

JAMES 1:26-27

James is like the ANTIQUES ROADSHOW- it's where you go to find out if what you have is genuine or a fake.

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James is giving advice that follows from the command – v. 16 Do Not be deceived. He is very concerned v. 16, 22, 26 about self-deception. It is the most dangerous form of deception.

Warnings in scripture are expressions of God's mercy.

It is also a command with a promise for all DOERS.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE BORN BY THE WORD

- 1. Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger v 19 – these reflect the character of God – Ps 103**
- 2. Is concerned for the righteousness of God v 20 – the character of God is at the heart of this**
- 3. Lays aside filthiness and wickedness v 21 This is addressed to believers, “beloved brethren**
- 4. Receives the Word in Humility v 21 God in Christ is the essence of humility -**
- 5. Is a doer of the Word v 22-25 Knowledge and memory of the Word are the prelude to the obedience of faith.**

Note who James is addressing- “anyone who thinks him/herself to be religious”.

Many today think of religion as a bad word and thus would say, “That’s not me. I’m not into religion. I’m into a relationship.”

James is not debating that issue. In his day “religious” was not necessarily seen as a bad thing. He is speaking to those who in some way want to avoid the label “non-religious”.

The sense from the text is that they want to be religious but want it on their terms. Perhaps they want all of the external trappings that may come with some display of religion. Or they want the social approval that may come. This sort of religion in name only has always been a problem. In Isaiah god spoke of those who “give lip service but their hearts are far from God.”

James changes the terms so that we can't just define “religious” any way we want to, and WE DO WANT TO.

Ex: I recently spoke with a young man who was doing just that, but he was honest enough to acknowledge it. He rejected some of the traditional things of religion including the authority aspect in order to create his own system. As he explained it, he acknowledged that he was basically creating his own authority structure. It was a refreshingly honest conversation.

So, James, in his own cut to the chase fashion, lays out issues that identify pure and undefiled religion:

- A bridled tongue, which James connects with a self-aware heart
- visiting orphans and widows, which James links with the character of God the Father
- keeping oneself unstained by the world, also linked with the character of god the Father.

We run into an immediate tension for us today, though not necessarily a tension for the original audience.

Do you see the tension in v. 27?

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The first part sounds like what many today would mistakenly call a “liberal view or practice” of religion – helping the weak, forgotten, and marginalized. And make no mistake; the orphan and widow have always been in a vulnerable situation.

The second part of the verse sounds like what many today would mistakenly call a “conservative view or practice” of religion. “Keep yourself unstained by the world.” **THAT WILL PREACH.**

EX: Andy Griffith – Barney Fife coming out of church. Andy says, “Good sermon pastor” to which Barney adds, “That’s one thing you can’t say enough about...sin.”

Barney is right because the bible talks a lot about sin. The bible also talks a lot about helping the weak and helpless. Those with a distinct and thorough biblical worldview will befuddle those on the left and those on the right. I’ll say this with all the love I can, **LEARN TO LIVE IN AND APPRECIATE THE TENSION** because it’s **NOT** going away.

Since James is heavy on application and light on the theological / doctrinal arguments about salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, it would be easy for some to jump on his teachings and create a salvation check-list, such as v. 26-27

- Bridled tongue, check
- I visit the orphan and widow, check
- I’m unstained by the world, check

YAY, I’M SAVED. James says it, I do it, so my religion must be pure.

If that is your approach, then your religion is just that – **YOUR RELIGION.** It is **NOT** the biblical religion. It is **VERY IMPORTANT** to remember that James is **NOT** the only book of the bible. James is not providing a complete definition of true or pure religion.

IF we act as if James 1:26-27 is all there is, then you have this formulation for salvation: “Bridle your tongue, visit orphans and widows, don’t be stained by the world and **YOU ARE SAVED.**”

Does that sound like **GOSPEL**, i.e. **GOOD NEWS**? **NO**, it sounds like another form of works righteousness. It is the kind of approach to scripture that gives rise to heresy and cults.

While James only mentions the name of Jesus twice, the grace that comes from God is the foundation of his letter. He is not creating a path to earn salvation; he is pointing us to what grace does in our lives. James is well aware that his audience is filled with the only kind of Christian there is – one who is saved by grace.

James is giving a snapshot of what a Christ-centered faith, hope, and love would look like. If we want to reflect God our Father, v.27, then we will care for the vulnerable and keep ourselves unstained by the world. Love god first and love others.

1 Jn 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Visit orphans and widows in distress V. 27
Isaiah 1:

**23 Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards.
They do not defend the orphan,
Nor does the widow's plea come before them.**

In my opinion, James is reminding us that we are to show to others the same measure and quality of grace that we have received from God. In the eyes of God we were helpless and had nothing to offer him. In the same way orphans and widows were (and still are) the most helpless members of society. When you help them, it's not out of a concern to get something in return. They have nothing to give from a material perspective. Aiding orphans and widows mirrors God's grace through Christ.

