

Is Your Religion Faulty or Faultless?

James 1:26-27

It's possible that as you began to enter those days of figuring out that girls, if you were a boy, or boys, if you were a girl, didn't have the dreaded cootie bug. That's the magical disease any child of the opposite gender had, which you could get but didn't want just by touching them. Moms were somehow immune. Eventually you figured out that wasn't the case at all, but instead there was something magical that made you feel a bit funny inside, especially if there was someone of particular interest. When you saw that person you felt like butterflies were fluttering around inside. It was a weird sensation.

However it made you feel, it was at times a bit unsettling because you really had no explanation for it until years later when you began to understand the nature of things when it comes to boys and girls and love. Maybe you were one of those who had an eye for a certain boy or girl and you began to entertain thoughts about liking them because they gave you goose bumps when you saw them or thought about them or talked with them. You wondered if they might like you too.

Somewhere someone got the idea that if you picked a daisy and pulled off the petals one at a time it would reveal the heart of the other person. It was considered to be nature's magic eight ball. Plucking the first petal you repeated in your mind, she loves me, the second petal, she loves me not. Eventually you worked your way around the head of the daisy and if it didn't end up the way you wanted, you might pop the head off the stem, just so you would end on the note you were hoping for and the matter would be settled. The day finally came when you decided to bite the proverbial bullet and express your love to Sally only to find out that she didn't have the same feelings for you, but instead liked Billy. Maybe she had plucked her own daisy. You had somehow deceived yourself into thinking something that wasn't true at all.

The reality of **Jeremiah 17:9** hits you like a hard, cold slap to the face. **"The heart is deceitful above all things."** It deceives about a great many things.

How often have we convinced ourselves of something that is not true? That is the reality and fact of our passage today found in **James 1:26-27**. Our passage tells us that we can talk ourselves into believing something is true that is in fact untrue. In **verse 26** we see that a faulty religion is exposed.

I. A FAULTY RELIGION IS EXPOSED – v. 26

For many serious runners back in the 1970's and 80's, the name Jim Fixx was synonymous with running. Overweight and smoking two packs of cigarettes a day, he took steps toward a healthier lifestyle by taking up running. For 15 years he ran 80 miles a week. He not only pounded the pavement with all his running but also pounded the philosophy that regular exercise would lengthen one's lifespan. That's why it came as a complete shock to the running world when, at age 52, he died of a massive heart attack and that while running. With all the running he did, he had convinced himself that it wasn't necessary to see a doctor, a visit that would have revealed a chronic health condition. Doctors speculate that his heart was so strong that it masked the shortness of breath and chest pains associated with arterial heart disease. One would think that a member of the high-IQ club *Mensa* would know enough that regular checkups no matter how healthy, should be pursued. He had convinced himself, deceived himself into thinking something that wasn't true.

We aren't much different. We deceive ourselves into thinking lots of things that are false. When seatbelts became a required apparatus for driving safety, many were under the false belief that they could go faster because the seatbelt would protect them from injury.

I'm going to go out on a limb here, but we were told early on that wearing masks, social distancing when in public, quarantining ourselves at home, using hand sanitizer, getting the vaccine and other such measures would eliminate this virus. Here we are a year later and as of March 4th it's reported that there are over 29 million confirmed cases and north of 500,000 deaths, just in the US alone. Now, please

don't get me wrong, measures are necessary to help in combatting the virus, but many believe that these measures will somehow make them immune.

We can deceive ourselves by faulty thinking and that's the first point to make from our passage.

A. Their Thinking Is Faulty – v. 26a

First there is their consideration.

1. Their consideration

The NIV uses the term consider.

The KJV uses the term seem.

The Amplified uses the term think.

The dictionary defines it as having a certain appearance, to have the look of being, to give the impression of, to be apparently true, something that appears real.

If I put on a blue uniform with a badge, I can give the impression that I am a police officer.

If I put on a camouflage outfit, I can make it look like I'm in the army.

If I put on a tall, white mushroom looking cap and apron, I can appear to be a chef.

If I put on a white lab coat with a stethoscope draped around my neck, I can look like a doctor.

By looking at me in any of those outfits, you may have the impression that I am in fact a real police officer, a soldier, a chef or a doctor when in reality none of it is true.

