

James – Life after Faith

James 1:27

“Real Religion”

**1. REAL RELIGION IS CONCERNED WITH THE FATHER ABOVE US**

A. The relationship they have with God

B. The responsibility they have to God

**2. REAL RELIGION IS CARING FOR THE FEEBLE AMONG US**

A. The people James mentions

B. The practice James mandates

**3. REAL RELIGION IS CLEAN FROM THE FILTH AROUND US**

A. The guard we should seek in our lives

B. The goal we should set for our lives

1. British soccer star, David Beckham, and his celebrity wife, Victoria, are favorites of the tabloids, both in Britain and America.

2. Not long after their first child was born, a little girl they named Brooklyn, they told the press they wanted to raise her in a spiritual home. Victoria explained, “We want to have Brooklyn christened, but we are not sure into which religion.”<sup>i</sup>

3. These days, people talk about religion so subjectively. They treat it as a matter of personal preference; as if there is a sort of religious buffet from which a person can pick and choose which deity and doctrines they prefer.

4. While our society talks about religion as a matter of options and opinions, Brother James reveals that as far as God is concerned, there is only one, real religion.

5. James says in the last verse of his opening chapter, “*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.*”

6. In verse 26, James described a religion that was nothing but a façade – ecclesiastically flashy on the outside, but essentially false on the inside.

7. In contrast to that superficial display, in verse 27 James describes the sincere devotion in the life of a person who truly knows God, and serves Him with a pure heart.

8. We are not saved by our religious activity, but if we are truly saved, then the religion we practice with our lives ought to be the real religion – the kind that James describes in our text.

9. Looking at this verse, I want you to notice some things that James teaches us in this description of what real religion involves. First of all, we see that:

**I. REAL RELIGION IS CONCERNED WITH THE FATHER ABOVE US**

1. In verse 27, James says, “*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...*” Notice that preposition “before”.
2. James is talking about religion as God sees it. You could translate the phrase as, “Religion...in the sight of God...”
3. While the façade religion of verse 26 is all about impressing men, real religion is only concerned with how it is viewed by the God of heaven.
4. The reality is that God’s assessment of religion is truly the only one that matters. Therefore, a genuine religion is concerned only with God, and His approval.
5. Notice from the text a couple of things about concern of a person whose religion is real. First of all, they are concerned with:

#### **A. The relationship they have with God**

1. Note carefully the language James uses. He says, “*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father...*”
2. God is referred to as Father. The indication is that before a person undertakes a religious service, they already have a relationship with God as their Father.
3. This religious person is someone who has come to faith in Jesus Christ. This is not religious service as the path to salvation. This verse is describing religion that is the product of salvation.
4. The relationship with God is twofold in this verse. It is firstly a relationship based upon *redemption*. Note that word “pure”. James describes a religion that is “pure” in God’s sight.
5. The word translated “pure” is a word that describes something that was once impure and dirty, but has been cleansed and is now pure.
6. We are able to have a relationship with God because we have been made clean through the blood of Jesus Christ! We can offer service to God, only because we have been made pure.
7. This relationship with God is not only a relationship based on redemption, but also a relationship based on *adoption*.
8. How is that we as rebellious sinners, born into Adam’s sin-sick race can come to call God our Father, as James does in this verse? It is only because He has adopted us into His family by His grace!

9. I read about a little boy who wrote a letter that he wanted his parents to send to God. The letter said, "Dear God, if you watch me in church on Sunday, I'll show you my new shoes, Signed Mickey."

10. A person whose religion is real carries out their religion only for the eyes of the Father to whom they are related. Notice another aspect of the concern of the person whose religion is real.

11. They are concerned not only with the relationship they have with God, but also with:

### **B. The responsibility they have to God**

1. James is talking about a religion that is pure and undefiled in the eyes of God. Notice that word "religion."

2. As we saw in the study of verse 26, this word describes the outward, ceremonial aspects of worship. Dr. Zodhiates says simply, "It means religious service."<sup>ii</sup>

3. When James talks about religion, he is talking about the work of religion – the efforts someone puts forth in the service of their God.

4. Now, there is a religion that is false and superficial; that is comprised of *nothing but* these outward works.

5. That, however, does not mean that these outward works are wrong, or that God does not expect some sort of religious service from His people.