**Psalm 68:5 A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows,
Is God in His holy habitation.**

It wasn't because we had something to offer God that moved Him to save us. When we understand that, then it changes the way we look at and treat anyone who is disadvantaged or just simply different from us. If we don't see it, then we haven't understood the salvation that is ours in Christ.

The Judeo-Christian religious system has the best track record in terms of caring for orphans, widows, and others in distress. That is not a fluke; it is an outgrowth of the biblical teaching from the OT AND NT. It is encouraging how this has been modeled here at Highlands through adoption and those engaged with the foster care system, now or in the past. This is certainly a huge need in our society. There are various ways of being involved – directly, indirectly by contributing to help those who adopt, faithful prayer.

WE need to prayerfully consider our own role in the process.

As for helping widows, we can all reach out and aid those who are widows in need.

Keep yourself unstained by the world V. 27 (side note: your worst sins may still be ahead of you, so don't be deceived)

This too is an outworking of a relationship with God the Father. The vertical relationship and orientation of the heart determines the horizontal orientation of the heart.

How to live in the world without being stained by the world is a HUGE TOPIC.

In the command of this verse is an understanding that "the world" is a system or mindset that is at odds with the things of God. 1 Jn 2:15-17

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EX:HOW THE WORLD CORRUPTS ... It appears that Amazon Studios is determined to update The Lord of the Rings with something that was specifically left out in any explicit form of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. And that is sex and nudity. As is now being reported, Amazon Studios has hired Jennifer Ward Leland, "a respected intimacy coordinator." The New Yorker tells us that it is her job "to oversee sex and nudity scenes and ensure that everyone is comfortable during filming." Now remember, this category of an intimacy coordinator is rooted in the pornography industry, especially in the aftermath of the Me Too movement.

Tolkien to his son "This is a fallen world. The dislocation of the sex instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the fall."

God and the Bible are not anti-sex, but they are opposed to the dislocation of the sex instinct.

There is such a thing as "this present evil age" of this world.

Gal 1:3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,

4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

Motyer: 'The world' (see, especially, 4:4) has the same meaning for James as for Paul and John. **It is the whole human scheme of things organized in terms of human wisdom to attain a human goal, without reference to God, his laws, his values or his ultimate judgment. The world is, in fact, anything and everything that is at odds with the Lordship of Jesus over our lives.**

The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sin AND that we are united with Him in His death and resurrection so that we might have newness of life. We don't have to remain slaves to sin as those who love the world and its system of values.

James recognizes that believers sin. That is why he gives so many instructions and warnings, which are a form of mercy towards us. God knows that sin doesn't bring freedom but misery and emptiness.

Don't accommodate sin to be popular with the world.

Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next. William Inge

APPLICATION:

How do we keep ourselves unstained by the world, grow spiritually and see real change? It's a HUGE topic, but David Powlison gives some good insights as he discusses **FIVE FACTORS IN SANCTIFICATION** i.e. Christian growth

God Changes Us

First, and foundational to all, God Himself changes us. He intervenes in your life, He raises you in Christ when you are dead in trespasses and sins. All good fruit in our lives comes by the Holy Spirit's working FROM THE inside out.

The Word of Truth Changes Us

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Wise People Change Us

Third, God uses wise people to change us. Godly growth is most frequently mediated through the gifts and graces of brothers and sisters in Christ. Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise (Prov. 13:20).

Suffering Changes Us- discussed previously in this series

Fourth, suffering, struggle, and troubles change us. God works on us in the midst of trouble, because trouble catches our attention And we only learn to love the way Christ loves by experiencing the hard things that He experienced in loving us.

We Change

The fifth and final factor is that we change.

You turn from darkness to light, from false gods to the only true God. You ask for help because you need help. You repent. You believe and trust. You seek. You remember, listen, obey, fear, hope, love, give thanks, weep, confess, praise, delight, and walk. No one does any of this for you. You are not passive. Notice, too, that none of these active verbs is a one-and-done. These are a way of life as we Keep In Step with the Spirit.

This is how sanctification works. These five factors work together. Each one contributes to how we change. They are present in differing degrees as our lives pass through different seasons.

Your entire Christian life is a series of variations and permutations of this five-dimensional process. This is how you live. This is how you minister to others, loving them well in their need. This is how you grow,

until you arrive in heaven where you will see Jesus face to face and find that you have been made like him.

The shadow of God's grace seen in v. 18 falls on all the applications of v. 19-27.

We obey because...18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Pure and undefiled religion is **SOMEONE WE MEET** before it is something we practice.

The ABC's of a Trust Transfer –

A - Admit that you can't save yourself and that you need grace – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

B- Believe that Jesus is the only Wisdom and Savior who can forgive your sin and heal your heart

C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

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