

Counseling James
Testing for Genuine Faith Part 4
Key passage James 1:23-27
Reading James 1:21-27 Emphasis 26-27

Introduction

James 1:19–27 (NASB95)

In the passage before us, James presents a third test of a true believer. The first was his response to trials (1:1–12). The second was his response to temptation (1:13–18). The third is his response to the truth revealed in the Word of God (1:19–27).

MacArthur, J. (2001). [*James: Guidelines for a Happy Christian Life*](#) (p. 26). Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group.

A. If you have genuine faith...

1. If you have genuine faith you will receive the Word of God with eagerness and will submissively listen to it.
2. If you have genuine faith there will be a desire to live a life pleasing to the Lord out of a heart of gratitude.
3. If you have genuine faith it will show itself by you humbly welcoming the Word into your life so that it can change you.
4. If you have genuine faith it will show itself by you seeking to habitually doing what the Word says rather than being a mere hearer of the Word.

B. The Professional Christian

1. James has challenged us to be doers of the Word and now he gives a severe rebuke to what you may call the “professional Christian.”
2. Perhaps the simplest definition of a professional Christian is the one who does external, religious looking things but on the inside is unchanged. The professional Christian thus has much in common with the majority of the Pharisees in Jesus’ and James’ day.

c. Understanding that helps us understand vs 26-27

1. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

I. A Mark of Genuine Faith is Controlling Your Manner of Speech (vs 26)

A. "If"

1. "if" indicates a conditional statement
2. it means that some of the people reading this letter were sinning with their words
3. James does not point to anyone specific so he uses the term "anyone."

B. The Guilty Person(s) have a flawed perspective of self.

1. "Thinks" (considers) indicates that the person is using a subjective mental reasoning that is not necessarily true.

a. subjective means- something based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions.

b. objective means-(of a person or their judgment) not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.

2. In the context of James the person(s) truly believes he is religious, but there is no proper proof.

a. "I identify of a religious person."

b. No objective proof

c. the person cannot show it

d. the person is busy "doing" but mistakes that for "doing the Word."

3. "Himself" indicates that that the person is affirming his godliness.

a. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Romans 12:16 (NASB95)

b. The person is guilty of spiritual pride

c. He or she evaluates themselves and are pretty pleased by his evaluation.

d. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' Luke 18:11–12 (NASB95)

e. "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' Luke 18:13 (NASB95)

4. "religious" is an obscure terms and refers to externals

a. The Pharisee in Luke 18:12 refers to fasting and tithing to name two externals.

(1) Paul uses the term in Acts 26:5 to refer to when he lived as a Pharisee and did all that he was supposed to do.

b. Current things we think of that are external observances of religion

- (1) Tithing or giving
- (2) being baptized
- (3) attending CG or adult Sunday School
- (4) memorizing Scripture
- (5) church attendance
- (6) being in "the ministry" or "having a ministry"
- (7) being confirmed (some denominations)
- (8) knowing the Catechism

c. "and yet"

(1) James brings the subjective opinion up against truth

(2) and the truth is very uncomfortable

d. The person(s) "does not bridle his tongue"

(1) the picture is of an unruly horse that is not being controlled

(2) Notice that it is the responsibility of the person to bring their tongue under control.

(3) The tongue is not the only indicator of true spirituality but is one of the most reliable. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). *James* (p. 88). Chicago: Moody Press.

(4) James does not specify regarding the type of speech he is referring to but would include:

- (a) gossip
- (b) slander
- (c) lying, manipulative speech
- (d) speaking evil and plotting
- (e) grumbling or complaining
- (f) arrogant speech
- (g) wrathful speech
- (h) complaining or grumbling

5. If sinful speech patterns are habitual or characterize you then you are who James is after.

6. Numerous Proverbs in the Old Testament speak to the same issue.

7. "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ... For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:34, 37).

a. Religion that does not transform the heart, and thereby the tongue, is totally **worthless** in God's sight.

C. "You think you are religious but you are deceived"

1. deceives his own heart

a. the heart is our control center and does not refer to "emotion"

2. "worthless"

a. indicates that the religion is futile because it does not bring about the desired results

b. the word is used in the context of futile idol worship

(1) 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB95)

Test yourselves *to* see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

(2) James is assuming that true salvation will result in the putting away of sinful speech patterns.

