

- ²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.
- ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Pure Religion **James 1:26-27**

INTRO:

We listen as James taught us about the importance of hearing and doing the word of God. If all they did was hear, they did not do enough to have God's blessing. To illustrate this James demonstrates how our reading and doing is carried out in our worshipping God.

I. Worthless religion (v. 26)

II. Worthwhile religion (verse 27)

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James 1:26 *"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."*

A. Remember what James said the last time we were here? He warned us we must not just hear or read the word of God, we must obey it also. We are to let it sink into us and change us. It was in the hearing and the doing that the blessing comes.

B. This verse illustrates this reality for us. The words ***"religious"*** and ***"religion"*** don't strike the right chord for us. We think of a truism we were taught for years. *'Religion is man reaching for God. Christianity is God reaching out to man.'* When James used this word, he did not think in this way. He could be talking about the externals of worshipping God. James wrote his epistle early in the life of the church and some of the religious ceremonies still practiced in the Temple most likely provide a backdrop to these statements. However, when James wrote about the acts of worship of God here he is underlining that outward obedience means nothing if the heart is not changed and engaged. The point is stated in describing a tongue which is not bridled.

1. James will deal with the matter of the tongue in chapter three. I do not want to steal his thunder, but we must realize he was not treating this lightly. Remember our study in **Isaiah 6**? When Isaiah saw the holiness of God he immediately

pronounced a condemnation of his own life, because he was a man of unclean lips. His unholy mouth was because he had an unholy heart.

2. The Lord Jesus Himself said,

Luke 6:45 *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”*

So, if his mouth is not controlled by God, the man has not his heart in his worship of God. This person may have heard the Word but he did not remember what kind of person he was (see **verses 23-25**).

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

C. The result of this approach to the worship of God is two-fold. First, the one who thinks he pleases God by just going through the motions *“deceives his own heart.”* **Jeremiah 17:9** reminded us that our hearts are naturally deceptive.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

Second, in the sight of God it is useless.

II. Worthwhile religion (verse 27)

James 1:27 *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”*

A. James now turns to the positive side of what constituted serving God.

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.”

James is not finished describing acceptable worship with this first phrase. What is James writing about here?

1. Remember James was not a 21st century American. Widows and orphans in the first century had no legal standing. If family did not step in they were very much in distress. However, the widows and the orphans were not the only ones in distress. James is not being exhaustive here. He is giving an example.

2. Think about Our Lord’s statement in *the Sermon on the Mount*.

Luke 6:32–35 *“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do*

good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”

Two thoughts are important. First, James is not talking about what the church is throwing money at. He asks, “What are you and I doing as individuals?” Second, we give to those who cannot give back to us.

B. Second, we must **“keep oneself unspotted from the world”** (v.27). Real personal holiness is the result of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not just keeping a grocery list of “dos” and “don’ts.” It is a result of wanting to please God.

Questions for Application:

1. Are we actively seeking to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? This is the only way we can really worship the Lord.
2. What do we do privately with our money? Are we good stewards? Are we giving to God in His church? Are we reaching out to others in their needs?
3. Finally, are you concerned with living a life of personal holiness? It means making a point of spending time with the Lord every day, and then working on confessing our sins and being aware of how we feed our lusts.

Hymn #441 *Take Time To Be Holy*