

Audio file

[Study 18 Real or Superficial Christianity3326gsm_james_1_v26-27.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

Please turn with me to James chapter 1.

00:00:03

Just reading the two last verses of this chapter.

00:00:07

James chapter 1 verses 26 to 27.

00:00:13

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

00:00:24

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this,

00:00:29

to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

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We come this morning to consider, with the Lord's help, this text under the title Real or Superficial Christianity.

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And really, where it's found, the focus will be in verse 27,

00:00:57

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this.

00:01:02

Now, a few years ago, I read an article written by a Christian man, and the title of it was, How Real is Your Religion?

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How real is your religion?

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And I thought about it for a while, and I began to see the difference.

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I hadn't noticed it before.

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But there is such a thing as a superficial religion.

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And some of us were in that particular stream in our childhood, maybe even in our teens.

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But there is also a real Christianity, a real religion.

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I'm not going to use the word religion regarding the Christian faith.

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I'm going to put it like this.

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I'm going to put the title like this, Real or Superficial Christianity.

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Now there's no doubt

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that human beings are religious.

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We are created in such a way.

00:02:02

We have been given a God consciousness.

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Whether we admit it or not, religion could be defined as a belief in and worship of a supreme power or person.

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Our world, the experts that is, have estimated that there are about 10,000 distinct

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religions.

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The sheer variety and number of religions is absolutely bewildering and confusing.

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Which is the right one?

00:02:36

Which one will bring me to the true God, to true salvation, to true forgiveness for sin, and to truly being with God forever?

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The question we must ask is this.

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Is our religion true, real, and does it transform our lives?

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Or is it false, powerless, damaging, and even detrimental to our true seeking of God?

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James here is teaching us something very important.

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He's showing us the contrast between vain religion, and we focused on this last week, empty religion, and there's a lot of that,

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and real Christianity, real belief in God and in Christ.

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You could ask the question, if we studied history and Christian history as it were, could we find true Christianity coming all the way through from the time of the apostles?

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And yes, we do.

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Almost, at one stage it was extinguished, but the Lord has kept His people throughout.

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Perhaps you might find real Christianity, says one, in institutional churches.

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Like for instance, the Roman Catholic Church and its history, tracing its origins all the way back thousands of years.

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Is that real Christianity?

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Well, no, because if you begin to read what Roman Catholic Church officially teaches, not what it has in its public domain,

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you will find that salvation is not based on Christ alone.

00:04:27

It's based on grace plus works.

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The churches, popes, priests and mass, for some of us was a discovery that these institutions and even the mass itself was not truly Christian.

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What about the modern churches?

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their emphasis on contemporary songs and worship of a certain style.

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They claim new revelations.

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Is that real Christianity?

00:05:01

What about the traditional religion -- predominations?

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You are now part of the worldwide ecumenical movement.

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You might not understand the word ecumenical, but it basically means that the Catholic Church and themselves are basically in cooperation together.

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Alas, no.

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What are the marks of a true church?

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Because if we know what a true church is, then surely we'll have true Christianity.

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A true church is based on the Word of God, not a novel interpretation of it.

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A true church derives its supreme authority not from men, but from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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A true church will base its teachings, its doctrines, its instructions, and even its behaviors upon the Word of God.

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Now, we as Reformed Baptists have this confession, and some of us have read it over the years and studied it, and others are coming to it fresh as it were.

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What is that 1689 confession about?

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Well, that basically is a helpful guide, a helpful summary.

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of the great teachings of the Christian Bible.

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We are told that the Western world is turning away from religion.

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History shows us that humanity wants and needs some form of religion.

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We all believe and then worship something or someone.

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Even those who deny God will worship celebrities, sports stars, and social media influencers.

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But why are we so religious?

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Why are we so religious?

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Why do we need something higher, bigger and better to believe in?

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Because it's the way we've been created.

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One old preacher back in the 1500s said, if we will not worship the true God, we will worship anything or anyone else.

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How true that is.

