

**I Believe...So Now What?**  
**(Week 3)**  
**James 1:25-27**  
**"Pure Religion"**

**Introduction**

**"Pure and undefiled religion before God is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world."** **James 1:27**

As we discussed earlier, the mature Christian's foremost priority is to live in a way that brings glory to God. To us, this is the very "meaning of life". Jesus tells us that one day faithful believers from every walk of life will have the privilege to stand before Him and hear Him say:

**"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness."**  
**Matthew 25:23**

Just think for a moment what it will be like to hear Jesus say that to you! I cannot think of anything that would give me such a feeling of indescribable joy, than to hear Him say these words to me when my race on earth has finally been run. Every Christian should long to hear those words. James wanted his readers to live in such a way as to guarantee this ringing endorsement of God upon their lives. He had a special way of describing this kind of life before God. He called it "Pure Religion" (**vs. 27**). The word that James uses here is a very seldom used word in the Greek. The word *Threskeia* carries with it the meaning of religious rituals and observances. In the Church, we have several specific things that we do that could be described as "rituals". We come to gather to pray, sing praises, take communion, baptize new converts, and take up an offering. These things are among some of the rituals that we normally perform in conjunction with our faith.

What James wants us to understand is that even the most sacred forms of worship are meaningless unless they come from a pure heart that is devoted to following Christ. If I go to church regularly, but do not love my neighbor, then my "religion" is meaningless. If I give money to the church, but engage in slanderous gossip about my fellow church members, then my giving is of no value. To be a follower of Christ is to strive to be like Christ. The Holy Spirit dwells within every true believer, so they may be able to accomplish this goal. Apart from the sanctification that only He can provide, none of us will ever attain Christlikeness. No one has ever been transformed into the image of Christ by "turning over a new leaf" as it were. However, countless individuals have been conformed to His image by "turning themselves over" to His Lordship. To be controlled by The Spirit of God... Now THAT is **True Religion**.

The book of *James* is given to us to remind us that, if we claim to know Christ, then the way we live should bear out our testimony. James is about not just saying the right things, but doing them. It is a book about "being real". He tells us that a "real Christian" will rejoice in all things and will resist temptation by the power of The Spirit and The Word. In today's passage, He continues by telling us that those of genuine faith will prove their "True Religion" by: **1. Controlling The Tongue; 2. Comforting The Troubled; and 3. Conforming To The Truth.**

**Controlling The Tongue (vs. 25-26)**

**"But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works — this person all be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless, and he deceives himself."**  
**James 1:25-26**

In this first chapter of *James*, the pastor of The First Church of Jerusalem stresses that he does not want his readers to be deceived. In **verse 16**, he warns us not to be deceived and led astray by the various forms of temptation aimed at enticing us into sin. In **verse 22**, he warns us not to deceive ourselves by thinking we can be right with God just by hearing His Word and not actually obeying it. In **verse 26**, he tells us that if we think we are “religious”, but cannot control what we say, then we are absolutely deceiving ourselves. To be controlled by The Spirit of God is to have self control (**Galatians 5:22-23**), and this also includes control over our own tongues. James actually uses three separate Greek words for “deceive” in these three verses. The last one that he employs in **verse 26** is “*apatao*”, and it means *to cheat or beguile*. James is in essence saying that if we cannot control what we say and claim to be true followers of Christ, then we are tricking ourselves, cheating our own hearts, by falsely convincing them that we are in right standing before God. Listen to what Christ Jesus says about the words that we speak:

**“But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person. For from the heart comes evil thoughts, murders, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, and slander. These are the things that defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”** **Matthew 15:20**

Jesus gave this answer to His disciples after the Pharisees had accused them of not properly washing their hands in observance of a religious Jewish ritual cleansing before a meal. What Christ said was exactly what James is saying about “true religion”. You can wash your hands as many times as you like, but it will not wash away the sin in your heart. You can follow religious observances to the letter on the outside, but still have a sinful heart on the inside. What we say gives away what the heart truly possesses on the inside. If there is filth on the inside, then filth will come out in our speech. If there is holiness on the inside, then what we say will bring honor to God. What we say will ultimately prove **who we are**. Listen to how *The Bible* describes those who are without Christ:

**“Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Viper’s venom is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”** **Romans 3:13-14**

The comment about their throat being an open grave is quite possibly the most descriptive verse in the entire *Bible*. Think about it for a moment. Imagine what it would be like to pass by an open grave. The smell of decomposition hangs in the air and is an assault upon the senses. That is what the speech of an unbeliever is like to God. The stench that emanates from their speech is vile and rotten. When Christ changes a person’s heart, then their tongues should produce holiness. For whatever is in our hearts will eventually come out of our mouths. There are a lot of folks out there who call themselves believers, who need to learn how to control their tongues. James will have much more to say about this in **Chapter 3**, but for now, I will leave you with an acronym that I was given many years ago that has forever made an impact on how I try to control my tongue. We must learn to T.H.I.N.K. before we speak:

**T... is it TRUE?**

Before we ever repeat anything that we have heard, we should first confirm that we are speaking the truth.

**H... is it HELPFUL?**

Is what I am about to say going to encourage someone or discourage them?

**I... is it INSPIRED?**

Is this what God is telling me to say, or am I just responding in my flesh?

This would certainly cause us to talk a lot less, if we lived by this rule.

