

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### **How Much Religion is Enough?**

I'm sure you've noticed that the world is chock-full of religion. Out of almost seven billion people in the world today, more than five billion are affiliated in some way with the five major religions of the world.

While some persons fill their speech with religious talk, their homes with religious books, and their walls with religious art, others are only marginally religious. Content with their baptism as infants or as children, their relationship with religion is one of benign neglect, and all they hope for is to maintain good credit for the life to come.

Well, religion is, after all, intended to prepare a person both for this life and for the life to come. So how much religion does it take to do what religion is supposed to do? How much religion is "enough"? Let me suggest three answers to that question:

First, **we need enough religion to make us quit our meanness**, a statement a friend of mine attributed to the great evangelist Billy Sunday. The point is that if our religion doesn't make us stop being ornery and selfish and hateful, we don't have enough of it. Religion ought to clean up our act.

There is, after all, a reason why the Bible calls being born again the entrance into "a new life" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It's because old habits are meant to be replaced by new patterns of behavior. Honesty replaces dishonesty. Kindness replaces meanness. Gentleness replaces anger, and decent speech replaces filthy talk (Ephesians 4:31-32). Do you have enough religion to make you quit your meanness?

Second, **we need enough religion to motivate us to serve the Lord**. Although many surveys report that most Americans believe that God exists, that belief has no real bearing on how they live their lives. Such people don't have "enough religion."

So how much religion is enough? We have enough religion when we're making measurable progress in the development of Christlike character qualities such as "*love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). And we have enough religion when we're motivated to service that expresses the love of God to others. Do you have enough religion to motivate you to serve the Lord?

Finally, **we should also have enough religion to make us happy!** Religion that is dreary, dull, and depressing isn't worth having. Religion that is joyful and interesting and encouraging and Hope-full is what we need. There's enough in this old world to discourage the soul. This world is full of war, disease, poverty, hatred, greed, anxiety, and guilt. Why add a burdensome faith to all that?

It's crucial to understand that God intends for those who follow Jesus to be happy, to be well-adjusted, to be content in their life and work, to have a positive disposition, a bright hope, and an enthusiastic confidence in the future. The Christian Way is a joyful

way! Even when he was in prison, Paul instructed us to “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4). Do you have enough religion to make you happy?

Growing in Christlikeness is sometimes called “discipleship.” Sometimes it’s called “sanctification.” Sometimes it’s called “spiritual formation.” But whatever it’s called, this process begins with God’s amazing grace that causes us to dare to believe that we really are loved. That’s why Zephaniah 3:17 has long been my favorite verse in the Bible: “*The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will comfort you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.*” That’s where we begin; and happily, if we follow Jesus, it’s also where we end up—in God’s powerful and loving presence in the eternal Kingdom of Light!