

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 111, NUMBER 3

HEAR THE WORD (JAS. 1:19-20)

Ronnie Scherffius

The book of James is one of the most practical books of the New Testament. Though he does treat such profound matters as the perfection of faith by works (2:14-26), James especially addresses practical matters of the faith. Topics such as enduring trials (1:1-6), living the Christian life without partiality (2:1-13), and controlling the tongue (3:1-10) are a few examples.

The practical nature of James is also demonstrated in its similarities to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly Proverbs. In fact, James has been called “the Proverbs of the New Testament.” It has been suggested that no less than 40 of the 108 verses of James have literary parallels in the wisdom literature. Some of the more striking include finding wisdom (1:5; cf. Pro. 2:6), the temporary nature of wealth (1:10f; cf. Pro. 23:5; 7:24), controlling anger (1:19f; cf. Pro. 14:29), the destructive nature of the tongue (3:5f; cf. Pro. 16:27; 18:21), partiality (2:1, 9; cf. Pro. 24:23), and hiding or covering sin (5:20; cf. Pro. 10:12). Parallels between James and Jesus’ sermon on the mount also demonstrate the practical nature of James. A portion of these parallels are the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3; Jas. 1:9; 2:5), they that mourn (Matt. 5:4; Jas. 4:9), the merciful (Matt. 5:7; Jas. 2:13; cf. 3:17), the pure in heart (Matt. 5:8; Jas. 4:8), peacemakers (Matt. 5:9; Jas. 3:18), suffering for righteousness (Matt. 5:11-12; Jas. 1:2; cf. 5:10-11), angry without a cause (Matt. 5:22; Jas. 1:20), treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19; Jas. 5:2-3), asking and receiving (Matt. 7:8; Jas. 4:3), and the wisdom of doing (Matt. 7:21-26; Jas. 1:22; 2:14). The book of James is certainly a book worthy of diligent study and active application.

One of the more practical matters addressed by James is the hearing of God’s Word, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”(1:19-20).

A proper understanding of this admonition requires an examination of the context. In the first chapter, James instructs us regarding proper attitudes. In verses 2-12, he addresses the proper attitude toward trials; in verses 13-17, he notes the proper perspective of temptations; in

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MARCH 2025

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FROM THE EDITOR:

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD (JAS. 1:21)

Cody Westbrook

When we hold a Bible in our hands, we hold the most potent force and most powerful weapon humanity will ever know. God's Word has the ability to accomplish more good than anything or anyone on earth could ever imagine. The most hardened sinner, the most doubtful skeptic, or the most hate-filled heart can be transformed by the power of Scripture (2 Cor. 10:3-5). But in order for God's Word to bring about change in our lives we must do our part in allowing it to do so. James wrote, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). To "receive" is to accept, to welcome, or to indicate approval. Thus, I must open the door of my heart and allow the Word to settle in and make itself at home. How can I do it?

First, reception involves preparation. James wrote, "Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness." To "lay aside" is to "rid yourself" of something. In Romans 13:12 the term describes "cast[ing] off the works of darkness." In Colossians 3:8 and Ephesians 4:22 Paul used the word to describe "putting off" sins of the flesh. The term is a word picture for taking off dirty clothes and putting them aside (cf. 1 Pet. 2:1). James characterized the stains on our spiritual clothing as "filthiness" and "wickedness." "Filthiness" has to do with moral filth, or, defilement. It refers to our action. The term, "wickedness," refers to our character and attitude. So, receiving God's Word requires me to first rid myself of all sinfulness, both in character and action. Like dirty clothes after a long work day, they must be thrown aside.

Second, reception involves attitude. One who approaches God's Word with pride will never allow their heart to be changed. Thus James says we must "Receive with meekness the implanted word." "Meekness," or, "humility" was a rejected virtue in the ancient world, seen by many as weakness. But the New Testament exalted the term. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). "Humble yourselves in the

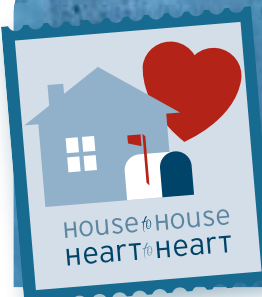
sight of God and He will lift you up" (Jas. 4:10). Why is humility a vital component to the reception of God's Word? Because humility is "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG). A prideful person refuses to allow Scripture to show his imperfections. He fights against God's Word by justifying himself and ignoring his own flaws. A humble person recognizes his need for God and welcomes His Word highlighting areas of life which must be improved. If the Gospel is to transform us, we must be humble enough to admit the need to be transformed!