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But also with the Christian faith and even with other religions, there is some sort of values, morals, and ethics that are needed.

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You may realize this, but the Western world was built upon Christian ethics, Christian morals, Christian values.

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They've all but eroded nowadays by an atheistic tsunami of false teaching to undermine

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real Christianity.

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We are, as it were, created to admire, to believe, to worship.

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That's why it's very interesting for some of us who've come up through the materialistic age in the academic world.

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All that mattered was material, what you see, what you touch, what you feel.

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Your experiences are most important of what is real.

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That's all but gone in academic circles.

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There must be something higher, something greater, something deeper to life than just what we have here.

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We're not just, after all, a bundle of cells randomly thrown together by this process called evolution and there's creation of the human being.

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You see, I believe that the Bible teaches us

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the difference between real Christianity and superficial Christianity.

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If you remember last time we looked at our little illustration, head, heart, hand.

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Head, we all got minds.

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Some of our minds are more, are a bit less active than they were.

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Maybe they're not as elastic and expansive.

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We don't have that on our side anymore, but we still have minds.

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We still think.

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We still process information.

00:09:21

We also have a heart.

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That's not speaking about this marvelous cardiac pump that we have in our chest cavity, but more the heart, the affections, the internal person.

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Each one of us has a heart.

00:09:37

We're not all cold, rock-like granite.

00:09:42

We have hearts.

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And the other aspect of us is our hands.

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And I'm not speaking here of literal hands, but you could think of that.

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It's that we want to do things.

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We want to be active as best we can.

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For the Christian, for the true Christian,

00:10:03

Head, heart and hands is a reflection of what it means to be a fully fledged believer.

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I mentioned this term last time and might have caused a little bit of raised eyebrows, if I can call it that, experiential Calvinism.

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Calvinism, of course, has a certain press in certain places, but really what I was emphasizing was the great doctrines of the faith that are experienced in Christ.

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That's why we sang that hymn.

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There's none but Jesus, lovely Lord, my satisfaction found, my comforts all in sweet concord, and from his death abound.

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We should be -- we can encourage ourselves, be heart-centered in the Gospel.

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We can focus on God's glory.

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We have fellowship with God.

00:11:03

And that's so different, in contrast to superficial Christianity, which is all about the outward.

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You see, the Bible teaches us that when our hearts are changed, our lives are different.

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That's really where I'm coming to.

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When we truly know Christ, we will live differently, not because we're told to live differently,

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because we desire to live differently.

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Let's think a little about this.

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I want you to notice what James does in verse 26.

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In James 1 verse 26, If any man among you seem to be religious, see that word seem, appear outwardly, you follow all the ceremonies, that's the word there and that word religious.

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It's to do with the ceremonies and the rituals, particularly of the Old Testament worship, but also of any other religion.

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You see, you appear, outwardly it's truth, it's a true religion.

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But if he seemed to be a religious and bridled not his tongue, he does not bridle his tongue.

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Now what animal wears a bridle?

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Well, you could be funny here, talking in a children's talk.

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You could see you try and put a bridle on a lion.

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I wish you luck.

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You'd have to tranquilize the lion first.

00:12:47

You might try and put a bridle on an elephant, and I have seen that.

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These elephants apparently have been reared.

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They're little orphan calves, and they're reared, and they're so used to human beings.

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Now, the first animal that we think of that could wear a bridle is a horse.

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What's a bridle for?

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Well, here's a little Greek term.

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And it actually says what it is.

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It's a .

00:13:21

which literally means to be a bit leader.

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That's why a bridle is so important.

00:13:27

It's got the bit in the horse's mouth, and it curbs the horse's temperament.

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You see, James here is speaking not about horses.

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He's speaking about the tongue.

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But he has that marvelous picture.

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He speaks here of self-control.

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Some of us probably need to learn this

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more vigorously than others.

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Some of us speak too much, say too much.

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But others may feel so nervous about even speaking.

