

Pentecost 15
September 2, 2018

James 1:17-27
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The Religion That God Accepts

- I. Is revealed in His Word.
- II. Is practiced in our daily lives.

Dear Christian friends,

“If anyone considers himself to be religious,” James wrote. SO, do you? On a SCALE of **one to ten** HOW RELIGIOUS would you say you are? Be honest! Do you have a number for yourself?

That’s how YOU rate yourself. **More important** is how GOD rates us. We can think things are OK in our **faith** and **lives** but if God says, “NO THEY’RE NOT!” then they aren’t! GOD can overrule us but **we can’t** overrule God. He’s God – **we’re not**.

In this letter James deals with ***“religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God.”*** Sometime this week read James. It’s a HARD-HITTING letter. James doesn’t PULL ANY PUNCHES. James nails those who are complacent in their faith-life. **If you are satisfied** with the **way things are** in your faith – **if you don’t see** any ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT or you don’t want to improve – James will JUMP ALL OVER you.

With these verses James teaches us that THE RELIGION GOD ACCEPTS 1)is revealed in **God’s Word** and 2)is practiced in **our daily lives**.

I. Is revealed in God’s Word.

Religion – **our faith** – deals with OUR RELATIONSHIP with God. James reminds us that **we have** a GOOD and GRACIOUS God. ***“Every good and perfect gift”*** we have comes from our heavenly Father. God has richly blessed us in SO MANY WAYS and in JUST THE RIGHT WAYS. Our heavenly Father also ***“does not change or shift like a shadow.”*** **In other words**, God doesn’t say ONE THING ONE DAY and then change His mind the next day. God SAYS WHAT HE MEANS and means what He says.

The greatest gift our **heavenly Father** has given us is His Word. James calls it ***“the Word of truth”*** – the Word ***“which can save you”*** – ***“the perfect law that gives freedom.”*** The Bible is not a collection of MYTHS and **fables** – IDEAS and **opinions**. It is ***“truth”*** – GOD’S TRUTH in all it says.

In His Word God has revealed the RELIGION HE ACCEPTS. We don’t tell God **what religion** HE is to accept. GOD TELLS US **what religion** and faith He accepts. There is only one true religion – not **several different kinds**.

We must not deceive ourselves here or LET OURSELVES be deceived. The truth God reveals ABOUT OURSELVES is **not pretty**. ***“If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,”*** John wrote. You heard Jesus in the gospel reading. ***“from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness.”*** That sin in our **hearts** and **lives** is not something we CAN SHRUG OFF as **no big deal**. We dare not comfort ourselves **by thinking** “NOBODY’S PERFECT.” Every kind of sin is an act of defiance and **rebellion** against God. The lies – the **gossiping** – the misusing God’s name and despising God’s **Word** and **worship** – ALL SINS call forth God’s righteous anger and the eternal punishment of hell. To think we’re NOT THAT BAD is to call God a **liar**.

It’s right here that we see WHAT A GREAT GIFT God’s Word is and HOW PRECIOUS the true religion is. ONLY IN the Bible do we learn the **good news** of the gospel – we have God’s own eternal Son as **our perfect Savior**. THROUGH His Word God takes us to Bethlehem and has us kneel at the manger. That Child is ***“Immanuel”*** – God Himself with us – Jesus – our **Savior**. THROUGH His Word God

proclaims that Jesus is **“the LORD our Righteousness”** – that Jesus lived for us that life of perfect love and obedience that we owed God. THROUGH His Word God takes us to the cross and says, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** God’s Word proclaims that Jesus is **“the atoning sacrifice ...for the sins of the whole world.”** THROUGH His Word God takes us to Jesus’ empty grave and says, **“He is not here; He is risen, just as He said.”**

That gospel Word “can save us.” Our heavenly Father “chose to give us birth through the Word of truth.” Through that gospel message God brought us to faith in Jesus as our Savior – made us His children and heirs of eternal life in heaven. That gospel is “the perfect law, the law of freedom.” Trusting in Jesus we are FREE from sin, guilt, death and condemnation. The only religion GOD ACCEPTS is our trusting in Jesus for the **forgiveness** of our sins, **peace** with God, **eternal life** in heaven. Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.”

That is the religion God HAS REVEALED in His Word and we are to practice in our daily lives.

II. It is practiced in our daily lives.

Because it is ONLY THROUGH His Word that God creates and strengthens faith in Jesus the Bible is a VITAL PART of our **religion** and **faith**. A person can’t be a Christian – can’t stay a Christian – if he’s not in God’s Word. That’s impossible. GOD SAYS SO.

