

James 1:17-27
September 9, 2018 – 16th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Religion that Counts

- △ **Born of God's truth** (vv.17-18)
- △ **Living by God's Word** (vv.19-21)
- △ **Doing God's will** (vv.22-27)

In the Name of Jesus, God's pure heart of love, dear family of God:

Ever been in a position where you had to do right while everyone criticized you? It's not just presidents and judges, but engineers and teachers, pastors and parents, children when "everybody's doing it," but you know it's wrong. So you don't and get criticized. So remember what Jesus said to His disciples shortly before He was crucified for doing right by His heavenly Father: "***If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first....Be courageous! I have overcome the world.***" (John 15:18; 16:33 EHV¹)

Long ago in a land far away, there lived a great military commander named Themistocles. Patriot Greeks called Themistocles a coward and a traitor because he kept waiting. Everyone could see the massive Persian fleet of Xerxes right offshore. Impatient patriots kept demanding action. "Why doesn't Themistocles attack?" But knowledge fortifies patience. Themistocles knew that every morning about nine o'clock a land breeze would come up to fill the sails of his ships. Then his rowers would be free to fight while he attacked, and the Persians would have to row into the wind. Criticism will come, but the more you know of God's holy Word, the more you can be blessed and be a blessing with **Religion that Counts**. First, it's...

△ **Born of God's truth** (vv.17-18)

Sometimes you get some snarky critics that need answers in their own language. They say, "There are too many hypocrites in the church." So you say, "There's always room for one more."

Meanwhile, your heart of hearts knows God hates hypocrisy. Jesus' brother James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, felt the same. He writes to hurting Christians tempted by trouble to just give up and not try so hard. They even blamed God for tempting them. But James has been counseling a kind of spiritual toughness **Born of God's truth**. God allows and sometimes even sends hardships into our lives, but never to make us fall. He always wants to strengthen His children to stand tall against adversity and not give in to sin or the despair that so easily follows it. Look how relentlessly God keeps blessing us. Our heavenly Father lives above the stars which He created. But from boundless stores of grace God funnels one blessing after another deep into your life. Bad things? "***An enemy has done this.***" (Matthew 13:28) And yet "***we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.***" (Romans 8:28)

And still our heavenly Father will not stop pouring out on us more blessings than we have room for. Even when we fail to give God the ***firstfruits*** of our offerings, God still counts us as "***a kind of firstfruits of his creation.***" His strong and steady love does not disappear like a shadow in the night. He keeps coming with blessings through His mighty Word to bring life to us and our children. God is proud of how you grow and flourish in your faith when you and your children "rock steady" in Sunday School and Bible Class – as a good example, and for the sake of your own soul. You are the prize part of God's creation. So you can trust that you are **Born of God's truth** as long as your heart is right there...

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

△ Living by God's Word (vv.19-21)

There's triple trouble for us: We don't listen – to God or each other. We talk too much – which shuts our ears to learning. We don't control our anger, so it crowds out of our hearts patience, kindness, understanding, helpfulness and forgiveness. By nature we would all stay stuck in death with our Old Adam hating God, living for self, always a hypocrite toward our neighbor. Relationships poisoned by our anger would never heal except for God's love which is greater than our sin. God's love is more stubborn than our pride. His pride is to adopt sinners like us into His family by Baptism.

In our Baptism we have been connected to Christ's death in our place and to His resurrection. Every day is a new day to drown that old sinful nature which keeps popping up like a cork. As Luther put it, "The sucker can swim." You fight back against anger, bitterness, resentment, selfishness and hypocrisy. Fight the good fight of faith by repentance – sorrow over sin and faith in forgiveness. **Living by God's Word** is a glorious, victorious way to live. Our children and grandchildren will keep **Living in God's Word** as we set a good example and lead them to follow Christ with us. Don't be like a little boy who keeps digging up the grass seed in Dad's lawn to see if it's growing. **"Receive with humility the word planted in you. It is able to save your souls."** Religion that Counts receives God's gifts for...

△ Doing God's will (vv.22-27)

Remember the expression? "He just an urban cowboy." A hopped up 4x4 that never gets muddy or goes off-road, what's it worth? "Urban cowboys" never test the power. A limo parked on an island in a raging river? You can sit in the driver's seat and make engine noises, but you're not going anywhere.

Religion that Counts because we're **Doing God's will** is going to get dirty. Remember Jesus criticized for eating with **"tax collectors and sinners"**? He called prostitutes away from their sinful lives to live for God. Women like Mary Magdalene **"from whom seven demons had come out...were helping to support"** Jesus and his disciples with their own money. (Luke 8:2f) Jesus caught constant criticism for the friends He kept. Maybe you do too. But notice how different Jesus is from teenagers running with the wrong crowd. Jesus loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way. He knows we'll get dirty **Doing God's will** like someone trying to walk across a field of Dakota gumbo. You may have to leave your boots out there and escape barefoot. Dirty, yes, but God keeps cleaning us.

Just don't get comfortable feeling dirty. Don't stop smelling the sin all around. Don't be content to just listen and then leave as if nothing happened in your soul. **"If anyone hears the word and does not do what it says, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own natural face in a mirror. ²⁴Indeed, he carefully looks at himself; then, he goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like. ²⁵But the one who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues to do so—since he does not hear and forget but actually does what it says—that person will be blessed in what he does."**

Can you hear James calling us to account for our lives? Can you hear how kindly he keeps saying, **"My dear brothers"**? In Christ we have been reborn with will power. So don't just **"listen to God's word. Do what it says."** **"Get rid of all moral filthiness....Bridle [your] tongue....Take care of orphans and widows in their distress....Keep [yourself] unstained by the world."** Don't just be *hearers of the Word*. Be *doers of God's Word* – **Doing God's will** with a heart that God makes pure and bright by His Word and sacrament. As surely as your car needs washing especially on dirt roads, so your soul needs God's deep cleaning especially when life gets messy and forces you to get down and dirty.

"The perfect law that gives freedom" is Bible instruction with your heart wrapped up in **"the one thing needful."** (Luke 10:42) **"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and light for my path."** (Psalm 119:105) You show me God's way to live high and dry above earth's drama and depressing dirt. Swerving off the road may seem like "freedom" for some, but getting stuck with rattlesnakes and horseflies, what kind of life is that? Bright headlights, clear road signs, a full forgiving tank of gas from the Gospel – that's where you enjoy **Religion that Counts. God's truth...God's Word...God's will** – make yours **Count**. Amen.

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