

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JAS. 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

NOTES

Be Doers of the Word

Lesson Text: James 1:19-27

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 10:19-21; 15:1-4; 17:27-28; Jeremiah 7:1-7

TIME: about A.D. 45

PLACE: from Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Lesson Exposition

The letter of James appears to have been addressed to specific groups of believing Jews outside the land of Israel. James applied the wisdom of Jesus, Proverbs, and the Law of Moses to their problems.

THE SPEECH OF THE SAVED— Jas. 1:19-21

Redemptive conversation (Jas. 1:19). The word "wherefore" directs us to what James had just stated in verse 18—that the Father begot us to be firstfruits among His creatures. When He begot us, He made us His children (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3). The Father sends good things down (Jas 1:17), including Jesus, whom He sent to rescue us from sin and death.

James declared that we therefore must live as people appointed for the life to come. He recognized that we humans perpetuate sin and death largely by our words and our anger, none of which pertains to our future life.

Many of James's original readers were believing Jews outside the land of Israel (Jas. 1:1). They faced serious trials (vs. 2) for various reasons. They lived in areas dominated by Gentiles. Moreover, Jewish Christians were of-

ten persecuted by non-believing Jews (1:9).

Being "swift to hear" (vs. 19) is one of the greatest pieces of wisdom we can apply to our conversation. One of the desires of the human heart is to be heard. Selfish conversation looks to be heard, not to listen. Being "slow to speak" is applicable in many situations. Quick, shallow answers to people's problems come from those who are overly eager to speak and have a high opinion of their own wisdom.

Destructive anger (Jas. 1:20). Someone angry assumes the right to judge others and to cause hurt. But this right is God's alone. Anger often divides people, making love difficult or impossible.

In contrast, the righteousness of God is welcoming and heals people.

Engrafted commandments (Jas. 1:21). We should have a gentleness that comes from our security in being saved. We should conduct our conversations to help others. Many readers may interpret James 1:21 as introducing a new topic. Yet it may be that James simply regarded angry and selfish conversation as filthy.

THE LAW-KEEPING OF THE BLESSED—Jas. 1:22-25

Purposeful application (Jas. 1:22). Much of James's teaching can also be found in the words of Jesus, and 1:22 is a clear example. Jesus knew well the tendencies of people to say "amen" to righteous teaching and then ignore the task of putting the teaching into practice.

Hypocritical affirmation (Jas. 1:23-24). This parable illustrates how people look into God's Word, compare it to their own actions and attitudes, see the inconsistency there, and yet walk away unchanged.

The words of God in Scripture are like a mirror, showing us how we fall short, as well as what we are supposed to be. We should not forget the discrepancies we see between our own actions and attitudes and those of Jesus.

Blessed law-keeping (Jas. 1:25). Two new things are introduced in this verse. First, James taught that there is a "law of liberty." Second, James indicated that those who did as he had been teaching—keeping the teachings of the word with action—would be blessed.

The two greatest commandments that Jesus cited are from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. To interpret the Old Testament laws rightly, we must remember they always reflected these as the highest priority. James referred specifically to the concept of Jesus' teaching on love and called this way of interpreting the law the "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25).

What did James mean that the one who lives according to a proper interpretation of the law will "be blessed in his deed"? In 5:16, James taught that the prayers of the righteous are powerful. In 3:18 he explained that those who live righteously have peace in their hearts.

THE RELIGION OF THE UNDEFILED—Jas. 1:26-27

Vain religion (Jas. 1:26). The tongue is very hard to control. Our words often reveal the emotions and attitudes of our hearts.

Pure religion (Jas. 1:27). Pure, un-hypocritical religion is evidenced by selfless action. James taught what true godliness looks like. Jesus showed care for widows and children. Jesus said the highest form of service is to those who cannot repay (Luke 14:14).

James, through this letter, was teaching Jewish disciples outside the land of Israel a way of life. His teachings are just as valid and needed today.

—Derek Leman

QUESTIONS

1. How does James 1:19 look back to what had just been said in verses 17-18?
2. Who was James writing to?
3. Why is being "swift to hear" (vs. 19) rarely practiced?
4. When a person becomes angry, what particular right does he erroneously feel belongs to him?
5. What good does listening do?
6. What are some different ways of interpreting "filthiness" (vs. 21)?
7. How does the illustration of a person needing to look in a mirror relate to looking into the commandments of God?
8. What other important teaching sheds light on the exact meaning of "law of liberty" (vs. 25)?
9. What sorts of blessings might verse 25 refer to?
10. How can people's speech unmask their hypocrisy?

—Derek Leman

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. A wise person will be a good listener (Jas. 1:19).
2. We should avoid anger since only God is capable of truly fair judgments (vs. 20).
3. Let the Word of God reform your attitude and demeanor (vs. 21).
4. Hearing God's Word but not acting on it is harmful to our spiritual well-being (vs. 22).
5. Hearing God's Word but not keeping it is pointless (vss. 23-24).
6. Hearers and doers of God's Word minister to people while keeping their life pure (vss. 25-27).

—Paul R. Bawden

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. When might a person's words display who he really is (Jas. 1:19)?
2. Why is it so important to avoid becoming angry (vs. 20)? What should we do when we are angry?
3. How should we respond when we have been wronged by another person (Jas. 1:20-21; cf. Rom. 12:19-21)?
4. Why might a casual reading of Scripture not bring change into a believer's life (Jas. 1:22)?
5. What are some ways through which we can allow God's Word to more effectively impact us?
6. What can we do if the Bible feels dry and doesn't seem to be affecting us (cf. Ps. 63:1)?
7. When we recognize a need in someone's life, what is necessary for us to do? Does what is necessary depend on who the person is (Jas. 1:27)?

—Paul R. Bawden

Golden Text Illuminated

"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

The book of James is concerned with pure and true religion (1:27). Our golden text is part of a series of strong, practical injunctions about living rightly under God. We must be "doers of the word." Let us consider this truth both positively and negatively.

Positively, being a doer of the word begins with taking in God's Word. It means being full of God's Word and full of God. We have to look "into the perfect law of liberty" (vs. 25). We must hear the Word, listen to it, internalize it, and truly know it. Of course, we must go beyond this. James commands us to be doers. This involves taking in the Word of God and putting it into practice.

Negatively, we must not be hearers only. That is like people who peer into a mirror, look at their face, and later forget what they look like. It is senseless. Likewise, hearing the Word but not doing it is senseless. It has not accomplished anything. God means for the Word to go deeply into our hearts and to be lived out.

The person who hears the Word but does not do it is deceived. He thinks that he has faith. But true Christian faith involves living faith. It means restraining anger (Jas. 1:19-20), laying aside filthiness (vs. 21), controlling the tongue (vs. 26), caring for orphans and widows (vs. 27), and so forth. Merely hearing the Word is not enough.

We must not treat our Bible with carelessness. The book of James challenges us to engage in active obedience.

—Jeff VanGoethem