Third, reception involves object. James describes Scripture as "the implanted word." The meaning of the term "implanted" basically describes the process of a thing being permanently established in place and developing, or, growing. In Luke 8:11 our Lord described His Word as a seed which grows roots and produces fruit in fertile hearts. That passage is a commentary on James 1:21. We "lay aside" sinful activities and attitudes and replace them with God's Word which is "living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12). Like a seed which germinates and spreads roots in the ground, Scripture is "implanted" within our hearts and grows roots. It takes up permanent residences and never stops growing.

Fourth, reception brings about outcome. The "implanted word" is "able to save your souls." Note that James writes in the present tense to those who are already Christians. In other words, once the Word of God is implanted within our hearts, we spend a lifetime allowing it to grow and mature and transform us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). This is why Peter commanded us to possess an insatiable appetite for it (1 Pet. 2:1) and why the Hebrews writer scolded his audience for their inability to digest it (Heb. 5:12-14). The Christian life is a never ending process of spiritual growth and maturity brought about by the influence of Scripture in our lives.

Have you opened up your heart to receive God's Word?

CW



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BE A DOER OF THE WORD (JAS. 1:22-25)

Kerry Clark

In James Chapter One, James gives us several imperatives – be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (v. 19); he also gives another imperative in verse twenty-two, “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” In every English translation I considered, the word “doer” seemed to be the unanimous consensus of the translators. The word in the Greek is remarkably interesting, it is the word from which our English word “poet” comes from. In the most basic form, the word means to make, create, or compose. We are to be poets (doers) of the word of God. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul declares that we are God’s workmanship. The word for workmanship is where the English word “poem” originates. Interestingly, the Bible then teaches us that we are to be poets writing God’s poem in this world. Imagine a poet who never writes a poem! If the child of God is not doing God’s Word, we are deceiving ourselves.

With these thoughts in mind, let’s consider the three verses assigned to us.

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1:22). Notice clearly, the Bible teaches that we are to be obedient to God’s Word; not simply a hearer of God’s Word.

We know there are far too many who believe that simply hearing God’s Word is enough. In their minds, it seems, being a “hearer” is enough. Again, the Bible is clear; we must hear God’s Word, and then we must do God’s Word.

On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts Chapter Two; Peter and the other eleven apostles preached the first Gospel sermon. A portion of Peter’s sermon is recorded for us (Verse 40 tells us, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation”). In this sermon, we see the principle laid out that James describes, in verse 37, “when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart...” Later, we are told, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

When Jesus confronted Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus, Saul said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do” (Acts 9:6). The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30)? These examples could be multiplied many times. The point is clear, James tells us to be doers of

the word of the God. Otherwise, we are self-deceived.

James continues with an illustration,

For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholding himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was (Jas. 1:23-24).

The illustration James uses is quite interesting. A person looks at himself in a mirror, sees a smudge of grease on his face, and gets distracted and walks away with the grease still on his face. No doubt, when he realizes his mistake, he is going to be embarrassed; but it is too late. As we consider this verse, we also need to notice that James uses a word in the original language, which is not a simple, casual glance; it means observe fully, to consider, to perceive. This man considered himself in the mirror, and then immediately forgot about the smudge on his face.

In verse 25 James writes,

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.”

James is teaching us that we must consider ourselves in the light of the teaching of the Bible. This is not a casual glance. It is a full, careful, insightful look at what kind of person we are. The apostle Paul wrote, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your selves. Know ye not your selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates” (2 Cor. 13:5)?

Having examined our life careful, perceptively, we then determine whether I am living as God has commanded me to live.

