

Be Doers Of The Word

James 1:19-27

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In James 1:19-27, James says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man...”—or “person”—“...be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” Now here’s our point. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face...”—or “the face of his birth”—“...in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”

Verse 25, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

In James 1, we are seeing three marks of a mature believer. A mature believer is, number one, joyful in trials, verse 2. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” The second mark of maturity is that they are triumphant in temptations, verse 13. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” So we are joyful in trials and triumphant in temptations.

Now we have the third mark of maturity: mature Christians are “doers of the word,” verse 22. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” We cannot be a mature believer without the right relationship with the Bible, God’s Word.

I’ve often said—and I still believe it—that your relationship to the Bible is the most important relationship you have. You cannot be properly related to God or to others without being a man or a woman of the Book. That may sound extreme, but I believe it’s true. If you are not rightly related to the Bible, you will not be rightly related to the God of the Bible. The Bible is God’s love letter to you. If you want to know God, if you want to serve God, if you want to have fellowship with God, if you want to reflect God in your life, in your marriage and in your family—you must be a man or woman of the Book. You cannot neglect the Bible and be a mature Christian. As we break down our text, you’ll agree with me.

In our text, we see three things: number one, we must hear the Word, verse 19; number two, we must receive the Word, verse 21; and number three, we must obey the Word, verse 22.

What is your relationship to the Word?

All three of these points are called imperatives or commands. These are not optional; “If you’re

not too busy or bored and maybe feel like it, try these three things, hearing, receiving and obeying the Word.” No. These are commands. And from God’s commands come God’s enabling you to obey them.

Now, number one, we must be hearing the Word, verses 19-20. “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath...”—and he gives us the reason —“...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Notice in verse 19, that the section starts with “So then” or “Wherefore.” The rule is wherever there is a “wherefore” or “therefore,” find out what it is there for. So if you go back to verse 18, James says, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...”—or “the Bible, the Word of God”—“...that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

So James ended the previous section by saying that God, in His own sovereign will, regenerated us or we were born again, and one of the instruments involved in our rebirth was “the word of truth,” which is a reference to the Scriptures, the Bible. Having mentioned the Bible, in verse 18, James goes on to talk about it in verses 19-27; that we should be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.” The context takes us back one verse to “the word of truth,” which is also called “the implanted word,” verse 21, and “the perfect law of liberty,” in verse 25. So the Word of God in relation to the child of God is very important.

In verse 19, James is speaking to Christians: “My beloved brethren.” So what we are reading in this text are actually commands for the household of faith, the believers, the children of God.

And James gives us three commands. First, “Be swift to hear.” It means “a readiness or eagerness to listen to God’s Word.” I like the story of the young boy, Samuel. Hannah said, “O Lord, if you will give your maidservant a male child, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.” So after Samuel was about five-years-old, Hannah took Samuel to the temple and left him with Eli, the priest, to be raised in the temple. Samuel later would become one of the great prophets in the nation of Israel. But Eli had sons who were wicked; it was a bad environment to be raised in.

Yet when Samuel went to bed one night, before he fell asleep, the Lord called Samuel. Samuel thought Eli was calling him, so Samuel jumped out of bed and went to Eli and said, “Here I am.” Eli said, “I did not call; lie down again.” Samuel went back to bed, but again the Lord called “Samuel!” Again Samuel thought Eli was calling him, so he went to Eli and said, “Here I am.” On the third time that God called, Samuel again went to Eli and said, “Here I am.” Now Eli realized that the Lord had called Samuel, so this time Eli told Samuel that when God called Samuel again, Samuel was to say, “Speak, for Your servant hears.” So when the Lord called Samuel this time, Samuel said, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”

I suggest to you that should be our prayer. When every Christian reads the Bible, he should say, “Speak, for Your servant hears.” The Word of God demands our attention. When you read the Bible, it’s a love letter from God. When you are listening to a sermon where the Bible is read

—as it always is at our church—say, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”

Second, notice in verse 19 that we should be “slow to speak.” The Greek philosopher Zeno said, “We have two ears and one mouth; therefore, we should listen twice as much as we speak.” I like that. God is trying to tell us something.

I heard the story of a monk who joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. He was told he could only speak two words every five years. At the end of the five years, he said, “Food bad!” At the end of 10 years, he said, “Bed hard!” And at the end of 15 years, he said, “I quit!” The head monk said, “No surprise; all you’ve done is complain since you got here!”

