

The Implanted Word
James 1:19-21
ABC 3/3/19

Open to Js 1:19-21. Here James presents a 3rd test of a true believer. The 1st was how we respond to trials (1:2-12). The 2nd was our response to temptation (1:13-18). & the 3rd is our response to the truth revealed in the Word of God (1:19-27). When the true disciple hears God's Word, there's a love for & a desire to obey it. One proof of salvation is a hunger for God's Word (Ps 42:1). In vs 19-27 James focuses on 2 truths relating to this. 1st, saving faith is marked by a proper reception of Scripture as the Word of God (19-21). 2nd, it's marked by a proper reaction to the Word, reflected in an obedient life, which we'll get to next time. The true Christian receives & submits to God's truth. It isn't that believers can sit back & passively understand, appreciate, & apply God's truth without determination & effort. Just as the Lord didn't save us apart from our initial trust in Him, neither does He bless our lives as believers & give us spiritual growth apart from our continuing trust in Him. & just as the Word was the power of our new birth, so is it the power of our new life. Unfortunately, many believe that salvation is based on a personal decision for Christ & that such a decision may or may not result in a changed life. In this thinking, a child may make a decision at summer camp *to invite Jesus into his heart*. He goes forward at the closing song after a meeting. He's given a Bible & told to read it. Maybe he's even baptized. He attends church every Sunday, because that's what his family does. But as he gets older, he finds church to be boring & irrelevant. He prefers having fun with his worldly friends to hanging out with Christians. Eventually, he stops going at all. He never reads his Bible. He has no desire to know Christ in a deeper way. & yet his parents will say, *He's saved, because he made a decision for Christ at church camp!* That may or may not be true. The important question in situations like this is this: *Is there any evidence of a changed heart & new life in Christ?* The Bible clearly teaches it's possible to claim to be a Christian & yet not be one (Mt 7:21-24). James teaches the same thing & will be relentless about this through the end of chpt 2. As we saw in vs 18, salvation is a matter of God giving new life through His **word of truth**. Just as a newborn baby gives clear evidence he's alive & well, so a new believer gives evidence of his new life in Christ. His desires change. He was a God-hater, alienated from God, &

hostile toward Him. Now he's a God-lover, reconciled to God, & receptive to the truths of God's Word. Jesus' parable of the sower (Mt 13:3-9, 18-23; Mk 4:3-20; Lk 8:4-15) shows that genuine faith in Christ isn't just a flash in the pan. Faith in Christ endures & produces fruit. In that parable, Jesus described the hard, unresponsive heart as the seed that fell by the roadside. The birds quickly ate it & it didn't take root at all. Next He described the seed that fell on the thin, rocky soil. This represents the shallow, impulsive heart. This person receives the word with joy, but as soon as trials or persecution hit, the person falls away. The 3rd place where the seed fell was on the thorny ground, representing the divided, worldly heart. The thorns eventually choke out the Word. The common thing among these is that none of them bear fruit. I understand Jesus to be saying that none of these were truly saved. The last type of soil is the receptive heart that hears the word, holds it fast, & bears fruit with perseverance (Lk 8:15). This is the only one of the 4 that represents the new heart that God promises to give (Ezek 36:26-27; Jer 31:31-34). The changes that come from new life in Christ grow out of the new heart that God implants by His power. But these changes aren't automatic or effortless. If they were, the NT wouldn't contain commands to spiritual growth that are throughout. If you've come to faith in Christ, it's crucial for you to cultivate a heart that's receptive to God's **word of truth**. 16-27 PRAY

James tells us how to have a receptive heart. He mentions God's Word in vss 18, 21, 22, 23, & 25 (**law**). In vs 18, he says God brings us forth by His **word of truth**. In 22-25, he emphasizes being doers of the word. In our text, 19-21, James talks about receiving the **word implanted** in our hearts. While his words about being **quick to hear, slow to speak, & slow to anger** obviously apply to our personal relationships, which he addresses in 4:1-2, the application in the context has to do with our response to God's Word. We should be **quick to hear** it, **slow to speak** out with our opinions on it, anticipating what James will say in 3:1, & **slow to anger** when it confronts our sins. Vs 21 adds that we must get rid of all the sludge of sin if we want to grow in our salvation. So James is saying here, *If God has given us new life through His Word, we must prepare our hearts to be receptive to it*. After all, the Word of God is our 1st resource in trials & temptations. It gives us wisdom &

knowledge so we can grow. Since God's Word is effective, we must receive it & let it to do its work in us. James' gives us 5 marks of the receptive heart.

