

James 1-2

James has been talking about the temptations and persecutions that the the scattered Jewish church is going through. And he's been encouraging them to rejoice in their trials, to rejoice in their hope in Christ, and let it work that patience in them.

And he's warned them not to be double-minded, not to become angry and filled with wrath. Not to complain that God is bringing this evil on them, that the Father is tempting them. Not to become filled with filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. But instead to lay all of that aside. They need to be slow to speak, and slow to wrath. But to be swift to hear. To receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls.

And to not just hear the word, but do it. To not just be a hearer, but a doer of the work. Not to be double-minded. They need to look into the perfect law of liberty, and continue therein, that they may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

So they need to abstain from wrath and filthiness, abstain from blaming God, and from double-mindedness. And instead they need to seek God's wisdom, accept that every good thing is from above, and rejoice in their patience, their greater hope in the good gift that will come, of Christ's return. To seek God's wisdom, to hear his word, and to do it. With rejoicing.

And so James's message here is going to be that they need to be consistent. Not double-minded. Not hearing one thing and doing another. But they should be holy, and doers of the word, and perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

They should be consistent.

And in particular he's going to talk about how what we say is often inconsistent with what we do. He's going to focus on that. On how their speech should be consistent with their actions, and their actions should be consistent with their speech.

And if you remember what we talked about in our study on faith, and what we said as we went through Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, faith is all about consistency. Faith is about being consistent with something, conforming to something, being at one with it.

And so a little later on James is going to use the term faith to describe this, he's going to talk about that.

But faith is about unity, about fidelity, about a faithfulness, a consistency, between two things. A consistency between what God said, and what you believe. A consistency between what God said, and what you do.

And so James has essentially been admonishing them to have faith, to follow and do what they hear in the word. And that is faith. When you conform your beliefs, your thoughts and actions, to the word of God, that is faith. Faith is a conformity between what God said, and what you do. And of course that starts with belief. But faith implies that quality of belief that stirs you to take action in accordance with that belief.

When God says something, and you believe it, but don't do anything about it, that's not faith. But when you hear it, and believe it, and do it, that is faith.

And so that is what James is going to be talking about here. He's going to be talking about faith, and how they should be not just hearing the word of God, but doing it. How what they say, should be in agreement with their actions. Because just hearing the word, and saying that you believe the word, is not much of value. The word has a powerful message, and if they truly believe it, they should be stirred to action.

So as we said, James is going to be talking a lot about their speech, and he's also going to be tying that into their actions, and talking about their faith, that there should be a consistency between what they hear and say, and what they do. And that what they do, and what they say, should be in conformity to the word of God, and the will of God.

Verse 26

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

So there should be a consistency between your words and actions.

James just dealt with the one side of that last time, when he told them that they should both hear the word, and do it. That when they are hearing and speaking the word, they should also be doing it.

But now he is also addressing the flip side of that. That when they seem to be doing the work, when they seem to be religious, then their words should also match up with their actions.

James told them that when their words were good, when they were hearing the word, but their actions weren't good, they were deceiving themselves.

And he now tells them again, that if their actions are good, but their words don't match up, they're also deceiving themselves, they're deceiving their own heart. He says that their religion is vain.

Both have to be in sync, or their religion is vain.

So James is talking about religion here.

Now, many people say that one of the world's major religions is Christianity. And unfortunately they're right. There are many people who claim to follow a christ, and who are engaged in a religion.

But if you look at what the Bible has to say about religion, it never calls NT Christianity a religion. The Bible only uses the term religion in 6 different verses, all in the NT. And each time, it is a reference to the same thing: Judaism. It calls Judaism a religion, and nothing else.

Acts 13:43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and **religious** proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

So these were proselytes of the Jewish religion. But they talked them out of it, and persuaded them to continue in the grace of God instead.

And Paul spoke of how *he* had once been a part of the Jewish religion:

Acts 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our **religion** I lived a Pharisee.

So Paul was a religious man, a Pharisee.

So the Bible speaks of those hypocrites, Pharisees, as religious. Certainly matches what James is saying here, about people who are inconsistent in their words and actions.

