

The Book of James

Session 3: James 1:19–27

OPEN

Is there a commercial on TV, radio, or Internet that you really like? Why?

Have you actually bought the product which that commercial is selling? Why or why not?

What's the difference between liking an ad and acting on it?

READ

Read James 1:19–27.

Leader: *Read it aloud yourself, or ask someone you know who is a confident reader. Ask the others to listen carefully and/or follow along.*

WATCH

Show Session 3: *James 1:19–27* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

James tells us to be “quick to hear, slow to speak.” **Have you had situations where you did the opposite—slow to hear, quick to speak? What's the problem with that?**

What does James say about anger?

Is there such a thing as “righteous indignation”? Do you think that sometimes God wants us to get angry about certain things? Then what do you do with verse 20?

What “word” is he talking about in verse 21? How is it “implanted” in us? (Is this the same as the “word of truth” in verse 18, through which we were “brought forth”? What's the connection?)

GO DEEPER

Learn more about our connection with the “word” in the following set of Bible verses.

Psalms 119:11; Jeremiah 20:9; John 15:7; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 4:12. Also James 1:18, 21, 22.

In what ways is God’s Word “in” us?

What effect does it have on us?

What does that look like in our lives?

In verse 21, when James talks about getting rid of “filthiness and rampant wickedness,” we think we know what he means. There is plenty of filth in our world too. We generally think of lust and various sins associated with it. But look at the context. James has just been talking about *anger*, and he goes on to say that the alternative to filth is to “receive with meekness” the word. So maybe this “filth” also involves *pride*. A quick look at the list of sins in Galatians 5:19–21 (the “works of the flesh” in contrast to the “fruit of the Spirit”) reveal the same thing. That list includes sins of anger and pride as well as lust.

Remember that James was writing to an audience of mostly Jewish believers scattered around the world. They would have likely had a strong moral upbringing in the Jewish faith. They would already be rejecting the *lustful* filth of their Gentile neighbors, you would think. But maybe James is challenging them to get rid of sins of anger and pride as well. It’s always easy for us to rail against the kind of sin that other people commit. It’s harder to confront our own.

PEEK AT THE GREEK

If you want to dig even deeper, consider this. The Greek word for “filth” (*rhyparia*) is found only here in the New Testament, but a related word (*rhyparos*) occurs in James 2:2 and in the Greek translation of Zechariah 3:3–4. Those references involve filthy or shabby clothing. In Zechariah, it’s a strong picture of salvation—God cleansing the high priest. This leads some experts to suggest that James is following a baptismal liturgy—removal of “shabby” garments, then cleansing, then listening to the Word.

Moving on to James 1:22, how do we “deceive ourselves” by just listening to God’s Word?

What is that mirror thing all about (in James 1:23–24)?

In the video, Francis said,

What was the point of looking in the mirror? The whole point of looking in the mirror is because you want to see your reflection, and you know whatever you need to do, maybe I missed a spot shaving, or whatever it is. But if I’m not going to remember what I look like, there was no point whatsoever. In the same way, if you’re going to a Bible study and you’re not actually going to do something about it, if you’re going to sit in a church service and there’s no action, or doing, or deeds afterwards, James says, Why do you even do that? It’s worthless.

Does that make sense to you? Do you have another example?

Do you think it’s really “worthless” to hear God’s Word without doing it? Why or why not?

How does that affect their lives?

[illegible]

In verse 25, what does James call God's law?

In what way is the law "a law of liberty"? Wouldn't you think it does the opposite?

Verses 26–27 focus on "religion." How would you define "religion"?

Do you think of religion as a good thing or not? Do you think your neighbors think of religion as a good thing?

A lot of people these days consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." To them, religion seems narrow, restrictive, maybe even hateful toward people outside the religion.

For the last several decades, many Christians have emphasized that their faith is about "a relationship not a religion." That is, it's not about following rules or rituals, but a connection with God through Jesus.

The Greek word James uses here for "religion" is rather rare in the New Testament. The other two uses of the word refer to the strict practices of the Pharisees (Acts 26:5) and the cult-like worship of angels (Colossians 2:18). Apart from James (possibly), the New Testament doesn't tell people to be more "religious."

With that in mind, do you think James is using the term "religion" in a positive way? Why or why not?

In verses 26–27, how does James define "religion"?

There are three specific actions he includes in his definition. **What are they?**

Why do you think he mentions these three? Aren't there other good deeds he could name?

GO DEEPER

Learn more about the components of religion in the following Bible verses.

Psalms 24:3–5; Isaiah 1:17; Philippians 2:14–15

How are these elements defined and described?

What is the view of “purity” reflected in these passages?

LAST WORD

James is writing to religious people. They have probably grown up in the Jewish faith. They know God’s law. But James keeps pushing them to take the next step. Don’t just hear it—do it! Don’t just reject the immorality of the culture around you, but also be careful about your own anger and pride. And if you think you’re religious, great! But what do you mean by that? Saying no to worldly temptation is a great start—God loves that—but He also loves it when we care for the neediest people in the community. And beyond that, are you careful about what you say?

Maybe you consider yourself religious, too. Maybe you have been a Christian for some time now. You have this faith thing figured out. But James keeps pushing us to move on. Do we listen more than we speak? Do we keep our anger in check? Are we careful about what we say? Do we put into practice what we hear in God’s Word? Do we let God’s implanted Word grow within us?

There are probably some parts of the Christian religion that you do pretty well. But it needs to be more than just a set of rules and rituals. It is God’s powerful Word at work within us.

So what is the next step for you? What issue is James calling you to confront?

LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Memorization: Learn James 1:22. Perhaps you could write it out on a card, which you put (appropriately) on your mirror.

Conversation: Do you need to develop the ability to be “quick to hear, slow to speak”? Is there a particular person in your life with whom you should do more listening? Work on this. You might even think of some questions to ask in your next conversation. Focus on them, not on your own responses.

Journaling: If you have a Bible study journal, add this component. If not, try journaling this week. Take the next six pages and put four headings on each page. Read. Think. Pray. Do! Then select Scriptures to read each day. As you do, record your thoughts on the text, write out key words of a prayer, and then—because of James—figure out something God would like you to do in response to that text. Oh, yeah—and then do it.

Prayer: Pray specifically about two things this week. (1) Your anger. (Even if you're not hot-tempered, do you “stuff” your anger and let it turn into bitterness?) (2) Soul pollution. Ask God to show you ways you might be getting “polluted” by the world.

“Widows and Orphans:” In many parts of Scripture—and here in James—we are urged to care for the neediest members of society. In your area, who are these people, and how can you help? It's possible they are, literally, widows and orphans, having suffered the loss of a family member. But also consider the homeless, the hospitalized, retirees, special-needs children and adults, the unemployed, immigrants, prisoners, etc. See if your church has a ministry you could support and become involved with, but also consider parachurch ministries and other charities.