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“THE WORD AND OUR WORDS”

James 1:19-27

● {Jas 2:14} **“What good is it...if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them?”**

{Life Application Bible} **“It is not enough to talk the Christian faith... we must live it.... The proof of the reality of our faith is a changed life...”** This is the core message of the Book of James.

Some have concluded from this that *words* are unimportant. They are mistaken.

Please turn with me to James 1:19-27. James addresses three distinct topics in these verses, but they all share a common theme: **the power and importance of words.**

■ Verses 22-25 {TNIV} are at the heart of our text: **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says....”**

📖 James is the oldest book in the New Testament, so **“the word”** he has in mind is the Old Testament as interpreted through the revelation of Christ. **“The word”** is the witness that Jesus is the Messiah who has fulfilled biblical prophecy, has perfected the Law of Moses, and has begun to establish his kingdom on earth.

Of course, the written **“word”** has grown to include the New Testament since James wrote. But now, as then, this **“word”** is {2 Ti 3:16} **“God-breathed,”** {Heb 4:12} **“living and active,”** and it {Is 55:11} **“will accomplish what [God]**

[desires] and achieve the purpose for which [he] sent it.”

● This is great news for us! As James reveals in 1:18, God **“chose to give us birth through the word of the truth.”** {Jas 1:21} **“Planted”** deep **“in”** our souls, the word has power to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil.

Apart from God’s word we are not {Ro 8:29} **“called...justified”** and **“glorified,”** we are not saved. Apart from God’s word we are not {Ro 8:29} **“conformed to the likeness of his Son,”** made righteous in thought, speech, and deed.

And so James speaks with great urgency: **“Do not merely listen to the word... do what it says.”** Anyone who doesn’t is like the man or woman who gazes into a mirror and then immediately forgets his or her appearance.

The Greek literally says that such a person forgets **“the face of his birth,”** the image bestowed at his or her creation. Applied spiritually to God’s people, it is our new identity in Christ. So those who hear the word but fail to do it are forgetting *who they are*: for though we are not saved *by* good works, we are definitely saved *for* good works. {Eph 2:10} **“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

Are we listening *and* doing? Are we looking **“intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and [continuing] in it – not forgetting what [we] have**

heard but doing it?” Will we “**be blessed in what [we] do?**” Is our faith alive?

When “**the word**” God is implanted and gives birth to life within us, it can be expressed in *our* words. But it isn’t always. {*Life Application Bible*} “**Possessing all the right answers,**” we often “**contradict the gospel with**” our own words – especially when we speak in anger.

■ Verses 19-21 {TNIV}:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because our anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Think back to the last time you got angry. What did you say to, or about, the person who triggered your indignation?

Were your words accurate, echoing the *truth* of God’s Word?

Were your words well-considered, displaying the *wisdom* of God’s Word?

Were your words unassuming, reflecting the *humility* of God’s Word?

Were your words merciful and kind, pointing toward the *grace* of God’s Word?

Were your words constructive, mirroring the *helpfulness* of God’s Word?

Were your words peaceable, expressing the *reconciling power* of God’s Word?

My words increasingly resemble his Word – *increasingly*, but not totally. I say fewer regrettable words than I used to – *fewer*, yet far too many. We “**should be quick to listen**” to God’s Word and, in conflict, to each other, “**slow to speak and slow to become angry, because our anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.**”

From this James draws an unexpected correlation: “**Therefore**” – as a result, for that reason – “**get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**”

● James clarifies the connection in 4:1-2: “**What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires**” (literally, “**your lusts**”) “**that battle within you? You want something**” (literally, “**You covet something**”) “**but don’t get it.**”

The hindrance of evil desire is a common flash point for anger, and it triggers a great deal of sinful speech. That is why we must cast off “**moral filth**” and “**evil**” like reeking work clothes if we are to take control of our words.

I know that I cannot do this by sheer willpower. I need God’s Word to do this good work within me. I suspect that you do, too.

Are we humbly accepting “**the word planted in**” us? Are we turning ourselves over to God’s Word

to {Ro 12:2} renew our minds, so we that may know and do his good, pleasing and perfect will?

■ Verses 26-27: **“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless”** (that is: vain, useless, incapable of achieving its purpose). **“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”**

How can we cut through the fog of near-sightedness and self-deception and determine whether our faith is real and alive? James hands us three surefire tests.

Two words of caution are in order before we charge ahead.

First, if you are tempted to wield these as weapons to judge others, don't do it! We are qualified to use these as tools for self-examination and nothing more. Only God has the authority to judge, and he will do so.

Second, if you are a perfectionist, take it easy on yourself. God is merciful! If you are quick to let yourself off the hook, take this seriously. God is holy!

⊗ Test # 1: do I control what I say?

Am I in command of the quality, quantity, and timing of my words? Do they honor God, edify my brothers and sisters, help my neighbors? Do they help to build the kingdom of God? Do they bring life?

⊗ Test # 2: do I help the needy and the vulnerable?

Orphans and widows were among the neediest people in the Ancient Near East. Without parents or husbands they were vulnerable to dire poverty, injustice,

slavery, and starvation. Am I doing what I can to guard the dignity of the vulnerable and help them to meet their physical and spiritual needs?

⊗ Test # 3: do I keep myself pure?

Do I devote my body to Christ, resisting all temptation to sexual immorality? Do I shun greed, deceit, pride, bitterness, the attempt to dominate and control others, and every act of injustice? Do I embrace the values of the Kingdom of God?

The point is not sinless perfection. That is beyond us. None of us will achieve it before the return of Christ.

The point is growth and consistency. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the power of God's Word we can mature in self-control, *αγαπε* (agape) love for our neighbors, and purity.

Oh, that we would pass these tests! Oh, that we our faith would be completely real and alive!