

Subject: *Receiving God's Word*

Scripture: *James 1:19-25*

Our text describes the important relationship of a believer and his Bible. It shows how the critical connection between God's children and His Word. This is a timely message because we are between the Christmas season and a new year. We should realize just how important God's Word is to our lives. How would we know about the birth of Christ if it were not for the Word of God? Where could we find guidance and strength for the new year if it were not for the Word of God?

1. Preparation for God's Word

Now is a good time to think about being prepared to receive God's Word. You will be reading your Bible, and some of you will embark on reading the whole Bible through this year. You want to be ready. You will be listening to many Bible lessons and sermons. Have you thought about how many you will likely hear in 2015? If you come to church on Sunday mornings you will hear about 50 sermons. If you come to the evening services you will hear about 50 more. Come on Wednesday night and you will hear 50 more sermons or Bible studies. Come to Sunday school and you will hear about 50 Bible studies. Add it all up and you will hear God's Word 50-200 times next year. That's beside the time you read and study the Bible on your own.

- Be physically prepared – Be rested, on time, and with Bible in hand.
- Be spiritually prepared – First of all, we need to pray. A man asked his pastor if he could suggest a prayer to pray when he came to church, and the pastor said, “Now I lay me down to sleep.” I want to suggest this prayer, *Psalms 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.* Once we have prayed, there is the spiritual preparation found in vs. 19, “let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” This statement contains three excellent resolutions for the new year as they relate to receiving God's Word.

Be swift to hear. God is speaking through His Word. The question is: are we listening? Jesus often said, “He that ears to hear, let him hear.” In Revelation 2-3, Jesus sends seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. In closing his message to each of those churches we find this word of caution: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Be slow to speak. In this context it means that we ought to be more ready to listen than to speak. The problem with talking so much is that we don't take time to listen to God.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 ¹ *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.* ² *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

Be slow to wrath. In context it means we must not get angry at God's Word or His servant who is teaching it. The word “wrath” is deep-seated resentment. The Bible isn't always pleasant to hear. Sometimes the message you like the least will do you the most good

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* We must not resent the Word or reject the Word, but we should receive the Word. How should we receive it?

2. Reception of God's Word

The word "receive" means welcome as you would welcome a guest into your home. As you would receive a friend into your home, you should receive the Word into your heart and mind. We need to be like those believers described in the Word.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

- Receive the Word with repentance – We are to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity (excess) of naughtiness." This means we have to strip off or lay aside our sin. It is a call to repentance. "Superfluity of naughtiness" was a term used to describe wax in the ears. One translation says, "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" (NIV).
- Receive the Word with meekness – This is the issue of control and authority. We must be willing to come under the authority of God's Word. When a person is meek, he is teachable. How we need a teachable spirit. Our attitude should be like young Samuel who said, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."
- Receive the Word with confidence – We know that the Word is changing us as we hear it and receive it. The word "engrafted" means planted. When God's Word is planted in your heart, it is able to save your soul. This refers to the process of salvation that begins at a moment in time with conversion. It is an ongoing process. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (justification). We are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification). We will be saved from the presence and possibility of sin (glorification). The text is talking about the second part of the process, making us more like Christ. Last week we enjoyed the musical drama, "The Perfect Tree." We tend to forget all that went into the two nights of presentation. There was the process and preparation of learning music and learning lines. Our Christian life is a process. Receiving God's Word is a process. It takes time, effort, and discipline to cultivate God's Word in our lives. We tend to overestimate the value of an event and underestimate the value of the process.

As we hear and study God's Word we should realize that those minutes or hours are a life-changing experience. *Romans 12:2* 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.

3. Application of God's Word

We need to be ready for the Word. It calls for our attention. We need to be receptive to the Word. It calls for our acceptance. And we need to be responsive to the Word. It calls for action. In verses 22-25, we find the word "doers" three times and we find the word "hearers" three times. It is one thing to be a hearer of the Word, and it is another to be a doer. As someone said, "After all is said and done, more is said than done." A person may say, "I really enjoyed that lesson or that sermon." That's good, but did it change your life?

James doesn't just say to "do" the Word; he says "be a doer" of the Word. What's the difference? To be a doer of the Word describes a person's character; that's who he is. He don't just do God's Word when he feels like it. A doer is a consistently obedient. Doing the Word is a way of life.

If we are just hearers and not doers, we have deceived ourselves. The worst kind of deception is self-deception. The word means "miscalculate." People who are content with just hearing the Word make a serious mistake. Their spiritual life isn't what they think it is. You may have been in church all your life and heard at least one or two sermons a week. That's great, but the real test is how well have you put those sermons into practice?

Ezekiel 33:30-33 ³⁰ Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. ³¹ And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. ³² And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. ³³ And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

God reminded his prophet Ezekiel that the people listened to God's message as those who listened to a concert. They wanted to be entertained, but not challenged or changed. They were hearers, but not doers of the word.

James gives us a very powerful example of God's Word as a mirror. Your "natural face" is the one you're born with, and the "glass" is a looking glass or mirror. When you get up in the morning and see yourself in the mirror, you have a choice. Either you can think that you look fine and go on about your business, or you can do something about it. You can wash your face, brush your teeth, and comb your hair.

The Bible is like a mirror. We need to get in it everyday and we need to stay in it long enough to know what needs to be changed and then make those changes. James uses two different words here: "beholding" can be translated observing and it means a casual glance, but the word "look" means a careful gaze. What must we do with a message or a lesson after we have heard it? What must we do with a passage after we have read and studied it? That is the whole point of Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed. Do you remember how Jesus ended His Sermon on the Mount? He reminded them of the need to apply what He taught them. **Matthew 7:24** *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.* **Matthew 7:26** *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.*

If we are going to receive God's Word there needs to be a preparation for the Word, a reception of the Word, and an application of the Word. Has God's Word changed your life? Jesus prayed that it would, **John 17:17** *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*