

## Worthless Religion vs. True Religion

### James 1:26-27

**Review & Context:** Genuine Christians respond rightly to trials (vs. 2-12), to temptation (vs. 13-18), and to the Word of God (vs. 19-27). As Christians respond rightly to God's Word, they will welcome it (vs. 19-21) and they will do it (vs. 22-25), and they will apply it (vs. 26-27).

#### *Logical sequence of vs. 18-27*

1. God gives a new birth which results in a new life – vs. 18-19a
2. The characteristics of this new life – vs. 19b-25
  - a) Hearing the Word – vs. 19b-21
  - b) Obeying the Word – vs. 22-25
3. The conduct of this new life – vs. 26-27
  - a) Changed speech – vs. 26
  - b) Compassion for the needy – vs. 27
  - c) Careful living in the world – vs. 27

**Definition of religion:** Outward expression of one's faith. This outward activity may or may not reveal a heart that is changed.

**Main Truth:** If a changed heart does not evidence itself in changed actions, your religion is worthless.

#### **1. The testimony of worthless religion (activity of an unchanged heart) – vs. 26**

- A. Self testimony: Very religious
- B. Speech testimony: Religion has not changed the heart
- C. Sad testimony: Self-deceived and trusting in worthless religion.

#### **2. The test of true religion (activity of a changed heart) – vs. 27**

- A. Changed speech – vs. 26
- B. Compassionate care – vs. 27
- C. Careful living – vs. 27

**Conclusion:** These three evidences are not exhaustive (comprehensive) in picturing all that true, God-honoring religion is, but they give a sufficient summary of a serious test for our religion. Does our outward expression of religious activity come from an inward heart change? Has the new birth from God changed our speech, our compassionate care for the needy and our holy living in this world? Is your religion worthless or true?

## Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Think about the world, about our country about our town, and about our church. How many people think themselves to be religious like the person being spoken about in vs. 26?
2. What is so dangerous for people to see themselves as religious if they not actually saved?
3. What is so deceptive about the religion of external activity?
4. Why can the simple test of a bridled (restrained) tongue reveal whether our religion is pure and undefiled in God's sight, or worthless?
5. What does our speech reveal? Why is this so? (Hint: Matthew 12:34-35)
6. What is the difference between Christians who sin with their tongue and the tongue that is unbridled (described in vs. 26)?
7. What makes a person's religion worthless?
8. What does religion that pleases God look like? Discuss the connection between the outward and inward change.
9. Discuss some practical ways that Christians can show some care to those who are in need and distressed.
10. What is the world, and how does it stain our lives?
11. What are some things we can do to keep ourselves unstained by the world?
12. How does our speech, compassion, and holy living reflect the character and likeness of our Father?

#### **Thoughts for prayer:**

- Pray that we would seriously assess our lives to see if our religion is a religion only of outward worthless activity or inner heart change.
- Pray that God would save those held captive and self deceived by worthless religion.
- Pray that our religious activity would be pure and undefiled in the sight of our God and Father.