

## Which religion is valid today according to God?

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The words 'religious' and 'religion' are first mentioned and defined in the New Testament.

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion [is] vain.

'brideleth' - is controlling the tongue

'vain' - useless, doesn't produce anything; it's of no value. Some people are all show and no go. Real religion is what you *do* based upon what you believe. It's based on one's values.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

'religious' - devout, holy

'widows' - The men are gone.

'affliction' - In the practical sense homes. Being concerned about those people is pure religion.

'visit the fatherless' -

Matthew 25:36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

'unspotted' - If you want to have pure religion, and be undefiled before God you better not get spotted by the world.

These are basic definitions. We will expand on them in detail.

James 1:27 says Jesus did not come to start a religion. He came to end religion! Pure religion has nothing to do with, ceremonies, temples, special clothing, special days, or a certain language. Pure religion is practicing God's word and sharing it with others through: speech (verse 26), service (verse 27a), and separation (verse 27b). God never leaves it in Man's hands to make/build a religion. Man-made Religion is an invention of Man to justify Man and the way to

get Man into heaven. Eternal life is not heaven. Jesus said eternal life is knowing God.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

- Jesus was obedient unto the will of the Father and He was obedient knowing God was going to get glory from it.

Religion tries to cover up sins. It weighs people down by making them think they need to follow a bunch of rules and rituals to try to please God.

The earliest form of religion occurred in the Garden of Eden in about 4000 B.C. when Adam and Eve covered their nakedness with fig leaves after they disobeyed God. They ate from the one tree they were forbidden to eat from - 'the tree of **knowledge of good and evil**' (This tree is incorrectly thought of as the 'tree of knowledge'). The knowledge of good and evil caused them to believe they had to cover up their nakedness. God's was angered by their disobedience. (They were instructed by God not to eat from this one tree only.) This was considered by God to be a sin. It resulted in them being expelled from the Garden of Eden and everyone born since then has inherited this 'sin nature'. Because Adam and Eve put on those fig leaf aprons a fig leaf in the Bible is a picture of self-righteousness. That's why Christ curses the fig tree.

Mark 11:21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

A religion based on worshipping multiple gods as termed as polytheism. Judaism is a monotheistic religion, meaning is based on one God, the True God, who we recognize today - Jehovah God. This is still a man-made religion. Note that the word 'religion' does not appear in the Old Testament (OT), However, in Deuteronomy a book in the OT, God explicitly commands His people to worship Him only and to avoid any other god.

Deuteronomy 6:14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which [are] round about you;

Presently there are only two religions in the world - the religion of 'it' and the religion of 'Him'(God). Much religions today are connected with an 'it'. More valid, but still Man-made religions are connected with

a 'Him'(God). Still, many Man-made religions are a bunch of 'its' - the wafer, the mass. One religion claimed that this was necessary for salvation. Buddhism has 'its' - beads, prayers, works, buddhas. Judaism has the yamica. Orthodox Jews wear a yamica (a type of skull cap) because the Talmud (A commentary of Rabbis) states, "Cover your head in order that the fear of heaven may be upon you." Historical instances of religion being used to control through fear or manipulation raise doubts about the authenticity of claims made by religious authorities.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

True Christianity is not the religion God considers pure. Its main function is not to help the poor, the needy or widows. Nor is it unspotted by the world. This is revealed by the fact that even within Christianity, there is a diversity of interpretations of the Bible and Christian doctrine. This diversity can lead to disagreements about what it means to be a Christian and whether or not Christianity is the only true religion. Some people notice differences or contradictions in how stories are told within Christianity, particularly between different parts of the Bible. These variations can make them uncertain about the reliability of religious texts and teachings. On the positive side Christians regard the Bible as a sacred text that holds God's teachings and revelations. They see its messages as offering guidance for living a righteous life and understanding the nature of God. It has no 'its'. The salvation, its worship is in God. Their whole system of worship the based on God not an 'it'. It's sorry when Christianity gets to the point where it can't have a church without having an often splendid building. The church is not the building. The church is the people inside the building.

what Christians worship is not an it. They don't worship an altar, a book, anything, but God, not other gods. Again:

Deuteronomy 6:14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which [are] round about you;

James 1:27 indicates that Jesus did not come to start a religion, He came to *end* what we consider a religion!

