

Real Religion

Ja 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world. - Ja 1:26-27

Introduction:

1. Not all religion is acceptable to God.
 - a. That statement would probably shock a lot of people who can't imagine that their efforts would not be enough to satisfy God
 - b. You can spend your life being very religious and end up wasting your time - you deceived yourself but you didn't fool God
 - c. You might as well have gone fishing or bowling or biking
2. This is the point that James is making

26 If any man among you seem to be religious.....

 - a. "If anyone thinks that he is religious"
 - b. It is easy for a person to imagine that he is religious
 - c. It is easy for a person to deceive himself and he doesn't even realize it
"Many people have only a form of godliness. They have a name that they live, but they are dead. Their religion is only an illusion. They seem to be religious but there is no reality to it and there is nothing worse than religion without reality. It ought to be real to you. It ought to be vibrant to you. You need to have a know-so, not a hope-so or maybe-so salvation." - Adrian Rogers
3. "Religious" - used only here in the GNT and nowhere in classical Greek
- "threskos"

- a. “This word denotes scrupulous observance of religious exercise in actions or words, sincerely or hypocritically performed in the guise of devout religion” - C. L. Rogers
 - b. Vincent says, “The adjective here refers to a zealous and diligent performance of religious services.”
 - c. This word refers to the outward aspects of the Christian faith - church attendance, singing, praying, giving, and other ways of going through the motions of Christianity
4. So how do we know if our religion - even our good, conservative, independent, Landmark Baptist, Bible-based religion is real.
- a. James 1:26-27 gives us three signs that prove that our religion is real
 - b. What is surprising is that the list doesn't seem all that “religious” at all.
 - c. Real religion, religion that God approves of impacts your conversation, your compassion and your character.
 - d. James is not saying that church attendance, singing, praying, giving etc are not important. He deals with those things in chapter 2
 - e. No amount of outward religiosity can compensate for an unbridled tongue, and uncompassionate heart and an unholy character.

I. SIGN #1 - YOUR CONVERSATION

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

- James says here that if you have been born again, if your religion is real, then its going to show in the way you talk.

A. Control Your Tongue

1. There are so many references to speech in this letter giving me the impression that there was a serious problem in that area
2. If your religion does not tame your tongue, then your religion is vain

- empty, worthless

3. James says that the Christian will “bridle” his tongue
 - a) *The tongue reveals the heart and if the heart is right then the tongue is right - Matt 12:34-35*
 - b) *A controlled tongue implies a controlled body*
4. Chalinagogo = chalin (a bridle) + ago (to lead)
 - a) *Using a bridle to restrain a horse or lead a horse*
 - b) *The present tense indicates continuous action*
 - c) *James is describing someone whose tongue is habitually unbridled*
5. Be careful that you sin not with your tongue
 - a) *Tongue sins are great sins*
 - b) *Like sparks of fire bad words spread and do great damage*
6. Here are some signs of an unbridled tongue
 - a) *Vulgarity, obscenity, indecent language.*
 - b) *Dirty jokes, off-color stories.*
 - c) *Racial or ethnic insults.*
 - d) *Angry outbursts, harsh words.*
 - e) *Mean-spirited comments.*
 - f) *Gossip, rumors, false accusations.*
 - g) *“I don’t care whose church you’re a member of, and I don’t care how many times you’ve been baptized - if you are a peddler of profanity, if you are a lover of lies, if you are a hunter of hurts, if you are a trader in trash, if you are a fondler of filth, then you need to be born again.” - Adrian Rogers*
7. Dr. James Orr once told about Billy Graham flying on an airplane and the attendant making a big fuss over him. “Do you want some more coffee, Dr. Graham?” “Oh, my mother prays for you everyday.” “I must write to her and tell her about seeing you.” About that time a big old Texan up front had a little too much to

drink. He started cursing and making passes at the attendant and creating a big ruckus. Finally the attendant had enough and walked up to the big Texan and said, “Sir, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to be quiet. You see, Dr. Billy Graham the evangelist is flying with us.” The Texan responded, “Billy Graham, Billy Graham is flying with us?”

The man stumbled back to where Billy was sitting and said, “Billy Graham, I'm so glad to meet you. I just want you to know how much your sermons help me to live the Christian life!” - Dr. James Orr

B. James' Handbook on the Tongue - 3:2-10

1. The Controlled Tongue - Ja 3:1-4

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body. 3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4 Behold also the ships, which though *they be* so great, and *are* driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

a) *One who can control his tongue can bridle the entire body*

b) *A small bit can control the big, powerful horse*

c) *A small rudder can control the huge ship*

d) *The tongue is a small part of the body but it is powerful*

2. The Careless Tongue - vs 5-7

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6 And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. 7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of

mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- a) *On October 8, 1871 in a barn in Chicago, a cow owned by Mrs. O'Leary accidentally kicked over a lantern. That lantern fell into some hay, the hay caught on fire and that fire spread...and when the fire was over, over 100,000 people were left homeless...17,500 buildings were destroyed...300 people died...and it cost the city over 400 million dollars...Just because of one spark.*
- b) *Fire, out of control is dangerous and deadly but fire in a fire place provides warmth and light and enjoyment*
- c) *One inappropriate word can cause a lot of damage*
 - (1) How many friendships have been ruined...
 - (2) How many churches have been split... by gossip
 - (3) How many reputations - ruined by careless words?
 - (4) How much hurt has been caused by false accusations?
 - (5) How many lives adversely affected by a “slip of the tongue”

Your Conversation....

