

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

PURE RELIGION

*A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
PART TWENTY OF SIXTY FOUR*

"Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

James is not giving the "sum total, nor yet the great essentials, of true religion", but is seeking to contrast pure religion with that which is vain. Pure religion is not the performance, however faithfully such performances may be done, of a few externals. Rather it is worshiping based on a love of God. It involves man's heart. Godliness manifests itself in all phases of life, and not just in rites and ceremonies. Pure religion creates a personal benevolent spirit and a repudiation of the world. "To be truly religious, you must carry out the whole verse."

The Pharisees were outwardly religious in their ceremonial washings, street-corner prayers, etc., but such was a pretense to devour widows' houses (Mark 12:40). With a heart like the Master, Christians should visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. Because of our hardness

of heart and real unconcern for others, too often we want to shift our individual responsibilities to others. Some would have the church do it. Still others would have institutions of men do the work, and have the church support them. This makes each individual's contribution a paltry sum. James is reminding us of the Lord's statement that at judgment He will recognize His followers who render service to Him by visiting the needy among brethren, and will not recognize those who withhold such service (Matthew 25:34-46).

Pure religion is more than doing good deeds. While the Christian cannot selfishly isolate himself from contact with the woes of others, he must in all his associations maintain personal purity. He must not allow himself to be spotted by the world. As the lambs offered to God in the Old Testament had to be without blemish, all Christians must seek to be "without spot and blameless in his sight" (II Peter 3:14). There must be a perpetual striving after personal holiness and a "putting away" of "all filthiness" (James 1:21). "Keep thyself pure" (I Timothy 5:22).

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