

How Useful and Pure is Our Religion?

James 1:26-27 in our daily lives

Light on the Rock
by Philip Shields

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Abstract: “Religion”. Many now distance themselves from religion because its given itself a bad name. But GOD says there is a true, right and pure religion that He describes and defines. It’s different from what we often see practiced. Is *your* religion useful and pure? Why not find out?
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Good day, worshipers of the one true God, the only God who actually lives -- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – and Peter and Paul and James and John. This is Philip Shields, your fellow worshiper, with a question for all of us: “How *useful to the Master* is your religion and mine? Is it religion God would sanction as the kind HE wants representing Him?”

I’m giving this message because I don’t feel *my* own religion is nearly pure enough or anywhere close to properly representing Holy God yet. Maybe you’ll conclude the same about yours.

If you know the passage about “*pure*” religion in **James 1:26-27**, I want to make my question to you very direct and practical: Are you *practicing* that passage? We’re going to talk about that.

And I also ask us *all* – if you were to describe “perfect religion”, what things come to your minds First, if we’re really honest with ourselves? *First of all, many of you kids and teens hearing the word “religion” might be tempted to answer, “BO-ring!” (ha!)*

When most of us think of the word “religion”, many of us think of wide bodies of beliefs, even *denominations* or vast religious *groups* – like the Catholic religion, the Buddhist religion, the Mormon religion, the Methodist religion, or even paganism, atheism, and so on.

WHAT ROLE DOES RIGHT DOCTRINE PLAY IN TRUE RELIGION?

And then beyond that, many of us would not feel like some group has “true religion” if they believed and taught differently than we do. Having right *doctrine*, in other words. And secondly, many hearing this would probably want a “religion” or church group that is “doing the Work”, and getting out the gospel to the world, or at least a warning message, if that is your preference. So, many would conclude “right religion” is having correct doctrine and doing God’s work.

But keep listening – because those aren’t the major criteria God uses for defining religion He calls “pure”. Now don’t get me wrong. I’m going to do a sermon sometime on how important true doctrine is. God indeed wants to be worshiped “in spirit *and in truth*” (**John 4:23-24**). Paul taught Timothy to be sure to teach right doctrine. So having a group that teaches the Bible right, is vital.

Doctrine means “teaching”. Some tend to focus on the particular doctrines where they feel they have it right and others have it wrong. So we focus on a small set – but important set -- of all the doctrines such as the Sabbath, clean and unclean foods, whether we keep Christmas or not, and so on. **But “doctrine” includes everything God is teaching His children. Doctrine includes everything in God’s word.** It’s the Sermon on the Mount – being a peacemaker and blessing those who curse you, as much as it is which day is the Sabbath. Doctrine *has* to include giving

unconditional *agape* love to every breathing human being. It has to include forgiving one another, accepting one another, and being humble in our eyes. You get the point?

Having said that, it is also true that at times I myself have been overly zealous about doctrine. Result? We alienate believers in the true God who don't believe as we do on every single point, big or small.

Now certainly there is such a thing as out-and-out heresy that cannot and must not be tolerated. I take my cue from **the great Elijah**, who after years of backsliding and heresy, when he faced Israel on Mt. Carmel, he could have enumerated a long list of areas where Israel had gotten off track. But what does he do? He **distills the biggest difference between his religion and Baalism with this: Who and What is the True God – YHWH, or Baal?**

So on doctrinal matters, I follow Elijah's lead and will not worship with those who teach any version of God that says Jesus is not fully part of the One God, or that He wasn't there with God long before His human birth, or those who teach Jesus was formerly an angel who got promoted into being "a" god. I heard a minister a few months ago say "Jesus is a god", but that statement is nowhere in the Bible. Jesus is not "a god", but is God. There is one God and somehow Jesus said He and the Father are one. If God the Father is God and Jesus is "a" god, then we would have "gods" – polytheism, and God clearly taught Israel that God is one, and yet uses the plural word *Elohim*, as in "and God said, 'let US make man in OUR image...'" (**Genesis 1:26**).

