

RELIGION, PURE AND UNDEFILED.

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"Religion, pure and undefiled, before God, even the Father, is this: To visit (take charge of) the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."—JAMES i. 27.

There can be no doubt, I think, that the reference here is to what we term "*religion*:" not a form of faith or of church connexion, but a godly and pious character and life. The idea of worship is included, but there is, besides, the true character, which is exhibited in the life. The previous verse indicates this: "If any man among you seem to be religious"—obviously makes a profession of being a godly man, a man of faith, and prayer, and of holy life—"and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's *religion* is vain." Such a man persistently offends in one important point; he lives in sin—the sin of the tongue: and though he has a name to live he is dead. Indeed if he does not use his tongue to good purpose he is living in sin; and the continued living in any way of iniquity, is utterly incompatible with real religion. A good man may be overtaken in a fault, and recover his standing; but one who loves and lives in sin, denies the Lord that bought him, and crucifies him afresh.

The verse before us is eminently instructive on a point of no little felt interest to many minds, and of real concernment to all. There are many who have much anxiety, and conflicting opinions, and unseemly controversy to ascertain *what* is true religion. Is there any such thing on earth, and if so, what and where is it? The text throws light upon this momentous point, by shewing us what it *does*. Dr. Paley well observes that the apostle is here describing religion not in *its principles*, but in *its effects*. And even the whole of them are not given in detail, but rather a vivid illustration of them. Some of the chief *duties* of religion are described in the beneficence and moral purity here insisted upon. It is to *do* good and to *be* good; not one without the other, but principle and practice in constant and harmonious action. It follows that there is implied the *principle* on which this excellent character is founded: the prevailing purpose is really included in the nature of these good works; so that the matter *Godward* has to be regarded as well as *manward* and *selfward*.

Thus divided into three aspects, we may, by God's blessing profitably contemplate this religion pure and undefiled; in other words, *true* religion. There seems to be an allusion to the excellence of a *precious stone*, which consists much in its being *καθαρά και ἀναισχος*, clear, pure, and also without flaw. And surely no *gem* is so precious or ornamental as this kind of religion. *Godward. Manward. Selfward.*

I. *Godward.*—In a previous verse we read of being begotten of the gracious will of God. Of his own will, of his loving, holy will, using as his instrument the Gospel of Christ. He makes of the degenerate sons of Adam *new creatures*. "They are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." It is observable that there is a contrast placed in the preceding verses. *Lust* is described as a parent of sin and wickedness: *God*, through the Gospel, is the parent of this pure and undefiled religion. And "the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It reveals Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sin, as a living and perfect righteousness, on the basis of which a believing sinner is justified, so that this is the name by which he is called—"The LORD our Righteousness."