1. Quick to Hear **This you know** in Greek appears to be a command, so it would be, *Know this*, or, *understand this*. But is he referring to what came before or what comes after? YES! He says, *Take all I've said about trials & desires & how we deal with them & pay attention to that & to what comes next*. James opens vs 19 by saying, *In light of your new life through the Word (1:18), here's something you need to know*. What follows is probably a familiar proverb from Jewish oral or written tradition.¹ It's interesting that James' opening words, to **be quick to hear**, are similar to Jesus' words after the parable of the sower. In Lk Jesus says, **Take care how you listen** (Lk 8:18a). In Mt He says, **He who has ears, let him hear** (13:9). James says the 1st mark of a heart that's receptive to God's Word is that it's quick to hear the Word. Since communication of the gospel in that day was verbal, listening was vital. Jesus told the Jews who disputed with Him, **He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God** (Jn 8:47). Clearly, these Jews heard the sound of the words that Jesus spoke, but didn't (& couldn't) understand them (cf Jn 8:43) because they weren't born of God. They lacked the ability to hear & understand spiritual truth. As Paul said, **a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; & he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised** (1 Cor 2:14). To be **quick to hear** God's Word implies an attitude of eagerness to take in the Word from every angle. As a believer, you should desire to read the Word, listen to preaching of the Word, meditate on the Word, & understand its teaching with a view to obedience. James's appeal is for believers to seize every opportunity to increase their exposure to Scripture. The eager desire for such learning is one mark of a true child of God. When he's blessed, he turns to the Word to find passages of thanksgiving & praise. When he's troubled, he searches for words of comfort, encouragement, & strength. In times of confusion, he searches for words of wisdom & guidance. When he's tempted, he searches out God's standards of purity & righteousness for power to resist. The Word is the source of deliverance from temptations & trials. It becomes the most welcome friend, not only

¹ Peter Davids, *New International Greek Testament Commentary on James*, p 91

because of what it delivers us from but also because of what it delivers us to – the glorious, intimate, & loving communion with our Lord. Paul David Tripp has said, *Your ears listen for what your heart craves.*² He's right. What does your heart crave? Is it to hear from God through His Word? It's possible to be regular in your Bible reading, but to achieve no more than to move the bookmark or check off a box. This is reading unrelated to an attentive Spirit. The Word is read but not heard. We must evaluate our hearts. Do we delight in God's Word? Do we long for it & pour over it as a young man longs for & pours over a love letter from his fiancé who's 14 hours away in another state? What's your attitude when you hear the Word preached?

The Welsh preacher Rowland Hill (1744-1833), as an old man, was visiting with a longtime friend who said, *It is now 65 years since I first heard you preach. I still remember your text & a part of your sermon.* Hill asked, *What part of the sermon do you remember?* The friend answered, *You said that some people, when they went to hear a sermon, were very squeamish about the delivery of the preacher. Then you said, 'Supposing you went to hear the will of one of your relatives read, & you were expecting a legacy from him. You would hardly think of criticizing the manner in which the lawyer read the will, but you would be all attention to hear whether anything was left to you, & if so, how much. & that is the way to hear the gospel.'*³

The true believer will be marked by a listening spirit which finds a way to be in Scripture regularly, not for the purpose of filling a certain time slot but to grow in the knowledge, understanding, & love of the truth which is to grow in the knowledge, understanding, & love of the Lord Himself. He'll be eager to attend Bible preaching & study so his heart & mind can again be exposed to God's truth. He'll be eager on the Lord's Day to fellowship with brothers & sisters in Christ & to worship Him. Do we hear from God regularly? When the Bible uses the word **hear**, it means more than how we often use the word **hear**. All of you in this room can hear what I'm saying, but not all of you are listening. In the sense James is talking about, many of us are not good listeners. In vs 22 he talks about those who are **merely hearers** or **hearers only** who are self-deceived. It's not necessarily because they're not paying attention or not understanding what's being spoken. It's because they aren't listening with the intent of responding appropriately. Some of you this very moment are doing that. Words are entering your ears, but you're not being the type of person vs 19 describes, eager to hear, listening to understand & to do something. Look at vs 22.

