

Pure Religion

The letter of James is where simple straightforward truth is driven home perhaps more than any other book in the New Testament. There is the famous section in chapter 2 where James writes says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

(James 2:14-17) Paul echoed James in his letter to the saints in Rome, “To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.” (Romans 2:7) Faith that is **not** acted upon and lived out from a changed heart and soul is worthless.

Understanding that faith must be lived lays the foundation for James 1:26-27, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. ²⁷ 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.” As we study these two verses this morning I plan to take James’ admonishment to speak not as the world does, but as children of the living God and act on one’s faith by serving others – namely orphans and widows of verse 27. I will move through these two verses and relate these to the plague of sin in our world, our nation and our community, specifically the sin of abortion.

Let me begin in verse 26, “If anyone thinks he is **religious** and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” Here James is again speaking of religious hypocrisy; people, who say they are religious, but use their tongues in the way of the world instead of the way of God. Both James and Paul say the same thing; outward religion without true faith is worthless. Anybody can talk-the-talk. True religion is different from the world or living out rules or the Law, true religion means living by faith in Christ Jesus. So when James uses the word “**religious**” in verse 26 or writes about “**pure and undefiled**” religion in verse 27, he is speaking of true religion or faith – those who walk-the-walk. As we follow James’ train of thought we understand that true “**religion**” is “**faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**” This is the religion of both James and Paul. When they speak they speak as Jesus taught, ²⁰ “**For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ... I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,** ³⁷ **for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.**” (Matthew 10:20 and 12:36-37) So if one says they have religion or faith in Christ but does not bridle their unloving, lying, gossiping, cursing or angry tongue, well then, the evidence shows that their religion and faith is worthless. True faith saves us. True religion or faith is observable by the change that takes place in how one thinks, acts and speaks. It is a reflection of the inward condition of the heart, mind and soul. James cautioned the use of one’s tongue back in chapter 1, verse 19, “**be quick to hear, slow to speak.**” The tongue can praise and uplift and heal or it can be a weapon to hurt, slay and destroy one another.

Paul said that there are evidences of sincere change demonstrating true faith and they include, ²² “**putting off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,** ²³ **and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,** ²⁴ **and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**” *This is true religion or faith. Once ones mind is*

renewed in the spirit one is able to speak truth into peoples lives with love. Paul brings home the result of true religion and faith in the next verse, ²⁵ *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”* (Ephesians 4:22-25) We should always be speaking God’s truth in love and kindness to all people that the Lord places in our life’s path - our neighbors and those near us. My beloved we are to be careful with our words. We are to speak truth with love into people’s lives.

James adds another tangible example in verse 27 writing, *“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.”* It is on this verse I want to spend the majority of time this morning. I want to relate James’ calling for Christians of true religion or faith to visit and serve others. He names two specifically; orphans and widows and they are important. The principle set forth here I also believe applies to other areas of service and Christians need to work to counter the deep sins of the world that neglect the needs of others and beyond that inflict great harm even unto death on many. It is Christians who are to expose mankind’s cruelty to one another and show the world a better way by shining God’s light into the darkness.

Let me take James’ concern about visiting and serving others further out. Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision of 1973 did not enforce the laws of the constitution, but created new law which is not the function of the Supreme Court. The US Supreme Court went against historical definition of life, failed to defend those who are helpless and sanctioned the murder of innocents making their decision like the Nazi holocaust of World War II that were considered crimes against humanity. They did not protect the innocent. Unlike orphans without parents there is now parents without God’s gift of children.

Undefined Religion

As you look at verse 27 you will notice there are effects of pure religion or faith in Christ. First, a Christian lives out practical compassion towards orphans and widows. Second, a Christian of pure religion lives a life of personal purity. This is important for us to understand because in our society and much of the world those who claim to be Christian think they can keep one foot in the world and one in Christ's Church.

