

James 1:19-27 Hearing and Doing

There is a lot of truth in vv. 19-27. And as we've seen already with James' letter, he speaks over and over about certain themes throughout. And this characteristic makes it difficult to organize as a preacher. So, keep in mind, sometimes I may not dwell on certain truths knowing they will come up again in another specific text. Today, I want to focus on the Word of God, particularly "HEARING" the Word, and "DOING" the Word. James continues this theme from v. 18 as he says, "**Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**" I have 2 truths: 1) Hear the Word of God, and 2) Do the Word of God. So let's begin.

1. Hear the Word of God. This morning I want to break this truth into two questions: 1) Why hear the Word; and 2) How (with what attitude) do we hear the Word.

i. Why? It is powerful to change the heart. We've already seen this in v. 18: "**Of his own will he brought us forth . . . How? By the word of truth . . .**" And then look at v. 21: "**Therefore put away filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**" Here the implication is that the Word of God has been planted and taken root in the soil of the heart, which in the end grows into the fruit of salvation.

Paul says the same thing in Rom. 10:17 says, "**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**" I remember clearly the power of the Word of God in my own life when I first became a Christian. At that time, some of you were speaking the Word to me. I was coming to church on Sundays and listening the preached Word. I was convinced it was true. And in my own time at home alone, I was reading it. And by the conviction and illumination of the Spirit of God, through the Word, I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. And many of you can say exactly the same thing. In fact, even now, through the years as I look back in my walk as a Christian, my greatest times of growth and faith have come in proportion to the amount of time and effort I spend studying, meditating, memorizing, talking about, admiring, and praying over the Word of God.

Heb. 4:12 says: "**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**" Ps. 119:130: "**The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.**" Is. 55:10-11: "**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**"

Brothers and sisters, do not neglect God's Word. Fathers, read the Word of God in your house. It is the means of gospel truth for your family (v. 18). It is the means God uses to save your family. Do you want salvation to come to your children? Look to the Word! Do you want godliness in your family? Look to the Word! If there will be change for the better under your roof, I promise it will come ONLY as you look to the Word God. Charles Spurgeon once said, "*The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.*" Can you imagine letting a lion loose in your house? Think of the

reactions, fear, terror, great action! Though in a different way, we do the same thing when we open the Word in our homes and our lives. Also, brothers and sisters, do not neglect the Word of God in your evangelism. Salvation will not come to those around you if you do not share. This is why we hear the Word. Now, let's turn our attention to "how" we hear the Word of God.

ii. How do we hear the word of God? With this truth the text emphasizes the heart or the "attitude" with which we receive the Word of God. Look at v. 21. James says, "**receive with meekness the implanted word . . .**" It is obvious in this passage that James believes the disposition of the heart is essential to hearing and doing the word. In v. 19 he says he addresses the tongue by saying be "**quick to hear, slow to speak . . .**" But, the reason we are often so quick to speak isn't so much that we are impatient or impulsive (though this may also be true), but the reason we speak quickly is due to the anger in our hearts, as he says also "**slow to anger.**" Jesus says, "**Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks**" (Matt. 12:34).

Now, we will spend ample time on speech and the tongue as we continue through James. So, I won't dwell long here today. But I must point out by way of application that there is an obvious connection between anger and the tongue. We use words to communicate. And when anger prevails in the heart, words are not pleasant, but instead do great harm to those we love. When we get angry, we often justify our anger by thinking it is necessary to produce change in those around us, but in the end, we do more harm than good. Look quickly at v. 20: "**for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**" The very things we desire, change in our spouse, change in our kids, justice in the community and the world, etc. does not come about because of our anger. James' readers must have been angry with the ways they were being treated by the world. We've seen already they were being persecuted because of their faith. And many of them were angry. And this anger was the root of other sins. Look at v. 21: "**put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness . . .**" James says, "**YOUR ANGER WILL NOT PRODUCE WHAT YOU THINK IT WILL.**"

Let me ask, "*How is it going in your hearts with the circumstances surrounding the corona virus in this world?*" On social media, how quickly are you apt to speak out in anger thinking your anger will produce the righteousness God requires? Parents, how is it going in your home with your kids? Do you think your anger will produce the righteousness God requires in your children? It won't. In fact, it may very well do the opposite; for our kids will do exactly what we do one day when they become parents.

