

James

Pure And Undeified Religion

September 4, 2011

I. Introduction

- A. **James 1:22-27** . . . But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; [24] for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. [25] But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. [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 undeified 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.
- B. I want to make it clear here at the beginning of this teaching that I am not talking to you today, I am talking to us because I need this teaching as much as anyone!
- C. Prayer

II. Pure And Undeified Religion

- A. **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.
 - 1. **If anyone thinks himself to be religious,**
 - a. To think yourself to be religious is to think you possess or live a life in conformity to the teachings of your religion. And in this case, it is thinking you live according to the teachings of the God of Christianity.
 - b. The problem we face in the church today, and it appears they faced a similar problem in James' day, is that some consider themselves to live according to the teachings of Christianity based on a loose and self-serving interpretation of God's word. For example:
 - (1) Some consider themselves Christians even though they continue to practice certain behaviors or activities which they know are sin. And they assure themselves of a good standing

with God by holding to an exaggerated understanding of God's grace and love.

- (2) Some hold to an incomplete teaching regarding saving faith – speaking of it as if we only have to agree that we cannot save ourselves and therefore must depend on Jesus to have paid the penalty for our sin to have eternal life. The problem with this incomplete teaching is that it leaves out such things as repentance, submissive obedience, progress in sanctification, and the necessity of being faithful to the end – which are inseparable parts of saving faith.
 - (3) Then there is the ever popular notion that our religiousness, or Christianity, is measured and validated by the outward show of religious activities, such as church attendance, reading our Bible, prayer, and serving others in some way – be it in the church or outside the church. Sadly, there are many who think they are good Christians living according to the teachings of Christianity based on these measurements.
- c. However, God does not use the same measurements to measure the worth of our religion or the genuineness of our Christianity as those in the three examples just mentioned.
 - d. According to the scriptures, God measures the genuineness of our saving faith or the worthiness of our Christianity by such things as our character, our values, what we treasure, our beliefs, who we live for, what we think about or what we allow our mind to dwell on, our intentions, and our deeds – be they hidden from the eyes of others or open for all to see. Let's look together at several portions of scripture to see just three requirements or conditions of genuine saving faith or Christianity as a whole.
- (1) **Luke 18:10-14** . . . Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' [13] But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' [14] I tell you, **this man went to his house justified** rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (**Humility**)

- (2) **I Samuel 15:22-23a** . . . Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. [23] For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king. (**Submissive obedience**)
 - (3) **Micah 6:6-8** . . . With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? [7] Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [8] He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (**Righteousness, godly love, humility**)
 - (4) **Romans 13:8-10** . . . Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (**Godly love toward others**)
 - (5) **Hebrews 12:14** . . . Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (**Holiness**)
- e. Returning to **James 1:26**, we read: "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." This means that God also measures the worth of our religion by the words and messages that come out of our mouth. In fact, the clear message here is that failure to pass this test means our religion or our practice of Christianity is worthless. And to be worthless means it cannot do or deliver what it promises to do.
2. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, **and yet does not bridle his tongue**
 - a. Therefore, the question is: Why does an unbridled tongue indicate a worthless Christianity? The answer is found in these words of

Jesus: “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (**Luke 6:45**).

- b. In other words, just as a tree is known by its fruit, so our heart, or the worth of our religion, is known by what commonly or regularly comes out of our mouth when we feel free to say whatever we want to say on a given topic or as a response to a given situation or in relation to a person or group of people.
 - c. The point here is that our speech reveals what is in our heart.
 - (1) And if our Christianity, or our religion – as God refers to it here in **James 1:26** – is to change anything about us, it is intended and expected to change what is in our heart.
 - (2) If our religion does not clearly and significantly change what is in our heart, God says it is worthless! And if it does change what is in our heart, it must include changing such things as our character, our thoughts, our values, what we treasure, our beliefs, what we allow our mind to dwell on, and who we live for.
 - d. Now, just to help us get a sense of the kind of speech that represents an unbridled tongue, consider these examples taken from scripture: slander, gossip, boastfulness, pride, abusiveness, cursing, bitterness, reviling, swindling, lying, anger, coarse jesting, silly talk, filthy talk, false witness, envy, insults, disputes, railing judgements, unjust criticism, fault finding, and complaining.
3. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue **but deceives his own heart**
- a. And what is the deception?
 - (1) The first thing I would like us to notice about this deception is that it is the second deception referred to by James here in the first chapter. In both cases, the deception warned against is self-deception. Maybe God wants us to take heed to this warning about self-deception.
 - (2) The second point I would like us to see is that this self-deception is often based on the misbelief that an unbridled tongue is a separate issue from the genuineness of our Christianity and therefore has no bearing on our saving faith in Jesus Christ.

