

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the Epistle of James 9- Pure and undefiled Religion

May 2, 2021

James 1:26&27

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.

To the Glory of God

The man, who has influenced my walk with God more than any other, died at the age of 55 (curiously from a smallpox vaccination) 263 years ago (1758)-eighteen years *before* the Declaration of Independence was signed. The greatest Theologian that America has ever produced; and the “Father” of the First Great Awakening¹ has been described by various theologians and historians as being:

- *God-centered*
- *God-focused*
- *God-intoxicated*
- *God-entranced*

... and those descriptions are not exaggerated.

Every day, from morning till night, Edwards *consciously* sought to live in personal communion with God, whether walking, riding, studying on his own, or relaxing in the bosom of his large and, it seems, happy and often extended family. Yet, unlike many, who lay claim to be his followers, Edwards was not a “mystic” who left rationality behind.

On the contrary, it was precisely through deep and clear thoughts about serious and eternal subjects that God warmed and thrilled his heart. A “Rationally Biblical” and “Biblically Rational” understanding of *everything*- was his constant Goal.

¹ A series of Revivals that swept the thirteen North American colonies in the 1740s where an estimated 1million souls were saved. The revival Movement was characterized by a renewal of individual Piety (Holiness) and devotion to the Bible. Many historians credit Jonathan Edwards' Sermon, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*” (July 8, 1741) as the catalyst that God used to ignite the Awakening.

Now it is really “cool” and “with it” today to make Statements like, “*I’m not religious*” or “*God is not interested in Religion*”. And if those Statements are designed to draw a distinction between the various Man-made religions and Biblical Christianity- then I agree with them. But one of the casualties of making Statements like that- is that we have determined that the word, “Religion” or us “being religious” is *always* referring to those Man-made exercises that can’t forgive a single Sin or save a single soul. And that isn’t true.

But how do I know that? Well, beside the fact that Jonathan Edwards used these terms all the time- no less than God the Holy Spirit Himself used these very words here in verse 26, when He “moved” the first Pastor of the Church in Jerusalem to write,

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.

... where both “Religious” and “Religion” are good and wonderful words- used to describe what Jude called,

Jude 3b

... the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

... which I would call, “Historic, Orthodox, Biblical Christianity” and which Jude was “moved” to instruct us to, “**contend earnestly**” for.

So, one of the things that I hope we can all take away from this Sermon is that we can, once again, use these two words- without having to apologize for using them- in their proper context.

So, in verse 26- when James used the phrase, “**If anyone thinks himself to be religious**” we should get at least four things from it:

1. It is good, correct, proper, right, and biblical to “think” ourselves as being “religious”
2. “Being religious” is connected to our tongue
3. An unbridled Tongue Deceives our Heart
4. An unbridled Tongue and a deceived Heart makes Religion to be Worthless

1. It is Good, Correct, Proper, Right, and Biblical to “think of Ourselves” as being “Religious”

Now, like all Biblical Interpretation- it doesn't matter what the words that James used here may mean to us, who live in the United States in the first part of the 21st Century. It doesn't matter what other people mean when they use these words or how these words may have been misused or polluted over the years. None of that matters at all- if we are to understand this Passage. The only thing that matters is what James meant when God the Holy Spirit "moved" him like the wind moves a sailboat across the water- around the middle of the 1st Century.

Now, like all of the other New Testament writers, James didn't write this Passage (or this Epistle) in English. James didn't speak a word of English. James wrote in Koine Greek- which was the type of Greek that the Mariners used. So, this is the language of the "common man" in Israel in the 1st Century.

Now the word, "**Religious**" comes from a Greek word (*ethelothoeskeia*; Strong's #2357), that has to do with: *Worship from the Desire of a person instead of being imposed by another source; or the free and unencumbered Worship of God.*

Now this Greek word (and its derivatives) was ONLY used here by James in the entire Bible. Two other Greek words (were translated as "Religious"- one in the NASB and the other in the KJV. For example, one Greek word, (*deisidaimonesteros*; Strong's #1174) was translated as "**Religious**" in the NASB in **The Acts 17:22** that says:

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

... but this word means: *fearing the pagan gods*; and would be *better* translated as "*Superstitious*" rather than "*Religious*" which is exactly the way the KJV translates this word.

