

VIII. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“Effectual Hearers and Doers of God’s Word – Part 1”
James 1:19-21
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Our focus in this study is in James 1:19-21 but I want to set the foundation and begin in verse 2. This is James the bond servant of Christ. James 1:2-18 says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, [10] and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

[12] Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

Two things cause me to want to do about five minutes of review here. One is that we are coming to a whole new section. The first section of James in James 1:2-18 give us Gospel Maxim number one. In James 1:19 we now move to Gospel wisdom for life Maxim number two but this section is covered by James 1:19-25 and I won’t be able to cover all of it in this study. So in this study we will cover half of this section, called Part 1. In this study we’ll look at the hearing part in James 1:19-21 and then in the next study we’ll look at the doing part in James 1:22-25. Secondly, you can’t look at this section without understanding that James 1:19-25 flow out of the context of the James 1:1-18.

So I’d like to take just a moment to get you up to speed on what we’ve already covered. Number one is this is one of five James mentioned in the Bible. This James is the half-brother of Jesus. Some people you know by just one name and this was the James that is like that. He was likely converted after Jesus’ resurrection. He became the pastor and leader at the church in Jerusalem, a mega church. This man was a rock star

preacher number one that ever existed. He will live and do his ministry for a number of years and this book is the first thing he writes. He writes the book of James about fifteen years into his ministry. It's actually the first book of the New Testament that is written. It is a book of wisdom, a pastoral book. He is writing to his congregation and beyond. That is why he keeps using the phrase 'beloved brothers.' It is a similar book to that of Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Proverbs.

It is the most quoted book of the New Testament because it has all of these wisdom statements. Some we will hear in this study. 'Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.' 'Receive the Word with meekness.' This is a highly quoted wisdom book in which he is not evangelistically speaking of Gospel foundations but he is speaking of the Gospel life to those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ and what the Gospel does. That is what he is writing about as a pastor, thus his reason for using 'beloved brothers' twenty one times in his book.

This book of James has a theme to it. The theme of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of 'wisdom from above'. In other words, everything that can happen to an unbeliever will happen to you except for God's condemning judgment. That will never happen to you because that all fell upon Christ but you'll get sick, die, lose your job, a business will close down, people will disappoint you and you'll have friends that experience this as well. Yet you will face all this with a Gospel new heart, new family, new life, new record and you also are getting a Gospel renewed mind, wisdom from above so that you know how to look at it, so the sin-cursed world and the sovereign hand of God becomes an occasion for God to mature you for persistent ministry and maturation. All of this is growing you by grace.

You profess faith in Christ, beloved brothers and that means you have a Gospel foundation with a new heart, new life, new record, new family and a new home. Now you have a Gospel motivation for the love of Christ has saved you and the love of Christ compels you. Now you need a renewed mind. You need Gospel wisdom to lead the Gospel life. That's why he says 'when' and not 'if' you encounter trials. What do you do when you encounter these trials? You count it all joy. That is counter intuitive to count trials as joy but when you have a renewed mind you know God is sovereign. God is taking a sin-cursed world and He is working my good and my growth in this and giving me a platform to do ministry so I can show the supremacy and sufficiency of God's grace.

So that leads us to Gospel wisdom Maxim number one which is the multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both "prove" and "improve" your Gospel life. Trials are multi-faceted. For instance, adversity is a trial of life. Prosperity is also a trial of life. Difficulties are a trial of life. Ease is also a trial of life. Poverty is a trial of life and so are riches. Lord, I need a spouse and that's a trial of life. Now wait until you get one. Lord, I don't have children. Wait till you get them. The trials of life are also inevitable for it says 'when you encounter various trials...' but God is sovereignly designing them by His grace to prove your faith as you endure by His grace and to improve your faith. Like any other test in life, the test shows you what you know and what you need yet to know and grow in wisdom.

It does one more thing. The trials of life become temptations when they uncover strongholds of idolatry in your heart. The tendency is when I falter in the trial is to say “God, it’s Your fault. You shouldn’t have tested me. It’s the test.” The test is not the problem, nor God the Tester. The problem is my over desires, my lust inside that gets married to that temptation which produces the child of sin which produces the grandchild of death. So James is telling you that the problem is you have uncovered a stronghold of idolatry in which this is more important than God Himself and God is graciously uncovering it for you so that you can kill it by His grace and keep growing in grace.

