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Religion That God Accepts

JAMES 1:26-27

Introduction

1. Have you ever asked anyone ask you if you are a religious person?
2. What does it mean to be a religious person?
3. I looked this up on the internet in preparation for this lesson and AI (Artificial Intelligence) provided me with this overview.
4. First, it generally defined a religious person as "someone who believes in a higher power or divine force and actively follows the practices, rules and community traditions of an organized faith.
5. Next, it provided me with three core characteristics generally found in someone considered to be religious:
 - a. Belief: Trusting in specific doctrines, sacred texts or the existence of a god or gods.
 - b. Behavior: Taking part in regular routines like prayer, worship services, or moral actions.
 - c. Belonging: Connecting with a wider community or group that shares the same faith and history.
6. In our text tonight, James 1:26-27, James speaks to us about two things:
 - a. The person who thinks himself or herself to be religious, but whose religion is worthless.
 - b. What "pure and undefiled religion" looks like in God's eyes.
7. Tonight, as we look at our own lives, I want each of to do so through God's lens and not our own.
8. Why? Because I am sure that many of us at one time or another thought we were right about something only to find out later that we were wrong.

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I. Worthless Religion

“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.” (James 1:26, NASB95)

A. THE PERCEPTION: HE THINKS HIMSELF TO BE RELIGIOUS

1. In his own estimation this person considers himself to be religious.
2. What is the measuring stick by which he gauges himself?
3. Jesus once told a parable which included an individual who thought himself to be religious — the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:10-14).
 - a. In this parable, the two men went up to the temple one day to pray.
 - b. The Pharisee stood up and was praying to himself.

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“God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” (Luke 18:11–12, NASB95)

4. Today, the person of whom James is speaking could very well be a person who says to him or herself, “I read my Bible, I go to church regularly, I sing the hymns, pray the prayers, partake of the Lord’s supper, give of my means, listen to the sermon — I do everything God expects of me — I believe that I am a religious person.

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B. THE PROBLEM: HE DOES NOT CONTROL HIS TONGUE

1. James, however, says there is a problem — we do not bridle or control our tongue.
2. James will have more to say about the tongue in chapter three, but for now I would like for us to consider two things concerning our tongues.

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3. *A true test of our religion is our ability to control our tongues.*

4. *Our tongues ultimately reveal what is on the inside of us.*
5. God has always placed tremendous importance upon the restraining of our tongues.

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- a. David continually wrote concerning the need to guard our speech
(Psalm 34:13; 39:1; 141:3)

“Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.”
(Psalm 34:13)

“I said, “I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence.”
(Psalm 39:1)

“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3)

- b. Solomon also wrote about the need to keep our tongues (Proverbs 13:3; 21:23).

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“The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” (Proverbs 13:3, NASB95)

“He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.” (Proverbs 21:23, NASB95)

- c. Jesus even addressed this issue in an exchange with the Pharisees, following His healing of a man who was both blind and mute (Matthew 12:33-34).

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“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. “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” (Matthew 12:33–34, NASB95)

6. Our tongues can be guilty of many abuses:

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a. Unwholesome speech

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29, NASB95)

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b. Lying

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25, NASB95)

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c. Gossip

“Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” (1 Timothy 3:11, NASB95)

NOTE: Three times Paul uses this term in reference to women in the church (1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3)

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d. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” (Ephesians 4:31, NASB95)

Clamor — shouting back and forth in a quarrel.

Slander — defamation, speaking against another person in such a ways as to harm or injure his or her reputation

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e. Abusive speech

“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.” (Colossians 3:8, NASB95)

Slide 14**C. THE RESULT: HE DECEIVES HIS OWN HEART**

1. James said that if think ourselves to be religious, but do not control our tongues, we deceive ourselves.
2. In other words we have been living a lie, but the person we have deceived is ourself.
3. Even worse is the fact that our religion is worthless — it is of no value to ourselves or God.

Slide 15**II. Pure and Undefiled Religion****A. LOVING MINISTRY**

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress . . .” (James 1:27a, NASB95)

1. In the ancient world, widows and orphans were helpless to provide for themselves because there were no . . .
 - a. Money-making possibilities
 - b. Kinds of social welfare
2. As a result, God had always commanded His people to care for those who were less fortunate (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 14:29)

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“You shall not afflict (take advantage of, NIV) any widow or orphan.”
(Exodus 22:22)

“The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” (Deuteronomy 14:29)

3. Through His prophet Isaiah, God told His people they must repent and “seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”

(Isaiah 1:17).

4. As Israel did this they were imitating God Himself who was “a Father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Psalm 68:5).
5. For those of us here tonight, Jesus said that when we care for the less fortunate around us, not only are we imitating God we are doing these things to our Lord (Matthew 25:34-40).

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B. A HOLY LIFE

“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this . . . to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27, NASB95)

1. Our world as Jesus taught His disciples is a realm influenced to a large extent by Satan and his angels:
 - a. Jesus often called him the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)

“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” (John 12:31, NASB95)

“I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me;” (John 14:30, NASB95)

“and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” (John 16:11, NASB95)
 - b. The apostle Paul called him “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

“in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4, NASB95)
 - c. The apostle John said that the whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19).

“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19, NASB95)

2. Thus “the world” is that which has an ungodly worldview and lifestyle.
3. It is that which is estranged from its Creator.
4. Because of this, Jesus said “in the world you have tribulation” (John 16:33).
5. It is also the reason that the apostle John wrote, “do not love the world” (1 John 2:15).
6. Our goal is to keep ourselves “unstained” from the world’s contaminating influence.

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7. Instead, as the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, God’s desire is that you and I “prove [ourselves] to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [we] appear as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15, NASB95).

Conclusion

1. Is your religion pure and undefiled in God’s sight?
2. According to James, if our religion is to be acceptable in God’s sight, we must . . .
 - a. Keep a tight rein on our tongues.
 - b. Be diligent in . . .
 - 1) caring for those who are less fortunate than ourselves.
 - 2) living a pollution-free life.
3. Remember, Jesus is the one who will judge us on the last day.
4. What will He say about our religion?