

True Religion

James 1:26-27

I. The Characteristics Of A Worthless Religion (26, cf. 22)

A. A Mouth Out Of Control (26a; cf. Col 3:8-9)

26a If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue

- Hopeless Words (1 Cor 13:1)
- Hurtful Words – Insults (Prov 11:9; 12:18)
- Coarse Words (Ps 10:7, Ex 20:7)
- Sinful Words (Eph 4:29; 5:4)

B. A Heart Devoid Of Truth (26b; cf. 2 Cor 11:4)

26b but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

II. The Characteristics Of A Pure Religion (27)

A. A Sacrificial Love That Serves (cf. Ps 68:5; Mt 25:43-45; Jn 21:15-19; 14:15)

27a Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction,

B. An Untarnished Holiness That Shines (27c; cf. Rom 12:2)

27b and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Conclusion:

1. True religion combines truth and love. Truth that doesn't deceive and love that serves.
2. Evaluate the evidence of our faith:
 - What does our mouth say about our faith?
 - What does our mind know is true about our faith?
 - How is our love a demonstration of faith?
 - How is our life an evidence of our faith?

Discussion:

1. How do you know if you're definitely in the right religion?
2. How do we know if our faith in Christ is really genuine?
3. Why do some churches find it easier to talk about truth and not showing love? Why do other churches find it easier to show love but not deal with the truth of God's Word? How can we be great at simultaneously living truth and giving love?
4. What are some ways you can minister to the people with the greatest needs during the Covid19 era?

True Religion

James 1:26-27

Introduction:

1. How do I know if I'm in the right religion?

- There are so many people in the world, how can so many people be wrong?
- Let me tell you something logical: not all religions can be right?
- You can't have 1 God, no god and 30 million gods and it's all true.
- It's possible that no religion is right.
- It's possible that one religion is right.
- But it's possible that all religions are right.



- What is truth? What is right and real. But to who? To culture, individual or God?
- Is truth absolute? If truth is conflicting and from varied sources, then no. If from one God, then yes.
- How do we know truth? For Christians, it's revealed in His Word in history and time.

2. If There Is One God, Why Are There So Many Religions?

Romans 1:21-23 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

3. Why is Christianity exclusive and not inclusive?

a. God Is Exclusive, Not Inclusive

Exodus 20:2-3 ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me."

b. Salvation Is Exclusive To Christ, Not Inclusive To All Religions

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

c. Salvation Is Not Universally Broad, The Way Is Narrow

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

4. James takes another approach to identifying true religion. Where I just used methods of logic and revelation, James is more practical. He tests the genuineness of one's faith. Is it real? Is it genuine? Does it pass the sniff test?

Scripture Reading:

James 1:26-27

²⁶If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

I. The Characteristics Of A Worthless Religion (26, cf. 22)

A. A Mouth Out Of Control (26a)

^{26a} *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue*

- **"Religious"** = Gr. *Threskos* – outward religious acts
 - D. E. Hiebert: "The term denotes the zealous and diligent performance of the outward and ceremonial aspects of worship. James uses it of an individual whose 'piety' consists in the scrupulous performance of the religious rites of worship and who feels satisfied that thereby he is obedient to the demands of the Word." (*The Epistle of James*, Moody Press, 1979, p. 139)
- Buddhist funerals – is there enough clanging to ward away evil spirits, is their enough chanting to please the gods
- Ancestor worship – is there enough food and burnt merchandise for the after-life? How do you know?
- There are a lot people that just holy sounding mumble jumble
- Self-empowerment clouds out God's empowerment
- **"not bridle his tongue"** = *chalinagogeo* (occurs only here)
 - Bridle (*chalinos*) – control of a wild horse
 -
- Not controlling our speech

Colossians 3:8-9 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

1. Hopeless Words

1 Corinthians 13:1. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2. Hurtful Words – Insults (Prov 11:9; 12:18)

Proverbs 11:9 The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.

- Winston Churchill was once insulted by a lady who was a political rival: "Mr. Churchill, you are a drunk." His sharp tongue retorted: "And you, my lady are ugly. But tomorrow, I will be sober – and you will still be ugly."
- Insults are often traded in a game of "One Upmanship"
- I used to use cut-downs at church until our pastor rebuked me (in Bible college)

3. Coarse Words (Ps 10:7, Ex 20:7)

Psalms 10:7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

- Can we take God's name in vain easily because we don't really have a personal relationship with God?

4. Sinful Words (Eph 4:29; 5:4)

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth,

Ephesians 4:29 (The Message) Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

Ephesians 5:4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- "corrupt" = σαπρός = *sapros*
 - "Corrupt" is *sapros* (σαπρος), "rotten, worn out, unfit for use, worthless, bad." (Wuest)
 - "process of decay." (Kittel)
 - "foul, putrid" (Hoehner, p. 629)
 - used of a disease body, rancid fish (Aristophanes), withered flowers (Demosthenes)

- used of a tree with rotten fruit, thereby is useless or without value
- “word” = λόγος = *logos*
 - speech, utterance
 - every word is to be evaluated and is to be glorifying

Matthew 15:11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

- **Q:** What do your words say about your religion or your philosophy?
- If you’re always talking about yourself or need to demean another to exalt yourself, you’re from the Cult of Self
- If you tell people to do one thing and you don’t do it yourself, you’re from the Cult of Hypocrisy
- If you use God, hell, damn and Jesus Christ as swear words, you’re in the Unholiness Religion
- On the other hand, I’m not advocating being a Christian jargon

