

True Religion, James 1:26-27 9.11.2019

Turn in your Bibles to the book of James. We are going to finish Chapter 1 tonight and we are going to look at what the Bible defines as “True Religion.”

As Kathy shared, the trips to China have always been specific to working in an orphanage. And we will see in these verses tonight the expression of one part of Religion, that is pure and undefiled before God, is visiting orphans. But does that one act show that this person is living out a religion in their life that is pure and undefiled? We will answer that as we look at our Scripture text for tonight.

Now, the word “RELIGION”, I believe has been given an unfair negative connotation or feeling if you will towards the use of this word. Why? I would say that the word religion denotes a: selflessness, a holiness and purity and a love for others. So, when that is not displayed there is that wonderful word, Hypocrite, or the idea that you are not living what you are saying.

Let’s use the Merriam-Webster dictionary to give us a definition for a starting point. Look at the definition on the screens.

Religion - a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices.

Now, “How many of you have been asked this question or have asked this question?” Are you religious? The answers that you were given, or you gave are probably one of the following. No, Yes or not very! Even in Christianity, because of the negative connotation, we try to stay away from that word because we will say something like this.

Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship! Are you religious? No, I am not religious, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Well, all those are good sayings and I understand the point behind those words. I hate to burst your bubble! But if you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, you are religious and you are following a religion. Needless to say there is definitely the relational side to it. Because that is God’s desire.

I will tell you everyone is religious. Even the most outspoken atheist is religious. Why? Based off the basic definition of religion. They have a personal set of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices. Practices denotes a devotion to that religion. We all are living our lives under some sort of authority. Whether it be ourselves and our own wisdom or the fact that God exists and that he has given us our authority by the Word of God.

According to the latest findings there are over 4200 documented religions. I will tell you there are only two. There are man made religions that make up that list of 4200. And God’s! So, it is not religion that should get a bad rap but false religion. Because there is only one true religion and that is Christianity and all the others are deceptions of Satan put into man’s mind. Romans 1 verses 21 to 23 state this.

Romans 1:21-23

²¹For 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. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Now I could go on with this, but you see the premise of these verses. Man rejects the one true religion and goes off to create their own. Because they do not want to devote themselves to the authority of God and what we see

is a works-based religion attempting to either get to God or become a god. Let's read our text for tonight and see what "True Religion" is.

James 1:26-27

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.

Now we cannot look at these verses and separate them from what we have already learned in this Chapter. What James has established is that God exists and the only religion he is talking about in this letter is this. We are separated from God by our sin and it is repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to salvation. In verse 1 James professes to be a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, look at verses 18 and then 21 in Chapter 1.

James 1:18

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James 1:21

Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Once again, we are being shown that there is an absolute truth and that truth is God's Word. In the Gospel of John, we know that Jesus is referred to being the Word. ***Remember, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word is God.***

John 14:6 – Jesus refers to himself as the Truth, As Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me!"

Those two verses in James is referring to teachings, doctrine. One, by the Old Testament with the Prophecy's of the messiah coming. Who is Jesus! Two, the "Word" that is being taught about Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection. The very teachings of Jesus that the Apostles are passing on. Establishing that Scripture, the Bible is the only truth we have as our authority for this life on earth.

Beginning in verse 18 until we get to these verses, we see that common theme about the importance of the Word of God. It is the Word of God that we are brought into a right relationship with the God. After hearing the Gospel and that takes root in our heart, we come to a point of repentance and like it says in verse 18 we are brought forth. The Greek word being used here is in relation to a birth. And what did Jesus say to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3. ***Truly, Truly except a man be born again, he will not see the Kingdom of God!***

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away behold, the new has come.

In verse 21 of James it tells us to, "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls."

This is the point of the Word of God being rooted into our heart. Like a baby being implanted in a woman's womb and it grows and is birthed at a point of maturity. Remember again, the 4 kinds of soil of which the seed

that the farmers seed came in contact as he was spreading it. There was only one soil that the seed was implanted in and that seed was able to grow into a full-grown plant.

How does it start? Humility! Pride will keep the Word of God to be implanted into our hearts. We are compelled by the power of God's Word and it has the power to save our souls. Then it has the power not to just save us but to help us grow in the path of sanctification, which is our holiness and eventually bring us to the point of glorification because we have been submissive and obedient to God's word to be more conformed into the image of Jesus Christ than in the image of the world.

If the word has been implanted, then the next step is what we learned last week. What did we learn last week? We are not to just be hearers of the Word, but we are to be what? Doers! This is where we can't separate these two verses tonight with what we learned last week. These two verses continue to show us if we are truly being doers of the word and not just hearers. Look at verse 26 again.

James 1:26

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

As I was studying and even listening to last weeks lesson there was something that kept jumping out at me. As we look at this verse, we see this word that is used for the third time in this chapter and it is speaking about being deceived. In verse 16, James wrote, "Do not be deceived" when he was talking about temptation. Again, in verse 22, look down at your Bible and see what it says.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves!

