

LIVING ON THE EDGE

"ON THE EDGE OF FAMILY"

JAMES 1:26-27

Generally speaking, the commandments of the old covenant are scattered throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The widely accepted number of them is 613. Some of these commandments are *moral*, e.g., the Ten Commandments, some are *ceremonial*, e.g., those regarding sacrifices and sacred days, some are *civil*, e.g., those regarding law courts, property rights, and freeing of servants, and some are *social*, e.g., those regarding marriage and family, women, and the exploitation of the poor. Regardless of one's overall view of the relationship of Christians to the law, few, if any, believe that Christians are obligated to obey all of the law's specific commandments. Clearly, the dietary laws are no longer applicable (cf., Ac 10:9-23; 15:5, 28-29).

Fortunately, the Bible contains general statements regarding what God requires of his people—helpful for those who struggle with details. In preparation for their entrance into the land at the end of their wilderness wanderings, Moses tells the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," and earlier at the outset of their journey he tells them in Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus puts the two passages together in his answer to the question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Specific and concrete actions are needed to demonstrate the reality of one's claim to "have religion."

— Douglas J. Moo

(cf., Mt 22:37-40). In Deuteronomy 10:12-13, we read these words of Moses, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" Note the verbs he uses to describe what God requires: "fear," "walk," "love," "serve," and "observe." The essence of God's expectations is put this way by Micah: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). The prophet's words to Israel in the past remain applicable to Christians today. James offers his own summary in terms of "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless." He tells his readers, largely Jewish Christians, it is "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jas 1:27).

This Week's Core Competency

Self-Control – I have the power through Christ to control myself.

Self-control is a two sided coin. Consider what Peter tells his readers: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1Pe 1:13-16), and "Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to

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goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2Pe 1:5-9).

Two sides of self-control are seen in the complementary passages that you just read. One aspect is *negative*; the other is *positive*. People with self-control exercise restraint and do not act impulsively or rashly. They don't act like intoxicated people who are, generally speaking, not in control of their thought processes and therefore act irrationally. Rather, people with self-control act sensibly instead of senselessly. In other words, they use "common sense." Someone who does not have self-control is someone we say does not have good sense. So the meaning of "exercise self-control" has implications like "restrain your evil impulses," "discipline yourself to be holy," "make yourself obey God's word," "master your desires," or "say 'No' to temptations to sin." No wonder Satan can take advantage of those who lack self-control (1Co 7:5).

The same two sides of self-control are evident in James' letter. He writes: "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 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" (1:26-27).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

James 1:26-27

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 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.

Cf., another translation

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. 27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you. (NLT)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "religious" in v. 26.
- * Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 26.
- * Bracket "keep a tight rein" in v. 26.
- * Circle "tongues" in v. 26.
- * Underline "deceive themselves" in v. 26.
- * Circle "worthless" in v. 26.
- * Bracket "pure and faultless" in v. 27.
- * Circle "world" in v. 27.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. People nowadays pride themselves in being "spiritual" rather than "religious." What do you think about replacing "religious" with "spiritual" in verse 26?
2. Explain the *contrast* introduced by "yet" in verse 26.
3. "Religion" lacking self-control is "worthless." How so?
4. Explain why the "tongue" requires a "tight rein" (cf., 3:1-12).
5. James mentions a second form of self-deception in verse 26 after mentioning a first in verse 22. Describe them.
6. List the three traits of those whose religion is genuine.
7. Give contemporary examples of these three traits.
8. Some Christians argue that Christianity is not a "religion" and they are not "religious." Are you one of them? Explain why or why not.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the connection, if any, between showing compassion to the poor and keeping oneself from being contaminated by the world.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Listening is easy; doing not so much! Listening to what the Bible says is simple. Doing what it says, on the other hand, is a whole different matter. Many Christians mistake being *knowledgeable* for being *spiritual*. And so they study the Bible, read books on spirituality, and listen to those they think are the best qualified teachers—authors of best-selling books, pastors of renowned churches, and academics with PhDs—but ironically, in the process they become like those who want to be healthy, and so they read books on fitness, go to workshops on aerobic versus strength training, join fitness clubs, debate who makes the best treadmill, watch the fitness channel, and buy workout gear, but never actually exercise.