CW

OUR RELIGION AND OUR WORDS (JAS. 1:26)

Adam Orr

Is it possible to have religion that is worthless in the eyes of God? Surely, He would be pleased with someone the world viewed as ‘good, moral, and religious,’ wouldn’t He? The answer plainly given in James 1:26 is that it is entirely possible to have a religion that displeases God. The Bible says in this verse, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this

person's religion is worthless." Here are words you could use to get the idea of what it means to be worthless – idle, ineffective, groundless, deceptive, fallacious, useless, fruitless, and unprofitable. Dear reader, none of us would like any of these words to describe our religion! How can we take the words of this verse and apply them in such a way that we do not have a religion worthless in the eyes of God?

There are two keys in this verse:

Make sure the inside matches the outside

The beginning of James 1:26 directs the reader to what one thinks about their religion. He says that it is entirely possible to deceive ourselves about how we practice our religion. This is something that should cause the Christian great pause. What does James mean when he talks about 'religion'? This is an outward devotion and piety which shows itself in church attendance, prayers, etc., but also in the way mentioned here. It is possible to be externally devoted to God, and come up lacking in other ways. "Deceive" is to trick, and so causing one to think God accepts him when He does not. The present tense verb indicates he keeps on doing this. The Greek word for religion here is translated "worshipping" in Colossians 2:18. It is outward devotion to God. (The ASV says in a footnote: "The Greek word denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to a creature, or to the Creator.")

It can, at times, be easy for members of the Lord's church to point the finger at man-made denominations bent on entertainment and correctly point out their error in departure from Scripture. However, James is writing to members of the Lord's church and reminds us that it is entirely possible for our religion to be worthless in the eyes of the Lord. If the outward worship is not driven or motivated from within us (truly heart-felt), God knows the heart (Ps. 44:21; Luke 16:15; Acts 15:8; Rom. 8:27) and knows if our outward actions match our inside devotion. This reflects the same teaching of Jesus to the 'religious' Jews in Matthew 15:7-9. The Jews honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. This cannot be true for us as Christians today if we want to be pleasing to God!

Oh, be careful little mouth what you say

James will spend a great deal of time on the tongue in his letter to the saints. It must have been a challenge for people in the first century and certainly remains a challenge for all in the twenty-first century. The tongue must be bridled! It is entirely possible that one may be proper and serve acceptably in worship services, and fail in other ways - like having a loose tongue. To bridle the tongue is to hold the tongue in check. A bridle is used to exercise complete control.

Isn't it true that words give insight to the character of an individual? You can tell so much about a person by listening to the words they speak. Do they use words to encourage or discourage? Are words used to praise or are they profane? In James 3:2, the inspired writer indicates that if one can control the tongue, they can control the entire body. Just as it is possible to continually deceive oneself in this verse, the one who has a religion acceptable to God will continually bridle his tongue. This is not something done from time to time, but ALL the time! Many excuses are offered for having loose lips, but none is justified in the eyes of God.

How sweet it is to hear little children sing, "Oh, be careful little mouth what you say." Oh how bitter to it is to grow up and hear adults say, "Oh, let me say what I want to say." God forbid that our words would fail to show our love for Him and seek to bring Him glory! The question we should all ponder: Do my words seek to lift Him up in the eyes of others? If our words will not help others to Jesus, they must be swallowed.

James has much to teach in this special verse. Aren't you thankful for the practicality of this letter? May we seek to have a religion that pleases God and one that is not worthless. Does my inside match my outside and am I truly seeking to keep my tongue under control? These, dear friends, will serve as a great barometer of our religion.

CW



RELIGION" ISN'T A BAD WORD (JAS. 1:27)

Jordan Moore

“Give me Jesus, but not religion.” This popular refrain is pervasive in the denominational world, and increasingly in churches of Christ. A Sister once rebuked me after a sermon for saying that Christianity is the one true religion (John 14:6). She alleged, “Christianity isn’t a religion, but a relationship.” Sadly, she 1) misunderstood the biblical term, “religion” and 2) overlooked or never read James 1:27. Let’s consider it...

“Religion...”

Some think it is, but “religion” isn’t a bad word. As always, a definition of terms is necessary. A simplistic online definition is, “a system of faith or worship.” In examining the original Greek, you begin to find that “religion” is more broadly connected to “your response to who you think God is and what He wants.” In other words, it’s what you do because of who God is. Christianity isn’t only a philosophical truth to believe inwardly, but also an ethical lifestyle to live outwardly. It’s “the outward display of an inward faith.”