Also, there is another Greek word (*sebomai*; Strong's # 4576) that was translated as, "Religious" in the KJV in **The Acts 13:43** that says,

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

... but this word means: *reverent*; and was *better* translated as "**fearful**" in the NASB.

But the Greek word that James actually wrote was used in other Greek literature back in the 1st Century to describe: *A God-fearing and pious life- lived consciously before God.* And this has to do with, "*Striving to be Holy on purpose*".

So, this word, “Religious” has to do with “Intentionality”. It is *meaningful* Worship; or Worship- *on purpose*. Now, sadly, with far too many in the modern church- “Worship” has basically come to mean: *The Song Service on Sunday morning*. And so, great amounts of time and money are expended to play and sing the songs- and to have all the technology (like colored lights and smoke machines) so as to get everybody “in the mood” to worship God.

And this is why more and more time is spent each Lord’s Day in the average Church with Music than in the preaching and teaching of the sacred Scriptures. The Leadership in many churches have determined that most technologically advanced people of the 21st Century are simply NOT going to sit through a careful exposition of what God has spoken- so we may know what God has said- so we may be obedient to it. And so, they have come to the conclusion that in order to draw huge crowds (and keep them)- the people MUST be entertained- rather than brought under Conviction; Encouraged; and Edified. This is truly one of the most embarrassing aspects of “modern church” that exists today. Because the very thing that people NEED- hearing and understanding what God has said- is becoming harder and harder to find. And this is what the Prophet meant when he said,

Amos 8:11&12

11 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord.

12 “People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, But they will not find it.

Now notice that Amos did NOT say there would be a Famine for Churches- because we have *more* churches today than ever before. Amos also did NOT say there would be a Famine for Bibles. More people own a Bible today than at any time in human History. The Prophet also did NOT say there would be a Famine for Preachers or Teachers- because we have more of them than ever before too.

No, Amos was “moved” by God the Holy Spirit to say there would be a Famine for ...

... hearing the words of the Lord

So, what is being preached and taught today- for the most part is NOT the Words of the Lord. People are hearing how to live a better life; how to accumulate more of this world’s goods; how to fit in with this fallen world; what political Issues are important; who to vote for; and how to be less offensive to a pagan

Culture- but they're NOT hearing the Words of the Lord. So, the Famine is found in two places: The Mouth of the Leaders- and in the Ears of the People.

But look where the Famine came from:

... I will send a famine on the land ...

... so, the Bible says that this Famine of hearing the Words of the Lord came from God. So, this is Divine Judgment. And then look at what else God said,

People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, But they will not find it.

So, this is terrible and frightening Judgment. Yet people are seemingly worshipping God more than ever. Churches have world-class singers and musicians. They have \$250,000 worth of equipment to give everybody goose bumps and to "wow" the people with special effects. But God said, "There is a Famine for hearing My Words!" So, how is this genuine Worship? It isn't.

And that would be bad enough. But unless there is Repentance- God said the day is coming when they won't be able to even find the Words of God!

But look how Jesus used the word, "Worship" from **John 4:21-24**:

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus said here in verse 21 that the "**hour is coming**" when God's people will NOT worship God in Jerusalem nor in the mountains of Samaria- meaning that the physical location of our Worship would be *irrelevant*- as soon as the superior New Covenant came into focus.

And then in verse 22- Jesus linked real, genuine Worship with the correct Knowledge of God- which at that time belonged ONLY to the Jews- because God had given them the existing Scriptures (the Old Testament)- *exclusively*.

But then in verse 23- Jesus *redefined* what Worship is; and who it is that genuinely worships God:

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth ...

... so, there is a new category of people that Jesus called, **“true Worshipers”**. And Jesus did NOT say that these “true Worshipers” would be “sons of Abraham” or “Jews” or “Hebrews”. No, Jesus said that the “true Worshipers” would worship the Father:

... in spirit and truth...

... regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. And then Jesus said,

... for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

So, the “true Worshipers” of the Father of Jesus are ONLY those, who worship Him in “Spirit” and ONLY those who worship Him in “Truth”. And then, in verse 24, Jesus said,

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

... and by using the word, **“MUST”** here- Jesus is eliminating all other forms of Worship- by anyone- for any reason.

