Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Belief that Behaves, Part 1
Scripture: James 1:19-21
Code: 59-9

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Let's open our Bibles to the first chapter of James, James chapter 1. We pick up our study at verse 19 and so you'll want to hold your place there for a moment while we introduce the subject that is at hand.

In one of the great Psalms of the Old Testament and by far the longest, Psalm 119, the Psalmist said this, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord." Let me say that again, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord." One way to define a believer is that a believer is one who walks in the way of the Lord, who walks in the law of the Lord. True believers then subscribe their life to the Word of God, that's basic.

In verse 10 of that same Psalm, we read, "O let me not wander from Thy commandments." In verse 14, "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies as much as in all riches." It is the mark of a believer that he desires to pattern his life after the Word of God.

On the other hand, unbelievers do not seek God's law. In the same Psalm, verse 155 says, "Salvation is far from the wicked, for they seek not Thy statutes. In Jeremiah 6:16 we read, "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."

It is the desire of a believer to walk in the law of God. It is the desire of an unbeliever to avoid the law of God. When the Psalmist speaks for believers, he says, "I have chosen the way of truth," verse 30, "I have chosen to walk according to God's Word." In fact, in verse 161 of that same Psalm, he says "My heart stands in awe of Thy Word." And even though there are times when we fail to obey, it is the longing of our heart to do that. The Psalmist says in that same Psalm, "I delight in Thy law," verse 70. "Thy law is my delight. I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed," verse 46. "I hope in Thy Word," verse 81. "I seek Thy precepts," verse 45.

And even in his own life when the Psalmist senses failure and sin, he cries out with words like this, "O that my ways were dictated to keep Thy statutes," verse 5. Or he cries out in verse 33, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes." Or in verse 35, "Make me go in the path of Thy commandments." Or verse 133, "Order my steps in Thy Word." Or verse 10, "O let me not wander from Thy

commandments." Or verse 36, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies." Or verse 37, "Quicken thou me in Thy way."

All of that sort of comes together to say the mark of a true believer in this particular aspect is a desire to do the Word and the will of God. The same Psalm, the Psalmist says, "I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right."

And the sum of all of that commitment comes in verse 112, "I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes always even unto the end." The reason, verse 97, "O how I love Thy law."

The godly, the true believer, the one with genuine saving faith is also described in Psalm 1 as one whose delight is in the law of God and in that law doth he meditate day and night. Such are the godly. The godly are those who love the law of God, who long to keep the law of God, whose highest joy, greatest treasure and deepest delight is obedience to the law of God.

So, we might conclude from that Psalm that a person's attitude toward the Word of God is a test of the nature of their faith. If it is true saving faith, if it is genuine belief there will be a strong compelling desire to hear and obey the Word of God.

Look with me at the gospel of John. And John seems to be on a special mission to make this point and to drive it home. In John 5 verse 37 he writes, "And the Father Himself who hath sent Me," of course Christ is speaking in the narrative, "has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape, and you have not His Word abiding in you for whom He hath sent, Him you believe not." The point is, John says if you don't believe in Christ, you have not the abiding Word of God. The reverse of that, if you believe in Christ, you have within you the abiding Word of God. In other words, you are committed to the truth of God's Word.

Chapter 6 verse 45, "It is written in the prophets and they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard and has learned of the Father comes to Me." And again Christ links true saving faith with a response to the Word of God, with a hearing of the Word of God.

Chapter 8 of John's gospel verse 31, "Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on Him, if you continue in My Word, you are My true disciples, My real disciples." Again, it is a question of your attitude toward the Word of God, the Word of Christ. Verse 37, "I know you are Abraham's seed but you seek to kill Me, here's the reason, My Word has no place in you." And again we are noting that synonymous with true saving faith is commitment to the Word of God or the Word of Christ, both being one and the same. Notice verse 45, "Because I tell the truth you don't believe Me." In other words, you have no capacity to hear truth. You can't link up with truth. Verse 47, "He that is of God hears God's words, you therefore hear them not because you are not of God." Again the same link true faith and the hearing and the commitment to the Word of God.

Chapter 10 of John's gospel again focuses on the same thing. John 10:26, "You believe not because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you." Then verse 27, "My sheep hear...what?...My voice and I know them and they not only hear but they...what?...they follow Me." Again, the linking of true faith with submission to the Word of God.

