

# **A FAITH THAT WORKS**

## **(A Study of the Book of James)**

### **The Pure Practice of Faith**

TEXT: James 1:26-27

INTRODUCTION: The Book of James is a book that strikes out at pretence.

That is why many of you like this book. You are wanting your faith and your walk with Christ to be real, to be genuine. That's what the Book of James is about.

A faith that works!

A faith that is real and not pretend.

A faith that

- Endures in trials
- Is not double-minded
- Not based on the riches of the world
- That has victory over temptation
- That is grateful to God, the source of every blessing
- That wants to be a part of God's harvest as both the fruit of it and the reaper of more fruit
- That harnesses anger so as not to undermine God's message
- That is willing to repent of filth and wickedness that work their way into one's life
- That is a committed student of the Word of God, but not just for the accumulation of information, but for the doing of it, the living of it

The close of chapter 1 puts an exclamation point on verse 22 which we studied last week.

**James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves!**

So let's read these words that close the first chapter and see here critical instruction on – The Pure Practice of Faith.

James 1:26–27 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.

Do you find it interesting that in a passage that is about abandoning pretence and about the Pure Practice of Faith that we find both the words religious and religion in just two verses? And that surprise might be made greater to know that any form of these words religion and religious only show up five times in the whole Bible – two of them right here in our text.

The word religion gets a bad rap from most born again Christians, and especially from us Baptists, because we are often telling people

**“You need relationship not religion.”**

- What we are saying in that statement is true.
- We are saying that all of us need a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and not just a list of rules or the repetition of liturgy.
- We are saying you need to know Jesus personally because He is alive.
- We are saying we need to trust the risen, living Jesus as our Lord, Master, and Savior.
- In trusting Him there is life – eternal and abundant.

And we often express that trust by saying, “You need relationship not religion.”

But while we may think of religion as the

- Mindless repetition of liturgy
- Of going through the motions of spiritual practices without any authenticity or reality
- Of keeping rules with the thought that they bring salvation or righteousness

That is not really what the word “religion” means, and it certainly is not what James means when he writes about pure and undefiled religion here in his letter.

I am sure most of you remember that when I was teaching through the Book of John with you on Sunday mornings that I gave you a definition of the word religion. I know this because of your care to take notes and study what I teach you diligently.

However, some of you weren't here when I taught the Gospel of John, so rather than the people sitting next to you having to lean over and explain it, I will repeat the definition.

## **Religion – The systematized worship and service of God.**

I ask you again to imagine this scenario with me:

- A group of us believers meet together for the first time in PC, and we decide to get together and worship the Lord one Sunday on the corner of 98 and Beck at 10:30.
- We meet and sing, pray, read Scripture, preach, and testify. It was worship!
- We decide we need to minister to some folks in need in the area, so we agree on Monday to each bring some food and set up some tables across the street and give food and share the gospel with those in need who come by. That is service.
- We decide to meet the next week on Sunday morning at 10:30 to worship.
- We decide to give out food and the gospel every Monday.
- We do this more or less regularly for 6 weeks
- For 6 months
- For 6 years
  - We worship the Lord at 98 and Beck at 10:30 on Sunday morning.
  - We give out food and the gospel across the street every Monday.
- Somewhere between the first few times we did it and the 6 year anniversary, it became religion.
  - That does not mean it became bad.
  - It means it became systematized.
  - It became a part of a system for us.
- Anything that we do repeatedly as an act of worship or service to God will eventually become systematic, and when it does, it is religion.
- So religion is not bad.

## **Religion is simply what we do regularly to worship and serve the Lord.**

So what James is talking about is how do we regularly worship and serve the Lord with authenticity and without pretence.

## **What is the Pure Practice of our Faith like?**

He points out three qualities of genuine, undefiled religion:

## I. A TONGUE THAT IS BRIDLED

Folks, this may be the quickest way that other people, lost people and our fellow Christians, evaluate whether our practice of our faith is genuine or pretence –

- the way we use our tongue
- whether or not we control our tongue
- Is it bridled, hindered from
  - wicked words
  - venomous outbursts
  - vindictive comments
  - hurtful exclamations filled with hatred

If our desire to practice our faith

To walk with our Lord

To worship and honor our God

Is not sufficient to exercise control over our tongue,

- How strong is it?
- How pure is it?
- Or is it pretence?

