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James 1:19-27 – Receive the Word Implanted in You

I. Introduction:

- A. Is it possible for us to discern whether or not a person is a Christian?
- B. What is the test or are the tests that we can use to grade ourselves and one another?
- C. Is there a danger in judging one another? Should we judge one another?
 1. In I Corinthians 5, Paul tells us to judge one another and not the world.
 2. What he means is that we are to discern in others who claim to be believers whether or not they are walking in the truth.
 3. We are to judge no one in the sense that we stand above others, seeing ourselves as more righteous.
 4. In Galatians 6, Paul tells us to be cautious to examine ourselves first, to recognize that we are sinners, before turning to rebuke a brother or sister.
 5. So, we are to judge one another, to test one another in order to spur one another on. In fact, this is exactly what James is doing. He is calling them to receive the gospel which must result in obedience.

- II. **Organization:** In our passage today, James introduces the subject of true Christianity by forcing us to face the issue of angry speech, then he explains true Christianity, and he concludes this passage by explaining two other ways to recognize true Christianity. So, we will see an introduction, an explanation, and a specific test.

III. Introducing the issue: Beware of angry speech. (James 1.19-20)

James 1:19-20 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 that God requires.

- A. James begins this section by introducing the issue that has led him to write this passage.
 1. Evidently, the churches to which he is writing are doing a poor job with their speech because they are angry with one another.
 2. We know that this introduces the issue, because v.21 begins, “Therefore...” So, whatever he says here is the reason he makes the exhortation he does in vs. 21 and following.
- B. First, note that he addresses them as brothers. He is writing to Christians, but they are struggling here. James writes this passage as a warning, hoping that they will respond with repentance and obedience. If we miss the context of this passage, we might apply this strict warning in an inappropriate way.
- C. James encourages his readers in a Proverbial way. Notice the similarities between his statements and Proverbs 17.27-28:

²⁷ Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
²⁸ Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.
- D. What do you say when you are angered by what someone says or does? Does your anger result in righteous behavior that God requires?

1. Anger is what we feel when someone interferes with or gets in the way of something we want.
 - a. comfort → interruption, responsibility, stealing, delaying → outburst of anger seeking to grab hold of what we want, demanding justice in our time
 - b. respect → insults, slander, lies, disrespect, shaming → outburst of anger seeking to grab hold of respect by insulting and demeaning
 - c. love → rejection, hurt, apathy → retaliation, outburst of anger, acting as if you are better
 - d. Our anger results in seeking to destroy the person, people, or thing that stands in the way of our happiness
 2. Our anger usually results in destructive ungodly behavior.
 3. *Note: The opposite problem of anger is fear. Some shrink away whenever what they want is threatened. Fear leads us to not confront sin in our lives or the lives of others. This is not what James is addressing here, but it is the other response to injustice.*
- E. God requires us to love one another. This means, when we are angered because of a wrong done, it should drive us to seek reconciliation.
1. The passion that comes with anger should drive us to fight our own sin.
 2. The passion that comes with anger should drive us to seek to be reconciled to the one who has harmed us or committed an injustice.
- F. Jesus got angry with the temple moneychangers.
1. His anger was the result of the passion he had for God's glory to be recognized and enjoyed.
 2. He was angry because instead of seeking to serve God in worship, many had turned the temple into an opportunity to extort money from others.
 3. He was angry because of the sinfulness of his people.
 4. So, his anger drove him to destroy the sin in our lives by overturning their idols and dying on the cross to pay for their sin so that they might be reconciled to God despite their sin.
- G. **Applications:**
1. When we remember Jesus' righteous anger, we are quick to look at ourselves to see our sin. We are quick to hear the critique or concerns of others. We are not quick to defend ourselves.
 - a. Defensiveness: If we find ourselves very defensive, always denying sin on our part, always claiming to be misunderstood, it is likely that we are finding our righteousness in our actions, and thus we are unable to see our shortcomings because the consequences of acknowledging the shortcoming would imply a lack of salvation or acceptance before God.
 - b. Defensiveness: If we find ourselves not open to critique in what we believe, it is likely that we find our righteousness in our adherence to what we believe or in having the right doctrinal convictions instead of God's grace in Jesus Christ.
 2. When we remember Jesus' righteous anger, we are slow to attack others. Instead of attacking others with harsh words, we think about how to speak in a way that will edify others. We are slow so that we may think how to lovingly speak the truth.

