

The Epistle of James

Lesson #5

October 17, 2021

James 1:19-27

- Using a scale of 1-3 (1 = YES, 2 = MAYBE, 3 = NO), rate each of the following behaviors in terms of how reliable they are in pointing out true faith [adapted from MacArthur Bible Studies]:
 - A. Wears Christian T-shirts and jewelry
 - B. Has Christian bumper stickers on his or her car (and drives the speed limit!)
 - C. Gives regularly to the church
 - D. Participates in regular missions and outreach efforts
 - E. Sings in the choir (sometimes even solos)
 - F. Serves at a local soup kitchen once a year
 - G. Studies God's word regularly and seeks to live it
 - H. Attends church occasionally
 - I. Has healthy, loving relationships with friends, family, coworkers, church members
 - J. Attends weekly prayer meeting
 - K. Owns all of Dr. John MacArthur's writings and listens to all his sermons online
- Before we jump into verse 19, this is a good time to be reminded why James wrote this epistle. We discussed this in the first lesson: It was to encourage - even exhort - believers to stand firm in the faith, and to live in a manner consistent with their profession.
 - James wants believers to behave like believers. And he wants those who do not behave like believers to be concerned for their souls.

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

- Sounds like pretty good advice, right? Especially for a married couple!
- It actually reminds me of a quote that's been attributed to just about everyone, except maybe Solomon: Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.
 - Come to think of it, Solomon did have a version of this. Proverbs 17:28 says: Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.
- Seriously, if we stop right here, this statement could apply to any number of situations where people are interacting with each other... even a business meeting.
- Verse 20 gives it specific meaning.

20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

- So then, what is the "anger of man", and what is the "righteousness of God"?
 - It can be tempting to think this might refer to "righteous anger"; but the context makes it very clear he is talking about "sinful anger".
 - If you do a word-study of the word "anger" in the New Testament, you will find that of the thirteen times that word is used, nine of them are in lists with other sins.
 - A few examples are Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8, 2 Corinthians 12:20.
 - *Galatians 5:19-23 - Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit*

the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- In this context, “the righteousness of God” is not the same as “God’s righteousness”. Rather it is the progress in sanctification God wants us to be pursuing.
- As it is with so much of what we will encounter in the rest of the epistle, James wants us to be growing in holiness and Christlikeness, and he wants us to flee from anything that hinders that growth, including sinful anger.
- I like the way the NIV puts these two verses:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

- What is the word “therefore” there for?
 - The word therefore means “for that reason; consequently; or as a result of”.
 - It always looks backwards to what has already been concluded and ties it to what is about to be said.
 - For example, the Florida State football team is 2-4 on the season; therefore, it is very doubtful they will win the national championship.
 - In the apostle Paul’s epistle to the Romans, he uses the word therefore seventeen times, in order to tie together his systematic teaching about the nature of God, the nature of sin, the fallenness of man, the truth of justification by faith alone, and the practical implications of it all.
 - Consider a few familiar examples.
 - *Romans 5:1 - Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - *Romans 8:1 - There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*
 - *Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
 - James ties “anger” to “filthiness and rampant wickedness” and says to put them away.
- What is the “implanted word”?
 - This probably alludes to the “word of truth” from verse 18.
- Why is it to be received with meekness (i.e. humility and submission)?
 - As Paul says in Romans 12, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We should always be conscious of this.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 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.

- What do you think is the difference between a doer and a hearer?
 - A “doer” is a person whose life is characterized by a desire to know God’s word, and to live by it.

- A “hearer” is like a person who audits a class: he listens to the lecture, but has no obligation to act on what he hears, or to even give evidence he understands it.
 - The contrast between doers and hearers would apply to whatever specific Scripture is being considered; but it also contrasts people in terms of their overall way of life.
- What is the deception James is speaking of?
 - The hearer might not be a genuine believer, and yet is deceived into thinking he is.
 - It begs the question: Is it even possible for a person to have true saving faith, and yet persist as a “hearer only” and never really become a doer?
 - We will be discussing that more over the next few weeks.
 - This reminds me of Peter’s exhortation, in 2 Peter 1:10. This follows the passage Tom and David have been preaching through.
 - *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.*
- What is meant by “the perfect law, the law of liberty”?
 - It is God’s moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, and then further summarized in the two Great Commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.
 - Specifically, the second of these is in view.
 - Other passages for consideration:
 - Matthew 7:12 - *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. [Golden Rule]*
 - Matthew 22:34-40 - *“which is the great commandment in the law?”*
 - 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 31-33 - *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*
 - *31-33 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*
 - Galatians 5:13 - *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

26-27 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.

- What kinds of behaviors might cause someone to think he is religious, even if he is not?
 - Go to church on occasion. Put a few dollars in the collection plate. Say a token prayer before a meal (if it is not in public).
- Why do you think James singles out sins of the tongue as indicative of a worthless religion?
 - God alone truly knows the heart and the thoughts of a person; but words tend to reveal what’s really inside, even more so than deeds.
 - Matthew 15:10-11 - *And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”*
 - Matthew 15:18-19 - *But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*
- Why do you think he summarizes true religion like this – pure and undefiled?

- It follows on his statement about doers and hearers. He wants to differentiate between those who just make a show of “religion”, and those whose hearts have really been changed.
- *Matthew 23:27 - Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.*
- Is this concern for “orphans and widows” new to Scripture? Can you think of other passages that speak to this?
 - *Exodus 22:22-24 You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.*
 - There are eleven references in the book of Deuteronomy alone, and they all have to do with the need to protect and provide for orphans (the fatherless), widows, and sojourners.
 - *Deuteronomy 10:18 - He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.*
 - *Deuteronomy 24:19 - When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*
- Write down one or two insights from today’s passage that apply to you right now. How will you strive to act upon them this week?