

Sincere Faith:

An Exposition of the Book of James

Sermon Six: Sincere Religion [James 1:26-27]

July 4, 2021

Opening ILL: People have big mouths and big hearts. Because of this, we say what we should not say and wound the hearts of others. Whether we like it or not, the sad reality is that one unguarded statement can forever destroy our usefulness in this culture and in the church. For better or worse (I have mixed feelings about cancel culture), more than ever, a lifetime of work can burn up in a few seconds of insensitive or evil speech. This is scary for a guy like me, but I already know that this is true. I could preach an awesome sermon (I think) and have it totally evaporate with one unguarded statement. Pray for me.

Quote: True religion is not a science of the head, so much as an inward and heart-felt perception, which casts down imaginations, and every upsoma (greek) that exalted itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. John Newton

I. A Sincere Review:

A. What have we been talking about?

1. The need for us to change our thinking.
 - a. About trials
 - b. About riches
 - c. About temptation/blame/guilt
2. The need for us to pursue sincerity and consistency in our walk with Christ.
 - a. Considering it all joy when we face trials.
 - b. Boasting in our own lowliness and the exalted character of God.
 - c. Refusing to blame others (especially God) for our failures.
 - d. Seeking to become people who are quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

B. What will we talk about today?

1. We will continue talking about what a sincere religious life must include and what it must reject.

II. A Religion that is Worthless (James 1:26)

A. What is the definition of “religion” here?

1. We must be careful not to put too much into this one word.
 - a. This word does not mean “salvation”.
 - b. Notice that this person “believes” that he is religious...and he is...but his religion itself is worthless.
 - i. What this person thinks he is contributing to the church is actually just fuel for the fire. 1 Cor 3
2. We must be careful to understand what this word is really describing.
 - a. Word study on the Greek word--qrhskeia

Quote: “The term is not specifically Christian and is used widely in Greek religion to denote the reverencing and worshipping of a god (or gods). It often connotes outward acts of worship. The true test of any religious profession, suggests James, is not the outward ritual of worship, which many go through unthinkingly and with little heart commitment. No, the real litmus test of religion is obedience—without it, religion is vain: empty, useless and profitless.”¹

- i. This word, then, is referring to external, religious practice.
- b. What are some examples of this in our lives/ our religion?
 - i. Going to church
 - ii. Singing songs
 - iii. Baptism
 - iv. Communion
 - v. Serving

¹ Moo, TNTC

vi. So much more

B. What is the danger in our religion?

1. It we think we are religious, but fail to bridle our tongue.
 - a. Again, remember the meaning of this word “religious”. He is not discounting doctrine or personal piety. What he seems to be referring to is outward religious expression.
 - b. Realize that the book of James will tell us a lot about the tongue and how easily we may fall into sin with our words. **See 3:1 and ff. We will get to this topic again in greater depth.**

Point: The Bible says that, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. (**Prov. 10:19**)” The more we say, the more stupid things that we say! Pray for me!

2. We may actually be deceiving ourselves!
 - a. We may use our religion simply to ease our conscience.
 - i. **Matthew 7:23-24**...you want to talk about great religion and self-deception? These people did the miraculous only to find that their religion was worthless.
 - b. We may unpreach with our words what we preach with our lives.

ILL: You have heard it said that you can “unpreach” what you preach by how you live. James is telling you that it works the other way around as well. You have heard it said that if you are going to talk the talk, you better walk the walk. James is telling you that the reverse is true as well. You may unpreach with your mouth what you are trying to preach with your lives. Similarly, you can put all your energy into walking the walk and ruin it all by not talking the talk!

- c. How might we be doing this?
 - i. Profanity—**Ephesians 4:29** 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.
 - ii. Gossip—**Proverbs 20:19** He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.
 - iii. Criticism—**Romans 14:10** But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.
 - a) Compare **James 3:9**
 - iv. Social Media
 - v. Probably 100 other things.