Chapter 14 of John's gospel, he comes right back around to the very same theme again in verse 21, "He that has My commandments and obeys them, he it is that loves Me." The mark of true love to Christ is obedience...obedience. Verse 23, "Jesus answered and said to him, if a man loves Me, he will keep My words...he will keep My words." Verse 24, "He that loves Me not does not keep My sayings and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." The one who is truly connected to Christ in genuine saving faith hears His Word. The one who does not hear His Word, therefore gives evidence of not knowing Christ at all.

Chapter 15, the same idea, verse 7, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done to you. In this is My Father glorified that you bear much fruit so shall you be My disciples." In other words, a true disciple is marked by two things, he hears the Word and he produces what? fruit.

Chapter 17 verse 6, Jesus in His high priestly prayer says, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world," He's praying to the Father. "Thine they were and Thou gavest them to Me and here's the mark of their genuineness they have kept Thy Word. Now they have known that all things whatever Thou hast given Me are of Thee for I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from Thee and they have believed that Thou did send Me." Again, true faith is linked with a hearing and a believing and a response to the Word of God. Verse 17 of the same chapter, Jesus says, "Sanctify them by Thy truth, Thy Word is truth."

So all of these passages basically do what we just saw in Psalm 119, they identify true saving faith with a great heartfelt desire to hear and obey the Word of God. This also is a theme that John does not want to release so when he writes his first epistle in chapter 3 and verse 10, he writes, "In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." In other words, show me the life, if it does righteousness it is of God, if it does not do righteousness it is not of God. To put it another way, show me a life, if it obeys the Word it is of God, if it does not it is not of God. Very basic.

In the third epistle of John, even there in verse 11 one last time, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil but that which is good. He that does good is of God, but he that does evil hasn't seen God." In other words, by your response to the Word of God, by your response to His commandments can be identified the genuineness or the falseness of your claim to faith.

Are you familiar with 1 John 2:24? Listen to this, "Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning." That's the truth of God, God's Word, the gospel. "If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, so shall you continue in the Son and in the Father." Again, the reality of saving faith and its continuity is linked to a life of obedience, a life of obedience.

Now James, in effect, is going to give us this very same mark of true saving faith, so let's go back to James chapter 1 where some of you have been all along, that's fine. Now James throughout his epistle, as you know, is giving us tests for living faith. The whole epistle of James is a series of tests by which you can measure the reality of your faith or its lack of reality. The first test that James gave to real faith was the test of what? trials. How you respond to trials is an indicator of whether your faith is real or not. The second one was how you respond not to trials but to temptation. The third test is how you respond to the Word of God. How a person responds to trials is a monitor on their faith. How a person responds to temptation is a monitor. And how a person responds to the Word of God is equally a monitor that measures their faith. How you listen and how you react and how you desire the Word and how you obey the Word reveals the nature of your faith and gives your spiritual temperature in that sense.

Now think about it. Because God's Word is the originator of the new birth, because God's Word is the agent of transformation, and that's the theme of verse 18 of His own will begot He us with the Word of truth to make us into a kind of new creation, a first fruits of a new creation, because it is the Word of truth that is the agent of transformation it is the Word that incorruptible seed, Peter calls it in 1 Peter 1, is that incorruptible seed that gives us the new birth, it is that Word of truth that makes us a new creation, that Word of truth not only is there at the beginning but it becomes the focal point of all the rest of our spiritual existence. It is the power of our new life. It was the power of our new birth. It is the continuing power of our new life. Just as the Word is that which brings about the new birth, the Word is that which feeds the newly born believer. That's why Peter says as babes desire the pure milk of what? the Word that you may grow thereby. It is the power of God which saves and it is the power of God which brings about progressive spiritual growth.

So, having been born again by the Word, we become its pupils and our heart's desire is to listen to it and to learn from it and respond to it, just in the same way a baby desires milk. You do not have to teach a baby to like milk, you don't have to teach a baby to want to eat, it wants to eat as soon as it arrives and continues to want to eat until it finally dies. And so all the way through life there is this normal hunger. And I believe that's true of a believer transformed by the Word of truth, he becomes then sort of linked to the Word of truth and there is a very normal spiritual appetite toward the things of God. If that appetite is there even though we don't always act like it, that's indicative of new birth. If it is not there, no matter how we may falsify it that is indicative of the absence of new birth.

Now James is going to make two major points in this regard. Point number one is that saving faith is marked by a proper reception of the Word. Point number two, it is marked by a proper reaction to the Word. So we're talking about how you receive it and what you do about it. And those are the things that mark out true faith. Now for tonight we're just going to look at the first one, a proper reception of the Word...a proper reception of the Word.