And we see here again in verse 26. Look at it!

James 1:26

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

Now, once again what we are talking about here are those people that are professing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The word religious is explaining the outward expression of religion but the lack of an inward transformation. It is talking about people that may appear to have all together. They have the appearance of a true Christian. They go to Church, tithe, pray, sing songs. But if it is true listen to the talk. Why the tongue? What comes out of our mouth is an expression of the heart. Scripture has a lot to say about our speech! We've already learned in this Chapter that we would be, "Quick to listen, Slow to speak and Slow to Anger!"

Turn to Ephesians 4:29 – Now as you are turning. Chapter 4 in Ephesians from verse 17 to 32 is a description of the new self, the new creation, that takes place at our point of salvation but also speaks to what James is talking about of being a doer of the word not just a hearer. Verse 29 and we are going to read to verse 32.

Ephesians 4:29-32

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of you mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasions, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Now that is a mouth full right there. There is so much in those 4 verses. But as we look at the word corrupting in verse 29 it means: rotten, putrid, has a stench! This is probably a bad analogy right here. But it's kind of like after you ate something with garlic or onion or have been drinking a lot of coffee and you belch. You know, burp! And that smell just permeates the area you are around.

Jesus had something very important to say about this topic also. Turn to Matthew 12:33-37

Matthew 12:33-37

³³ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Does that not make you take a step back just for a moment? This goes to what we have learned last week and this past Sunday. Jesus cares what you do! And our speech is part of it! Our speech truly shows our heart! And at the end of verse 26 it says this person's religion is worthless. It is of no good. Why? Because we are saying one thing, but we are living another and our testimony through our actions and our talk does not match up.

In Scripture there is a warning against slander around 20 times depending on the translation. There are other words used also. This can really cause issues within the Church and evidently there was a problem that James was addressing or he wouldn't been led by the Holy Spirit to write it.

I've been around awhile. It's like those Farmer's Insurance commercials. We know a thing or two because we've seen a thing or two. I've seen how a person can go from person to person and they are seeing what they can get from them. How they can help them out.

But once there is nothing left for them to get there. They go to another person at the same time belittling the person they just used. It's a cycle and in their wake is all this carnage. Also, how there is no one off limits to their gossip and their slander. Sometimes people make excuses for how they talk as saying, "Well I am just opinionated, I have a strong personality!" No, when we do that, we are showing a heart issue and we become a stumbling block and a hindrance to the Gospel.

This is a practical aspect of being a doer of the word instead of just a hearer. The ability to Bridle the Tongue. Again, being obedient to God's Word. Now verse 27 tells us what True Religion is but we have to be careful even in what is described here.

James 1:27

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.

We are talking about a "True Religion" that has caused a true transformation. Let's read the verse again! ***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction: Stop right there!***

Is that enough to show that you are actually saved? Is that enough to show you are a doer of the Word and not just a hearer? Because lots of people give or do things for those in need. Think about right now.

There are probably millions of people sending donations and giving financially to help the people of the Bahamas and those on the coast that have been affected by hurricane Dorian. And rightfully so! Definitely, we should help in some way. There are many people and organizations that give towards many good causes. But where does that sense of justice or that sense to do good come from? It comes from God! But even in that, in our sinfulness we can pervert what is good.

You know those verses in Isaiah 5. Woe to those that call good bad and bad good. Telling us what? There is an absolute to truth to what is good. What is being explained here depends all on those 4 words in that verse: ***Before God the Father. Now we are looking into motive.***

What is being expressed here is the overflow of our worship to God. Everything we do is in the sight of God. We are looking at how our relationships with others match up to being a doer of the Word. What is being described here is how this relates to the most vulnerable. What is more vulnerable than a child and a widow?

In relation to the Widow and the Widower for that matter. The whole reason the office of Deacon was begun, in Acts Chapter 6, was to help meet the needs of the widows.

But is that enough? Are good works enough? Look at the rest of verse 27.

James 1:27

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.

The answer to that question I just posed would be no according to this Scripture. I go back to the beginning. There are truly only two religions. The one and only true religion. God in his mercy sent his one and only Son to die for our sins. Through repentance of our sin. Do you hear me? Repentance of our sin and complete devotion and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word. There should be a strong desire for the things of God and to be obedient to the Lord. A doer not just a hearer. That is how we keep ourselves unstained from the world.

And then Satan's! Works, Ceremony! Rejection of Jesus as, The Way, The Truth and The Life! We can do all theses "Good" things but if we reject the fact we are sinners and need to repent. Those are nothing! Our motive behind all things should be the sharing of the Gospel. Our motive should be to glorify God. We can not do that if we are living in sin and letting our mouth run wild or our motives are to somehow put the spotlight on us.

Galatians 5 gives us a good picture of the contrast of what we have talked about tonight. Turn to Galatians 5 and we will end with the reading of these verses.

Galatians 5:19-26

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do^[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.