Pure and Undefiled Religion 10.4.09

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." James 1:27 ESV

"Religion that is pure and undefiled" Means "the outward practice, the service of a god." Used only 5 times in the NT. Refers here to our set of beliefs and practices about Jesus and is used in a positive light instead of the negative light we saw in Colossians. Two synonyms to communicate spotlessness. James is seeking to redeem and reframe their concept of religion.

"before God, the Father" It is God who determines the purity of our 'religion,' not us.

"to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" Orphans and widows were two the neediest groups in the early church. There was no welfare or life insurance to support them. Serving them shows the very essence of Christian love (sacrifice) because they had nothing to give in return. The word *"visit"* is important. We can't just believe that these people should be visited. We must visit them. It means more than just dropping by for a chat. It means caring for others, exercising oversight on their behalf and helping them in whatever way is needed.

P: The purity of our religion is in the proof of our service to others—especially those who are the most needy.

1. The "needy" have always been close to God's heart.
    a. OT: (Ps. 68:5 Ex. 22:22, Deut. 14:28-29).
    b. NT: 1 Tim. 5:3, 1 John, Acts 6.
2. When we show mercy, are being the 'City within the City' and modeling the Kingdom that is to come.
3. There is a "Social Gospel" caution in our day. This does not diminish the force of this Text.

Why Don't We Care for Orphans and Widows?

1. We are too busy.
    a. We are moving so quickly that we just don't notice.
2. We are too selfish.
    a. Serving ourselves and our agenda eclipses serving others.

Am I caring for the 'orphans and widows' in my life? If not, what needs to change?

Putting Feet On It:

1. Serve with Crossing!
    a. Oct. 24 9 AM- 1 PM Orphans at Boy's Haven.
    b. Oct. 31 6 – 8 PM Widows and Outreach.
2. Look for those already around you who are in need.
    a. The principle here is intended to be broadened to anyone in need, not just orphans and widows.
3. Just do it.
    a. Don't give your flesh opportunities to make excuses or explain the need away.

"and to keep oneself unstained from the world." "Keep" denotes regular, continuous action. *"unstained"* means 'moral and spiritual purity.' It is not a command to sinless perfection (only Jesus could do that) but rather describing the basic orientation and trajectory of our lives. Similar to 1 Pet. 1:17b-19. Also, "holiness."

Two Dimensions of Holiness:

1. Positional:
    a. "Double Imputation" (our sin on Christ, his righteousness on us)
    b. Our "Gospel Identity" (Being clean and righteous before God)
2. Practical:
    a. How the Positional is playing out in daily life.

Retreat / Fundamentalism
"Worldly"

P: Our goal should be to "In the World and not of the World."

Where am I and my family on this continuum? What changes need to be made?

Putting Feet On It:

1. Look to Jesus.
2. Listen to Jesus.
    a. Immerse yourself in the Bible. It shows us what holy living looks like & gives us wisdom to navigate the gray areas.
3. Live "with Jesus" and in community.
    a. Respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction and promptings.
    b. Part of our role is to encourage and correct one another on this path.

Works Consulted: *Expositor's Commentary, MacArthur Study Bible, ESV Study Bible, MacArthur Commentary on James, The Bible Exposition Commentary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments, New Bible Commentary, The Outline Bible, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary, Wilmington's Bible Handbook, Word Pictures of the New Testament*