“Give me Jesus, but not religion” often stems from frustration with expectations of one’s lifestyle or the aforementioned “system” (i.e. proper worship). Seemingly, a relationship with Jesus and the benefits of His sacrifice are desired, but His expectations are not. These individuals claim to have faith, but are unwilling to demonstrate it (religion). James later asks, “What good is it...if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” (2:14). The implication is that a person lacking religion is actually lacking faith.

“...that is pure and undefiled...”

Granted, if there’s such a thing as pure and undefiled religion, it necessitates that the opposite can also be true. On one hand, folks that are averse to religion need to accept that it’s biblical. On the other hand, folks that claim to be religious, also need to ask whether what they’re practicing is actually impure and defiled. For example, religion is impure when... 1) A person does not bridle their tongue (Jas. 1:26). 2) Practiced outwardly, but having a heart far from God (Matt. 15:7-9). 3) One thinks more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Rom. 12:14). Religion isn’t only what one practices in response to what they think about God, but also what one thinks about themselves and others because of what they think about God. Jesus contrasted the

highly-religious-Pharisee (who arrogantly prayed while comparing himself to others) with the (considered to be irreligious) tax collector who said, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:9-14).

“...before God the Father...”

Some may be, but not all religion is defiled. We must be careful to not throw out the baby with the bath water. Since God’s word tells us what pure religion is, it means that it exists.

First, realize God is the observer of our religion. Pure religion goes before God. Pure religion isn’t man-made, for man’s purposes, or only for man’s involvement. Rather, it’s God-ordained and God-sought. It is either God-approved or God-rejected. Jesus tells us that God is seeking true worshipers (John 4:23).

Of extreme importance is that true religion isn’t about observation from man (Matt. 6:1,5,16), but God’s observation of man (John 4:23-24). It’s something He is connected to and something He takes pleasure in (Phil. 4:18-20; 2 Cor. 2:15). God observes our religion and sees it as a measure of our love for Him.

Second, realize God is the focus of our religion. Our religion is an outgrowth of that which (Who) we put our faith in. Because we believe God is who He says He is, we respond with Him as our entire focal point. Sometimes religion persists purely for the betterment of individuals or society. While often a side-effect, it should not be what motivates it. Rather, its sole motivation is to bring honor and glory to God, not self (1 Cor. 10:31) – whether in planned acts of worship, intentional acts of service, or by holy living.

Just as faith comes by hearing God’s words (Rom. 10:17), pure religion only seeks guidance and approval in the words of God – because He is what it’s all about. Just a few verses prior, James says, “...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls...be doers of the word, and not hearers only...” (1:21-22).

“...is this to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world...”

It’s unlikely that James is saying that all of religion is limited to these two things. Rather, when examining your religion, ask, “Am I concerned with the needs of widows and orphans, and with holiness?” Because these are things that God is concerned with: people with the greatest needs (seen in His plan to save sinners) and holiness (seen in His character). They sum up what God does and who God is. Each are expectations of selflessness - nothing is necessarily earned or gained by them. They require sacrifice and reveal an attitude that’s fully submitted to the Lord as King, instead

of self.

Visiting orphans and widows isn't simply saying, "hello." Thayer defines the term, "to look upon or after, inspect, examine." What's being described is legitimate concern for their whole being. And not only making sure they have money, but sacrificially serving to ensure needs are met physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In the minds of worldly, selfish people, widows and orphans have nothing to offer. But pure religion isn't adulterated by greed, power, or notoriety. It's shaped by a desire to be like God.

Christian, is your religion driven by the benefits it brings you; family tradition or nostalgia; a fear of losing relationships? Preacher, is your ministry driven by self-seeking pursuits – notoriety in the brotherhood, publication of books, invitations to speak, etc? These are symptoms of a religion that may be defiled by selfishness. Widows and orphans don't have these things to offer, but presence in their lives is a testament to pure and undefiled religion (and ministry). An undefiled mind transformed by the gospel is like Christ's – putting others (even widows and orphans) first (Phil. 2).