00:14:07

And, of course, here James is speaking about those who bridle not his tongue in a negative way.

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He also speaks about the tongue again.

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is chapter 3 and verses 5 to 6 notice this even so the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things behold how great a matter a little fire kindles or kindleth and the tongue is a fire a world of iniquity what a picture of the tongue you heard this phrase when we were children sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me is that truly the fact

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Can some of us not remember being called horrible names as children and we haven't forgotten yet?

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A tongue can be quite dangerous, but the Christian's tongue can be different.

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Here, of course, tongue is a picture of the speech, of our conversation, of what we say to others and what we say about others.

00:15:13

We need to control our tongues.

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That's what James is teaching us.

00:15:17

We don't have a literal bridle, but the Lord gives us an ability to control our tongues.

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He brideth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, and this man's religion is vain.

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That's one aspect.

00:15:36

It's not the only aspect.

00:15:38

But it's one aspect.

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There are three things, two things I just want you to notice here.

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The person deceives his own heart.

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A person, a man or a woman who cannot control their tongue.

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I don't mean that in the sense that there's times that we do get hot under the collar, we get angry and we shouldn't.

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But this is the idea of that there is no control of the tongue, deceives his own heart.

00:16:09

This man's religion is vain, but the second thing is the only man, the man seems to be religious.

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He's outwardly religious.

00:16:16

He conforms to what is demanded of him, but his tongue lets him down.

00:16:21

There's no inward conversion.

00:16:26

He does not know Christ.

00:16:29

I once was like this.

00:16:31

I was religious, but I wasn't converted.

00:16:35

I went to a good church.

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Some presumed I was a good Catholic and therefore a good Christian because I was going to a good church.

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It was all in appearance.

00:16:46

The Holy Spirit began to deal with me in a way that some of you know about and some will never know because the depths of it are so profound.

00:16:56

But He dealt with me in such a way that I realized that my religion could not save me.

00:17:04

My ideas of God, my concept of religion, even my attendance of the services could not save my soul.

00:17:12

I needed Christ.

00:17:15

I needed Christ.

00:17:18

I remember going one Lord's Day morning to the local evangelical church with some friends of mine, and they were singing this hymn, Rock of Ages.

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Clef for me, let me hide myself.

00:17:34

in thee.

00:17:38

Do we understand those terms?

00:17:44

Nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

00:17:49

Naked come to thee for dress.

00:17:53

Those terms are scriptural terms.

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Who's the Rock of Ages?

00:17:57

It's Christ.

00:17:59

What does it mean to cleft in thee, to hide in thee?

00:18:05

What does it mean to nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross cycling?

00:18:12

That's forsaking all religion and trusting in Christ alone.

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What's the difference?

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That's the difference.

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So I've seen a little of the vain religion.

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Secondly, true Christianity.

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I want you to notice in verse 26, pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this.

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There's two aspects here.

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It's positive and there's negative.

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Notice how James puts it, pure religion and undefiled.

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It's pure, it's pleasing to God.

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It's clean.

00:18:54

It pleases God because it's clean.

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How can religion be clean?

00:19:00

How can faith be clean?

00:19:03

Because of God who cleanses our hearts.

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That's the whole point.

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Pure religion.

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The negative, that's the positive.

00:19:12

It's pure.

00:19:13

It's pleasing to God, a holy God.

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glorious God, a perfect God, an immortal, invisible, only wise God.

00:19:25

This is the God who is the true God.

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And all other religions must be compared to God's truth.

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Pure religion, pure worship, pure adoration, our services aren't perfect,

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but we try to follow what God teaches us in his word.

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But there's another aspect.

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That's the positive.

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Now in the negative, undefiled.

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Unsoiled.

00:20:01

Unsoiled.

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Undefined speaks of negative, doesn't it?

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Somebody has just rolled themselves in a pool of muck.

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Sadly, a lot of our hearts were once upon a time soaked, saturated with the muck of sin.

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And before God, James says, Pure religion and undefined before God and the Father.