That brings us now to Gospel wisdom Maxim number two. Before I give it to you I want to give you the context in which it is developed in. It is developed for us in James 1:19-25 and in this study we’ll look at the hearing part in James 1:19-21 first. First he gives us the negative in James 1:16 in which he says ‘don’t be deceived my brothers with worldly wisdom.’ You need wisdom from above. So know this. James 1:19-21 says *[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Here is James giving us Gospel wisdom Maxim number two and we’ll get to it by looking at the text. The first thing is, who is James’ audience? He gives you three identifying marks of his audience. He is talking to people who have the Word implanted (James 1:21b). He is speaking to those who profess to be born again. If you are born again you are born again by the Holy Spirit and the Word of Truth. James 1:18a says *[18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...* Here is something that every single writer of Scripture emphasizes. When someone says to you “Are you a born again Christian?” your answer should be yes because there is no other kind. Born again Christian is not a subset of Christianity. If you’re not born again then you’re not a Christian. You can profess to be born again and not be a Christian but you can’t be a Christian without being born again. If you’re not born again you’re still dead in your sins.

That is why Jesus says you must be born again. You must be born of the Spirit. Then John says in his epistle those who are born of God overcome sin. Paul says if any man be in Christ he is a new creation (he is born again), the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Peter says for you have been born again by the imperishable seed, the living and abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). If you are a Christian then you have been born again and your two God ordained instruments were the Holy Spirit and the Word of Truth, with both of those working together.

In your first birth there was an egg and a sperm. When you were born again there was the Word of Truth and the Holy Spirit to bring the new life into existence. Jesus, John, Paul and Peter all said it and now James says it. You are born by the Word of Truth (James 1:18). That means if you’re born again then the Word of Truth is in your soul and has been implanted. The Holy Spirit is also in you. So here is what I know. You can profess to be born again and not be a Christian.

Here is a third thing. If you’re born again and you’re a Christian it will show up in your life to some degree. You are a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come. Now you need to grow. How do you grow? How did you come into existence? The Holy Spirit and the Word of Truth allowed you to come into existence.

How do you grow? You grow with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. So James is talking to those who profess to be born again.

The second identifying mark is those who are his beloved brothers. That means you are loved by God, loved by your pastor and you're loved by one another.

The third identifying mark who James is talking to is every person who is born again. Everything I am now about to say is absolutely crucial for every believer who has been born again. If you're going to grow you have to listen to what James is saying here, as a pastor insistent upon your development because he loves you for you are a beloved brother.

After identifying James' audience, what is his admonition? He says three things. I want you to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. This is wisdom literature. The book of James is the New Testament counterpart to Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Psalms and that means it will be written the way they wrote wisdom literature. In wisdom literature they loved to use parallelisms. They would make a statement, restate it and sometimes they'll state it three times. They will say this; do not answer a fool according to his folly. Answer a fool lest he be wise in his own estimation. There are parallelisms where you say one thing and seemingly something different in order to get to the balance position. Sometimes he'll say one thing and then the next time he'll repeat it, just changing the words a little to build on it. Sometimes they'll do three of them and really emphasize the third one and that's what is happening here.

Number one, here is what I want you to do. To get Godly wisdom you have to be quick to hear. The number one priority in your life is the hearing of the Word of God. Why? It is because you live by faith. How do you live by faith? Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Be quick to listen. Be a learner. Jesus is the greatest example of growing in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man. In Luke 2 where do you find Jesus? You find Jesus in the temple listening and asking questions.

Be quick to listen but you can't listen unless you're slow to speak. My daddy had all kinds of sayings and I keep finding them in the Bible. I thought they were just quotes from the Bible but they weren't. He told me one time "Son, if you're going to be effective in life you need to be a learner. The one time in life you're never learning a single thing and that's when you're talking. Whenever you're talking you quit learning." If you want to learn you have to quit talking. You have to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

What is the number one enemy of disciplined listening and disciplined speaking to stop speaking? It is the emotional outburst of man-centered anger. That is why James says to be slow to anger. He doesn't say don't be angry. Anger is not a sin. I'm deeply indebted to Dr. Jay Adams for the volumes of books he wrote on this subject that I had to go through in seminary. Anger is a God given emotion. That is why Paul says in Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry yet sin not." The Bible records three times when Jesus was angry. Anger is not a sin. Anger is a God designed emotion to do two things; to provide emotional energy to attack evil and defend the defenseless. Even people who are timid and fearful, when they see the defenseless being attacked, they all of a sudden want to step in, defend them and attack those who want to do evil.

So is there a place for anger in our life? Absolutely and the Bible would identify it as that righteous indignation. Here is the problem, for most of us we seldom have righteous indignation. We usually don't have a Godly anger against that which would

oppress the marginalized and the powerless but we usually have an anger that is self-directed and self-righteous. We use our anger to defend ourselves and to attack our perceived enemies. A lot of us do that as Christians, don't we? "I stand with the truth. If you're against the truth then you're against me." It's just a short trip to saying "I stand with the truth and if you're against the truth you're against me" to "if you're against me then you're against the truth." That's the anger of man. That is self-righteousness. That's arrogant. You and I can identify with the truth but the truth is not identified with us. We are fallible and that's why we need to be quick to listen. That's why we need to be learners. Much of our anger is to preserve ourselves and is all about us.