Galatians 1:13 [He said] For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' **religion**, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:
14 And profited in the Jews' **religion** above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

So Paul was a religious man who persecuted the church, and profited from it.

That is how the Bible speaks of religion. That's all the references there are to it, outside of these two verses in James.

So when James says, "If any man among you seemeth to be religious," what is he talking about?

Well, remember who he is speaking to. He's speaking to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. He's speaking to people who are Jews, who have been a part of the Jewish religion, and many of whom remained zealous of it even after coming to faith.

So even now that they are scattered abroad, some of them are still holding onto aspects of Judaism, aspects of their religion. He says that they seem to be religious.

But he says that that religion is vain. It doesn't matter how religious they seem to be, if they bridle not their tongue, they're deceiving their own heart, and their religion is vain.

They need to be continuing in the *perfect* law of *liberty*. Hearing the *engrafted* word with meekness, and being slow to speak and slow to wrath. Otherwise they're just deceiving themselves, their religion is vain.

Verse 27

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

So you want to be religious? James tells you what true religion is. It isn't Judaism. It isn't even keeping the law. It is much simpler than that. It is much more practical than that.

It is like Jesus said, the whole law is fulfilled in one point: love your neighbor as yourself.

And so James tells them not to have Jewish religion, not temple religion, not all this superfluous stuff that is meaningless, all this ceremony. Instead they should have pure religion.

And in the same way they shouldn't have filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, they shouldn't have an unbridled tongue. But their religion should be pure and undefiled.

Any kind of religion that they have along with an unbridled tongue, is vain. Any kind of religion they have where they are filthy, is vain. But their religion should be pure.

And what is that pure religion? "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

So pure religion, without all of this superfluity. And undefiled, without filthiness.

Just to visit the fatherless and widows, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Now, this visiting of the fatherless and widows is something that God has always directed. That is something that was part of the law.

Exodus 22:22 Ye shall not **afflict** any **widow**, or **fatherless** child.

23 If thou **afflict** them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;

24 And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

So God told them in the law that they had to do this, or he would punish them.

Psalms 82:3 Defend the poor and **fatherless**: do justice to the **afflicted** and needy.

But Israel didn't do that. They didn't keep that part of the law. Oh, they kept all of the religious ordinances and ceremonial cleanliness and sacrifices and rites. But all they had was religion.

Defiled religion. It was defiled with their filthiness.

Here is what God told them by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

So he compares them to the filthy sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah.

11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

So they are keeping the religion, the Jewish religion. They are offering sacrifices.

But God doesn't delight in it.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Their religion is vain. In fact, it is worse than vain. God even goes so far as to say that when they do these things in keeping of the law, that they are in fact committing iniquity.

Their religion isn't pure, and it isn't just vain, it is defiled.

14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the **fatherless**, plead for the **widow**.

So they need to relieve the oppressed, the fatherless and widow. They've been neglecting that part of the law, and only keeping the religion.

They are hearing the word, but they aren't doing it. They are doing evil. And so their religion is vain, and defiled. They need to have pure religion, and undefiled, where they do well, and seek justice for the fatherless and widow.

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

And so God tells them if they will do this, if they will do the spirit of the law, by seeking justice for the oppressed, he will make a way to cleanse them from their sins. They don't need to worry about the sacrifices, the religious rites. That's not religion. Pure religion is to relieve the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and wait upon God's cleansing for sin and uncleanness.

You see, in their religion, the Jews were doing the exact opposite. Instead of pleading for the oppressed, he said that their hands were defiled with blood. They didn't help the oppressed, they were the oppressors. They didn't visit the fatherless and widow, they afflicted them. But they were very religious in keeping the feasts and the sacrifices and remaining ceremonially clean.

And that is also exactly what the religious were like at the time of Christ.

You see, this helping of the fatherless and widow is the exact opposite of what most of the world's major religions do. Instead of helping the widow, they take from the widow.