B. A Heart Devoid Of Truth (26b)

^{26b} *but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.*

- “**deceives**” = *apatao*
 - Hiebert: “The verb used here (*apatao*) is more common than the term used in verse 22, where the reference was to self-deception due to erroneous reasoning. Here the deception comes from an erroneous estimate of his conduct, leading him astray from the path of reality.” (p. 140)
- **False religion deceives about who God is**
 - Atheist says there is no God
 - Agnostic believes God is not knowable

• **False religion deceives about who Christ is**

2 Corinthians 11:4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

- Unitarians don’t believe Christ is God
- Islam considers Christ a mere prophet, not God
- The Jehovah’s Witness is a reincarnation of Michael the Archangel
- The Mormons believe Jesus was born of a heavenly father and mother along with his brother Lucifer
- Sun Mung Moon claims to be the second coming of Christ
- **False religion deceives about what Christ did**
 - Islam denies Christ died on the cross
 - Some branches of Christianity see Christ’s death on the cross as an example, not the payment of our sin

- **False religion deceives about what God's Word is**
- **False religion deceives about how we're saved**

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- My heart is saddened when one worships idols and misses out on Christ Himself
- One prays in dependence to Mary
- When I was in Argentina, I learned that there were many virgin saints that were prayed to
- **"worthless"** = *mataios* = vain, empty
- There is so much false hope in so many different types of religion
- Oh for them to know the resurrecting power of Christ

II. The Characteristics Of A Pure Religion (27)

A. A Sacrificial Love That Serves

^{27a} *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction,*

- It's easy to give to those who give back
- It's easy to encourage those who encourage you
- It's easy to pay the bill for the person that pays the bills too
- But orphans and widows don't have the means to pay back the love and help we give to them
- Orphans and widows are not listed here as any kind of pariah, but because of their personal plight
- In the ancient times, widows and orphans were seen as the most unfortunate class of people – abandoned, alone, helpless, afflicted
- **"visit"** = *episkeptesthai* = to care after, to meet the needs of, more than a social hangout
 - *Epi* = over
 - *Skopos* = to look

Psalm 68:5 Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

Matthew 25:43-45 ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, **sick** and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or **sick** or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

- Our Barnabas Team contacted our widows and senior citizens to see how we can minister to them during this difficult time of Shelter In Place

- Now is not the time to hoard toilet paper but to distribute it
- Be prepared for a couple of weeks – but don't hoard
- Ie/ In Texas, a guy hoarded 17,000 bottles of hand sanitizers
- Ie/ Girl Scout Annabella made homemade hand sanitizers for the church
- James 2 – James talk about favoring the rich person

James 1:1-3 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"

- **James is not teaching salvation through the Social Gospel of meeting the needs of the poor**
 - James is exposing fake religion by talking about love and not showing it
 - By being hearers of the Word but not Doers
- **Salvation is by faith alone**
- Jesus said if you love me

John 21:15-19 [15] When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." [16] He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." [17] He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

v. 15	v. 16	v. 17
Jesus asked: <i>agape</i>	Jesus asked: <i>agape</i>	Jesus asked: <i>phileo</i>
Peter answered: <i>phileo</i>	Peter answered: <i>phileo</i>	Peter answered: <i>phileo</i>
Peter's "know": <i>oida</i>	Peter's "know": <i>oida</i>	Peter's "know": <i>ginosko</i>
Jesus' expectation: feed lambs	Jesus' expectation: tend sheep	Jesus' expectation: feed lambs

John 14:15 If you love me, you will **keep my commandment**

B. An Untarnished Holiness That Shines (27c)

^{27b} *and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

- **"unstained"** – unpolluted, undefiled
 - Unpolluted from a moral stain
 - Unpolluted from the world system

- “**world**” = *cosmos* – the world system
 - 3 Biblical Meanings For “World”:
 - Planet Earth – **Psalm 24:1** “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”
 - World of People – **John 3:16** “For God so loved the world”, “It’s a Small World”
 - World System
 - *Cosmos* – 86x in John, 27x in John’s other writings, 15x in Synoptic Gospels
 - W. E. Vine describes *cosmos* as “order, arrangement, ornament, adornment”
 - The opposite of *cosmos* is *kaos* (chaos)
 - Frequent synonyms are *aion* (“age”) and *oikoumene* (“inhabited earth”)

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- “**Worldliness** is that state in which our thinking is governed by the mind and the outlook of the world....The man who is not a Christian is not guilty of it because he cannot be anything else. Worldliness can only be true of God’s people; it is that state in which their thinking is still determined by the mind and the outlook of the world.” (D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare*, p. 363)

Conclusion:

1. True religion combines truth and love. Truth that doesn’t deceive and love that serves.
2. Evaluate the evidence of our faith:
 - What does our mouth say about our faith?
 - Does our speech portray our faith? (not with Christian jargonism)
 - Will your kids say your speech matches your faith?
 - What does our mind know is true about our faith?
 - Are certain of God’s truth
 - Does it provide the rock in the time of the Covid 19 storm?
 - How is our love a demonstration of faith?
 - Are we ministering to those in need?
 - Or are we part of the hoarding (get mine) mentality?
 - How is our life an evidence of our faith?
 - Is our thought-life free from entanglement in the world?
 - Are we more invested in this world or the next?

Discussion:

1. How do you know if you’re definitely in the right religion?

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