We practice our religion in OUR USE of God’s Word. **“Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** Notice carefully that James DIDN’T SAY it’s more important to do God’ Word than it is to hear it. James is warning us about ONLY HEARING God’s Word and NOT DOING what it says. James emphasizes that we need to BOTH **faithfully hear** God’s Word AND **daily** live it.

Being a DOER of the Word starts with being a HEARER of the Word. **“If you continue in My Word, then are you really My disciples,”** Jesus tells us. God told Joshua, **“Meditate on (this Book of the Law) day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”** We’ve HEARD that now God wants us to ACTUALLY DO that. So be a DOER of the Word by reading your Bible at home every day – by coming faithfully to church every week – by bringing your children to Sunday School and coming to Bible class yourself. God isn’t looking for EXCUSES - He WANTS ACTION. That is practicing in our daily lives the RELIGION GOD ACCEPTS.

James continues. **“Remember this, my dear brothers: Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Certainly, a man’s anger does not bring about what is right before God.”**

“Quick to listen.” That certainly applies to listening to GOD. **Perhaps** you’ve heard people say they’re RELIGIOUS and that they TALK TO GOD every day. **Usually** they’re thinking of prayer – that they **pray every day**. We don’t want to DOWNPLAY the power and **privilege** of prayer. But **at the same time please realize** that we are DOING ALL THE TALKING in prayer. If we only pray but don’t take the time to hear and read God’s Word we’re not letting God GET A WORD IN edgewise. We need to pray. We also need to **“be quick to listen”** – to LET GOD TALK to us through His Word.

“Quick to listen” also applies to **listening** to OTHER PEOPLE. We don’t need to have the FIRST or LAST WORD. That kind of person is a KNOW-IT-ALL and there is only one Person who **really does know** it all – God. So, James ties “quick to listen” with “slow to speak.” BEFORE we speak we should make sure we HAVE ALL THE FACTS and that we have them STRAIGHT.

Being careful to LISTEN and careful about WHAT WE SAY will help us be **“slow to anger.”** Anger is a powerful and usually destruction emotion. Anger doesn’t help us fulfill God’s **“royal law”** of LOVE. It’s amazing HOW MANY TIMES the Bible warns us about LOSING OUR TEMPERs and not controlling

our TONGUES. The two go together. **Just think of how many marriages – friendships – relationships have been hurt or destroyed by words and anger. ***“Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.”*** We’ve HEARD that now God wants us to ACTUALLY DO that. **Once again** God is not looking for EXCUSES – He WANTS ACTION. James even adds, ***“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.”*****

The God we worship is HOLY and RIGHTEOUS. Jesus died to save us FROM our sins not so that we can continue in them. ***“Therefore,”*** James continues, ***“get rid of all the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.”***

It’s NO SECRET that we live in a world that’s IN REBELLION against God and His will. Being POLITICALLY CORRECT is more important than being morally and biblically correct. **How many** of the TV show and **movies** that we watch – **how much** of the music we listen to – **how many** of the people we **work** and **socialize** with – help us live **God-pleasing** lives? It’s no secret that we can EASILY BE INFLUENCED by the world around us. Instead of ***“letting our lights shine”*** in this dark world we are intimidated by it and KEEP QUIET about what **God** says. We need to be ON OUR GUARD against the influences of the world. There can be no compromising here – no GIVE AND TAKE with sin. If something or someone HINDERS or INTERFERES in our faith life God’s will is clear. ***“Get rid of it. Keep yourself from being polluted.”*** We’ve HEARD that now God wants us to ACTUALLY DO that. Again, God isn’t looking for **excuses** but ACTION. That is practicing in our daily lives the RELIGION GOD ACCEPTS.

The God we worship is KIND and LOVING. So ***“the religion that God our Father accepts”*** includes ***“looking after orphans and widows in their distress.”*** Selfishness – laziness – INDIFFERENCE – arguing it’s INCONVENIENT or will cost us **too much** – contradicts our faith in a **loving** God. To BASK in **God’s love** but not show love to others – to rejoice in **God’s help** but NOT BE HELPFUL – that’s unacceptable to God. ***“As I have loved you, so you must love one another,”*** Jesus tells us. We’ve HEARD that now God wants us to ACTUALLY DO that. God isn’t looking for **excuses** but ACTION. That is practicing in our daily lives the RELIGION GOD ACCEPTS.

I said James doesn’t PULL ANY PUNCHES. ***“Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*** Amen.

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