- (a) Psa 15:1-5
- (b) Rom 1:28-32
- (c) 1 Cor. 6:9-11
- (d) 1 Jn. 3:8

3. Key point of verse 26: James is saying that the person is busy doing religious things without being saved first!

a. we need to be stunned by this!

b. we need to be bothered by this!

c. it shows God's perspective on something we tend to take lightly.

II. A second mark of genuine faith is showing Compassion to those who receive no compassion so as to not act as the world acts. (vs 27)

A. "Religion"

1. Qualitative statement

a. James is not identifying what true religion is, but is saying you can identify true religion by it's quality.

b. His examples are illustrations of quality religion.

2. "Pure" and "undefiled"

a. synonyms

(1) Pure means cleanliness

(2) Undefiled means free from contamination or free from defects\stains

(a) In 1 Peter 1:4 our salvation is referred to being undefiled

(b) In Hebrews 7:26 Christ is the high priest who was undefiled unlike human priests.

b. Best in the sight of God

(1) "You invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me' " (Matt. 15:6b-8).

(2) "In the sight of our Father"

(a) God determines what type of activities please him.

(b) Micah 6:6–8 (NASB95)

With what shall I come to the Lord *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God

(c) Isaiah 1:16–17 (NASB95)

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

B. Why orphans and widows?

1. Isa. 1:17-no one to defend orphans and widows

- (a) taken advantage of by evil people
- (b) property stolen
- (c) no voice

2. God speaks and defends

(a) Deuteronomy 10:17–19 (NASB95)

“For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.”So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

(b) Deuteronomy 24:17 (NASB95)

“You shall not pervert the justice due an alien *or* an orphan, nor take a widow’s garment in pledge.

C. What the verse does not mean

1. James is NOT advocating a social relief program to ALL orphans or widows. He is saying that the people should be reaching out to those within the church who were widows or orphans.

2. "At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" ... "Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow." And all the people shall say, "Amen." (Deut. 14:28–29; 27:19) MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). *James* (p. 90). Chicago: Moody Press.

3. God expects God's people to take care of God's people

a. Acts 6:1-Hellenistic widows being over looked in the daily distribution of food. Led to the establishment of deacons.

b. 1 Tim 5-A lot of detail about the care of widows, giving standards and regulations.

D. Keep oneself unstated by the world

1. World's method versus God's method

2. James is saying don't be like the world in their treatment of those who were helpless.

3. The world saw these people as easy pickings and weak.

4. Psa 68:5 (God's perspective) A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

Questions for the Community Groups

1. Read James 1. There are three tests for genuine faith found in James 1. Responses to the tests reveal the genuineness of our faith. What are the tests? (Ref. James 1:3-12; James 1: 13-18; James 1:19-27)
2. Based on how you identified the third test how would you rate the following behaviors as indications of genuine faith? A rating of 5 would be a good indication and a rating of 1 a poor indication.

___ wears Christian T-shirts and jewelry

___ has Christian bumper stickers on car (and drives the speed limit!)

___ gives regularly and sacrificially to the church

- _____ participates in regular missions and outreach efforts
- _____ sings on the worship team (sometimes even solos)
- _____ studies God's Word regularly and seeks to live it
- _____ attends church faithfully
- _____ has healthy, loving relationships with friends, family, co-workers, church members, and neighbors
- _____ prays fervently for the lost
- _____ owns all of Pastor Matt's writings and listens to all his sermons.

(Modified for MDF but otherwise...MacArthur, J. (2001). [*James: Guidelines for a Happy Christian Life*](#) (p. 25). Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group.

3. Read John 14:21-24. How does this teaching of Jesus add to your understanding of the relationship between true saving faith and obedience to the Word? What does obedience demonstrate?

4. What do the following passages say about resisting the world's influences on our obedience? (Rom. 8:4; John 8:31-36; 16:7-15; Gal. 5:16-26)

For self-examination

5. Why is humility necessary in hearing and obeying God's Word (James 1:21)? When do you find it most difficult to approach Scripture with a humble heart and a teachable spirit?

6) Are you aware of any specific situations in your life in which you are not doing what you know God's Word calls you to do? Why the reluctance on your part to obey? What are the potential consequences of your disobedience? How could Christian friends help you in this struggle?

MacArthur, J. (2001). [*James: Guidelines for a Happy Christian Life*](#) (p. 31). Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group.