So Jesus is also fully God. Only God can be worshiped and called God. Jesus was *often* worshiped – from the time of His birth in the manger by the Shepherds and later by the wise men when He was now in a home. So Jesus must have been God then too, or that would have been a huge sin. After Jesus was resurrected, Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my GOD" (**John 20:28**). He was God after the resurrection. Paul calls him "God and Savior" in **Titus 2:13**. Peter also calls Jesus "our God and Savior" (**2 Peter 1:1**). He is God and was with God (**John 1:1-2**), and has no beginning of days (**Hebrews 7**).

So true religion must worship the right God. That's what Paul focused on in Athens (**Acts 17:23**). Paul never worshiped in pagan temples to a pagan god. He did, like Jesus, worship God in synagogues however (**Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14; 17:10; 19:8**), sometimes for months on end, even as He tried to persuade them on who Christ was.

A question for you: would *you* be comfortable worshiping in a synagogue? Would *you* ever go to one? Have you *ever* gone? I don't know how long you'd be welcome, if you – like Paul – spoke of Jesus.... But hey, Paul often went to the synagogue, and in one case for years! (**Acts 13:14; 17:10; 19:8**). **Keep in mind, that was after the new covenant church had already been started.**

Again, however – Paul is never seen going into a pagan place of worship. I remember hearing about one well known evangelist attending and worshiping and bowing in a Buddhist temple. And we see the Pope recently worshiping in a Muslim mosque in Istanbul alongside worshipers of the moon god Allah!! My wife and I have been in that same mosque in Istanbul. But I sure didn't *worship alongside all the Muslims bowing down with their faces on the floor on their knees. The Mosque is an historical site – the Blue Mosque – and we went in as tourists only.*

Now I mention all that to try to convey a balance about *doctrine*: it's important, and we need to know where to absolutely draw the line, but it's not the end-all. And in the passage we're going to

read in James 1, hear this: *doctrine is not even mentioned as part of the definition of pure or perfect religion!!* But still, I hope you heard me: it's important, none the less, but let's not over emphasize it to the point where we divide the body of Christ, and those who are truly worshipping God, though perhaps somewhat differently than *we* might!

So back to unanimity of doctrine: **In this lifetime, all members of the Body of Christ may not ever come to total agreement on all doctrinal issues.** Take "God's calendar", for example. So come to believe what you believe – but at least look carefully into it and know why you believe what you believe – but then don't kick others in the shins who don't seem – to you at least – as zealous as you are on your beliefs!

So God is to be worshiped – but God no longer is limited to being worshiped in certain *buildings*, mountains, or places any longer – but in spirit and truth! In the old days, you had to go to the temple, in Jerusalem, if you really wanted to be considered "worshipping" God. No longer. **Some have built a church building or cathedral or lavish auditorium and called it the "House of God"** – as indeed the Old Testament temple *was* called that. But now, after Calvary, the "house of God" is *not* an auditorium, is not a temple, is not a synagogue, and is not a cathedral. Are you *hearing* this? In Acts 17:24, Paul said in Athens – and I've been in that very area where he spoke these words -- "**God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.**" *Jesus says the same in John 4:21-24 – that God no longer confines His worship in Jerusalem, or on a particular mountain or place.*

YOU are now the temple of God and of His spirit. End of story. Because God is now in *you -- your heart is now God's HOLY OF HOLIES, if you will, if God is in your heart (2 Cor. 4:6; 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:19)*. Wherever God or God's spirit is, becomes *holy* to Him. We have no ability to hallow ourselves. Only God can make something holy, and He does so by putting His presence into us.

So let's worship God, the true God – and realize that *some* doctrinal discussions may *never* be resolved until Christ comes and straightens us *all* out in whatever areas we don't have perfectly right. I think on some matters we just have to study *deeply* on that matter – and then come to a conclusion *ourselves* and then not let that divide us from one another. Other matters – such as the nature of God and Jesus as God – *are* too important to not come to your own definite conclusion.

IS RELIGION A BAD THING?

So what is "religion" and how would you define it?

Isn't it the set of strongly held body of beliefs especially about God and the divine and what that deity says should be the way we live and what we should believe? That's kinda my definition of it.