Jesus said:

Matthew 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour **widows'** houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

So the Pharisees, the most religious men, weren't helping the widows. Oh, they would pray for them, they would intercede for them, before God. For a price. For a donation. 'When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.'

That's religion. It targets the vulnerable and takes what little wealth they have in the name of interceding before God. It is very religious, and very ceremonially holy. And God said that he hates it, and Jesus said that they'll receive greater damnation. There is a special place in hell reserved for the religious, who devour widows' houses.

So James warns the Christian Jews here, don't have religion. You're deceiving your own heart, and your religion is vain. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

And that certainly fits with what Paul said in Hebrews, about how Christ is our great high priest who has made one sacrifice of himself, and so there is no more need for earthly priests, no more need for religion. But a need to hear the word of God, and have faith, and do it unto the end.

When James says that they need to visit the fatherless and widow, I think that also connects to what he said about them being the firstfruits. Certainly as the first fruits they should be undefiled, unspotted by the world. They should be holy unto the LORD.

But you see, the first fruits also related to them providing for the fatherless and widow. It talks about that in Deuteronomy 26.

Deuteronomy 26:1 And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein;

2 That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there.

So they would take their first fruits and come to the house of God.

3 And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us.

4 And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God.

5 And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous:

6 And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage:

7 And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression:

8 And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders:

9 And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

10 And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God:

11 And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.

So that is the first part of the law of the firstfruits.

But in addition to the firstfruits, the first fruit of the land, you also have the tithe, a tenth of all of the increase of the field.

And so in addition to the first fruits there was also a law about the tithe of your harvest:

12 When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the **fatherless**, and the **widow**, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled;

13 Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the **fatherless**, and to the **widow**, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them:

14 I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me.

15 Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

So when they brought in the first fruits they were speak before the LORD, and when they came to the feast at the end of the harvest, in the year of tithing, they were to do something similar. They were to signify that they've given the tithe to the Levite, stranger, fatherless, and widow. And so the offering of the first fruits is supposed to be followed by an offering of the tithe, when the harvest is completed. And the tithe is to be given to the fatherless and widow.

You know, religious people today will tell you that you need to tithe. And they'll tell you that you need to give it to the church, to the building fund, to the priest, to the ministers. But that's not what they were supposed to do with the tithe in the OT. Sure, some of it was supposed to go to the Levites that sojourned among them. But it was also supposed to go to the fatherless and widow.

And so James tells them here, that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is to visit the fatherless and the widow. Not to give it to a priest. To give it to the afflicted, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. That is pure religion.

We've been seeing how the exhortation that James gives the twelve tribes here will also be important for them to keep during the tribulation.

And last time we looked at some different passages that talked about meekness. James was telling them here that they need to be meek, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. And there are many OT passages that speak of how when God comes, he'll come to save the meek of the earth. Those that have heard his word, and wrought his judgement. That haven't been filthy with the wicked.

And today James warned about having vain religion, where you don't bridle your tongue. He said that pure religion is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

And there are also prophetic passages that speak of that, of how God isn't pleased with vain religion, but wants his people to visit those in affliction.

And one particularly relevant passage is Malachi chapter 3.

As you know, Malachi is the last book in the OT. And in it God gives his final rebuke of the Jewish religion, and a warning that Christ will come, and their Judaism won't count for nothin'. In chapter 2 he spoke of how profane their priests were, and how they were partial in the law. He spoke of how they would offer sacrifices with tears and weeping, and how much God hated it.

And he closes the chapter this way:

Malachi 2:17 *Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?*

So their problem is that they aren't meek. They are religious, but they are wicked, and they speak their own abominable words. They say that the evil are counted good in the sight of the LORD, and ask where the God of judgement is? When will judgement ever come? It's not coming, they say.