One of our big problems is that we are swift to speak and slow to listen. Have you any friends who do all the talking when you are with them? You feel you can’t get a word in edgewise? They don’t allow you to talk or share. They just talk. When we’re talking, we’re not learning. When we’re listening, we’re learning. Remember that. So if you keep your mouth shut, you’ll be a wise person. Proverbs 10:19 says, “He who restrains his lips is wise.”

Have you ever been with someone who is very quiet? You think that they must be very smart. But then they open their mouth and dispel all doubts; they’re not smart. So the Bible says it’s better to keep silent—people will think you’re smart—than to open your mouth, and they’ll know you’re a fool. So let us be “swift to hear, slow to speak.”

Then, third, let us be “slow to wrath,” verse 19. By the way, all three of these subpoints are commands: “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” “Wrath” is a harboring of angry, resentful feelings. An angry spirit is not a teachable spirit.

Verse 20 is the rationale for verse 19: “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” When you are angry, you won’t receive from God through His Word. When you’re mad at the world, you’re mad at God, you’re mad at others and there’s anger in your heart, then your heart’s not going to be open; it won’t be soft and it won’t be receptive.

Some people come to church that way. “I’m here. I don’t want to be here. I’m mad. I don’t want to listen to the preacher.” I’ve preached long enough that I can tell by looking at people’s faces their receptivity—or lack thereof—in their hearts. I can’t see your heart; I don’t know your heart. But on some people’s faces I can see, “What you got to tell me, preacher boy!” So my prayer is that their hearts would be open and receptive to hear the Word of the Lord, and my voice will be eclipsed by the voice of God speaking through His Word.

So if you are angry today, “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” It might be keeping you from hearing the Word of God.

The second thing we need to do in our relationship to the Bible is we need to receive the Word. The first thing was that the Word should be heard—it demands our attention—and the second thing is we need to receive it. The Word demands our attention and our reception. Verse 21 says, “Therefore...”—here is another “so then” or “wherefore”—lay aside all filthiness and

overflow of wickedness.” So not only get rid of anger, but get rid of wickedness and sin in your life. And here’s the command: “And receive with meekness the implanted word...”—so “the word of truth” is the engrafted or “implanted word”—“...which is able to save your souls.” The word of God demands our reception.

The word “receive,” in verse 21, speaks of “a welcoming or an appropriating reception.” “Speak Lord, I’m listening.” It means to embrace it, to make it your own. This is used of the Bereans, in Acts 17:11, where it says, “They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” When Paul went to Berea, they didn’t reject the Word; they searched the Word. They listened to the Word and received the Word. They checked out what they heard with the Scriptures.

When you read the Bible, note that it is God’s Word and make your heart receptive to the Word of God. It means to embrace it. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul says, “You received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

That is so awesome! To have a congregation hearing the Word and then receiving the Word, and not as “the word of men” but as “the Word of God.”

Notice also it is called “the implanted” or “engrafted word.” God wants to graft His Word into your heart so your life might bear fruit like seed does, to the glory of God. Jesus gave an interesting parable, which is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, in Matthew 13. It’s called “the sower and the seed.” In this parable, Jesus gave four kinds of soil. It is about how the soil received the seed from the farmer, and the fruit that was born, or not born, by it. The soils are a picture of the human heart. The seed is a picture of the Word of God, he who preaches the Word, and our receptivity to it.

In Bible times, the farmer would pull up his garment and make a basket out of it, walk down the furrows, and throw the seed as he walked. It was very primitive but effective. Jesus said the first soil was hard, it was the beaten path. Some of the seed would go where the farmer didn’t want it to go, such as on the beaten path. The soil was hard, so the seed just lay on the surface, and the birds would come along and eat it. This seed didn’t penetrate, so it wouldn’t bring forth fruit.

This represents the hard heart. Your heart has been hardened, so Satan is stealing God’s seed and it’s not penetrating your life. You can come to church week after week and hear the Bible being taught. You can even read the Bible yourself, but if your heart is hard, Satan will steal the seed, so it’s not bearing fruit.

