

Faith Works: Living What We Claim to Believe

Faith Loves

Dr. David Platt

September 6, 2009



FAITH LOVES James 1:26-2:13

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to James 1. Søren Kierkegaard once said, "The human race, in the course of time, has taken the liberty of softening and softening Christianity, until at last we have contrived to make it exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament." Let me repeat that. Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher theologian said, "The human race, in the course of time, has taken the liberty of softening and softening Christianity, until at last we have contrived to make it exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament."

I agree with Kierkegaard, in that we try at every turn to define Christianity on our terms instead of what God has outlined in the New Testament. I am convinced one of the deep dark secrets of our religious subculture in Birmingham, Alabama, is that we want Christianity and we want church on our terms, in a way that aligns with our preferences and accommodates our lifestyles. Regardless of what the New Testament says, we are happy to go to church, we are glad to be Christians just so long as we don't have to make radical changes in our lives in order to do so. We soften Christianity and create a religion that is opposite of what it is in the New Testament.

The only problem is in order for our religion, in order for Christianity to be true and authentic and actually acceptable before God, we have to take Christianity on God's terms, according to His definition of religion, which is very different from ours. And so we're faced with a choice. On one hand, we can take Christianity and twist it into our terms and our preferences and our lifestyles, or we can surrender our preferences, our lifestyles and our terms and submit ourselves to what God has said is true, authentic, acceptable religion before Him, and the stakes here are high. And what we're going to see over the next two weeks in particular, end of James 1 into James 2, is the definition of religion and faith that is radically different than what we might contrive. And I want to challenge us over the next two weeks in two major ways based on the Word of God in James. I want, as your pastor, to present before you as a faith family two major challenges over the next two weeks, one today, one next week, based on the Word of God in James. And in the Word of God in James, we are going to have to decide whether we are going to take religion on God's terms or we're going to settle for it on our terms, which one do we want?

And be careful before we answer. Luther said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing and is ultimately worth nothing." And James 1 and 2 is about to turn us upside down. I was telling some leaders this week I don't recommend preaching through James. I'm not going to recommend preaching through James, because James changes everything, and I think these next couple of weeks are going to show us that. So, with that lead-in, go with me to James 1:26. We're going to read the end of Chapter 1 and go midway through to Chapter 2 today. James 1:26:

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his 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.

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

God, we pray that you would help us to understand religion according to your terms, that by your Spirit you would take our minds, our hearts, our lives, this church, and that you would keep us from religion that is worthless, that you would bring us onto your terms, that you would guard us from playing religious games with eternal realities and that you would help us particularly, God, over these next couple of weeks to give ourselves to what you have said is pure and faultless. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

The Marks of True and Acceptable Religion...

Religion, probably not a word that has the most positive of connotations among many and really not a word that's very common in the New Testament at all. But here James uses it to describe what faith looks like in action, the kind of faith that is pure, faultless, acceptable before God, worthy, so to speak, before God, as opposed to being worthless. And what I want us to see in verses 26 and 27 of Chapter 1 is three marks of true and acceptable religion, and then see how that third one is expanded on, I believe, in Chapter 2, so three marks of true and acceptable religion.

Controlled Speech that Displays a Changed Heart

What does true religion look like in our lives? Mark number one: controlled speech that displays a changed heart. Controlled speech that displays a changed heart. Verse 26, "If

anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." James, why don't you really say what you're thinking there? This is one of many times that James is going to talk about the tongue. He's already mentioned about being slow to speak. We're going to camp out for a while on this when we get to James 3. But for the time being, I want you just to feel the weight of what the Word of God is saying right here. Now, keep in mind, James relies heavily on what Jesus has already said in the Gospels. And you remember what Jesus had said regarding our words, "Out of the heart flows the overflow of the mouth," our words are in overflow of what is inside of us. Matthew 12:34, Luke 6, both of these talk about how what we speak is an overflow of what is inside of us.