And so here is God's reply to that:

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*So where is the God of judgement? He shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.
And God mocks them here, saying that they seek the Judge, the Deliverer, the Christ, and
delight in the covenant.*

*Yeah right. They're plenty religious, but do they really want the messenger of God to come?
They don't think he will. Yet he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is
like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:*

*3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and
purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*

*4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of
old, and as in former years.*

*So they have been offering offerings unto the LORD. But they haven't been pleasant to him.
Because they haven't been offered in righteousness. They have been offerings of iniquity.*

*5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers,
and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the
hireling in his wages, the **widow**, and the **fatherless**, and that turn aside the stranger from his
right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*So God is going to judge those who oppress the widow and fatherless. All of their religion, all of
their offerings, won't count. Their religion is vain. If they commit adultery, and swear falsely, and
oppress the fatherless and widow, he will be witness against them.*

*As we said, adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God.
And those that oppress the fatherless and widow will not either.
When Christ comes to sit as the judge, he will be a swift witness against them.*

*And Christ spoke of that time that would come upon his return, in Matthew chapter 25.
That's the only other passage in the Bible where it talks about the need to visit people that are
afflicted, as James does here.*

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,
then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*

*32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another,
as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

*34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit
the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

So these are the ones who get to inherit the kingdom of heaven:

*35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a
stranger, and ye took me in:*

*36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye **visited** me: I was in prison, and ye came unto
me.*

So they helped those in need, and visited them in their affliction.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

So these are those that will not receive the kingdom. They'll receive hell fire. He'll be a swift witness against them.

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

*43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye **visited** me not.*

They didn't help and visit the Jews in their affliction and tribulation.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

So in the tribulation, it will indeed be necessary to avoid vain religion, the religion of the whore, or of the antichrist, and instead to practice pure and undefiled religion. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world.

So James tells them to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

And I think that this is a reference to the fact that the temple sacrifices were supposed to be of an animal without spot.

Instead of giving to the temple, they should be giving to the poor. And instead of offering sacrifices without spot, they should be keeping *themselves* unspotted from the world.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having **spot**, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

And so we are expected to be holy and without blemish, without spot, just as a holy sacrifice would be.

And Paul said that what cleanses us, how Christ cleanses us, is with the washing of water by the word.

And so when we hear the word of God, it should cause us to be clean, and without spot.

As James said, when they hear the word, they should also do it. And so it should cleanse every spot from them.

Pure religion is to hear the word, and do it, thus keeping yourself unspotted from the world.

And what would those spots be?

Well, they would be any sin. They would be filthiness, as James said. An unbridled tongue filled with filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. That would be spots, that they should keep themselves from.

And it also describes spots in a few other NT passages:

2 Peter 2:10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. **Spots** they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

So people who have an unbridled tongue, speaking evil, and despising government, and walking in filthiness, in the lust of uncleanness, and lusting, with eyes full of adultery. He calls them spots in the church.

But they are religious. They attend every church function, so that they can sport themselves with their own deceiving while they feast with them.

And he says also that the exercise covetous practices:

15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

So they are religious, and are covetous, and like Baalam they'll intercede before God for you for a price.

Their religion is vain, they don't bridle their tongue, but like the Pharisees they devour widows houses, they like a wage for their unrighteous work done in the name of God.

They are spots.

And James is telling them here not to be anything like that. Not to speak filthiness, or have vain religion. But to keep themselves unspotted from the world. To hear the word, and do it.

We've looked at what his brother Jude said in his epistle, and he also referred to these people as spots:

Jude 1:8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

So they are filthy, and speak evil.

9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

So again, he compares them to spiritual and religious people, who want to do something their own way, but do it in the name of God. Who just want to practice their own form of vain religion. He compares them to Cain, who offered a sacrifice of his own imagination, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. Remember how we talked about that in Hebrews.

And he compares him to Balaam, who Peter compared them to, who perished for his wickedness, when he sought a reward for his divination.

12 These are **spots** in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

And so these who he compared to waves of the sea, he also called spots. They are wicked, and embrace vain religion, while speaking naughtiness.

And like James, Jude was warning them there not to be like that. Not to follow them. But they should be without spot.

They should hear and do the word, and keep themselves unspotted from the world. Not engage in vain religion while speaking filthiness.

He said if you are like that, your religion is vain. You're deceiving yourself. Pure religion is to visit the fatherless and widow, and keep yourself unspotted from the world.