That's why James then gives a warning. The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God, James 1:20. There is a little help there. Before you are saved what is the bent of your life? It is to sin and fall short of the glory of God. When you are saved by grace, instead of attacking God's glory and assaulting God's glory, now you want to pursue God's glory and His righteousness.

The pathway to the life of righteousness is to honor Christ. He is not talking about a righteousness that gains you heaven. That is the righteousness of God in Christ that is attributed to you but when you're right with God through Jesus Christ you now have a new direction in life. You want to live for the Lord. You want to live a righteousness that will draw people to the Lord that will display the power of His grace and when that is at work in your life James is saying this; let me tell you what attacks a life that would give glory to God by the pursuit of righteousness by God's grace and for God's glory. It is the anger of man. That is the number one self-centered display of arrogance in our life that gets in the way of being quick to listen and slow to speak – the anger of man.

Having shown us that the anger of man is counterproductive here is a great evidence of the anger of man. It is thoughtless, explosive and with no proportion. Whenever the anger of man takes over we'll treat anything as if it is all the same level of importance and the reason why is because it's all about what I believe, not about what God teaches which we can walk through with proportionality and it will be explosive and thoughtless. That kind of anger is destructive. Get rid of the anger of man and then that frees you up to be slow to anger, slow to speak and quick to listen and learn. When I hear that admonition, where do I go from there?

Then James gives an application. James 1:21 says *[21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.* So first attack evil and put away all filthiness. As I am coming to hear God's Word, I am putting away the anger of man, slow to anger, no to defending myself, no to promoting myself, no to self-righteousness, yes to being slow to speak so I can be quick to listen, now attack all sin and filthiness in your life. Don't play with it. Don't joke about it. Attack it. Kill it. Sin kills. Either you kill it or sin will kill you. So start attacking it.

Second, attack all rampant wickedness. What does James mean by that? He means every kind of wickedness. Wickedness is rampant. A moment in front of the computer screen leads to hours in front of the computer screen looking at that which I ought not to be looking at because of buying into worldly wisdom and the idols of this world. The maneuvered expense account leads to thievery. The anger of Cain is like the

anger of man which led to murder. Wickedness never stops its invasion, penetration and permeation.

Some are thinking ‘the Bible is calling me to the Word of God to learn it so that I will know what is evil and what is pleasing to the Lord as I live for the Lord because I’ve been saved by grace but the same Bible is telling me to do away with filthiness in order to learn the Word of God.’ The reason it can do that is because you’re coming to the Word to go deeper, higher and wider with the implications of the Gospel but you already have the Word implanted in you. The very Word that convicted you of your sin to begin with is enabling you to come hear the Word, read the Word and attack the filthiness that you know is there. Wickedness is already at work within you. It’s already built within you. When you are attacking sin and rampant wickedness, now we get to where he is wanting to get you.

Thirdly he wants you to receive the Word of truth with meekness. Meekness means patient humility. Teachable and discerning humility is meekness. You have been brought to this point where you are receiving the Word because you have attacked rampant wickedness and all filthiness, said no to the anger of man and put it under the surrendered work of the Holy Spirit who is within you and now you’re slow to speak and quick to listen. So how are you listening? You are listening with meekness – patient prioritized persistent humility is where we end up.

Now let me give you a glimpse of the future. The inevitable end of all of this is that Word is able to save your soul from your sins. That is the promise. Now let’s finish this up.

We are at Gospel wisdom Maxim number two. We will finish this study in part two when we look at what it means to be a doer of the word but let me give you this maxim. Here it is. The Gospel wisdom essential for the Christian life comes from “above” (how) through persistent believing prayer and a prioritized receiving of God’s Word with preparation and purpose. If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask of the Lord, not with double-mindedness but with single-minded faith. The purpose we’ll deal with in the next study.

At the risk of enduring the anger of man, did you do any preparation before you came to this study? Don’t be quick to anger and don’t get mad at me. One might be thinking, ‘I don’t need to prepare for I’m one of the beloved brothers. I don’t need to prepare to be slow to speak, slow to anger or quick to listen. I don’t need to examine myself on my way to hearing the word or on Saturday night or dealing with the known sins in my life, asking God to give me legal forgiveness as well as experiential forgiveness and walk with Him and hate rampant wickedness in my life. I’m the exception. I don’t really need that.’

I’m not a faithful pastor if I don’t follow the lead of this pastor of the church of Jerusalem and try to say this to those of you whom I love. James is a very faithful pastor. He will not let his people off the hook. When they faltered in the trials of life their tendency was it’s the test or it’s God. James said no, don’t look out there because you’re not a victim. Look inside. The problem is inside of you, not outside of you. He loves them too much not to let them know that God’s grace is sufficient over the practice of sin as well as the penalty of sin. It is sufficient over the power of sin as well as the penalty of sin. So don’t look out there and blame God or the test.