And the picture here is if we are speaking in a way that does not bring honor and glory to God, if we do not have a tight reign on our tongue, controlled speech, then this is a picture of our heart. And what James is saying, what Scripture is saying is if we don't have a tight reign on our tongue then our religion is a sham, it is vane, literally meaningless here. We need to be warned here. When we speak, brothers and sisters, we tell the truth about what is in our heart. Husbands, when you speak to your wife or about your wife, you are telling the truth about your heart. Ladies, when you speak to your husband or about your husband, you are telling the truth about your heart. When you speak to family, when you speak to friends, when you speak about others, you are exposing realities that are at the core of your heart. When our language is filled with gossip or backbiting or cursing or anger or maybe just plain inundated with trivialities, we are revealing things that are at the depth of our heart. And what James is saying here is the tongue is the test of true religion.

Now, I want to be careful here because the tongue, what we say, is not the only indicator of what is in our hearts. And as we've seen before and we're going to see today, we can oftentimes make professions with our lips that are not backed up with our lives, but there's a word for us here today, in a day of text messaging, cell phones, blogs, e-mail, out of control twittering, tweets all over the place. We live in a day where we've bought into this cultural idea that if you have a thought that necessitates that you announce it to the world, and it's not true. Be careful. Be careful, brothers and sisters in our day, to keep a tight reign on your tongue and to make your words count. Amidst all the texting and e-mailing and writing to realize that what we are saying is a reflection of our hearts, tongue, the test of true religion. Now, that's the first factor. We're going to camp out in that more when we get to James 3.

Then we get to verse 27, I love this verse, "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:*" two things, "*to look after orphans and widows in their distress and,*" second, "*to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*" I love this picture. Practical compassion, personal purity put right up next to one another. And the reality is we have a tendency to go to one of these and leave the other behind. And religion and politics, you think about it, jump up on your right wing conservative platform and talk about how we need to guard our morals and the sanctity of life and truth, or jump up on your left wing liberal platform and talk about how we need to have social concern for the needs of those around us. And James says, "Yes." I'm not saying James is a Republican or a Democrat, that matters little here. What James is saying is that true religion brings public compassion and personal purity side by side. You can't care deeply about the needs of the world and throw your morals to the wind, and you cannot stand deeply on these conservative truths you hold to and lack concern with your life for the needs of the world around you. They must both come together. Personal purity, public practical compassion, this is what God our Father accepts as pure and faultless.

Sacrificial Care for Those in Need

The next two marks of true and acceptable religion: first, sacrificial care for those in need, *"to look after orphans and widows in their distress,"* sacrificial care for those in need. This word, "to look after," and you might have little notes in there because we've looked at this before, this word, we've traced it before all throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, it's a word that literally means "to visit someone", "to seek someone out", not just to say hello, but to care for them, to provide for them. It's a word, it's a potent word in Scripture that God uses in Exodus, in Luke 1, Luke 7, to describe how He visits His people, to care for them and to provide for them, it's talked about that way in Acts 15. This is a word that's not just to check in on somebody, but to take ownership and responsibility for caring for them, to look after them.

And here's the deal, in that day, there was no life insurance program for a widow or a child, this husband or father passed away, there were no welfare programs. And the reality is orphans, widows, the picture is they are in need. There is a void there for the widow or the widower, the void of a husband or wife who is no longer there. And I know that there are brothers and sisters spread throughout this room that find yourself there this morning, and God, I remind you, is your defender and your sustainer and your strength and your life. In need, the widow and the orphan, the orphan who has no mom or dad.

Joshua, our son is now 21 months old, and his new thing is to be the chef in the house. And he has this chef hat that he'll put on, either a chef hat or we've got him one from the Varsity in Atlanta, you know those hats so, either way, we're trying to teach him to say, "What'll you have?" if you ever been to the Varsity or the Chef House. He'll put on an apron, and he's got this little kitchen deal, and he'll go in and he'll make food and deliver it to us, that's his new thing.

Caleb's new thing, 3-1/2, his new thing is, after we've had family worship in the evening, where we come together and we read together and we pray together and we sing songs together, and then we put the kids to bed. And Caleb's new thing is when you're tucking him into bed, he wants you to crawl in there with him. And so last night, every night, crawl in there with him, and he'll just lay there. And one of his favorite things is for me to say, "Do you know how much daddy loves you?" And he'll say, "How much?" And then I'll give him this huge bear hug. And then he'll look back at me, first time last night, looking back at me and he said, "How much does Caleb love you?" I said, "How much?" And he gives me this huge bear hug, you know, wow!

