

COMMON GROUND

Dealing with the Challenges to Christianity



Discussion #2: "Does Soap Exist?"

Weekly Devotions & Notes for 8/18-24

Monday, August 19 Read Micah 6:1-8

One of the strongest criticisms of religious people is that we are 'hypocrites.' That word is from a Greek term meaning actor, or one who wears a mask. In this passage, what does God see as real or of substance and what things are just externals or masks? _____

Tuesday August 20 Read Isaiah 58:1-14

What angers God in this scripture and of what sorts of actions or activities does He approve? _____

In your church experience, how much of what is done is of the former and what is of the latter? _____

How does this cripple our witness? _____

How can we change this? Give some specific examples or activities that you can be a part of. _____

Wednesday, August 21 Read 1 John 3:11-24

This is only one of many passages that encourage us to emulate Christ by being self-sacrificial. Look at v. 17. What does the church look like when we practice this and how can not doing it lead to charges of hypocrisy? _____

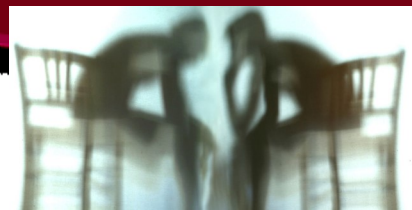
Note that the world won't appreciate either stance (v.13). What *should* motivate us? _____

Sermon Notes from August 18, 2019

"Does Soap Exist?"

1. Religion 'goes bad' when it is used to serve human purposes instead of God's.
2. Christianity is authentic when it
 - a. ...is defined by sacrificial love.
 - B. ...is evidenced by a transformed life.
 - C. ...exists as a blessing to others.

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Thursday, August 22 Read Matthew 23:1-36

How would you sum up Jesus' critique of the Pharisees? _____
_____ It is important to remember that the Pharisees were devout religious leaders, and as such ought to have known better! How should we as the church hear such criticisms? _____

How can we avoid the same mistakes the Pharisees made? _____

Friday, August 23 Read 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Paul wrote this letter to a church fractured by disagreements and factions. Without using the word 'love,' how would you describe his "more excellent way (12:31)?" _____

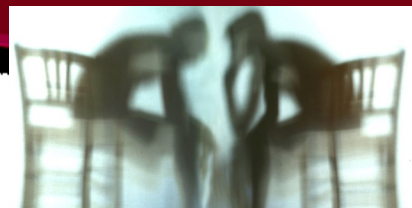
Why is it so important for our witness to the world that we follow these guidelines? _____

Saturday, August 24 Read Luke 10:25-37

Note that this familiar parable is told as a 'nuts and bolts' explanation for how we are to fulfill the great commandment to love God and neighbor. Look at the lawyer's question in v.29 and the answer ultimately given in v.36-37. Who is *your* neighbor? _____

_____ How (list some specifics) do you exhibit mercy? _____

#2: 'Does Soap Exist?'



Small Group Leader's Discussion Guide

Section 1: Looking Through the Lens of Scripture

1. **Have the group read Micah 6:1-8 aloud.** Share: "One of the strongest criticisms of religious people is that we are 'hypocrites.' That word is from a Greek term meaning actor, or one who wears a mask." Discuss:
 - *In this passage, what does God see as real or of substance and what things are just externals or masks?*
2. **Read Isaiah 58:1-14.** Discuss the following:
 - *What angers God in this scripture and of what sorts of actions or activities does He approve?*
 - *In your church experience, how much of what is done is of the former and what is of the latter? How does this cripple our witness?*
 - *How can we change this? Give some specific examples or activities that you can be a part of.*

Section 2: Applications

1. **Have someone read 1 John 3:11-24** Share: "This is only one of many passages that encourage us to emulate Christ by being self-sacrificial. Look at v. 17." Discuss the following:
 - *What does the church look like when we practice this and how can not doing it lead to charges of hypocrisy?*
 - *Note that the world won't appreciate either stance (v.13). What should motivate us?*
2. **Read Matthew 23:1-36 aloud.** Discuss the following:
 - *How would you sum up Jesus' critique of the Pharisees? It is important to remember that the Pharisees were devout religious leaders, and as such ought to have known better!*
 - *How should we as the church hear such criticisms? How can we avoid the same mistakes the Pharisees made?*
3. **Look at these notes from last Sunday's sermon. Discuss the questions that follow.**
 - A. Religion 'goes bad' when it is used to serve human purposes instead of God's.
 - *Does misusing God's teachings necessarily invalidate God's existence? Why or why not?*
 - *What does misuse of God's guidelines say about the nature of God's relationship with people?*
 - B. Christianity is authentic when it...
 - ...is defined by sacrificial love. (Read Matthew 23:11-12)
 - *How is this different from what is usual emphasized in 'salvation' messages?*
 - ...is evidenced by a transformed life. (Read Galatians 5:19-26)
 - *Why is a transformed life critical to living the Christian faith?*
 - ...is exists as a blessing to others. (Read Matthew 5:13-16)
 - *How might this be seen as a critical part of the reason for Christian discipleship?*

Section 3: To take with you...

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13** Share: "Paul wrote this letter to a church fractured by disagreements and factions." Try and discuss the following:
 - *Without using the word 'love,' how would you describe his "more excellent way (12:31)?"*
 - *Why is it so important for our witness to the world that we follow these guidelines?*