² Paul Davd Tripp, sermon titled "Anger is a Story" preached 2/10/2008

³ Adapted from *Spurgeon's Lectures to his Students*, condensed & edited by David Otis Fuller, p 374

A receptive heart opens the ears to God's Word of truth.

2. Slow to Speak. If you've opened your mouth only to change feet as much as I have, this advice rings true! I've never had to take back something I didn't say. It seems that **slow to speak** includes the idea of being careful not to be thinking one's own thoughts & ideas while someone else is expressing God's thoughts. We can't really hear God's Word when our minds are on our own thoughts. We need to keep silent inside as well as outside. Again, in the context, James' exhortation seems also to apply to the need to be **slow to speak** as a teacher of God's Word, which he develops in 3:1-12. Often, out of pride, we want to spout off to show how much we know. James, following the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, says, *Slow down! Hold your tongue!* As Prov 17:28 says, **Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.** Someone long ago pointed out that we have two ears that we cannot close & one mouth that we can, which ought to teach us something! TV interviewer, Larry King, observed, *I never learned anything while I was talking.*⁴ James isn't forbidding us from interacting with God's Word & asking questions to gain understanding. Rather, he's confronting the person who's never silent before the Lord. When God's Word confronts his ways, he's quick to argue with God or to find excuses of why this doesn't apply to him. But in the words that Eli taught Samuel, we all must learn to say, **Speak, Lord for Your servant is listening** (1 Sam 3:9). You won't hear from God if you're doing all the talking! A receptive heart controls the tongue & listens to God. Jesus warns us that our words matter. Every single word we speak has significance. **I tell you, He says, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak** (Mt 12:36). Not most of those careless words. Not some of those careless words. All of them. That's a terrifying thought for those of us who are prone to speak often, speak hastily, or speak harshly. It calls us to repent, then to guard our mouths & our hearts, for it's out of the abundance or overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. Just like vomit reveals the contents of our sickened stomachs, our words reveal the contents of our sinful hearts.⁵

⁴ Reader's Digest, 12/02, p 67

⁵ www.challies.com/articles/the-eternal-significance-of-a-single-little-word

Be still & know that I am God (Ps 46:10) or, to paraphrase, *be quiet & listen to Me!* The 3rd trait of a receptive heart is that it is...

3. Slow to Anger. Anger here doesn't refer to an explosive outburst of temper but to an inner, deep resentment that seethes & smolders, often unnoticed by others. It's an anger that only the Lord & the believer know about. Therefore, it's a special danger because it can be privately harbored. In the context, James seems to be speaking particularly about anger at a truth in the Word that displeases us, confronts our sin, or conflicts with a personal belief or standard of behavior. It refers to being hostile to scriptural truth when it doesn't correspond to our own convictions. How do you respond when the Bible steps on your toes? Maybe you're reading it or hearing it preached & it says something you don't like, because it confronts & convicts you about the way you think or live. Do you get angry & defensive, thinking, *What right does he have to say that? How dare he tell me how to live!* Kent Hughes says, *An angry spirit is never a listening, teachable spirit.*⁶ It's interesting that the only time that John Calvin mentions his own conversion, he says, *God by a sudden conversion subdued & brought my mind to a teachable frame...*⁷ A teachable heart has stopped fighting angrily against God. Rather, it submits to Him. Paul asked the Christians in Galatia, **have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?** (4:16). In the minds of some church members, the answer doubtless was, *Yes*. In reality, of course, Paul's telling them God's truth was the kindest & most helpful thing he could do for them. That's the kindest & most helpful thing anyone can do for someone else. James gives the reason that we should be slow to anger, **for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God** (20). If you want to grow in righteousness, stop fighting God's Word & submit to it. Personal anger, bitterness, & resentment can never serve the cause of Christ, because **the anger of man doesn't achieve the righteousness of God**. What's that mean? It doesn't accomplish what is right in God's eyes. That is especially true when the hostility is against the truth of God's Word, for that in reality is against God Himself.

⁶ James, p 66

⁷ Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, p xl

James says that as those who've been given new life from God, we must prepare our hearts to be receptive to God's Word. The receptive heart opens the ears, controls the tongue, & controls anger.

