

James

Lesson 2

James 1:19-27

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Lesson 2

James 1:19-27

Genuine Faith

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says. *James 1:22*

Prayers

Read James 1:19-27, Listening and Doing

Jas 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, *Jas 1:20* for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Jas 1:21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Jas 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Jas 1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror *Jas 1:24* and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Jas 1:25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Jas 1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Jas 1:27 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.

1. Words have tremendous power to build up or destroy. Once spoken, they are not easily taken back. Research indicates it takes ten nurturing comments to undo the damage of one critical comment. What practical advice does James give us concerning our speech? Why is this advice so hard to follow!?

- a. Verse 19 – **quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.**

Oh my, how we want to be heard and have others see things our way, but sometimes (too often?) they don't! What is the source of our anger? Anger often stems from frustration or impatience, frequently compounded by stress. "You're in my way, you're going too slow, I'm not getting what I want, you don't respect me!" are sentiments expressed in anger when we are focused on ... ourselves.

- b. Sometimes our first impressions are entirely wrong, so listening is better than speaking or judging. What are some other situations where you have learned it is better to listen before speaking?

Anger – words said in anger are often exaggerated, untrue, and especially hurtful.

Complex feelings and issues. Some people speak to think through issues; others want to quietly “process” information before they speak. It’s best to understand how you think and let the other person know, – when you are silent (or rambling!).

Political or socially sensitive issues. People’s views are shaped by their experiences. Let others talk first so their perspective can be understood before “proving” your opinion.

2. James makes a profound statement in verse 20, “for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” The word James uses for anger is “orge” which implies smoldering anger or resentment rather than explosive anger (also not helpful).

- a. What is the common result of anger or smoldering resentment?

Smoldering resentment does not remain bottled up. It can come out as sneering, critical speech, a sour disposition, nagging, or suddenly cause someone to fly off the handle with the slightest provocation.

When acted out with words or actions, anger often leads to broken relationships and an unwillingness to mend the offense. It does not end in mutual understanding. It does not bring about the righteousness – of anyone.

- b. What are some situations where you find it difficult to maintain your composure?

In Houston, nearly everyone would say, “traffic!” but most control their road rage. More serious examples occur where the relationships are important – with your spouse, children, or colleagues.

- c. Is there such a thing as righteous anger? Can you think of any examples?

Yes, the righteous have anger. There are 256 references to God’s anger in Scripture. We might also have righteous anger- over the abuse of the innocent, the neglect of the suffering, exploitation of the poor. Unfortunately, our anger is too often self-righteous.

3. The book of James is best known for the statement: faith without deeds is dead. In verses 20-25, James illustrates a faith that is alive. What are some of the examples James gives that demonstrate a faith of worth?

- a. Verse 21 (1) – **get rid of all moral filth**

- b. Verse 21 (2) - **Accept the word that is planted in you**
 - c. Verse 22 - **Do what the word says**
 - d. Verse 25 **look intently into the scripture to understand what it says to you to shape your life**
 - e. Verse 26 – **Keep a rein on your tongue – be quick to listen and slow to speak**
 - f. Verse 27 (1) – **Care for widows and orphans**
 - g. Verse 27 (2) – **keep yourself from moral pollution**
4. James stresses the word as the source of instruction for your faith. What do the scriptures impart?

There are so many gifts of the word but among them are:

- a. **Wisdom of God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ**
 - b. **Wisdom of God’s love for us and his desire for our worship**
 - c. **Knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit**
 - d. **Truth, of our need for daily contrition, repentance**
 - e. **The truth of our need for the daily guidance of the Holy Spirit**
 - f. **Sensitivity to the needs of others and our great calling to love our neighbors**
5. Verse 21. James warns us to be rid of all “rhyparia,” a Greek word for pollution or filth, so we do not deceive in our faith. Paul is equally pointed when he says there are sins so serious that can disqualify us from eternal life; “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Discuss; Are there sins that indicate a person is not a Christian and have no spiritual inheritance in Christ despite making a Christian profession of faith and baptism?