Look with me at verses 19 to 21, and that's our text for tonight. What a tremendous text, now listen carefully. It starts out in verse 19, "This you know, my beloved brethren, let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, put off all filthiness and abundance of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls." The key word here is "receive." We're talking about how you receive the Word. That's the issue. And if you are a true believer there is a receptivity. To put it in a simple illustration, your dial is tuned to that frequency. That message comes through because that's where you've set your spiritual dial, you want that message, you desire that, you want to obey God. And when you disobey, you find yourself caught in a terrible, terrible vice and twisted and ripped and shred because it's what you're doing but not in the deepest part of you what you really want.

True saving faith is marked by a desire for a proper reception of the Word. Jesus said in Mark 4:24, "Take heed what you hear." In Luke 8:18 he said, "Take heed how you hear." The true believer looks at the what, the content, and the how, the intensity, with which he responds to the Word of God. Jesus points out in the parables of Matthew 13 when He talks about four soils that some people hear the Word and some don't, right? And you remember that in that little interim between the parable and the beginning of the chapter in its explanation about verse 18, the section in the middle Jesus says, "Blessed are your ears for they what? hear and your eyes for they see. Blessed are you because you understand what has been hidden from the wise and the prudent and the unbelieving. You hear and you understand." Why? Because your faith is real and you have made a connection with the living God. And in that connection there's a flow of love and life and power that makes you responsive and receptive to the Word of God.

Now, this marks us but at the same time we need to cultivate it. It isn't as if we can sit back and it will happen automatically. It takes all of the spiritual energy that God has and all of the commitment that we can make to that to realize the fullness of being true receivers of God's Word. In the reception of the Word, James gives us three things. Okay? And this is what I want you to see tonight. A right response to the Word involves three things...number one, a willingness to receive the Word with submission...a willingness to receive the Word with submission.

Now obviously unbelievers would be characterized in a different way. Unbelievers do not submit to the Word of God. It may irritate, it may aggravate, it may exacerbate their predisposition against the things of God, but for sure they're not going to willingly submit to it. Typically, for example, in 2 Timothy 3, we get a characterization of an ungodly person. It says, "They resist the truth...they resist

the truth." That verb means to stand against the truth “anthistemi,” it's an anti-position, they take a position against the truth. Also, I think in the fifteenth verse of chapter 4 it mentions Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil, the Lord rewarded him according to his works, of whom do thou beware also for he has greatly stood against our words. Now there's a typical picture of an unbeliever who is in opposition to the Word of God. He's like the hard soil, or the soil with rock underneath it, only hears so long and then shuts it off when there's a price to pay, or the weedy soil where it listens a little while but if you have to give up all the things in the world and the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches, forget it. They really don't want to hear that clearly.

Typically then the unbelieving mind resists the truth, just as typically true faith receives it. And willingly receives it with an attitude of submission. And I want you to see how this is tucked right in here in verse 19. Now verse 19 says, "My beloved brothers," I'll just pull that phrase out, that's also back in verse 16 and James is being very sensitive and very concerned and very compassionate and showing a lot of love as he exhorts his people. Something certainly every wise teacher and instructor does. And again he calls them his beloved brothers, a familiar and sort of repeated phrase throughout this epistle, along with just my brothers with which he begins chapter 2 and chapter 3. So he has a loving heart toward these people and yet is very strong in his exhortation.

He says to them, "This you know..." Now some of your Bibles might say "wherefore" at the beginning of verse 19. That is what we call in the Greek text a variant reading. That is the word “hoste.” In the better manuscripts the word is “histe,” only one letter difference, the difference between in English would be an "o" and an "i", that's all the difference there is. All of the better manuscripts without exception have the “histe” which should be translated "this you know." By the way, that also fits much better with the use of “dei” in verse 19 as well and makes sense in the context. So what he is saying is this you know. What does he mean? Well, he's really playing off of verse 18. "You know this, you know that the power of the Word was able to beget you again, to make you a new creation, the first fruits of glorious new creation that God will perform in the future, you know this."

In other words, you know the power of the Word. Okay? You know the power of the Word, this you know that by His will He begot you with the Word of truth and made you a new creation...this you know. In other words, you're aware of the marvelous power of the Word in regeneration. You have experienced the power of the Word in regeneration. You have experienced the power of the Word to transform your life and make you a whole new creation. You know what it is to be transformed by that incorruptible seed and given eternal life.