And as I read James 1:27, I am thankful to God for this gospel commandment that makes that possible in our Caleb's life, because there are countless kids still in the baby house where he came from in Kazakhstan who do not have a father doing that with them. There are literally millions of kids who did not have a mom or dad wake them up this morning, who do not have a mom or dad giving them a bear hug or putting a chef hat on their head, and there are millions of kids who will not have a mom or dad tuck them into their beds tonight. And James says to the church, "This is not an option for you. This is not one way that you can show love as a Christian, this is an obligation upon the church to look after orphans and widows in their distress, in such a way that if you are not doing this your religion is not acceptable before God as pure and faultless." That's how serious this deal is.

They are in need. We must not neglect them. We must not neglect them. "*Religion that,*" I love this, "*God our Father,*" He is the Father to the fatherless, He shows His provision for the needy how? Through His people. Through His people's real, true, authentic, not just listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says kind of religion. Care for, look after the orphans and the widows; otherwise, your religion is not acceptable before God. Sacrificial care for those in need.

Clear Separation from the Ways of the World

And then third - controlled speech, sacrificial care, and then third, clear separation. Third mark: true authentic religion, clear separation from the ways of the world, clear separation from the ways of the world. Now, this is where it starts to get interesting because many think, "Okay, keep oneself from being polluted by the world, be pure." And then we kind of close the book on James 1 and get into James 2. I'm convinced there's a clear key link between James 1:27, end of that verse, and what follows in James 2:1-13. The picture here - go over to James 4. Let me just encourage you to circle this, James 4:4, we'll get to this later in our walking through the book of James, but it says, "*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world,*" circle world there, "*friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world,*" circle it there, "*becomes an enemy of God.*"

Now, come back, work your way back to Chapter 2:5, "*Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world,*" circle it there, "poor in the eyes of the world." And then keep working your way back to James 1:27, "*in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world,*" circle it there. What I want you to see is where this theme is going. James is setting up a picture throughout this letter where he is going to show us the ways of God in contrast with the way of the world, the ways of God in contrast with the way of the world. The way of the world, there's a system in this world that runs completely contrary to the ways of God. And He is going to urge us to stay out of this world's system, that's religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by this world, to not live according to the system.

And what he does in Chapter 2:1-13, is he gives us a picture of how the church had bought into the world's system with favoritism, and the church was doing exactly what the world did, honoring the rich and neglecting the poor. That's the way the world works, isn't it? In the world, you give preferential treatment to those who can benefit you the most, right? In the world, you give preferential treatment to those who benefit you the most, those who you have the most to gain from. And James says, "You're doing that in the church." He gives this illustration of a man coming into the meeting wearing a gold ring, fine clothes, and then a poor man, basically the picture of homelessness, shabby clothes coming in, showing special attention to the man with fine clothes, saying, "Here's a good seat for you." The poor man in shabby clothes, "Sit by my feet." That's not the way the church looks, that's the way the world looks. Now, that begs the question, then, from us, "Are we doing the same thing in the church today?"

Now, it's at this point we could easily begin to consider, maybe churches that we've been a part of, grown up in, where if you had wealth, you were immediately given influence in the church. And those who were leaders in the church are the ones who had the most money in the church, and obviously, there is no place for that in Scripture. But instead of considering that, why not consider ourselves at this point? Have we honored the rich, shown preference to the rich to whom the church can gain benefit in the eyes of the world while neglecting the poor? Have we done that? Think about it. Think about the buildings we have designed and the programs we have created. Have we designed our buildings and created our programs for the poor? Or have we designed our buildings and created our programs for the rich, to appeal to those who have much? Because, after all, those who have much expect much. They expect excellence. They expect things to look good, to be appealing. Have we not taken the very resources of God and used them to appeal to the rich while we have said to the poor, "We will throw you our scraps at our feet."