Christians can become trapped by any of the sins listed by Paul in Galatians. Even if we are plagued by “lesser” sins, we need to be confronted with the truth in scripture. Paul is saying these sins have no part in a Christian’s life. If they are not repented, they lead to spiritual death, not to the inheritance of eternal life in Christ. But the good news is Christ is ready to forgive all these sins if a person is truly repentant and turns away from them.

6. James was writing during a time of trials. Needs were unmet, and issues needed addressing, so James said to do what the word says. What issues could you influence or respond to if he were writing specifically to you?

Answers will vary. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unparalleled time of testing this country has not seen in generations, but it affects different communities differently. People have faced record rates of unemployment, eviction, and hunger. Nearly every food pantry and social service organization is stretched to their limit. Needs abound. Allow people to talk about their needs or the care they need to give to others.

7. What is the self-deception James refers to in verse 22?

The self-deception James refers to is continuing in gross sin and believing their faith is genuine. Verse 22 is convicting because we know that we sin daily – in our thoughts, actions, and inaction. This conviction brings us to repentance at the foot of the cross, where Christ’s blood cleanses us, and he is quick to forgive us. We also need to recognize we are unable to change ourselves spiritually. That is the Holy Spirit’s role, so we must expose our minds to good and noble things and pray to the spirit for his transformation in our lives.

8. Describe in your own words the meaning of the analogy of the mirror.

These days, I’m shocked by the man looking back in the mirror; where did youth go!? But James isn’t talking about aging. If you forget what you saw in the mirror, there is no point in looking in the mirror. Likewise, worshipping in church, reading the Bible, or attending a Bible study is pointless if it does not impact your life.

9. Verse 27. James tells us to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. What are some of the big snares of the world you confront?

Answers will vary. People may be reluctant to open up about the issues they face in their life.

Drugs, excessive alcohol, pride and selfishness, coveting money, materialism and taking on excessive debt, jealousy, resentment, divorce and the reasons, and sexual sin are as prevalent in Christian relationships as in the “world.” Christians who only worship once a week with no other Christian activity are not visibly different from their neighbors. Christians who worship and study the Bible at least three times a week begin to differentiate themselves in their worldview. Christians who worship and study the scriptures five or more times per week take on views that significantly differentiate themselves from secular views, including religion, spirituality, money, work, and possessions.

10. Discuss Luther's dilemma with James – James stressed obeying God's law and not sinning. Luther emphasized relying on God's grace alone for salvation. Are these opposing views or facets of the same faith?

It is easy to understand Luther's dilemma with James. No one tried harder to live a holier life than young Martin Luther. While Luther was a monk in an Augustinian monastery, he rose daily from sleep at 1:45 AM to attend church and prayer services three times before breakfast, then four more times throughout the day. He read scriptures, prayed, held vigils, practiced confession and penance, and even practiced self-mortification of the flesh. Nothing brought him peace with God. Instead, he came to view God as a cruel tyrant who demanded him to be righteous when he knew he could never live up to God's perfect standard of righteousness.

So, Luther saw James making the same demand he felt in the monastery - a Christian needs to work out their own righteousness. Through Luther's study of the scriptures, he understood that righteousness was a free gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

James' message to do good works and be free of moral filth is mild compared to Paul's blistering admonition to the Corinthians. The Corinthians practiced gross immorality while professing to be Christians. Paul confronted their abhorrent practices of sexual immorality, including incest, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, drunkenness, slander, jealousy, idolatry, and arrogance. No wonder the church was divided! He told them in no uncertain terms – the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9) whether they were self-professing Christians or not. Their faith was worthless, not genuine. James was an apostle at a time when the church body was suffering. During the late 40's AD, some people were starving because of famine. Others were rich. James told them to demonstrate their faith was real by loving their neighbor – specifically to care for the widows and orphans.

Closing Prayer and Blessing