**This One’s Religion is Useless**

*James 1:26*

**Introduction**

1. Religion is a bad word to many today. These are ignorant. James does not speak negatively of religion, but of a religion rendered worthless by the inconsistencies of its practitioner – **James 1:26-27** (a pure and undefiled religion exists)
2. Religion – *thrēskeia* – expression of devotion to transcendent beings (BDAG)
3. **James 1:26** – thinks himself devoted to God, but what he is doing is useless – unbridled tongue, self-deception.
4. Could we be guilty of the same useless religion via an unbridled tongue and self-deception?
5. NOTE: Think beyond mere profanity, slander, etc. Also, James is not writing concerning the useless religion of denominationalism, or any other false religion, but that of Christians who are not walking worthy of their calling.
6. The Text in Context
7. The Self-Deception
   1. Considers self-deception three times in chapter – **James 1:16, 22, 26**
   2. Origin of temptation – **1:16**
      1. **(vv. 16-17)** – good from God in contrast to what was stated before.
      2. **(vv. 13-15)** – temptation to sin not from God, but from own desires. *(THINK: what Christian would ever do this – can be more subtle than the general thought stated here.)*
      3. Why discussion of own desires drawing away from God?
         1. **(v. 5)** – ask for wisdom from God to endure trials.
            1. **Wisdom to be imparted through His word.**
         2. **(vv. 6-8)** – warning of doubting and double-mindedness.
            1. Not doubt that God can or will give wisdom – **(v. 7)** – supposing to receive.
            2. **Double-minded** (2x) – *dipsychos* – means “twosouled” (*dis*, “twice,” *psuche*, “a soul”) (VINE)

**4:8** – divided between God and world **(4:4).**

* + - * 1. **Doubt(s)(ing)** (middle voice) – *diakrinō* – signifies, in the middle voice, “to separate oneself from, or to contend with,” (VINE) (“contended”)
    1. Combine thoughts – **(vv. 6-8, 13-16)** – asking God for wisdom, but divided between following His wisdom, and taking own path (temptation – own desires) (contending with God’s word).
       1. **(v. 8)** – unstable in ways – i.e. ways of doing, ways of religion **(vv. 25-26)**
    2. **Self-deception – convincing self that your way is acceptable. 🡪**
  1. Hearing but not doing – **1:22**
     1. **(vv. 19-20)** – swift to hear God’s word **(v. 18).**
        1. Slow to wrath – against what/who? – God and His word.
        2. Righteousness of God – His will, only accomplished through acceptance of word and doing.
     2. **(vv. 21-25)** – receive word, but do it, not just hear.
        1. **(vv. 21, 18)** – it’s already been implanted from beginning of faith, but telling Christians to continue to receive it – points to the vacillation of decision in **(vv. 6-8).**
        2. **(v. 5)** – ask for wisdom, look to word – will you do?
        3. Self-deception – went through the steps, not like what I find, convince self my way is acceptable to God.
  2. Unbridled tongue – **1:26** 🡪