Maybe the greatest resistance to religious teaching happens at the call to leave sin. A call to holiness is often seen as an exercise in judgy-ness, lumping "holiness" into the "bad word" category. But it's not about being "holier-than-thou" or a "goody-two-shoes." Instead, staying unspotted from the world is evidence of a pure religion. Most importantly, holiness is concerned with emulating the character of God, not just the outward practices of God. We're called to be walking pictures of Him outwardly (Rom. 8:29), and at our core, inwardly. Religion that's purely concerned with externals will be seen through by the world – and by God.

A failure to be like God in holiness prevents pure and undefiled religion. A failure to be like God in holiness hinders the gospel's furtherance. And of greatest personal consequence, a failure to be like God in holiness removes our salvation in eternity.

CW

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verses 19-25, James instructs us regarding the proper attitude toward God's Word. Our attitude toward the Word of God is first to "hear" it (19-21) and second to "do it" (22-25). With regard to our hearing, James draws two distinct contrasts: swift in contrast to slow, and hearing (which results in working!) in contrast to speaking and anger.

We are to be swift to hear God's Word. The word translated swift is found only here in the New Testament and simply means "quick, fleet, speedy" (Thayer). As used by James, it has to do with our mindset toward the truth. We are not to be slow in hearing God's Word but slow in speaking and wrath when we hear it. The term slow is found in only two verses of the New Testament. Here and in Luke 24:25, where Jesus declares, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." This statement of Jesus is directed at two of His disciples who, because of their own expectations, were "slow to apprehend" the reality of His resurrection and the true nature of His Messiahship. When we approach the Word of God, we should set aside preconceived ideas and our own will and "with all readiness of mind" (Acts 17:11) be quick to hear (and do) the truths discovered therein.

Part of being swift to hear is being slow to speak and slow to wrath. In this second contrast, James highlights our reaction. Not only are we to have the heart to swiftly hear God's Word, but we are to refrain from speaking "back at it," and becoming angry because of it. The book of Acts provides numerous examples of these attitudes set in contrast. By the labor of the apostles,

the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

In contrast, the unbelieving Jews, "stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him (Stephen, RLS), and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses" (Acts 6:11b-13a).

In Antioch of Pisidia, when the unbelieving Jews witnessed the success of the gospel, they "were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). In contrast, the Gentiles who "swiftly" heard the Word of God, "were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord (through obedience, RLS): and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

James concludes his admonition by noting that "wrath," i.e., anger that is stirred up against the Word of God, does not "work righteousness." Peter noted that the working of righteousness has to do with believing in Christ (cf. Acts 10:35, 43), and Paul called the working of righteousness "living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Tit. 2:12). Such a life is only produced when we have the proper attitude toward the Word of God. Friend, will you swiftly and with all readiness of mind hear the Word?

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From the Director's desk



Steven Lloyd
Assoc. Director
SWSBS

The school is doing well. Our students, overall, are doing well. It is hard to believe we are at the close of our third quarter, entering the final quarter of the school year, and graduating students at the end of June.

The incoming first year class is shaping up well with twelve students already approved and raising support. Three women will be among them, and a brother from Mexico is making every effort to be here as well. Most of them located in Texas. We are looking forward to all the prospects of another productive class in 2025-2027. If you know anyone able to help support a student, let us know.

Dr. Doug Burleson from Freed-Hardeman University is scheduled to be with us on April 25, 2025. Dr. Burleson's academic interests focus on New Testament backgrounds as related to the manuscript tradition and use of the Old Testament. We look forward to having Dr. Burleson with us. Be sure to check our school Facebook page for further information concerning April 25.

We hosted our Arise Workshop February 27-March 2. It was well attended with over 400 people at some sessions. Speakers and their topics were presented well, and students from Southwest were kept busy with every sort of chore from watching children to taking out the trash, as well as serving food. The Workshop being so well attended transforms into a great reunion on top of the feast we enjoy of the word of God.

One final note, Ronnie Scherffius teaches church history along with Restoration history at the school. He endeared himself to the school, both faculty and students. Ronnie accepted a full-time teaching position at the Texas School of Preaching and will be moving his residence sometime in May of this year. We will miss him and pray for him and his wife, Athena, in their new venture.

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