4. Put Aside the Sludge of Sin. 21

Remember, James is writing to **beloved brethren**, to Christians, & tells us to put away our moral filth & widespread wickedness. Clearly, Christians not only remain sinners while they remain in this world, but remain serious sinners! There's filth & wickedness in our lives we must put away, get rid of, & put to death. The Christian life requires a constant supply of living water which we have in our new birth, in the Word of God, & the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, but it also requires we do something with the raw sewage. We are, spiritually speaking, both environmentalists caring for the purity of the watershed & wastewater workers tending the sewer. We have both responsibilities & we live every day with one foot planted in the pure, clear stream, & the other in the city sewer. We're spiritual plumbers, if you will, concerned both with inflow & outflow. Both here & in 1 Pt 1:23-2:2 the new birth through the Word of God is followed by the command to get rid of evil behavior & to embrace the Word of God. **Putting aside** is a term used for taking off filthy clothes. It carries the idea of removing or stripping off the pre-Christian lifestyle. If we want to receive & benefit from God's Word, we must get rid of the sins it reveals to us. If the Word isn't active & alive to us, we must do a spiritual house-cleaning.

The story is told of an older Christian who attended prayer meeting faithfully & always confessed the same: *O Lord, since we last gathered together, the cobwebs have come between us & Thee. Clear away the cobwebs, that we may again see Thy face.* One day a brother called out, *O Lord God, kill the spider!* You know very well that you may sweep the webs away, but if you leave spiders you'll have webs again tomorrow morning.⁸

All filthiness & all that remains of wickedness expands from the sins of vs 19 to include all kinds of disobedience to God's Word. The word translated **all that remains** is literally, *abundance*, but it's clear that James doesn't mean you can keep some wickedness, as long as you get rid of any extra wickedness! Either it's a figure of speech that means the whole dirty mass of wickedness or it means to get rid of every trace of it.⁹ KJV has it as the **superfluity of naughtiness**. However it's

⁸ Spiros Zodhiates, *Faith, Love, & Hope*

⁹ Davids, p 94

phrased, it reminds us how repulsive sin is to God & how we should be repulsed by our sin as well. All sin is disgusting in God's eyes & Isaiah said all our righteous deeds are filthy in God's sight (64:6). Paul looked back on his own best righteousness in Phil 3 & acknowledged the best of his own efforts were to God filthy rubbish, trash, even manure. His only hope was to have a perfect righteousness from another & that's the essence of the gospel!

We all bring baggage from our old way of life & our evil desires into the Christian life. Usually, we're blind to much of it. We don't realize we're displeasing God by our thoughts, words, or actions. As we begin to read God's Word, it convicts us of areas we didn't even know were sin. & when we realize it we must turn them aside. Putting off sin involves a fight that can take many different forms. Like an army with many soldiers, sin persistently attacks us. Knock one sin down & another quickly arises to take its place. Or, to change the picture, we dig out the weeds of wickedness in one place only to find them growing in another. Once we think we've got them taken care of, they pop up again. We must be constantly working against the fertility of our old nature & our evil desires. As we do this, the receptive heart cleans out the sludge of sin & puts on the clean clothes of new life in Christ. If you don't do this, the sludge will prevent you from growing & maturing as a Christian. Before God's Word can produce His righteousness in us, we must renounce & put away the sin in our lives that stands between us & Him. As this is done, we can receive **the word of God, ... not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in us who believe** (1 Thes 2:13). When you see sin in your life, do you have the courage to be honest with yourself? Have you stopped making excuses & blaming others for your sins? Do you admit your life isn't what it ought to be? Do you want to get rid of the evil that's so prevalent in you? That desire should drive us to God's Word, where we find strength & guidance. Which leads us to the 5th trait...

5. Receive the Implanted Word. In humility receive the word implanted. The picture here is that of the parable of the sower, scattering the seed of the Word. Will your heart be good soil that receives the seed & bears fruit, or will it be a soil that's unproductive? Once the seed falls into the good soil, it still needs to be nurtured in order to bear fruit. The seed must be watered & weeds must be

pulled. It must be protected from the birds or from being trampled under foot. The word translated **humility** has the idea of strength in submission or strength under control. The idea is clearly that of selfless receptiveness, of putting self, as well as sins, aside. Among other things, **humility** includes the quality of teachableness, which obviously is of utmost importance in regard to hearing & understanding God's Word. The faithful Christian is to receive the Word implanted with a submissive, gentle, & teachable spirit, cleansed of pride, resentment, anger, & every form of moral corruption. The gospel that saved us can't be forgotten after conversion. God plants it within His people, making it a permanent, inseparable part of us, a guiding & commanding presence. Despite its already being within us, we must continually receive it, in the sense of allowing it to direct & control our lives. It was in this way that the noble-minded Jews of Berea **received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things** preached by Paul & Silas **were so** (Acts 17:11).

