

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Stop Kidding Yourself

James 1:19-27

Part Eighteen

Joshua 1:8 says, **“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”** Why does Joshua under the inspiration of the Spirit tell us to meditate on the law day and night? He tells us this in order that we **“may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.”** If we are making our decisions by the seat of our pants, doing what comes naturally to us without contemplating the word of God, our actions and attitudes will begin to look more like the world’s than the disciples of Christ.

A number of years ago there was an FAA controllers strike. This group included a number of professing Christians. This was unfortunate in light of what the scriptures teach on a number of different points. First of all, when these particular individuals were hired, they agreed not to strike against the federal government. By their strike they not only broke their agreement, which is clearly a violation of biblical principle found in **Eph. 4:25**, but they also broke the law which was a violation of biblical command in **Rom. 13:1**. And even beyond this, they failed to see their obligation to do their work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men, which is spelled out for us in **Col. 3:22-23**. If these Christian men had felt so strongly about the unsafe or unfair conditions in the work place there were other options open to them that would have been righteous, including even quitting, but to strike was from a biblical standpoint clearly wrong. **WHAT HAD HAPPENED? THEY WERE BEING INFLUENCED BY THE MEN AROUND THEM RATHER THAN BY THE WORD OF GOD. HOW SERIOUS IS THIS FOR PROFESSING BELIEVERS? ACCORDING TO JAMES, THIS CAN BE EXTREMELY SERIOUS IF THIS IS TYPICAL OF OUR LIVES.**

The theme of James is “Tests of Living Faith!” This epistle was written so that we might know whether 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 of active obedience that we looked at was 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.”** The second area of active obedience that we looked at was the area of expressing genuine concern for others. Let us look at **V. 27**, **“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father; to visit orphans and widows in their distress”** This morning we come to the last illustration of active obedience that James brings to our attention and that is found at the end of **V. 27**, **“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father; to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”**

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We will call this last area that James highlights the area of

SEPARATION

A Christian, having been redeemed and regenerated by the Lord, will conduct himself differently than those who have not. Holiness, not evil, is to be the characteristic feature of the believer's life.

Clearly James is communicating this truth to us at the end of **V. 27** and he is placing the responsibility for this directly upon our shoulders. Look again at the verse. What does it say? **“For this is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”** **“To keep”** translates a form of the Greek verb TEREÓ, indicating regular, continuous action. In other words, keeping **“oneself unstained by the world”** is the perpetual obligation of Christians. This vigilance is not optional; it is mandatory. Those who belong to God are to be characterized by moral and spiritual purity, by **unstained** and unblemished holiness. Peter admonishes believers to **“conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of the life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ”** (1 Pet. 1:17b-19).

What is our responsibility as true believers if we are in fact practicing **“pure and undefiled religion?”** We are not only to bridle our tongues. We are not only to visit orphans and widows in their distress, but we are **“to keep ourselves unstained by the world.”** This is a responsibility that we ourselves must shoulder.

If we are in fact being vigilant to keep ourselves unstained by the world, we can be assured that our religion is pure and undefiled and therefore has value. But if we are in fact not being vigilant to keep ourselves unstained by the world, we can also be assured that our religion is impure and defiled and is therefore “worthless” as we see in **V. 26**. But what does it mean to keep oneself unstained by the world?

To answer this question we must understand what James means by the world. Most often the word for world (KOSMOS) in the Bible is used to represent fallen mankind in general and it's ungodly spiritual systems of philosophy, morals, and values and that is the sense in which James uses the term in the present text.

The word for “unstained” (ASPILON) speaks of a condition of purity that remains unchanged in spite of contact with surrounding pollution.

Each day we are being bombarded by the pollution of the world in every conceivable manner, but it is our responsibility to keep ourselves unstained.

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The attack upon us is relentless and can take on many different forms. Listen to **1 John 2:15-17**, **“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”** As indicated here, there are three things the world has to offer. The first is pleasure - **“the lust of the flesh;”** the second is possessions - **“the lust of the eyes;”** and the third is the satisfaction of our pride - the honor and praise of men which John calls **“the boastful pride of life.”**

Let us consider first of all the “lust of the flesh” or in other words pleasure. Is the unsaved world as you know it encouraging you to make pleasure the focal point of your life, whether it is food, drink, drugs, sex, recreation, vacations, or entertainment? The world is in hot pursuit of these things with very little if any consideration of God’s will or design for their lives. Will we follow them in that same pursuit without even pausing to consider what direction the Lord might have for us?

The second thing that characterizes the world is the “lust of the eyes” or in other words possessions. Is the unsaved world as you know it encouraging you to make possessions the focal point of your life, whether it is through the pursuit of bigger and better homes, nicer cars, clothes, sports equipment, bigger life insurance policies, more comprehensive health insurance or substantial retirement savings? The world is in hot pursuit of these things with very little if any consideration of God’s will or design for their lives. Will we follow them in that same pursuit without even pausing to consider what direction the Lord might have for us?