Now, since you have experienced the power of the Word of God to make you a new creation, the idea is you've got to let it continue to do its powerful work in your life. That's the transition that he makes marvelous transition. God brought us forth by the Word and wants us to live not by what? bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, Deuteronomy 8:3. So all Scripture is given that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Timothy 3:15 and 16

and 17, that whole text there.

Now, the Word we've experienced that its power to make us new creation and now we must yield to it in its power to cause us to grow. And by a continual faithful hearing of the life giving Word, the power of the new nature is stimulated into action. And we'll see that action in verses 22 to 27. But as you with your dial now spiritually turned to the channel that the God is broadcasting on, you begin to hear and receive, that stimulates the new nature into action. And it all begins with an attitude of hearing the Word of God of being receptive. He brought us forth by the Word, so we live by the Word. It is our food. Jeremiah says, "Thy words were found and I did eat them." Desire it like milk, as I quoted earlier from 1 Peter 2:2.

Now notice that he says in verse 19 "Let every man...but let everyone," in other words, all of you believers, all of you, and here is the transition of the use of “dei,” he says connected to verse 18, "This you know," then he says, "but that's not enough, let every one of you follow up on what you know." You know the power of the Word in salvation, so let everyone and follow these imperatives, "First be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to wrath."

Now let's talk about the first one, quick to listen. What does he mean? Is he just talking about being a good hearer? Is he saying you need to be a good listener and a slow speaker, you need to shut your mouth and you need to just hear. You need to be a quiet patient listener. Is he talking about Proverbs where it says, "In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refrains his lips is wise?" Proverbs 10:19. Is he talking about Proverbs 13:3? "He that keeps his mouth, keeps his life, but he that opens wide his lips shall have destruction." Is he referring to Proverbs 17:28, "Even a fool when he holds his speech is counted wise?" As somebody said, you're better off than to keep...you're better off to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove any doubt.

Is he talking about Proverbs 29:20, "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his word, there is more hope of a fool than of him?" Is he just saying in general; learn to keep your mouth shut and not talk? I don't think so. I don't think that's the issue at all. That's not the context here. He's not leaping catapulting himself out of a context of talking about hearing the Word and doing the Word into some kind of unrelated discussion of how you react with your tongue, that will come in chapter 3. The issue here is a response to the Word. Verse 18, the Word of truth is mentioned. Verse 21, the implanted Word is mentioned. Verse 22, be doers of the Word is mentioned. It is called in verse 23 a glass or a mirror. It is called in verse 25 the perfect law of liberty into which you look. The Word of God is the theme. And when he says here "be quick to listen," he means to listen to what? To the Word of God. It's how you respond to the Word of God that is his concern. Actually the text says, "Be quick to the hearing...be quick to the hearing," as if it were a sermon or a lesson or an exposition of Scripture. And I believe all of that is encompassed in that term.

The idea then is an eagerness to grasp every opportunity to increase our hearing of God's Word. And I'm not belaboring the text at all to conclude that, I think that's essentially what this text is conveying. It means to pursue every privileged occasion to obtain the knowledge of God and His divine will. That is the mark of a believer. You show me someone who has no desire at all to be under the teaching of the Word of God and I'll show you someone who does not give the mark of being a true Christian. True believers run to hear the Word of God, long to read the Word of God, want to learn the Word of God. And as I said, when there are trials in the first part of the first chapter that are difficult and demand wisdom and strength from God, the word provides those answers. When we get into temptations that test us to the very limit, we go to the Word of God and it is through the power of the Word of God that we resist temptation, "Thy Word have I hid that I might not sin."

The Word is the source then of deliverance out of trials, it's the source of deliverance out of temptation. It becomes then the most welcome friend to us and beyond that not only for what it delivers us from, it is our welcome friend because of what it engages us in, and that is communion with the living God. If you are a believer you desire to communicate with God. E.F. Hutton says when they speak, everybody listens. When God speaks, those who love Him listen. And this involves listening to those who preach and listening to those who teach.

And you can ask yourself the question, you can do a little inventory, do you hunger for that? Or is it a burden for you? Are you always checking your watch? Are you coming under constraint? Could you take it or leave it? Do you really have a tremendous desire to learn? Do you long to grow? Do you have an appetite for the Word? Do you hunger to know God's Word? Charles Wesley put it in one of his lesser known hymns so beautifully. "When quiet in my room I sit, Thy book be my companion still; my joy Thy sayings to repeat, talk o'er the records of Thy will and search the oracles divine till every heartfelt word is mine." What a great desire.

