

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Stop Kidding Yourself James 1:19-27 Part Seventeen

We all, I think would say, “It is important for us as professing believers to show love in very tangible ways. But saying something and doing something about it are two totally different things.” Certainly this is true in respect to how we treat the poor of this world.

It is not enough for us to say, “If we ever become rich we will be generous with the poor.” The ball, in a very real sense, is in our court right now! At this very instant.

I came across this story of a professing believer who boasted to a missionary that if he had 50 pigs, he would give 25 of them to the Lord’s work. “That’s very nice” said the missionary. “If you had 30 pigs would you give 15 to the Lord’s work?” “Of course I would,” said the professing believer. “If you had ten would you give five of them?” asked the missionary again. “You know I would,” he answered. Then the missionary said, “If you had two, would you give one to the Lord?” The professing believer responds, “You know I have only two pigs.” He was willing to give everything that he did not have, but not even a part of what he did have. This lack of follow through can be very significant when we, as professing believers, are confronted with genuine need and though we have the resources, fail to respond. Certainly James would see this as significant.

The theme of James is “Tests of Living Faith!” This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we are saved. The first test that we find in this epistle is the “The Response to Trials test.” This test is found in **James 1:2-18**. We are now considering the second test which is “The Response to the Word test” in **James 1:19-27**. A proper response to the word involves a “proper reception” in **VV. 19-21** and a life characterized by “active obedience” in **VV. 22-27**.

As we have explored this area of “active obedience,” we have looked at the “demand for it” in **VV. 22-25** and we are now looking at specific “illustrations of it” in **VV. 26-27**. The very first area that we have looked at is the speech area. Let us look at **V. 26** **“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”** This morning we will be moving on to consider a second area of concern which is stated for us in **V. 27** **“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father; to visit orphans and widows in their distress**” We will call this second area that James highlights

GENUINE CONERN FOR THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

Let us read the very first part of this verse once more. **“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress.....”**

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Generally, the neediest people in the early church were the two groups contained in this verse. There were no life insurance or welfare programs to support them. Jobs for either group were scarce, and if they had no close family members, or at least none who would help them, they were financially challenged to provide for themselves the basic necessities of life. I understand that this verse addresses only these two specific groups, but I would have to think that these two groups are really representative of anyone who is struggling to provide for themselves at the most basic level of food and covering. When we come across someone like this, whether they are an **“orphan”** or a **“widow”** or anyone else that is in **“distress”** because of the lack of basic necessities, the Lord would expect us to take action.

Where do we see this in **V. 27**? Notice the word **“visit.”** What does this mean? Does James mean a physical visit which will enable us to say a few comforting words to a child who has lost his father and mother or to a woman who has lost her husband? Certainly it might include this, if this was a genuine need, but I believe the word is bigger than this.

The word “visit” (EPISKEPTESTHAI) means much more than to drop by for a chat. It carries the ideas of caring for others, exercising oversight on their behalf, and of helping them in whatever way is needed. It is from the same root as EPISKOPOS, which means “overseer” and is sometimes translated “bishop.” (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:25). THEREFORE TO VISIT IN A WAY THAT IS PLEASING TO OUR GOD AND FATHER IS TO MEET, AS BEST WE CAN, ALL THE NEEDS OF ORPHANS AND WIDOWS AND ANY OTHERS IN WHATEVER DISTRESS THEY MAY BE IN. BUT TYPICALLY THE “WHATEVER DISTRESS” IN THE CASE OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS IN THE TIME OF PAUL INVOLVED THE LACK OF THE BASIC NECESSITIES OF LIFE.

How important is it that we actually take this instruction to heart and act on it? The passage tells us that this type of visitation is **“pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father.”** The implication is clear. If the presence of this type of visitation in our lives is in the sight of God **“pure and undefiled religion”** then I believe that we would have to conclude that the absence of this type of visitation in our lives is in the sight of God **“impure and defiled religion.”** This of course brings us right back to **V. 26** and the painful conclusion that James drew for us there.