Now the superstitious, mindless, mystical worship of the gods by the pagans and the Samaritans was NEVER received by God in the first place. But when Jesus made this Statement- He was saying that because of Who He was; and because of what He alone would do- the elaborate, ceremonial Worship that the Jews had been engaged in for several thousands of years (at the Command of God) was no longer going to be received by God either.

So, the emotional, superstitious worship by the pagans- through trances and hallucinations- NEVER honored God; and God NEVER received that form of Worship- even though the people, who offered it, were VERY sincere.

But as soon as Jesus died and rose again- every facet of Worship that the Jews were told to carry out (by Moses in the Law) became TOTALLY obsolete. And today, God is no more honored by the honest and sincere Worship by an unbelieving Jew than He is by any other pagan. Jesus said those who worship the one, true, and living God MUST worship Him in two ways:

1. In Spirit
2. In Truth

... and so, whatever else they are doing- no matter how sincere- is NOT Worship.

So, ALL Worship today- MUST be carried out “in Spirit”- meaning it MUST be orchestrated by God the Holy Spirit. And in James’ terminology- ALL Worship must be “Religious” meaning: *Worship from the Desire of a God-fearing and intentionally pious person instead of being imposed by another source.* And ALL Worship today MUST be carried out in accord with the Knowledge of God found in the 66 Books of the Holy Bible. So, Worship CANNOT be mindless; it CANNOT be purely emotional; it CANNOT be mystical; and it CANNOT be superstitious.

So, in addition to Worship being carried out by people, who are *intentionally* striving for Holiness- all during the week- Worship MUST also be in accord with the Bible- or God does NOT receive it.

And that means that real, genuine Worship; or “being Religious” has much more to do with what we are doing Monday-through Saturday- than it does with what songs we sing in the Song Service on the Lord’s Day. The *real* Worship of God- involves how we live our lives- every day. So, a much *better* definition of what James meant about us being Religious; or what real, genuine Worship looks like- would be:

Striving against the Lusts of our flesh (by the Power of the Holy Spirit) to be found joyfully and humbly submitted to the Authority of Scripture- in our daily life- all to the Glory of Jesus, the Christ.

But for that Worship to make us to be “Religious” (as James used that word)- that Striving and that Submission MUST be carried out- NOT because we are scared of Hell (even though Hell IS terrifying); and NOT because it is what our Parents have taught us (although Parents are *commanded* to teach their children; and children are *commanded* to learn from their Parents); and NOT because it is the “Right Thing To Do” (although it IS the “Right Thing To Do); and NOT because we have a “Duty” and an “Obligation” to do so (even though we DO have that Duty and Obligation).

No, we Worship God; we think of ourselves as being “Religious”; we voluntarily strive to submit to God and His Word ONLY after we have *carefully* and *thoroughly* analyzed the breathtaking Claims of Scripture; and by God’s Help- we come to the reasoned and intelligent Conclusion that those Claims are true. And so, we have determined that the God, Who is revealed in both Creation and Scripture, is *worthy*; and *deserving*; and *entitled* to our Worship.

But our Worship MUST NOT end there. Because- if we are to be what James speaks about here- we MUST ALSO become convinced that this Worship;

this Striving and Submission to God and His Word; us “being Religious” is also the Pathway to the fullness of our own Joy as well as a Glory to God. And we MUST believe that; and trust in that Promise- or we are NOT being Biblical.

So, there are several phrases and words, used by various Biblical writers, that all mean the *same* thing:

- Bearing Fruit (**John 15**)
- Being Spiritual (**1Corinthians 2:15**)
- Being Godly (**Psalms 32:6**)
- Serving God (**The Acts 26:7**)
- Striving to be Holy (**1Peter 1:15**)
- Being Obedient to the Faith (**The Acts 6:7**)
- Following Christ (**1Peter 2:21**)
- Abiding in Christ (**John 15**)
- Loving Jesus (**John 14:15**)
- Keeping God’s Commandments (**1John 5:3**)

... and “Being Religious” (**James 1:26**).

... which tells us that Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth- or thinking ourselves to “be” Religious is Good; Correct; Proper; Right and Biblical.

2. “Being Religious” is Connected to our Tongue

James said,

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue...