Brothers and sisters, we are guilty of honoring the rich and neglecting the poor in the way we have approached church, and we need to repent. It's the same picture that James is describing here. The question is how? How do we go against the grain of a system that we are so engrained in? Because after all, we are relatively rich compared to the rest of the world, all of us, so we want to appeal to ourselves. We naturally ignore the poor, and that's what James is saying, "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," to live radically different over here. How do we do that?

And this is what I want you to see, James unpacking here in James 2. How do we do that? And James gives the church reminders to address this major need in the community of faith in that day and in our day. He reminds them first: we are captivated by the glory of Christ. Chapter 2:1, "*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,*" it's only the second time, one of two times that James will even refer directly to Jesus in the whole book. First time, James 1:1, "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*" second time, "*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*" (Jas. 2:1). Now, teachings of Christ are all over, every single verse in the Book of James. There's two direct references to Jesus, and you'll notice here, he adds, "*As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.*" Now, some of you may have different translations. Some of your translations may say, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious one," or "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." The emphasis here is on how the glory of God is embodied in the person of Christ. The emphasis here is on the majesty, glory, splendor, the reign of Christ above all and over all. As believers in that Christ, think about this, if we are captivated by the glory of Christ, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of glory, if He captivates our hearts and our minds then this radically affects the way we view others.

First of all, we realize that He is supreme over the wealthy. We see his supremacy over the wealthy. A proper view of man is dependent on a proper view of Christ. We look at those who are wealthy and successful in the world, and we begin to attribute honor to them oftentimes unnecessarily, undue honor. The wealthy are not deserving of honor. Christ is worthy of honor. He is supremely Lord over all. This affects the way we view man. We seek Christ as supreme over the wealthy. James is saying, "Get your eyes on the glory of Christ."

See Him in His majesty and His splendor and then, second, remember His sacrifice for the needy, because it was Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, who came down for poor sinners like you and me. Those who are impoverished in our sin, completely unlike Him, that's who He came to save. 2 Corinthians 8:9, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*" If you followed that Savior then favoritism toward the wealthy makes no sense. If anything, you follow this Savior, there's favoritism toward the poor, if anything, but don't show favoritism is what he's saying.

And the picture here is when we see Christ as supreme and the one who sacrificed Himself for the poor, then it radically affects the way we look at others in the world around us. This is a different way to perceive people. It's transformed by the glory of Christ, this is where the gospel transforms the way we live. We're captivated by the glory of Christ.

Second, we are gripped by the grace of Christ. He finishes this illustration in verse 4, and then he says in verse 5, "*Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen,*" it's a picture of grace. God has "*chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him*" (Jas. 2:5). This is the picture that we see throughout redemptive history. God, in His grace, pursuing, in particular, the poor,

not just because they're poor but because they respond to Him, they see their need for Him, and He is the defender of the poor.

Psalm 68:10, *"O God, you provided for the poor."* Jesus, Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount that James keeps alluding us back to starts with, "Blessed are the," what "in spirit"? *"The poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:3). And what James is saying is when you neglect the poor, you are negating the very grace of God that He has expressed all throughout redemptive history. You're running contrary to the very plan and purposes of God to reach out to the poor. Might *"be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him"* (Jas. 2:5). This is the way to remember Him. And when Christ comes on the scene, He changes everything. Christ reverses our status in this world.

Christ reverses our status in this world, it's the whole picture of the parable, the rich man and Lazarus, you remember, we studied that. And the rich man has everything in this world, and the poor man, Lazarus, sits at his gate begging for food. And then they both die, and everything changes. And he who sought pleasure in this world realizes that it was all temporary. And he who trusted in the God who reaches out to those who admit their need for Him realizes that pleasures forever more are his in eternity. Reverses our status, it's the whole picture of what Paul writes, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were of noble birth,"* basically, it says, "Not many of you had much to bring to the table. You were outcasts, and yet God chose you and raised you up to show his power in you." Christ reverses our status.

