

## James 1:19-27

### “Don’t Deceive Yourself”

Allow me to remind you; James is all about practical Christian living. He’s given us keys on how we stay true to God through trials/*tribulations*, how we stay true to God rather than indulge *temptations*. Now, he wants to talk to us a bit about our *temper*. Tribulations, temptations & tempers. Let’s look...

### Vs 19-20

I’ve mentioned to you in the past how I like to mark up my bible w/different colored ink based upon what’s in front of me. If I see a command (something I’m supposed to do) I like to underline that in blue. If something is sin or unwise etc., I underline that in red. If a *result* from a certain course of action is in front of me, I’ll use a green pen. But regardless of how you like to mark up your bible, let me encourage you to draw attention, *not* to the suggestion, request or recommendation of Vs 19, but the *command*.

James doesn’t give us good ideas, God’s word doesn’t say, “Well, if you *want* to...” Or, “It might be wise to...” In a “take it or leave it” kind of context. God’s word *demand*s a *course of action* from our lives as believers.

& We’ll talk about this more (throughout the book of James), but there’s nothing required of you to be saved. One day the people asked Jesus, “*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*” (They wanted to know what work God required of them that they might be saved). *Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”*<sup>1</sup> In other words, salvation is free. Just believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved. For w/the heart one believes unto righteousness & w/the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Which is to say that the mouth makes know what’s happening in the heart).

But once you surrender your life to J.C. There are some things that God wants to deal w/in your/my life. He wants to take us & make us more like Jesus & that’s not going to happen on the basis of recommendations but requirements. *Let’s remember, we’re not our own. We’ve been bought at the price of the shed blood of J.C. That means, God tells us what to do, we do it. We’re His. & Again, it’s not out of obligatory legalism that we respond, but out of love.* Remember these words? “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*”<sup>2</sup> Our love *for* God is expressed through our obedience *to* God. – “Therefore, my beloved brethren...let each of you be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (anger).”

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 6:28-29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Jn 5:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now, surely there's application to be had here in just about any context. Spousal relationships, employee/employer relationships, siblings, parent/child, whatever... God has given us 2 ears, He's given us one mouth. Add to that, the ears are open, the tongue is encased behind a pair of lips & a set of teeth... that should be telling us something! 😊

Wise is the individual who makes the practice of listening twice as much as they speak! You'll spare yourself tons of trouble. I've never met anyone who got themselves in trouble from being overly attentive, paying too much attention. It's when we want to add our own 2 cents that things start going south. The Bible says, "*He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.*"<sup>3</sup> & Again, "*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.*"<sup>4</sup> The danger isn't in listening too much, it's in talking too much!

So, again, the applications are many. But contextually the reference is too the importance to listening & taking heed to the Word of God... In Vs 18 James tells us that we've been born again by the *word of truth*. God has brought forth life in us by the power of His Word. Therefore, we should be swift to hear it. Eager to take it in.

Today, we appreciate a cordial environment when it comes to hearing God's word being taught. In James' day, things were a bit less formally structured as it pertained to being taught. It wasn't uncommon for someone to interrupt the teacher, begin to debate or offer their own "insights" which may very well be "out of line"! & It may be especially true of a new believer. James says, "Listen, you've been born again by God's word. Now sit, listen & learn. Don't be eager to speak your opinion, or interrupt the one who's sharing w/you & get in some kind of heated debate w/them.

As believers, our thoughts, our opinions really aren't important. What has God said? *That's what we want to know... His word is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path, more necessary than the food we eat is the bread of life (the word of God)... Swift to hear, slow to speak.* Slow to anger. Here's another proverb for ya, "*He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.*"<sup>5</sup> As it's been said before, better to be silent & thought a fool than to open your mouth & remove all doubt. 😊

Sometimes the one we need to be slow to speak to is ourselves. God's word is being taught & we're inwardly raising objections, we go from listening to kind of lambasting the speaker in our heart/mind...

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 18:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 10:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 17:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God's word is sharp, it can cut us. How do we respond to that? Sometimes we become resentful and combative. Or maybe we just don't like the guy up there sharing so we don't really listen. James is saying, "Stop w/that. Listen to the word of God." "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Think of it like this, *unrighteousness* won't somehow produce a *righteous* result.

### Vs 21

Not only eternally, but presently as well. You realize we're saved in 3 tenses, yes? We've *been* saved, we're *being* saved & we'll be saved. God's word is salvation for your soul. Therefore, we should respond to that truth in a 2-fold manner. (We've been born again *by* it, we're to be swift & eager to *hear* it, it's salvation to you in every essence of the word; presently, practically, eternally). That should yield a 2-fold net effect in our lives. #1 Repentance should be ongoing regular occurrence. James says it like this, "Therefore, lay aside (turn away from) all filthiness & overflow of wickedness."

It speaks of taking off a garment. You've clothed yourself in immorality, depravity & corruption. Take those things off, be done w/those things. "Lay aside" any/all filthiness, impurity & overflow of wickedness (malignity, ill-will, evil, maliciousness, spitefulness), anything that would be recognized as an impure/inappropriate manner of living.

