



## INTRODUCTION

Hosting company in your home is both enjoyable and exhausting. There is much anticipation over the arrival of the guests, but it is often accompanied with some anxiety over getting the house prepared for the guests. With toys to be put away, dishes to be washed, beds to make, carpets to be swept, trash to be emptied, pictures to be straightened, furniture to be dusted, silver to be polished, and food to be prepared the hosts tirelessly work. Yet what joy there is in having a house full of friends and family to eat with, laugh with, and fellowship together.

In this first chapter, James has taught us how to respond to trials and temptations, now he wants us to understand how to receive and respond to truth – the truth of God’s Word. He wants us to hospitably host God’s Word in our heart. Verse 21 is key to this passage. For nestled in the center of the verse is a simple command that ties the whole section together – “receive” (*dechomai*). This word is more than a passive “accept”. It often includes the idea of fully embracing, making the thing part of oneself. The word is used of people “receiving” Jesus hospitably (Jn. 4:45). In Acts 17, the Bereans “received the word with all readiness of mind”. They anticipated and were eager to hear God’s Word. This is what James has in mind, that we would welcome God’s Word into our hearts with the same anticipation and eagerness that we welcome family and friends into our home.

Transition: Welcoming the Word into your heart involves work, just as having company into your home does. James gives us a three step process to being good hosts in welcoming the Word.

### 1. The Preparation for Welcoming the Word (1:19-21)

Listen up!, James demands (“wherefore”). He doesn’t want us to miss what he is about to say. He is about to give some family rules of conduct (“my beloved brethren”). These are details for preparing to welcome the Word.

#### A. We must ready our heart (vv.19-20)

“Quick to hear” – this command means more than merely listening intently, rather it is a beautiful way of capturing the idea of active listening which includes a readiness to obey what we hear. It is actively listening with the intent to immediately obey. “Listening is the art of closing one’s mouth and opening one’s ears and heart” – Kistemaker. Remember, God has given you two ears but only one mouth.

“Slow to speak” – does not refer to slowness in speaking but is a call for restraint upon hasty and ill-considered reactions to what is heard. This is a caution against argumentation with the Scripture. There should be unhesitating obedience to the Word, not protracted discussion to circumvent it. It is also a warning against promoting one’s own ideas. So it also means speaking with humility and patience, not with hasty words or nonstop gabbing. To prepare our hearts to welcome the Word, we must put a damper on the tongue. Constant talking keeps a person from being able to hear. A continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says and by the same token will not hear when God speaks to him. Keeping our mouths shut makes room for thinking, pondering, and meditating. Some think wisdom is always having something to say; when in truth it involves listening carefully, considering prayerfully, and speaking quietly. Too many talk much more than they listen. James wants us to reverse the order. Listen more, talk less. We are not quick to hear and slow to speak but loathe to listen and anxious to argue.

“Slow to wrath” – how does anger relate to receiving the Word? It relates in part to the function of the Word in the lives of believers. When eagerness to hear and heed God’s Word is replaced with ambition to expound on one’s own ideas, bitter arguments can soon develop. Bitterness and anger closes our minds and hardens our hearts to God’s truth. The anger spoken of here is a thoughtless, uncontrolled temper that leads to rash, hurtful words. It is anger that erupts when our egos are bruised. We often get upset when “my opinions are not being heard” or “I am being ignored or criticized”. When the Word hits close to home, we most naturally respond with defensiveness, indignation, even anger. However, when God’s Word confronts us in our sin, we must not get angry with the truth. Like the man who broke the mirror because he disliked the image in it, people rebel against God’s Word because it tells the truth about them and their sin. Anger usurps God’s role as judge. Anger rejects rebuke; peace accepts it. Anger dismisses correction; peace embraces

it. So we make preparation to welcome the Word into our hearts by opening our ears, zipping our lips, and suppressing the urge to strike back.

### **B. We must remove any hindrance (v.21)**

Part of preparation to welcome the Word involves removing anything that would hinder the accomplishment of spiritual growth. “Lay aside” literally means to take off a garment, to remove clothing. The tense of the Greek word means a once-for-all action. Like stripping off and discarding soiled clothes, we must see sin for what it is, quit justifying it, and decide to reject it if we would progress in our spiritual lives. We bring many ideas from the world that the Word confronts and counters. The Word thinks much differently from the world! So James is saying that we must put aside the sinful and selfish ideas from the world if we would properly receive the Word. Filthiness in life plugs our hearing. Wickedness slows our response time. Pride keeps us from exposing our true selves to the light of the Word. The hindrances of filth, evil, and worldliness must be removed if we would welcome the Word.