When James says that the word implanted **is able to save your souls**, he's viewing salvation as the entire process of the Christian life, culminating in our *ultimate deliverance from sin & death that takes place at the time of Christ's return in glory* (Rom 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Thes 5:9; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 9:28; 1 Pt 1:5, 9; 2:2; 4:18).¹⁰ **Save** is a radical word that means to be rescued or delivered. Picture a man in danger of his life, who fights against those who come to rescue him. That's the wrong way to get rescued! The right way is to follow their orders, assuming they know what they're doing & they want your best interests. God's aim, through His implanted Word, is to **save your soul**. The Word that has the power to save your soul also has the power to change your life if you'll continue to receive it. You received it when you were saved, but it's not to stop there. You must continually grow & produce fruit. You may be saved from your sins (past tense) but Scripture also speaks of salvation in the present tense as an ongoing reality & it also speaks of salvation in future tense (glorification) as a final reality. We're delivered in our conversion from the penalty of sin. In heaven we'll be delivered from the presence of sin. But in this life we need deliverance from the power of sin. The gospel breaks the power of cancelled sin & sets prisoners

¹⁰ Douglas Moo, *James*, p 88

free. We can only lay aside our defiling sins in the power of the cross of the One who had those sins laid on Him. The gospel isn't just for unsaved sinners, it's for saved sinners. We need the gospel daily! In vs 21, notice there must 1st be repentance from our sin before the Word can be received. They go hand-in-hand & there must be both. If you just try to be a hearer & doer of the Word but aren't dealing with your sin, it will suck the spiritual life out of you. & if you're only trying to deal with your sin & not diving into & doing what the Scriptures say by the power of the gospel, you're trying to do moral reformation without a true power source. James isn't talking about behavior modification. He's talking about gospel-powered, biblical transformation by the Spirit of God.

Every day should provide us with some evidence that we are saved, that God is at work within us, & that He is making us whole. We must think of God's Word as the implanted agent of the new birth (Js 1:18) & also as the agent in daily growth or sanctification. Prov 4:23 says, **Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.** Have you done a heart check lately? If your heart is apathetic to God's Word, James says, **Be quick to hear.** If you're prone to spout off arrogantly with how much you know, James says, **Be slow to speak.** If you're fighting some aspect of the Word that you don't like, James says, **Be slow to anger.** If you're tolerating the sludge of sin, James says, **Put aside all filthiness.** If you're resisting God's commands that are designed to rescue you from sin, James says, **In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.** Perhaps some of us having heard what James is saying, ought to be saying to ourselves, *I've been fooling myself. I call myself a Christian, but I'm not.* If that's your reaction to God's diagnosis through the words of James, there's only one thing for you to do & that's run to Jesus Christ & the cross because you can't fix yourself. The Christian life isn't an endless series of resolutions to do better. The Christian life isn't turning a new leaf. The Christian life is a recognition that we don't have within ourselves the energy, the power, or the ability to change ourselves. We must look somewhere else. & the only *somewhere else* to look for that is in Jesus & His life, death, & resurrection. It's when we renounce our own ability to try & change ourselves & we run to Him for grace to change us that we find salvation & strength to change. If you realize you've been fooling

yourself, that's where you need to go. If you profess faith but realize that you don't possess it, you need begin by going to Jesus Christ.

For others of you, it may just be dawning on you that your view of Christianity is out of whack & you need a new mindset. You may be one of those people practicing a segregated spirituality. You do some things that are spiritual, you read your Bible, you pray occasionally, you go to a Bible study & to church, but you realize the things you're doing there aren't permeating the rest of your life. You realize you need an integrated spirituality. If that's the case, you need to go to God & ask the Holy Spirit to renovate the whole of your life, to change your mindset & your outlook, to give you new priorities, to live the life of faith, & to worship God in all your life.

For still others of you, these words may be revealing to you deficiencies in your own character. You may recognize the anger that James is talking about. You may recognize the lack of appropriate speech, or listening, that James is talking about. For you, James' words ought to move you to repentance, to change, to growth, & again you'll need the help of the Holy Spirit to do so. Spiritual life isn't the work of a moment; it's the work of a lifetime. & James is calling us in this passage to grow in grace moment-by-moment. **This you know, my beloved brethren.** Now, how will you respond?