According to James, *listening* to what the Bible says isn't enough; we must *do* what it says. One author puts it this way, "James' chief interest lies in setting before his readers the need for obedience to the message that translates itself into practical effect. He is warning us against the notion of mere assent or tame acceptance of God's truth when it is viewed as an end in itself, or worse, as a substitute for practical religion" (Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 48, *James*, 44).

James sees *both* listening and doing as essential. In 1:19-21, James stresses *listening* to the word that was planted in us when we were saved (v. 21). "Take note of this," he insists in verse 19. "Everyone should be *quick to listen*, slow to speak and slow to become angry." In verses 22-25 he stresses *doing* what it says. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves," he warns. "Do what it says." The person who merely listens to the word is like the person who merely looks at himself in a mirror; both do nothing, and both are worse off for it. Instead, James instructs us to look intently into God's word and "abide by it" (NASB) if we want God's blessing on what we do. As one writer says: "Listening to truth is not an end in itself any more than gazing at one's face in a mirror is an end in itself. The purpose of listening to truth is to act upon it" (Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:175).

In verses 26-27, he concludes by giving three examples of the kind of doing that he has in mind. On verses 21-27 one commentator writes: "James' exhortation to Christians to 'accept' the implanted

word (v. 21) is the main point of vv. 21-27. But, typical of his concern that believers demonstrate the reality of faith in obedient lives, James goes on to specify just what it means to 'accept' the word. Essentially, James argues in vv. 22-25, to 'accept' the word means to 'do' it. 'Doing' frames vv. 22-25: 'Be doers of the word' (the Greek equivalent of these words comes at the beginning of the verse) opens the paragraph, 'blessed in what he does' conclude it" (Douglas J. Moo, *James*, PNTC, 88). James then becomes more practical and specific in his call to "accept" the word. Moo continues, "'Accept' the word" (v. 21) becomes 'do the word' (v. 22), which becomes 'do the law.' Verses 26-27 culminate this progression, as James suggest three ways in which believers can do the word/law" (95). These three are: control what you say (v. 26); show compassion to widows and orphans (v. 27) and avoid contamination by the world (v. 27). They are defining traits or essential traits of "pure and faultless" religion.

About the first, James has much more to say in 3:1-12.

About the next, Moo writes: "'Looking after widows and orphans' picks up a frequent OT refrain. In the ancient world, with an absence of money-making possibilities for women and any kind of social welfare, widows and orphans were helpless to provide for themselves. A mark of Israel's obedience, therefore, was to be a special concern for these helpless people" (97). A number of Old Testament passages testify to this. For example: "Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless" (Dt 22:22-24); "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Dt 14:28-29); and "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isa 1:17).

About the third, one commentator suggests that the second is the *means* and the third is the *end*. He writes: "It is perhaps preferable to translate the phrase 'in order to keep oneself unspotted from the world' [rather than "and to keep oneself . . ."]. This would suggest that the regular practice of mercy toward orphans and widow, indeed to visit (Greek: *episkeptesthai*) them for their assistance, is

a safeguard against worldly defilement. Any Christian who fails to mingle with and assist those who have greater material needs than his own is in serious danger of being infected by the world's selfishness, greed, and indifference" (Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James*, 47).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

To be genuine, your practice of Christianity must include controlling what you say, showing compassion to the poor and disenfranchised, and keeping yourself from being contaminated by the world.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Describe how an *individual* might respond to the message of this passage.

Describe how a *community* of believers might respond to the message of this passage.

