

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

2-27-1975

### Religion in the Home

Joseph J. Battistone  
*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Battistone, Joseph J., "Religion in the Home" (1975). *Faculty Publications*. 3765.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3765>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# Religion in the Home

---

If religion is to be a vitalizing power  
in our homes, it must be  
a religion that is illumined  
by the light of the gospel.

---

By JOSEPH J. BATTISTONE

IF RELIGION IS TO MEAN ANYTHING at all, it must first prove itself in our homes. Consider, for example, some of the social ills afflicting our communities: Educators overwhelmed with behavioral problems lament the permissiveness in our homes and warn us of the disastrous consequences ahead if the problems are not resolved; children who are emotionally troubled or undisciplined cannot learn as readily as those who come from secure and stable homes. Law officers point to the breakdown of the home as the principal cause for the mounting felonies in our communities.

Failure to instill moral principles in the minds of children at an early age is the chief cause for the increase of teen-age felonies ranging from robbery to rape. Small businesses in some communities have been forced to close because of the accumulated loss as a result of theft and armed robbery. Because of the grim problems plaguing our communities some students have changed their majors from studies in urban renewal to studies in fields more bright with promise.

A recognition of the situation leads to an important question: How can we make religion a vitalizing power in our homes? To put the question this way does not mean, of course, that we can accomplish our goal by sheer determination.

Religion can become an active force in our homes only by the grace of God. But having said this, we still face the practical question: How can this be accomplished? If anything, our question implies that God is willing and ready to act on our behalf. In fact, He has already done this. It is the conviction of the New Testament that God in Jesus Christ has placed at our disposal the immeasurable resources of heaven. It remains for us to enrich ourselves and our homes with this treasure.

How then can we do this? First, we need to become aware of the religious dynamics exhibited in the life of Jesus. This will require time and effort on our part. Many of us are aware

---

*Joseph J. Battistone, Ph.D., is associate professor of religion at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

of Jesus' teachings and miracles but are not conscious of their significance for life as we experience it today.

Second, we need to incorporate into our lives what we have learned. And let us be reasonable about this: We cannot accomplish this in a week or even a year. But God doesn't expect us to! The important thing is that we begin now and that we do so in faith. And as we venture forth we will experience the miracle of God's grace. New life forces will be released that will activate our homes. For the religion of Jesus is not a lifeless response to meaningless traditions, but a vital and vigorous experience essential for life today.

### The Religion of Jesus

Religion, as Jesus understood and embraced it, was something less formal and more personal. His ministry is depicted in the Gospels as one of keen interest and abiding concern for human life. His teachings, acts of healing, and sermons reveal this clearly. There is no fancy rhetoric, showmanship, or oratory, but a genuine display of compassion for those hungering and thirsting for newness of life.

The compulsion He experienced and expressed originated in a deep, abiding love for human life. We see this perhaps most clearly in those situations that brought Him into conflict with the religious authorities: It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, He said, and demonstrated this by healing a man with a withered hand (see Matt. 12:9-14). Was it necessary, we may ask, to heal this man on the Sabbath or could Jesus have waited until sunset?

From the viewpoint of the Pharisees, Jesus' act of healing was inappropriate because it violated the Jewish law of Sabbath observance. In the Sabbath law provision was made for healing, but only in cases of emergency. And the situation facing Jesus was not a crisis. Hence, from the perspective of the Sabbath tradition Jesus did not act rightly.

**It is only as we receive God's love in Christ that we can understand and show affection to others. And the service we render in love to others is perhaps the sweetest praise we can offer to God.**

But religion for Jesus was a way of living that is exciting and productive: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10, R.S.V.). Man-made rules, undoubtedly designed with good intentions to enhance the sacredness of the Sabbath, became offensive to God when they were enforced at the expense of love and human life. This is why Jesus placed human values (healing the man with the withered hand) above institutional ones (preserving Jewish Sabbath tradition; see Mark 2:23-28).

How can we emulate the attitude and spirit of Jesus in our homes today? Some time ago one of my students explained to me why at one point in his life he left the Adventist Church and for years refused to have anything to do with religion. His father was a minister, his mother a nurse. However, his home

was neither a place of worship nor a haven of rest, but an arena for bickering. Religion became to him a cumbersome set of rules that was suffocating him. So when the opportunity came he repudiated his religious tradition.

It is a paradox that some of the domineering religionists are persons who exhibit within the privacy of their homes little self-control in their lives. They seem to have an unusual compulsion to impose rules on others in order to compensate for their own feeling of insecurity: "Do as I say, not as I do," a parent will remark to his son. By exercising lordship over others, these persons seem to be able to keep in chains the monster that lives within themselves. Failure to keep in line the behavior of others oftentimes results in a loss of self-control. Hence, they feel compelled to hold tight the reins of authority so as to maintain a sense of order and inner peace.

