



The unfolding of your words gives light.

## Faith That Works

### An Exposition of the Book of James

<sup>25</sup>But one who looks intently<sup>a</sup> at the perfect law, the law of liberty<sup>b</sup>, and abides by it<sup>c</sup>, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer<sup>d</sup>, this man will be blessed in what he does<sup>e</sup>. <sup>26</sup>If anyone thinks himself to be religious<sup>f</sup>, and yet does not bridle his tongue<sup>g</sup> but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless<sup>h</sup>. <sup>27</sup>Pure and undefiled

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<sup>a</sup> 1:25 **But one who looks intently.** This word translated “look” is used in Luke 24 and John 20 of disciples stooping to look into the empty tomb and in 1 Peter 1:12 of angels desiring to look into God's salvation of men. The way we are to approach Scripture is with the same curiosity of one searching out the unknown, but with an anxious passion knowing that what we find will be great.

<sup>b</sup> 1:25 **at the perfect law, the law of liberty.** The law of the Lord is perfect (Psalm 19) because it reflects the holy character of God. The Ten Commandments, for example, did not bring Israel into bondage. The law was given in the context of their *release* from bondage. Want to be free? Live under the rule of the Great Emacipator. Here is another proof that James understood and wrote about grace. The believer in Christ does not look into the Scripture and see that needed change comes through adhering to a list of rules. He sees a message of life that sets him free from such bondage. Living by the precepts of the Bible becomes a joy instead of drudgery.

<sup>c</sup> 1:25 **and abides by it.** This means that living by God's moral code becomes a lifestyle rather than an unattainable standard.

<sup>d</sup> 1:25 **not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer.** James relates this back to verse 22. The word of God is transforming in its “effects” when it is lived out in a life.

<sup>e</sup> 1:25 **this man will be blessed in what he does.** This is the blessed life of which Jesus spoke in the beatitudes.

<sup>f</sup> 1:26 **If anyone thinks himself to be religious.** We evangelicals often think of Christianity in terms of a relationship with God and dislike the word “religion” (see also Acts 26:5 and Colossians 2:18) because it seems to promote the works-based righteousness from which God rescued us. James is pointing out that the outward display that is called “religion” is not bad in itself.

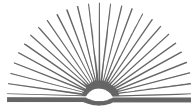
<sup>g</sup> 1:26 **and yet does not bridle his tongue.** This is a humorous picture if you stop and visualize it. The control of the tongue is personal. You do not bridle, tame and ride any tongue but your own.

<sup>h</sup> 1:26 **but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.** You deceive yourself when you have a high opinion of yourself outside the boundaries of God's kind of religion. In other words, even the worst among us may say they consider themselves basically good people. “Good” is not defined by how we feel about ourselves but by what God says about us.

James 1.25-27  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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religion<sup>a</sup> in the sight of our God and Father<sup>b</sup> is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress<sup>c</sup>, and to keep oneself unstained by the world<sup>d,e</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> 1:27 **Pure and undefiled religion.** God established outward rituals as pictures of unseen reality. He points out the threefold picture of “pure religion” in this passage: tongue control, care of the weak and moral purity.

<sup>b</sup> 1:27 **in the sight of our God and Father.** This is one of many references in Scripture to the constant gaze of God. David danced for the eyes of the Lord in 2 Samuel 6. Living with the estimations of God in mind rather than the estimations of man or even ourselves is what James is talking about here.

<sup>c</sup> 1:27 **to visit orphans and widows in their distress.** Caring for the most vulnerable among us (those who have no one to care for them) is the way we are like God in this world. See Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 14:29; 24:19-21; Psalm 68:5; 146:9; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3.

<sup>d</sup> 1:27 **and to keep oneself unstained by the world.** This is the challenge to the one who wishes to properly respond to God’s word: Keep yourself in the world as an ambassador of Christ ministering to the weakest souls without becoming stained by the world system. James has shown us that the way to remain pure is gazing on and obeying God’s word. Listening to the word displaces resident anger and other filthiness because the word properly “listened” to (see note above on “listen”) cannot coexist with such things.

<sup>e</sup> 1:25-27 Has there ever been a time in your life when you lived by bare minimums? That is, you wanted to be just good enough to make it to heaven or—for that matter—not quite bad enough to get sent to hell. The idea behind such a philosophy is that doing what it takes to get to heaven robs us of the freedom we could have to live as we please in this world. Notice that James has already reminded us that God is the giver of good things? He is not the designer of ways to make us bored and joyless but the Author of the only path to real delight. Remember that garden he made?

So then, the only real freedom to be had in this life is to live within the boundaries set by the creator of pleasure. God’s changeless moral law brings about more than cosmetic change. The freedom spoken of here is not freedom from bondage to God’s law but freedom from bondage to sin. If you are finding it hard to measure up the answer is found in rightly relating to the one who holds the ruler. Note the internal changes that come when you are set free from your sin:

1. You learn to control yourself. For example, putting a bridle on your tongue (as we will learn later) is a means of harnessing the heart that drives you. No fun? Ask anyone who has lived awhile without being able to say “no” to themselves how much freedom they have. God created us with moral limits like he created fish to live in water. There are reasons for the boundaries.
2. You have compassion for those in need. There is no freedom in living selfishly. Life becomes a drudgery when your primary goal is to look out for your own needs and get others to do the same. God knows that and designed us to be his instruments in caring for others. There is great freedom in caring for the needs of others.
3. You maintain internal purity. The world that corrupts us is not the created order that declares the glory of God. It is the fallen system that stands in rebellion against God. By nature people look at Jesus Christ and his standards and say, “We will not have the man to rule over us.” To keep yourself unstained by the world is not to move away from the world but to refuse to become part of the rebellion.

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