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Jesus came to free us from the futility of Man-made religions and offer us something so much better - a real relationship with God. He fostered relationships. The word in the epistles "church" just meant "called out ones", *ecclesia*. You must be aware of our religion, which has entrapped many a soul in the snare of works rather than rest in the finished work of Jesus. If you are doing ANYTHING in a "spiritual" manner (serving, teaching, preaching, resisting temptation, etc.), thinking that you can successfully do so in your own natural power and/or you are hoping to merit God's favor by so doing, then you are deceived. Religion always focuses on works you do. Relationship always focuses on the work Christ has done. The manifestation of Christ's life through an individual is proof that that person is rightly related to Jesus Christ by faith. In other words, faith in Christ will result in love for others. The manifestation of Christ's life through an individual is proof that that person is rightly related to Jesus Christ by faith. In other words, faith in Christ will result in love and the caring of the needs of the needy and this is what James referred to as **pure religion** (James 1:27 is analyzed below).

The Lord Jesus Christ showered His love on those who could not help themselves and who could not, or would not, return His love at that time. When we know Him as personal Saviour, we will have this same kind of love. We will love those who are helpless and unable to return our expressions of love. Christianity is woefully deficient if we give in order to receive or if we give and expect an even larger gift in return. This is not pure religion. So when a person is rightly related to Jesus Christ and the world - he/she then has **pure and undefiled religion** - and he will express the love of Christ to those who are in dire circumstances and unable to return similar expressions of love.

1John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue;

- You should live in your deeds and in truth. **What you do is what matters.**

'tongue' - talks love only

If you really love God it won't be just talk - it will be in your walk if there's a real love. A Christian can be very carnal. Look to Christ's work in and you will maintain the proper attitude. He performs the work, you just yield to it. Best is Christ working through a Christian. Are you willing to serve the needy, the widows, remain unspotted by the world as spelled out as in James 1:27? Until then you aren't fully submitted to God.

All throughout history men have tried to make ritual and liturgy a substitute for sacrifice and service. They have made religion splendid within the Church at the expense of neglecting it outside the Church. This is by no means to say that it is wrong to seek to offer the noblest and the most splendid worship within God's house, but it is to say that all such worship is empty and idle unless it sends a person out to love God by loving his fellow-men/women and to walk more purely in the tempting ways of the world. Pure is that love which has in it no foreign admixture, such as self-deceit and hypocrisy. "Pure" expresses the positive, while "spotted" expresses the negative side of religious service. Just as visiting the fatherless and widow is the active side of pure religion, keeping oneself unspotted from the world is the passive side of pure religious duty. This is the nobler form that our religious exercises should take, instead of the ceremonial offices of the law. James is not restricting "right religion" to only literal care for literal widows and orphans. At the time James wrote, these represented society's most helpless members. Widows, in that culture, were women who had lost their husbands prior to bearing children. This left them destitute. Children without parents, and women without husbands, were among that culture's most needy. According to this verse, "pure" religion is defined as caring for those who are in need, and avoiding the sins of the world. Again, pure religion has nothing to do with, ceremonies, temples, special clothing, special days, or a certain language. Pure religion is practicing God's

word and sharing it with others through: speech (verse 26), service (verse 27a), and separation (verse 27b).

We now have a true intermediary between God and Man. God now defines what 'religion' should be in the New Testament, which only came into force with the death of Christ (who was the testator).

Hebrews 9:16 For where a testament [is], there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

Hebrews 9:17 For a testament [is] of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

To review, consider how God now defines the religion He considers 'pure'. Pure is that love which has in it no foreign admixture, as self-deceit and hypocrisy. "Pure" expresses the positive, "defiled" the negative side of religious service. Just as visiting the fatherless and widow is the active, keeping himself unspotted from the world is the passive side of religious duty. This is the nobler shape that our religious exercises take, instead of the ceremonial offices of the law.

God has always been concerned with widows and orphans:

Exodus 22:22 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

Exodus 22:23 If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;

Deuteronomy 10:18 He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

Deuteronomy 10:18 He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

Deuteronomy 24:19 when thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Psalms 68:5 A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, [is] God in his holy habitation.