The third thing that characterizes the world is the “pride of life,” the satisfaction of our pride which so oftentimes is connected to the honor and praise of men. Is the unsaved world encouraging you to draw attention to yourself perhaps through physical beauty, through the display of your talents, through financial or material success or through the accumulation of power? The world is in hot pursuit of these things for the purpose of their own glorification with little if any consideration of God’s will or design for their lives. Will we follow them in that same pursuit without even pausing to consider what direction the Lord might have for us?

If we are not determined to **“keep ourselves unstained from the world”** we will find ourselves swept away. If the world is continually bombarding us with their philosophies, morals and values which are flowing out of hearts that are in rebellion against God, we need to be vigilant to do what? To keep ourselves unstained from the world. The world’s rebellion must not become for us the force which molds and shapes our lives.

Assuming our desire is to in fact do this, what must we focus on if in fact this is truly going to become a reality? We must focus on knowing the moral will of God. We cannot be a fuzz ball in this area; otherwise we will consciously or unconsciously be swept along with the thinking and the values of the world.

God’s moral will are those commands and principles in the Bible that teach men how they ought to believe and live and is the expression, in behavioral terms, of the character of God. This is why we are commanded to be holy as God is holy in **1 Pet. 1:16.**

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If the moral will of God is the expression of His character, then one would expect that it would encompass much more than laws concerning merely external behavior. And this is exactly what we see in God's Word. God is not concerned simply with what we do; He's equally concerned with why we do what we do, as well as how we do it. The purpose, the process, and the product should all be directed by His moral will. For instance, it is not only important that children should obey their parents but why they are obeying and how they are obeying is also important. It is not only important as believers that we seek out Christian fellowship but the reasons we seek it out and how we carry it out are important also.

I have already shared with you that God's moral will are those commands and principles in the Bible that teach men how they ought to live. But someone might ask if the scriptures alone are sufficient to give us this kind of insight? Can we, from the scriptures alone, know the moral will of God fully? And the answer is, Yes! The moral will of God is fully revealed in the Bible and is our final and complete authority for faith and practice. I am sure you are familiar with **2 Tim. 3:16 - 17** Let us consider these verses for a moment, **“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”** If we want to know what God's will is for our lives and know how to perform it so that we might live a life pleasing to the Lord in every respect, we will find all that we need to know in the Bible. What does this passage tell us? **“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for (some, most?), every good work.”**

If those Christian air traffic controllers had paused and considered what the Bible taught, they would never have walked out on strike. For in doing so they clearly violated God's moral will as it was revealed in the Scriptures. I believe that they failed to keep themselves unstained by the world.

What we are feeling, what we are thinking, what we are striving for, what we are doing must be held up to the light of the Word of God if we are going to keep ourselves **“unstained by the world.”** Those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed command and principles of God (His moral will), must be obeyed.

Though the believer's preservation is in the fullest sense the work of God, which is seen clearly in such passages as **1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Pet. 1:5** and **Jude 1:24**, it is characteristic of James to lay stress on our cooperation, such as he does in **V. 27** when he tells us **“pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is to keep oneself unstained by the world.”** Not because our cooperation is necessary for God's work to one day be completed, but rather as a testimony to ourselves and others that God is in fact working within us.

Our cooperation does not mean perfection. **Eccles. 7:20** tells us, **“Indeed there is no righteous man on earth, who continually does good and who never sins.”**

Every Christian falls short of the Lord's standards. Like Paul, we find ourselves doing things we know are wrong and not doing things we know are right (**cf. Rom. 7:14-25**).

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Even the most faithful and loving believer does not always show as much compassion as he should, love his fellow believers as he should, or love God as he should. When James is referring to keeping oneself unstained by the world, he is speaking of the basic orientation of our lives, of our central commitment and allegiance. It is not our perfection that proves our salvation but rather the hating of our imperfections and seeking, with God's help and power, to correct them. In his inmost heart, the genuine Christian longs to speak and do only those things that are uncorrupted and **“unstained by the world.”** And if this is our heart then we will focus on God's Word, knowing that those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands and principles of God (His moral will), are to be obeyed no matter what the world might be trumpeting.

But someone might say, "What about those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle?" If the Bible gives no command or principle then we are free. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God. However having said this I would like to go on to also say that in any non-moral decision, we must be fully convinced that it will magnify and glorify the Lord. The reason why even non-moral decisions must be made in light of this ultimate end is because the scriptures teach us that **“Whether we eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** And the reason why we must be fully convinced that the decision that we are in fact making is doing this is because of the teaching of **Rom. 14:23** which tells us that **“whatever is not from faith is sin.”**

CONCLUSION

If we will seek to conform ourselves to the moral will of God, applying the principles and precepts of God's word as best as we understand it and seeking to glorify the Lord in all aspects of our lives no matter how mundane it may seem to the world, we will grow and mature in this matter of keeping ourselves unstained by the world and we will be blessed no matter how young or old we are in the Lord this morning.

Our fruitfulness and growth in Christ, our ability “to keep ourselves unstained by the world” will not happen instantly. But **MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD DAY AND NIGHT WILL BRING MATURITY AND IT WILL ULTIMATELY BRING BLESSING AND PROSPERITY TO OUR LIVES.**

This is the promise of Ps. 1:1-3, **“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. (2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. (3) And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”**