

Message #6

James 1:19-26

When the book of James was written, it was written in a context of a very religious world. People had their religion. They had their religious denominational rules and man-made traditions and they followed them. Those Jews were proud of their religion. They loved it. It made them feel good. But frankly, their worship didn't mean a thing to God. It was all a big religious sham and show.

In **verses 26-27** of this section is a rare Greek word “religion” (θρησκεια). This word is used here by James, it is used in Acts 26:5 by Luke and it is used in Colossians 2:18 by Paul.

The Apostle Paul uses that word in Colossians 2:18 and there it is translated “worship.” The word has to do with what one externally does in worship (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 208).

That raises an interesting question—What is worship? What is worship that is acceptable to God? One theologian said, “To worship God is to ascribe to Him the worth which He is worthy” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 1193).

That is a good definition, but what does that mean? How do you logistically do that? What actually do we externally do so that God deems us participating in worthy worship?

We could say, well to externally worship God, we need to go to church. We need to pray. We need to carry our Bibles. We need to sing. We need to give. We need to listen to God's Word taught. We need to fellowship with others. All of those things certainly are worthy things. But James had something else in mind.

What James said is this:

TRUE WORSHIP THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD IS WORSHIP THAT IS AFTER A CAREFUL UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF GOD'S WORD, IN REGARD TO ONE'S OWN SPEECH, TEMPER AND CLEANLINESS.

Craig Blomberg, who has written a commentary on the Greek text of James, said, “Christians should respond to God's word with obedient listening, careful speech and humble demeanor” (*James An Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 81).

It is clear from **verse 19** that James is addressing “beloved brethren.” He is not addressing lost people. In fact, he begins by saying God's people need to “know this.” You need to know that just because people go to church does not mean they offer acceptable worship. You need to know that many people go to church and their worship is worthless.

To worship God in a worthy way means we cannot shoot off our mouths. We cannot be saying bad things about others.

We cannot be throwing some verbal temper tantrum and expect God to accept our worship. We cannot be involved in dirty, filthy things and expect God will accept our worship.

As we look through the book of James, we can begin to see some of the problems that were caused by talkers:

- 1) Many wanted to teach, who were not qualified to teach (3:1).
- 2) Many were jealous of others and were verbally ripping them to shreds (3:14).
- 3) Many were judging others and condemning others in regard to their personal codes and laws (4:11-12).

James says knock it off because if you think you can run your mouth and then duck into church and worship God, think again. **Your worship is worthless.**

Again notice from **verse 19**, we learn that these were “beloved brethren.” So these were true believers who were loved by James and by God. James says when you go to worship “you must” go with an attitude that is “quick to hear; slow to speak; slow to anger.”

This section in James is tricky grammatically. In fact, Craig Bloomberg said that the “internal structure of 1:19-27 is the least clear of the passages...” (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

There are different ideas that James develops that all are designed to communicate truth about real worship that is not worthless. There are, as near as I may determine, eight ingredients to worship that is not worthless in God’s estimation.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #1 - Go to worship to be quick to hear. 1:19a

Notice the address is to “everyone.” Each person who goes to church better take a serious look at this. **One who will worship God in an acceptable way cannot wait to get to church to hear God’s Word.** True worshippers have this focus. Those who go to church to acceptably worship God go because they want to hear God’s Word PERIOD.

Unfortunately, not all go with this attitude. In fact, most don’t go with this attitude. There are people who go to church with the idea that I can’t wait to get there to talk. **The proper attitude of true worship is I cannot wait to get there to hear and to listen.** Many people go to church with full mouths and leave with empty hearts.

Solomon said exactly the same thing in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. He said, “Guard your steps as you go to the house of God, and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.”

Real worship goes with an expectation to hear God’s Word.

This is serious business. Some people go to church with the idea of I can't wait to talk. I can't wait to run my mouth. I can't wait to share the latest. Let me tell you something from this text- God watches you, God listens to you and your worship to Him is worthless.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #2 - Go to worship slow to speak. **1:19b**

The word "slow" is one that refers to movement that is very slow and calculated, such as when one sails a ship slowly (*Ibid.*, p. 85).

This is one serious verse. God carefully monitors what His people say at church. So when one goes to worship, one should go with an attitude to hear with great speed, but to speak with very slow speed. Slow to speak does not mean never speak; it means think carefully and be slow to speak.

Now this is just the opposite of what most people do. They go to church and are quick to speak and slow to listen.

Chrysostom said to his congregation, "I for my part should prefer to praise you for being slow to speak and even more that you are self-controlled enough to keep silent" (*Orations*, p. 32.2).