& #2 "Receive w/meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul." To the negative we turn away *from* sin & to the positive we turn *to* & take *in* the word of God. James says that we're to "receive w/meekness". That is, we're to take in God's word. We're to *accept* it, rather than *argue w/it*, we're to have a teachable, receptive heart that recognizes & submits to the authority of scripture.

& Notice James refers to the Word as the "implanted" word. It kind of triggers our minds to think back to the parable of the soils that Jesus taught. How that a sower went out to sow. & As he was sowing his seed, it fell on a # of different types of surfaces. Some of it fell by the wayside & the birds of the air snatched it up. *Some fell on stony ground, couldn't take root & withered. Some fell among thorns & was choked out before it bore fruit. But some fell on ground that was fertile, cultivated, ready to receive it. It took root, up came the shoot & then came the fruit. Some 30, 60 some 100-fold.*

& As He explained the parable, He told His disciples that various surfaces represented the different kinds of hearts found in various people. The seed represented God's word sown into the human heart. Some people don't want to hear it. So Satan just comes along & snatches it out.

Others have hard hearts; it can't take root. Trials/tribulations, when the "heat" rises in their lives, they stumble & fall away. Some receive it but the weeds/thorns, cares of this world wrap around it, overpower it & choke it out. Their priority lies in the things of this world rather than in the kingdom of God.

But some... Some receive the word in fertile, ready to receive & respond soil. The fallow ground of their heart has been busted up. God's word takes root & brings forth a harvest of fruit that remains for His glory. (That fruit could be soul winning, worship, growing in holiness, it could be good works, it could be giving...)

& That's what James is speaking to here. Left to itself the soil of the human heart is only going to produce weeds (an overflow of wickedness that needs to be done away with). "Pull the weeds" & prepare the soil for the "implanted word". The preparation of the heart belongs to man... **Not all soil is fertile soil. How's the condition of your heart? – Hard? Overrun w/the cares of this world, or open to & receptive of God's word? – Listen, it won't be revealed in what you say (at least not in full), but what you show...**

That's where James is heading here. *Receiving* God's word is displayed in how we *respond* to God's word. You see, if I'm not honestly/appropriately *responding* to God's word, than am I truly *receiving* God's word? James would say, "No".

### Vs 22-25

What a warning for you & me... How easy it is to content ourselves in *hearing* God's word & thinking we've done our part. – But to have that mentality, (I've gone to church, I've done my duty. Now I'll live how I want till next Sunday & I'll go hear the Word again) is to *deceive myself*. Listen, if Satan deceives me, that's one thing. But if I deceive *myself*... surely that's even worse!

But James is here trying to enlighten us, instruct us, teach us what it looks like to "receive" w/meekness the implanted Word. How does taking in God's Word translate into my life? It will show itself in the corresponding actions *in/of* my life.

Listen; *1* is too many, but I would dare to say that this is a problem of *epidemic proportions* w/in the Christian community. It's common that Christians will come & content themselves w/hearing a Bible study & think that they've done what's necessary. *We've heard* the pastor, perhaps (if we were lucky) we were entertained *by* the pastor. Now I'm off to do life till next Sunday. & I think I'll be blessed of God, I'm growing spiritually because I've heard the Word... I'm deceiving myself.

1 Person put it this way. Too many Christians mark their Bibles but their Bibles never mark them... Never make a difference in their lives. It's not enough to get into the Word. The Word has to get into us. So much of the church today reminds me of the words of Ezekiel 33. Let's look at it together **Ezekiel 33:30-32**

Over & over again in scripture is the exhortation/warning that we're to be *doers* of God's word. Meaning it's something we're to continually be about, not something we've done & can check off the list. "There, I did it, I'm done." No, we're *doers* of the word. It's what we're about for the rest of our lives. That's the warning. – Why do I say, "warning"?

Because James is alerting us (& will expound upon it more later) as to what true saving faith looks like in real time in our lives. True faith will produce change... A "false faith" will say all the right things, but there's no real corresponding change of life to match the profession. **& A false faith can fool people. You know, you say the right things, you sing the songs, put money in the offering at church. But if your life hasn't been at all affected by your "faith" in Jesus, then the main person you're fooling is yourself...**

Again, the word of God demands action. Requires attention. We're to be doers, not hearers only. Jesus said, **"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"**<sup>6</sup> & That's when He spoke of the difference between the one who does what He says, & the one who doesn't. The doer will stand strong in adversity, the hearer will be swept away by the storm.

Listen, it was common in the ancient world for people to hear a teacher. However, if you *followed* that teacher & sought to live what he said, you were called a *disciple* of that teacher. Jesus isn't looking for a fan club, cheerleaders, sentimental admirers or proverbial agreeers. (People who can really get behind His teachings & see the good in them). He's looking for disciples. Doers of His word.

However, to the one who is a hearer & *not* a doer of the word, James says that person is like a man who looks in a mirror, observes his natural face, goes away & immediately forgets what kind of man that he is...