The second soil is the shallow or emotional heart; it’s a thin layer of dirt over rock, which lacks depth. When the seed lands here, it starts to take root, because it has some soil. But because the dirt is shallow, when the plant springs up, it withers and dies. It can’t get moisture. This is the person who hears the Word and starts to respond to the Word, but there is no real

commitment in their life, so they wither away spiritually and don't bring forth any fruit.

The third soil, which I call "the crowded heart," has weeds. The seed that lands here begins to take root and grow, but the weeds choke out the plant, so it doesn't bear fruit.

I hate weeds. When you pull out the weeds, they come back again. That's why I say, "Just let 'em grow!" I can't think of anything more aggravating than pulling weeds! Think of all the weeds you've pulled in your lifetime, and they just keep coming back.

This soil represents a crowded heart, where the cares of the world—the deceitfulness of riches and the lust for other things—choke out God's Word in your heart, so you don't bear fruit. You have so many things in life to deal with that they choke out God's Word.

The fourth kind of soil or heart is the fruitful soil or the fruitful heart. Unlike the hard heart, it is soft; unlike the shallow heart, it's deep; and unlike the crowded heart, it's clean. The seed lands on this soil that is soft, deep and clean, and it brings forth fruit. This is the fruitful heart. This soil produces 30-, 60- or 100-fold.

What is the condition of your heart? Is your heart soft, deep, clean, fruitful soil? When God's Word comes into your heart, does it find root and bring forth fruit to the glory of God?

Now note the condition for receiving the Word, verse 21 of our text. You have to "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness." Number one, God's Word will be hindered if we are angry, so lay aside anger. Number two, God's Word will be hindered in our life if we have sin. So we must pull out the "weeds," the sin. You can't grow unless you are willing to give up the sins the Bible condemns.

If you are reading the Bible and it says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church," you can't say, "Ah, let's find another passage. Let's find something about God loving me and has a wonderful plan for my life." Or wives, if you open the Bible and it says, "Wives, submit to your husbands," you're not to say, "I rebuke you, Satan! Get behind me, devil!" You don't say, "This was written before my husband was born! If he was alive when this was written, it wouldn't be in the Bible!" I don't think so. You can't pick and choose; the Bible is not a smorgasbord. "I'll take that verse, I'll take that one. I'll throw that one away. I'll tear that one out."

If you have sin that the Bible condemns, and you're unwilling to repent, you will grow no further. As a matter of fact, you'll go backward instead of forward. You'll have hit a wall, as far as fresh understanding, fresh transformation and new revelation goes. God won't take you deeper, if you don't accept and respond in obedience to what He reveals to you. If you don't obey what God reveals, He won't take you any deeper.

It's not the Scriptures that I don't understand that bother me; it's the ones I do understand. Those are the ones that really convict me. I need to surrender my life to God and be obedient to Him. It's so very important. So lay aside all the "weeds" that are in your life that are

hindering.

Now notice the manner in which you receive the Word, verse 21: “with meekness.” When you hear the Word and you receive the Word, it’s with meekness. The word “meekness” does not convey weakness. Meekness conveys power under control. A meek horse is not a weak horse; it’s a horse that responds to every movement of the rider. It’s an obedient horse. Jesus was “meek and lowly in heart.” He was obedient to the Father’s will and command. So if we are going to grow and mature, we need to have meekness toward God and toward others, responding to the truth of God’s Word.

The reason we are to receive the Word, verse 21, is because the Word “is able to save your souls.” When it uses the word “souls” here, it is where we get our word “psyche.” So it’s not just conveying the salvation of your soul in heaven eternally, but it’s talking about saving your whole life. I would freely translate that “save your life.”

In Acts 20:32, when Paul was meeting with the elders in Ephesus, he said, “We commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” So that salvation, sanctification and service involves all of your life being blessed by the impact and the influence of the Word of God.

So, number one, hear the Word; number two, receive the Word, that “is able to save your soul”; and number three, obey the Word. The Word of God demands our application. So it’s our attention, our reception and our application. Verses 22-27 say, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

I’ll break this down for you. Number one, the command is “Be doers of the word.” True hearing and true receiving must be resulting in true obeying. Hearing, receiving, obeying—we can’t circumvent those three. We must hear the Word, have receptivity to receive the Word and we must be obedient to the Word. If you only hear the Word, you are deceiving yourself. Hearing is not enough.

