

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 12 Text: 1:26-27 Date: 4-16-23

Trinity Lutheran Church - Pastor David Nehrenz

www.tlcnorman.org

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.

TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(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; Mark 12:38-44; Lk 4:25-27; 7:11-17; 18:1-8;

Ac 9:39-43; Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 5:3-16; 6:12-16;

1 Pet 3:10; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:20; 3:10-14; 1 Jn 2:15; 5:18)

LUTHER ON TRUE RELIGION – VOLUME 24

“Faith must lay hold of this, must be founded on it, and must take comfort from it in times of temptation, when the devil and man’s own conscience argue with him as follows: “Listen. What kind of Christian are you? Where is your righteousness? Do you not see and feel that you are a sinner? How, then will you pass muster before **God?**” Here again he must base his words on this verse and say: “I know very well, and I am sorry to say, that I am a sinner and that in me there is no righteousness that will be valid before **God**. And I must and will not look for or know of such righteousness in myself, for with it I could never come before **God**. But in this verse I hear **Christ say that my righteousness consists in His going to the Father and in His ascension into heaven**.”

There my righteousness has been deposited, and there the devil will surely have to let it remain; for he will not make **Christ** a sinner or reprove or find fault with His righteousness. If I am a sinner and my life does not pass muster before **God**, and if I find no righteousness in myself, I have **another treasure**, which is the righteousness of which I boast and on which I rely. This is **Christ’s going to the Father**, which He has **presented to me as a gift**.” What does **this righteousness** lack, or what flaw can you find in it? You surely do not see or feel anything of it, do you? Answer: “Indeed, **Christ Himself** defines and describes righteousness by saying that I will not feel it but must take hold of it by faith in **Christ’s Word** ‘you will see Me no more.’ But why would I need faith if I could perceive and feel this righteousness in myself?”

Therefore learn this verse well, in order that on the basis of it you may be able to distinguish clearly between **Christ’s righteousness** and anything else that is called righteousness. For here you learn that the **righteousness of which Christ** is speaking is not our work or doing, but that it is **His going to the Father or His ascension**. It is clear and obvious, of course, that there is a wide gulf between the two types of righteousness.

Our work surely is not **Christ**, and His going is not our doing or work. For what did I or any other man contribute to **His going to the Father, that is, to His suffering and death, His resurrection, and His sitting at the right hand of God?** This “going to the Father” certainly is not my obedience and good works not even the works done in accordance with the Ten Commandments, much less my self-chosen worship and human works, monasticism, pilgrimages, self-made exercises in religion, etc. Even if one cannot comprehend the meaning of the words “going to the Father,” still one can at least hear and understand that this is not and cannot be our work or doing but is given to **Christ alone and is placed entirely on His Person...**

It is true of course that we must improve our conduct and change our way of life, do good and shun evil; but a better life of this kind will not accomplish what **Christ's going to the Father** is to accomplish, namely, our justification before **God** and our salvation. The lives and the works of all the saints and the capabilities of all men are far too weak and too few to accomplish this; for everything they do is surely nothing more than earthly, transitory activity, which must terminate with us and remain here below.

And although the works and deeds believers perform in conformity with **God's commandments** are pleasing to **God** and will also be rewarded by Him both in time and in eternity, still they cannot bring us to **God** or be the righteousness that delivers from sin and death. No, there is no other consolation than **Christ's going to the Father. This is our chief possession and inheritance, our ultimate trust and eternal righteousness.**"

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

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?