Psalms 146:9 The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

The Jews were very religious. They fasted, prayed, sacrificed and observed all of the religious ceremonies and the ordinances of God, but it was all pretense, God was not responding to them. Observe in Isaiah 58 where we find the people concerned that their prayers were not getting through to God, and all their fasting was in vain. Their conclusion was that all of their religious activities were not paying off, God was not listening! Consider verses 1-3:

Isaiah 58:1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

Isaiah 58:2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

Isaiah 58:3 wherefore have we fasted, [say they], and thou seest not? [wherefore] have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

They were just going through the motions. They were being religious. They were saying all the right words. And they seemed so obedient, they were sounding so religious, but their hearts were divided.

Ezekiel 33:30 Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD.

Ezekiel 33:31 And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee [as] my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, [but] their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Ezekiel 33:32 And, lo, thou [art] unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

James has already admonished us in James 1:22:

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

That's exactly why God commanded Isaiah to shout out against God's people who appeared to diligently seeking after Him, but were deceiving themselves. The Jews needed to set some biblical priorities to bring about the favor of God and peace and prosperity.

So God, through the words of Isaiah, tells them what to do.

Isaiah 58:6 [Is] not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Isaiah 58:7 [Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Isaiah 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.

Isaiah 58:9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I [am]. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

God wants His people to care for those who cannot care for themselves. It is not the government's job to care for hurting people, it is the church's responsibility.

Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all [men], especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

1Thessalonians 3:12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you:

1Thessalonians 4:12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and [that] ye may have lack of nothing.

This boils down to:'

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.



Isaiah 58:7 [Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

James offers a New Testament refrain:

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion [is] vain.

'brideleth' - 'slow to speak' controlling his tongue  
'vain' - useless, doesn't produce anything, it's of no value  
Some people are all show and no go.

Real/True Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship with a living Divine person, Jesus Christ who rose from the dead. As we said, religion is man's attempt to earn his salvation or entry into heaven. Christianity starts from the point where no man is good enough for God or His heaven and also, no man can EVER be good enough or do enough to earn a place in heaven/paradise.

True religion is neither rules-based nor ritual-based. True religion is a relationship with God. Two things that all religions hold are that humanity is somehow separated from God and needs to be reconciled to Him. False religion seeks to solve this problem by observing rules and rituals. True religion solves the problem by recognizing that only God could rectify the separation, and that He has done so. Let's analyze James 1:27: to hopefully understand it better.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

⋮	James	1:27	Bible	⋮					
2356 [e]	2513 [e]	2532 [e]	283 [e]	3844 [e]	3588 [e]	2316 [e]	2532 [e]	3962 [e]	
thrēskeia	kathara	kai	amiantos	para	tō	Theō	kai	Patri	
27	θρησκεία	καθαρά	καὶ	ἀμίαντος	παρὰ	τῷ	Θεῷ	καὶ	Πατρὶ
Religion	pure	and	undefiled	before	the	God	and	Father	
N-NFS	Adj-NFS	Conj	Adj-NFS	Prep	Art-DMS	N-DMS	Conj	N-DMS	
3778 [e]	1510 [e]	1980 [e]	3737 [e]	2532 [e]	5503 [e]	1722 [e]	3588 [e]		
hautē	estin	episkeptesthai	orphanous	kai	chēras	en	tē		
αὕτη	ἐστίν	, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι	ὀρφανούς	καὶ	χήρας	ἐν	τῇ		
this	is	to visit	orphans	and	widows	in	the		
DPro-NFS	V-PIA-3S	V-PNM/P	Adj-AMP	Conj	N-AFP	Prep	Art-DFS		
2347 [e]	846 [e]	784 [e]	1438 [e]	5083 [e]	575 [e]	3588 [e]	2889 [e]		
thlipsei	autōn	aspilon	heauton	tērein	apo	tou	kosmou		
θλίψει	αὐτῶν	; ἄσπιλον	ἑαυτὸν	τηρεῖν	ἀπὸ	τοῦ	κόσμου	.	
tribulation	of them	unstained	oneself	to keep	from	the	world		
N-DFS	PPro-GM3P	Adj-AMS	RefPro-AM3S	V-PNA	Prep	Art-GMS	N-GMS		

### Analysis of the Greek

“Pure” (2513) in Greek is katharos, from which we get our English word “catharsis” meaning, purifying, cleansing, a term used in psychology and counseling for a cleansing of the mind or emotions. Katharos literally describes that which is free of dirt and thus clean. It is also worth noting that katharos is related to the Latin castus, from which we get chaste. The related word chasten refers to discipline given in order to cleanse from wrong behavior. Katharos is blameless, innocent, unstained with the guilt and is used to describe that which is ceremonially or ritually pure or clean.” “Katharos has two shades of meaning. Some suggest that it also means unmixed or unalloyed or unadulterated or sifted or cleansed of chaff. In other words, to be pure means you have no added mixture of any foreign element. Thus, what our Lord was really saying here is, ‘I desire a heart that is unmixed in its devotion and motivation. Pure motives from a pure heart.’ Either

way, it has to do with attitudes, integrity, and singleness of heart as opposed to duplicity and double mindedness.”