James is saying that this person seems to be something that he is not.

In **Galatians 2** we have the account where Paul describes having to confront Peter. After the event with Cornelius and his family where the gospel was preached to Gentiles and they were saved, Peter started hanging out with Gentiles, that is, until the Jews showed up and Peter began to ignore the Gentiles for fear of what the Jews would say. Paul confronted him and essentially said he was being hypocritical. He was giving a false impression.

When we seem to be something we are not, we are being hypocrites. We deceive ourselves and others.

An old farmer once said "Be who ya is, cuz if ya is who ya ain't then ya ain't who ya is."

Some of these believers James was writing to gave the impression of being something they weren't. They seemed to be religious. That's their condition.

2. Their condition

I had a conversation this past week with one of my cousins. He's interested in going into ministry. He recently got a Master of Divinity degree and he was calling to get some advice from me. For about a year he and his wife had been attending a church and he was looking for some ministry opportunity in the church and talked with the pastor. A number of years ago his wife walked out on him and after several years he remarried. The pastor told him that because he had been divorced he would not be able to serve in any capacity in the church, but he could come in and warm a pew and, oh, by the way, the pastor told him that he had been attending there long enough that it was time to start wearing a collared shirt and tie. He's no longer at that church.

James says there were some who gave the appearance of being religious. That word simply refers to outward acts of religion. The person who appears to be religious gives the outward impression of something that isn't true on the inside, though we will see in a moment that they really believe they are. This person is concerned with all the outward observances of his beliefs. We might use the term legalistic or even Pharisaical.

In **Matthew 6** Jesus condemned such outward appearance of religion that is only motivated by getting the attention of others who merely give the impression of being religious or pious.

In **verses 1-4** Jesus condemned the act of giving to the needy when it was accompanied with great fanfare. The Pharisees would blow a trumpet to announce they were helping the poor. Instead of doing it discreetly, they wanted to give the impression to everyone else that they took their religion seriously.

The week before His crucifixion, Jesus was with

His disciples in the Temple. They were watching people drop their offering into the collection box. He praised the widow who gave two small coins. It was all she had. But He condemned those who gave out of their abundance. My mind's eye imagines them shaking their money bag just before they dropped it into the box. Or maybe they let the coins roll slowly out of their hand so that the clinking sound when it reached the bottom would draw attention.

[I heard of a church going through a building campaign. A very wealthy man in the congregation would give a sizeable donation if the pastor would acknowledge his gift publicly in the service.](#)

In **Matthew 6** Jesus also condemned their religious prayers in **verses 5-15**. The Pharisees stood in the synagogue and on the street corners and prayed loudly so everyone could hear. They were lofty prayers, wordy prayers, prayers of self-righteousness. It reminds me of when Jesus told the story of two men entering the Temple to pray. One was a religious leader who exalted his piety for keeping the law and fasting. He was telling God how lucky God was to have him on His team.

In **verses 16-18** Jesus condemned their fasting. So that others would notice they were fasting they would powder their face to make it look like they were pale and gaunt.

On a couple of occasions Paul described how religious he was before his salvation.

Galatians 1:14 **“I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”**

Philippians 3:5 **“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”**

He was as religious as anyone could be, but he

continued by saying his religion was worthless, faulty.

Those with a faulty religion are zealous to keep the traditions, follow festivals, and observe rituals. They go through the motions of keeping their religion without having a real heart of worship. Many will stand before the Lord on the judgment day arguing that they were very religious – prophesied, drove out demons, performed miracles all in His name only to hear that the Lord didn't know them. They gave the appearance of being religious, but it was faulty.

In **Psalm 51** as David confessed his sins to God, he acknowledged that God didn't want sacrifice or even burnt offerings. God doesn't want external religious behavior. He desires a broken and contrite heart. (**Psalm 51:16-17**)

In **I Samuel 15**, Saul couldn't wait any longer for Samuel and took it upon himself to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. When Samuel finally arrived, he condemned Saul and told him that God had taken the kingdom from him. Saul tried to excuse his behavior, but Samuel replied: **“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in observing the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than the fat of rams.” (I Samuel 15:22)**

Religious rituals mean nothing to God if first there isn't a heart of obedience.