So that ends chapter 1, and we're going to start chapter 2.

And chapter 2 is basically going to expand on the things that James has just said in these last few verses on vain religion.

He's going to talk about how they shouldn't be having vain religion, should be fulfilling the perfect law of liberty, and should not just be hearing the word, but doing it.

In essence, he's going to be explaining how vain this religion is, where you say and hear things, but don't do them, and the works that you do do are contrary to the word of God. He's going to show why that religion is vain.

Chapter 2 verse 1

James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

Now, it might seem he's changed the subject. He hasn't. He's still talking about religion. This is what religion looks like. Vain religion is accompanied by respecting persons.

But James says that they shouldn't have the faith of Christ with the respect of persons.

In the law it said:

Leviticus 19:15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not **respect** the **person** of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

So in judgement they were supposed to do righteousness. They weren't supposed to take into account how rich or poor the person was, how weak or mighty. They weren't supposed to consider the circumstances of the individual in question, and let that sway their judgment. They were supposed to judge justly.

They weren't supposed to say, "this guy is poor, I think I'll ignore his plea for justice." Or, "This guy is poor, I think I'll help him out." Or, "this guy is mighty, I want to stay on his good side." Or, "This guy is rich, I think I'll stick it to him."

They weren't supposed to respect persons.

Deuteronomy 1:17 Ye shall not **respect persons** in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

So they weren't supposed to respect persons, but treat everybody equally, both small and great.

And James tells the scattered tribes that they shouldn't be respecting persons under the faith of Christ either.

Because that is what inevitably happens in a vain religion. Remember how we read from Isaiah rebuking the OT Jews, who were religious in keeping the feasts and the sacrifices, but refused to hear the cause of the poor and needy, the fatherless and widow. So they were religious, but they respected persons. And God was very angry with them for it. That was contrary to the law, contrary to his word.

And so James tells them not to have the faith of Christ with respect of persons. Because, as it says:

Romans 2:11 For there is no **respect of persons** with God.

God doesn't respect persons, Jesus Christ doesn't respect persons. And so neither should you, if you have faith.

Any religion you have where you can do that, is vain. That's not something that God approves of. That's not the faith of Christ. That's not following him.

But the faith that they have is supposed to be the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

He is their Lord, the Lord of glory. Everybody else is nothing compared to him. Why would they respect anybody's person?

He's the Lord of glory. The Lord of riches and honor. He's promised them a great inheritance. They of low degree are exalted by him. So why would they respect anybody's person? In Christ they are exalted above all, and the rich will pass away as the flower of the grass.

Verses 2-4

James 2:2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

Now, this is something that the covetous religious man does. He respects those that are rich, because he knows that they are the ones that are going to put an offering in the plate. He's the one who may want to give something in exchange for a blessing, so they'll make sure to treat him well.

And James says don't do that. Don't treat the rich man special, like he's better than everybody else. Don't give him special treatment.

Don't look at their clothing and be partial toward them based on that.

You know, 99% of people respect persons in that way. There is something, that's just almost a part of human nature, that makes us respect somebody's clothing. What someone wears can have a profound impact on people.

But when people come into the assembly, they shouldn't be treated different based on how well they are dressed.

James says that when you do that you are respecting persons, and are partial, and are become judges of evil thoughts.

1 Timothy 5:21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by **partiality**.

So Paul told Timothy not to be partial, not to prefer one person before another. To treat everybody equally.

James said that when they are partial in themselves, they are become judges of evil thoughts. They are a judge, who has evil thoughts. Whose judgement comes of evil thoughts, it is their evil thoughts that they are judging based on.

They shouldn't be doing that.

What has he just told them?

To be slow to speak.

But swift to hear.

They should be slow to speak the thoughts of their own heart, but swift to hear the word of God.

They shouldn't be judging based on their own evil thoughts, they should be judging based on the word of God, they should be treating people in accord with the word of God. They shouldn't be partial in themselves.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed **evil thoughts**, adulteries, fornications, murders,

22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an *evil eye*, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

So out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, and an evil eye. An eye that is not single, but partial. Evil toward certain people.

