

## Message #7

## James 1:26-27

A couple of weeks ago I had an opportunity to witness to someone and in the course of the conversation the person said, "I know I need religion." I said, no you don't need religion. In fact, most religions will mess you up. What you really need is a relationship with Jesus Christ. The man looked startled. I proceeded to tell him that religion has done more damage to people in this world than anything else. It is fake. It is phony. It is dangerous. That is the way James saw it.

**When we look at these two verses, one word is repeated three times and the word is "religion" (θρησκεία).** We live in a very religious world. The word actually has to do with external, outward religious activity (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 208).

James lived in a very religious world. It was very liturgical. His was the Jewish world that was given to external religion. Truth is those Jews had a formal religious system that has never been equaled anywhere. Those Jews had their religious laws and codes and traditions and the people carefully followed the liturgy and the rituals.

They could tell you how far you could travel from your house on the Sabbath Day. They could tell you how many times you needed to wash your hands and when you needed to do it. They could tell you how many times to pray. The world of James was a religious world.

But quite frankly, most of the religious stuff they were doing was worthless and useless. These people went to their religious gatherings and, spiritually speaking, they were dead. Their religion was worthless. Their spirituality was zero. Their hearts were not right with God. These people put on a good religious show and that is all it was. **Real religion and true religion is very interested in what pleases God and not what one does externally in front of others.**

What James says here is this:

**TRUE, PROPER GRACE AGE RELIGION CONTROLS ONE'S SPEECH, CARES ABOUT OTHERS AND KEEPS ONESELF UNSTAINED FROM THE WORLD.**

Here is real worship. Here is what it is supposed to be. James did not want grace age believers going through religious motions that are dead. He did not want grace age believers thinking they could shoot off their mouths and say anything about anyone. He did not want grace age believers to be uncaring or worldly.

**True Grace Age religion is a caring religion.** It cares about self and it cares about others. It cares about one's own speech, one's own life and it cares about those who have real needs.

Now there are three elements to a religion and worship that is worthwhile and not worthless:

**ELEMENT #1** – True, pure Grace Age religion controls one’s mouth and speech. **1:26**

We clearly saw that last time. Basically the entire theme of James 1:19-26 is that if someone cannot control their mouth, they cannot be worshipping God in any acceptable way.

Now the point James makes is that people go to church and many think and consider themselves to be real religious people and real spiritual people. James says you need to know two realities if you cannot control your speech:

**(Reality #1)** - You need to know you are deceiving your own heart.

The participle “deceives” is present tense that speaks of a continual perception. The word speaks of a perpetual deception in one’s own heart (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 45).

When Jesus was here He taught that what was really in the heart would ultimately be viewed by what comes out of one’s mouth (Matt. 12:34-37). There are people who go to their worship services every week with deceptive hearts.

People deceive themselves into believing they are some spiritual giant, when in fact they are nothing. They are useless and worthless in the sight of God because they cannot even control their mouth.

It may be that James had his half-brother Jesus in mind. He saw what they did to Him and said about Him.

The religious leaders of Jesus day thought themselves to be giants of religion. These were the same guys who used their mouths to call Jesus Christ a drunk, a friend of prostitutes and sinners and an insurrectionist who was trying to stir up a political riot and revolution. They went so far as to say Jesus was Satanic and that His power was demonic power.

The men saying this were all pretending to be right with God. They had deceived their own hearts. They weren’t right with God one bit.

So James says you need to know that if you cannot control your speech you are deceiving yourself. You have deceived your own heart, because the heart is not right with God.

This is what most people never see. Those who talk about others and gossip have not just developed some bad habit; they are showing what is really in their heart.

**(Reality #2)** - You need to know your religion is worthless.

The word “worthless” means the religion, the worship is empty, vain, foolish and of no value or purpose (*Ibid.*, p. 280). One writer said all of the words lead to the conclusion that the worship is of “no use.”

Most people who go to church don't go saying I am going to church to offer God “useless worship.” Most also don't say I am going to church because “I need my heart changed.” Most go thinking they are just fine. What they want to hear is that they are good to go.

James says you need to know this, if you cannot control your mouth, what you do in a religious setting means zero. In God's mind there is no value to it. To God it is of no use. If one is not willing to get on top of one's speech, then when he goes to worship he is singing the doxology to the wall because it is not acceptable to God.

**ELEMENT #2** – True, pure Grace Age religion is concerned about the needs of the hurting.  
**1:27a**

In contrast to a phony, pharisaical worship service that is useless from God's perspective that is nothing but talk, true Grace Age ministry cares about others.

True, pure Grace Age religion is concerned and compassionate when it comes to the needs specifically of the hurting widows and orphans. A true, pure Grace Age religion has a proper visitation ministry.