6. Contrary to the way many church members and professing Christians live, the Bible indicates that God did not save us to sit; He saved us to serve.

7. You were not saved to be idle until the kingdom comes. You were saved to be involved in the coming of the Kingdom!

8. Jack Herbert said, "Some of us are like wheelbarrows – only useful when pushed, and very easily upset."

9. James reminds us in this verse that a person whose religion is real does not have to be pushed, and is not upset about serving God.

10. They understand that out of their relationship to God comes a responsibility of service to God. Their religious efforts are concerned with God and what He expects of them.

11. Notice a second truth James gives us about real religion. He tells us not only that *real religion is concerned with the Father above us*, but he goes on to say that:

## II. REAL RELIGION IS CARING FOR THE FEEBLE AMONG US

1. There are some who have the idea that religion is all about sermons and steeples, pulpits and pews. Or, as one writer put it, "...rites and robes, bells and smells."<sup>iii</sup>

2. As James goes on in verse 27, what you find is that the kind of religion that God views as legitimate has little or nothing to do with church attendance and ecclesiastical activity.

3. James says that the religion that is pure in the eyes of God "*...is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction...*"

4. I want us to consider this social and benevolent aspect of religion that is so often neglected by the church, but is clearly revealed in this passage. Think with me first of all about:

### A. The people James mentions

1. The word translated "fatherless" in this verse is translated from the Greek word that gives us our English word "orphans".

2. Along with the word "widow", James mentions what would have been among the poorest and most helpless of the population in the first century.

3. There was no social security, or public aid available to a woman whose husband died, or to a child orphaned by death or abandonment.

4. With the mention of these two classes of people, James is not venturing out on some new philosophy or ministry. He is merely echoing what is a common theme throughout the Old Testament.

5. In Psalm 68:5 God is described as, "*A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows...*" In Isaiah 1:17, God encourages His people by saying, "*...relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*"

6. Job 29:12 says, "*I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.*"

7. This specific issue of orphan care has recently been raised within our own denomination. Led by Dr. Russell D. Moore, who has adopted two sons from

Russia, this past June, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution on reaching out to orphans.

8. Part of that resolution says this:

“WHEREAS, In the gospel we have received the "Spirit of adoption" whereby we are no longer spiritual orphans but are now beloved children of God and joint heirs with Christ , and...

WHEREAS, The Scripture defines "pure and undefiled religion" as "to look after orphans and widows in their distress", and...

WHEREAS, Upward of 150 million orphans now languish without families in orphanages, group homes, and placement systems in North America and around the world;

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, June 23-24, 2009, express our commitment to join our Father in seeking mercy for orphans...<sup>iv</sup>

9. I appreciate that resolution, and I think every Christian ought to pray about participating in some way in an adoption ministry that funds and facilitates the adoption of orphans.

10. Notice something further about this care for the feeble among us that James describes in this verse. Notice not only the people James mentions, but notice also further:

### **B. The practice James mandates**

1. James says that this care for orphans and widows is to be carried out by “visiting them in their affliction.”

2. Note that phrase “to visit”. It does not speak of someone merely dropping by and saying “hello” to a widow, or just checking in on the kids down at the orphanage.

3. The word translated “to visit” literally means to look after someone, or to care for someone. It is the same idea behind the word “bishop” or overseer.

4. It is not enough to merely think of the orphans and widows, or even to pray for them. What James is calling for here is a hands-on, consistently involved ministry to these helpless souls.

5. Not too long ago, one of the late night talk show hosts was talking about a new, special car that the Vatican had purchased for the Pope to ride in. The host

said, “The Pope will use the \$1.3 million car to fulfill one of his duties, waving at the poor.”<sup>v</sup>

6. Real religion involves more than a sympathetic wave to those who are feeble among us. Real religion puts orphans with families, and puts groceries in the widow’s cabinets.

7. It answers infant’s cries, and wipes widow’s tears. It loves the ones abandoned, and the ones neglected.

8. Real religion is more than pious pity. Real religion is actively caring for the orphans and widows – the feeble among us.