One cannot have pure religion or faith and vacillate between living for self and worldly gain, and living, at times, as God's calls his children to do in the Scripture. Some would claim that living as a true Christian means a life of personal purity; meaning living with sexual purity, financial integrity, pious thought and speech, and fulfilling the Ten Commandments. However, if they forget love and compassion they become legalistic in their approach and this makes them weak when it comes to serving others with deeds of compassion, especially towards the poor and helpless. Those on the other side of the fence, worldly Christians say, what truly matters is compassion for the poor and helpless, and social justice, but they would argue that what one does with their own body, what they do in private is no one else's business. So they want to be Christians, but live in private sin. Sins that are private or if one believes there is no such thing as sin as long as one claims Christ; fornication, adultery, homosexuality, career over faith and family, and abortion is a private personal choice. Although the majority of people in New Mexico claim to be Christian, this comes into question when they refuse to take a stand against abortion, which denies the humanity of defenseless babies.

However, James says in verse 27 that pure and undefiled religion or true faith in Christ Jesus means that one lives within the scriptures and lives for the Lord and serves others with compassion and love. One puts their faith into practice meeting

the needs of “orphans and widows *and the helpless in their distress* and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Christians are not to live with either social justice or holiness, but they are called to live with both. God calls his children to live proactively with kindness and service towards others and a life of holiness striving to overcome sin. The is what verse 27 says, “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.” This is my primary focus this morning.

Orphans and Abortion

One might ask, “What does abortion have to do with orphans?” Well, let me explain my thought process. God tells us we are to be concerned with and to help orphans because they are helpless without their mother and father. God calls us to feel compassion for the helpless that depend on others for life. For example imagine, a young child riding in their safety seat with their mom and dad riding in the front. There is a dreadful crash and both mom and dad are killed. The child has minor injuries, but otherwise is okay. The hospital checks and discovers there are no grandparents and no other family. This is a heartbreaking situation. God says to the Church, step in there and take care of that child.

So orphans are children whose parents have died and left them at the mercy of others to take care of them, lest they too die. How does abortion relate to that? Well, abortion puts the child in a worse situation. The parents are not dead, but they chose to have the child put to death. Is this not worse than being an orphan? To have mommy and daddy choose to have you put to death, I believe, is worse than ones mommy and daddy being dead. If God so cares for children who have been orphaned, would he not also be concerned for children whose lives are endangered by their parents?

Of course, the objection could be raised that the unborn child is not a child and so doesn't qualify for the compassion of verse 27. You hear this argument less and less in the public debate. A woman may hear it in the abortion clinic, but not in public, where it may be called to account.

There are several reasons for this change.

1) Scientific evidence has shown that the fetus has all the crucial genetic elements of human life. On the back counter are some facts concerning pregnancy and abortion that give more facts and details than I will give this morning.

2) The differences between the unborn baby and the born baby are differences that do not count in determining whether this is a human life. What I mean is size, shape, looks, physical dependence, etc. These are simply immaterial, because they all apply to the baby inside and the newborn outside the womb. Ultrasounds makes clearer every day – inside the womb is a child – it was a giant leap when I was the chairman of the board for the Crisis Pregnancy Center now known as CareNet and we began using Ultrasound enabling women to see the person inside them.

3) Doctors treat the unborn human as legitimate patients just as they do the children who have been born. Doctors will work tirelessly to save a baby the mother wants.

4) Some promote the idea that the Bible teaches that human life begins with the first breath. People try and use the Bible to argue that the baby in the womb is not a person, they say look at Genesis 2:7 there was no life in Adam until he drew his first breath. “The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” When someone wants to use the Bible to teach something different than what God says, they have to take verses out of context. So this argument breaks down when we compare it to Leviticus, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it

for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” (Leviticus 17:11) By this definition a fetus is a human by the 4th week because the heart is beating and blood is pumping. However, we know that all the elements needed for life are present at conception. The prophets wrote, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: ‘I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself...’ ” (Isaiah 44:24) Jeremiah continues, speaking for God, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you...” (Jeremiah 1:5)

5) God has given mankind the ability to conceive techniques and build machines that makes the age of viability in the womb earlier and earlier.

