

True Religion is Simple.

James 1:26-27

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Introduction: At conferences and other gatherings where orphan care, foster care, and adoption are the focus, the front-half of James 1:27 often stands front-and-center: "**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).**" But if we even just look at the immediate context of James, we see there are not one or two but three aspects of pure and undefiled religion.

James 1:26-27 [Take out your mental highlighter and be ready to highlight a particular that shows up three times in these two verses] If anyone thinks he is **religious** [there it is] and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's **religion** [there it is again] is worthless. [and then he uses it one last time] [27] **Religion** [so he's continuing the thought from the previous verse] (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.

Three aspects of pure and undefiled religion:

- Controlling the tongue (v. 26)
- Visiting orphans and widows in their affliction (v. 27a)
- Keeping oneself unstained from the world (v. 27b)

OBSERVATION: Lots of conferences on orphan care, foster care, and adoption. But how many conferences have you seen that are focused on controlling the tongue? How many "tongue" conferences have you attended?

Question: How do these 3 aspects of true religion relate to each other?

- **Here's what I believe:** To the extent we focus on one without the others, we lose something of the others. So if we are the "bridle the tongue people", we lose something of the other two. Etc. Etc.

Illustration: *How familiar are you with the Inklings?* **Quick flyover of who they were:** the Inklings were informal literary gathering of friends, most of whom taught at Oxford University. And they would get together in the early 1930s into

late 1940s to read and discuss what they'd had written. Of the Inklings, two of C.S. Lewis' closest friends were J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams. **So, moving ahead quite a few years, when Charles died, Lewis thought he'd get more of Tolkien....**

- **Listen to what Lewis discovered about this:**

“In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; ***I want lights other than my own to show all his facets.*** Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to [one of Charles'] joke[s]. Far from having more of Ronald, having him 'to myself' now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald.”

[Ex: When I first met my wife Melissa, my relationship with her did not grow in isolation. When we were together at a restaurant with some of her friends, Melissa's friends showed more of her facets....We get married, add children: more light...]

- **3 aspects of True Religion shine light on each other:** To the extent that one is lacking, to that extent the other two are lacking. They do not exist in isolation from each other. **So, here's what I'd like to suggest: *if our focus is on visiting orphans in their affliction to the neglect of the other two aspects of true religion, far from simplifying the practice of caring for orphans, we actually complicate it. AND the path to seeing these three aspects operational within us is really quite simple.***

So what I'd like to do is look at **(1)** the light that ***words shine*** upon visiting orphans and widows in their affliction, **(2)** the light that ***being unstained from the world shines*** upon it, and **(3)** the light that ***the Gospel shines*** upon all three aspects.

Our Words Shine (upon orphan care)

Being Unstained (from the world) Shines (upon orphan care)

The Gospel Simplifies (orphan care)

1. Our Words Shine (upon orphan care)

James 1:26 If anyone thinks he is religious and ***does not bridle his tongue*** but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

James 3:5-8 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And ***the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness***. The tongue is set among our members, ***staining*** (think back to James 1:27 here: “unstained from the world”) ***the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell....***[8] ... no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, ***full of deadly poison***.

James 1:17-18 Every good gift (every activity of giving) and every perfect gift (every gift given) is from above (i.e., *every...every: inexhaustible!*), coming down from the Father of lights (i.e., of every star! See Psalm 147 below) with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will **he brought us forth by the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Psalm 147:3-6

[3] He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

[4] ***He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.***

[5] Great is our Lord, and abundant in power...[The Father's giving is inexhaustible. **ILLUS:** Niagara Falls and Cave of the Winds]

2. Being Unstained Shines

James 1:27 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***.

- By "world" James is referring to its value system. The world tells us that our fundamental identity is determined by our performance. The “world” seduces us to find our main sense of significance in what we do.
- The world tells us that our fundamental identity is determined by our performance not by the performance of another (i.e., Jesus). It seduces us to believing (often unknowingly) that our main sense of significance is found in what we do or in what we're involved in.

What can this look like?

- "God is pleased with me because I have given my life to caring for the least of these." Now, does God smile at us when we care for orphans? Yes, but if the main way we sense his smile is by our efforts to care for orphans, then chances are we've become stained by the world.
- Performance-based versus Grace-based religious practice:
 1. "I share God's heart for the orphan; therefore, God accepts me."
 2. "God has accepted me because of Jesus; therefore, I am freed to care for the orphan."

3. The Gospel Simplifies (orphan care)

The word “visit” in James 1:27 is a wonderful Greek verb. James uses a word that itself sums up the history of redemption. The entire history of it! Visit is a massive story word for Jews to whom James is writing.

ILLUS: We have story-words: 911 or DC Sniper...

Exodus 4:31 “And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD has visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

Luke 1:68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people...”

Luke 7:16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

The Gospel comes to us...

- I know your words are corrupting, hurtful, and you can't control them. But I have given you my good Word, my healing Word to you and I continue to give it to you! My word of acceptance rests upon you!
- I know you're constantly experiencing the stain of the world, that you have to perform well to be accepted, but I have accepted you in Jesus!

Psalm 147:3-6

[3] ***He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.***

[4] He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

[5] Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

[6] **The LORD lifts up the humble...**

James 4:6, 10 [6] He gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but ***gives grace to the humble.***”...[10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, ***and he will exalt you.***