So a *radical* Muslim, for example, believes his religion says to *kill* infidels and that he will be rewarded for beheading a non-believer. So he spends his life zealously living and walking that walk for his god whom he thinks teaches him to blow up innocents and to shout violence in violent street protests. We should be thankful that not all Muslims are so radical.

Many "Christians" in history were no better. The Crusaders wiped out whole villages, in the name of their god. Not the true God, by the way. The True God says to take care of orphans and widows – not to *make* more orphans or rape young women you've just made into a widow by killing her husband! That conduct has nothing to do with God's religion as He defines it. The Inquisition

hanged, tortured, raped, burned alive and beheaded hundreds of thousands – all in the name of their god. I assure you: their god was NOT the Holy God Almighty, the Living God.

That's not religion as God defines it! Neither does God's religion have anything to do with big, expensive cathedrals, long flowing robes, headdresses, and big limos! Nor does it have anything to do with men grasping for power, demanding impressive titles, and being served hand and foot by people vying for the right to impress this self-important "holy man. They *have* their reward. But it's not of God.

So "religion" got a bad name and more and more people now say they are "Spiritual" but not "religious", because of the bad name religion has attained. God is against religion if it is that kind of religion. But God Himself is part of a pure religion. He says so, and defines it.

God himself identifies what *He* calls useless, or worthless, religion and what He identifies as "pure" religion.

Those of you who "know your Bible" really well can recite the passage about "pure religion" off by heart. My emphasis today is not going to be on just *knowing* what it says – but *doing* what it says. In the end, that's what the true measure is going to be: did we DO what God's word says?

GOD DEFINES "PURE" AND USEFUL RELIGION

James 1:26-27 NIV

"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a *tight* rein on his **tongue**, he deceives himself and *his religion is worthless*. (NKJV: "useless") 27 Religion that God our Father *accepts as pure and faultless* is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (NKJV: "keep oneself *unspotted* from the world")

Look at verse 26 again. A *tight* rein on our tongue – or our religion is *worthless!* *Worthless!*

So at least 3 things are mentioned clearly here to have the kind of religion God wants us to have, and you can even subdivide it even more:

- controlling our tongues
- look after ("visit") orphans and widows in their trouble
- keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Each point is worthy of an entire sermon. There have been many good sermons on the tongue. So I'll spend the least time on that one, especially since I'm still working on my own tongue.

The best thing you can do is to take time in your Bible study for the next 2-3 days to use a concordance and study every single verse using the words: "tongue", "words", "word", "mouth", "lips" and related words. Do your own study. Write out the verses which you feel directly speak to you. You'll get more out of that study than any number of sermons on the tongue from ministers. Would you please do that?

The bottom line is this: if we end up not doing what it says in James 1:26-27, GOD says our religion is impure and worthless. So let's tackle the first one – the tongue.

1-- Useful religion: Reining in Our TONGUES

On the basis of what **James 1:26-27** says, I have a confession: I include myself in having useless religion by that definition – at least until I can do a better job of letting Christ in me control my tongue. Mine is not so much in the area of gossip, as it is in the area of being more careful *what* I say and *how* I say it – especially when I'm annoyed or upset. How about you? Overcoming a sin *can't* even *begin* until we admit we fall short in the area we need to overcome. Turn to James 3 please.

I think we know our tongue is out of control. James tells us that whoever can control his/her tongue is a perfect person. So this point is for you - - unless you're God, unless you're perfect.

James 3:1-10 NKJV

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many things. **If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.** 3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6 **And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.** The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 **But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.** 9 *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.* 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. *My brethren, these things ought not to be so.*”

So do I have everyone's attention? GOD said all that to me – and to you too. I know I sure fall short.

The apostle Paul teaches us that one of the best ways to overcome and to grow, is not just to stop doing something, but to replace the evil with good. For example, he says – don't just quit stealing, but get a job, so you can start sharing what you have with others. Don't just stop cursing people, but start blessing people.

So it is with the tongue. I would urge you all to hear my sermon on the website “[A word of Encouragement](#)”. It's a good place to start in this matter of reining in the tongue. Replace gossip and rough talk with words that heal, words of encouragement. And be willing to apologize. I sure have to – over and over again, when I realize I had let fly with a hot tongue and a cold shoulder.

