



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Kerang

FAITH AND DEEDS

A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES

WHAT IS TRUE RELIGION?

Let's **READ JAMES 1:19-27**.

Our study of the first chapter of James helped us to understand:

- What testing produces – maturity and joy (verses 2-4)
- How to be victorious in times of testing – faithful prayer (verses 5-8)
- Material things are not everything – what counts is our riches in the Lord (9-11)
- The outcome of “hanging in” when trails come – the crown of life (verses 12)
- The source of testing and temptation – it does not come from God (verses 13-15)
- God's faithfulness, his steadfastness and his eternal calling (verses 16-18)
- Christians should not give ear to those who do not take God on his promises; and if they have done so, they must repent and once again trust God and the promises of his Word (19-21)
- to trust God, and believe the promises of the Word, means to not only listen to the Word, but to apply what it says (22-25)

In this study: profession and deeds must line up – anything else is pretence

INTRODUCTION

As we continue the study of James we must keep the context in mind: through the devastation of persecution some of the former members of the congregation of James lost all they had – friends, property, and even (maybe) a vision of who God is. Some started to doubt the promises of God, blaming Him for putting them in the testing circumstances without the ability to get them through the trails (1:13-15).

But there were others who were not so open about their discontent: they kept the outer appearance of a good Christian, but they lacked practical evidence of the fact that they indeed believed in God.

In other words, they were keeping up the appearances: they *said* they were Christians, but inwardly they *did not really believe it*. What James is teaching them here is: to *say* you are a Christian must be *backed up with deeds* to confirm your testimony!

Last week's study could be summed up with “put your money where your mouth is”. This week's study could be summed up with “put your mouth where your money is”.

When mouth and actions come together, we have true religion. If not, everything is false and phony.

READ JAMES 1:26. What do you think does the “consider” (“seem” or “thinks”) in the verse mean?

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The reality of life is that there sometimes is a distinction between *being* and *appearance*, between *reality* and *imagination*. In our verse “someone” is a judge. He applies a standard to judge himself by: he judges himself to be religious. He then proceeds to tell others (he uses his tongue) that he judged himself a religious person.

Such a person might have the appearance of a being a Christian, he speaks like a Christian, but he lacks evidence to back it up.

Give a good definition of a hypocrite?

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Interesting in earlier times a hypocrite was the term to refer to a stage actor!

READ JAMES 1:26 again. What in your opinion does the word “religious” mean?

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The word used in our verse might have both a negative and positive meaning:

- *Positive*: it may mean someone who is truly pious or devout: he truly believes in God (a god) and he does so with all his heart by having consistent actions.
- *Negative*: It may refer to someone with an excessive practice of religion with a bad implication.¹ Here it describes the diligent performer of divinely ascribed duties of outward service to God who predominantly renders a ceremonial service of religion. There is an external framework of godliness, without inward piety of soul. ² This “pious” or “religious” person is engaged in “religious” activities of prayer, fasting, and worship and perhaps the keeping of the ritual law as well. He has the outward practice of religious activity and so considers himself pious.³
- The person *says* he is religious, but something is wrong: it is all just *show* and no *substance*.

In the light of what we have hear up to now, what does James say in **JAMES 1:26**. What does the “tight reign” mean?

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Why is such a person “deceiving” himself?

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Why is his religion “worthless”?

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Let’s look at ourselves: is there a possibility that others might see us as hypocrites?

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Why are non-Christians people (in many cases) *not* hypocritical?

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Is their religion deceptive?

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Is their religion worthwhile?

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¹ *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

² Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

³ Davids, P. H. (1982). *The Epistle of James : A commentary on the Greek text* (101). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

READ JAMES 1:27. Considering what true religion is, what is the difference between who the judge is?

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Verse 27 may be saying “put your mouth where your money is”: you say you are a Christian, but two things are needed to represent authentic religion:

- God must be the Judge, because He sets the standard of what constitutes “true religion”;
- What is professed must be backed up with what is done, or else “keep a tight reign on your tongue” (or: just “shut-up”!)

It is interesting to see how the words “pure” and “clean” are used in connection with the sacrifices of the Old Testament. It was a condition of God that his people would be pure and clean. When they sinned or if they developed a disease a sacrifice was necessary. Blood or water was used to symbolically proclaim that God considers them as clean and therefore fit for membership in the community.

For instance, read **LEVITICUS 7:19-21** and **LEVITICUS 12**. How did the unclean get clean again?

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Read **HEBREWS 10:19-22**. How did Jesus Christ fulfil all sacrifices of the Old Testament? What is the effect (verse 22)?

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There is a sense in which **JAMES 2:27B** is fulfilled in Christ. How?

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How would Christians be followers of Christ who did not only *say* He loved us, but *showed* his love practically for us by taking our penalty upon Him? **READ JAMES 1:27.**

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Jesus prayed for his church in **JOHN 17:15-19**. What is his petition before the Father about believers in the world (verse 15)?

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What does Jesus pray for in **VERSE 17**. How does this correspond with “pure and faultless” in **JAMES 1:27**?

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Read **JOHN 17:18**. How does this correspond with “look after orphans and widows in their distress” (**JAMES 1:27**)?

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To sum it up: What is true religion?

1. The judge of true religion is
2. True religion does not only
3. True religion adds to professing of the tongue