6) The insistence of Planned Parenthood, politicians and others to keep the late-term abortion procedure legal shows that the basis of their position is not that the unborn are not human, yet they want laws to legally kill babies. So you rarely hear anymore, in public, that the basis of legal abortion is that the fetus is not a human life and a real developing human person. There are only a handful of doctors in the USA who perform late-term abortions with one of the largest facilities here in Albuquerque. In an interview with a Texas TV station, this now Albuquerque doctor said, and I quote, “Am I killing? Yes, I am. I know that.” For him it is a job without morality and a job that makes him a lot of money. He thinks himself to be religious and speaks nonsense to justify his sins and says what he is doing is not sin. He admits he has performed abortions on girls as young as 9 years old. I ask, “How is this any different that the Holocaust of World War II, crimes against humanity and more importantly crimes against God?” The Nazi’s spoke nonsense to themselves to convince themselves that their sin was not sin. History repeats itself.

How does this doctor and others justify murdering the innocent? The bottom line is for them it is a choice between a mother's plans and a baby's life. It is not a moral decision or an ethical one, but a legal one - A baby in the womb has rights to life if the mother wills it to and does not if the mother does not will it to. There are fetal homicide laws that stand as a stunning testimony in our culture that it is a crime to kill an unborn baby if the mother doesn't want you to. Yet abortion laws say it is not a crime to kill the same baby if the mother wants you to. The difference is not the humanity or the personhood of the child. The difference is the desire of the mother. The rights of the weak are defined by the will of the strong.

So the objection that James 1:27 doesn't have implications for the unborn because they are not human persons is wrong. They are persons created by God in the womb. Therefore, James commands that Christians are to have compassion on the helpless who have lost their mother and father applies also to those whose mother and father turn on them and become worse than dead parents, they become killing parents. If orphans should be cared for by God's people, well then, how much more children whose parents reject them.

When James says, visit them "... [in their affliction](#)...", we may ask, "Is there any place of greater distress or affliction than in the womb of a woman who gives herself over to abortion?" This is the greatest "[affliction](#)" any child will ever experience. To be torn limb from limb in the very place that should be the safest place in the world is the most horrible "[affliction](#)" if there ever is anything called "[affliction](#)" and James says, "[visit orphans and widows in their affliction](#)." Abortion is beyond affliction, it is the American holocaust!

Let me return to James' concern with orphans, lest I isolate the case of abortion, let me put it in the context of the wider need for compassionate action toward orphans. In some of the states and countries of the former Soviet Communist Block the

increasing number of orphans is huge. For example, in Romania, there are nearly three abortions for every live birth. Still, hundreds are abandoned in hospitals and at the front doors of the orphanages. An estimated 350,000 street children, panhandle, and live underneath bridges and in the municipal dumps of Bucharest and other cities. The church is working hard to care for these children – their faith has feet.

Abortion has not solved the problem of unwanted children. It never will. Killing the unwanted will never be a solution. There is another way as James 1:27 points out. Helpless children are a great concern to Christ and he says that our religion, our faith in him, will express this concern with radical, risk-taking acts of compassion. There are over 2 million families, right now, in the USA waiting to adopt children. Christians should consider adopting and being foster parents and giving these children a chance to grow up in Christian homes learning about Jesus. Each year Americans murder 1.1 million babies by abortion and we need to protest and vote to change this holocaust. There are families waiting to adopt these children, if only they were allowed to live.

Speaking of risk-taking, consider the greater tragedy of AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and its impact on children. Worldwide more than 39 million people are HIV positive or have AIDS. About 5,753 people will become infected with HIV each day—about 240 every hour. Estimates are that there will be 2.1 million new infections each year, which would bring the total number of HIV/AIDS cases to over 45 million by 2020. The AIDS epidemic is not getting better, 1.7 million people died of AIDS in 2015 and 7 to 8% of these are children under 15. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in thirteen sexually active adults is HIV positive. One of the staggering effects of this is that AIDS has orphaned over 8 million children. These are mind-numbing realities and evidences of the sin and calamity in this fallen world. The call on the Church is to take this massive word “[visit](#)” found in James 1:27 and apply it in radical, risk-taking ways to rescue orphans for Christ and his kingdom.

