



Daily Verse and Comment

James 1:27

(27) Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

New International Version

The apostle presents Christian living as a two-pronged endeavor that we can perhaps simplify or summarize even more. The first is doing good works: visiting orphans and widows in their trouble. The second prong is to become holy or build righteous character in ourselves in cooperation with [God](#).

We could also divide it into the practical and the spiritual sides of life. Obviously, when a person does good works, it is a practical application of what he has learned and put on as spiritual character.

Another way to look at it is to say that James divides it into the outward and the inward. Part of Christian living goes on inside an individual, and something—a work, an action—comes out of him as a result.

However we want to name this two-pronged approach, we must realize that neither of these prongs is sufficient alone, which is why James presents them together. It is "pure and undefiled religion" to have an inward and an outward aspect or a practical and a spiritual aspect.

The apostle John agrees with James in [1 John 3:16-19](#). Pure religion requires both of these elements:

By this we know [love](#), because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up

his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

He says that, if we do not manifest God's love by giving, helping, and caring for others, then we have not fulfilled anything. We cannot be sure that the love of God is actually in us if it is not coming out in some sort of physical work that we do, some act of love.

In this church's teaching, we tend to stress only one of these prongs. It is not that we do not talk about the other, but we tend to stress the inward, the spiritual, the holy, the righteous character part—the second prong that James shows in [James 1:27](#). There is good, sound, solid, biblical reason for this. Basically, it is that the spiritual aspect is the more important of the two.

The inward, the spiritual, the holy, the righteous-character part of Christian living is the foundation—the wellspring, the fertile soil—out of which good works grow. One could go so far as to say that effective and truly good works cannot be done without godly character or a right relationship with God.

This means that we must have godly character before we can even begin to do good works properly! Without godliness, good works are simply common and rather empty, humanistic philanthropy.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
["If I Have Not Charity"](#)



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