Recipe Religion?

My wife bakes a great banana bread, but we are both watching our carbohydrates, so she doesn't make it often. Some time ago we discovered Splenda… wonderful stuff in your coffee or tea, but not so great for some recipes. Tastes pretty much like sugar, but not in banana bread!

It struck me that sometimes our religion is often the same. I believe in pattern theology (Philippians 3:17; 2 Timothy 2:13 NASB), but for today, let's call it "recipe theology." No, I am not speaking of some "cookie cutter" type of stamped out Christianity void of relationship with Christ. But I am speaking of a pseudo-religion where some try to leave out what God commanded or add what God has not.

The Splenda banana bread was simply not pleasing. Most of it eventually went out with the weekly trash. The truth: Banana bread without sugar is not the real thing. Likewise, Christianity has some very specific "withouts" in the scriptures if we are to please our Maker. Let's see what is not acceptable to God:

1. Faith without works is useless. (See James 2:20.)
2. Faith without works is dead. See James 2:26. No, we are not saved by works, but works are the evidence of saving faith. (See Ephesians 2:8-10.)
3. Zeal without knowledge is not acceptable to God. See Rom. 10:1-3.)
4. Sacrifice without love is profitless. (See 1 Cor. 13:1-3)
5. Going beyond what is written is actually belief without obedience. (See 1 Cor. 4:6.)

When we study foundational principles, we learn that knowledge is absolutely vital. As Hosea 4:6 states, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

Be gravely careful with your "recipe." Don't leave out the sweet part! All the doctrine in the world will not replace the sweetness of love for Jesus. Conversely, all the sweetness or zeal for God, if it is without knowledge is not pleasing to God.

To lead us to love and relationship, Jesus warned us through Paul not to go beyond what is written and not to try to replace knowledge with zeal. We need both. We need doctrine and we need zeal. But remember, we need relationship with Jesus, personally. It is our Savior whom we are trying to please as we bake a life fit to serve to Him.

Ray Wallace