

Pure and undefiled Religion

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1. Introduction

James 1:26,27 *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 [unpolluted] from the world.*

We have taught, many times, that Christianity is not a ‘religion’. We define ‘religion’ as a series of formulae, formal acts and traditions. This is not the meaning of the word, though, in this passage. The group that produced the Authorised Version of the Bible, in 1611, translated the English word ‘religion’ from the Greek, in error.

The Greek word, translated as ‘religion’, occurs three times in the NT and means ‘worship’ or ‘ceremony’. Indeed, the same word for ‘religion’, θρησκεία [thray-skaya], is directly translated as ‘worship’ in Col 2:18a:

Col 2:18a *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the **worship** of angels disqualify you for the prize.*

1. So, using the English terminology, what kind of ‘religion’ do we have? Is it like a:

SPARE TIRE (used only in the case of an emergency)?

- WHEELBARROW (easily upset and must be pushed)?
 - BUS (ridden only when it goes your way)?
2. Whatever kind of religion we have, it is of no value unless it is pleasing to the Lord God (Rom 14:18; Col 1:10).
 3. In James 1:27, we find a definition of what constitutes ‘pure and undefiled religion before God’.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

4. To be sure that our own religion is acceptable before God, let’s look at some characteristics of ‘Pure And Undefiled Religion’ as indicated in this passage.

2. A ‘Practicing’ Religion

First, ‘**Pure and Undefiled Religion**’ must:

a. Involve Doing Something On Our Part

1. This is clearly implied in the phrase ‘to visit’ (v 27)
2. The context prior to this verse also makes it clear that we must be ‘doers’ and ‘not hearers only’ - Jas 1:22-25
3. This echoes the teachings of Jesus Himself; words aren’t enough - Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46

b. If We Are Not ‘Doers’, We Are Deceiving Ourselves (Jas 1:22)

1. And usually, it is only OURSELVES we are deceiving
2. We are certainly NOT deceiving God, nor Satan
3. And it unlikely that we fool others

3. A ‘Practical’ Religion

Having ‘a practicing religion’ must be important, because later in his letter, James emphasises again the necessity of our faith working (Jas 2:14-17,26 ... esp. v 16). In fact, we can conclude that a religion that is not a practicing religion is a DEAD religion.

a. God Did Not Intend Our Religion To Consist Solely Of ‘Going To Church’

The meeting together of Christians is very important, particularly on the Lord’s Day (Heb 10:25), but we also have to go beyond our chapel walls and realise our faith is required 7 days a week ... or as is said in these days, ‘24/7’.

Heb 10:25 *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

1. Extending OUR HEART TO GOD IN WORSHIP is certainly important
2. AND, so is extending OUR HAND TO MAN IN SERVICE – back to Jas 1:27

b. Throughout The N.T., Much Emphasis Is Placed Upon Producing Good Fruit

1. From the writings of Paul - Gal 6:10; Ti 2:14; 3:8,14
2. From the author of Hebrews - He 13:16
3. From the Apostle John - 1 Jn 3:17,18

4. A ‘Personal’ Religion

Until we apply the Word of God, by showing kindness and compassion for the poor and helpless, not all the preaching, teaching, and studying we may do can make our religion ‘pure and undefiled’. A further characteristic of ‘**Pure and Undefiled Religion**’ is that it is personal, as:

a. Implied By The Use Of ‘Singular Pronouns’ In The Text

1. ‘anyone’ - Jas 1:23
2. ‘his’ - Jas 1:23
3. ‘himself’, ‘he’ - Jas 1:24
4. ‘he’ - Jas 1:25
5. ‘anyone’, ‘himself’, ‘his’, ‘he’ - Jas 1:26
6. ‘oneself’ - Jas 1:27

b. Now, There Is A Place For ‘Corporate’ Giving

1. That is, where we give in conjunction with others to meet a need
2. For example, in helping needy Christians - 1 Cor 16:1,2

c. But It Was Never Intended To Replace Our Individual And Personal Responsibility

1. Some might think:
 - a. That our giving on Sunday fulfils our responsibility to the poor, the widows, and the orphans
 - b. That it fulfils our obligation to preach the gospel
2. But God intended for ‘corporate’ giving, i.e. the tithe, to only meet certain needs
3. He still expects us to fulfil our ‘personal’ service to the poor, widows, and orphans as we have the ability and opportunity

4. Just as we find in the Old Testament:

Though the third-year tithe was for the widows and orphans, they were to always help them, whenever they had the opportunity.

5. A 'Pure' Religion

To practice **'Pure and undefiled Religion'**:

- We must make it personal; we can't pay someone else to do our work for us
- We cannot excuse ourselves by saying 'I gave at the church'

One last point to make concerning **'Pure And Undefiled Religion'**:

a. **This Sounds Redundant, But In Our Day Our Faith In Christ Must Be Emphasised**

1. Our society has become increasingly immoral and materialistic
2. Such is wreaking havoc upon many in the Lord's church
3. What we hear and see may only be the 'tip of the iceberg'

b. **Our Religion Is For Nothing, Unless It Is**

1. **Pure** - without blemish
2. **Undefiled** – not spoiled
3. Capable of keeping us **Unpolluted** by the world

c. **But If We Are Sinners (see 1 Jn 1:8), How Can We Ever Be Pure, Undefiled, and Unpolluted?**

1. It is possible, only BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS
 - a. Which can cleanse us and make us pure, if we walk in the light with God - 1 Jn 1:7
 - b. This involves keeping the commandments of God - 1 Jn 2:3 – which means:
 - 1) Experiencing the INITIAL CLEANSING of the blood, when we obey the commands to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins - Acts 2:38
 - 2) And, experiencing the CONTINUOUS CLEANSING of the blood, when we confess our sins to God - 1 Jn 1:9
2. It is possible only BY THE HELP OF GOD
 - a. Who not only provides the blood of Christ to cleanse us from sin...
 - b. But also a way of escape in times of temptation - 1 Cor 10:13

3. Yes, with Christ's blood and God's help, it is possible to be pure, undefiled, and unpolluted by the world.
4. And this is what makes the 'religion' of, or rather faith in, Jesus Christ UNIQUE
 - a. Other religions may be 'practicing, practical and personal'
 - b. But **only** the true 'religion' of Jesus Christ can present us 'pure' in the sight of God - cf. Jn 14:6

6. Conclusion

1. What kind of religion do YOU have?
 - a. Is it a PRACTICING religion?
 - 1) Does it go beyond the walls of a building?
 - 2) Does it go beyond the printed pages of the Bible?
 - 3) Does it go beyond a superficial hearing of the Word?
 - b. Is it a PRACTICAL religion?
 - 1) Does it consist of more than JUST 'going to church, reading, and praying'?
 - 2) Does it reach out and show itself in consideration to those in need?
 - c. Is it a PERSONAL religion? Personal means:
 - 1) Going beyond what we may do together with others
 - 2) And, including our **personal** involvement ...not writing cheques
 - d. And, finally, is it a PURE religion? Does it:
 - 1) Involve our initial cleansing from sin by the blood of Jesus as we, in faith, repented and were baptised?
 - 2) Involve our continual cleansing by the blood of Jesus, as we confess our sins and repent of them?
 - 3) Include a putting-away of sin, with the help of God, so that we might be 'unpolluted by the world'?
2. If not, then whatever religion we have is **Useless** and we are simply **Deceiving Ourselves**.

Let's always encourage one another to be sure and have a '**Pure And Undefiled Religion**' before God.