So the obvious things about controlling the tongue – and I think *we should include with this, instant messaging, e-mail, written letters and text messaging:*

- **CLEAN HEART, CLEAN TONGUE. ANGRY heart, angry tongue. CALM heart, calm tongue. Whatever is in our hearts will come out sooner or later. The old GIGO –** Garbage in, Garbage out.... Or clean in, clean out. **START WITH A CLEAN, CALM, GODLY, RIGHT HEART.** As always, God looks to the inward man, our insides, our HEARTS. What we are inside, what we are really like for REAL – that's what God is concerned with. And then what we say will reflect what we are inside. So start with an **INSIDE JOB.** That means

Jesus Christ in our hearts, and that means repentance, conversion and real change. *We will account for every word one day. Doesn't that get your attention!?*

Matthew 12:34-37

“Brood of vipers! **How can you, *being evil*, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** 35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36 **But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.** 37 **For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” ******

- **Having a godly tongue is more likely when we have a high respect for all people and especially for God.** The Bible says to “honor ALL”. A hot tongue does not “honor” anyone. Least of all our God. That’s what James was talking out: we bless God and then minutes later gossip about someone. Incompatible from a righteous heart.
- **PAUSE, PRAY, BEFORE SPEAKING, ESPECIALLY IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS.** If you’re angry or mad, count to 10, or 100, before saying anything. *COOL OFF first before speaking or writing* – and then probably don’t say or write anything at all. There ARE times we must be strong and take action, even tough actions – but be sure you’re in the right time. *Seldom can our anger result in righteousness.* Sure, there are times to be angry and sin not (**Ephesians 4:26**), but those times are more rare than we might think.

James 1:19-20

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be **swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**”

God created us with one mouth and two ears for a reason: to remind us to listen at least twice as much as we speak. David says he put a “muzzle” on his mouth (Ps. 39:1).

If you’re putting something hot in writing, sleep on it first.... then decide if you should hit the “send” button or “delete” button. I usually end up using delete when I do that, and OFTEN wish I HAD slept on it first. Aren’t there times when we are upset and send a hot email, flaming someone, only to be looking for an “unsend” button. But alas, like our tongue, email has no “unsend”. But usually, harsh words are usually better unsaid. Boy, do I ever preach to myself. I need to do a lot better in that arena myself and am working on it.

Proverbs 21:23 “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles”

- **Generally, in terms of our tongue, the less said the better.** However, don’t let that keep you from *active, positive use* of the tongue as in words of encouragement, thank you letters, notes which say “I’m praying for you”, and so on.

****Proverbs 10:19**

“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but *he who restrains his lips is wise.*”

Proverbs 17:27-28

“He who has knowledge *saves his words*, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.

28 **Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace;** when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.”

A variation of that is the saying, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, rather than speak and remove all doubt.” Hmm. I’m talking right now. God help me!

- **USE THE TONGUE TO HEAL AND ENCOURAGE. USE IT POSITIVELY. Don’t just stop talking, but consciously think of ways to heal. Replace the intended angry words with kind words. Send a blessing, say a blessing and a kind word, instead.** You’ll find that the people will WANT to please you more now, rather than be cringing wondering what you’re going to do next.

I’m trying to send 1-2 grateful emails a day and 1-2 outrageously encouraging things every day to the man or woman at the checkout, to the cleaning lady at work, to the UPS delivery man, to my son or to my wife – just think of someone you can cheer up today! Best thing about that: It will cheer you up when you voice appreciation, instead of dismay.

Proverbs 16:23-24

“The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.

24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.”

Proverbs 12:18 “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, **but the tongue of the wise promotes health.”**

Ecclesiastes 10:12-14

“The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness.

14 **A fool also multiplies words.”**

Colossians 4:5-6 NIV *“Let your conversation be always full of grace,* seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

- **Everything we say should enhance GOD’S reputation.**

Colossians 3:16-17

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the

Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

I think that’s plenty to think about in terms of the tongue. I pray you will do your own study about your own tongue, on your knees. And then repent, and then ask for Help for a clean heart and a clean, gracious tongue. Let’s ask God to help us pour out words of love, words of kindness, words of grace, every time we speak.