3. In our double-mindedness, our religion can actually be deemed “worthless”? [mataioj]

- a. What does this mean? Word study on Greek term
 - i. **BDAG:** “pert. to being of no use, idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, lacking truth”

ILL: What are some things that seem valuable but are really worthless? 1. Money on a desert island.

- b. **Point:** Do your best never to give a person an excuse to dismiss you simply because you are mean.
 - i. Without realizing it, we may fall into that trap all the time.

III. Religion that is Worthwhile (James 1:27)

A. How is this worthwhile religion described?

1. Pure and undefiled
 - a. **ILL:** When you put a little bit of something bad into something good, which one wins? Brownie analogy.
2. God-centered

B. How is this worthwhile religion practiced?

1. The sincere practice of compassion
 - a. What does it mean to “visit” orphans and widows?
 - i. Most translations render this word [ἐπισκέπτομαι] as “visit,” but that may not be the best translation. It might be better to render this as “watch over” or “tend to”.

- a) CSB- “Look after”
- b) NET- “care for”
- b. Why orphans and widows, specifically?
 - i. Because they really need it.
 - ii. Because they are the people who have nobody else.
 - iii. Because they are the easiest pray for predators.
- c. Is this really better “religion”? Let’s do our best to prevent misunderstanding.
 - i. Again, remember what this word (religion qrhskia) means!
 - ii. Helping those in need honors Jesus.
 - a) Do you love me? Feed my lambs!

ILL: “Do they send that money to God?” This was a question that I asked my Grandfather when I was a kid. He took me to church, and I remember wondering, “Does God need that money?” and “What’s the point?”. My grandfather explained to me that the money that goes in the plate does not go to God, but to the church with the understanding that they will fund the ministry and help people with it. The point is, God does not need our help. People do. We honor Him by helping them.

- 2. The sincere prevention of contamination
 - a. What does it mean to be “unstained” by the world?

ILL: “It’s a meal!” I spill stuff on my clothes all the time! Sometimes, it ruins the shirt/pants. Sometimes, it stains!

- b. What does it mean to be unstained by the “world”?
 - i. It means that we refuse to allow our culture to form what we think when that way of thinking violates what is biblically stated.

Quote: “All that is commanded in the Word belongs to our obedience, and nothing else is binding. We are strictly directed neither to add to it nor to subtract from it. We are to do not only what is commanded, but all that is commanded, and nothing more. If not commanded, it is not a part of our obedience. The inbred light of nature yet remaining in us may give us direction as to moral good and evil, but this light must be subordinate to the Word and is not the final rule of gospel holiness. The law grace writes in our hearts must answer to the law written in God’s Word.” John Owen

- a) That is conservative culture or liberal culture.
 - 1) In either culture, Christians will stick out.
- b) That is American culture or the culture of whatever country you live in.
 - 1) Worldliness may be different in different places, depending on the culture.
- c) Clarification: This does not apply to things that are non-biblical.
 - 1) Example: Almost everybody wears pants, so should we wear robes so as not to be “worldly”? There is nothing wrong with wearing pants. The Bible doesn’t discourage that.
 - 2) Very often, when people cannot find an excuse in their Bible to criticize their brothers, they will simply say it is “worldly”. Beware of holding people to a nebulous standard to which the Bible does not hold them.

Quote: Some are so entirely absorbed in their own inward experience and their own heart’s conflict that they forget the world outside. Others are so busy about doing good to the world that they neglect to cultivate their own souls...but none perhaps do so much harm to religion as those who are busybodies about others’ salvation and at the same time neglecters of their own.

IV. Is Your Religion Sincere? (Conclusions)

A. Watch your mouth!

- 1. You may be unpreaching your testimony!
- 2. You may be training people to hate Christians!

B. Watch out for opportunities to relieve suffering!

1. Are you “too religious” to show love to the suffering?
 - a. **Luke 10:30ff**—the priest and the Levite were too “religious” to help the guy who got mugged.
 - b. Matthew
2. Are you “too religious” to spend time with the lonely?

C. Watch the Lord transform your life!

1. Something must precede even sincere religion!
2. Before you can have sincere religion, you must be born again!