James tells us that we should be swift to listen, but slow to speak (**James 1:19**).

**N... is it NECESSARY?**

Would the world be just as well off if I were to just keep silent about this?

**K... is it KIND?**

*The Bible* admonishes us to speak the truth **in love** (**Ephesians 4:5**),

so it’s not just about what we say, but how we say it, and what is our motive for saying it.

If you cannot control your own tongue my friend, then you are deceiving yourself about being a follower of Christ. Not my words, but God's. Look intently into the Word of God this morning (**vs. 25**) and examine your heart. What do you see? Are there some changes that need to be made? God is still in the heart changing business. Turn over the control of your tongue to His Holy Spirit this morning.

### **Comforting The Troubled (vs. 27a)**

**"Pure and undefiled religion before God is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..."** **James 1:27a**

If anyone claims to belong to Christ, then they will have the love of Christ within them. Jesus' ministry on this earth was all about serving the less fortunate. *The Bible* tells us that He was "moved with compassion", when He saw the masses of people who were lost, hurting, and broken (**Matthew 9:26**). There are plenty of people who regularly attend church services, but far fewer who actually look around and actually "see" their fellow congregants. So many among us today are hurting and going through unimaginable struggles.

Recently, we just went through the book of *Hebrews*, and in the twelfth chapter, we are commanded to "look out" for one another (**Hebrews 12:15**) to keep anyone from falling away from the grace of God. Here in **James 1:27**, we are commanded to "look after" those who are in distress among us. The two words found in these two verses are related. The root word for both of these in the Greek is *Episkopeo*. It means to "oversee". It is the same word used to describe the function of a pastor in The New Testament (*Episkopos*), meaning "overseer".

You see, as Christians we are to be constantly looking around us to see those in need, and to meet their needs, whether they be physical or spiritual. James uses "orphans and widows" to describe those who are the most vulnerable among his congregation, but the context is by no means limited strictly to those two groups. We, as a congregation, must constantly be looking out for **anyone** in our midst that needs our help. The Church is intended by God to be a place of rescue for those who are troubled. As I have stated before, we don't just gather here to have our own needs met, but rather, we must gather to look around and see just who might **need us!**

If someone among our congregation is doing without, then it is our responsibility to meet their needs. The whole point of "*loving your neighbor as yourself*" is to weigh the struggles of others equally with our own. Sadly, often times when the struggles of others are made known, they are met with the response, "We are praying for you". How about we not only pray, but **do something?** James tell us that caring about others enough to actually lend a hand is living proof of "true religion". It is time that the church started to live out what we say we believe. Who are you helping today?

Now, I know what some of you are thinking... "Pastor, I'm not wealthy. I can't afford to help anyone." Would you like to know the truth? There are plenty of ways to help others without using money! Time is important. Listening, performing menial tasks, offering to provide a service or a meal, aren't very costly. To be quite honest, if you do not have time to serve someone else, then your life is far too busy, not to mention self-centered. I do not believe that God is going to give us a pass on this one folks. He expects us to take time to look out for each other. This isn't just a *New Testament* concept by the way. God has always had a heart for the less fortunate. He commanded His chosen people of Israel to look out for those in need all the way back in *Leviticus*:

**"When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap all the way to the edge of your field or gather the gleanings of our harvest. Leave them for the poor and the resident alien; I AM The LORD your God."** **Leviticus 23:22**

I love that verse! It plainly tells me that everything that I have been given is not intended for my use only. The same God Who has blessed me with what I have expects me to bless others with it as well. True faith is sharing faith. How are you "managing your crops" this morning? When is the last time you came to church just to find someone to help? If you have genuine faith in Christ, you will remember His words:

**“... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.”**  
**Matthew 25:40**

### **Conforming To The Truth (vs. 27b)**

**“... and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”**

**James 1:27b**

James tells us in no uncertain terms that we are to live according to The Word of God. To do so is to reject the filth of this world. It is to live out what we believe. While he compares the person who claims to have faith, but doesn't live by The Word, to one who looks in a mirror and goes away forgetting what he looks like (**vs. 23-24**), he goes on to say that the true believer will look into the Word “intently”.

**“But the one who LOOKS INTENTLY into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works — this person will be blessed in what he does.”**  
**James 1:25**

The Greek used here for “looks intently” is a perfect description of how a Christian who possesses “true religion” will approach The Word of God. The word is “*paraklypto*”, and it literally means to “*lean down and carefully look into*”. What a great picture of what a follower of Christ must do in order to conform to the truth of God's Word. We must humble ourselves (stoop down) and carefully **study** God's Word to let it have rule in our lives. Then, we will be not only hearers, but doers of The Word. Then, and only then, will we be able to “keep ourselves unstained from the world”. Unless we humbly receive The Word of God, then we can never be changed on the inside. When we are like Jesus, we will no longer crave what this world offers. The Word shows us perfectly how to be imitators of Christ.

Just listen to what Paul says in **Ephesians**:

**“Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather, giving thanks. For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or greedy person, who is an idolator, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. Therefore, do not become their partners. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in The LORD. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth — testing what is pleasing to The LORD. Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. Everything exposed by the light is made visible, for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore, it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

**Ephesians 5:1-14**

Pretty much says it all doesn't it?

And let ALL of God's people say... **TRUTH!!!**