And all kinds of other wickedness.

Doesn't matter if you are religious, you're deceiving your own heart, and your religion is vain, if it is accompanied by evil thoughts, evil words, and an evil eye.

Jesus was saying that there, after the Pharisees were trying to accuse his disciples of not keeping the ceremonial traditions of the elders. And Jesus told them that all of that is vain, this is what counts. That won't defile you, being ceremonially unclean doesn't matter. What defiles you before God is what proceeds from your heart.

And so as James said, when your heart is able to spew wickedness through your mouth, your religion is vain.

And it will be accompanied by evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness.

That pretty much sums up religion.

And covetousness is exactly one thing that would be associated with this partiality. Not wanting to offend the rich, so that they'll contribute something.

Verse 5

James 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

James says don't treat the *rich* special.

If anything, God treats the *poor* special. He's chosen them rich in faith, rich spiritually, and also heirs of the kingdom which he's promised to them that love him. One day they'll also receive physical riches in his kingdom.

As he said before, the brother of low degree is exalted.

But the rich is made low.

As Jesus said, it is very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Most of them aren't very rich in faith. They are too reliant upon themselves, too taken with the things of the world, to seek for a better one to come.

James is going to repeatedly rebuke and warn and chastise the rich here.

And today, that means most of the developed world.

If you looked at the people that he was calling poor, you'd see that most Americans don't fall into that category.

Today in America people that are living under poverty level have luxuries that even the rich then could not always afford. The average poor or middle class person in the United States would be very well off by the standards of James's day.

So if you wonder why so many developed countries have become so secular, there's part of your answer. It is very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Luke 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye **poor**: for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

So this is the kind of poor that the Bible is talking about. People that go hungry. And Jesus said that those poor were blessed, because the kingdom of God was theirs.

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the **poor**;...

So Jesus knew that he was to preach the gospel to the poor. That they were the ones who would listen, who would come to hear. The rich, would not. It was the poor who were chosen rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.

Not because the rich cannot enter in. But because they seldom will love him. They love riches more.

But those that love him, that are rich in faith, though poor, are heirs of his promised kingdom.

And so if God has accepted the poor, preached the gospel to them, because they will hear, because they will love him, that they might be heirs of his kingdom, then how can they treat a poor man with partiality? How can they countenance a poor man? How can they treat him like he's of less value than the rich?

God doesn't. He sent his Son to preach the gospel especially to the poor. He's chosen them rich in faith as heirs of his kingdom of promise. So they are heirs of a great kingdom, the kingdom of God. How can they despise them?

Verses 6 & 7

James 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

So how can they despise the poor, who are heirs of the promise? And conversely, how can they treat the rich like a special group of people, when so many of the rich are not of faith. And not only not in the faith, but actually persecuting it?

Riches certainly don't make a man special before God. If anything it means that they are more trouble for the Christian. Because they are more likely to be against the faith, and have the means to persecute us.

James says that rich men oppress them, and draw them before the judgement seats. They persecute them, and blaspheme the name of Christ.

So they shouldn't be treating people special, just because they are rich. That's nothing in God's eyes. That doesn't mean anything.

That just means you are partial and a judge of evil thoughts. You aren't judging justly, you're taking something into account that is meaningless in terms of righteousness and justice.

Verses 8 & 9

James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

So we read how under the law they were forbidden to have respect of persons in judgment. And so if they are respecting persons, they are sinning, and the law would condemn them.

So they might think that they are religious, but if they respect persons in their religion, their religion is vain.

That's not fulfilling the law. That may fulfill your phony Jewish religion, but that isn't fulfilling the law. That isn't even valid OT religion.

And James points them to the perfect law of liberty. To fulfill the royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

He says that is the royal law, the king of laws, the one overarching rule that rules the law in the OT.

They don't need to keep the whole Mosaic law and all of the Jewish traditions. They don't need Jewish religion. As Jesus said, the whole law is fulfilled in that one point: to love your neighbor as yourself.

