

Pure Religion

Over the last few weeks in the **NEWSLETTER**, we've been looking at a number of things James says are necessary in order to be the kind of people God expects us to be. In **James 1:27**, James defines religion. To us, according to Webster, religion is "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs." Wow! In other words, religion defines God, outlines worship to Him, and provides the framework of what is acceptable behavior for a follower of His. James, always the pragmatist, says simply in **James 1:27**:

"Religion that God 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."

James has just said that Christians should put their devotion toward their God by "doing" what the "**perfect law that gives freedom**" requires of them. He will follow his definition of religion by condemning favoritism and by encouraging us to show faith by doing the good God expects of all of us.

Our religion, according to James, involves two things:

1. **Take care of those in need**. No doubt James is remembering Jesus' words in **Matthew 25:34-40** when He says those who fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, showed hospitality to the homeless, clothed the unclothed, and visited the sick and the imprisoned would be rewarded by God. They were simply doing what God expected of them.
2. Stay pure. They knew they had been cleansed by the blood of Christ. They were now God's children, set apart to do the good that God expected of them. But they were still in the world and had to impact it rather than let it pollute them. Peter had said it in his sermon on Pentecost: "**Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.**" (**Acts 2:40**) Paul had said it: "**do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.**" (**Romans 12:2**) He urges us in Philippians to "**become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation.**" (**Philippians 2:15**)

In practicing "pure religion," it is our obligation to cease to be like everyone else, whose attention is placed entirely upon themselves. We are to worship the true God by being different, and showing that difference to everyone by

caring for and helping others. That way, we are showing our religion in word and deed, not just looking "religious" like the Pharisees of Jesus' time.