‘Religion’ - **Threskeia** primarily refers to the ceremonial worship of a deity and can be used to identify any externalization of someone’s internal beliefs, whether positive or negative. Threskeia, then, refers to the outward trappings that may or may not be associated with any genuine faith. **It is this word that James plays with in James 1:26-27, reframing it in terms of the love ethic of Jesus.**”

‘Unstained’ (283) (**amiantos** from **a** = negates what follows + **miaino** = to defile by staining, as with color) means without contamination, unpolluted, untainted, unstained (stainless), unsoiled, without uncleanness or impurity. The idea is free from that by which the nature of a thing is deformed or debased, or its force or vigor is impaired. In secular Greek writings **amiantos** was used to describe things such as unstained hands, heart, flesh or body. Aeschylus calls the sea simply "the undefiled".

Christianity is not just about knowing truth, it’s about allowing the truth direct our actions. God’s Spirit within changes our desires. Gradually, we are able to set aside our tendency to focus all our attention and effort on ourselves. We become able to reach out to people around us and, because of the way Jesus met our need for salvation and forgiveness, we seek opportunities to meet their needs. That’s true religion.

Now James writes that there is a form of religious expression that is still pure and undefiled before God. It is simple, though not easy: show up with the widows and orphans in their suffering. Help them. And don't let yourself be polluted or stained by the world.

As with other verses, we need to carefully understand the point at hand. When the New Testament speaks of "the world," it usually means the "world system." This is the fallen, sin-soaked attitude of humanity, which rejects God and opposes His wisdom. In his letter, James will describe worldly wisdom as bitter envy and selfish ambition. To be unstained by the world means that we refuse to be driven by our own appetites and desires and selfish goals. It means not compromising with a system that hates God. Just as James pointed out in James 1:5-8, the world's wisdom is not like God's.

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

James 1:7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

James 1:8 A double minded man [is] unstable in all his ways.

With this, James is also implying that it's very difficult to practice pure and undefiled religion before God, unless we see some serious changes inside of us. Merely planning to follow the right list of regulations is not enough. Religion that God our Father 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 begins by using words like “pure” and “unspotted”. Other translations might use the words “faultless”, “unblemished” or “spotless”. Whatever the words, James is describing something for us here. So, while commonly referred to as a “command” to care for orphans, James 1:27 is in fact NOT a command verse, it's a descriptive verse.

There's no command language in this verse. Instead, this verse is describing something that is pure and undefiled in its application and expression. An interesting fact – the Greek word for “pure” is translated as “catharsis” in English, meaning “cleansing”. This is the root from which our word “cathartic” is derived. This refers to an activity or practice which is psychologically or emotionally relieving or cleansing for us. It's also the same root we get our word “catheter” from – a tube inserted into the body to drain toxic or potentially dangerous fluids. So there's something pure and cleansing about what James is *describing—not commanding*.

We can begin paraphrasing James 1:27 with this statement: ‘The purest and most undefiled religion’  
**“Religion”**

When we think of the word religion we think of a variety of things – steeples, rituals, rules. But the word “religion” here, in its most distilled down form, refers to an *outward expression of faith, or a demonstration of something that is inwardly true*. It is describing a “pure and undefiled” outward expression or demonstration of something that is inwardly true – namely of who God is and what God does.

Some translations use the word “visit” in James 1:27, which is strong. In Scripture, it is often used in reference to visiting the sick. Luke 1:68 uses the same word to describe the redemptive work of Jesus on our behalf when it says, *“Blessed be the Lord God...for He has visited (cared for) us and redeemed his people,*” He came near, wrapped Himself up in our brokenness and was broken by our brokenness so we don’t have to be broken anymore. In the gospel, God basically is saying, “I see your problems and I want to help you.” Perhaps James is suggesting that this gospel is most acutely and purely put on display when we echo that same sentiment with our lives to those around us.