James tells us in **V. 26** that if we fail to **“bridle our tongue,”** then we deceive ourselves and our religion is what? Worthless! I believe that James is in essence saying the same thing in **V. 27**. If we fail to **“visit”** those who are in need by seeking to meet their needs as best as we can and this is the pattern of our lives, then if we believe ourselves to be religious, we have deceived ourselves and our religion is worthless. Why would it be worthless? Because it is **“impure and defiled.”**

We cannot assume that we have **“genuine faith.”** We must take time to examine ourselves to see if in fact we are truly saved. The first test that James gives us in order to examine ourselves is the **“RESPONSE TO TRIALS TEST.”** The second test is the **“RESPONSE TO THE WORD TEST.”** The proper response to the word not only requires a proper reception but also a proper response, and this entails active obedience. The first area that James highlights for us as an area where active obedience needs to be manifested in is in the **BRIDLING OF OUR TONGUE**. The second area where active obedience needs to be manifested in is in the area of **GENUINE CONCERN FOR OTHERS**.

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I would like to take the last remaining minutes left in this message to address the question : What areas do we need to give attention to if we are going to thrive in this area of showing genuine concern for the welfare of others?. There is much that can be shared but I would like to begin to address this question at it's most basic level and that is at the material level which was certainly the primary need of widows and orphans in the time of Christ. If we are going to show genuine concern for the welfare of others at the material level, we need to prepare ourselves in three different areas.

WE MUST BE PREPARED FINANCIALLY

Let me ask you a question: Do you have the financial resources readily available to you at this moment in time to assist a person who is in financial need, as an expression of concern for them?

A number of years ago I believe my salary was about 40% less than a public school teacher. We had three children at home and Lynn was not working. This meant that we did not have a lot of money. And in the midst of this our 1985 Toyota Van's transmission went out. We had it towed to a local transmission shop in town and they told me that the bill would be something like \$1,500 - \$1,600. We had the money to fix it. But certainly it was not as if this was no big deal. The cost of that repair was very significant. So what happened? The transmission shop called us and told us that the van was ready and when I went to pay the bill they told me the bill had already been paid. He told me that someone in our church congregation had seen our van being towed to their shop and apparently came in later to pay our bill. This someone in our congregation took pity on Lynn and I and demonstrated their concern for us in a very tangible act of generosity. IN EFFECT THEY HAD VISITED LYNN AND I IN OUR TIME OF NEED WITHOUT EVER COMING TO OUR DOOR. HOW WAS THIS POSSIBLE? HOW COULD THEY THRIVE IN THIS AREA OF GIVING? THEY HAD THE RESOURCES.

I believe one of the most significant reasons for believers to not be engaging in this area of financial assistance is because they have not prepared themselves financially to do so.

When I have given financial messages in the past, we have encouraged you to set up 2 to 6 months of your income for an emergency fund. This should not be viewed as a fund to only meet our emergencies but also the emergencies of others. To have such a fund is not just the product of human wisdom but it is also based on biblical wisdom. In **Prov. 6:6-8** it says, **“Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, (7) Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, (8) Prepares her food in the summer, And gathers her provision in the harvest.”** Then again we see this same thought shared in **Prov. 30:24-25** **“Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise.”** And the first thing that is mentioned is of course ants. **(25) “The ants are not a strong folk, but they prepare their food in the winter.”** How are you doing? Have you set aside money that you can get at quickly to not only meet your need but the needs of others given the opportunity? Beyond the spare change in our pocket or the few dollars in our wallets. How else do we need to be prepared? We need not only to be prepared with resources but also with a strategy.

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WE NEED TO BE PREPARED STRATEGICALLY

Let me ask you question? Are we as Christians morally responsible to meet every material need of every man? And the answer to this question is clearly, no! We certainly are called to meet the needs of the poor, such as widows and orphans, but this biblical call is not global in it's reach. It has never been global in it's reach. The nation of Israel under the laws of God did not organize programs to meet the material needs of the poor in Egypt. The nation of Israel under the laws of God raised money to meet the material needs of the poor in Israel. When we talk about being prepared strategically, we need to understand the emphasis of the scriptures. We need to understand what God expects from us. And what is that? First of all God, expects us to respond to the needs of people not in a generic sense but in a personal sense. God expects us to deal responsibly with needy people who have in some sense crossed our path.

I am sure you are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus gave this story of the Good Samaritan in response to a question from a certain lawyer. **Luke 10:25-29, “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (26) and He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” (27) And he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (28) And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; Do this, and you will live.” (29) But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?.”** In response to this question, Jesus shared the story of the Good Samaritan. He shared how, after a priest and then a Levite had passed by a man who had been beaten and robbed, a despised Samaritan stopped to render aid. The man who had fallen among the robbers became the Samaritan's neighbor because their paths intersected. God has not called us to go find the poor but He has called us to act responsibly when needy people cross our path.