You will notice the infinitive “to visit.” The Greek word means to make a careful inspection and evaluation for the purpose of caring for and helping those with need. It is much more than just visually seeing someone, it also implies seeing them to see if we can care for them and help them (*Ibid.*, p. 173).

I have many books in my library that talk about Pastoral visitations. One of those books lists different types of visitations:

- 1) There is absentee visitation to find out why someone is absent.
- 2) There is prospect visitation to find new good prospects for the church.
- 3) There is evangelistic visitation to present the gospel to those who are lost.
- 4) There is new comer visitation to contact those who recently came to church.
- 5) There is membership visitation to visit those who are in the church.
- 6) There is pastoral visitation to visit those who have critical needs in the church.
- 7) There is hospital visitation to visit those in the hospital who are in the church.
- 8) There is discipline visitation to visit someone to encourage them to repent.

Now to my knowledge, not one of these visitations is specifically demanded in the Scriptures. They are good to do, but they are not demanded.

The one that is demanded here is not even mentioned in these books:

9) There is orphan and widow visitation to assess the real needs.

But this is the visitation that determines whether the worship is valid.

Now in each of these cases, careful investigation is needed to determine the best way to help. In each of these cases, James describes there was no father or husband or family to help. In other words, there is no one else to help. There was no other family to meet the need.

Now the prepositional phrase “in their distress” goes with both groups. Those words suggest that these people were in real pain or trouble. They were experiencing some very real, not imagined pressure.

There are two areas of visitation that are demanded by James if one is to have proper worship:

**Area #1** - Proper worship cares for orphans.

The word “orphan” is a Greek word that refers to children who do not have a father or one that is fatherless.

James does not say why the child doesn't have a father; but what he wanted the Church to realize is that it does have the responsibility to look out for children who do not have fathers and the church who doesn't do that does not worship God properly.

Over in the Cleveland area there is a Presbyterian Church about which I want to tell you a story. The man who taught me Greek and a man who taught me how to study the Bible and even expound the Scriptures was Mr. Bill Brew. His father dropped dead when he was 15. Mr. Brew was in the car when it happened and he carried his father into the house.

The church took this principal seriously. The men of that church rallied around Bill Brew. They saw to it that he had needs met and they saw to it that he received spiritual training and they saw to it that he was financially able to go to Dallas Theological Seminary to receive a theological education.

Bill Brew moved to Grand Rapids and taught for years at GRSBM. Now he ended up influencing many people, including me. Many are in ministry today and know how to rightly divide Scripture because a little Presbyterian church in Cleveland said it is our job to care for an orphan.

We have a responsibility to be on the lookout for children who do not have dads. We need to nurture them, teach them, help them and look out for them. That is what God expects Grace Age churches to do.

**Area #2** - Proper worship cares for widows.

The Grace Age church has a responsibility to look out for the needs of women who have no one. There is no question that all throughout Scripture God places a priority on the widow (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 14:28-29; 27:19; Ps. 68:5; 146:9; Acts 6:1-6).

We have a responsibility as a church to keep tabs on the widows who have no husband or means of help. That is our job. We do take that seriously here. We have a list and we consistently call on the widows and see if there are needs we are able to meet.

Paul would teach that the first priority of help must come from the immediate family (I Tim. 5:3-5). Children and grandchildren have a responsibility to take care of their mother and grandmother before the church has responsibility. However, the church must keep track of this.

But there is also an individual application to this as well. Jesus taught this principal in Luke 10:29-37. He taught that His people need to care about others, including the neighbor and someone said, "who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:29). Jesus followed the question up with the story of the Samaritan. It turns out our neighbor is anyone who has a need and we are in a position to do something about it. So this not only has church application, but individual application.

By the way, the church is to help the widow, not steal from the widow. There is a dirty smell to those ministers who look at widows as easy prey. They will answer to God.

**ELEMENT #3** – True, pure Grace Age religion is concerned about an unstained character.  
**1:27b**

If we are to worship God in a worthy, rather than worthless way, we need to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We need to keep away from worldly things that can stain us.

The world offers filthy lures and wicked lures (**v. 21**). People, who worship God, get rid of them and pursue a clean, righteous life.

Now there is no one who is sinless. The Apostle John made that point very clear (I John 1:8). However, we can be stainless if we are walking honestly before God. If we are continuing in a sin, rather than confessing it and turning from it, we are stained from God's perspective.

God does not want His people to be ritualists, but righteous. He wants His people clean.

Why does James bring this up? Because it is possible to be involved in all kinds of physical things around the church, including good things, and still be dirty. It is possible to help do all kinds of things and do it totally tainted by the world. James says that kind of worship is worthless.