At this point, we can add to the paraphrase of James 1:27 to now read: **One of the purest and most unspotted demonstrations of the gospel is to provide help for –**

### **“Orphans and Widows”**

Remember, this is a descriptive verse. James is describing something for us, and in so doing is not being prescriptive, but descriptive. Orphans and widows – the fatherless and the husbandless – easily represented two of the most marginalized and pushed-aside classes of people in James’ culture. They carried no legacy and contributed nothing to society, so society pushed them away. James is using them as

representatives of the most marginalized, disenfranchised and vulnerable groups of people we can come in contact with.

We don't believe he's being prescriptive – as if it's orphans and widows *only*. We believe he's being descriptive, so if we were to say, “But James, what about victims of trafficking, the homeless, the under-resourced in our city, the parents in crisis and on the brink of losing their children or my struggling neighbor across the street?”, You might disagree saying It's orphans and widows *ONLY*. Instead, we believe James meant, ‘we should help anyone who's needy. They are our people.’

In essence, he's suggesting that we become the kind of people who move towards, give intense attention to and visit those in our world who have been outcast, marginalized and pushed aside the most. And when we do—when we step towards the hard and broken, and not away—it puts the heart of God demonstrated in the gospel on display with a vividness and clarity and purity and cleanliness unlike anything else.

Your friends or family or co-workers might wonder why you're so boldly going against the status quo of avoiding and isolating yourself from hard and broken things and instead choosing to say, “I see you where you are and I want to help you.” They'll wonder why, and you'll have a great answer to that question – ultimately it's because of what Jesus has done for me. Now we can add even further to the paraphrase of James 1:27 so it reads: ***One of the purest and most undefiled demonstrations of the gospel is to move towards hard places and broken people, not move away from them.***

## **“Keep Oneself Unspotted”**

We tend to neglect this portion of the passage in our care for families. Probably because we're not entirely sure what the connection is and how it ties in. But we think it's clear now. **Our participation in this work and even more than that, our becoming this kind of people in the gospel is “cleansing”.** It puts a clean, unadulterated picture of the gospel on display, but it cleanses us as well. Who has time or energy to be stained by and consumed with the affairs of this world if we're so immersed in and stained by the brokenness of others? It changes our perspectives, our worldviews, our hopes and dreams and prayers and families. It changes everything—for the better. And we're somehow “cleaner” for it.

We know stuff like this requires some thought. But sometimes that's necessary to renovate our understanding and application of some things that are truly important. We hope, in the end, as we've rebuilt this profound passage of scripture we're all deeply familiar with that you've seen it in a new, more beautiful and clear light. Of course foster care, adoption, and caring for families is a direct and beautiful application of James 1:27, but we now also see the opportunity for there to be an endless array of expressions and demonstrations of this that go beyond that.

The point is not just to “do” James 1:27, but to “be” it in the lives of the poor and the destitute and people we are loving and serving, and beyond. James previously had said:

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

In James 1:27, the apostle James gives us insight into what pleases God.

When interpreting any verse in the Bible, including James 1:27, we should always look at its context to get an idea of what the verse means within the surrounding verses. In this case, we can look at what comes immediately before James 1:27 and get some idea of what is going on in this particular passage.

Verse 26 says,

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion [is] vain.

So, in these final two verses of James 1, we have a contrast between what makes religion “worthless” and what makes religion “acceptable” to God.

Here it would be good to define the word *religion*. By “religion,” James means the external evidence of inward piety; that is, worship as expressed in ritual acts. In the “worthless” religion, it doesn’t seem to matter what rituals or pious acts the worshiper engages in. It is all negated by an out of control tongue. A man may go through all the external motions of Christianity, yet if he tells lies or speaks unkindly or gossips or slanders or profanes God’s name, then his religion is empty. Everyone around him will see it, but he himself remains deceived. “By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Matthew 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

The implied contrast in the “pure and



undefiled" religion that pleases God is that the worshiper keeps his tongue under control.

Psalms 34:12 What man [is he that] desireth life, [and] loveth [many] days, that he may see good?

Psalms 34:13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

But James goes beyond just tongue control and gives examples of the religious acts God is looking for. One is outward focused: "Look after orphans and widows in their distress." The other is inward-focused: "Keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Holy living, coupled with service to others, is the key. Or, as Jesus said:

Mark 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [is] the first commandment.