So many professing Christians have this problem. It is one of the biggest problems in the church today. For many believers, there is a huge gap between the Bible and the way you live. We believe the Bible; it is the inerrant Word of God. But we don’t obey the Bible. It’s wonderful to have an orthodox understanding of the Bible, but the goal of Bible study is not to have an enlightened intellect. It’s not to have a big head. It’s to transform character.

How are you doing in that area? Is there a gap between what you believe and how you behave? Let’s close that gap by obedience. We believe the Bible, but do we obey the Bible? We are to be “doers of the word,” obeying the Word. D. L. Moody used to say, “Every Christian’s

Bible should be bound in shoe leather to remind them the Word of God is to be lived out in their daily lives.” So just hearing the Word is not enough.

Jesus, in Matthew 7, closed His famous Sermon on the Mount with another parable about a wise and foolish builder. He said a wise man “built his house on rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew,” but the house stood strong, because it was built on the rock. A foolish man “built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew,” but his house fell. “And great was its fall.”

Now Jesus explains the parable. The Greek word for “parable” is “parabole,” which means “to lay alongside.” So Jesus takes a story and lays it alongside a spiritual truth. What is the spiritual truth of this parable? The wise man is one who hears the Word and obeys it. It’s that simple. So when you hear the Word and obey the Word, you’re wise; you’re building your house on the rock. Your house will stand strong in the storms. But the foolish man is one who hears the Word—just like the wise man—but doesn’t obey it. He’s building on sand rather than the solid foundation of Christ and His Word. When the storms come, his house will fall.

What are you building on? How are you receiving God’s Word? What are you building your marriage, your family and your life on? The Word of God is the only sure foundation, the only thing that will stand the storms of life.

James gives us an illustration, in verses 23-25 of our text. “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” In the Bible times, they didn’t have mirrors, which actually was a blessing. They had polished sheets of metal that somewhat reflected their faces. Mirrors today are brutally honest; they tell it like it is. And don’t you hate those mirrors that are well-lit and magnify your face? I like dimly-lit mirrors.

The Bible, the Word of God, is a mirror. If you open up the Bible and see your true condition but close it up and walk away, it’s like someone looking into a mirror and soon forgetting what they’ve seen. But the Bible is like a mirror; the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God. So we need to look deeply into the Word of God, receive the Word of God and then put it into practice. That’s the illustration.

Verse 25, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” This means to look carefully, to study the Word. It’s called “the perfect law of liberty,” because it brings freedom. And we are to “continue in it,” which speaks of habitual activity. And “this one” is emphatic; it means only this man or only this woman. “This one will be blessed in what he does.” Obedience brings blessing.

Psalms 1 is called “the happy psalm.” By the way, it’s one of the great psalms for dads. “Blessed is the man...”—or “woman”—“...who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and

in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”

You want to be happy? You want to prosper? Don’t walk, stand or sit with the ungodly or with sinners or with the scornful. Be the blessed man or woman. Meditate on God’s Word, and you’ll be “like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”

There is nothing I desire more, as a father, than for every one of my children to love the Bible—to read it, to receive it and to obey it. Why? Because their lives will be blessed. If they just grow up loving God’s Word and loving the God of the Word and letting God’s Spirit work in their lives, their marriages will be blessed, their children will be blessed and their lives will be blessed. The same will be true for us.

Now notice the application, in verses 26-27. If we give God’s Word our attention, our reception and application, it will be seen in three practical areas of our lives. First, it will be seen in our words or speech. We’ll have wise words, verse 26. “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” This is the only place in the Bible where you find the words “religious” or “religion.” This verse is talking about a pious individual, someone who follows religion, who says they are a Christian or a believer or religious, yet their mouth and their life are anything but; there is a contradiction there. One of the evidences that you are truly a child of God is that your speech will be wise, edifying, godly words.

The second way it will be seen is in our service or in our works, verse 27. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.” So you have wise words, verse 26, and you have a loving heart, verse 27. It’s about your service, the way you live your life. God is always taking care of the fatherless and the widows in the Scriptures.

And third, it will be seen in your walk, verse 27. You will live a separate, holy life. “And to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” So our words, our works and our walk will be seen, if we give God’s Word our attention, our reception and our application. Psalm 119:9 and 11 say, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word....Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

A story is told that John Bunyan, the author of the spiritual allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which he wrote from Bedford Prison, had written in the fly leaf of his Bible, “This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.”