I am not going to add more right now on this quality of the Pure Practice of our Faith because James will spend almost a whole chapter of his book on our use of our tongue. We will explore what the Spirit says through him when we get there.

Meanwhile, let this serve as warning. If you are a person who really does want to be serious about your faith and walk. You are turned off by pretence. Check your speech.

- What comes out when something makes you mad?
- How many people get wounded from that sword in your mouth?
- If WikiLeaks had a tape of everything you said in private, would you be scared to death?

If those questions are convicting, you might want to do some repenting, recommitting, and work on your anger and on control of your tongue before we get to the passage where James unleashes the big guns.

## II. REFUSING TO TOLERATE THE FILTHY STAINS OF THE WORLD

This is James' third point, but I am going to take it second because we have already considered the primary principle here.

**James 1:21 told us if there were filthy, wicked things in our lives we needed to do two things:**

**Repent**

**Implant the Word of God in our lives and obey it!**

Continuing sin in our lives keeps us from a fully authentic practice of our faith. Filthiness stains us.

Wickedness scars us and others.

God of course already knows if the practice of our faith is pure or pretence, but when our lives are spotted or stained from the filth of the world, everybody can see that we are not living a genuine expression of our faith.

### III. LOVING CARE OF ORPHANS AND WIDOWS

This is James' first mention of this marker of pure and undefiled religion.

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

The principle is simple and clear.

A real follower of Jesus will care most about those for whom Jesus cared the most.

- In a nutshell: the disadvantaged, the hurting, the oppressed, widows and children,
- Especially widows and children
- God instructed the first church to create a special group of officers in the church whose primary task was to be sure that widows were cared for and not neglected.

I am glad that we continue to obey that instruction. Two primary things characterize the Deacons of SABC:

1. They consider themselves to be servants and not rulers or administrators of the church.
  2. Their most important task as servants of the church is their ministry of caring to widows.
- But our text also emphasizes children

- Jesus loved the little children
- Jesus still loves the little children of the world

Jesus said,

**Mark 9:42** “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Now our church has a wonderful children’s ministry that ministers to our children and reaches to some children outside our church family.

But there is a whole host of children in our own country and in the world to whom no one is ministering and for whom few are caring.

**In the United States there are over 100,000 children in foster care that are eligible and waiting for adoption.** If this year is like the past few, a little over half of those will be adopted, but as many new ones will be added to the list. **Each year, more than 20,000 of those children will age out of eligibility, never having been invited to become a part of a new family.**

As sad as that statistic is, **families in The United States adopt more children than families anywhere else in the world.** Therefore, as many children in America as there are that need homes, multiply that number many, many times, when you think of the children of the world.

Folks, because one of the hallmarks of pure and undefiled religion, the pure practice of our faith is the care of orphans in their time of trouble, God is raising up more and more Christian families who are adopting orphan children and making them to become their own sons and daughters.

God is doing this among families in our church.

I will tell you, that this is a matter very dear to my heart and to the heart of my wife Karen. Most of you know my oldest son, Jeremy, is adopted. He will have to speak for himself as to whether we have been a blessing to him, but he has certainly been a blessing to us and still is.

My younger son and his wife, while they have four children by natural birth, are in the process now of adopting a little girl from China.

But adoption is not the only way to care for orphans in the time of their need. Foster care is another, and the need for foster parents right here in Bay County is enormous. I was

surprised to learn that Bay County has more children in need of foster homes than any other county in Florida.

And God is raising up Christian families to step in and minister to these children as well.

**CONCLUSION:** We all know that we live in trying and difficult times. One of God's provisions for meeting difficult times is the faithfulness of His people, people whose faith is not a shallow pretence, but a strong and driving conviction, that molds who they are and what they do.

I believe that a lot of you in this congregation desire to be that kind of believer. You are desperately needed in our nation and our world. No one will be able to offer the help to the hurting people in the times in which we live like you will be able to offer.

If you have the desire to be a stalwart man of faith such as James is talking about, if you want to be a woman who with all authenticity walks with Christ, the Holy Spirit through James is laying out a foundation here in these two verses.

1. If your lips still get loose and injure your testimony, get them bridled.
2. If the sins of the world are staining your life at places, clean them up with repentance and obedience to the Word of God.
3. Let God develop a heart of compassion in you for the hurting, the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and especially for widows and orphans. Begin to ask God how He wants to work through your life to minister to those.