

Sermon or Lesson: James 1:27 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: God Accepts Your Practice Of Religion When It Is Pure

INTRO: Have you ever taken a drink from a glass and as you were setting the glass back down see a big nasty bug swimming in your drink? Or worse yet, the big nasty bug got sucked into your mouth with the liquid and you felt something chunky moving in your mouth? What did you do? Immediately spit it out and scream? Ahhhh !! Then what did you do? Dump the drink out, right? Why? Because it was contaminated - not acceptable.

As we look at this passage, we are going to see that God does the same thing spiritually when religion is offered to Him contaminated with sin.

READ: James 1:27, with verses 25-26 for context

[Lesson Question: How does verse 27 relate to verse 26?]

Verse 27 relates to verse 26 in that it is:

- - offering the God-approved behavior, which was being addressed in verse 26, i.e. religion that has worth;
 - - accentuating the difference between man's perspective and God's perspective;
 - - giving a general illustration of what "doing the Word" (v.25) means or manifests itself in the life of a hearer-doer believer who does not deceive himself;
 - - focusing on the external practice of religion as evidence of the internal state of one's religion.
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[Lesson Question: What are some implications of the phrase "accepts as pure and faultless"?)

"accepts as pure and faultless":

"accepts" = Strong's #3844 "in the presence of; near; i.e. from beside (literally or figuratively), at (or in) the vicinity of (objectively or subjectively), to the proximity with"

"pure" = Strong's #2513 "clean (literally or figuratively)"

"faultless" = Strong's #0283 "undefiled; unsoiled, i.e. (figuratively) pure"

- - In the presence of God the Father, He needs to find that the religion being practiced is comprehensively righteous and has no aspect or element of it that is sinful.
- - One correlation is that the religion being practiced needs to have the same character quality as God has - purity of righteousness; in His presence it must be sinless-ly pure as He is.
- - This requires, then, that the religion being practiced must utilize all of: sinless motives, sinless incentives, sinless approach, sinless thinking, sinless speech, sinless actions, and etc.

- - Because we believers are still imperfect in this life, we cannot achieve this comprehensive sinless practice of religion in its ultimate sense all the time, but we can strive to excel in our religious practice to be sinless as much as we can with the empowering of the Spirit. (see Galatians 5:16)

[Lesson Question: What does this verse infer in regard to religion that is opposite of “pure and faultless”?]

In regard to religion that is opposite of “pure and faultless”, this verse infers:
- - that God rejects the essence, contents, and practice of self-deceiving religion;
- - of course the world would vehemently disagree with this contention.

[Lesson Question: Why are these two manifestations of acceptable religion listed? Why not list something else - like ‘love God’ and ‘love your neighbor’?]

These two manifestations of acceptable religion are listed here, and not something else like ‘love God’ and ‘love your neighbor’, because:

- - The Book of James is focusing on putting your faith into practice and specific ways to do this.
 - - These are two examples and not a full explanation.
 - - One is an example of outer uprightness among humans, and the other is an example of inner uprightness before God.
 - - As this verse states, both are examples of how to practice religion that God accepts.
 - - Essentially, these two examples are variations of loving God and loving your neighbor.
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[Lesson Question: Why has something relatively obscure as “to look after orphans and widows in their distress” been cited?]

A relatively obscure principle of “to look after orphans and widows in their distress” has been cited here because:

- - How we respond to people in distress is just as important to God as other aspects of our practice of religion - but the condition of the heart towards God seems likewise to be equally important. (1 Corinthians 13:3)
 - - It adds not only how we speak to one another (v.26) but how we treat one another.
 - - Love for God and love for neighbor requires love in action towards our neighbor.
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[Lesson Question: Why has something that seems out of place, “to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”, also been cited here?]

Another seemingly out-of-place principle of “to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”, also has been cited here because:

- - If we have true and acceptable faith, we will be naturally doing preventative spiritual things like these in our normal course of living.

- - Love for God, by nature and definition, also requires not loving the philosophy of the world and instead actively rejecting it. (cf. v.4:4)
 - - Engaging in this preventative action denotes and requires putting up one's guard ("to keep oneself from"), especially because we are being continuously bombarded, and in subtle or seductive ways; e.g. polluting content is within almost every moment of television shows and commercials, and within the lyrics of most secular songs.
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[Lesson Question: Do these two examples have anything in common?]

These two examples have in common that:

- - both require intentional deliberate action in alignment with one's faith - doers of the word;
 - - both perhaps run contrary to what everyone else is doing - contrary to our nature / society / culture - contrary to the moral "pollution of the world";
 - - both examples embrace "purity and faultlessness" - of heart and of action.
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BIG IDEA: God accepts your practice of religion when it is pure, without sin both outwardly in action and inwardly of the heart.

APPLICATIONS:

- - When you think about it, what good does it do to practice religion if the divine being you are trying to worship rejects your practice of religion to Him? You have put in a lot of time, hard work, and effort for nothing - for no lasting gain to you, and for no reciprocated amicable relational interaction from Him and technically with Him (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). (Note: This sounds like Cain in Genesis 4:1-7.)
 - - In light of what has just been learned in this passage, are you going to now make every effort you can to live out your faith so that in all ways you are pleasing to God?
 - - Let's start right now in this religious gathering of fellow believers. What can you do right now to improve how you conduct yourself henceforth in this religious gathering so that your conduct is comprehensively pleasing to God?
 - - No more selfish ambition or manipulating - to be in power or control?
 - - No more criticizing or arguing or rebelling - demanding that things be done your way?
 - - No more pride - trying to make yourself look good?
 - - No more greed - trying to acquire for yourself the charity from your religious group that is suppose to go to others who are more in need?
 - - No more worldliness when you are outside of church gatherings?
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Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary". *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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