1. The Unbridled Tongue
   1. Contrast:
      1. **Religion** – *thrēskeia* – expression of devotion to transcendent beings (BDAG)
         1. **James 1:26** – useless.
      2. **Colossians 2:23** – ***“self-imposed religion”*** – *ethelothrēskia* – self-made religion, do-it-yourself religion, idiosyncratic religion (BDAG)
         1. **(vv. 20-23)** – subject selves, commandments/doctrines of men, self-imposed religion.
   2. Use of tongue in context – **James 1**:
      1. **(vv. 13-15)** – charge God with a way that is not from Him.
      2. **(v. 19)** – replying against God with wrath.
      3. **(v. 26)** – tongue not bridled.
   3. **Unbridled tongue which deceives self and makes religion useless?**
      1. **Claim to appeal to God – ask wisdom, hear word.**
      2. **Reason self away from God’s word, but convince self God is directing – this way is from God (really it is temptation away from God)**
      3. **Unbridled tongue – not subjecting thoughts, words, actions to God’s will – useless religion (though convincing self otherwise) (self-imposed religion)**
2. The Tongue as the Messenger of the Heart
3. The Significance of the Tongue
   1. The tongue, though small, is very significant in the body – **James 3:1-5a**
      1. **(v. 1)** – warning against taking position with high use of tongue.
      2. **(v. 2)** – control of tongue, control of whole body.
      3. **(vv. 3-5a)** – illustration: horse, ship.
   2. What is not said:
      1. The tongue is inherently evil.
      2. The tongue cannot be bridled or controlled.
4. The Heart as the Bridle of the Tongue
   1. The tongue is so significant because it is the messenger of the heart.
      1. **Matthew 12:33-37** – words are the fruit of our true self.
         1. Heart bad – bad speech. (blasphemy against Spirit)
         2. Heart good – good speech.
      2. **Matthew 15:18-19** – outward sins always start in the heart, and often manifest in speech before exact action.
         1. Murders – hateful speech.
         2. Adulteries, fornications – filthy speech.
         3. Thefts – covetous speech.
         4. False witness, blasphemies – slanderous speech.
         5. All come from the heart.
      3. **James 3:14-16** – heart’s wisdom.
         1. **(vv. 14-15)** – bitter envy, self-seeking in heart = worldly wisdom.
         2. **(v. 16)** – confusion, every evil thing where? – envy, self-seeking = in heart **(v. 14).**
            1. **Confusion** – *akatastasia* – “revolution or anarchy” (VINE); opposition to established authority, disorder, unruliness (BDAG)
         3. Effect – speech (teaching) which is contrary to God’s word, leads to actions contrary to God’s word.
            1. **(v. 1)** – judgment of what is taught.
            2. NOT NECESSARILY CRUDE, PROFANE SPEECH.
            3. Deceptive error, man’s wisdom/philosophy, traditions of men, etc.
            4. COMING FROM A HEART WITH WORLDLY WISDOM.
   2. **Control content of heart, control tongue, control whole body.**
   3. A heart trained in God’s word leads to speech reflecting God’s word, and a life in submission to God’s word – **Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:9-16; James 1:19-22**
      1. RELIGION THAT IS ACCEPTABLE.
      2. OPPOSITE: **James 1:26** – thinking self-religious, but speech betrays – unscriptural speech/ideas, strange doctrines, unsound (though maybe not immoral, etc.)
5. This One’s Religion is Useless
6. When one has deceived himself into thinking he is pleasing to God with his own words of reason contrary to what he has seen in God’s will.
   1. Though he seems/sounds religious (to others and self), his religion is useless as it reflects a heart that is opposed to God’s will.
7. Doubting Religion (1:5-8)
   1. **James 1:5-8** – asking God for His wisdom (through word) but vacillating between accepting and applying it and going with your own will.
      1. ***“in faith”*** – i.e. in connection with, and in the interest of faith (**v. 3** – testing of faith).
      2. **Romans 10:17** – comes by hearing God’s word.
      3. **Ask God for wisdom** – He will give it through His word.
      4. **Ask God for wisdom in faith** – a predisposition toward His word, a willingness to accept and apply what it says no matter what.
      5. **Doubting** – (middle voice) – *diakrinō* – signifies, in the middle voice, “to separate oneself from, or to contend with,” (VINE)
   2. Appearance (even self-deception) of interest in God’s will when in reality you are searching it to justify/find your will.
      1. **Luke 10:29** – asking wanting to justify himself.
      2. End justifies the means – I know God’s word says this, but think of what this will accomplish.
      3. New hermeneutic – scripture is not meant as a rigorous pattern. (Yes, CEI would require/prohibit…but…)
8. Emotional Religion (2:19-20)
   1. **James 2:19-20** – speaking of faith that doesn’t show itself in works, demons used as an example – shows belief, and even strong emotions, but dead faith that doesn’t work.
      1. They tremble – **Matthew 8:29**
   2. Conflating emotionalism with spiritual substance – emphasizing and valuing feelings over scripture.
      1. NOT: complete keeping of word (**2:8-12**); working faith (**2:22**)
      2. Seeks what makes one feel good rather than truth – **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – speaks of sermons void of substance as powerful and good. (Devalues truth)
      3. Compromising on doctrine to maintain pseudo unity, and promote pseudo love – keep the peace, exclude nobody.
9. Dualistic Religion (4:4-5)
   1. **James 4:4-5** – Showing the impossibility of holding onto the world and pleasing God simultaneously.
   2. Attitude – **Jeremiah 7:4, 8-10** – delivered to do these abominations.
      1. **Cf. Psalm 50:16-21** – acting as though faithful, but participating with wicked.
   3. Thinking your “faithfulness” in some matters (EX: attendance) (empty formalism) means you are safe in worldly activity.
      1. Confuses apostasy with being completely absent from all spiritual activity. (can be, but not necessarily) **(physically present, but spiritually absent)**
      2. Speaks of man’s nature as corrupted (false humility) – cannot break free from sin.
         1. Resists the power of godliness – **2 Timothy 3:5**
      3. Misunderstands God’s grace – **Romans 6:1** – “Our sin may be different, but we’re all sinners.”
10. Legislative Religion (4:11-12)
    1. **James 4:11-12** – addresses a specific evil speaking where one judges beyond what the law requires/prohibits, and thus judges the law as insufficient. (Usurps the throne of lawgiver instead of submitting to law.)
    2. Pharisaical – **Matthew 15:1-3** – adding to law, creating further restrictions.
    3. Viewing your differences from others which are not revealed restrictions or requirements as evidence of greater faith/godliness.
       1. EX: dietary restriction, education preferences, recreational preferences, OPINIONS ON INDIFFERENT MATTERS, matters of conscience, etc.
       2. Shows inconsistencies in matters of authority/pattern – says something is dangerous to the degree of sinful though God’s word hasn’t revealed, says something is helpful to the degree of sinful if not applied though God’s word hasn’t revealed.
       3. **2 Timothy 1:13** – sound words are what we should hold fast to.

**Conclusion**

1. We must be careful that our heart is trained by God’s word, our speech reflects such, as well as our actions.
2. Our religion is not worth anything unless it is congruent with God’s expectations.
3. God does not settle for a religious people. He wants those who follow Him entirely by His word.