So, James connects our Worship of God and “being” Religious to the way we use our tongue. And this is a preview of what James is going to teach us later from Chapter 3, where the half-brother of Jesus wrote,

James 3:1-12

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong

winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

Now back in **1:26**- James used the word, “**bridle**”. And this word was translated from a Greek word (*chalinagoegoe*; Strong’s #5468), which means: *to direct; govern; restrain; or control*. And in Chapter 3- James uses two other examples to help illustrate the Power of the Tongue:

1. A ship’s rudder
2. The bit in a horse’s mouth

... and he makes the point that, while both the rudder and the bit are small (and seemingly insignificant) they are very powerful. The ship will run aground; and the horse will run wild- unless the rudder and the bit control them. And in Chapter 3- James uses other words, to help us understand what “bridle” means like:

- Obey
- Direct
- Directed
- Tamed

... these are *synonyms* of what bridling our tongues looks like.

So, for example, we bridle our tongues- so our tongues will “obey” us. We are to bridle our tongues- so that we may “direct” our tongues; or so our tongues

will be “directed” by us. And we are to bridle our tongues- so we may “tame” our tongues.

Now all of these words have to do with *restricting* the use of our tongues. And anytime God *restricts* our Behavior; or anytime God (through His Word) *limits* what we may do- this involves two Aspects:

1. What brings Glory to God
2. What is Good for us

Every Commandment of God *restricts* human Behavior. Every Commandment of God *limits* what we have Divine Permission to do. And this is why the Commandments of God are so universally despised. Part of what it means to be “Fallen” is that we rebel against any Limitation imposed on us. It is “natural” and “normal” for human beings to chafe at any limitation or restriction of our Behavior. It is “human Nature”.

But when the rebel experiences the Miracle of the New Birth- the Nature of that individual is *radically* and *permanently* transformed. And part of that new Nature is a genuine, strong, and ever-growing Love for God; and a genuine, strong, and ever-growing Desire to see God- glorified.

And because the Nature has been supernaturally changed- those divinely imposed Restrictions (Commandments) are no longer despised. And the human inclination to rebel against God’s Commandments is forever *replaced* with a sincere Desire to worship God; to honor Him; and to prove our love for Him- by joyfully and humbly submitting to that Restriction.

And the New Birth gives the individual the ability to understand that the Commandments of God are the pathway to, not only us glorifying God- but to experience the fullness of Joy ourselves. In **1John 5:3**, the Apostle John wrote,

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

Now what is interesting is that John did NOT teach that the “keeping” of God’s Commandments was an Issue of Human Will-Power or of us “putting forth more effort”. No, John taught that us keeping God’s Commandments is an Issue of us loving God. And that means that the “fix” for Disobedience- is NOT more Effort or Will-Power- but more Love for God. And this corresponds to what Jesus said in **John 14:15**,

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Our ability to obey God (Righteousness) is found in our ability to love Jesus. In fact, Jesus said here that keeping God's Commandments was almost *automatic*- with those who genuinely love Him.

And that tells us that Obedience is really an Issue of Worship. And Worship- true Worship- involves the way we think; what we believe; who or what we love; and what we enjoy. And those things determine what comes out of our mouths. And that is why James said that thinking ourselves to "be" Religious involves bridling our tongues.

So, bridling our tongues have to do with "Self-control"- which is a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**) or the unmistakable Proof that we have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth. And Self-control has to do with "Accountability". As believers- we are accountable to God for how we act; and what we think; and what we believe; and what we trust in. But we are also accountable for what we say.

The opposite of having Self-control as far as our tongues are concerned- would be to NOT have control over what we say. And so, we would just pop off at people out of anger or bitterness or fear. Another example would be to speak words that have no Edification in mind. So, we would say something for the purpose of "getting even" or to hurt them. Or we would engage in Gossip or spread rumors about others.

The Apostle Paul agreed when he wrote this in **Ephesians 4:29-31**:

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

All of this is connected to our Worship of God. And so, bridling our tongue is a big part of us loving Jesus and worshipping Him in Spirit and in Truth.

3. An Unbridled Tongue Deceives our Heart

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart...

Now if you were to cut a human being open- you would NOT see a connection between his Tongue and his Heart. But the Bible teaches that these two

parts of the human body ARE connected. And perhaps the best way to understand this Connection is to see what Jesus said from **Matthew 15:17-20**:

17 Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?

