

## Pure Religion

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In our society there are a great number of people who claim to be religious. In fact, based on a recent study, it is estimated over 82% of the American population falls into this category. On a worldwide scale the numbers are even greater. Last year demographics suggested 84% of the world's population, 6.7 billion people, adhere to some religion or another. As Christians it is certainly refreshing to hear there are still a significant number of souls interested in spiritual matters, but are all of these people genuinely "religious"? In the book of James, the inspired writer records several tests or qualifications to determine whether or not an individual is practicing pure religion. With that in mind, let us consider these things to make sure we are religious not according to the world's definition, but according to God's definition.

First, in order for an individual to be religious according to God's definition their speech must be in check. In James 1:26 the Bible says, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless." Brethren and friends, we would all be wise to think about the kind of words that come out of our mouths. If we are allowing corrupt words to come forth, we are not religious (Eph. 4:29). If we spread gossip and constantly talk about other people, we are not religious (1 Tim. 5:13). If we curse and cuss behind closed doors, we are not religious (James 3:9). God says in order for mankind to be religious the tongue must be bridled.

Second, in order for an individual to be religious according to God's definition their service must be in check. James goes on to say, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (v. 27a). In essence, James is making the point pure religion requires service. In other words, if you are unwilling to serve others, you are also unwilling to bear the name of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46). The truth is you cannot be religious without being a servant. Now, in this context specifically James points out Christians are to be those who serve widows and orphans; however it is important to recognize the Christian is called to serve all (Mark 9:35). If we desire to be religious, we must be servants.

Finally, in order for an individual to be religious according to God's definition their soul must be in check. James says, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (v. 27b). Many people may not realize this, but our souls can be stained. When we sin against the Lord, and we all will (Rom. 3:23), our soul becomes unclean, and we are spiritually stained (Isa.

1:16). When transgression is committed our spiritual garments become defiled (Rev. 3:5; Jude 23), and it is for that very purpose God sent His Son (Isa. 1:18; Acts 22:16). So, for the Christian who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5), God says in order to remain religious you must keep yourself unspotted from the world. You must constantly live a blameless life (1 Thess. 3:13), and walk in the light (1 John 1:7). Those who are religious are those who keep their soul in check.

Without a doubt, there are many in the world today who claim to be religious, but what about us? Are we religious according to the world's standards, or are we religious according to the standards of God. If we want to be religious according to God's definition we will keep our speech, service, our souls in check.