

V I T A I

BECOMING DOERS

the book of james

BE DOERS & NOT HEARERS ONLY

James 1:19-25

S I G N S

Be Doers Not Hearers Only

This passage written by James falls into the context of his encouragement and teachings regarding the experience of trials in life. The following verses are qualities that we need to pose and employ during times of trial.

James 1:19-25

19 My dear brothers, take note of this:

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,
20 for mans anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*

An Attentive Ear – Be quick to listen

Being attentive means to be concentrated, focused and observant; giving care or attention to detail. Believers should be eager to read, listen and grow in the word and will of God. We should do as it says in Psalm 119:11 “*Your law I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.*” Notice how *listen* came before *speak*...listening comes first. Notice also that it doesn't say ‘hear’ the word? It says ‘listen’; take it in and understand what it says. In Proverbs 2:2 and 22:17 we are told to

*“Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
and apply your heart to my knowledge & understanding”*

That's the first step to righteousness – knowing the truth that comes through the word of God.

A Controlled Tongue – Be slow to speak

Everyone knows the childhood saying:

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me!

That's the biggest load of rubbish I have ever heard. Everyone knows how damaging words can be when spoken too swiftly and not spoken in truth and love. There is immense destructiveness in an immoral and uncontrolled tongue. Notice the contrast between *Quick to Listen* and *Slow to Speak*. Ultimately what this passage is saying is:

“Think before you speak”

This implies that we should know and understand the facts and truth before we shoot-off with our mouth. That's where the listening comes into play. By listening to God's truth and developing understanding and insight we are practicing the art of listening before speaking. We are told in Proverbs 12:18 & 17:27 that “*A man of knowledge uses words with restraint...and the tongue of the wise brings healing.*” However it also tells us that “*Reckless words pierce like a sword...and a man that lacks understanding is ill-tempered.*”

A Controlled Spirit – Be slow to anger

So what does anger have to do with anything? In the context of the passage, James is describing the types of things that we do when we are going through trials...something as simple as stress from work, relationships, lack of sleep etc...these all ‘try’ us everyday! The first things to surface when you're stressed, tired or anxious are a bad temper and a quick mouth! Do you ever remember becoming angry toward someone and telling them what you thought before you got the story straight? Did you listen first...most likely not...or perhaps not attentively enough?

It's the same with God...when things aren't going our way or times are tough, we are all too quick to tell Him what we think, and often find ourselves angry at God for something...even if it only lasts a while. We are told in Proverbs 29:11 that “*A fool vents all of his anger, but a wise man brings himself under control.*” Lack of understanding leads to anger, and anger to a quick mouth...together they demonstrate a lack of self control. It is spelled out quite clearly in Proverbs 25:28 where it says:

“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.

Proverbs 14:29 and 19:11 tell us that understanding and discretion make us slow to anger...so how do we develop understanding and discretion? By being quick to listen and slow to speak!

It's a bit of a vicious circle once you're in it really. Although anger is often a root cause for slowness to listen and quickness to speak...it's the lack of knowledge, understanding, insight and discretion that usually leads us to become angry...why?...because we lack the truth. Ultimately we lack the truth because we are slow to listen.

Anger v Righteousness

Psalm 4:4-5

*'Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed and be still.
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.'*

So I guess we *are* allowed to be angry...but we are told not to sin in our anger. In light of this, anger can be good or bad, depending on the motive or purpose. Righteous anger hates all forms of injustice, immorality and ungodliness; this type of anger is selfless and is based on love for God and others...it focuses on sin and not individuals. Jesus displayed righteous anger when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple:

Mark 3:5

He (Jesus) looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.

However even righteous anger can turn to sin if left unresolved. We are warned in Ephesians 4:26, "... Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, do not give the devil a foothold"

Righteousness is the condition of being in *right* standing or relationship with God. Righteousness is not a character trait of a Christian; but rather the Christian bears fruit of his or her righteousness. If in our anger we sin then we are not walking in righteousness, sin and righteousness can't go together.

21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

What is Moral Filth?

'Morality' is the ability to discern good from evil and right from wrong. A 'Moral' is the principle or standard to which to behave or live. Filth is something dirty and disgusting. So what is Moral Filth then? The problem here is that the world's morals are completely different from God's morals...just like my morals might be different from another person. Ultimately God and the world live with different guidelines on what's good and what evil. So I guess from God's perspective 'Moral Filth' is the standard by which we live our life here on earth...we think we are living moral lives based on the worlds standards...God doesn't call that moral he calls that Filth!

