

James 1:26-27 Reflection

Ps 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Don't Be Deceived! It can be deadly. Self-deception can lead us down the road of false religion / misplaced worship...to a place where we may be busy with activity and yet come to find on the last day that it was all worthless. Empty. Vain.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion 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.

James sets out for us, 3 tests of true religion: Controlled Speech - Practical Compassion - Personal Purity. These 3 things matter b/c they are reflections of God who created us, loved us, saved us, and is transforming us.

1. He reached out to us through His life giving WORD of truth...we His children...should reflect this through a bridled tongue
2. Behind that was His determination to do for us what we could not do for ourselves...dead in sin, given over to our own desires...in love for the helpless He acted, we could never pay back what it cost to redeem us...we as His children, should reflect His compassion and mercy for the helpless
3. His work had a purpose, "firstfruits", specially His and holy...our lives are meant to reflect His righteousness and holiness and we ought to keep ourselves "*unstained from the world*"

James is setting these marks out for us that we may examine our own lives and hearts and see whether or not we have fallen prey to self deception and form of religion that does not have the power to save and transform. Are you reflecting the One who has made you His Own? Apples and trees.

27 Religion 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.

"And" is a very important word here...

- Moves on to 2 more traits to be seen in our lives...tests of whether or not we have deceived ourselves...Practical Compassion and Personal Purity
- James didn't say "or" ...the church likes to err on 1 side or the other...true religion is about practical compassion "yes" ...true religion is about personal purity "yes"

1) Personal Purity - *and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* When James, the Bible, talks about “the world” it’s referring to an entire system of thinking and motivation that is utterly contrary to that of God.

- *the whole human scheme of things organized in terms of human wisdom to attain a human goal, without reference to God, his laws, his values or his ultimate judgment.*

The big picture that James is painting looks like this: true faith, religion, reflects itself in a growing desire to not buy into the way the world operates. To not buy into the things the world values, to define ourselves by the things the world says matters. So that you end up trying to live out a pseudo-Christian faith.

2) Practical Steps of Compassion

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

- These 2 groups represent and encompass the defenseless, helpless, often poor in society...those most often subjected and most vulnerable to exploitation
 - Orphans - helpless...no mom or dad...left to the mercy of others or they will die
 - Widows - no life insurance policy on husband

James says that the work of the Gospel in us is to be reflected through us in a genuine concern and proactive care for the helpless...those who utterly depend on others for their life.

The Church, God’s People are obligated “to visit” (to look after, care for)

- Trying to convey something...this is where the weight is...
- literally means “to visit someone”, “to seek someone out”, not just to say hello, but to care for them, to provide for them. Not just to check in on somebody, but to take ownership and responsibility for caring for them, to look after them
- It’s a word, it’s a powerful word in Scripture that God uses in Exodus, Luke 1, to describe how He visits His people, to care for them and to provide for them.
 - Exodus 4:31 - *"The LORD had visited the children of Israel [in Egypt], and he had looked upon their affliction."*
 - Luke 1:68 - at the coming of Jesus, Zacharias says, *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people."*
 - It’s a massive word...and therefore a massive responsibility...massive calling

Ps. 68:5 - God himself is a , *“a Father to the fatherless and defender of widows”*

- Moses says the Lord *“shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt”* (Deut. 10:17–19).
- The Lord commanded the people: *“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan”* (Exod. 22:22), and the law specified that the people were to go out of their way to provide for the widow and the orphan (Deut. 14:29).
 - They receive a portion of Israel’s tithes (Deut. 26:12–13). He also commands that they be given the opportunity to work; they may glean the corners of the fields of Israel (Deut. 24:19–21).
- Isaiah, announces that God will no longer recognize the worship his people offer him; they must repent and *“seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow”* (Isa. 1:10–17).

James is pointing back to the natural reflection of the righteousness and character of God that is meant to come out of us.

We reflect His mercy and His compassion b/c the Gospel that saves us reminds us that we were in need of mercy, helpless and poor. In fact, in many ways we still are.

- **“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”** That is, blessed are those who know that apart from God’s grace, they are estranged from God and more desolate than orphans.
- By faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family and have been redeemed to reflect Him!

His redemption and adoption of us cost Him, His Son.

- You and I were enemies of God and made made His Son to be His enemy in our place...
- It will cost us as well...widows, orphans, aliens, neddy...can’t pay you back.
- It’s pure kindness, pure mercy...Gospel at work

Our religion, our faith in him, will express this concern with radical, risk-taking acts of compassion. It’s not an option...it’s an obligation