Now, back to our truth. Hear the Word of God with meekness. This is humility. Jesus says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**" (Matt. 5:3). This means we receive the Word of God in humility. We listen as we read, knowing that every Word is from God. And his Word is truth. His Word is life. Let me ask, "*With what attitude do you read the Word of God?*" Do you read it to check off a list? Or, do you read it with fear and trembling, knowing these are the very Words of God. And what if you hear these words of mine this morning and you say, "*That's me.*" What do you do?

First, know that if you want to change the action, change the heart. This is always the case. "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.**" God wants our hearts. This means if you want to read and receive the Word of God in the right way, pray to the Lord of the heart. Seek him and ask him for such a motive. And, He will give.

2. Do the Word of God. Look at v. 22. **“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only . . .”** Look also at vv. 26-27 as James gives specific examples of doing the word. **“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”** His specific examples are the use of the tongue, the treatment of orphans and widows, and living in a different way than the world the world around us. I’ll come back to these in application in a few minutes. But, the principle is this: Hear the Word . . . Do the Word. James is simply following the teaching of the Lord Jesus as a good disciple who makes disciples, teaching them to obey everything the Lord has commanded.

For example, in Luke 6:46 ff. Jesus says, **“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”**

He gives another parable that teaches the same principle in Matt. 21:28-31: He says, **“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?”** At the end of the day, it is the one who said, **“I will not,”** but later changed his mind who heard the Word and obeyed the Word.

Application: There is great deception for those who hear but do not obey. Look at v. 23-25: **“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”**

Application: This is a great warning for those who call themselves Christians. I am not so naïve to think that some of us who profess Christ and even listen to these sermons year after year are not really Christians. As we’ve seen in 1:16, James speaks to his readers saying, **“Do not be deceived.”** And then in v. 22, **“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves . . .”** Good preaching must warn in very direct ways sometimes. Therefore, beloved, look at your life over a period of time. Are you hearing the Word? Are you doing the Word? The difficulty here is that those who are deceived don’t know it. Otherwise, there would be no deception. Let me give an opinion that I believe is based on Scripture. I think the difference is on a heart of repentance. The Christian, the one who has the “implanted” word, the one who has been “brought forth by the Word of truth,” hears the word. But, in this marathon of following Christ in this world we are being sanctified and the more we run this race and live this life, the more sin we see and the more we realize our own failures. And as we think about our sin and

lack of obedience, especially in the sins of omission, we may from time to time even question our faith. Christian, does this ever happen to you? YES! But, then what happens? Because the Word has been implanted in our hearts, we are repentant. And what do we do? By the Spirit of God, we look to Christ who says, “*Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*” And as Paul says in Romans 8, “**the Spirit (of God) bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and we cry out Abba Father,**” knowing our sins are forgiven in Christ. So, Christian, if this is your experience, I do not think you are deceived.

Now, concerning the one who professes Christ, he/she may look good on the outside, but on the inside there is no heart of repentance. There is no implanted word. There is deception. The heart is angry, worldliness is still their love. Look back at cp. 1. There is no joy in trials and testing of faith, for there is no faith (v. 2). There is lots of sinful doubting and blaming of God (v. 5). The one who is deceived is not blessed, but doubts the promises of God, holding God responsible for his/her sin (vv. 12-13). Therefore, I say to all who name the name of Christ to NOT BE DECEIVED! And the answer is always repentance and faith. Look unto Christ! He will give the Christian great assurance. He will save the non-Christian! The answer is the same. And I think this application is always timely, especially in a culture where many name the name of Christ. As James says, we must “*look into the perfect law, the law of liberty*” which is the Word of God. And in so doing, we will persevere, we will hear, we will obey. At the end of the day, I believe the one who really hears is the one who really obeys. Did not Jesus often say, “*To him has ears to hear.*”

Application: You need the church. You need the people of the church. You need what the church does together. You need the preaching of the Word. You need the fellowship of the saints. You need godly shepherds to watch for your souls. You need to regularly take the Lord’s Supper in obedience with God’s people. In all of these things we learn to hear properly and obey. This means we love the church.

Application: There is great blessing in hearing and doing the Word. Look at v. 25: “**he will be blessed in his doing.**” This is the practical principle of Psalm 1 which says: “**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**” I always tell my kids, “a happy kid is an obedient kid.” This is always true.

Application as a Church in the specific examples: How are we generally in the use of our tongue? Kids, how are your parents! Parents, how are your kids? How godly are we? How do we treat orphans and widows? These merely scratch the surface of the specific commands in the Word of God. But, at the end of the day, we must HEAR Word rightly. We must DO the Word, which is obedience.

Let’s pray together.