18 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

The infallible Word of the living God teaches clearly and repeatedly that every Evil Deed that has ever been carried out by anyone- for any reason- from War to Injustice to Murder to Sexual Sin- *originates* from the human heart. And that means that Evil does NOT come from Poverty. Evil does NOT come from a lack of Government Programs. Evil does NOT come from a lack of Opportunity; or a lack of Education; or a lack of Money.

And that means that you can't fix Evil with Medicine; or with a Vaccine; or with Technology; or with Education; or with Government spending. Evil absolutely exists- and it comes from people. Inside. Deep inside. Evil originates from the human heart.

So, contrary to what Sociology teaches- Evil is NOT an animate object. Evil doesn't exist outside of people. So, Evil is NOT found in the concrete and bricks of the most blighted Ghettos. Evil is the product of a heart that is sinful and fallen and rebellious to God. And that means that until that heart is touched with the Grace of God; until that heart experiences the Miracle of the New Birth- it is and will remain- Evil.

And that would be Bad enough. But the Bible also teaches that we have an enormous capacity for Deception. And being deceived- has to do with believing something that isn't true. It is believing or trusting in something that God has NOT spoken. But it is also NOT believing or NOT trusting in something that God HAS spoken.

But what is fascinating is that being deceived has NOTHING to do with a lack of Intelligence. Because Deception is a *spiritual* Problem. So, for example, the writer of **Hebrews** wrote that Sin has the Power to deceive us- and to harden our hearts:

Hebrews 3:12-14

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

And James said that anyone, who does NOT bridle his Tongue- deceives his own heart. How so? Because part of what it means to be "Human" is that we have the ability to think that we are something that we are not. For example, I have never met anyone, who told me they were "Lost". Every single person I have ever met- told me they were saved. And that includes the people I used to minister to- at the Harrison Country Jail.

Now some of these people were simply trying to pull the wool over my eyes. But many of them actually believed what they said. And that tells us that we are NOT the best analysts of our own spiritual Condition. Okay but who is? No human. And that is why we need the Bible. As we read the Bible- the Spirit of God makes the Words of Scripture clear. And it is the Testimony of Scripture that will determine our spiritual Condition. The Bible will either Condemn or Commend us. The Words of Scripture will bring us under Conviction- so we may repent and get right with God- or we will stop our ears and run away and remain deceived.

For example, the Book of **1John** is a series of 10 Tests that tells us what being saved looks like. And as I have already told you- this Epistle of **James** is a series of 15 Tests that will give us an accurate picture of our own spiritual Condition.

Jesus said the manifestation of an evil, wicked, sinful, broken, and rebellious Heart- is what comes off the tip of our Tongues. And that is because the Tongue and the Heart are connected. Not *physiologically*- but *spiritually*. So, what a person speaks- what he *enjoys* saying; what he *delights* in talking about- *proves* the condition of his Heart.

And since that is true- the opposite is also true. When that evil Heart has been miraculously transformed by the Miracle of the New Birth- the Prophecy of Zephaniah comes to pass where he said,

Zephaniah 3:8-13

8 "Therefore wait for Me," declares the Lord, "For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms, To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal.

9 “For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.

10 “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, Will bring My offerings.

11 “In that day you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain.

12 “But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the Lord.

13 “The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble.”

... and when that happens- we will be “Religious”.

4. An unbridled Tongue and a deceived Heart makes true Religion to be Worthless

James 1:26

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.

A person, who is willfully deceived about his own spiritual Condition- will NEVER seek to bridle his Tongue. He will always feel justified at whatever he says. Yet a person like this will avoid any Accountability about himself. And James that a person with these Characteristics proves that his “Religion”; his Salvation; his Faith in Jesus; his Relationship with Jesus; his Worship- is “worthless”.

Now James did NOT say that this man’s Religion had *little* Value. James said the Faith or the Salvation or the Religion of a person, who has these Characteristics has NO Value. It is “worthless”. In other words, he doesn’t have any true Religion at all. So, a person like this isn’t saved. He is Lost. He is yet in his Sin. He is Hell-bound.

Now some would argue and say, *“But Brother Blair- that isn’t possible- I’m saved. I gave my heart to Jesus many years ago. And once saved- always saved. So, James is wrong. I’m saved- even though I haven’t bridled my Tongue.”* No, James isn’t wrong. You are. You are deceived about your own spiritual Condition and you are in jeopardy for your soul.