### **C. We must receive with humility (v.21)**

In contrast to the quick speech and anger, there must be humility in approaching the Word. This is the word “meekness”. We must not come with our defenses up. Too often we want to argue with what God has said. We look for ways to rationalize and reinterpret scripture to suit our desires. God’s Word is not a menu from which you make a selection, it is a mandate to which we must give humble submission. We must not look for something to argue about, but with humility something to live out. Meekness and humility means submitting to whatever the Word has to tell us, ready to put off the thoughts and deeds of the old lifestyle in favor of the attitudes and actions of the new. James reminds us that the Word was planted in us (“engrafted”) at salvation (1:18) when God put His law (Jer. 31) and His Spirit in our heart (Ezek. 26). It is the Spirit of God who uses the Word of God to make us more like the Son of God. That planted Word becomes part of our being, and as it begins to grow in our hearts it moves us to action. But the soil in which the Word is planted must be hospitable in order for growth to occur. May we welcome the Word with meekness.

Transition: The preparation for welcoming the Word is done through a ready heart, by removing hindrances, and receiving with humility. With preparations in place, we are ready to actively engage our guest.

## **2. The Participation of Welcoming the Word (1:22-25)**

James is going to demonstrate two ways of handling God’s Word. He presents a contrast between one who hears and acts with one who simply hears.

### **A. The casual participant is passive (vv.22-24)**

- **Listens** ⇨ **Looks** ⇨ **Leaves** ⇨ **Looses**

Some people take a casual approach. They may quietly listen, but they fail to act on God’s Word so it never affects their lives. They are like the person who looks so quickly into a mirror that flaws go undetected and nothing is changed. They listen, but don’t act. The word *hearer* (v.22) has been used outside the NT of an attendant at a lecture and suggests a more casual listener or auditor.

Illustration: Many college and university classrooms have individuals called “auditors”. These people sign up for the class, pay a nominal auditor’s fee, and then sit through the lectures. But beyond that, everything is optional to them. Some take notes, but they are not required to do so. Some might read the textbook, but no one is checking up on them. Auditors don’t write papers or take tests. They are not in it for course credit; they are merely hearers of the instructions, not doers. James is warning that the Christian life cannot be audited! And those who think that is an option for them are self-deceived. If all who are auditors of the Word on Sunday would put it into practice during the week, what a difference that would make! We are not just to be spiritual sponges that sit, soak, sour, and eventually stink. The truth must be rung out through our lives.

James uses a deliberately ridiculous analogy of a person who gazes into his own face in a mirror but then seconds later couldn’t even pick himself out of a police lineup. He forgets what he looked like. We are being warned not to forget the Word, but to let it lodge in your heart and in your mind. The man who looks in the mirror to see his tousled hair and stubby chin but then fails to get busy with his comb and razor has not received benefit from the encounter. To James, the person who hears God’s Word but does not heed it is just as ludicrous.

It is self-deception to congratulate ourselves about knowledge of Scripture if that’s all there is to it. It is sad to be deceived, most miserable to be self-deceived. Many still determine their godliness by the quality of hearing or reading instead of action and obedience. We learn God’s Word not just to know it, but also to do it. We are not to engage in passive listening, but rather in active attentiveness that leads to action.

Application: We must not view the Bible as a textbook of information, arguments, and logical propositions to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. It must be valued as the living Word of truth given by God to alter our attitudes and change our actions. Filling a pew each Sunday and our notebooks with biblical information is not enough! James calls for action – like the Nike slogan “just do it”!

Don't just be willing to obey the Word; obey the Word. Don't just be willing to help the poor; help the poor. Don't just be willing to share the gospel; share the gospel. Don't just be willing to live in purity; live in purity. We are to be doers of the word and not hearers only!

### **B. The committed participant is active (v.25)**

- **Listens** ⇨ **Looks** ⇨ **Lingers** ⇨ **Lives**

The other approach is the one who intently looks into the Word with a deep, continual study. The term *looketh* means to look intently. It refers to stooping down and looking closely at something so as to absorb every bit of detail. Like a small boy that sees a bug crawling by. He will stop, bend down putting his face only inches from the ground to study the insect. The same word is used to describe Peter's stooping down to get a better look into the empty tomb (Lk. 24:12), of John doing the same thing (Jn. 20:5), and of the angels who desire to investigate the glories of salvation that are outside their personal experience (1 Pet. 1:12).

The “doer” is one who has such intense interest in the Word that he will go out of his way to study it and then put it into practice. This person sees their personal flaws through the mirror of the Word and makes adjustments accordingly. They desire to have their life in line with God's standard. They are active and committed participants in welcoming the Word.

The kind of mirror that God's Word provides is unique. It shows us our inner nature in the same way that a regular mirror shows our exterior features. Both mirrors reflect what is there. When God points out something in us that needs correction, we must listen and act. Wholehearted acceptance of the Word must result in active obedience to the Word. God's Word grows best in the soil of obedience. “Obedience is the mother of true knowledge of God” – John Calvin. It is important to hear God's Word, but it is much more important to obey it (Lk. 11:28; Rom. 2:13).