Mark 12:31 And the second [is] like, [namely] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Basically, pure and undefiled religion happens when believers take care of the less fortunate and strive for personal purity. The right kind of religious practice involves helping those who cannot help themselves (and who cannot pay you back). As Jesus taught, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"

Luke 14:13 But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

Luke 14:14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

The right kind of religious practice also requires a personal commitment to growing in Christian virtue.

2Peter 1:5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

2Peter 1:6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

2Peter 1:7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

2Peter 1:8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make [you that ye shall] neither [be] barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul also wrote about pure and undefiled religion. the actions of those who wish to please the Lord: If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

1Timothy 5:4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

Taking care of one's family is a proper religious practice. Looking after widows and orphans and keeping oneself "unspotted" from the world (King James Version) are just two practical examples of what the Christian might do who desires to please God in his or her religion. James is not trying to create an exhaustive description of what religious practice must include. He is most likely highlighting some areas of concern among the believers to whom he was writing. But the result – pure and undefiled religion – is what believers of all eras should have as their goal.

Paul often writes about the "Jewish religion" and warns against the "religion of angels" as well as "self-made religion" and he reminds the Church that we should put our religion into action. Paul also warns against an outward appearance of religion, and Peter admonishes carnal Christians that their behavior brings the Christian religion into disrepute. And the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, calls the religions and customs of idolaters "worthless."

In James 1:27 James encourages us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, and righteous in all our ways. He reminds us that our services should mirror God's word of truth and that our lives should be separated from ungodly behavior and worldly pursuits. He warns that failure to live this way causes our Christian witness to be worthless, which he reminds us will make the Christian religion "vain and ineffective." As members of Christ's Body, our lives

should be a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ in us through a practical demonstration of loving acts, kindly deeds, and gracious words.

Sadly, many in Christendom today have brought the pure and undefiled Christian religion into disrepute through false teachings, doctrines of demons, foolish predictions, avarice, and greed. They make a mockery of biblical prophecy, have a lack or reverence for the Lord, redefine the gospel of Christ, and have an incorrect interpretation of the word of Truth. As the times in which we live become darker and colder.

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Hopefully, we will draw closer to the Lord with every passing day, as we seek to know more of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let our hearts desire to reflect the yearning desire of the apostle Paul, who near the end of his life cried out

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

### English Analysis of James 1:27

#### ***“Pure and Unspotted”***

James begins by using words like “pure” and “unspotted”. So, while commonly referred to as a “command” to care for orphans, James 1:27 is in fact NOT a command verse, it’s a descriptive verse. There’s no command language in this verse. Instead, this verse is describing something that is pure and undefiled in its application and expression. Interesting fact - the Greek word for “pure” is translated “catharsis” in English, meaning “cleansing”. This is the root from which our word “cathartic” is derived. This refers to an activity or practice which is psychologically or emotionally relieving or cleansing for us. It’s also the same root we get our word “catheter” from - a tube inserted into the body to drain toxic or potentially dangerous fluids. So there’s something pure and cleansing about what James is *describing* - *not commanding*

## ***“Religion”***

When we think of the word religion we think of a variety of things - steeples, rituals or being scolded as a kid for taking too many crackers from the communion tray! But the word “religion” here, in its most distilled down form, refers to *an outward expression of faith, or a demonstration of something that is inwardly true*. It is describing a “pure and undefiled” outward expression or demonstration of something that is inwardly true - namely of who God is and what God does. Martin Luther once said that "The world does not need a definition of religion as much as it needs a demonstration." That’s pretty much the idea here, and the context of the whole book of James - a poignant call to put our faith in the gospel into action. Perhaps he is suggesting that there is a particular outward expression of the gospel which is one of the “cleanest”, purest and most vivid we could participate in. And not only is it pure in its demonstration, but perhaps it’s also cleansing to us in its application. Participating in it somehow cleanses us as well. Again, he’s not so much commanding us to do something as much as he is inviting us to *be* something - the kind of people who have been so deeply and intrinsically effected by the gospel within us that it begins to express itself in some pure and vivid and clear ways through us.

At this point we can paraphrase James 1:27 to read: One of the purest and most undefiled demonstrations of the gospel is...