9. This social benevolence is not the only trademark of true religion, however. Notice a third truth we draw from this text. James teaches us not only that real religion is *concerned with the Father above us*, and *caring for the feeble among us*, but notice also lastly that:

### **III. REAL RELIGION IS CLEAN FROM THE FILTH AROUND US**

1. Look again at verse 27. Lest some feel that religion is all about social work, James concludes his definition of pure religion before God with the statement, “...and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

2. It is good that the Spirit inspired James to end this verse with this statement about personal purity, because it is possible to be caring and still be carnal.

3. There are people who are helpful, but are not holy. Real religion goes into the world to help the feeble, but does not live like the world in which it serves.

4. Notice a couple of things James teaches us about staying clean from the filth around us. First of all, think about:

#### **A. The guard we should seek in our lives**

1. James says that pure religion in the eyes of God involves a person who keeps themselves clean from the world.

2. Note that word “keep.” It is translated from a word whose noun form is the Greek word for a warden, or a guard.

3. The word literally means to do the work of a guard. It speaks of continually watching yourself.

4. We are reminded here that no one stumbles into holiness. No one falls into purity and godliness in their lifestyle.

5. Those who are holy, and live pure lives do so because they are careful and watchful over every aspect of their conduct.
6. This guarding of our lives to which James alludes, reminds us of Peter's words in I Peter 5:8, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*"
7. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, a man working for the UN in the country of Cyprus was killed while trying to clear a minefield.
8. The man was from Mozambique, and was said to have been an expert at the dangerous work of removing the live, buried munitions.
9. Sin is nothing to play with. Everyday, people who know all about sin and its consequences, nonetheless have their lives destroyed by it, all because they are not careful and on guard against it.
10. Notice something else about the clean life that marks real religion. James points us not only to the guard we should seek in our lives, but also:

#### **B. The goal we should set in our lives**

1. James says that a pure and undefiled religion in the eyes of God is one in which a person keeps himself "*...unspotted from the world.*"
2. That word "unspotted" is an interesting one. It literally means without a single spot. The idea of something that is completely clean. James describes this as the goal and ambition of a man whose religion is real.
3. How many of you realize that staying completely clean in a world so filled with the filth of sin is something akin to throwing a person into a pool, and asking them not to get wet?
4. How are we to fulfill this last part of verse 27? How are we to reach the goal of living unspotted from the world? I think there is at least a clue in the very word the Spirit inspired James to use for "unspotted."
5. The same word translated "unspotted" in verse 27 is the same word the Spirit inspired Peter to use to describe the blood of the Lord Jesus.
6. In I Peter 1:19, we are told that we have been redeemed by, "*...the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*"
7. How can we keep ourselves unspotted in this filthy world? The answer is through the spotless blood of Jesus Christ!

8. I John 2:1 says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:”

9. The way to keep yourself unspotted from the world is to keep coming to Christ, receiving His forgiveness and cleansing, and walking in the purity that only His blood can provide.

*Are you walking daily by the Savior’s side?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
Do you rest each moment in the crucified?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

*Are you washed in the blood,  
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?  
Are your garments spotless,  
Are they white as snow?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?<sup>vi</sup>*

1. Brother James tells us that there is a contrast to the showy, shallow, and superficial religion of those whose lives eventually reveal them to be hypocrites.

2. The contrast is a pure and undefiled religion that worries only about the favor of God, works selflessly for the feeble and helpless, and lives with a genuine holiness that is unstained by the world.

3. Those of you who profess to belong to Jesus, and claim to practice the religion that bears His name must compare your religion with the one James describes in verse 27.

4. If your religion does not match up with verse 27, it is likely that your religion is simply not the real religion.

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<sup>i</sup> David Beckham: Beckham Blooper, *anecdote.com*, accessed 11/4/09,  
<http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=7414>

<sup>ii</sup> Zodiates, Spiros, *Faith, Love, Hope*, (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, 1985), p. 136

<sup>iii</sup> Phillips, J.B., quoted by Blanchard, John, *Truth for Life*, (Evangelical Press, England, 1986), p. 101

<sup>iv</sup> On Adoption And Orphan Care, SBC Resolutions, Resolution No. 2, *SBCNet*, accessed 11/5/09, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1194>

<sup>v</sup> Pope's Fiat, *anecdote.com*, accessed 11/5/09, <http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=13035>

<sup>vi</sup> Hoffman, E. A., "Are you washed in the blood?"