#### Incubator of God's Love

In striking contrast, Jesus exhibited remarkable freedom in respect to the burdensome religious traditions of His day. Today it is only the freedom of God's grace (the gospel) that enables us to grow and develop in accordance with God's will (the law). If we could only understand and accept this fact our homes would become centers of spiritual enrichment.

To be saved in Christ means to be delivered from the power of all oppressive tyrants—within ourselves as well as without—so as to be free to grow into spiritual maturity. God does not ask us to demonstrate our sincerity or good intentions before coming to Him. No, not at all! He asks only that we believe that He receives us, and then act accordingly. Faith, to be sure, finds expression in a life of obedience to God. But this is possible only after we have accepted the reality of God's grace toward us in Jesus. Spiritual growth (good works) is the result of salvation, not the condition for it.

If religion is to be a vitalizing power in our homes, then it must be a religion that is illumined by the light of the gospel. For apart from God's grace there can be no Christian growth. That is to say, we must grasp the gospel of salvation intellectually and be grasped by it emotionally before we can truly come to an understanding of God's law.

Put briefly, infants in the faith can grow and develop into Christian maturity only in the incubator of God's love. This is especially so with respect to those who have been baptized prematurely. As we come to understand the gospel and are grasped by God's love, new incentives for worship and service appear. So parents who formerly had to threaten their children to make them attentive during family worship have an inner calmness and peace that generates an atmosphere of reverence for this sacred hour. And questions about appropriate or inappropriate dress, proper or improper entertainment, and those Sabbath afternoon activities don't end in bitter debate but in a more mature understanding and appreciation of God's holy will and purpose. It is only as we receive God's love in Christ that we can understand and show affection to others. And the service we render in love to others is perhaps the sweetest praise we can offer God.

Because the religion of Jesus is the religion of God's grace it provides the appropriate context for spiritual growth. This does not mean then that we by definition exclude God's law. Instead, we affirm that God's law can be grasped only in the context of His grace—grace as manifested in the life of Jesus. When viewed in this light God's law is not seen as a cumbersome set of rules but as important guides for a secure, stable, and productive life. Religion, then, is no longer a set of demands arbitrarily imposed on us for someone else's benefit but becomes essential for a meaningful and purpose-filled existence. □

## Fellowship of Prayer

### Trust God, Even in Darkest Hour

"To every sincere prayer an answer will come. It may not come just as you desire, or at the time you look for it; but it will come in the way and at the time that will best meet your need. The prayers you offer in loneliness, in weariness, in trial, God answers, not always according to your expectations, but always for your good."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 258.

"We are prone to look to our fellow men for sympathy and uplifting, instead of looking to Jesus. In His mercy and faithfulness God often permits those in whom we place confidence to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of trusting in man and making flesh our arm. Let us trust fully, humbly, unselfishly in God. He knows the sorrows that we feel to the depths of our being, but which we cannot express. When all things seem dark and unexplainable, remember the words of Christ, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.' John 13:7.

"Study the history of Joseph and of Daniel. The Lord did not prevent the plottings of men who sought to do them harm; but He caused all these devices to work for good to His servants who amidst trial and conflict preserved their faith and loyalty."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 486, 487.

► Years ago I sent in a prayer request that my two daughters would accept the Adventist faith and be baptized. It is with a feeling of gratitude and great joy that I express my thanks for answered prayer with reference to my one daughter. She was baptized in the Adventist faith. I am still praying for my other daughter and grandchildren. I thank you all for your prayers and thank God for His answers.—S. S., of North Carolina.

► Thanks for your prayers on behalf of our children. The Lord has wonderfully blessed, and we are happy to see most of our children working in some definite way for the Lord's cause. Two are hoping to further their education in our schools and are asking for prayers that God will open the way. Two others are presently in our junior college, and two are in our academy.

The Lord has answered our prayers in the past, and we know that with such an army as our youth rightly trained, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be carried with power, and soon Jesus will come. We are still praying for one son and we believe that when full surrender is realized

changes will be seen for the better.—A mother in Guyana.

► Some three months ago I wrote asking for your prayers for our son who had become wayward. Already for what seems like a very long time we had waited on the Lord.

I have finally learned a lesson that I needed so much to learn. For many years I had stood before my Sabbath school class and told them how to claim the promises of God, how to put faith to work, and how to accept the righteousness of Christ. Now I see that teaching a facet of faith and putting it into action are indeed two different things. On my knees I learned to claim the promises of God by faith for my son, and our gracious Lord is ever ready to answer.

The answer came last Friday morning as I was preparing lunch. My son called to say that he wanted to return to the Lord with all his heart and put behind him all the things he had done contrary to God's plan and go back to church. Thank God for His goodness and mercy. We are looking for the day when Jesus will come and take us all home.—L. C., of Tennessee.

*We are admonished by the Scriptures to "pray one for another" (James 5:16). This column is designed to encourage united prayer for personal, family, and church problems. The appointed time of prayer is at sunset each Friday evening. Participants believe "it is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask."—The Great Controversy, p. 525.*

*Portions of letters reporting answers to prayer will be published as space permits.*