

Life Group Notes

How to be religious

James 1:19-27

To begin

If someone asked you if you are religious, what would you say? Why does being religious have such a negative image with those outside of the church?

Further Questions

1. Bill Hybels distinguishes between religion and faith. He suggests that religion is spelt 'DO' whilst faith is spelt 'DONE'. How does this speak to you?
2. In verses 26-27, James talks of those 'who consider themselves religious' and of the 'religions that God our Father accepts'. The Greek word behind these terms (*threskos/threskeia*) usually refers to the outward expression of religion through liturgy and ceremony. What is the value of such outward expressions of faith? What more is required by God?
3. James talks of three things that lead us towards being religious in the right way. The first is to receive the Word of God (vv19-21). What can get in the way of us doing so?

The word translated 'moral filth' (v21, NIV) is closely linked to the word for 'earwax' (Greek = *ruparia/rupos*). Tim shared the story of having his ears syringed of the earwax that prevented him from hearing better. Like earwax, there can be all sorts of gunk in our lives that prevents us from hearing the Word of God rightly!

After the 'gunk' is removed, we can 'humbly accept the word planted in [us]'. If you have time, take a look at how the word can yield fruit (or not) in Matthew 13:1-8).

4. The second thing we must do is to practise the Word. Verses 22-25 remind that we must do what the Word says, otherwise we are like the person who looks in a mirror and goes away and immediately forgets what they look like! Think about what you see when you look in a mirror. What does reading the Bible help us to see in ourselves?
5. How does looking into the Word lead us toward being religious in the right way? See verse 25.
6. James has a lot to say about the damage that can be done by the tongue. We'll look at that in more detail in a later study. But how can we use our tongues (i.e. our speech) wisely? What would Jesus do?
7. The third thing James encourages us to do is to share the Word (vv26-27) in practical ways. What is Well Street Church doing in that regard? What else do you dream of us doing?

Conclusion

James encourages us to be religious, but in right ways. He wants our actions to back up our words. As he says in 2:17, 'faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead'. James is not saying that we are saved by works, but that works will be the evidence that we truly have faith in Christ. We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* them (see also Ephesians 2:10).

Pray

Perhaps the following ditty can prompt your prayers?

'Mirror, mirror, on the wall.
Do I look like Christ at all?'

Keep looking into the Word, do what it says and inevitably you will look more and more like Christ!

Tim Edworthy

2 July 2017