

Sermon or Lesson: James 1:26 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Sinful Speech Equals Religion Worthless To God

INTRO: Have you ever been in a situation in which you observed a person in a group setting, and that person was very cordial, pleasant, accommodating, and supportive, so you began to develop an admiration of that person? But later in private, you observe that same person profusely speaking in a foul manner about all the people in the prior group setting. How did that make you feel? Were you shocked and did you quickly become disenchanted in your regard for that person? Furthermore, did it start to make you question the integrity of the group as well, even to the point where you were contemplating leaving the group? And now that you know the true nature of that person's attitude, do you think that person's cordiality in group settings was helpful, or perhaps worthless?

Let's see what our passage in James has to say about this same kind of situation but from a spiritual perspective.

READ: James 1:26, with verse 25 for context

In James, there are listed many examples of "deceives himself" in just the first chapter. Examples:

- - v.7 - the doubting believer who thinks he will receive things from the Lord;
- - v.11 - the rich believer who "fades away even while he goes about his business";
- - v.16 - the believer who thinks God is tempting him;
- - v.20 - the believer who thinks his anger accomplishes God purposes;
- - v.22 - the believer who thinks merely listening to the word without doing it accomplishes God's purposes;
- - v.26 - the believer who thinks his sinful speaking does not adversely effect his relationship with God.

[Lesson Question: Why in James are there listed so many examples of "deceives himself" in just the first chapter?]

SECTION POINT: From these examples, deceiving oneself is easy and common for believers to do.

- - Perhaps a common trap believers fall into as they become more religious is to deceive themselves into thinking that they have achieved righteous living before God when in reality they have not because they are only hearing the Word and not doing it.
- - Apparently there are many pitfalls believers can fall into in regard to accurately self-assessing their own spiritual condition before God.
- - Some people practice a deceptive and "worthless religion" (v.26), and others practice a genuine "pure and faultless religion" (v.27).
- - Perhaps there is a second supportive theme in the Book of James: practical Christian living requires correct non-self-deceiving thinking.

[Lesson Question: Does verse 26 tie into the topic of verse 25 and preceding verses that we are to be hearer-doers of the Word, and if so, how?]

Verse 26 ties into the topic of verse 25 and preceding verses that we are to be hearer-doers of the Word, in that:

- - Verse 26 lists a specific way in which being a hearer-doer of the Word is to be carried out.
 - - Verse 26 cites a specific test to determine if one is a hearer-only or a hearer-doer.
 - - Verse 26 points out that considering oneself to be in right-standing before God is an erroneous self-assessment if there is not adequate comprehensiveness in one's being a doer of the Word. (v.22)
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[Lesson Question: What are the implications of the meaning of the following key phrases in verse 26?]

“considers himself religious”:

“religious” = Strong's #2357 “religious; ceremonious in worship (as demonstrative), i.e. pious”; (AMP) “piously observant of the external duties of his faith”

- - “Considers himself religious” carries a tone and sense of self-assessing that one's performing of religious practice is acceptable to God because of the visible proof of conducting external duties of the faith in an outer pious manner.
 - - In the context of this verse, the implication is that the piousness of the outer performing of religious practice may be mismatched within the person by his/her inner corrupted spiritual heart condition.
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“does not keep a tight rein on his tongue”:

“keep a tight rein” = Strong's #5468 “bridling; to be a bit-leader, i.e. to curb (figuratively)”

- - Sinning in the way we speak is not a minor matter to God.
 - - Controlling one's tongue is decisive in the control of one's entire behavior - much like a horse's rein or bit. (see vv.3:3ff)
 - - Immoral ways of speaking cannot be excused biblically.
 - - We will give priority attention to our speech if we truly desire to mature as a believer.
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“his religion is worthless”:

“worthless” = Strong's #3152 “vain; empty, i.e. (literally) profitless, or (specifically) an idol”

- - The practice of religion from a position of disobedient faith characterized by sinful speaking has no value to God - such practice of religion is vain, empty, profitless, worthless.
- - God dismisses and throws out the value of all of that person's religious practice, even though some of the religious practice may appear quite pious and beneficial.
- - The sinfully-speaking person's standing and relationship with God is actually seriously unhealthy, being corrupted by that person's sinful speaking and being corrupted by that person's self-deceiving in thinking his/her relationship with God is fine.

[Lesson Question: What can be reasonably theorized as to why people with sinful speech think they are in healthy standing before God?]

SECTION POINT: Religious people with sinful speech think they are in healthy standing before God because their self-deception is based on flawed premises that are not God-accurate.

Religious people with sinful speech fail to embrace the truth about:

- - how sinful their words are;
- - how much damage their words cause;
- - how their heart speaks out of their mouth: “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34), and from the heart “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him” (Matthew 12:35); therefore their heart-condition is corrupted, which is the source of and yields corrupted speaking;
- - how pious-looking outward religious practice does not cover over or negate or excuse or recompense the consequences of sinful speaking.

BIG IDEA: Your religious practice is worthless to God if your mouth spews sinfulness, which is indicative that your heart is corrupt.

APPLICATIONS:

- - For those of you believers who appear pious and religious, if we attached a microphone to your lapel to record you all day long for a week, would we consistently hear pious words to match your pious appearance or would we hear sinful words that hypocritically contradict your pious appearance?
 - - Has your mouth been spewing sinfulness, such as gossip, slander, malice, disparaging, mocking, ridicule, contempt, criticalness, judgmental-ism, coarse joking, vile words, and etc.?
 - - You do realize that if you are “not keeping a tight rein on your tongue”, God rejects your pious-looking outer religious practice?
 - - Maybe it is time right here and now to put an end to your corrupt speaking. To do this successfully though, you will need to get your inner spiritual heart condition right with God. Therefore, some serious confession and repentance are in order for you to do right here right now between you and God.
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