

James 1:26-27
July 14, 2024



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

True faith and true religion lead us to love others with the love of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think of something you own that is certified as “genuine”—perhaps a pair of genuine leather boots or genuine collector’s item. What makes it genuine? How does that make the item more valuable?

What are some “genuine” traits people look for in other people?

Many of us have something in our possession that has been deemed “genuine.” Maybe as a kid you had a set of a certain kind of toy that was a collector’s item. It came with official tags certifying the authenticity; it was a big deal to add to the collection. Or perhaps it was a collection of baseball cards, with only a certain number produced for each player. Whatever it may be, when something is deemed genuine, it means it is



authentic. It possesses the character it claims. That is what James points us to in the text today. Jesus calls us to true and genuine faith—to have the substance we claim when we say we follow Him.

In this section of James, we learn that true and acceptable religion must include controlled speech, sacrificial care for the needy, and clear separation from the world. As we consider these final two verses of James 1, we will be faced with a choice: are we going to define our faith on our terms, or are we going to submit to God’s terms for genuine faith? Genuine faith leads to a pursuit of holiness and love for others.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 1:26-27.

James concluded the first chapter of his letter by summing up what obedient faith looks like for the believer. Having just explained that our faith is not only theoretical but also should be lived out in what we do, he defined true religion by highlighting three aspects that should mark the Christian life.

What three markers does James give for one who is truly living out his or her faith?

The first marker of genuine religion is a bridled tongue (v.26). This isn’t surprising after James’s exhortation to be quick to listen and slow to speak (vv.19-20). Indeed, a quick tongue can often lead us to speak out of anger and sin. Of course, a bridled tongue doesn’t mean we remain silent. But it does mean true believers demonstrate fully the fruit of self-control (Galatians 5:23)—not being bent any and every way by the flesh. Otherwise, according to James, we are only deceiving our own hearts.

Secondly, one whose religion is pure and genuine demonstrates true love and care for the orphan and widow. A true believer takes care of and advocates for those whom society has oppressed. This was by no means a new command from James, as God has always instructed His people to care for widows and orphans. This is seen throughout the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 10:18; Isaiah1:17; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). The love God has demonstrated to us should be reflected in how we love others—especially the last, the least, and the lost.

Finally, true faith means that we remain “unstained from the world” (v. 27). If we have been rescued from our sin, then we have been set apart. Therefore, our lives going forward should look different than the world around us (1 John 5:18). James’s language had echoes of a pure and unblemished sacrifice (2 Peter3:14), which is indeed the call on our lives—to present ourselves daily as a living sacrifice (Romans12:1).



Which of these three markers of genuine faith stands out to you as the most personally challenging? Why?

Aren't words just words? Why does James say words are a test of true religion?

James wrote these verses as absolutes. Does this mean that if you say hurtful things in the heat of the moment or stream a series that is worldly, you're not really saved? What does it mean?

Do you think this is how most Christ followers would define religion? Why or why not?

In these verses, James described those who practiced outward religious acts like public prayer, a regular presence at temple worship, fasting, and giving without having or demonstrating a genuine love for people. Their focus was on the works they demonstrated, but those works were not motivated by love—as was made clear by the loving acts they did not do.

What are some outward religious acts people today might be tempted to believe prove their faith in God?

How are you tempted sometimes to live that way?

Why must true outward religion demonstrate itself with inner control?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is it a struggle for us to look beyond ourselves to the hurting and helpless, such as the widows and orphans James mentioned? How can we as a small group help hurting people see Jesus in their everyday lives?

In what situations do you most need to submit to Jesus so that you might better control your tongue?

What would change in your life this week if you were to keep yourself “unstained from the world”?



PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Thank God that His Word lovingly confronts our contrived religious ideals. Ask Him to penetrate our hearts and minds with His truth and the power of His Spirit until our lives are a full manifestation of true and acceptable religion that expresses itself through love.

LOOKING AHEAD

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study, **Faith and Works: A Study of James.***

July 21, 2024 --- James 2:1-7



COMMENTARY

James 1:26-27

1:26. This verse describes a person who considered himself to be religious but did not listen well to God's Word. The person focused on the externals of religious action such as public prayer, fasting, giving, and worship attendance. James did not belittle this action, but he added that inner control of the tongue must accompany outward performance.

Keep a tight rein on his tongue sometimes described the bridle used with a horse. The tongue is compared to an unmanageable horse which needed bit and bridle to tame its excesses. Controlling the tongue is so important that James devoted most of chapter 3 to its use.

James leveled two accusations at the person who practiced outward religion without inner control. First, he deceives himself. This repeats the idea of verse 22 in different words. What a pity to find after a lifetime of pseudo-religion that you have only been practicing self-deception!

Second, his religion is worthless. Peter used the same word—translated as empty—to describe useless pagan practices his readers had followed before they became Christians (1 Pet. 1:18). Religious practices without inner control have no more saving power than paganism.

1:27. Two evidences demonstrate pure religion: deeds of compassion and inner purity. This does not reduce Christianity to mere benevolence. True religion has more features than James has mentioned. The emphasis here is that for God to accept our worship it must be accompanied by loving ministry and a holy life. Both Christians and non-Christians could see and understand this type of evidence.

To look after orphans and widows demanded demonstrations of concern and active involvement. The psalmist pictured God as a defender of orphans and widows (Ps. 68:5). Christ used the word for look after in Matthew 25:43 to describe the ministry of caring for those in prison. Obeying this appeal calls for more than an occasional visit. It demands genuine compassion and true engagement.

(Not) polluted demands a freedom from contamination by the world. Peter used this word to refer to Christ as "without. . . defect" (1 Pet. 1:19). Christians are to model their purity after that of Jesus.

