

Keeping Oneself *Unstained by the World*

Studying the Word of God is not only a huge part of my “job” as a preacher/teacher, it’s something I love to do- it’s been this way all of my adult life. So, I look forward to and greatly enjoy getting together with those who share this passion to learn and grow spiritually. And invariably, each time this occurs I learn something new, or gain additional insights to what I already knew on one level. At such opportunities, as the proverb affirms, “*Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,*” Proverbs 27:17. All of that to get to this...

At men’s bible class this week at a local eatery, the subject under consideration was taken from James 1:27, “*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*” On this particular occasion, the specific focus was on the last part of the verse, as our title suggests. However for our purposes here, it might be well to consider two additional points from the first part of verse before proceeding:

- True religion (that which is *pure* and *undefiled*) must be so as determined by God, not man. Note that James specifies “*in the sight of our God and Father...*” We do have neither the right nor the prerogative to determine the *form* or *practice* of “religion”- God alone does. Anything and everything aside from that He determines and dictates is *vain*, *false*, and *invalidates* “*the word of God for the sake of your (human) tradition,*” cf. Matthew 15:6-8. Additionally,
- True religion (again, that which is *pure* and *undefiled*) is based in *action* rather than *mere emotion*. It is not defined or determined by *how we feel*, or even what we *say*, but what we *do*. Though we should certainly *feel* the right way toward others (cf. 1John 4:7-11), James makes it clear that true religion must be *practiced*. It demands not just *sympathy* or even *empathy*, but *service to/for* those who are *distressed* (in this case, *widows* and *orphans*- thus, those largely incapable of helping themselves). So, *true religion* and *true wisdom* is not about just what we *feel* or *say*, but what we *do*. “*Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom,*” James 3:13.

Now, with those things at least partially covered, let’s get back to the part about *keeping oneself unstained by the world*.” Admittedly, this is easier *said* than *done*. We live in a world that seems to be ever-increasingly *filthy* and *staining*. Obviously, we can’t avoid all contact with it if we hope to have a *salt* and *light* (Matthew 5:13-16) influence on it, cf. 1Corinthians 5:9-10. But how are we to live *in the world* and yet remain *pure*, *undefiled*, and *unstained* by it?

While there may be many scriptural and useful answers to this question, four really good ones (in my opinion at least) came out of that men’s bible study I spoke of at the beginning:

- 1) **Continue in Prayer.** Keep communicating with God. Tell Him of your desire to become or remain *pure*, *undefiled*, and *unstained*. Ask for His assistance. Pray for knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and courage, cf. James 1:5-9; 5:16-18.
- 2) **Continue to Study, Learn, and Grow.** Allow God to communicate with you. He does so through His Word. Keep “*looking intently*” into that *mirror* God provides- “*the perfect law of liberty,*” and be a “*doer of the word*” rather than merely a “*hearer who deludes himself,*” cf. James 1:22-25.
- 3) **Associate with *pure*, *undefiled*, and *unspotted* people.** Or at least with those who are truly trying to be such. As was mentioned earlier, we can’t “*go out of the*

world” and must *live in it*, but this doesn’t mean that *worldly* people are our closest friends, or that they compromise our *chosen* associates. If we even *wish* or *desire* “*to be a friend of the world*,” we make ourselves “*an enemy of God*,” cf. James 4:4. We simply can’t become or remain *pure, undefiled, and unstained* by the world when we spend our discretionary time with and chose for our closest companions those who are *impure, defiled, and stained* of/by the world.

- 4) **Stop setting yourself up for failure.** Oftentimes, we just simply make it too easy for Satan. We put ourselves in situations where we are likely to be tempted (in the wrong places and with the wrong people), and then are both surprised and disappointed that we failed to overcome temptation. Why do we do this? Probably because our true *desires* and *motivations* aren’t what they should be. Our *pleasures* and *motivations* are based in the wrong source(s), cf. James 4:1-3. As Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, “*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust*,” Romans 13:14. Seek *pleasure* from right things; be *motivated* to do right things; and stop putting yourself in circumstances where you’re likely to be tempted and fall.

See what I mean? Choosing to go to a bible study both *enlightened* me with additional information from God’s Word, and *encouraged* me to greater faithfulness. Such helps tremendously when one is trying to keep himself “*unstained by the world*”! Thanks,

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