Illustration: Several men were standing around talking about different Bible translations. Each had their opinion on which was most helpful. One man said, “I like my mother's translation best”. The others said, “We didn't know you mother was a scholar. How did she translate the Bible?” He answered, “My mother translated the Bible into daily living. That's the most helpful translation of all”.

Application: Even in the midst of our hectic schedule and lives, we need to make time stop and study the Word. Don't be content with a little word from God for the day (the Daily Crumb). Dive in deep. Allow the word to penetrate your heart and be absorbed into your mind. Think deeply, obey willingly, respond positively, and practice constantly the Word. You have not really listened to the Word if you have not obeyed the Word. The bottom line is that the Word evokes action, and if there is not action from the Word, then clearly there has been no acceptance of the Word. For those who have accepted Jesus, will obey Jesus.

Transition: When we welcome the word with a prepared heart and mind, and when we become active participants in obedience to the Word, it will be evidenced in our lives.

### **3. The Production of Welcoming the Word (1:25-28)**

True Christian faith will have outward expression. Just as a healthy apple tree can be identified through the fruit it produces, a healthy Christians will be productive also. James points to three “fruits” as evidence of the believer who is a doer of the Word.

#### **A. It produces happiness (v.25)**

The one who hears and obeys God's Word “will be blessed in his deed”. James sets this man before us as one worthy of our admiration and imitation. Why? Because he is a “doer of the work”. The phrase points to his continual practice of truth. Like the wise man pictured by Jesus in Matthew 7:24, this man qualifies for blessing because he has heard and heeded the Word. The future tense of the verb (“will be blessed”) means he is promised and assured of God's blessing both in life and eternity. The voluntary doing of God's will is the secret to true happiness. An obedient Christian is a happy Christian. Welcoming the Word produces happiness.

#### **B. It produces helpfulness (v.25-26)**

Real faith will practice God's Word and helpfully share it with others in both word and deed. God's perfect law should be put into practice in our speech as well as our service. James warns that the one who does not keep a tight rein on his tongue demonstrates the emptiness and futility of his faith. One of the ways others will know that our faith is real is by what we choose to talk about and the way we speak.

Furthermore, genuine religion has a positive social concern. The term *visit* means to “look in on or go see”. It denotes more than a friendly social call for

it was often used of visiting the sick with an aim to care and provide. “Orphans and widows” are representative of two most needy classes in ancient society. James is telling us to do something for those who cannot return the favor. If we express concern only for those who are able to reciprocate, we are not truly loving as Christ loved. As believers, our concern for the needy is not just a social concern, but a spiritual one as a means to present the gospel. We must share the Word that has “saved us” with those around us.

It is self-deception to have religious practices that do not lead to an ethical lifestyle. James has pointed out three dangerous deceptions in chapter 1: (1) we are deceived when we believe a distorted view of the character of God (1:16); (2) we are deceived when we listen to God’s Word without taking action (1:22); and (3) we are deceived when we accept our own rationalization that our beliefs can be kept inside or expressed in ritual with no real obedience (1:26). Even our outward religious practices are worthless without obedience. As the saying goes, “Your walk talks, and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks”.

Application: When there is no divorce between God’s words and our words, that’s real Christianity. Does your 9-to-5 talk-time square with your early morning quiet time? Does your Monday through Saturday speaking conform with the Sunday preaching? When we are moved by the needs of others and it leads us to action, that’s authentic Christianity. Genuine faith touches people’s lives. When our works benefit those around us in tangible, observable ways, we are living out our faith.

### **C. It produces holiness (v.26)**

Real faith is practical. Outward rituals cannot substitute for inward righteousness. Church services are no substitute for our service to God. Inward rationalizations are not substitutes for outward righteousness. We are commanded to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. Constant vigilance is required of the believer to remain “unspotted from the world”. We are not to adapt the world’s value system based on money, power, and pleasure. Real faith means nothing if we are contaminated with such values.

Application: Instead of allowing the lies of secularism to dirty our testimony, we must let the truth of God’s Word wash us clean, making us stand out in the world around us. The contrast should be obvious. When our upright lifestyles contrast sharply with the crooked norms of our surrounding culture, that’s real Christianity. Sympathy with suffering and separation from sin demonstrate the operation of living faith in the heart.

### **Conclusion**

The Word of God is crucial to man’s quest for understanding himself and his world. James has explained that all men live in a world where outward circumstances are often difficult, and where inward pressures lead fallen men in paths contrary to God. Only if help comes from outside himself can man solve his problems of outward trouble and inner evil. That help is found in God alone. He has given us His Son to save us, His Spirit to sanctify us, and His Word to guide us. Genuine faith will rightly relate to the Word. Real faith welcomes the Word.