Now what about my growth in the Word and in prayer? Look inside not out there. Are you a double-minded pray-er or a single-minded pray-er. Yes you need to be discerning to the Biblical preaching of the Word. What is the issue? Look inside and say have I prepared my heart. Whenever we talk about quiet times and preaching we always focus on technique. James has not said a single word about technique. He says let's go to the heart. Was your heart ready? Was your soul ready for your mind to hear the Word of God? Was your heart ready for your mind to hear the Word of God?

You have that great foundation. You have a new life, a new record and a new family. To get that renewed mind have you prioritized and prepared with purpose to get in the Word to read it and to lay hold of the Word in its preaching? James says he wants to give a glimpse of the future. In the past you've been born again. At present your dealing with sin. In the future God is going to save your souls. He wants us to see all of this but his instrument is the Word of God.

Let me illustrate it this way. I went to the doctor this past year and they said tell me about your mother, tell me about your daddy. They go through my mother and through my daddy and they can now say this is what is going to happen to you. Why? It is because my daddy gave something, my mother gave something and the sperm and egg came together and that was me. If you're a Christian then the Holy Spirit came with the Word of God. To quote Mr. Keller on this, the Word preached is deep calling to deep. When the Word is preached I've already got it planted in my soul. I long for it.

There was a time in my life when I didn't. I would go see my grandparents which meant I would have to go to their Methodist Church where they would preach the Gospel. I made sure I didn't have Sunday clothes with me. They would say let's go to church and I'd say I haven't got any clothes to wear to church. I have shorts. My granddaddy wasn't liberated enough to let me go in shorts. I figured that one out.

When I got saved I was scouring the papers to find good preachers that might be in Charlotte that week that I can go hear them. It wasn't a matter of convenience or whether it fit into my recreation schedule or my entertainment schedule but there was deep calling to deep. The Word had been implanted in my soul. Now I want to read it. That's why the Bereans were noble-minded. The ability in Christianity is the heart to receive the Word with eagerness and examining the Scriptures to see if these things are so. The Word of truth and the Holy Spirit are your daddy and mother. The Holy Spirit calls you to prayer, to the Spirit of truth and the Word of truth calling you to itself. It's already there. It's deep calling to deep. It's the DNA of being born again.

I want to walk right before God. It's not the anger of man that will get you there. It is quick to hear, slow to speak and receiving the Word, prioritized, prepared preparation to lay hold of the truth as it's being preached. You have to be discerning of what preaching you listen to. Notice that James doesn't command desire. He expects that you're born again and you have the desire. He doesn't give you technique. He says it's the heart that prepares the mind to be renewed.

Every time we come to the Table we always have the preaching of the Word for without the preaching of the Word this is meaningless ritual. The Word that is Christ-centered and Gospel-driven, if that's not there this ritual is meaningless. If Jesus is who He says He is there is nothing more important in your life than to come to Christ. Do you understand that? Don't leave without Christ! There is nothing more important for you. How do I know that? It's because the Bible tells me so and if the Bible is the Word of

truth then there is nothing more important than your hearing, reading and studying it, because you can't know your Savior or how to walk with your Savior, the foundation of your salvation and the growth of your salvation without the Word.

The Christian life is not intuition, it's Divine revelation. It doesn't come magically into your life. You go and hear it preached to the soul with preparation and prioritizing. There is nothing more important. What about my children? You can't be a Godly parent without being a Biblical parent. What about my marriage? You have to know what the Word of God says. Here is the Bible that is there before you.

I may empty the church with what I'm about to say but pick your preaching well. It needs to be Christ-centered and Gospel-driven but always prioritize it and be prepared. Pay close attention to what you listen to but like Mary always choose the one thing that is necessary and that is to hear the Word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. Prepare your heart, not only that it's a priority, but my heart was made ready.

We are going into a world that doesn't believe in absolute truth, at least they say they don't but they are hungry for it. Our biggest obstacle is those of us who believe in absolute truth being engulfed with absolutism. If you and I will examine ourselves with meekness, being learners of the Word, then notice we're affirming absolute truth but we're not absolutizing ourselves. What they see are humble people learning with meekness. True truth is what they see. I believe that is a magnet that the Holy Spirit will use to draw people. It's when they see not absolutists 'I'm the truth' but learners of the truth with meekness and humility that say 'this is my lifeline by the Holy Spirit that saves my soul, wash me with Your Word.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together and to come to this Table. Please affirm and move these truths upon our heart and soul that we might be effectual hearers to be actual doers that Christ would be seen in us for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.