

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 10 Text: 1:22-27 Date: 3-26-23

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES



(22) But be doers of **the Word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

(23) For if anyone is a hearer of **the Word** and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

(24) For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

(25) But the one who looks into **the perfect law, the law of liberty**, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

(Ps 1:1,2; 19:7; 119:92-94; Mt 7:21-27; Lk 6:46-49; 11:28; 8:21;

Jn 8:32; 13:17;

Rom 2:13; 8:2; Gal 2:4; 5:1,13; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 2:19)

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

(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.

(Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:19; Job 31:16-21; Ps 34:13; 39:1; 141:3; 146:9;
Is 1:17-23; Jer 22:16; Hos 14:3; Mt 25:36; Lk 7:11-17; Ac 26:5; Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 5:22;
1 Pet 3:10; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:20; 3:14; 1 Jn 2:15; 5:18)

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

The immediate background for these verses seems to be the problem of the distribution of charity among widows in the early church at Jerusalem. The Hellenized Jewish Christians were complaining that their widows were not receiving the same attention as were those Christian widows who were native to Palestine (Acts 6:1). Thus it seems that, from the very beginning of the church organization in Jerusalem, charity was handled not in a haphazard way but according to strict organizational procedures. The complaint may have been lodged against the apostles themselves, as they ask that this task be transferred to seven men chosen by the congregation. These seven men, among whom were Stephen and Philip, sometimes called deacons or ministers, may have been the first clergy in the church who were not apostles. This is a widely held view. It cannot be overlooked that the clergy or those associated with the clergy had the administrative responsibility for charity.

As the church spread out from Jerusalem into the rest of Palestine, the pastors in what certainly seemed small congregations also were the administrators of the funds. The word "to visit" (*episkepesthai*) suggests more than a type of social visit, but rather a visit with authority, concern, and relief. It is used in the song of Zechariah, the Benedictus, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has *visited* and redeemed His people" (Luke 1:68).

Standing behind this pericope is the final judgment scene in which Jesus as King and Judge rewards those who have been considerate to the needy (Matt. 25:31-46). One of the commended virtues is visiting the sick and imprisoned (vv. 36, 43). The virtue in charitable work is not in the works themselves as some sort of detached humanistic ethic, but it rests in being able to identify Christ in the sufferer and coming to His assistance (v. 45). Still such a view of charity seems to be only a small improvement on performing charity simply for charity's sake.

The first charity embarked upon by the Jerusalem church was care for widows. It is inconsequential that Acts makes no reference to orphans as does James. The disruption of the family through the death of its chief financial supporter was seen as a tragic evil which the church was necessarily compelled to address. But why this particular problem and not another? God's first paradise, where the family unit was unthreatened, was destroyed by death. Now the church as God's reconstruction of His paradise was obligated to alleviate as much as possible the evil consequences brought by death. The sharing of the wealth among Christians, a temporary social experiment (Acts 4:34-37), was an attempt to remove the line between the rich and the poor, a prototype and prelude to the final days when all evidences of evil would be removed. This is the thought of Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat, "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away" (Luke 1:53). In the Sermon on the Mount the meek inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

Jesus appeared as the One who was lowly, humble, and poor. The dishonored poor man mentioned in 2:6 could very well be a reference to Jesus. On this more must be said later. Throughout the gospels Jesus is described as poor and is associated with the poor. The rich have a disadvantage in getting into the kingdom (Matt. 19:23-24) which the poor do not. Jesus' association with the poor and needy is a necessary result of His humiliation. He shares in the deepest and lowliest degradation known by men. The widows and orphans are deprived because of death. Those who are the most deprived are most like Jesus in His humility. In the least of His brothers Jesus can be found (Matt. 25:40). On this account James says that the religion acceptable to God and the Father is the care of those who have lost all visible means of earthly support. Though bereft of earthly fathers, God has become their Father in a special way. In their affliction they became totally dependent on Him. Through the church God is removing their affliction and showing evidences of what the final times will be like.

The admonition of keeping oneself spotless from the world, if detached from and lifted out of this pericope, would seem hardly more than encouragement for morally clean living. Important as that thought is, James is referring to the Christian's total detachment from the concerns of this world (*kosmos*), a concept developed in John. Again, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that John is dependent on James for many of his fundamental concepts, including the dualism between God and the world. Throughout Matthew, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (6:25-34), Jesus warns His disciples about concerns for ordinary existence, i.e., the things of this world. This is of course James' message also. Such concerns are evidences of unbelief still residing in the Christian after conversion.

The Christian's commitment to charity, especially among those who are suffering within the church, cannot be hindered by concerns to share in more and more of the world's goods. Attachment to the world means the failure of Christians to carry out their obligations to Christ as He is found in the poor.

LIFE APPLICATION

1. If we desire to be truly religious, how do we bridle our tongues?
2. If our **religion is pure and undefiled before God, the Father**, what are the ways to visit orphans and widows in their affliction?
3. Why must we keep ourselves unstained from the world?