Now do you remember why we spent all that time on the TONGUE? Because James 1:26 says if we can’t put a tight rein on our tongues, our religion is worthless! * Useless. If you want useful religion, spend some time studying your tongue, and rein it in and use it to heal and build people.**

People see YOU and ME – rather than GOD - - by what we say and how we say things. Our words bring no glory to God unless we can have words that encourage, show we understand what people are going thru, and promotes their sense of well being and life. If when we're done, someone is hurt, discouraged, feeling worthless, or down – we did something wrong with our tongues.

So God's word is encouraging us to be sparing with our words, and when we speak to think first – and then try to say something that will EDIFY – build up someone. Words that will make them feel better about themselves and their chances in life to be a good person doing good things. Let's all strive for that, OK ? Boy, do I ever preach to myself on that one. Folks, again remember: all my sermons start out as Bible studies for myself, in areas I know I am so lacking. I know I can, and I know you can, get much better at using our tongues for blessing – rather than negatives. I know we can use our tongues to build people up and help them grow – rather than leaving them discouraged. Let's do it.

Now the next part of “pure religion” is found in James 1:27 and is in 2 parts: Pure religion is defined as being there for the needy fatherless and widows in their time of need, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

2 – HELPING ORPHANS (the fatherless) AND WIDOWS

People who are more defenseless are very special to God. He holds them near and dear. They don't have the clout, the money, the centers of influence or education to defend and provide for themselves as others might. God sees people in that situation as people the rest of us need to love and cherish in a very special way. In a general sense, the poor also fall into this category. I'll give one soon on our responsibility to the poor.

Taking care of orphans and widows is such a part of God's way – that we're defining here as “pure religion” – because it's at the heart of what God is all about: loving those who are least capable of paying you back, providing for those who may not even appreciate you as much as they should – but many, many orphans and widows will appreciate you.

I have one question for us. Since we are *supposed* to take care of widows and orphans within our *own* family, that's a given – can you right now name one orphan, or one widow you are taking care of, who is unrelated to you, or whom you are not dating?

If the answer is “no” – then we don't have pure religion. It's all talk and no action.

Now keep in mind: if you have orphans and widows within your family or relatives - - God is even stronger: if you don't care of relatives in need, you're worse than an infidel (**1 Timothy 5:8**). Jesus also condemned those who said they couldn't support loved ones in need because that would take money away from offerings “to God”, at the temple, in His day (**Mark 7:11-13**).

Again, I'll say – God did not inspire James here to say God's definition of true religion, pure religion to be right doctrine, or doing the work of God around the world. Both are important, so don't get me wrong. BUT, here in James 1:26-27, **God inspires James to define pure religion in very practical terms: learn to shut up, take care of fatherless orphans, and watch out for widows.** That's it.

Again, I *can* say I'm helping with widows and we are trying to help the needy orphans. But that's only in the past few years. Not much before that. My parents, however, did adopt 2 orphan Filipino boys even before they had their own children. So I grew up with orphans who were my "big brothers". My father also had an orphanage in the Philippines and saved dozens of lives.

Let's let God's word talk to us first, then we'll get into practical ways we can take care of orphans and widows. *We'd better start doing it, or our religion is worthless.*

Psalm 68:5 "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation"

In God's call to Israel to repent in **Isaiah 1:16-17**, God tells us in verse 17 to "...defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

In the passage in Isaiah 58:6-9 about the benefits of godly fasting, God says the right kind of fasting will result in godly *actions* and godly changes in our lives. Let's check it out:

Isaiah 58:6-9

6 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? *7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;* [when have we EVER done THAT?] **When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?** 8 *Then* your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 9 *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;* you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

Do we want answered prayers? Here's one way God assures us of hearing us: when we hear the cries of the orphans and widows and start to take care of them – and *not* just those who are part of our fellowship! We *are* to "especially" take care of the needy in our own midst, yes, but God also says not to forget those outside our group:

Galatians 6:10 "Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all**, *especially* to those who are of the household of faith."