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See, not only is it to be positive and negative, but it's to be public before God and the Father.

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Even this morning God is here.

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in this place, by His Spirit, through His Word.

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To live before the presence of God is not just to come to a morning worship service or an evening worship service.

00:21:07

It's to live in the consciousness that God is there even when no one else is.

00:21:18

to live in the holy presence of God.

00:21:21

The Old Testament phrase is the fear of God, but please don't confuse that with dread fear of God, terror of God.

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Fear of God for the believer is a reverence for God.

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To know that every step I take and every thought I have and every breath I breathe is in the presence of the Almighty Holy God.

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That's the consciousness that the Lord would have each one of his people on earth have this morning.

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I'm in God's presence.

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Believe you me, friends, it keeps us from much harm and it keeps us from becoming complacent in the Christian life.

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If only we were more conscious of God in His holiness, in His righteousness, and in His grace, our lives would be different.

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That's what real Christianity looks like.

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A man or a woman who is living with a God consciousness that God is here and yet I cannot see Him.

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How different that is to the concept that Christianity is just following rules and regulations.

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There are instructions in the Bible how to live to please God, but perhaps the most important point here is the motivation is that we are now in the presence of God.

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In our homes, God is there.

00:23:13

By His Spirit.

00:23:16

In our quiet times, God is there.

00:23:21

In our private devotions, God is there.

00:23:26

Even when we have difficulties in the home, God is there.

00:23:32

Pure and religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this.

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But if we've seen something of vain religion

00:23:41

and true Christianity.

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Now let's look at faith in action, thirdly.

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Faith in action.

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Notice how James now moves it to the practical.

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Yes, it's one thing to be conscious of God's presence, but how is it seen?

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Well, it's seen the same way as it ever was.

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It's seen in action.

00:24:04

Faith in action.

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What does pure and undefiled religion look like practically?

00:24:13

Well, for James is to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

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To visit.

00:24:25

When you visit someone, you go out of your way to visit them.

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That's the point.

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To visit who?

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The fatherless and the widows.

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Do you know if you do a little reading of the Old Testament

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There are many, many times that this little phrase, fatherless and widows comes up.

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It's found many times in the book of Deuteronomy.

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God gave Moses this book as part of the first five books of the Bible.

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And God told Moses how he considered the fatherless and the widow.

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and how Moses should consider the fatherless and the widow.

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I just read one or two, but let me just note this.

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It's in Deuteronomy 10.

00:25:24

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, almighty and terrible, which regardeth not persons.

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In other words, He's not partial.

00:25:34

doesn't show favoritism to those that think they deserve favor.

00:25:38

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

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How about 14, verse 29?

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This is just a flavor, but I just want you to see that James is not drawing this out of some religious manual, he is taking it straight out of the Word of God.

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He says the Levite because he hath no part nor inheritance and the stranger and the fathers and the widow which are within thy gate shall come and shall eat and be satisfied.

00:26:17

11, And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou and thy son and thy daughter, thy manservant, thy maidservant, the Levite who is in thy gate and the stranger and the fathers and the widow that are among you.

00:26:31

Again and again, he brings this phrase up.

00:26:33

He speaks about the fatherless and the widow.

00:26:38

17, he says, Thou shall not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless, nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.

00:26:46

In other words, don't be corrupt.

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Treat them with fairness and respect.

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The fatherless, the orphan, the widow, the woman without a husband.

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How practical that is.

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This could apply to those on the margins today.

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But before that, let us just think of some of those great men of God, and women too, of a previous generation.

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Victorian Britain has got a bad press recently.

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But did you know in Victorian Britain, there were men and women who cared for the fatherless and the widow, who built great orphanages

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for a place of refuge, security, and even to care for and nurture orphans.

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We've all heard of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

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If you haven't, I hope you do, read something by him.

00:27:48

But he built an orphanage for boys and then for girls.

00:27:53

He built Widow's Almshouse.

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Now, he didn't build them himself, but he orchestrated the building of these institutions to care for those most needy in society.

