

Unspotted

Introduction. Greg Boyle, founder and director of Homeboy Industries in East Los Angeles, has put together a team of physicians trained to remove the tattoos of ex-gang members. The service is crucial for their success in making it outside the gang.

Gang-related tattoos prevent many former gang members from getting jobs or advancing in work. For others, the markings put them in serious danger on the streets. There is no fee or community service required to receive the service offered by Homeboy Industries; tattoo removal is strictly a gift. Currently, more than a thousand names are on the waiting list.

The process of tattoo removal is extremely painful. Patients describe the laser procedure as feeling like hot grease has been poured on their skin. Yet the list grows, each name representing a life that longs to be free and is willing to endure the pain to seize freedom.

These are people who wish they could go back and be unspotted, and James 1:27 is an important verse to study if you want to remain spiritually unspotted from the world. But before we proceed, we're going to consider two additional points from the first part of verse.

First, true religion is determined by God, not man. Note that James specifies "in the sight of our God and Father ..." We do not have the right nor the prerogative to determine the form or practice of "religion" — God alone does. Anything and everything aside from what He determines and dictates is vain, false, and invalidates the word of God (cp. Matthew 15:6-8).

Second, true religion is based on action rather than mere emotion. It is not defined or determined by how we feel, or even what we say, but what we do. Though we should certainly feel the right way towards others (cp. 1 John 4:7-11), James makes it clear that true religion must be practiced. It demands not just sympathy or even empathy, but service to and for those who are distressed (in this case, widows and orphans — those largely incapable of helping themselves). So, true religion and true wisdom is not about just what we feel or say, but what we do (cp. James 3:13).

Now, with those points covered, let's get back to the part about keeping "oneself unspotted from the world." Admittedly, this is easier said than done. We live in a world that seems to be ever-increasingly filthy and staining. Obviously, we can't avoid all contact with it if we hope to have a salt and light influence (Matthew 5:13-16; cp. 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). But how are we to live in the world and yet remain pure, undefiled, and unspotted by it?

While there may be many scriptural and useful answers to this question, four really good ones will be examined in this lesson.

I. Continue In Study

- A. Learn and grow. Allow God to communicate with you. He's revealed His law so you'll know what He wants (2 Peter 3:14-18).
- B. Keep "looking intently" into the mirror God provides — "the perfect law of liberty," and be a "doer of the word" rather than merely a "hearer who deludes himself" (James 1:22-25).

1. “Looking intently” comes from a word which means to stoop and look into (John 20:5, 11), to gaze carefully by the side of, to peer into or to peep into (1 Peter 1:12).
2. “The law of liberty” rests on the work of Christ, whose truth sets us free (John 8:32; 2 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:2).

II. Continue In Prayer

- A. Keep praying to God (Colossians 4:2).
 1. Tell Him of your desire to be undefiled and unspotted (Psalm 86:1-5).
 2. Ask for His assistance (Acts 7:34).
 3. Pray for knowledge, wisdom, and courage (James 1:5-9; 5:16-18).
- B. Ask Him to help us with temptation (Matthew 6:13; 26:41).
 1. The request to not lead us into temptation does not suggest God causes temptation, but is a rhetorical way to ask for His protection from sin.
 2. Jesus shows us how to overcome the devil and temptation in a unique and powerful way — we utilize the power of the Bible (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
 3. In Matthew 26:41, spiritual eagerness is often accompanied by carnal weakness — a danger still experienced by us today.
 4. No matter what the temptation may be, we know that God will not allow us to be overwhelmed (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 2:9; cp. Genesis 39:7-9).
- C. Many people throughout scriptural history have used prayer to strengthen their resolve in God (Jacob, Genesis 35:3; Israelites, Exodus 6:5-6; Daniel, Daniel 6:10; Christians, Zechariah 13:9).

III. Continue In Fellowship

- A. You need to associate with people who love and appreciate pure and undefiled religion. Or at least with those who are truly trying to be such. As was mentioned earlier, we can’t “go out of the world” (John 17:11, 15-16). We have to live in it, but this doesn’t mean that worldly people are our closest friends, or that they comprise our chosen associates.
- B. If we even wish or desire “to be a friend of the world,” we make ourselves “an enemy of God” (James 4:4). We simply can’t become or remain pure, undefiled, and unspotted by the world when we spend our discretionary time with, and choose for our closest companions those who are impure, defiled, and stained by the world.
- C. Paul always commended his friends who were Christians and who built up Christ’s kingdom (Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:17-18). Can you say the same of your friends? Are they truly spiritual?

IV. Continue In Steadfastness

- A. Why set yourself up to fail? Sometimes we just make it too easy for Satan. We put ourselves in situations where we are likely to be tempted (in the wrong places and with the wrong people), and then are both surprised and disappointed that we failed to overcome temptation. Why do we do this?
- B. Probably because our true desires and motivations aren’t what they should be. Our pleasures and motivations are based in the wrong source (James 4:1-3).

Seek pleasure from what's right (Psalm 111:2); set your mind to do what's right (Philippians 4:8); and stop putting yourself in circumstances where you're likely to be tempted and fall (Romans 13:14).

Conclusion. We can be enlightened with information from God's word which encourages us to greater faithfulness. This is the right direction for people who are trying to keep themselves "unspotted from the world"!

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