Luke 1:68 Blessed [be] the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,  
The word “visit in Scripture is often used in reference to visiting the sick. Perhaps James is suggesting that this is most acutely and purely put on display when we echo that same sentiment with our lives to those around us. One of the purest and most undefiled demonstrations of the gospel is in our actions towards...

## ***“Orphans and Widows”***

Remember, this is a descriptive verse. James is describing something for us, and in so doing is not being prescriptive, but descriptive. Orphans and widows - the fatherless and the husbandless -

easily represented two of the most marginalized and pushed-aside classes of people in James' culture. They carried no legacy and contributed nothing to society, so society pushed them away. James is using them as representatives of the most marginalized, disenfranchised and vulnerable groups of people we can come in contact with. We don't believe he's being prescriptive - as if its orphans and widows ONLY. We believe he's being descriptive, so if we were to say, "But James, what about victims of trafficking, the homeless, the under-resourced in our city, the parents in crisis and on the brink of losing their children or my struggling neighbor across the street?", he would not say, "NO! It's orphans and widows ONLY!" Instead, I believe he would say, "YES! That's where we go! Those are our people!" In essence he's suggesting that we become the kind of people who move towards, give intense attention to and visit those in our world who have been outcast, marginalized and pushed aside the most. And when we do - when we step towards the hard and broken, and not away - it puts the heart of God demonstrated in the gospel on display with a vividness and clarity and purity and cleanliness unlike anything else. Your friends or family or co-workers might look at you and wonder why you're so boldly going against the status quo of avoiding and isolating yourself from hard and broken things and instead choosing to say, "I see you where you are and I'm coming after you!" They'll wonder why, and you'll have a great answer to that question - ultimately because of what Jesus has done for me.

### ***"Keep Oneself Unspotted"***

This work is our becoming these kind of people in the spoken of in the gospel is "cleansing". It puts a clean, unadulterated picture of the gospel on display, but it cleanses us as well. It's difficult to be stained by the affairs of this world if your so immersed in and stained by the brokenness of others. It changes our perspectives, our worldviews, our hopes and dreams and prayers and families. It changes everything for the better. And we're somehow "cleaner" for it.

It's a difficult concept to put into play, but sometimes it's necessary to truly analyze it a bit in order to renovate our understanding and application of some things that are truly important. Hopefully, in the end, as we've dissected this profound passage of Scripture we're all acutely familiar with, that you've seen it in a new, more vivid light. Care for the needy, adoption and caring for families is a direct and beautiful application of this passage. but we now also see the opportunity for there to be expressions and demonstrations of this valuable concept applied as Religion.

We attempted to figure out how not just to "do" James 1:27, but apply "it in the lives of needy people we are loving and serving, and beyond.

#### SUMMARY

True "religion" is this: to care for orphans and widows and to keep oneself unspotted by the world.

#### Conclusions

This familiar verse is not such a bad way to summarize the practical implications of the theology and exhortation that characterize the book of James.

Yesterday James reminded us how important our "talk" is. Today he reminds us about the importance of our "walk": we are called to talk and walk honorably before God.

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

'But' - normally introduces an antithesis It looks like you have to do more than just believe.

Three kinds of people are implied in this passage:

1) hearers and not doers - They forget what manner of person they are. They don't understand the depravity of the flesh; that they're wretched. That's self-righteousness. Just listening to the word of God produces a self-righteousness person.

2) doers and not hearers - They do things. have a zeal for God, but not according to righteousness, all heart and no head. They're not ready to study.

3) You need a balance. That's what God seeks.

Proverbs 11:1 A false balance [is] abomination to the LORD: but a just weight [is] his delight.

Proverbs 11:1 A false balance [is] abomination to the LORD: but a just weight [is] his delight.

True religion is not all talk. We must live and love as Jesus Christ did. God has always called his people to care for the widow and the fatherless, and he challenges us to offer genuine help to others who are forgotten, overlooked, and find themselves as outsiders (Deuteronomy 15:1-18). As Jesus' followers, we must care for others while keeping ourselves holy to God. James wants us to know that this is what "Christ-like living" is all about.

Pure religion is a gift from God. The gift of Pure religion has nothing to do with, ceremonies, temples, special clothing, special days, or a certain language. True religion comes directly from God to humanity. And that religion is not for the cutting off or the dividing of the world; it is to bring light into the world.

Thank You