Now, this is interesting because the word "observes" or "observing" means to "perceive clearly, gaze attentively, to fix one's eyes or mind upon". In other words, it's not a casual glance, it's careful observation. So the picture is of a man who looks closely to find every flaw, each imperfection & blemish. He sees everything he needs to fix...

(Hairs messed up, teeth need brushed, a shave is in order... whatever). But then he goes away & just forgets about everything he saw, everything that needed attention & does nothing about it.

Here's the point. The information that the mirror reflected back to him, made for zero application in his life. It did him *no good*. When we look in a mirror (generally speaking) it's to find what course of action needs to be enacted so that our appearance is put in proper order. (I need to comb my hair, or pop a zit, or put on make-up, you get the idea).

James is saying that God's word is like a mirror. It reflects back to us the truth of who we are. It reveals every flaw, every out of order detail in our lives that needs attention. But if you look into it (even w/careful observation, you gaze intently, study it carefully) & then walk away from it having done nothing about what you saw/learned of yourself. **Then all that information you learned did nothing of any value for you... It made no difference in you. Knowing the Bible won't do anything for you. Reading/studying the Word in itself won't help you. I've got to respond to what I've read, give attention to those things that need changed in my life.**

Imagine an X-ray that reveals cancer in your body & you just go, "It'll be alright, no need to address it." & You go on to ignore it & forget about it. That cancer will kill you. There's a course of action that needs to be taken if it's to be dealt with. The Bible reveals to us the cancer of sin in our lives. But too often we just ignore it, don't deal w/it. We *agree* w/it, just don't change anything in response to it.

Listen, agreeing that we should pray, doesn't mean we're praying. Knowing you should worship doesn't make you a worshiper... Don't just *learn* about it, be about it & God will bless your life.

**"He who looks into the perfect law of liberty... (That's the word of God) & continues in it... is a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." "The Law of liberty". You shall know the truth & the truth shall set you free. Satan does all that he can to convince you that sin is freedom & God's word is bondage. The opposite is true. Sin is bondage, God's word will set you free. - Look into it, take time to understand it w/the heart to respond appropriately to it... Continue in it. Abide in it.**

### **Vs 26-27**

Have you noticed the emphasis upon deception? "Don't be deceived", "Deceiving yourself", "Deceiving his own heart..." Don't deceive yourself.

If you think you're religious & you don't bridle your tongue, you're only deceiving yourself... my how this should speak to this generation. James puts it real plain! & He's going to speak more on the tongue later so we'll leave it for now, but let's not forget, the mouth makes known what's in the heart...

Now I need to point out that there's a little variance in opinion about James' use of the word religion. Some would say he's using it as a euphemism for one's works for God. Others point out that nowhere in scripture is Christianity referred to or noted as a religion, but in reality, it's an antitype for religion. Religion is all about man's efforts at reaching out to God. The Bible teaches us that man's not reaching out to God, but that God has reached out to us in the Person of His Son. Christianity is a Person, the Person of J.C.

Perhaps James is dancing on semantics. Or, he may be saying that it doesn't matter how "religious" a person is (or self-righteous they may appear) if they can't control their tongue, that demonstrates that they aren't right w/God. & Controlling the tongue goes beyond profanity. It speaks to gossip, hearsay, slander, character assassination, whatever... Someone has said, "You can't believe ½ of what you hear, but you sure can repeat it..." One might "think" their religious, but their uncontrolled tongue proves otherwise, they're only deceiving themselves.

"Pure" religion before God has essentially 3 elements to it. #1 A clean mouth, #2 Commendable service & #3 Godly character.

Widows & orphans is a proverbial kind of statement by James. They were the ones who needed the most care in his day. The idea is that of seeing a need & meeting a need. A "visit" here isn't speaking about providing an occasional meal (though that's fantastic). It carries the idea of taking oversight, consistent care. (Close)

Being about tending to genuine needs. The idea is that the conduct & the character of the Christian are in harmony. God's emphasis isn't upon religious ritual, but right living as the result of receiving His word.

& When he says, "& to keep oneself unspotted from the world." He's not saying that we're to retreat *from* the world, go & live in a monastery or something. Jesus was the "friend of sinners". He's saying we're to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. – Personal integrity & moral purity.

Don't deceive yourself. Be quick to hear God's word, humbly receive God's word, respond appropriately to God's word, & God will bless your life.

**Prayer Points:**

God we thank You for Your Word. May we be swift to hear it. Help us not to argue with it or buck against it but to humbly receive it that we might be changed by it. Help us to be doers of your Word rather than hearers only, deceiving ourselves.

One thing God's word teaches us is that we all sin & fall short of the glory of God. That if we're to be saved the penalty of our sin, than we're to repent (turn from our sin) & believe in J.C. who has died *for* our sins & we'll receive forgiveness on the basis of faith in Him. If you've not done this, than receive today the implanted word which is able to save your soul, that you might be born again, made new by the Spirit of God.