- (3) As for the deception itself, we deceive ourselves when we think our Christianity is genuine in spite of having an unbridled tongue. And when we **deceive** ourselves in this way:
 - (a) we hide the truth from ourselves so as to be able to believe a lie as if it were true;
 - (b) we fool ourselves into holding a lie as if it were true by willfully ignoring the obvious;
 - (c) and we encourage false hope or unreasonable expectations where none is to be found.
- b. In other words, we deceive ourselves into thinking our Christianity is genuine by separating or compartmentalizing our life and looking only or mostly at those areas that confirm the genuineness of our Christianity while ignoring those **select key areas** that confirm the worthlessness or emptiness of our Christianity – such as what comes out of our mouth on a repetitive basis.
- 4. 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. When something is worthless, it means it is useless, having no value or being of no help, good for nothing, incapable of producing the desired or expected result.
 - b. The point here is that any form of the Christian religion that does not change your heart – that is change your character, your values, what you treasure, your beliefs, who you live for, what you think about, what you speak about, your intentions, and your actions, is useless for obtaining the desired or expected outcome of participating in that form of Christianity.

B. **James 1:27** . . . 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.

- 1. Simply stated, the religion, or form of Christianity that God accepts as valid and therefore receives from Him what He promises to all who live by faith in Him, has two primary and visible expressions: love and holiness.
- 2. And so you say: “That sounds easy enough!” And for many who attend Christian churches, it does sound easy enough. It sounds easy because many in the Christian church have reduced love to specific, organized, or currently popular acts of charity. And they have reduced holiness to specific, private and public activities, such as Bible reading, prayer,

occasional fasting, tithing, church attendance, serving in some capacity in the church, short-term mission trips, occasional evangelism (i.e., inviting unbelievers to our church), and some sort of group Bible study.

3. I want to make it clear that it is not my intention to put down any of these activities. However, as we have seen from **verse 26**, without a faith that changes your heart – that is, without a significant change in character, values, beliefs, what you treasure, who you live for, what you think about, and the denial of self – it will be just as hard to love as God teaches us to love and to pursue holiness as God expects us to pursue it as it is to bridle your tongue.
 - a. Look back at **James 1:27**. It begins with: “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this.”
 - (1) To be pure and undefiled is to be pure on the inside with outward words and deeds that exemplify that purity.
 - (2) Or we could say that to be pure and undefiled is to have a genuine and sincere faith in God, manifested by a changed heart resulting in changed behavior.
 - b. When we look at God’s expectations of the Christian life this way, we can rightly conclude there is little room in His expectations for average or mediocre or self-serving or partially loving/partially selfish Christianity. He is looking for purity, for a religion that changes us inside and out, for a love that is like His love, and a holiness that is like His holiness. To aim lower than this is to engage in a religion that is impure, defiled, short on love, failing in holiness, and in the end, worthless, because it is unable to produce the promised or expected outcome and rewards.
4. Regarding love, Paul said to Timothy: “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (**I Timothy 1:5**).
5. Regarding holiness, Jesus said: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (**Matthew 5:48**). And John added these words of exhortation: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (**I John 3:2-3**).

III. Conclusion

- A. The seriousness in which we take these words from James impacts self-deception and the outcome of our religious/Christian experience.