Amos 5:21-23

We can come every week to church, sing all the songs and do so with gusto, we can pray, we can give, we can serve the needy, we can take communion, we can go through the motions but all we do is give the appearance of being religious. That's the condition of the heart that considers itself to be religious. Their thinking is faulty and faulty thinking is exposed by a faulty tongue.

B. Their Tongue Is Faulty – v. 26b

Once more James has something to say about the tongue. **Do you get the idea that some of these believers had a problem with the tongue?** The tongue gets us into trouble because it reveals what's

in the heart. The tongue will show others the worthless nature of our religion. James is saying that we can go through all the motions of appearing to be religious by keeping rituals and traditions and festivals but if we lie or speak unkindly about someone or gossip or slander someone or even take God's name in vain, we show that we don't value our religious observances, or even the God we say we serve at all. It's meaningless. If our talk isn't consistent with what we say we believe, the only person we're fooling, the only person we're deceiving is ourselves. No one else will buy it. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:37** that our words will condemn us.

The person who trusts in his external forms of religion will sooner or later have his faulty religion exposed by his mouth. He deceives himself into thinking that he is something he is not and all his religious activity has no bearing. It's considered worthless, futile, vain, meaningless, pointless.

When we look back at **verse 22**, we are told that we deceive ourselves when we think that all we have to do is hear the Word of God and that will somehow make us spiritually mature, when James says we need to actually do something with it. We need to act on it, and act on it right away. Doing implies immediate and obedient action. In that verse, the word is compound in the Greek and literally means to reason falsely or deceive by false reasoning.

The word deceive in **verse 26** is a different Greek word and means to cheat or to give a false impression whether by appearance, statement or influence. This religious person doesn't keep his tongue in check. It is unrestrained.

It's been estimated that the average person will speak 18,000 words in a day, enough for a 54-page book. In a year that amounts to 66 – 800-page volumes. Up to 1/5th of the average person's life is spent talking.

I love the imagery of the word bridle in the KJV. In ancient days, a bridle was simply a loop on the halter rope that passed around the horse's lower jaw. The purpose of the bridle was to control the

horse. Picture yourself with a bridle on your mouth intended to keep your mouth in check, to keep you from speaking falsehood that serves really only to deceive yourself. James says the only one who is deluded is the individual. Everyone else can see through his false appearance.

John MacArthur notes that if the tongue isn't controlled by God, chances are, neither is the heart.

Someone wrote this little poem.

You're writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and words that you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you.
Does your tongue expose a faulty religion?

So what does true religion look like? James gives us an answer in **verse 27** where we see a faultless religion is explained.

II. A FAULTLESS RELIGION IS EXPLAINED – v. 27

Oswald Chambers makes a very profound observation when he writes "The destined end of man is not happiness, nor health, but holiness."

Now bear in mind that what James is going to say in **verse 27** is not how we become holy, how we are justified in the sight of God, how we are saved. He explains what pure and faultless religion looks like and is accepted by God, one that is evident by a controlled tongue, a compassionate heart and a careful walk.

Notice right away that James draws a distinct contrast between a faulty religion and faultless religion. Let me add that this is not an exhaustive list made up of only three components for godly living. Each can be expanded to include many other things that should be evident as we exhibit them.

The first is their tongue is controlled.

A. Their Tongue Is Controlled

I'm not going to go into much detail here since we will do that at length in **chapter 3**. But suffice it to say that if not keeping the tongue in check is a sign

of a faulty religion, then keeping the tongue is the sign of a faultless religion. Scripture gives us some clues about what keeping the tongue looks like.

Colossians 4:6 “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer every man.”

In **Colossians 3:8** we are told to rid ourselves of slander and filthy language.

Leviticus 19:11 tells us not to lie.

I Peter 3:10 “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.”

In **Ephesians 4:29** Paul instructs us not to let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths but only what will build others up and encourage them. In **verse 32** it says to be kind which implies both in our actions and words.

Proverbs 10:19 “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

Proverbs 15:4 “The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.”

Proverbs 21:23 “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.”

Psalms 34:12-13 “Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.”

We will come back to the tongue in **chapter 3**, so let me just say here that the keeping the tongue is important in expressing a heart that strives to be godly in what we say. Let me also add that the word “keep” suggests a regular, continuous action. We must have a controlled tongue.

