

James 1:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. Pure (kathara, καθαρά) and undefiled (amiantos, ἀμίαντος) religion (thrēskeia, θρησκεία) before God the Father is this: visit (episkeptesthai, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι) orphans (orphanos, ὄρφανός) and widows (chēras, χήρας) in their affliction and keep oneself unspotted (asplilon, ἀσπιλον) from the world. James unites mercy and holiness as the twin marks of true worship.

Care for the vulnerable reflects God's character (Psalm 68:5), while moral purity resists assimilation to worldly values. This verse encapsulates the letter's themes: compassionate action, controlled life, and separation from worldliness—all flowing from gospel grace.

Historical Context

Many diaspora believers were poor, yet James calls them to care for those even more vulnerable. Early church history records practical ministries to widows (Acts 6) and orphans as a distinguishing mark. James, writing early, sets the trajectory for diaconal ministry that Paul and others later organize.

The exhortation also responds to accusations that Gentile-inclusive Christianity

neglected Torah justice. James shows continuity with Old Testament ethics while emphasizing new covenant holiness amid pagan cultures.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Who are the modern 'orphans and widows' near you, and how can you visit them?
2. What disciplines keep you unspotted from the world while serving in it?
3. How can your church integrate mercy and holiness in its discipleship pathways?

Interlinear Text

θρησκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ καὶ
religion Pure and undefiled before G3588 God and
G2356 G2513 G2532 G283 G3844 G2316 G2532

πατρὶ αὕτη ἐστίν ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὄρφανοὺς καὶ χήρας
the Father this is To visit the fatherless and widows
G3962 G3778 G2076 G1980 G3737 G2532 G5503

ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν ἀσπιλον ἐαυτὸν τηρεῖν ἀπὸ¹
in G3588 their affliction G846 unspotted himself and to keep from
G1722 G2347 G784 G1438 G5083 G575

τοῦ κόσμου
the world
G3588 G2889

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:2 (References God): And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Psalms 119:1 (Parallel theme): Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

James 4:4 (References God): Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

1 Timothy 5:4 (References God): But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

1 Timothy 1:5 (Parallel theme): Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

Luke 1:6 (References God): And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Psalms 68:5 (References God): A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

Matthew 5:8 (References God): Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Isaiah 1:23 (Parallel theme): Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

1 John 5:18 (References God): We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.