If you do that, you don't need to worry about the law about respecting persons. Because when you love your neighbors as yourself, then you're going to love each person equally. You're not going to be partial in your treatment of them. You're not going to respect persons.

No need for all of that vain religion and ceremony. Follow the law of liberty. The royal law. The perfect law. The word of the NT, where Christ said, you just need to love your neighbor as yourself.

And when you follow that, you'll fulfill the law of liberty. And if you don't follow that, you'll certainly be transgressing the Jewish law as well. So if your religion doesn't fulfill that, it isn't even remotely based in scripture. Don't deceive yourself. It is vain.

Verse 10

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

So if they don't keep that, it doesn't matter how religious they are, how much of the ceremonial law they are keeping. If they're offending in just that one point, they are guilty of breaking the law. And so their religion is vain.

Verse 11

James 2:11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

So they can't just pick and choose which parts of the law they want to keep. If you are going to keep the ceremonial law, then you have to keep the whole thing. And if you don't keep the whole

thing, then you've transgressed the law as a whole. You haven't kept it. It is an all or nothing deal.

So they should stop keeping all of that vain religion, and instead keep the royal law. The perfect law of the NT, without religion.

Verse 12

James 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

So his point isn't to tell them to keep the whole law, to go back into Judaism. Like Paul did in Hebrews, he's calling them to come fully out of that, and to have a completely different mindset. He wants them to speak, and act, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. The perfect law, declared in the NT. Not just keeping the OT, but the law of liberty, where we've been freed from the yoke of bandage. We're no longer under the law, but under the word of Christ.

So they should both speak and do, as they that will be judged by the law of liberty, by the word of Christ, not by the law of Moses.

All of that vain religion won't do them any good if they're going to be judged by the law of liberty. It has no place in the law of liberty.

But if they are neglecting to love their neighbor as themselves, as Christ directed, then they are going to be in trouble, they are transgressing the word of Christ, the law of liberty.

So he told them to speak as if they'd be judged by that, telling them that if they didn't bridle their tongue, their religion was vain.

And also to act as if they would be judged by that, not respecting persons, but loving each man as themselves.

And so you see, he's still on the same subject here, that he was talking about at the end of chapter one. He's telling them to both speak and do as they that will be judged by the law of liberty. To both speak and do in accordance with the engrafted word.

Verse 13

James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

And as a final word on that particular point, he's also pointing out something about the law of liberty, that is different than the Mosaic law.

And that is, that how you judge, will be taken into account in how you are judged.

You see, under the Mosaic law, in many things, there wasn't a lot of room for mercy. But in the NT, under the law of liberty, there are no longer decreed punishments for something. Christians are never told that they should undergo some kind of punishment for sinning, that the church is to see that they are punished.

The only thing that it says is that in some cases you shouldn't keep company with people who call themselves a brother but are engaging in perverse sins. Like if they are a drunkard or extortioner or fornicator.

But other than that there is no kind of punishment decreed in the law of liberty, meted out by the church.

So under the law of liberty, there is definitely room for mercy. When somebody repents, and returns to walking in righteousness and holiness, we should show them mercy. We shouldn't hold that against them. We shouldn't be partial toward them.

And note that this doesn't mean that you shouldn't judge. He didn't say "he that *doesn't judge* won't be judged," but to have mercy when you judge. God expects us to do justice, to speak and judge justly. He expects us to speak righteousness and truth. But it means that when you do judge, and somebody repents, that you show them mercy.

He says if you don't show them mercy, then when *you* make a mistake, people aren't going to be inclined to show you mercy either. If you don't show mercy, people are going to judge *you* without mercy.

And mercy rejoices against judgement. When judgement comes and mercy comes along right beside it, that is reason for rejoicing. That's what they'd like to have, is mercy along with judgement on them.

So they shouldn't be unforgiving, they shouldn't be holding a grudge, they shouldn't be permanently excommunicating people.

They should be showing mercy. If they want to receive mercy from others.

