

Series: James

Title: Defining Real Religion

Text: James 1:26-27

Time: 11/6/2011 (a.m.)

Introduction

1. James has powerfully driven home the point that if we are merely *hearers* of the Word, we have deluded ourselves, for we must also be *doers* of the Word. Now he issues a further warning against the danger of deceiving ourselves with false religious doings. The doings are not bad in themselves, but the practice of them can delude believers with a deceptively comfortable sense of religiosity.

2. There is a great story in the Old Testament about during a war how the Gileadites developed a password in order to detect Ephraimites who pretended to be Gileadites when captured. The word was *Shibboleth*, which the Ephraimites (who had trouble with the "sh" sound) could only pronounce *Sibboleth*. This worked perfectly on the unsuspecting enemy. (Judges 12:4-6)

3. We Christians have our Shibboleths, but they are much easier to pick up. They are words like "fellowship" and "brother" and "born again." Use these passwords with the right inflection and you will be considered *Christian*.

4. If you show the "right" socioreligious attitudes toward alcohol and tobacco, social issues, and modesty and style, you will be thought religious or pious.

5. If we carry a Bible and are somewhat familiar with it, if we read the "right" books, if we attend church regularly, sing the songs, apparently listen, and especially if we give, we can easily deceive ourselves into thinking we are properly and adequately religious. Our doing can produce a deadly religious delusion!

6. The King James adds "seems" but the phrase refers to self-deception, not the observation and evaluation of others. Often believers substitute the human performance of rules and ritual for daily, Christlike living. Verses 25-26 are not a reference to religious hypocrites, but to sincere, unfulfilled, uninformed, unfruitful religionists. The term "religious" means "one concerned with scrupulous details."

7. The church has always had at least two very consistent battles, 1) legalistic believers who trust in rules or 2) Gnostic believers who trust in knowledge, neither of whom live godly lives.

8. To combat this real danger, James puts forth three penetrating dimensions of "religion" which is acceptable to God. These challenge those who think themselves safely religious.

1. Speech

1. The first dimension that James deals with is the tongue which is translated speech, which we will talk about a great deal in James 3. Here James, I believe is dealing with a specific problem of outwardly religious people.

2. In talking to deeply religious people Jesus made this incredible statement:

Matthew 12:33-34 "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.

3. The outwardly religious person usually stays away from filth and lying but tends to engage in criticism and vilification which the Bible calls slander. John Calvin helps us understand how this operates: "When people shed their grosser sins, they are extremely vulnerable to contract this complaint. A man will steer clear of adultery, of stealing, of drunkenness, in fact he will be a shining

light of outward religious observance—and yet will revel in destroying the character of others; under the pretext of zeal ... but it is a lust for vilification. This explains ... the bloated pharisaical pride that feeds indulgently on a general diet of smear and censure.” (Calvin, A Harmony of the Gospels)

4. An unbridled tongue is a sign of spiritual immaturity and a lack of self control. A tongue that engages in criticism that creates strife is participating in an activity that is specifically hated by God. **Proverbs 6:16** There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

Proverbs 6:19 A false witness *who* utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

5. James says such an individual is living in self-deception and has a worthless religion.

6. A controlled tongue is not speaking uncontrollably among your most trusted friends. It is controlling your speech in such a way that pleases God regardless the company.

2. Service

1. Verse 27 moves us from the negative, that which is not true religious practice, to that which is positive, “pure and undefiled religion.”

2. At times someone will approach me in frustration and say, “I don’t know what God wants from me!” “I just wish He would tell me!”

Micah 6:6–8 With what shall I come to the Lord *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

3. “Orphans and widows” were the most helpless people in Jewish society, their “distress” (literally “pressure”) coming from their desperate need of food and clothing. James uses them as representative of all who are in need.

4. James is telling us that our care for the needy must not just be by supporting social programs or through the hands of others—but *personally*. We are to be involved in their “distress”—the pressures which squeeze them in their circumstances—pressures due to illness or fractured relationships or unemployment or family tensions.

3. Separation

1. Most of us think of holiness as the absence of sin but in reality it is more about the presence of purity, specifically, the person of Christ.

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

2. The holiness of Jesus motivated Him to service, it did not prevent Him. True holiness manifests itself in service to others.