Jesus teaches us that He comes to us – you heard me, He comes to us – disguised as orphans, needy and widows, as a test to how we really are treating those He cares for very deeply:

Matt 25:34-40

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; *I* was thirsty and you gave Me drink; *I* was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; *I* was sick and you visited Me; *I* was in prison and you came to Me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Who do you consider among “the LEAST” of these my brethren? Jesus in another place says when we provide a glass of water in His name to a little child, we did it unto Him.

1 John 3:17-18

“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but [**let us love**] *in deed* and in truth.”

Now, if you're hearing God, you won't let another week go by without taking care of the problem. How can you take care of an orphan or widow? I say do it within the week, because if you're like me, if we put it off, we won't ever get around to doing it.

I'd select a widow on your street or **neighborhood** who could use someone visiting. Or you can pick **a nursing home**. Have you ever just gone into nursing homes and sat and chatted with the little old ladies in there? They eat it up. If you can play the piano, go and play the piano. If you can sing, go and sing. If you can't do either, go and just be you and listen to them. Let them tell you all about the old days. They won't remember yesterday – but they'll tell you all about World War II or perhaps even the Great Depression days. And you'll have made a person feel like there's still reason to live.

Orphans? I'd love to see you focus on 1-2 specific orphans – and then generally help orphans. Pick out one or two, and then send money once in a while to “Feed the Children”. [Updated notes: The next couple minutes will be different on the audio. I've updated this in 2022, then it gets back to the original content.]

We at Light on the Rock have been supporting about 30 orphans in Kenya, under the watchful eye of a church pastor and his wife. In the past 16+ years, funds that come to us are used to feed, clothe, house, educate and school these fatherless/motherless children. When we started they were very, very young. Many now are in their middle-to-late teens. We've had to build a better home, buy uniforms for school, school supplies, medication and hospitalization as needed, dig proper artesian well, provide better toilets, bedding, clothing and we even helped them raise chickens so they can have eggs. They also have several goats and cows.

If you wish to have a way of taking care of orphans, we would gratefully accept your donations and use it entirely for that cause. We in the western world have no idea what poverty means to most of the rest of world. I thank you in advance if you agree to help us take care of these orphans and even widows that are part of the church over there in western Kenya. Anyway, there are no end of possibilities and opportunities. I like the idea of sponsoring a child, as well as in your own neighborhood finding out a child or widow you can sponsor, help and support.

The bottom line, if you want the King to say you fed *Him*, clothed *Him*, supported and helped *Him* when *He* needed you – then we better find orphans and widows, and anyone in need – and start doing it. It's God's love in action. It's God's doctrine proven by our deeds. It's putting our money where our mouth is. That's the start to pure religion.

Now I'll make gentleman's bet – no money- - that some minister out there is likely to say not to do what I've just said, but just give all your money to their church so the work can get done and Christ can return. Ha. Well, you sort out what the Bible tells you to do. I'll stake my future on God's word.

3 - KEEPING OURSELVES UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD

The final definition of pure religion is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

“Unspotted”. What does that mean?

That same Greek word for spot, or unspotted, is used in several other verses. It's used of our goal to appear before King Jesus “without spot”, and of Jesus as a lamb without spot. Spotless. It means faultless, untouched by sin, pure, without blemish. That's how it is used in scripture. So Pure Religion is also when we keep ourselves untouched, unspotted, unspoiled by the world. Here are some other places showing how else “unspotted” or “without spot” is used.

2 Peter 3:14

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, *without spot* and blameless;

1 Peter 1:19 “but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and *without spot*.”

It is also used in context of making it our aim to obey God flawlessly, without spot.

1 Timothy 6:14

“that you keep this commandment **without spot**, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,”

When we dabble with the world, we're going to get its dung flung all over us and we come out dirty. That's why we're called to be witnesses *in* the world, but not a part of its culture, or its ways and values. We are to love the *people* of the world while deploring anything the world participates in that is evil in God's eyes. We are to love people of all races, tribes, nations, and cultures. Jesus prayed we not be taken out of the world, but just that we not be *of* it (**John 17:14-16**).

