

James 1:19-27
“Furthering Faith”

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I. Introduction

James introduces the next section of his letter with the phrase, “*So then*” which tells his readers that what he is about to express is an **action based upon what he has previously written**. The topic of the above verses was the “*Believers maturity*” and how that was accomplished through:

- A. Enduring through trials
- B. Enduring through temptations

The believer’s maturity is still the focus of this section and ***endurance still the key*** as verse 25 suggests that the believer will need to “*continue in it*” and avoid self deception which James mentions twice in verses 22 and 26. With trials being something that happen too us and temptation something that we are to avoid James mentions something that we can do to facilitate spiritual growth in our lives and that has to do with our “spiritual diet” which needs to be upon the Word of God. James want’s his readers to know three ways in which the maturing believer will digest God’s word in their life that will effect their maturity:

- 1. Vs. 19-21 How they ***HEAR*** it
- 2. Vs. 22-25 How they ***APPLY*** it
- 3. Vs. 26-27 How they ***SHARE*** it

II. Vs. 19-21 How to hear the word of God

Vs. 19-20 First after James makes an initial statement upon the “*personal qualities*” needed for maturity of being: “Swift to hear”, “Slow to speak” and “slow to wrath”. Then his focus is upon what “*receiving with meekness the implanted word*” looks like in the maturing believer.

Notice that the illustration from James is drawn from the realm of agriculture as James describes in negative terms:

- In verse 20 anger is said to halt the “***PRODUCE*** of the righteousness of God” in a person’s life.
- Then in verse 21 he describes, also in negative terms, what his readers were to lay aside namely the worlds influence upon them so that they can, “*receive in meekness the ***IMPLANTED*** word*”.

What we are to realize is that both our ***flash*** as well as the ***world system work against our maturity and will have to be overcome***. The question is just how is such negative influences as our flesh and world system to be countered? First James in his exhortation mentions in verse 19 three “personal qualities” necessary if we are going to be able to appropriate the Word of God for maturity as we will need to be: “***Swift to hear***”, “***Slow to speak***” and “***Slow to wrath***”. We will need these three things first so that we will be able to “*lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness*” so that we can “*receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*” Those familiar with

Hebrew poetry will recognize James phrase as he uses “parallelism” to the triple “personal qualities” to receiving the word of God.

1. Vs. 19a “**Swift to hear**”: The statement indicates the early date of this letter as these Jewish believers had no written scripture yet of the New Testament and only had the First Testament. This suggests the importance placed upon “**hearing**” because **the truth with regards to Jesus was oral and not written yet**. They would have gathered in homes to “**hear the truth**” and listening was imperative as those who wouldn’t listen would have no back up in the written word of God as we do. **Those that listened gain an advantage to spiritual maturity**. Though we modern believer aren’t as handicapped because we have the written word we still are “non-listeners” as billions of words are spoken with few heard! One of the major reason today that we Christians are poor listeners is that we are too busy or too preoccupied to pay attention. Further more we have switched from a society that “**reads**” or even “**listens**” to a society that “**watches**” all of **which has drastically shortened our attention spans and our ability to concentrate**. This inability to listen has huge implication to our ability to “HEAR” the word of God. **This morning I have been given the call to speak the Word of God to you all and you have been given the task, for your maturity, to listen to the Word of God spoken and our prayer ought to be that we both finish at the same time!** The modern prayer of many a saint is, “*Speak NOW LORD to me! You have 30 seconds!*” The problem of listening to 45 minutes of teaching is compounded when we take into consideration that the average 30 second commercial on TV has 60 images in glaring color with sound and we are accustomed to turning that out; how does a modest exposition of God’s Word stand a chance? **Our maturity in Christ depends upon our ability to be “SWIFT TO HEAR” there are five disciplines that will make us better listeners:**
 - a. **Posture**: Becoming a good listener requires hard work, we need to get our hearts and bodies in the best position to listen, sit up and look up as if your life depended upon what was being said.
 - b. **Exposure**: You must limit your exposure to visual media, if you don’t it will over whelm you and impair your ability to listen.
 - c. **Exercise**: You need to read God’s word, take notes, highlight passages be engaged, pray the word of God into your life.
 - d. **Patience**: You need to take the time to listen, pray what Samuel did in 1 Samuel 3:10 “*Speak, for your servant listens*”.
 - e. **Consistent**: Far too many only hear God’s word once a week on Sunday, I suggest to take the best of every day to listen to the One who loves you so much that He sent His Only Son to die in your place!
2. Vs. 19b “**Slow to speak**”: The second the triple “personal qualities” to receiving the word of God again were directed to the early church practice that invited open dialog during the service. This unstructured climate created opportunity for insistent interruptions that were a distraction to hearing the word of God. James, though not barring the practice seeks to cause people to wait and listen above asking questions or making comments. Zeno the Stoic philosopher said, “*We have two ears and one mouth, so that we should listen twice as much as we speak.*” There is always the danger as I know well that far too often I open my mouth only to change my feet! You never have to take back that which you didn’t say in the first place! Proverbs 10:19 reminds us that, “*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*” It is unfortunate that far too often with regards to God’s word that we can become “Slow to hear” and “quick to speak” and because of this stunt our own maturity.
3. Vs. 19-20 “**Slow to wrath**”: The final of the triple “personal qualities” to receiving the word of God is James’ understanding that those who don’t really listen to the Word being taught where they foolishly speak out without thinking are prone to