- a. Insults: If we find ourselves quickly attacking others in response to their words, then we are seeking to boost ourselves above them because we are finding our righteousness in ourselves rather than in Christ.
- b. Brutal Truths: If we find ourselves speaking the truth to others in a brutal way that devastates them rather than encourages repentance and change, then we are seeking revenge rather than seeking to forgive. Forgiveness only comes when we don't think ourselves better than others.

IV. Explaining True Christianity: Receiving the Gospel means believing and obeying the Gospel. (James 1.21-25)

James 1:21-25 ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

- A. After introducing the specific issue at hand, James begins to make a deeper theological point that serves as the reason why he has called them to be slow to speak, quick to hear, and slow to anger.
- B. Verses 21-22 are the key verses in this passage. They are at the very heart of the message of James as well.
 1. James first gives them a general command not to sin by telling his reader to 'put away' or to 'take off' sin. The imagery is one of clothing, employed often in the New Testament. We are to take off the old life and live differently.
 2. Notice that James suggests that sin is filthy. This idea stems from the Old Testament where sin produced pollution and impurity that had to be cleansed in order for a sinner to be in the presence of God.
 3. He also describes sin as rampant wickedness. The idea here is that our sin is deep and abundant. It is not easily defeated. It is rampant, so even when we fight one sin, there is another we must put aside.
 4. The main exhortation in these verses though is 'receive with meekness the implanted word.' Some translations might say with humility rather than meekness. I think that English word better fits.
 - a. What is the implanted word?
 - i. The implanted word can apparently 'save your souls', verse 21.
 - ii. The implanted word is the same as 'the word of truth' in verse 18, that God, by his own will, used to bring us forth so that we might be the first fruits of his creatures.
 - iii. The implanted word can only be the gospel.
 - b. So, is James speaking to non-Christians, telling them to be converted?
 - i. No, because he has already said that his readers have been brought forth to be the first fruits of his creatures.
 - ii. No, because the word is already implanted. This is an allusion to Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 where God promises to make a new covenant with Israel in which he will give them new hearts with the law written on them.
 - iii. Thus, James is calling the believers to remember the great blessing they have received in the new birth. It is a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

- iv. Notice also that the word is ‘**implanted.**’ This means that the readers were passive. The word was implanted by God causing the new birth, but not he is calling them to receive what the word says so that it transforms them. This fits with what follows.
5. How were they to receive the implanted word with humility?
 - a. Verse 22 tells us the answer to this question.
 - b. It begins with ‘but’ making a contrast. But the contrast is not obvious until we see the second clause which follows rather than precedes it.
 - c. James’ readers are to receive the implanted word, which means they are to listen and obey the word.
 - d. James is saying that we can be easily deceived. We can think we have been born again, that God has implanted the word in us because we intellectually agree with the gospel. But, if we do not received the implanted word by doing what the word says, then our faith is not true saving faith and we haven’t been born again at all.
 - e. This passage is a perfect example of what many theologians have said: “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone.”
 - f. If we humbly listen to God’s word which is about the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we will receive its instruction and do what it says.
 - g. If we say we believe the gospel but we are totally unchanged by it such that we consistently ignore what it teaches in all areas of our lives, then we are deceived, thinking ourselves Christians when we are not.
- C. James illustrates this truth and then re-words his point to drive it home in verses 23-25. The illustration is focused on the results of our looking, not the what we are looking at or the how we are looking.
1. First, James explains that to look in a mirror and then walk away forgetting what you look like is pointless. The result of the looking was the same as before looking. The looking produced no knowledge or life change. There is no blessing or positive result of the looking if you forget what you looked at.
 2. But, second, the person who looks at God’s word and remembers it so as to do it will have future blessing.
 3. Notice that the Law is called perfect here. Some translations say, ‘**the perfect law that gives freedom,**’ rather than ‘**the perfect law, the law of liberty.**’ James is not here saying that Christians are under the Law. The language very clearly suggests that James sees the Law as fulfilled in Christ. Jews often referred to the Law as perfect, but by adding to this word the idea of freedom and liberty, it seems James has in mind here a completed Law that has been transformed by Christ’s work on the cross.
 4. Thus, we see that James sees a strong connection between, the word, the gospel, and the Law. The Word and the Law have at their heart, the gospel. To listen to and obey the gospel is to do all that the Word and Law say as Christians.
 5. To do so brings freedom and blessing.
 - a. If God’s Word is burdensome to you, and you feel that it is not a Law of liberty, freeing you from destructive, sinful, filthy living, then it is possible that you have not come to see the ugliness of your sin and have not truly repented of it.
 - b. If God’s Word is burdensome to you because you cannot obey it no matter how hard you try, it is possible that you have not understood properly the main