And the picture here is that as God does that, He not only reverses our status, but He changes the way we view status in this world, which leads to the second part, Christ reverses our status in this world, and as a result, Christ transforms our standards in this world. James says here in verses 6 and 7, "Do you realize who you're honoring? You are honoring the very people who are oppressing you. You are appeasing the very people who are oppressing you." And the people who are far from God - now, I want to be careful here not to imply that poverty automatically implies righteousness, and riches automatically implies wickedness. But the picture here, and we don't know the whole contextual situation here in James 2, but the picture is the rich were oppressing the poor, they were blaspheming the name of Christ, and yet they were still living to try to please them while they ignored the poor. And James says, "Stop looking at the people around you according to the standards of this world, according to what car they drive or house they live in or clothes they wear." There's something deeper here. Christ has reversed our status, and He transforms the way we see other people. Has Christ done that in your life? Is He doing that more and more and more so that you see other people through the eyes of Christ, through the lens of the glory of Christ and the grace of Christ? We are captivated by the glory of Christ, gripped by the grace of Christ. Third, we are devoted to the law of Christ.

In verse 8, James starts saying, *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."* Anybody know where he's quoting from there in verse 8? This is the audience participation part of our program. He's quoting from—a little note in your Bible takes you to the bottom—Leviticus 19. I won't make you turn there, but listen. Leviticus 19, he's quoting from verse 18, just a couple verses before that, Leviticus, the Law in the Old Testament, it said, *"Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly"* (Lev. 19:15). It's the same picture that James is talking about. And you get down to verse 18, and he says, *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."*

The royal law, do you remember when Jesus was asked about the commandments of God, when He said, "The first and greatest commandment is this, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, all your mind, and with all your strength." And the second is like it, "To love your," who? "Neighbor as yourself," the royal law found in Scripture. And this is so beautiful when you think about how James is using this word "law." Because back in James 1:25, he had written, "*The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,*" we talked about that a couple weeks ago, the law that gives freedom, the royal law found in Scripture here. Then you get down to verse 12, "*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.*" And the picture here is the law of love, commandments of God fulfilled in Christ, expanded in Christ focus on, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself," that in Christ you are free from sin and selfishness. You are free from the ways of this world to love extravagantly. That's the point. As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, love. You're free from bondage to the ways of this world. You've been brought out from that so that you might love in the way that is radically different. This is where Christian love is radically distinct from any other type of love. It's love that is grounded in Christ, and there's no room for favoritism in it.

He begins talking about how if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers, that favoritism is sin. That's why I say if in any way we have honored the rich while neglecting the poor, this is sin and we need to repent. It's as if we had broken the whole law, as if we not just broke one little part, but it's if we hit one part of a window and the whole thing is shattered. This is that serious. Why is it that serious?

Well, think about it, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength." Favoritism first disrespects man. That word "favoritism" literally means "to receive according to the face", in other words, to respond to someone based upon external factors, external appearance, to respond to them based on that.

Now, we have been talking about favoritism when it comes to the rich and the poor, and that's exactly what this context right here is addressing. But I want to encourage you at this point to think through if there are any facets of your life where you are showing favoritism, discrimination based on external appearance, based on external factors, for this is sin. And there are many ways that this may look. As I was praying for this, I was reminded again of the ways of the world that are so pervasive in our lives. I was reminded of this particularly when it comes to ethnicity. I'm not going to use the term "race" here, different races, because I think we have to be careful when we talk about different races because we begin to divide up the theological reality that we are all a part of the race from Adam. And this affects how we view ourselves, view our unity in Christ, our need for Christ.

But when it comes to different ethnicities, you think about it. Imagine yourself walking into a lunchroom and there are two tables. You're by yourself and there are two tables. At one table, there are a small group of people with an ethnicity like you, and at the other table, there's a small group of people with an ethnicity not like you. What immediately goes through your mind? Because the reality is we are drawn naturally to the table that is like us. What is the thought process that leads to that? Isn't it something like, at the speed of thoughts, it's not like we intentionally go through these stages, but isn't it something like, "Okay, like me, not like me; like me therefore safe; safe therefore comfortable; comfortable therefore beneficial to me," and the converse, "Not like me therefore not safe, not comfortable, not as beneficial to me."