display anger at others who attempt to correct this threefold progressive trend. “***A angry heart never belongs to a teachable spirit!***” That’s the point of James’ words in verse 20. We need to listen with all our heart for the Word of God, however it may come to us and not become angry in the way truth has been delivered! No person I know will be convinced of the truth I speak by a display of anger.

Vs. 21 Having dealt with the triple “personal qualities” to receiving the word of God James issues a two-part command to receive the word of God from an agriculture illustration of.

1. “***Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness***”: The first part of this command is negative as James says that an unwillingness to listen is connected to a sinful tongue and an unrighteous anger. If we reverse James exhortation and become “Slow to Hear, Quick to Speak and Quick to Wrath” then moral filth is the outcome of our actions. So if we desire to mature we need to reverse this trend and do some spiritual house cleaning. A closed Bible belongs to a closed heart which is characterized by filthiness and an overflow of wickedness! James is saying that before you plant in the soil of the garden of your heart the seed of the Word of God you may need to pull some weeds out. It is foolish to try to plant the Word of God in your heart if it is covered in the weeds of the flesh and the world!
2. “***And receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls***”: The second part of this command is positive. First we learn something that God’s Word is not native to our hearts as it needs to be “***implanted***” and as stated above in “soil” that has been cleared of the weeds. Then it needs to be “received with meekness” which suggests both humility and teach-ability. To hear God’s Word suggests that when we read it, listen to it that we will accept it, and obey it so that we will be transformed by it especially if it challenges us! Our “Point of View” can be weeds that need to be removed as what we desire is the truth of His point of view! We have already personally witnessed that such acceptance has saved our souls so why stop being teachable now?

III. Vs. 22-25 How to apply the word of God

Vs. 22-25 Now James deals with the second aspect of maturing through the Word of God and that is how they are to apply it. We learn a very valuable truth with regards to the Word of God and that is that it is NOT ENOUGH to be a good listener it is not hearing alone but DOING that is the indication that you have listened to the Word of God.

Marking your Bibles is never as good as being MARKED by your bible! Hearing the Word of God is not the sign of maturity but doing the Word of God is! To illustrate this for us James compares the Word of God to that of a mirror. There were three understandings mentioned here that James’ readers would have understood with regards to a mirror:

1. Vs. 23 ***Examination***: “*If anyone is a hearer of the Word of God and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror..*” The main understanding of a mirror in that time was that it led to personal “***Examination***” so that the person would be able to clearly see what they truly looked like. There is no way to cover what you are in a mirror, no way to excuse what you see reflected back at you. The doer of the word isn’t looking to negate the purpose of the mirror; they don’t have taped over the glass or polished service a picture of what they imagine themselves to look like. A hearer of the word may acknowledge the truth but not want the examination of the reflection. They are content with the truth so long as they see others reflection not their own. They don’t want to see the heart of the face that they now possess. To do so will reveal through the perfection of the word that we

are the worst sinners we have ever met. Such examination will reveal that there is much imperfection as we are gazing into the Mirror of God's Word we are seeing His reflection. Ah, but such an examination we reveal what He in His work through the Word of God and the Spirit of God is making us into as we are being made into His image from glory to glory!