You see, the Bible doesn't teach that you are saved forever- *regardless* of how you live your life. Yet the Bible DOES teach that Salvation is eternal. But the reason that Salvation is eternal- is because part of what it means to be saved- is that God has given every single genuinely saved soul- the Gift of Perseverance.

So, a person doesn't simply believe one time- and you're done- you've got your ticket punched and now you're able to do whatever you're big enough to do and still go to Heaven. The Bible does NOT teach that. You believe to be saved- yes. But then you KEEP ON believing. You repent- yes. And then you KEEP ON repenting. You trust- yes. And then you KEEP ON trusting. So, Salvation gives you both the Power and the Desire to KEEP ON doing what you did at the beginning.

So, you love Jesus- but you *continue* to GROW in your love for Jesus. You understand SOME of the Bible- but you GROW in your Knowledge of God. You receive Grace- but you GROW in the Grace of God.

So, genuine believers have a Desire to love and obey and follow Jesus and to please Him with the way they live their lives. In other words, Salvation causes ALL believers to begin to Worship God; to strive for Holiness; to follow Jesus- *intentionally*; or, as James said, to be "Religious".

And where that Perseverance doesn't exist- Salvation doesn't exist. Where that KEEPING ON isn't there- Salvation isn't either. And where that ongoing and ever-growing Worship of God is missing- Salvation is missing too. You cannot have one without the other.

Now look again at what James said in verse 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.

Now if it is true that "Religion"- as James uses that word here is actually Worship; or Faith in God; or Salvation; or the ongoing striving to be Holy- then James is giving us two very practical ways to judge our own spiritual Condition:

1. Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth *includes* an ongoing "Visitation" of Widows and Orphans
2. Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth includes an ongoing "Keeping" of Ourselves Unstained by the World

1. Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth includes an ongoing "Visitation" of Widows and Orphans

Now back in the 1st Century- the *weakest* people; who had the *least* to offer; but which required the *most* time; energy; and money- were Widows and Orphans. And *nothing* illustrates the supernatural transformation of the human heart, through the Miracle of the New Birth- better- than the disposition that believers have toward these two groups.

And James uses the word, “**Visit**” here. Now the word that was translated here as “**Visit**” comes from a Greek word (*episkeptomai*; Strong’s #1980), which means: *to look after; to take care of; and to tend to*. So, this word has nothing to do with periodically “visiting” these two groups on Christmas or on their Birthday. This word has to do with genuinely *loving* these two groups of people; and looking at them with Mercy. It has to do with “putting our money where our mouth is”. So, this is about “Orthopraxy” (Right Living) in response to “Orthodoxy” (Right Believing). And it has to do with exerting energy; time; and money *in response* to that Love.

“Visiting” Orphans and Widows in the way that James speaks of it here causes believers to NEVER say, “*What will happen to me and my plans if I care for them and look after them?*” It has to do with us saying, “*What will happen to them if I do NOT care for them and tend to them?*” So, this too is about Worship. It is about what being “spiritual” looks like. It is what being saved is. James called it, “Pure and undefiled Religion”. And James says here that we are lying to ourselves- we are deceived- if we say we love God and are worshipping Jesus and yet we are *neglecting* these two groups.

Now I am NOT teaching that believers are *required* by this verse to *always* bring Widows and Orphans (whether they are Family or Strangers) into our homes to live. Sometimes that simply is NOT possible. But what I AM teaching; and what James WAS teaching is that ALL genuine believers MUST have SOME TYPE of Relationship with Widows and Orphans- on SOME level.

Now please notice that James makes NO distinction here between saved Widows and Orphans versus those who are lost. And please notice that James did NOT teach that this was “nice” or that this is for those who “feel led” to do this. And also, please notice that James doesn’t address how *inconvenient* this may be to us; or what this may cost us. No, James is teaching here that this is what it means to be saved. This is what worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth looks like.

2. Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth includes an ongoing “Keeping” of Ourselves Unstained by the World

Secondly, James taught that “Pure and undefiled” Religion; which is synonymous with Spirit and Truth Worship- has to do with an ongoing “Keeping” of ourselves from being stained by the lost and pagan World.

