

James

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James 1:19-27

Vss. 19-20

- Not every saying of the Bible is deeply mystical. There are things, Paul says in Romans, that are revelations of God that are common to everyone. That we should be quick to listen and slow to speak is one such piece of common wisdom. Proverbs 10:19 says, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable. But he who restrains his lips is wise". You find the same sentiment in Proverbs 13:3; 17:28; 29:20. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt".
- The same is true when it comes to prayer. So often as we pray, we do all the talking as if God needed our instruction or an update from us on the current situation. Neither is ever the case. Richard Blackaby suggests that rather than coming to God with our prayer list we should stay silent, keep a pen and paper handy, and listen, writing down only the list that God gives to us.
- We should also be slow to anger. Raging at people rarely wins anyone for Christ, if ever. James points out that anger "does not achieve the righteousness of God". There certainly is a place for righteous anger, such as when one wants to overturn the tables of money changers in the Great Temple. Given that the qualities of the righteousness of God are love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness it is easy to see James' point, because anger typically carries nothing of these qualities.

Vs. 21

- The NASB translates this as "putting aside all filthiness...". The Greek word here literally means to strip off all your dirty clothes. Thus we are to strip off all the filth and dirt of sin from our lives.
- The word for filthiness is *ruparia*, which can mean the dirt that soils our clothes, but it is a derivative of the word for earwax! So perhaps what James is really saying is that we need to clean out our ears of all the dirt and filthy ear wax which prevents us from rightly hearing the word of God. We've spoken frequently lately on hearing God and why we can't and how we can and how we must! If because of sin we cannot hear the word of God we will never know the Truth. Strip it off, put it aside, and dig it out. Do whatever we need to do in order to hear the Word of Truth.
- "the word implanted" or "the inborn word": In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) we have the picture of the seeds of salvation being sown and implanted in the soil – and we are the soil. And we who are the good soil receive the seed of life with gentleness, humility, peace, and goodness. The word here simply doesn't have an English equivalent but may be translated all those ways.

Vss. 22-24

- Having been the pastor of the Jerusalem church, James is well aware of people who come to church, hear the sermon and the scripture readings and think that it is enough to make them a Christian. Jesus didn't die on a cross just so we could fill a spot on Sunday morning. No, Paul says Jesus died and we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works,

which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10). No, its not just hearing the word, sitting in church, that makes you a Christian, it is in the **doing** of the word, the good works which God has prepared for you to live out and perform day to day. Someone once said that just sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car.

- James says it's like a person looking at themselves in a mirror, as soon as they step away, they forget what they saw. In other words, if you only hear the word with no thought of practicing the word, then it is quickly forgotten as soon as worship is over. William Barclay once said that “what is heard in the holy place must be lived in the market place – or there is no point in hearing at all.”

Vs. 25

- Verses like this are why Martin Luther didn't care for the Book of James. He didn't like the use of the word Law at all. But surely there is a law of Christian ethics we are to follow. Is that not what the Sermon on the Mount lays out. James' “perfect law” is to be found in the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Christ.
- This law is perfect because a) it's God's law as laid down and lived out by Christ in accordance with the will of the Father b) it is perfect because we cannot improve on it, even though some have tried for 2000 years, there is nothing that can be done to improve on what Christ has left us with c) it is perfect because as we live out this perfect law we find our perfect destiny. I met a family recently who immigrated to the US from the former Soviet republic of Moldova. They are in the process of raising funds to go back. They will be starting an evangelical church. They literally found their destiny in the perfect law of Christ.
- James also calls it “the law of liberty”. In walking in The Way of Christ's law we find the only true freedom there is in this world. As long as a person lives trying to obey their passions, desires, and emotions they will always be a slave. It is only when a person accepts Christ as Savior and then knows Him as Lord are they truly free, for only in the hands of our creator are we free to be what we were truly made for.

Vss. 26-27

- It is ironic that the pastor of the first great church says that true worship does not take place inside the walls of the church on Sunday, but in the streets with the orphans and in the small homes of the widows. Psalms 68:5 says, “A Father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows is God in His Holy habitation.” The prophet Zechariah said as much in 7:6-10 as did Micah in 6:6-8. A splendid religion **inside** the church building is rendered null and void when religion **outside** the church building is neglected or forgotten.
- The same is true of an unbridled tongue. Here James is speaking of how the slightest word can destroy all the good religion a Sunday service can offer. Children may say the rhyme about sticks and stones, but its not true. Words can hurt far more than sticks or stones and we never forget them.
- So speak only to build people up, not to tear them down. Balance wonderful worship inside the church building with wonderful worship outside. Keep yourself unstained by the sin of the world's filth and you will find yourself discovering what it means to be saved, what it means to be Christian.