2. Vs. 24 **Evaluation**: *“for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”* The second aspect familiar to those that would have read this was that a mirror was for “Evaluation” and if we are to evaluate ourselves a “quick glance” won't be satisfactory. A superficial reading of the Bible, a little daily devotion that serves only as an inspiration and not transformation will not do. This kind of bible reading leads to personal forgetfulness. It becomes like an x-ray with out the body to be examined. When we are truly in the Word of God we should be moved in some direction but never to stay as we are! Isaiah described his encounter with God's word 6:5 saying, *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”* Peter said it this way in Luke 5:8, when he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”* Hearing is never the same as doing.
3. Vs. 25 **Execution**: *“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.”* The third aspect of looking in a mirror is “**Execution**” there can be no substitute for accomplishing the task that caused us to look in the mirror in the first place. This requires time, attention and devotion. The blessing comes about in the “DOING” as we seek to practice the word of God. The glance moves to a gaze and continues until the word of God has accomplished its purpose. James calls the word of God the “*perfect law of liberty*” because it sets us FREE when we obey it by His Spirit.

III. Vs. 26-27 How to share the word of God

Vs. 26-27 The final aspect of what the Word of God should do in the life of the believer is to cause them to want to SHARE it with others. Notice that James uses the the words “religious” in verse 26 and “religion” in verse 27. These words are only used five times in the entire New Testament and else where it is translated into the word “worship.” James isn't referring to the outward practice of ceremonies or special days instead the idea behind the word is means **“practicing God's Word, sharing it and living it before others through your speech, service and separation from the world system”**. You will see that James identifies three ways in which the “doer of the word of God” will share.

1. Vs. 26 **Speech**: *“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”*. When James brings the need to share the Word of God his first words about communication has to do with “bridling the tongue”. He compares the tongue and our speech to a powerful horse off to a wild ride where the reins are not taught and the 1500-pound animal is at full gallop and unstoppable. There is nothing remotely religious about a mouth that just roars and is unyielding! In fact, James says, that it is worthless as far as communicating the world of God is concerned. **The true test of a person's faith is not in the volume or passion in which they speak but rather in their ability to harness what they are passionate about in such a way that enables a person to listen to the truth!** There are a lot of things that can come out of an unbridled tongue, hate, filth, gossip and lies! Much truth is communicated out of what a person doesn't say than what they do say.
2. Vs. 27a **Service**: *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble”*. Seeing Jesus in the mirror of the Word of God will cause us to see the needs of others as well. Orphans and widows were

the two most helpless groups in Jewish society as their needs were always desperate. James is saying that any form of communication that is not associated with action towards the needs of others is not communication. No person who is hearing God can ignore the cries of the needy says James. Further more such action will require is to do more than throw money and instead will say “here am I send me”! The finest worship we can offer God is to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

3. Vs. 27b **Separation:** “*and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*” The final way we share God’s word is equally visible as we aren’t polluted by the world system in the way we live. We live in a world that ever seeks to redefine words and meanings: Society calls the killing of the unborn children “Pro-choice” and says that it supports “Women’s rights” while failing to realize that over half the children that would have been born would have been women, so how does this “choice” support women rights? The world defines sexual promiscuity as loving and gay and we see the prophecy of Isaiah being fulfilled a “*evil is called good and good evil, light is called darkness and darkness is called light.*” We are being called to purity and to keep ourselves unspotted by the world system. We may be in the world but we are never to be of the world. Never underestimate the power of the word seen in a life that is both separate from the world and separate to God.