

Pure Religion Involves This
James 1:26-27

James 1:26-27 reads, “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. 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.”

The opening line of **James 1:27** states, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this.” Through the truths of **James 1:26-27** we discover three essential elements to that which the Lord our God would define and accept as a pure religious life. First, from **verse 26** we learn that an unbridled, selfish tongue defeats the spiritual value of a religious life. Even so, we may conclude that if an unbridled, selfish tongue is contrary to a pure religious life, then a bridled, Spirit-filled communication is an essential element of a pure religious life. Furthermore, **verse 27** reveals two additional elements that are essential to a pure religious life, saying, “ure 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.” Indeed, pure religion involves this – a Spirit-filled communication, a selfless compassion, and a separated character. In fact, these elements are so important to our lives that James deals further with each matter in the three chapters that follow. In **chapter 2** he deals significantly with the matter of a selfless compassion toward the poor and needy. Then in **chapter 3** he deals significantly with the matter of a Spirit-filled communication. Finally, in **chapter 4** he deals significantly with the matter of a separated character.

I. A Spirit-filled Communication

As we have noted, **James 1:26** teaches that an unbridled, selfish communication is contrary to a pure religious life; for it states, “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.” Thus we may conclude that the opposite is also true. Whereas an unbridled, selfish communication is contrary to a pure religious life, a bridled communication is essential to a pure religious life. Yet we are unable to bridle and tame our tongue in our ability. Even so, **James 3:6-8** declares, “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. 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.” Due to our natural selfishness of our sinful flesh, our tongues are a consuming fire, “a world of iniquity,” “an unruly evil,” a source of “deadly poison.” In fact, our tongues are so unruly, so unable to be naturally ruled, that none of us is able to bridle and tame our own tongues. Therefore, we must yield our tongues as instruments of righteousness unto the Lord our God. Indeed, only as we yield our tongues unto the filling influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit can our tongues be spiritually bridled and tamed. Even so, in **Psalms 19:12-14** David prayed unto the Lord, “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from

the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” Yet again in **Psalms 141:3** David prayed unto the Lord, saying, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

So then, what will be the character of a Spirit-filled communication? First, a Spirit-filled communication will be spiritually careful and considerate, not speaking freely or foolishly. Even so, **Proverbs 10:14** declares, “Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.” Again **Proverbs 10:19** declares, “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.” Again **Proverbs 11:12-13** declares, “He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.” Again **Proverbs 12:16** declares, “A fool’s wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.” Again **Proverbs 12:23** declares, “A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.” Again **Proverbs 13:3** declares, “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” Again **Proverbs 15:2** declares, “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” Again **Proverbs 15:28** declares, “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.” Again **Proverbs 17:9** declares, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” Again **Proverbs 17:27** declares, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” Again **Proverbs 18:6-7** declares, “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.” Again **Proverbs 18:13** declares, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Finally, **Proverbs 29:11** declares, “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

Second, a Spirit-filled communication will be Biblically wise and wholesome, speaking that which is good and gracious to the use of edifying. Even so, **Ephesians 4:29** gives the instruction, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” Again **Colossians 4:6** gives the instruction, “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Indeed, **Psalms 37:30-31** declares, “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.” Thus in **Psalms 119:172** expressed the commitment, “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.”

Yea, **Proverbs 10:11** declares, “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” Again the opening portion of **Proverbs 10:13** declares, “In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found.” Again **Proverbs 10:20-21** declares, “The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.” Again **Proverbs 10:31-32** declares, “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the forward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.” Again **Proverbs 11:11** declares, “By the

blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.” Again **Proverbs 12:17-20** declares, “He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.” Again **Proverbs 14:3** declares, “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.” Again **Proverbs 14:25** declares, “A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.” Again **Proverbs 15:1** declares, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” Again **Proverbs 15:4** declares, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.” Again **Proverbs 15:7** declares, “The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.” Again **Proverbs 15:23** declares, “A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” Again **Proverbs 15:26** declares, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.” Again **Proverbs 16:21** declares, “The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.” Again **Proverbs 16:23-24** declares, “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” Again **Proverbs 20:15** declares, “There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.” Again **Proverbs 25:11** declares, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Again, specifically concerning the virtuous woman, **Proverbs 31:26** declares, “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” Finally, **Ecclesiastes 10:12** declares, “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.”

II. A Selfless Compassion

In the second place, **James 1:27** teaches that a selfless compassion is essential to a pure religious life, saying, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Herein the requirement “to visit” means personally and actively to help another in meeting their need. Herein also the categories of the fatherless and the widows is presented as a representative class for all who are significantly poor and needy. Even so, we learn herein that it is an essential element of a pure religious life to demonstrate a selfless compassion toward those who are in personal need and who are unable to pay us back. Indeed, this is the way of the Lord our God Himself; and in this manner we demonstrate ourselves to be follows of God our heavenly Father as His dear children. Even so, in **Psalms 10:14** the psalmist declared concerning the Lord our God, “Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.” Again in **Psalms 10:17-18** the psalmist declared, “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: to judge [that is – to provide justice for] the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.” Again in **Psalms 68:5** David declared, “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of [that is – for the sake of] the widows, is God in his holy habitation.” Again in the closing portion of **Psalms 68:10**, David declared, “Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.” Again in **Psalms 140:12** David declared, “I know that the LORD will maintain

the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.” Again in **Psalm 146:9** the psalmist declared, “The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.” Finally, **Proverbs 15:25** declares, “The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.”

