

James III – Study Notes

Introduction

A major problem that affects every believer in either a mild or acute case is the hearing and doing. For some Christians, God's Word gets lodged between the head and the heart and fails to make it to the heart.

A.W.Tozer said these words. *So wide is the gulf that separate theory from practice in the church that an enquiring stranger chances upon both would scarcely dream that there was any relation between them. An intelligent observer of our human scene who heard the Sunday morning sermon and later watched the Sunday afternoon conduct of those that heard it would conclude that he has been examining two distinct and contrary religions.*

Today we are continuing in this lesson *that real faith produces genuine works*. In this final section of chapter 1, James focused on the believer's appropriate response to God's Word.

James 1:19-20 *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* James began by acknowledging that they already knew what he was about to say, even though they knew this, they needed to hear it again. They seemed to have forgotten.

James talked about preparing our heart to receive God's Word.

Firstly, James urged his readers to *be quick to listen*; to genuinely receive the words spoken. Jesus said his day in Matthew 13:14: *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.* Jesus then went on to teach about the parable of the sower: about the one who receives the Word with joy, but no root takes place and is only temporary and when difficulties arise they immediately fall away. Jesus's teaching formed the background of James's teaching here.

James included putting a damper on the tongue, *slow to speak*. That's the other side of listening well. When we keep our mouths shut it makes room for thinking, pondering, and meditating. This is necessary for listening and learning.

Finally James used the phrase *slow to become angry*. All three are closely related to receiving the planting of the Word. James sees them as links in a chain.

How does being slow to anger relate to receiving the Word? When the Word hits close to home, sometime we respond with defensiveness, indignation, or even anger. People don't like their sinfulness shown up by a perfect standard, the Word of God. But that's what happens when God's Word exposes our innermost thoughts and actions. Instead of allowing this type of response of anger *because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires*, James calls us to respond in a peaceful way. Anger rejects rebuke; peace accepts it. Anger dismisses correction; peace embraces it.

James 1:21 *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.* After preparing to receive the truth by opening a heart and listening, shutting the lips, and suppressing the anger to strike back, we are ready to properly receive the truth. In the middle of this verse is the Greek word *dechomai* for accept, which means to fully embrace and receive. It is the same word used of the Berean's who in Acts 17:11 *Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.* They received the word with great eagerness, examining the word daily. This is the eagerness that James has in mind. An angry response to God's Word does not achieve God's righteousness.

James III – Study Notes

James described the conditions needed: *get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you.* Humility means submitting to whatever the Word of God tells us, ready to put off the thoughts and deeds of the old lifestyle in favour of the attitudes and actions of the new.

James 1:22-25 says *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* ²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror* ²⁴ *and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.* ²⁵ *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.* First, the soil of our souls must be prepared (1:19-20), second the seed of truth must be planted (1:21), Third, the weeds of anger must be uprooted (1:19-21). The proper response to the Word is required; that is to be doers of the Word not just hearers. This is where real faith produces genuine works. Those that hear and do, demonstrate their authenticity. The Word must be firmly understood and lodged in our hearts. This is the key that James is trying to explain to us. Those that hear the Word without acting on it delude themselves.

James talked about two kinds of Christians.

The first Christian who is a man who glances in the mirror, sees what he looks like then shrugs, walks away, and does nothing about it. God's spiritual mirror shows you and I what kind of person we are. James pictures a man who glances at the Scriptures, looks at words on the page, and then closes it and goes his way, forgetting what God said about his condition.

The second kind of Christian is the doer of the Word. What characterises that person? They give careful attention to Scripture, called by James the perfect law, *perfect law that gives freedom.* They think deeply, obey willingly, respond positively, and abide by its principles. Instead of hearing and forgetting, they hear and do. This person will be blessed in all that they do.

James 1:26-27 *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.* ²⁷ *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.* The Greek word for religion doesn't refer to some ones personal convictions, but to a religious community.

James is therefore referring to Christianity as a distinct body of believers. It is important because, James said a person who does not control his tongue, but says one thing and does another, actually makes his or her religion (religious community) worthless.

When unbelievers witness the hypocrisy of a Christian, it too often makes the whole Christian faith, Christian religion, look bad, and not just the person who claims to be the Christian. People respond with *If that's what a Christian is being like then I don't want to know.*

Those who live consistently with their religion give attention to the needs of others. Visiting orphans and widows and keeping oneself un-stained by the world are clear examples of genuine faith that demonstrate the uniqueness and truthfulness of the Christian message.