Now the word that was translated here as “**Keep**” comes from a Greek word (*taereo*; Strong’s #5083), that means: *to guard or watch diligently*. This word has to do with: *staying alert to a danger so as not to be overwhelmed*. ... and to actually obey this part of the Bible *requires* that we look at the World with great caution.

Now there are many things in this World that are wonderful; and sweet; and lovely; and helpful; and beautiful; and worthwhile. But there is a World *system*-created and maintained by fallen Man- that is death to our soul. Hear the Word of the Lord from the Apostle John, who said this in **1John 2:15&16**:

15 Do not love the world nor 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 lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

Now John is speaking here about the Issue of “Worldliness”. And verse 16 lists three things that John was talking about:

1. The Lust of the Flesh
2. The Lust of the Eyes
3. The Boastful Pride of Life

... and John said that these three things are, “**all that is in the world**”. But the world has many more things than these three. So, that tells us what John was talking about when he used the word, “World” here. John wasn’t talking about the dirt or the trees or the mountains or even the people of this World. God made all of that. And He called all of that, “**Very Good**” (**Genesis 1:31**).

No, John was talking about the fallen World *system* that operates in hostile rebellion to God. And John said in verse 15 that if we love this World system- the Love of the Father is not in us- meaning we are not saved. And this is why I abhor the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Movement. Because the foundational Teaching of this wayward Movement says that what James and John and Jesus and Paul taught about the Danger of Worldliness was wrong- and we can ignore all of these God- inspired Warnings and live in Greed and Covetousness and Materialism now- AND still go to Heaven later.

The half-brother of Jesus said we must “**keep**” ourselves; we must *guard or watch diligently*; we must *stay alert to the danger of Worldliness*- so we are not overwhelmed by seduction of this fallen World!

So, there **MUST** be *some* Method devised; *some* Way; *something* that is ongoing in the life of ALL believers- that we constantly do (or don’t do) that will

prevent us from being deceived; or taken in; or led astray by the fallen World-system- without becoming monks. And again, James is NOT teaching that SOME believers do this- but that EVERYONE, who lays claim to be saved- does this.

James said that NOT being Worldly is what PURE and UNDEFILED Religion looks like. And that phrase is *synonymous* with Spirit and Truth Worship; or pursuing Holiness on purpose; or being saved; or loving Jesus; or Spirit and Truth Worship.

It is important for us to know that this Pure and Undeclared Religion that James speak of here had a key place in Jonathan Edwards' understanding of God's Plan for the Future. Edwards had become "convinced by Scripture" that ordinary believers- striving to obey James' Teaching here- would eventually lead to the earth being "**full of the Knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.**" (Isaiah 11:9).

Edwards, along with other Reformers and Puritans were *constantly* laboring to get and keep Churches in "Scriptural Shape"- because they believed that doing so would bring about the eventual "Triumph of the Gospel"- over all the Evil of Man.

Edwards's understanding of Revival was *first*, the supernatural Conception and *secondly*, the ongoing deepening and energizing of a personal Communion with God- for each believer- according to the Scriptures. And that was simply *impossible* to Edwards without these two verses in **James** being *paramount* in our lives.

Much is spoken and written today of a "christianity" that is defined as a "Self-discovery that ends with Self-fulfillment". Much is spoken about a "Relationship with God that brings about Happiness, Contentment, Satisfaction, and inward Peace." But Holy Spirit inspired Issues like: bearing our Crosses; battling wrong Desires; resisting Temptation; killing Sin; cutting off a limb and plucking out an eye; bridling the Tongue; visiting Orphans and Widows; and keeping ourselves unstained by the World- is rarely, if ever, mentioned. Yet the Fulfillment that is so desired WILL NEVER happen unless these other Issues are carried out- FIRST.

Seeking to "live out Repentance"- without the practical *emphasis* on the more *demanding* side of the Christian life (like NOT being Worldly; and visiting Widows and Orphans; and bridling the Tongue)- is nothing more than Self-deceived Shallowness. It surely is NOT Christianity- the once for all handed down to the saints- Faith.

But what is certain, however, is this: God calls ALL OF US to seek for ourselves- the *full* Reality of this "**Pure and Undeclared Religion**"- as James described it, and as Edwards spent his life pursuing. And God has called ALL OF US to pray for the next earthshaking Revival- that will allow sinful rebels to

behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ; to love what they see; and to be changed into what they see. Make it so, Lord.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