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There was another man called George Mueller.

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He was converted by the grace of God in Britain while he was on holidays and he came over to live and he was converted and he was a pastor

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And he then had this burden to care for the fatherless, for the orphans.

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And in Bristol, you can still see some of the evidence of the work that the Lord did through him for the orphans of Bristol.

00:28:42

You see how practical that is, to care for those in great need.

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Now I know in the West we have many ways of caring.

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The government has ways of caring for the needy.

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And perhaps there are people here even and around us who need help.

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But caring for the fatherless and the widows in other parts of the world is not done by the government.

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And some Christian charities, some Christian congregations

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care for the fatherless and the widows in their own community, living out this text, caring for, visiting, nurturing, sustaining, even building orphanages for those who are fatherless or motherless or have no parents at all.

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Sadly, the scourge of a disease called AIDS has

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caused great havoc in the communities in Africa.

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Young children are growing up without mother or father.

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The Christians there have come to their aid and sought to build orphanages.

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They don't call them orphanages in the sense of the Victorians anymore, care facilities.

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But that's what they are.

00:30:14

Places of refuge, places of nurture, places of security.

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But there's one last thing that James says to us that's public, that's evident, but to keep himself unspotted from the world.

00:30:38

That's not possible without Christ.

00:30:42

That's where the gospel comes in.

00:30:46

That's why it's so important not only to know about Jesus Christ, but to trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Lord, because only by His grace and His strength will He keep us from falling back into the world.

00:31:07

To be unspotted from the world, to go out from this world

00:31:15

with a character reference, he lived a life pleasing to God.

00:31:23

What a testimony that is.

00:31:28

She lived a Christ honoring life.

00:31:34

Her Christianity was real.

00:31:40

She practiced what she preached.

00:31:44

She lived as she believed.

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What a testimony that is.

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And of course, if a person was to leave this world, they were to leave a message and saying, I lived a life pleasing to God because of His grace, because of His mercy, because I knew

00:32:10

that Jesus Christ came into the world to save a sinner like me, and He washed me and cleansed me of all my sin, and now I'm going to be with Him forever.

00:32:25

That's real Christianity.

00:32:28

That's genuine Christianity.

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That's the Christianity that God commends.

00:32:36

That's the Christianity, that's the faith

00:32:39

that will hear those welcome words, Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into your promised rest.

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So there's a world of difference between a superficial Christian religion and a real, genuine, deep walk

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with God in Christ.

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There's huge differences.

00:33:13

A way an empty religion will never change the life, never change the heart.

00:33:21

But true Christianity will transform the person from the inside out.

00:33:29

And even in the latter times, even in the dark times, even in the difficult times,

00:33:36

the Lord's grace is sufficient and our faith shines through.

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So let us go into this new week with a renewed commitment and determination to serve and honour and love the Lord, to prove to others not just by

00:34:04

our words, but by our practice and our lives that we are truly the Lord's, called by grace to serve Him because one day we'll be with Him forever.

00:34:22

Our gracious God and loving Father, we do pray, help us, help us to live for thee in these days.

00:34:32

Bless us and keep us this week.

00:34:35

Forgive us, O Lord, when we haven't lived as we should have done.

00:34:39

Help us to know what it is to trust in and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

00:34:45

Perhaps someone's seeking this morning, Lord, and only you know about it.

00:34:51

And O we pray that they would not give up, that they would know the kindness and the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

00:35:00

Perhaps someone, Lord, has lost their first love,

00:35:03

this morning they have been stirred and want to return to the Lord whom they love.

00:35:10

Oh, draw them with kindness and mercy.

00:35:13

Draw close to them, we pray.

00:35:15

May thy Spirit do that great work.

00:35:18

Not only has he done the work of conversion, but he can do the work of drawing back, drawing to.

00:35:29

We pray, Lord, hear our prayers.

00:35:32

Be with us now.

00:35:34

For Jesus sake, Amen.