And of course this is another thing that Jesus talked about in the sermon on the mount:

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

So Jesus told his disciples this same principle, that others would judge them in the same way that they judged others. And since he wasn't sending them out to judge, but to preach, he told them to abstain from being judges, because that would just mean that they would be judged. But it wasn't supposed to be about them, it wasn't supposed to be about judgement. It was supposed to be about Christ, about the gospel, and about mercy. About a call to repentance. So that wasn't the time to be judging. That was the time to be sharing the good news of God's mercy so that people could repent and receive it.

Otherwise, if they became judges, people would judge them harshly, and the gospel would be hindered.

Luke 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore **merciful**, as your Father also is **merciful**.

37 **Judge** not, and ye shall not be **judged**: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

And I quote that just to make it absolutely clear what Jesus was saying, and what James is saying. Jesus is talking about how men will treat them, that if they judge men, men will judge them, if they condemn men, men will condemn them, if they forgive men, men will forgive them, and if they give to men, men will give to them.

It isn't that God will judge people more harshly who judge others, or show more mercy to the merciful. That really wasn't his point here. But that if you want *other men* to show you mercy, then you should be willing to forgive them.

James wants them to follow that rule, to understand that principle of the perfect law of liberty. That there is a lot of mercy involved, not just judgement. And that those who show mercy will have mercy shown to them. And those that are partial, and that don't show mercy, aren't going to be shown much mercy by others.

But they shouldn't be partial in any thing. They shouldn't be judges of evil thoughts. They should treat all equally, rich and poor, small and great, and show mercy.

They should lay aside vain religion with all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive the word, and be doers of it, visiting the afflicted, and keeping themselves unspotted from the world.

James is not a particularly uplifting book, but it contains some practical admonition. And I guess that it is admonition that is good to be heard today. Like Hebrews it is good admonition for people who have been caught up in religion, and who need to be called to come fully out of it. That's a message that much of the Gentile church needs to hear today, just as the Jewish church needed to hear it then. Much of the Gentile church, like those Christian Jews, is very zealous of their religion. But it is just vain religion, and they are deceiving themselves, hearing the word of God, and not doing it. And I'm not even talking about the Catholics and other pagans, I'm talking about the Protestant church. There is far too much Protestant religion, that is just vain, and filthy, and defiled. Even the word that they preach, the word that they hear, is defiled. But they need to receive with meekness the pure and perfect engrafted word, which is able to save their souls. Protestant religion, will not.

And there is also a need to show mercy.

Matthew 18:11 *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

So he came to show mercy, and to rejoice in that mercy that would save from condemnation. To have mercy rejoice against judgment.

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

And he instructs them to show that mercy to one another. To be ready to forgive the fault of their brother.

They should only excommunicate him if he refuses to repent even before the whole church. But they should have given him three chances to repent and receive mercy before that.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Now, we don't have time to go into this in depth, but yes, he is essentially saying that this man who is cast out of the congregation is also cast out of the kingdom. That because he wouldn't repent of his fault, he won't receive of the inheritance.

And he's going to provide some more clarity on that in a moment.

21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

So Peter says, OK, you asked us to show mercy and forgive, but how many times do I have to do that?

And Jesus tells him essentially that there is no limit. You need to keep showing mercy and forgiving over and over again.

And he's going to explain why.

It's because just as that man who refused to repent was forfeiting his place in the kingdom, so those that don't show mercy when he does repent, are also forfeiting their place in the kingdom. It cuts both ways.

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

So this man had a fault, and he was shown mercy by the king, by Christ.

It's important to remember here that this is in Matthew, this is in context of the physical kingdom. This doesn't necessarily apply to us today, but it certainly does to the Jews in the tribulation, and as Christ sets up his kingdom during the millennium.

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So he didn't show mercy.

What did James say? He said that he that judges without mercy, will be showed no mercy.

That's a policy that Christ is going to follow during the millennium.

31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So if you are one of these people of the nations who survives into the millennium, and received Christ's forgiveness, allowing you to continue to live on the earth. But your salvation isn't assured at that point. If you are unforgiving to others during the millennium, then Christ is going to cast you into prison. And you'll have lost your chance of making it to the new earth.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.