One minister observed that Jesus Christ said that on the Day of Judgment people will give an account of "every careless word." So there are different types of losses that will occur:

- 1) There will be those that are swift to hear other things rather than God's Word and they will be swift to lose rewards.
- 2) There will be those who are swift to speak and they will be swift to lose their rewards.
- 3) There will be those who were slow to speak the truth and they will be swift to lose rewards.
- 4) There will be those who were swift to hear God's Word and slow to speak and they will be swift to receive rewards.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #3 - Go to worship slow to anger. **1:19c-20**

There is a very close connection between one's anger and one's speech. Also one should be very slow to anger. That word "anger" (οργη) is one that refers to one who has an impulsive and emotional disposition that quickly gets angry (*Ibid.*, p. 322).

What I take from all of this is that God wants His people going to worship with hearts and minds that are under careful control. He wants His people going to worship to hear God's Word, not to have some emotional disposition that flies off the handle and shoots off the mouth. God pays very careful attention to what is discussed in His church.

The reason why God wants this anger attitude is because the goal of worship is to "achieve or go to work on the righteousness of God" (v. 20). If one is exploding and running one's mouth, that goal will not be reached.

The purpose of going to church is to produce righteousness in our lives. The point of worship is that we become more godly and righteous. That comes by hearing God's Word, not by getting mad at people and running off one's mouth.

A person's anger or wrath will never produce the righteousness of God in one's life. If you go to church with some angry chip on your shoulder, God will not ever produce righteousness in you or for you. Zealot religious activity proves nothing. Eagerly following rules and man-made traditions does not mean one has real righteousness and is produced by God. The Pharisees followed laws and codes and had hate in their heart for Jesus Christ. They were quick to explode and did not deal with anger.

God's people had better not go to church quick to be angry. Because there is no righteousness there.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #4 - Go to worship having put off all filthiness. **1:21a**

This first word "filthiness" (ρυπαρια) is a word that refers to moral filthiness and defilement (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 399). God will not accept the worship of one who goes to church with a filthy life of moral depravity that never cleans up.

It is impossible to offer God acceptable worship if you go to church dirty. If one is to hear God's Word so that it produces righteousness, one must be clean, not filthy.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #5 - Go to worship having put off all wickedness. **1:21b**

Now this word "wickedness" (κακια) has a different slant to it. This speaks of a wicked depravity that is a malignancy that has not been removed (*Ibid.*, p. 227).

God says I do not accept the worship of one who comes before me in moral depravity and sin with no regard with being cleansed of it.

If one is not getting rid of evil, one cannot worship God. One can go to church, but God does not accept it as worship.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #6 - Go to worship with humility to hear God's Word. **1:21c**

Now both getting rid of filthy and wicked things is connected to the ability to hear God's Word and receive God's Word.

To hear God's Word and receive God's Word requires humility. That word "humility" is one that emphasizes hearing God's Word with a gentle, meek and humble spirit (*Ibid.*, pp. 376-377).

One could theoretically get away from filthy wicked things and still be proud. As a result, the Word of God will not produce its effect. To have God's Word produce its affect requires humility.

Now what is specifically said here is that the Word of God is "implanted" in the soul of a believer. It is the Word of God that saved us. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. But I understand James to be saying that implanted in every believer is not only the Spirit of God that indwells, but a passion for the Word of God that is able to produce righteousness.

This explains why so many believers do not have a passion for God's Word. They are not humble and they are dirty.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #7 - Go to worship not just to hear God's Word, but to Apply God's Word. **1:22-25**

If you go simply to hear God's Word and not apply it, you are deluding yourself if you think that is acceptable worship to God.

Now there are two reasons why one should apply God's Word:

(Reason #1) - The negative reason. **1:23-24**

If you do not go to apply God's Word, the Word will have no lasting effect on you whatsoever and you won't even look like what God wants you to look like.

If a person does not go interested in applying God's Word, the impact on your life will be about as lasting as looking at yourself in a mirror. The image is there for a moment and then gone.

(Reason #2) - The positive reason. **1:25**

If you do go to apply God's Word, that individual will be blessed by God. He will blossom not in the O.T. law, but in the "law of liberty" and be blessed by God.

Back in James day, people went to worship coming from a rigid and legalistic system that was very judgmental. They had their system of rules and traditions and they judged others based on those legal codes.

The "doer of the word" is one who embraces grace and looks carefully at the law of liberty. He does not pursue that which is filthy or that which is wicked, but he also does not pursue Pharisaical rigid legalism.

This believer grows in grace and, as a result, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Acceptable Worship Ingredient #8 - Go to worship thinking that if I don't bridle my tongue, my worship is worthless. **1:26**

Notice how **verse 26** begins, people like to think of themselves to be very pious, very religious and very worshipful. James says it doesn't matter what you think about yourself, if you don't bridle your tongue you are deceiving yourself and your worship is worthless.

When you go to church to worship God, remember this—"Silence is Golden." Restraining your speech is a key to your own righteousness. Wrong words, angry words, and a dirty life means worship is worthless.

Think about this all week and do something about it and next week you will offer acceptable worship to God.