

# Bathing Your Religion

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*Js 1:27*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. How would you like to live with a person who never took a bath?
1. It is said that Isabella of Spain boasted that she only took two baths in her life—one when she was born & one when she married Ferdinand. She later received a bath after she died.
  2. If I had been Christopher Columbus & had to ask her for support, America still would be waiting to be discovered!
- B. We greatly value cleanliness.
1. In fact, we likely value cleanliness a little too much.
    - a. Our love of hand sanitizers is weakening our resistance & allowing superbugs to attack many people.
    - b. Research has shown that children whose parents have them wash their hands often have weaker immune systems as adults than those children whose parents weren't quite as concerned with such things.
  2. But, when it comes to religion we dare not be like Isabella of Spain & it's not possible to be overly concerned with the purity of our religion.
- C. In tonight's text, James is apparently dealing with some "pretenders."
1. These individuals were active in church life & worshiped regularly, but their hearts were not right before God.
  2. It seems that particularly these individuals had a hard time controlling their tongues, for James says:
    - a. "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (v 26).
    - b. In other words, the mouth is a "window" to the heart & how one speaks determines whether or not his heart is attuned to God.
  3. The word "religious" further carries connotations of people who just pretended to be Christians.
    - a. The word refers to the worship of God, especially in terms of public worship, fasting, or giving to the needy.
    - b. In other words, the Greek word "religion" refers to the visible acts that one carries out before others.
      - 1) In fact, the adjective "religious" only occurs at verse 26; the noun religion occurs four times in the New Testament & only **once** is it used positively.
        - a) In Acts 26:5, Paul uses the term to refer to his former life of strict adherence to the Pharisees in the "religion" of Judaism.
        - b) In Col 2:18, Paul uses the word to refer to the ungodly practice of worshiping the angels.
        - c) In Js 1:26, the Lord's brother refers to religion that is worthless.
        - d) James does use the term positively in tonight's text to speak of "pure and undefiled" religion.
      - 2) Thus, 80% of the time that you find the word "religion" in the New Testament, it's religion that needs a bath. It's dirty. It doesn't honor God. It's not service to God at all.

## A BATHED RELIGION IS A SERVING RELIGION

- A. “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”
- B. A bathed religion serves orphans & widows.
1. The Greek term for “to visit” is loaded with meaning & has nothing to do with a mere social visit.
    - a. The word itself means to look upon or to examine.
      - 1) A physician does not examine a patient simply to see the patient, but he does so in order that he might discover what is wrong & what can be done to help.
      - 2) The idea in this verse is much the same—that one “examines” widows & orphans to see what their suffering is & what can be done to alleviate that suffering.
    - b. The word is often used for the care God shows his people. E.g.: “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?” (Heb 2:6).
    - c. When people do the visiting, the idea is to see how the person is. E.g.: “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are’” (Acts 15:36).
    - d. Therefore, in visiting widows & orphans, the Christian looks after them & sees what he can do to alleviate their suffering.
  2. Why would James single out “orphans and widows”?
    - a. We must understand that care was not given to orphans & widows in the first century as it is today.
      - 1) Today, widows have Social Security and likely have a pension from their husband. She can, if she is able and has the need, find employment.
      - 2) Orphans will be provided for by the state, if need be.
    - b. But, in the day of James, none of these “safety nets” existed.
      - 1) Orphans & widows had no means of support & they were not able to find employment.
      - 2) Therefore, they were totally dependent upon the benevolence of others.
    - c. God has always been greatly concerned with widows & orphans.
      - 1) “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me’” (Deut 26:12-13).
      - 2) “Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut 27:19).
- C. What do we need to take away from this passage? We live in an era where orphans & widows aren’t as powerless as they were in James’ day; therefore, what should we take away?
1. Obviously, we need to be involved in caring for orphans & widows.
    - a. The government’s action does not remove our responsibility. We dare not sit idly by & allow the government to do what God has told us to do!
    - b. “Honor widows who are truly widows” (1 Tm 5:3).
    - c. “If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows” (1 Tm 5:16). While Paul says that widows are to be provided for first by their families, notice that the church is to care for widows who are all alone.
  2. How are we to care for widows & orphans?
    - a. We can do so as a congregation.
      - 1) Notice that Paul says that the church is to “care for those who are truly widows.”
      - 2) This congregation has at times provided support from its funds to care for widows & orphans—whether it is to Potter Children’s Home or helping an widowed lady pay her utilities.
    - b. While we can work collectively, we can also work individually to help widows & orphans.
      - 1) The pantry items are often provided to widows; the baby items are given to children who (sometimes) have been abandoned by their fathers; our support to Potter Children’s Home through our change cans & pantry items help care for orphans.
      - 2) Of course, we can offer assistance privately—whether it’s helping a widow with some yard work or helping an orphan with school work.
  3. Two preachers were having lunch.
    - a. One turned to the other & said, “Mark, do you know what the number one sin of the church in America is?”
    - b. “It’s not the plague of internet pornography that is consuming our men. It’s not that the divorce rate in the church is roughly the same as society at large. The number one sin of the church in America is that its leaders are not on their knees crying out to God, ‘Bring us the drug-addicted, bring us the prostitutes, bring us the destitute, bring us the gang leaders, bring us those with AIDS, bring us the people nobody else wants, whom only you can heal, and let us love them in your name until they are whole.’”

- c. How much do we seek to help widows & orphans be whole? Is your religion clean, or do you need to give it a bath?

## **A BATHED RELIGION IS A SEVERED RELIGION**

- A. “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”
- B. Not only does a bathed religion serve others, but a bathed religion severs its ties to the world.
  1. God has always desired that his people keep themselves away from the world.
    - a. He commanded the Israelites to be different from the nations around them: “When the LORD your God gives [the Canaanite nations] over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:2-4).
    - b. In this current age, we must keep ourselves “unstained from the world.”
      - 1) “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2).
      - 2) “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor 6:14-16).
  2. Why is it so important that we keep ourselves “unstained from the world”?
    - a. God expects his people to draw others to him.
      - 1) “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:13-16).
      - 2) If I fail to keep myself separate from the world, how can I be the “salt of the earth”? If I’m no different from my neighbor, how can I be “the light of the world”?
    - b. Becoming stained with the world leads us into sin & away from God.
      - 1) That’s precisely what happened when Solomon married his foreign wives: “When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Ki 11:4).
      - 2) If we allow the world to stain us, our heart will not be attuned to God & we can easily fall away as did Solomon.
      - 3) Mithridates was overcome in battle by Lucullus, and sought safety in flight.
        - a) Seeing his pursuers were gaining upon him, he caused great quantities of gold to be scattered in the way.
        - b) The Romans stopped to pick up the treasure, and Mithridates escaped.
        - c) The Romans were overcome with the things of this world & took their eyes off their goal.
          - i. If we are overcome with the things of this world, we will also take our eyes off the goal.
          - ii. Are your eyes on the goal tonight?
          - iii. Is your religion “pure and undefiled before God, the Father,” or do you need to give your religion a bath tonight in the blood of Jesus?