And the challenge before us is to ask God in Christ to radically transform our thinking so that we do not live according to the pollution of the world, that even in the way we speak we are careful not to discriminate, not to show, point out how people are different from us based on external appearance, external factors. When someone says to me, "I was talking with a Korean guy the other day..." Why did you tell me he was Korean? "I was talking with a Hispanic guy the other day..." Why did you include that? Do you say, "I was talking with a white guy the other day? I was talking with a black guy the other day?" The reality is we are constantly thinking in terms of what separates us from others, and the body of Christ changes everything. We are all in Adam's in race, in need of Christ, and with brothers and sisters, we are all unified in Christ in a way that transforms, transcends ethnicity. And so we must be careful here to avoid favoritism that disrespects man, that always highlights our differences, because it not only disrespects man but ultimately favoritism dishonors God Himself. We're not just breaking a law, we're offending a lawgiver. To show favoritism is to dishonor God. This is serious stuff and leads to the next reminder: we are cognizant of the judgment of Christ.

Verse 12, *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful"* (Jas. 2:12-13). Wow, James just goes right for the jugular. "Speak and act because you're going to be judged." This is where it started, isn't it? Verse 26 and 27, "Speak and act in a way that shows your religion is pure and faultless. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged." He brings in this picture of judgment and reminds us, first, our words will be judged. Our words will be judged, it's James, it's Jesus. Listen to Matthew 12:36, Jesus says, *"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matt. 12:36-37).

Does that not make you want to spend the rest of today in silence? You will...Men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken, *"By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matt. 12:37). That'll make you think twice before texting, speaking. What Jesus is talking about there in Matthew 12 is what we talked about earlier because our words are the overflow of our hearts, but don't miss the relationship here in James between faith and words and faith and works. Our words will be judged and our deeds, or lack thereof, will be judged. Our deeds will be judged.

Now, some may think, "That does not sound New Testament, like, Paul would never say that." I remind you, Romans 2, *"God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism"* (Rom. 2:6-11).

Talk about humbling words. God will give to each person according to what He has done. This is why James would make such strong statements about religion, that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this. Because, well, let's go back to Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:10, *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."* And what James is saying is, "Speak and act like what you are saying and doing is going to affect all of eternity."

Isn't this exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 25, when He was talking to those who were not feeding the hungry and clothing the poor? And He said, "Because you did not, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." There's a cognizance of the coming judgment of Christ that reminds every single person in this room, you and I will stand before God to give an account for our words and our deeds.

Now, for some of you, that causes you inside to tremble, and it should, that causes us to think, "How can I stand before God accountable for all the things I've said and all the things I've done? I'm doomed." And this is the gospel. Yes, you are doomed, eternally doomed for your words and your deeds because you are a lawbreaker, we are lawbreakers, we are guilty of breaking the whole thing. And praise be to God, mercy triumphs over judgment. This is the gospel. It is the cross of Jesus Christ, the justice of God and the mercy of God come to meet together as one in the cross. And the payment, the judgment for sin is poured out fully. And the mercy of God over sin in His Son, Christ, is made available to all who would trust in Him. Have you done that? Not talking about religious games here, religious activities, have you realized that you stand condemned before God and your sin, that you will stand before Him one day to give an account, have you cried out for Him to pour out His mercy on your soul to cover over your sins by what Christ has done on the cross?

If you have never done that then I urge you at this very moment in your heart to say, "Yes, I need your mercy. I need your grace to cover over my sins, to fill me, clothe me with the righteousness of Christ that I might one day stand before you, not based on my account but on His account that He bought for me on the cross." Trust Him now in your heart and this reality, by faith, is yours. Glory be to God for that great gospel. Mercy literally boasts over judgment. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Now, see where this flows. You trust in Christ, whether at this moment for His mercy or whatever point of your life up until now, you've done that. Here's the reality, we're cognizant of the judgment of Christ and we are a reflection of the mercy of Christ. We are a reflection of the mercy of Christ. If your life has been transformed by that gospel, that mercy has flooded into your heart then it changes everything about how you live. You can't receive mercy like that and go on with a loose tongue and deeds that avoid the poor and the needy and the oppressed and the weak, you can't do it, it's impossible.