message of God's word, the gospel, and thus you are try by mere force of will to obey rather than being transformed by your new status in Christ.

D. Implications and Applications:

1. First, the main implication here is that the test of a true Christian is their reception of God's word seen in their obedience.
 - a. This means that just because you or someone you know and love walked down the aisle, prayed the prayer, had a radical behavior turnaround, etc., that doesn't mean you or that person is saved.
 - b. This means that in one sense, the verdict is still out on all of us. If we do not continue in repentance and obedience, we have not truly been born again.
 - c. The implication of this is that we must seek to be clear about the gospel always. Too many people have been offered false assurance of salvation because they prayed a prayer. Too many people have been told all they have to do is accept a gift, when in fact, Christ calls us to follow him, radically throwing off our former life. Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow him. True faith, the faith that saves, results in radical obedience.
2. Second, we must recognize the sovereignty of God in the new birth. James tells us that the gospel is implanted. It is an act of God, 'of his own will' (vs.18), to bring us about as a new creation.
 - a. While James affirms that God causes the new birth, he does not suggest that we just sit around passively. The word implanted must result in obedience to the word.
 - b. So again, faith that is simply a one time commitment, intellectual agreement, or emotional appeal, will not save a person.
 - c. It is those who listen to the gospel, believe it, and then do what it says that will be blessed at the final judgment.

V. The Test: True Christianity results in self-controlled speech, a care for the helpless, and purity from worldliness. (James 1.26-27)

James 1:26-27 ²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

- A. James ends this passage by giving three specific tests to see if his readers are obeying the word.
 1. Controlled speech
 2. Care for the helpless
 3. Purity from worldliness
- B. Controlled Speech: First, James gives a negative example, saying that unbridled speech reveals a worthless religion. (vs. 26)
 1. James returns to the issue that led him to discuss this whole topic in the first place: speech.
 2. Apparently, the churches had been failing to love one another by speaking harshly with one another and having conflicts where no one listened to anyone else, resulting in more sin against one another.
 3. James says that those who have received the gospel and thus do what it says are careful to guard their speech.
 4. Again, he mentions that those who do not control their speech are deceived.