What is Evil?

Evil is defined as - 'morally objectionable behavior'. This really is self explanatory...if your behavior is contradictory to God's morals, then that is what God calls evil.

Prevalence is used to describe just how widespread the filth and evil is...not just in the world but with our life.

James 1:27

*A pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this:
...to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

2 Corinthians 7:1

*Therefore...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,
perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

So how then do we get rid of our moral filth and evil?

Confess, ask for forgiveness and repent!

Confession and Forgiveness - 1 John 1:9

To confess mean to admit to, own up to or take responsibility for something...usually in the context of having done something wrong. God tells us that if we own up to our sins and ask Him to forgive us, then He will. So what is forgiveness then? Forgiveness is defined as – ‘the mental and/or spiritual process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger against another person for an offense or mistake; and ceasing to demand punishment or restitution.’ Wow – will I get all that if I just ask God to forgive me? Well don’t ask me ask Him... 1 John 1:9 will tell you. So confessing and receiving forgiveness is the easy bit...now you have to live a life of repentance.

Repentance – 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 and Matthew 3:2,8

Repentance originates from the genuine sorrow over ones sin. Sure, you can admit (confess) that you have sinned and even ask for forgiveness...but that doesn’t mean that you actually feel bad about your sin or even want to change. Repentance means turning from one’s sin...it’s not a ‘work’ in itself but the fruit (or evidence) of repentance should be evident in the way you live...so I guess you have to ‘work at it’. The question now is... If I ‘turn away’ from my sin where am I turning to? The answer...You’re doing a 180 straight to God...that’s called faith! That’s why repentance and faith go together...repentance means turning from sin and faith means turning to God. You can’t have both.

Humbly

Let me start by saying that the word, and the act, of ‘humility’ originates from God! That should help to clear a few things up along the way.

Webster’s dictionary definition:

- Humble adj.** 1. Having or showing awareness of one’s defects; not proud; not self-assertive
2. Low in condition or rank; lowly

God’s definition:

- Humble adj.** 1. Submissive to God and quick to listen and accept His direction and/or correction
2. The willingness to be obedient to the will of the Father, regardless of personal cost
3. Dead to yourself and alive to God

See what happens when you look to the world’s perspective on a Godly matter?! Any non-Christian would be quick to tell you that Jesus was not humble...he got angry, he opposed the leaders, he spoke up, he made know His authority etc. That doesn’t sound like humility according to Webster’s dictionary...but unfortunately the world typically implies humility to be weakness, compromise, accommodation, and peace at any cost. According to God’s definition, that is definitely not the case. Humility involves living your life in righteousness toward God. Our humility toward God allows us to know when to keep the peace and when not to...that’s called discernment.

The following verse sums it up nicely:

Philippians 2:8

*And after He (Jesus) had come to earth in human form,
He humbled Himself in an even greater way,
by carrying His obedience to the Father to the fullest extreme –
through His willingness to die on the cross.*

Accept the Word planted in you which can save you

I found some really nice examples to describe what God implies when He says ‘accept’ the Word.

*Hold as true - respond favorably to - receive willingly – take on as one’s own
– make use of – be designed to hold or take*

What is the 'word'?

To put it simply, the word is God himself.

The bible describes the word as many things...the word Is God, the word is God's spoken words/laws, the Word is Jesus, the word is Jesus' words, and the word is the bible or the written word. (John 1:1-2,14; John 5:39; Ephesians 1:13 etc). Either way they all originate from the same place...God. The 'word' is God; His character; His laws; His love; His justification/redemption/sanctification; His Son etc...The 'word' is our manual, which instructs us on how to receive life and then live a life of righteousness before God.

Planted means to be deeply rooted; firmly fixed; set in the soil ready for growth.

The phrase *planted in you* suggests the readers were believers who already possessed some truth. James is telling them to take accept and take hold of the truth that is literally able to save their souls.

How can this word save me?

James isn't talking here about 'Justification' (although we are also justified through His Word). Justification is a once-and-for-all pardon from the guilt and penalty of sin...offered through Christ's death. The sinner receives this gift of God's grace by faith alone.