What else does God expect us to know strategically? Acting responsibly does not necessarily mean that we are obligated to give to every needy person that crosses our path. In fact, it might be very irresponsible on our part to do so. I am sure you remember **2 Thess. 3:10, “or even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.”** I am very cynical of panhandlers and beggars, so I have purposed not to give them money. But I will invite them to come to our church office. And I will share with them that if they come, food will be given them. This is helpful because I know that at least at this initial stage of our relationship, they are willing to put out the modest effort to either walk or drive to the church in order to get the food. After this, if they want to have more food, they will have to be willing to actually do work around our church grounds.

Finally, acting responsibly does not necessarily mean that we are obligated to act alone in meeting the needs of others. Certainly we need to encourage people who have needs for certain basic necessities to take advantage of all that governmental agencies are willing to provide, but in addition to this, if a person crosses our path that we believe is in need of the basic necessities of life, it would behoove us to encourage their immediate family members to come to their aid. **1 Tim. 5:8** makes the following statement, “... **if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.”**

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This is God's order of things. But beyond the family there is also the church.

If you are a part of this fellowship, we do not view you as alone but as an extension of ourselves in this world. If a person in need comes across your path who you believe to be a responsible individual who has not created this problem through their own sloth and you do not have the resources to deal with the problem alone, certainly you can appeal to your brother and sisters in Christ to help. This is where it is so advantageous to be a member of one of our growth groups at our church. These groups can bring you additional assistance in seeking to meet the needs of others. If the problem is greater than even a growth group can manage, then we have the larger body of the church to draw from. Certainly we see this in the scriptures. **IF WE ARE GOING TO THRIVE IN BEING OBEDIENT TO THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF JAMES 1:27, VISITING ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR DISTRESS, WE NEED TO PREPARE OURSELVES FINANCIALLY, STRATEGICALLY, AND FINALLY SPIRITUALLY.**

WE NEED TO PREPARE OURSELVES SPIRITUALLY

How do people come to the place in their lives where they can give of themselves and their resources generously? We get a clue from **2 Cor. 8:1-5**, “**Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, (2) that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. (3) For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, (4) begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.**” This is extraordinary and how can we explain it. Look at the very next verse in **V. 5** “**and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.**”

When we give ourselves to the Lord, a marvelous thing happens. We come to the place of peace. We come to the place of calm. We come to the place of satisfaction. Remember the way **Ps. 23** starts, “**The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.**” When we come to the Lord and give ourselves to Him so that He becomes to us our shepherd, the act of giving of our time, energy and resources does not at all threaten us. We have no fear. Therefore having no fear, we are only left in our efforts to meet the needs of others with the joy of giving.

CONCLUSION

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God is visiting orphans and widows in their distress. Looking at widows and orphans as representative of materially deprived people in general, God has called us to express a genuine concern for all those lacking the basic necessities of life.

This would be accomplished not by simply stopping by their house and having a chat but by taking personal interest in their life very much in the same way as an overseer would do in the lives of those given to his charge.

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For us to be effective, even thrive in this endeavor, we need to prepare ourselves in three ways:

We need to prepare ourselves financially.

We need to prepare ourselves strategically

We need to prepare ourselves spiritually.

If we would prepare ourselves in this way, I believe that we would add a dynamic factor in world evangelization..... this quote is from an article in Christian History called “Converting the Empire.”

“Many pagans were attracted to the Christian faith because the church produced tangible (not only spiritual) blessings for its adherents. Chief among these tangibles was that, in a world entirely lacking in social services, Christians were their brother’s keepers. At the end of the second century, Tertullian wrote that while pagan temples spent their donations “on feasts and drinking bouts,” Christians spent theirs “to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined to the house.”

Similarly, in a letter to the bishop of Antioch in 251, the bishop of Rome mentioned that “more than 1,500 widows and distressed persons” were in the care of his congregation. These claims concerning Christian charity were confirmed by pagan observers.

“The impious Galileans support not only their poor,” complained pagan emperor Julian, “but ours as well,” BROTHERS LET US LET THE LIGHT OF LOVE SHINE.....