Thus we find that the Lord our God gave specific instructions to the children of Israel in the Mosaic Law concerning their care for the fatherless, the widows, and the poor. In **Exodus 22:22-25** the instruction was given, “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.” Again in **Leviticus 25:35-36** the instruction was given, “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.” Again in **Deuteronomy 14:28-29** the instruction was given concerning the tithe of the land, “At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: and the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.” Again in **Deuteronomy 15:7-8** the instruction was given, “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.” Finally, in **Deuteronomy 24:19-21** the instruction was given, “When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.”

Even so, **Psalm 37:21** declares, “The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.” Again **Psalm 41:1** declares, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.” Again **Psalm 112:4-5** declares concerning the upright individual, who maintains a pure religious life, “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.” To this **verse 9** adds, “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.” Again **Proverbs 14:21** declares, “He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.” Again **Proverbs 14:31** declares, “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.” Again **Proverbs 19:17** gives the promise, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” Again **Proverbs 21:13** gives the warning, “Whoso stoppeth his ears at

the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.” Again **Proverbs 22:9** gives the promise, “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.” Again **Proverbs 28:27** declares, “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.” Again **Proverbs 29:7** declares, “The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.” Again, specifically concerning the virtuous woman, **Proverbs 31:20** declares, “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.”

Indeed, in **Isaiah 1:16-17** the Lord gave instruction concerning a pure religious life, saying, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Again in **Isaiah 58:6-11** the Lord gave instruction concerning a pure religious life, saying, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” Finally, in **Acts 20:35** the apostle Paul gave instruction concerning a pure religious life, saying, “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

III. A Separated Character

In the third place, **James 1:27** teaches that a separated character is essential to a pure religious life, saying, “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.” A pure religious life requires that we keep our character from being “spotted” with the spiritual corruption and pollution of this present evil world’s ungodliness. Yea, we must faithfully and fervently keep ourselves separated from the spiritual corruption and pollution of this present evil world’s ungodliness, in whatever form it may present itself. As believers we are no longer of this present evil world, even as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not of this present evil world. (**John 17:16**) Indeed, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” (**Galatians 1:4**) Yea, by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and by His death of the cross, this present evil world has been spiritually crucified unto us believers; and we have been spiritually crucified unto this present evil world. (**Galatians 6:14**) Through “the great and precious promises” of our salvation, God our heavenly Father has made us partakers of His own righteous and holy nature and has delivered us from “the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (**2 Peter 1:4**)

Brethren, we must understand that by nature this present evil world, in all of its spiritual characteristics, lies in wickedness and ungodliness. Yet we must also understand that we are no longer of this world spiritually. We are now the children of God. Therefore, we must no longer lie with this present evil world in its wickedness and ungodliness. Yes, before we were saved through faith in Christ, we “walked according to the course of this world” and “according to the prince of the power of the air,” that is – that great wicked one, the devil. (**Ephesians 2:2**) Indeed, at that time we were “the children of disobedience,” conducting ourselves “in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” (**Ephesians 2:2-3**) Yet we are no longer to walk according to this selfish and ungodly course. We are no longer to walk as this present evil world walks, “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (**Ephesians 4:17-19**) Henceforth we are to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” and to “be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind,” and to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (**Ephesians 4:22-24**) Yes, we were a part of this world’s spiritual darkness. Yet now we are spiritual light through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Therefore, we are to “walk as children of light,” proving and pursuing after that which is acceptable unto our Lord. (**Ephesians 5:8-10**)

Indeed, we are not to be spiritually conformed unto this present evil world, but to be spiritually transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove and pursue after “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” (**Romans 12:2**) We are not to be partakers with this present evil world in their ungodly ways. (**Ephesians 5:7**) We are to “have no fellowship” whatsoever “with the unfruitful works” of this world’s spiritual darkness, but rather we are to reprove them. (**Ephesians 5:11**) We are not to love this present evil world and its selfish, ungodly ways. Yea, “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” (**1 John 2:15-17**) We are now to set our affection on things above, on the things of the Lord our God and Savior, “not on things on the earth.” (**Colossians 3:2**) We are not to become entangled with the affairs of this present world, so that we might live pleasing unto the Lord our God. (**2 Timothy 2:4**) Yea, we are not to allow “the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things” to spiritually choke out our walk with the Lord and in His Word. (**Mark 4:19**) Rather, as the children of God, we are to walk in a manner that is spiritually blameless and harmless, “without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” among whom we are to shine as spiritual lights in this present evil world. (**Philippians 2:15**) The Lord our God has called us to be the spiritual light of this world, reflecting the glorious light of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His saving gospel. (**Matthew 5:14**) Therefore, we must not allow the brightness of our spiritual light to be dulled by the corruption and pollution of this world’s spiritual darkness. Rather, we are to let our spiritual light of godliness so shine before this present evil world, that they may clearly see our good, godly works and may be drawn unto Christ for salvation. (**Matthew 5:16**)

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (**Titus 2:11-14**) Therefore, we must cast off the works of this world’s spiritual darkness, and must put on the Lord’s armor of spiritual light. (**Romans 13:12**) We must put on our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, even abiding in Him, and must not make any provision for our selfish flesh, “to fulfil the lusts thereof.” (**Romans 13:14**) We must walk in the power and after the direction of the indwelling Holy Spirit, so that we should not fulfill the lust of our selfish flesh. (**Galatians 5:16**) We must walk “as obedient children,” not fashioning ourselves in character and conduct after the former lusts of our unsaved walk, wherein we walked according to the ungodly course of this world. (**1 Peter 1:14**) Rather, we must be holy in all manner of character and conduct, just as the Lord our God and heavenly Father is holy, who has called us out of this world’s spiritual darkness into His own spiritual light. (**1 Peter 1:15**) Therefore, “dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims,” as those who are not of this present evil world, but who are of the all-holy Lord God, let us “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” (**1 Peter 2:11**) Let us keep ourselves spiritually “unspotted from the world.”