Romans 5:1

*Therefore having **been** justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

James is speaking here about our 'Sanctification'...once we have accepted Christ through faith God sets us apart for His purpose. But it's not a one-way-street...we are expected to **set ourselves apart** for God's purpose and **set Him apart** as Lord.

Leviticus 11:44

*For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves,
And you shall be holy; for I am holy.*

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Only through the knowledge and understanding of His word are we able to live in righteousness and be saved from the filth of the flesh.

Ephesians 4:22-23

*...and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
and that you put on the new man which was created according to God,
in true righteousness and holiness.*

John 17:17

Sanctify them by your truth. Your Word is truth.

Ephesians 1:13

*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation...*

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

The 'word' is the foundation of your faith. Previously we are told to 'listen' to the word...but now we are told to take it a step further...do what it says. We are clearly warned in by James that to bring our faith to life and to be able to be able to enter the kingdom of heaven we need to be doing what God tells us...

James 2:26

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Matthew 7:21

*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of my Father in Heaven...*

James speaks here about the sin of omission (not doing what we are instructed to do)...which however, ultimately leads to the sin of commission (actively doing what we know to be wrong). So really if you think about it...by choosing not to do what we have been asked to do, then we are actively choosing to do the wrong thing.

James 4:17

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin.

James is warning them..."Don't be deceived!"

A **deception** is something that convinces us to believe information that is not true, or not *entirely* true.

We must be careful not to think that we are justified just because we read and know God's word...only those who follow the Law/Word are justified

Romans 2:13

...for not the hearers of the Law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

The NKJ uses the word "**observes**" as opposed to "looks" – with the meaning to look carefully, attentively and cautiously as opposed to taking a casual glance.

The **mirror** is used to describe the word of God. What we see when we read the word of God, is what we were designed to be and have now become through Christ. This implies that those who read, know, understand and accept the word, will have a clear picture of what we should look like (spiritually) as a child of God.

The problem comes when he know the word yet fail to do it. It's like sign language...you can see it done and even learn how to do it, but if you don't practice it or use it regularly you forget. Not only do you forget the 'right signs' but there is the potential to use the 'wrong signs' when you're not sure...which means you've said something that you weren't intending to say...perhaps something offensive!

We all know the saying..."Practice makes perfect"...well that's what God wants. We know that we will never reach perfection until the day we meet with Christ in heaven, but our job here on earth is to keep practicing so that one that day we are able to stand before Him blameless.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

God's law is **perfect** - without defect or blemish, precise, complete and flawless.

God's law gives **freedom** – We are told in John 8:34 that before Christ we were slaves to sin. Yet we are comforted with this verse in Romans 8:1-2

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,
who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
For the **law** of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus
has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

The word ‘**Continues**’ means – to maintain an unaltered condition; to do something repeatedly, showing no intention to stop. The phrase emphasizes the thought of habitual activity. The idea here is not to think that we have reached a point of ‘righteousness’ where we are now able to stop ‘doing’ ...but rather we are told to...

Philippians 3:14

...press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Blessed in what he does

Ok so the big question is “What does blessed mean – to God?”

Let’s look at a couple of verses:

Psalm 1

*Blessed is the man...
He shall be like a tree planted by the river of water,
That brings forth fruit in its season,
whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

Luke 6:20-22

*Blessed are those who...
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven
For they shall be comforted
For they shall inherit the earth
For they shall be filled
For they shall obtain mercy
For they shall see God
For they shall be called sons of God
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I think in light of these 2 verses, it would be fair to say that to be ‘blessed’ means that God’s favor rests on you. It’s not about earthly happiness or wealth...it’s about having the hand of God on your life and what you do through Him. Sure He may bless you with earthly things as well but that is not the blessings that we should be searching for. The only blessing that we should desire is Him.

REFLECTION

I guess apart from the obvious fact that we should heed the word of God and actually live what it says...I guess for me this passage reminds me who I am. It’s a hard hitter. I have trouble claiming who God says that I am. It’s not that I don’t believe it; it’s more that I’m not living it...or I lack the confidence and strength to live it. The words need to become life for me...I need to see myself in His word and claim it. I’m not who others think I am nor who I think I am...and I’m definitely not who Satan is trying to tell me that I am...I am who God say I am and I need to start living like it. Ouch that hurt!!