So—what James is going to show us in the days to come—it's impossible to say that you have faith and there not be any actions from it. Here's the reality, you got this in your notes, as we have received mercy, so we extend mercy. When the mercy of God is a reality in your heart then mercy toward others becomes a reality in your life. When the mercy of God is a reality in your heart then mercy toward others becomes a reality in your life that flow from one another. This is how James can say—it's come in full circle here—this is how James can say, "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress*," he's not saying, "Look after orphans and widows in their distress so that you can receive mercy from God," that would undercut the whole picture (Jas. 1:27). Because mercy is mercy, because it can't be earned, you can't do anything to receive mercy, it is given.

There's a picture here in James 2:5, "*Has not God chosen those who are poor*," He's poured out His mercy on us, but religion that looks after orphans and widows in their distress is the automatic byproduct of the transforming mercy of God in our hearts. So that when his mercy transforms your heart, it is evident in your life in the way you speak and in the way you act, speak and act with mercy, which is how James can say, "Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful." What he's saying there is if you have

not been merciful, don't miss this, if you are not merciful then you are showing the mercy of Christ is not in you. And if Christ is not in you, then on that day of judgment, then you will stand, give an account with no one else, and you will be given judgment without mercy.

You see, the converse here as we have received mercy, so we extend mercy. If we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy. If we are not extending mercy, we are demonstrating that we have not received mercy. If there is not mercy toward others in our lives then there is reason to question whether or not Christ is in our hearts. If there is not mercy in the way we speak and act toward others in our lives then there is reason to question whether or not Christ is in our hearts. James says, "If there's no mercy in your life toward the orphan and the widow, if you're living according to the ways of this world, and if you don't have a tight reign on your tongue, your religion is a sham because you're trying to operate on that which is hollow, it's worthless."

Hear this, hear this, men and women all across this Christian subculture where religion is rampant and oftentimes hollow. Is the mercy of Christ alive in your heart? "How do I know?"

The Manifestation of True and Acceptable Religion...

Look at your life. When it comes to those who are needy, when it comes to what we say, and this is where we come to overall point of this text is that the mercy of God produces mercy in the people of God, which transforms the way we speak and we act, which leads to this reality: the manifestation of true and acceptable religion, faith always expresses itself through love, love for others, love for the orphan and the widow, not an option for those whose faith is real.

So, here's the challenge. I praise God for His mercy, expressed, evident all across this faith family, His mercy in the way you speak and the way you sing to the glory of God and the way you speak about others, in the way you speak to leaders, to me, and praise God for His mercy expressed in the families all across this room who have in different ways looked after orphans and widows in their distress. You have shown obedience to James 1:27, which leads me to this challenge, it's something that God brought to my heart and my mind as I was praying through this text a few weeks ago, millions of orphans around the world, but not just around the world, they're here as well. There are over 500,000 children in the foster care system in the United States, over 100,000 of whom are waiting for and wanting a parent to adopt them.

And so I came across that statistic a few weeks ago, and I called up the Department of Human Resources here in our county, and I asked them if they have any needs when it comes to foster care, and they said, "We are desperate with a capital D." I said, "How many families do you have?" They said, "We have 35 families for the whole county." I said, "How many do you need?" They said, "We really need about 150 more to be able to care for the needs of kids in this county, the needs of kids who right now who are waiting for and wanting a parent to take them in and adopt them." I said, "Do you have to adopt as a part of the foster care system?" They said, "No, many times we have needs for an overnight stay, for a child who, as a result of physical, drug, sexual abuse, crimes they've seen or witnessed, they have a need just to have a home for a couple of nights."

And as I listened to this particular lady talk, I wondered, "Why could we not take our county and say, 'We're not going to let a child in our county be without a mom or a dad for a night, without someone who will care for them and love on them maybe for a short time, maybe for a long time, whatever is best for that child?' Why can we not as a faith family say, in accordance with James 1:27, 'We're not just going to listen to the Word and so deceive ourselves and go on our way?' We're going to do what it says, and we're going to take responsibility for caring for the kids that are right around us."

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: Radical.net