

James 1:26 - 27 (NASB) ²⁶If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. ²⁷Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- The word translated “religion” means “the outward practice, the service of a god.”
- It is used only five times in the entire New Testament (James 1:26-27; Acts 26:5; and Col. 2:18, where it is translated “worshiping”).
- Pure religion has nothing to do with ceremonies, temples, or special days.
- Pure religion means practicing God's Word and sharing it with others, through speech, service, and separation from the world.

Speech (v. 26).

There are many references to speech in this letter, giving the impression that the tongue was a serious problem in the assembly (see James 1:19; 2:12; 3:1-3, 14-18; 4:11-12). It is the tongue that reveals the heart (Matt. 12:34-35); if the heart is right, the speech will be right. A controlled tongue means a controlled body (James 3:1).

Service (v. 27a).

After we have seen ourselves and Christ in the mirror of the Word, we must see others and their needs. Isaiah first saw the Lord, then himself, and then the people to whom he would minister (Isa. 6:1-8).

Words are no substitute for deeds of love (James 2:14-18; 1 John 3:11-18).

Separation from the world (v. 27b).

By “the world” James means “society without God.” Satan is the prince of this world (John 14:30), and the lost are the children of this world (Luke 16:8). As the children of God, we are *in* the world physically but not *of* the world spiritually (John 17:11-16). It is only as we maintain our separation from the world that we can serve others.

The world wants to “spot” the Christian and start to defile him.

1. First, there is “friendship of the world” (James 4:4),
2. Which can lead to a love for the world (1 John 2:15-17).
3. If we are not careful, we will become conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1-2).
4. And the result is being condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32).

This does not suggest that we lose our salvation, but that we lose all we have lived for. Lot is an illustration of this principle.

1. First he pitched his tent toward Sodom
2. Then he moved into Sodom.
3. Before long, Sodom moved into him.
4. He lost his testimony even with his own family.

When judgment fell on Sodom, Lot lost everything. It was Abraham, the separated believer, the friend of God, who had a greater ministry to the people than did Lot, the friend of the world. It is not necessary for the Christian to get involved with the world to have a ministry to the world. Jesus was “unspotted” (1 Peter 1:19), and yet He was the friend of publicans and sinners. The best way to minister to the needs of the world is to be pure from the defilement of the world.

Monday Morning Moment: Action Step

“Control our tongue while improving our serve!”

James 1:26 (NLT) ²⁶If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.