II. SIGN #2 - YOUR COMPASSION

27a Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction...

A. True Religion Moves Us to Action

- 1. We don't just see the need and then walk away after saying a few good words
- 2. After we see ourselves and Christ in the mirror of God's Word then we must see others and their needs
- 3. Isaiah first saw the Lord then he saw himself, then he saw others
- 4. Words are no substitute for deeds of love
- 5. We need to roll up our sleeves and get involved in this hurting world

B. James Singled Out Two Groups that Deserve Special Attention - Widows and Orphans

27a Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction...

- “In their affliction” - true religion sees the distress of the world and then moves to meet that need
- They are alone and forgotten and they are in affliction because they have no one to care for them
- This is a common OT theme - Ex 22:22; Isa 1:17; Zech 7:10

1. Widows and Orphans

a) *Ray Pritchard said, “I never knew what the word “widow” meant until my father died in early November 1974. Three weeks after his death my wife and I drove home to be with my mom over Thanksgiving. When it was time for the Thanksgiving meal my mom did what she had done hundreds of times before. She called for my father so that he could come to the table and eat. After saying his name out loud, she had a stricken look on her face, when she suddenly remembered that dad was gone. For the first time in my life, I knew what the word “widow” meant. Nothing would ever be the same for her again.*

- b) Widows and orphans had little legal protection in the first century.
- (1) That’s why Jesus rebuked the religious leaders who “devour widows’ houses” while making long prayers as a show of piety (Mark 12:40).
 - (2) They made a show of their religiosity while taking advantage of the widows.
 - (3) They “devoured” whatever money the widow had until she was left helpless and penniless.

2. This is more than just stopping in and saying “hello” - There is care

- involved here, exercising oversight, helping
3. True religion will help care for those whose need is so great that they can never repay us
 4. God bless those who care for the widows.
 - a) *God bless those who minister to single mothers.*
 - b) *God bless the nursery workers.*
 - c) *God bless the children's choir leaders.*
 - d) *God bless those who lead backyard Bible clubs.*
 - e) *God bless those who take in foster children.*
 - f) *God bless those who adopt children.*
 - g) *God bless those who care for the disabled.*
 - h) *God bless those who give to support orphans in India.*
 - i) *God bless those who speak up for the unborn.*
 - j) *God bless those who support crisis pregnancy centers.*
 5. Pure religion cares for the widows and orphans but it doesn't stop there. It includes the unborn, the sick, the dying, the homeless, the disabled, prisoners and many others that the world would rather overlook.

Your Compassion....

III. SIGN #3 - YOUR CHARACTER

27b ...and to keep himself unspotted from the world. - Ja 1:26-27

A. Pure Religion Keeps You from Being Stained by the World

1. The "world" is society without God
 - a) *Satan is the prince of this world - Jn 14:30*
 - b) *The lost are the children of this world - Lu 16:8*
 - c) *Christians are in the world but not of the world*
2. The world wants to "spot" the believer
 - a) *We live in a dirty world and if we aren't careful we'll end up*

stained by moral compromise

- b) *We want to find ways to help in this dirty world, but we must not let the world rub off on us*
- c) *Be careful where you go, what you do, what you read, the people you hang out with, the TV shows you watch, the movies you watch etc.*
- d) *Beware of the “friendship of the world” - Ja 4:4*

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

- e) *If we are not careful then we might become conformed to the world*
Ro 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.* 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

- f) *In the end we may be condemned with the world*

- (1) This is not losing our salvation
- (2) This is losing all that we have lived for
- (3) Lot is an example of this - he pitched his tent toward Sodom, then he moved into Sodom, then Sodom moved into him and he lost his testimony. In the end judgment fell on Sodom and Lot lost everything.

- 3. We must be wise in the choices that we make

- a) *There are many websites that I can't visit.*
- b) *There are TV shows that I don't want to watch*

- 4. Notice that James says we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

- a) *It's a big enough job to keep ourselves in line, be careful about judging others.*
- b) *We care about our family, friends, Christian brothers / sisters but we can't make decisions for them*
- c) *I'm 100% accountable for the decisions that I make*

B. Sometimes We Think that a Little Sin Doesn't Matter

1. Would you drink a glass of water if it had a little poison in it?
2. How about 1% poison? That isn't very much
3. We hear about air and water pollution, how about moral pollution?
 - a) *It's easy to get dirty*
 - b) *The world rubs off on us more than we think*
 - c) *If we aren't careful, then we start to think and act like the world*
4. Jesus is our great example
 - a) *He left the purity of heaven for the dirty, sinful world in which we live in order to rescue us from sin*
 - b) *He walked among us, lived with us, talked with us, ate with us, laughed with us, wept with us*
 - c) *He rubbed shoulders with gluttons and drunkards.*
 - d) *He knew the Pharisees and He called them hypocrites*
 - e) *Jesus never became a glutton or drunkard or hypocrite*

Conclusion:

1. If we are to obey what James taught us here, we need to have Jesus living in us
2. We will never bridle our tongues, or reach out to the hurting, or keep ourselves unstained by the world in our own power.
3. Do you know Him? Have you trusted Jesus as Savior?