Brethren, my goal in this sermon is to get *you* thinking: what areas ARE we being affected by the world's values? *You* know yourself. Look for areas where you are tugged towards the world. It might help to ask those who know you where they think you might be struggling. Be ready for a shock though, if you do that. We've all been contaminated much more than we want to admit.

When we were baptized, we said we were sorry for our sins, we accepted Jesus as our Savior and our new Way. Hands were laid on us and we were *consecrated, set apart* for holy use by the Living God! We committed to being living sacrifices for God. To change. To be holy. To be new. To be different. To overcome. To be children of God. To be *His* nation, *His* people – different from all the rest.

How are we doing on our baptism commitment?

Here are some clues, and I'm asking you to do some introspection with God, on your knees, with pad and paper and ask Jesus to show you where you need to come all the way out of the world:

- **values:** having to be accepted by people of the world, look like them, and act like them. We forgive people. We patiently wait without using bad words. We help the needy. We give in to others and let them have the best parking spots or seats. We don't demand attention. We don't participate in office gossip. We work hard, never cheat on our taxes, tithes – or on our

spouse! We now keep a low profile. I know – I gotta work on all these things too. This is where we should be heading though. If we've failed, we repent – and get it right next time.

- **CONDUCT and THE WAY WE TALK:** do we talk like, sound like people of the world? Do we ever use God's name, or Jesus' name in vain? Do we ever curse or use foul language? When we get mad, that's when we gotta especially watch that. Dirty language has to stop. (my golfing 4-some story) Our language now has to be worthy of being a disciple of Christ. We sound like Jesus would sound now. Do we lose our cool and holler and - - God forbid – do we ever give the one-finger salute to anyone, ever? Christian, I sure pray we never do. And again, I always preach to myself too.
- **The way we dress and look.** Women: are you modest and helping men not have to fight wrong thoughts by the way you dress around town, at work, or on the beach? Men: do we *look* like a Christian man, or look like someone on the cover of a rock band magazine? We should dress neatly and smartly – but don't need to have so many piercings that it looks like we got hit by shrapnel! I hope you realize the Bible absolutely forbids tattoo (**Lev. 19:28** – tattoo, or printing marks on our bodies). Obviously exposing a lot of thigh and breast is not what a Christian woman would do either.
- **Entertainment:** Think hard on this one. **Are we entertained by depictions of sin** – whether violence, murder, adultery, seduction.... **Are we amused by lying and lies?** Think about that. God's people, when we're thinking straight, do not find entertainment by things of sin, which caused the crucifixion of our Lord for those things to be forgiven! Are you willing to walk out of a movie that you know is being offensive to Jesus in you? Are you willing to *stop watching* a video you've paid money for – to not be inviting evil into your home?
- **INTERNET:** wow. Internet can help us with research and so many things useful, but man-oh-man, you can see anything there is to see on there with a flick of a button. Christian, are we unspotted in the way we use our computer?
- **Most of all, the way we ARE.** We should be *noticeably* different now. I know, that's sometimes a lifetime of changing. I know, it can be slow. But it can also be dramatic. People who knew us before should absolutely notice that we're different now.

1 Peter 4:2-4 TEV

“From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires. 3 You have spent enough time in the past doing what the heathen like to do. Your lives were spent in indecency, lust, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and the disgusting worship of idols. 4 **And now the heathen are surprised when you do not join them in the same wild and reckless living, and so they insult you.**”

If it were a crime to be a Christian, would there easily be enough visible evidence to convict you?

Remember God also warns us, begs us, and commands us to come out of this world's BABYLON – **Revelation 18:4** or else we'll partake of His punishment in the Day of Wrath that is coming. Also **2 Corinthians 6:17** – “come out from among them and be separate” – but never aloof and never “better than thou”.

Jesus was awesome. He said about Satan and Satan's world: "the prince of this world is coming, and he has NOTHING in Me" (**John 14:30**). Wow! Oh how I wish and pray I could say that. But alas, I have to repent each day, for ways I find myself being affected, spotted, and blemished – including outright sins caused by Satan and his world. But I hope we're growing here.

1 John 2:15-17

"Do not love the world (cosmos; society) or the things in the world. ***If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*** 16 For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

James 4:4-5 says if we want to be the friend of the world, we make ourselves the enemy of God!