Pen your reflections on:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-foster-care-became-christian-priority-just-time/>

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 26 **religious** "The words 'religious' (v. 26) and 'religion' (v. 27) are rare in the NT (Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18); and for much the same reason that many Christians avoid them. For they are very general in meaning, referring to worship in general, and especially often to the outward practice of ceremonies in honor of a god. Among Jewish writers, the words often referred to the cultic worship of the temple. Perhaps James deliberately chooses such broad terms in order to sharpen his point: anyone who has a claim to genuine religious experience must submit those claims to these tests" (Moo, 96).

v. 26 **tight rein** The figurative expression refers to the person whose speech is unrestrained like an unbridled horse. "He exerts no controlling restraint on his speech. Exactly how his speech offends is not indicated, whether it be by the cutting criticism of others, by uncleanness, by dishonesty, or by other ways. His uncontrolled tongue reveals that 'his religion is worthless,' being merely external sham" (Burdick, 12:176).

v. 26 **tongues** See 3:1-12. The word is used figuratively to refer to people's speech, namely "what they say" (3:2).

v. 26 **deceive themselves** "(apaton kardian heautou, lit., 'misleads or seduces his own heart!)" (J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 823).

v. 26 **worthless** I.e., of no practical value, "useless" (NKJV, Phillips) or "good for nothing." "This word translates a Greek word (mataios) that is often used in Scripture to characterize idolatry as 'vain' or 'meaningless' (in the NT, see Acts 14:15; Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:17; perhaps 1 Pet. 1:18). The 'religion' that people who do not control their speech have is no better, James suggests, than idolatry" (Moo, 96).

v. 27 **pure and faultless** Cf., "pure [i.e., not mixed with error] and undefiled [i.e., uncontaminated by the world]" (ESV, NET). "Verse 27 is not, and is not intended to be, a comprehensive definition of Christianity: it is an assertion of one element positively but not exclusively indispensable in that religion" (James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, NICNT, 85). "As Calvin says, '[James] does not define generally what religion is, but reminds us that religion without the things he mentions is nothing.' James is not polemicizing against religious ritual per se but against a ritual that goes no further than outward show and mere words" (Moo, 96).

v. 27 **world** "'World' describes the total system of evil that pervades every sphere of human existence and is set in opposition to God and to righteousness" (Burdick, 176). "In 1:27 James finds it convenient to use the word *kosmos* to epitomize the veils he has been describing in other words (vv. 14, 15, 20, 21, 26)" (Adamson, 87-88). "The 'world' is a common biblical way of referring to the ungodly worldview and lifestyle that characterize human life in its estrangement from the creator" (Moo, 97).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I often find when I'm going to write about something God gives me the perfect object lesson. Typically, it's something pretty amazing and uplifting, but this week He pointed out my sin and it cut like a knife. James 1:19 "...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." I failed the first two this weekend. I said something unkind to my nine-year-old this Sunday, at church no less, and it broke his heart. There's something about the familiarity of family that gives us the feeling we have the right to say things we wouldn't ordinarily say to a stranger or even a close friend. I would never had said what I did to one of your kids-why did I say it to mine? How can I expect my kids to hold their tongue when I can't? How can I expect my kids to think before they speak when words roll off my tongue like a tidal wave wreaking havoc? Thankfully, I was immediately convicted and was able to apologize to him and God, but the words were out there hanging over us like a dark cloud. He was so forgiving, gracious, and filled with mercy, because that's how kids are. No wonder Jesus calls us to a childlike faith. Parents, we are all works in progress, humbly seeking the Lord and learning as we go. I am praying for us this week to shower words of love and affirmation on our families.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Jas 1:19-27

1. What are the three things James encourages us to do in verse 19? Why?
2. In addition to listening to the word, what should we do? Why?
3. What kind of religion does God accept?

What Do You Think

What does it mean to be polluted by the world (v 2)?

What R U Going To Do

As a family, speak in Pig Latin for an entire meal. (Move the first consonant at the beginning of a word to the end and add an "A" sound. For example, Bible becomes lble-bA.) Was it difficult to carry on a conversation? Did you have to think about your words before you spoke them?

Core Comp

Self Control – I can take charge of myself with Jesus' help.

Memory Verse

1Sa 16:7 – *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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