Why do I call this word “[visit](#)” a massive word? Because of the way “visit” is used in some massive ways in the Bible. In Exodus, “[The LORD had visited the people of Israel \(in Egypt\) and that for he had seen their affliction...](#)” and we know the massive results. (Exodus 4:31) In Luke, he writes about the coming of Jesus and Zacharias says, “[Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.](#)” (Luke 1:68) God visited his people as Christ to bring their salvation – this is massive. Again, God’s visiting is key to the salvation of the world. Our visiting and serving and caring for those who are afflicted is what God has called us to do and it can have massive results.

“Visiting” is a huge word. God’s calling us to visit those in need carries wonderful redeeming overtones. What a great calling for the church! We are to visit, care for, to defend all people, born and unborn! What a great work for the pro-life Christian Church! What a great calling for a number of ministries and more specifically CareNet, which has brought so much redemption to helpless children through supporting mothers with education, counseling and adoption! What a great dream for some of you who are wondering what mission is God calling Christians to!

Widows and Abortion

But before I finish, let me tell you one thought that springs from the word “[widows](#)” in verse 27. Many women who have abortions are worse off than widows. The pain of widowhood is great. The loss of a husband is heartbreaking beyond words. But the loss of a husband through abandonment is in some ways worse. The amputations caused by death usually heal clean. The amputations caused by abandonment often stay infected. These wounds do not heal the same. A high percentage of divorced and abandoned women live in financial stress or poverty. Women who abort often feel desperately alone and they feel trapped and one result

is abortion. So, there are worse situations than being a widow. CareNet is one organization works with and counsels these women.

What should the church do? Just what it has always done, we are to care for women in crisis marriages, crisis pregnancies and financial crisis. The greatest criticism from pro-choice people to those who are the pro-life is that pro-lifers care only for babies and not for women. It simply is not true. The evidence is overwhelming. According to James 1:27 we are concerned with both orphans and widows. Our compassion is not either/or, but for both.

So I leave you with this one very encouraging hope about the future of the “abortion war.” Dave Andrusko, Editor of National Right to Life News, said, “**Some think the conflict will just go on and on, without resolution.**” But he pointed out that this is based on a false assumption: namely that the two sides speak two different languages: one invokes the woman and one invokes the unborn child. Not so, he says. “**In truth, pro-lifers are bilingual, lifting up both mother and child and because they are fluent in both languages, which pro-choice people are not, they can lead American women by the most natural route imaginable**” out of the impasse. He and many others see the tide turning in our culture, which is far less, enthusiastic about abortion than it was in 1974. As people are beginning to understand abortion is a holocaust greater than that of World War II, we, the Church of Jesus Christ must not retreat, but advance the cause of Christ, serving others with compassion. We need to be proactive in politics and voting.

My beloved, I pray that the religion of our church will be “pure and undefiled religion” and is pure and undefiled faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! May God grant us the ability to speak the language of compassion, to orphans, to widows, to helpless children, and to people in affliction. Our language of compassion must be followed by acts of compassionate love and mercy! There are many other languages we must

also speak to the fathers and to the lawmakers and to the doctors, etc. Our language must be followed by acts of mercy and compassion. But whatever we do, let us not be silent. For those who call themselves Christian, if we are silent, our religion is empty and our faith is dead. The battle is before us and we are to engage it with the hope of the Bible and Christ and with compassion, mercy and love.