Romans 12:2 "And ***do not be conformed to this world***, [ARE we? Probably more than we admit!] ***but be transformed*** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Galatians 6:14 "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, ***by whom the world has been crucified to me***, and I to the world."

If something's crucified, it's taken out of commission. It's pretty much nailed down and dying! It no longer can move or exercise any influence. Paul said he had crucified the world as far as he was concerned. Wow. How I wish I was in the same spot as he, but I'm not there yet. I still let the world touch me too much. How about you?

**

I think you get the point. Religion is not just where you go to church or what you profess to believe. God's true religion, God's pure religion, is really very simple. It means living like Jesus lived. It means loving everyone – even those who hurt us. It means turning the other cheek, and even though we only have 2 cheeks, Jesus talked about 70 x 7!

Pure religion is using our tongue for good, and reining it in when we should be quiet. It means therefore letting God's spirit control our words – and our deeds – and to keep from being dirtied up by this world; remaining consecrated for God's holy use.

It means caring for those who are the cast offs of the world. Looking out for poor people, old people, orphans, widows, anyone who needs help. It means being there for anyone who needs you if you have that opportunity.

And it means being the people of God, for real, by the way we live, act, speak and conduct ourselves. Those in God's true religion strive to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

HOW are we going to accomplish all this, as weak as our flesh is?

The JOY of all this, is this: **if** we abide in the Vine – who is Christ – HE will grant us fruit. He has the spot remover. He has the wrinkle remover. And our Husband, King Jesus *will* present us, if we stay attached to Him in daily prayer and study and seeking Him, He will present us without spot or

wrinkle or any such thing. In fact, He will present us *faultless*, for He will *cover us* by His righteousness. *Our* righteousness won't do it, brethren. I know MINE sure won't. And I know yours won't do any better either. Sorry – but that's the fact. Don't forget, **Matthew 6:33** says to seek first the kingdom and HIS righteousness, not our own. **Romans 3:25-26** says God reveals His righteousness. Paul wanted none of His own righteousness but the righteousness that is by *faith* (**Philippians 3:9**). We'll talk much more about that at length in a future sermon.

We are saved by the Savior. I'm not my own savior; I don't save myself. Jesus is my Savior. I know there are a couple verses that refer to saving yourselves, but read them in context and read the verses afterwards, and you'll see it is always in context of a closeness to God (**1 Tim. 4:16; Acts 2:40**).

One favorite of those who are into self-improvement, rather than letting *God* in us change us – is Phil. 2:12, where it says to “work out your own salvation”. But then they stop reading. If they would just read the next verse, it is clearly *God* who is at work in us, making us willing and able to do all that He tells us. Here's the whole passage:

Philippians 2:12-13

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling; 13 **for it is God who works in you both to will and to do** for His good pleasure.”

This same Paul, who penned the book of Philippians, makes it clear in Phil. 3:9 that He wants *God's* righteousness, not his own. I'm going to have to give a full-length sermon on *God's* righteousness vs our own.

GOD is the one who qualifies me – I won't qualify myself (see **Colossians 1:12**).

So the good news is this: we will be unspotted – if we come to the One who IS unspotted by the world. We will rein in our tongue – if we surrender it also to Christ. We will defend and help orphans and widows and the helpless – if we let the love of God really be shed abroad in our hearts.

So don't be down on religion. God shows us there is *good* religion, *true* religion, *pure* religion—HIS one true, religion which is a religion of love, practicing what it believes, a religion that forgives and cares for one another, a religion that lets people be accepted in as they grow and change, a religion that helps people be safe and all live in harmony. A religion that heals and takes care of people. A religion that is practiced, as much as it is preached.

What a wonderful world this would be, if we Christians would start living the life of God's true religion. I have to include myself. I'm far from being a great example of this life yet, but by the grace of God, you and I will someday be doing it and living it more perfectly.

Now let's go practice it! Find someone to encourage today. Decide on a widow to care for. And look for another way or two where we can clean off the spots from the world.

Until next time, your brother in the faith – one fighting the same fight you are – your brother Philip Shields. Let's this week walk worthy of our high calling as children of the Highest.