5. What does it mean to have a bridled tongue?
 - a. This is not James' way of saying, "Christians don't cuss." Never in all of Scripture are we given a list of words that we are not allowed to say. Scripture is always concerned with the heart and effect of words, not just speaking a certain word. Words must edify.
 - b. More likely, James has in mind angry insulting, slanderous, or gossip speech. This is clear later in the letter where James reveals that he knows they are cursing one another, fighting, and even murdering one another with their speech. He challenges them to see that it is because of jealousy and hatred that they treat one another this way.
 - c. Having a bridled tongue then means, at the very least, using our words to build others up rather than seeking their destruction, especially in conflict.
 - d. Now, there is a place for harsh words. We see this in the way that Paul and others speak about the unrepentant and false teachers of the day. But, we should not resort to this sort of speech quickly, but be slow to speak. Eventually, we must call a spade a spade, but we must be open to discussion, reason, and dialogue first.
- C. Care for the helpless: Second, James explains that true religion involves caring for widows and orphans. (vs. 27a)
 1. Orphans and widows are two groups of people that were always mentioned throughout the Old Testament Law as those who were helpless. These people fell outside of the social institutions and were most vulnerable to oppression and neglect.
 2. Thus, James explains that Christians must be for the helpless, the oppressed, the vulnerable.
 3. The reason for this is that Jesus himself is for the oppressed (those abused and attacked by the devil), the helpless (those enslaved to sin), and the vulnerable (those who are weak and ignorant of the truth). Jesus himself became weak by becoming a man and submitting himself to death on a cross so that he might triumph powerfully over sin, death, and the devil who ruled this world cruelly.
 4. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is the reverse of the kingdoms of this world. While kings here seek power through oppression, Jesus sought salvation through death.
 5. Furthermore, God our Father has adopted us as his children, giving us the full rights as heirs because of Christ. We share in the inheritance of Jesus Christ through faith in him. We reconciled to God and join his family as brothers and sisters, even though we were orphans without a good home.
 6. And finally, even though we have married ourselves to many husbands through our idolatry, as an adulteress, God has wed us to his Son, Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for his bride as the kinsman redeemer of his people.
 7. Thus, Christians must be about helping those who cannot help themselves. We must ask ourselves who the poor are in this world so that we may provide for them.
- D. Purity from worldliness: Finally, James' second positive statement makes it clear that those who are walking by faith in the gospel are not living according to the patterns of this world. (v.27b)
 1. James makes it clear here that true Christianity is not simply action. It is not simply speaking properly and performing social action. True Christianity must involve spiritual faithfulness to God.

2. Being unstained from the world means that we are not to reflect the virtues, values, and beliefs of the world. This does not mean we don't believe anything non-Christians say, it means that we think, value, and reflect Christ's kingdom rather than the kingdoms of this world.
 - a. For instance, in the kingdom of America, people value social action. So, in one sense, we are going to be just like the world in our concern for the helpless.
 - b. But, in another sense, our concern for the poor will be different in that we will see poverty and brokenness as deeper than environment. We will see poverty as both a physical and spiritual issue.
 - *Note: There are at least three causes of poverty, and usually more than one is at work in any one situation: the sin of the person, the sins of other people, the brokenness of the world in general as the result of sin.*
 - c. However, in the kingdom of America, personal freedom is of ultimate value, such that the helpless in this country are the unborn children of women who, along with many men, refuse to take responsibility for their actions in the name of personal freedom and prosperity. So, we will conflict with the kingdom of America in this respect. This is what it means to be unstained from the world.
 4. In every kingdom of this world, Christians will be praised for some of what they believe, value, and do, and they will be hated for some of what they believe, value, and do.
 5. Christians are thus always countercultural while at the same time working alongside of and inside of culture. Just like Jesus who lived in the world but was not of the world in order that he might save the world, we are to be in it, but not of it, on a mission.
 6. We do this as those who have believed in Jesus, the only truly pure man who is from heaven. His purity is credited to us when we believe in his name.
- E. Implications and Applications:
1. We must examine our speech to see if we generally edify others or if we are caught up in constantly tearing others down.
 2. We must be people who adopt children who need homes.
 - a. Too many Christians are caught up in the worldly concern of going to extreme measures to have children biologically when they are having trouble. There are some things that are wise for couples to try when they are having trouble getting pregnant.
 - b. But, Christians must ask themselves, in light of this command to visit orphans in their distress, how much money can we justify spending on fertilization procedures and surgeries when that money could be used to take in those who already need a home?
 3. We must be people who care for and help single mothers.
 - a. This means that we have to actually know single mothers rather than shunning them.
 - b. This means that we have to be involved with poor people. Somehow, we have to find ways to have ongoing interaction with those in need.
 - c. Thus also means that those of us with big houses need to think about how they might be able to take in and help those in desperate situations.

4. We must be people who fight to protect and who dedicate themselves to the service of those who are helpless in this world.
 - a. This includes the unborn, the war torn, and hungry.
 - b. This means we must engage in politics and think about the political implications of our lifestyles. (We can only do so much in this respect.)
 - c. This means that we must be willing to give up comfort in order to help others.
5. We must constantly be people and be a church that demonstrates the kingdom of Christ.

VI. **Basic Message:** We must test ourselves to see if we have truly believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ by examining our works to see if we are ever growing in repentance and obedience.