James mentions a second component for a faultless religion. Their heart is compassionate.

B. Their Heart Is Compassionate

It is characterized by looking for and looking out for the needs of others, especially those who can't care for themselves. He mentions two specific

groups that should be helped. They had tremendous challenges. Orphans obviously didn't have any adult care. There was no welfare system, no foster care program, no government assistance to help them. They were on their own.

Like orphans, widows also had a tough time. You will recall the story of Ruth in the Old Testament. Because of a famine, Elimelech and Naomi, with their two sons, moved out of Judah to Moab. They were there for quite some time, long enough for the two sons to get married and for all three men to die. Eventually the famine ended and Naomi decided to move back to Bethlehem since she didn't have anyone to care for her in Moab. She encouraged her two widowed daughters-in-law to return to their respective families. The culture then and in New Testament days was that family took care of widows. In Naomi's case she didn't have any so headed home. Ruth went with her. According to the Law, the poor and widows could glean in the fields of farmers and pick whatever was left by the harvesters. Specific instruction was given in the Law about caring for the orphans and widows. Jobs were scarce, there was no Social security or retirement benefits or insurance to live on.

When we show compassion to the needy, we show the heart of God. **Deuteronomy 14:28-29** tells us that every three years they were to bring out all the tithes collected from that year's produce so that the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows could eat and be satisfied. That passage ends by saying that when they did this God would bless the work of their hands.

Psalms 68:5 tells us that God has a special heart for orphans and widows. It says He is “**A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.**”

When we show compassion to the orphans and widows, we demonstrate the heart of God by being their defender and provider.

We have a great opportunity coming up the end of this month to show God's love to women and children being helped by LACASA. Because of

circumstances in their lives, we might consider them widows and orphans. The Easter baskets we put together are a small way to show God's love.

Within our community and church there are lots of ways that we can outwardly demonstrate a compassionate heart for orphans and widows.

Chuck Swindoll suggests that "true faith touches people's lives. The truth should manifest itself not only in words, but in deeds."

I John 3:18 "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

J. Vernon McGee adds "A child of God ought to be in personal contact with the sorrow of the world and the problems of the world...I believe there is a grave danger in our having a religion of the sanctuary but not a religion of the street...We should be in contact with the world in a personal way, with tenderness, kindness and helpfulness."

A faultless religion is explained through a controlled tongue and a compassionate heart. James gives us one more evidence of a faultless religion that God accepts. Their walk is careful.

C. Their Walk Is Careful

Where one speaks of generosity, this speaks of godliness. Someone wrote that "pure and undefiled religion happens when believers take care of the less fortunate and strive for personal purity. The right kind of religious practice involves helping those who cannot help themselves (and who can't pay you back). As Jesus taught, 'When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (Luke 14:13-14).

The right kind of religious practice also requires a personal commitment to growing in Christian virtue."

II Peter 1:5-8

In verses 3-4, Peter explains that through God's divine power He has given us precious promises by

which we participate in His nature helping us to escape the corruption that is in the world.

The word "unspotted" (KJV) or "keep from being polluted" (NIV) is the same word used of Christ in **I Peter 1:19** which speaks of Him being the spotless lamb of God.

In his second letter, Peter admonishes those looking forward to heaven to "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with God." (II Peter 3:14)

Our goal as believers is a mature Christian walk and practical holiness. Unspotted or not polluted by the world doesn't mean that we are perfect, nor does it mean that we should have no contact with the world but rather that the world doesn't influence us, or mold us into its image (**Rom. 12:2**).

This is not a call for sinless perfection, but rather our effort in striving for godliness within that is demonstrated in how we live without.

A little league coach asked one of his players if he understood the rules about sportsmanship in their league – not throwing temper tantrums, not shouting at the umpire, not using abusive language. The player said he understood. The coach then asked his player to go and explain them to his father.

If we want to demonstrate a faultless religion that God accepts, we need to control our tongue, have a compassionate heart, and exhibit a careful walk. Otherwise, we only prove that our religion is faulty deceiving only ourselves in thinking we are practicing true religion.

What kind of religion are you displaying? Is it faulty or faultless? Communion is a wonderful time to assess and then confess so that you practice what is acceptable to God.