

TODAY'S VERSES:

James 1:26-27
Matthew 7:24
John 7:17
Matthew 12:34b
Isaiah 1:11-17
Isaiah 5:20

THIS WEEK, I CAN APPLY THIS LESSON
TO MY LIFE IN THESE WAYS:

MY NOTES:

[illegible]

JAMES

A FAITH THAT WORKS

PART EIGHT: JAMES 1:26-27
PURE RELIGION

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PURE RELIGION

If you go to most dictionaries today, they will define religion as, *"an organized system of beliefs and rituals centering on a supernatural being or beings."* Is that all religion is or meant to be, an organized system of beliefs or rituals?

Religion wasn't only rituals; it was about connecting and RE connecting with God throughout our lifetime. Religious people are meant to ask themselves how we can re-bind ourselves, or re-connect, with a God who is infinitely more intelligent and loving than we are. This connection starts with God Himself through the Gospel and the work God does to rescue us from our rebellion against Him. We are saved by God's grace alone, but that should reflect in the life we live. James puts forth three dimensions of "religion" which are acceptable to God. When understood rightly these could challenge us about true worship.

- **Our Words** – James starts by talking about our tongues and comparing them to a horse. Horses in James' day were expensive, strong, and were seen in imagery of war. How do we use our words, to build up or tear down?
- **Our Hands** – Jesus tells us to care for "the least of these." Those would be the most helpless in society. If we take an honest look throughout history, the most vulnerable, even today, tend to be those deemed worth less than others. The truth is religious observances, no matter how perfectly observed and appropriately reverent, are empty if there is no concern for the needy.
- **Our Hearts** – A pure life. This is not simple morality as morality doesn't save us, Jesus saves us. When we understand the Gospel we will begin to live differently. In our world everything is polluted by the cultural air that we breathe. What do our hearts long for?

It is easy for worship to become impure religion centered on legalism. It is also easy to be deceived by our cultural norms and think that living a life that reflects God's call is not that important. So what does James say? Keep a tighter rein on our words, care for those around us, and place God's honor above all other things in our life.

Read James 1:26-27.

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "religion?"
- Who do you picture as being "religious?" Why?
- Has your view of what "religion" is changed over time? How?
- What are the "social conventions" of Christianity? Of Element? How are they different from outward worship?
- How have you lived-out your religion?
- What does "Pure Religion," a saved life lived inside out, look like?
- Have you seen someone who lives their faith out in a beautiful way?
- How can you tangibly worship with your words, hands, and heart?
- Who are the "least of these" in our society?
- Have you ever thought of your tongue as a war horse? What would it mean to bridle it?
- In what ways have you failed in controlling your tongue?
- In what ways do you live differently today because of the Gospel?
- As a community, how can we be more God-honoring with our words?
- What do your words say about your heart? Give an example.
- Is heaven the focus of Christianity? Why/why not? If not, what is?
- What is something that you have submitted to Jesus, even when our culture or your heart disagreed?
- Do you trust Jesus?
- Is Jesus right about *everything*?