Abortion Facts

- Less than 1% of abortions are performed to save the life of the mother.
- Evidence shows that the morbidity rate of legal abortions is several times higher than that of carry a pregnancy to term.
- Prior to legalization of abortion females outnumbered males by about 3%. Since 1973 the number of males as steadily grown to where males outnumber females by about 200 million. Abortion has become an effective means of sexism.
- U.S. abortions number about 1.1 million each year. 22% of all pregnancies in the USA end in abortion. (*This excludes spontaneous miscarriages*)
- USA rate is among the highest in the world. Only 9 countries have a higher rate. All but 1 of these countries are communist or former communist.
- USA abortions – 51% are performed on women under 25 years old. 1/3 of American women have had an abortion by age 45. 85.2% of abortions are performed on unmarried women. Blacks have 3.5 times higher rate of abortions than white women. Women on Medicaid have a 3 times higher rate of abortions than those whose are not on Medicaid.
- Women who have an abortion are twice as likely to suffer major depression compared to women who deliver. Major depression following abortion can be delayed and long-term compared to post-partum depression.
- 39 States have some form of parental consent for minors seeking an abortion. New Mexico is NOT one.
- Abortion Medical services are not regulated like other medical services. Therefore, reliable reporting on deaths, medical complications and women who become sterile from abortion procedures is not available.
- 22 States allow abortions after 20 weeks. New Mexico is one.
- 17 States use public funds to pay for abortions for some women. New Mexico is one.
- New Mexico and specifically Albuquerque have been given the name of “Late-Term Abortion Capitol” of America.

Conception and Pregnancy

- 3 Weeks – Eyes and spinal cord are visible and the brain has 2 lobes.
- 4 Weeks – Heart is beating and circulatory system is in place and functioning.
- 7 Weeks – About the time a woman begins to realize she might be pregnant. Muscles and nervous system are working together. The cerebrum has divided into hemispheres. Baby is sensitive to touch and pain.
- 9 Weeks – More than 90% of body structure found in full-grown humans are now present. Medical classification changes from embryo to fetus.
- 10 Weeks – About the time a woman knows she is pregnant all parts of the brain, spinal cord, muscles and nerves are formed. The heart pumps blood to every part of the body. The baby reacts to touch, noise and pain and now makes facial expressions.

- **80% of abortions in the USA are performed between the 6th and 10th weeks.**

Abortion Facts, continued –

State of Florida’s statistics are similar to the rest of the states.

The state of Florida records a reason for every abortion that occurs within its borders each year. In 2015, there were 71,740 abortions in Florida. This table lists each reason and the percentage of abortions that occurred because of it.

Percentage	Reason
.001%	The pregnancy resulted from an incestuous relationship
.065%	<u>The woman's life was endangered by the pregnancy</u>
.085%	<u>The woman was raped</u>
.288%	The woman's physical health was threatened by the pregnancy
.294%	The woman's psychological health was threatened by the pregnancy
.666%	<u>There was a serious fetal abnormality</u>
6.268%	<u>The woman aborted for social or economic reasons</u>
92.330%	No reason (elective)

Adoption

- There approximately 156,000 adoptions in the USA each year. These adoptions include - private and public sources and children from overseas.
- There is an average of 2 million families in the USA on waiting lists to adopt.

	2007				2008			
	Private*	Public	Inter-country	Total	Private*	Public	Inter-country	Total
New Mexico	250	355	80	685	197	427	70	694
Total of ALL STATES	63,775	52,657	19,569	136,001	63,094	55,303	17,416	135,813

*Other could include private infant adoptions from adoption agencies or adoption attorneys, tribal, and step parent.

Worldwide Abortion

- Worldwide 56 million abortions are performed every year. 7 million in developed nations and 49 million in less developed nations. 25% of all pregnancies end in abortion.

NUMBERS AND RATES

Global and regional estimates of induced abortion, 1990–1994 and 2010–2014

World and region	No. of abortions (millions)		Abortion rate†	
	1990–1994	2010–2014	1990–1994	2010–2014
World	50.4	56.3	40	35
Developed countries	11.8	6.7*	46	27*
Developing countries	38.6	49.6*	39	37
Africa	4.6	8.3*	33	34
Asia	31.5	35.8	41	36
Europe	8.2	4.4	52	30*
Latin America and the Caribbean	4.4	6.5*	40	44
Northern America	1.6	1.2	25	17*
Oceania	0.1	0.1	20	19

*Difference between 2010–2014 and 1990–1994 was statistically significant. †Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44.
 SOURCE: Sedgh G et al., Abortion incidence between 1990 and 2014: global, regional, and subregional levels and trends, *The Lancet*, 2016, [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)30380-4/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)30380-4/abstract).

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