Psalm 119:111 says, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever for they are the rejoicing of my heart." One writer said, "We might wonder why the ever practical James does not proceed to outline schemes of daily Bible reading for us, for surely these are the ways in which we offer a willing ear to the voice of God, but he does not help us in this way, rather he goes deeper for there's little point in schemes and times if we do not have an attentive spirit.

"It is possible to be unfailingly regular in Bible reading, but achieve no more than to have moved the bookmark forward. This is reading unrelated to an attentive spirit. The Word is read but not heard. On the other hand, if we can develop an attentive spirit, this will spur us to create those conditions, a proper method in Bible reading, a discipline of time, and so on by which the spirit will find itself satisfied in hearing the Word of God," end quote.

The true believer is going to be marked by that desire, that hunger. Now it will get...it will get dulled sometimes because we get all wrapped up in the things of the world, but down inside there is that

great longing. And when we have not fed that longing, we over a period of time become very hungry, don't we?

How eager are you? How eager are you to come on the Lord's day, in the morning, in the evening? How eager are you to learn the Word of God, to read a great book that explains scriptural truth to you? How eager are you to run to a Bible study so your heart can be opened? How eager are you to go into a quiet place, a private place and open the Word of God before God and commune with Him? James says if you want to test yourself, start with "quick to listen."

The second thing he says in willingness to be submissive to the Word is "slow to speak." And he's not here just talking about jargon, he's not talking about giving a dumb opinion before you've heard the whole story. He's not talking about social relationships or that. What he means here is very interesting. The literal Greek says, "Slow for the speaking." The hearing almost defines a scriptural exposition, a sermon, a lesson. And the speaking does it also from the viewpoint of the one speaking. What he is saying is this, as quick as you are to listen, be just that slow to speak. In other words, don't ever presume to stand up and speak on behalf of God His Word unless you are prepared for all that that encompasses.

We pursue eagerly every opportunity to hear the Word taught, every opportunity to hear the Word proclaimed but cautiously, slowly, patiently with great reluctance would we be the speaker.

I don't know that I've ever said this to you and maybe I've never hit a text that brought it into my mind, but I was thinking about that just a few minutes ago. After all the years that I have been preaching, I have to confess to you that while the exercise of preaching is the manifestation of my gift, I cannot honestly say that I relish or that I sort of bask in the light of preaching. I can't honestly say to you that I literally rush to preach with some kind of unnatural exhilaration. But I can honestly say to you that there is a certain reluctance in my heart every time I come to a Lord's day, there is a certain reluctance for fear that somehow some way I might misrepresent the truth of God.

Notice the first verse of chapter 3. "My brethren," he says, "stop being so many teachers." Too many of you are teaching. "Don't you know that we will receive the greater judgment?" Because we know everybody's going to stumble and the only people that don't stumble with their mouth are perfect people, and that's not us so we're going to mess up with our mouth...and when we do it will be public. Don't run into that. Don't be in a hurry.

Oh, I'm telling you it grieves me greatly, sadly when new converts and novices and untaught celebrities are pushed up to speak representing the Lord. I feel that's completely contrary to the indication of this particular text. We are to be very slow before we stand and offer ourselves as those who teach. In fact, it says in 1 Timothy 3:6 no one should ever embark upon the rule of teacher, pastor-teacher in the church, elder, bishop, if he is a novice, a new convert. Why? Because he'll tend

to be lifted up with pride and fall into the same condemnation the devil fell into when he was proud, and that is he was booted out. And what could have been a good ministry ends up being a disaster. If given time maybe he would have developed.

In 5:22 of 1 Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." Don't quickly put anyone in the position of teaching. Back in Ezekiel, do you remember chapter 3 and chapter 33 where he says, "I've pointed you a watchman on the wall and I'm going to require at your hands the blood of anybody you lose"? So you better be careful how you treat the ministry. It is a serious thing.

In Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 17 he says, "Those who rule over you, who teach you, who watch for your souls, have to give an account to God." And that's right, they have to give an account. So anyone of us as believers needs to learn this dual truth that we are to be quick to hear God's Word taught, rushing to find every occasion and opportunity within reason to do that, taking advantage of all of those privileges. At the same time, we are reluctant to offer ourselves in the place of preaching or teaching because we have great sense of its significance.

When the great John Knox was called to preach, his biographer says and I quote, "He burst forth in most abundance tears, withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior from that day until the day he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching did sufficiently declare the trouble and grief of his soul," end quote. For him it was a frightening responsibility.

So, corresponding to the positive command to receive the Word with submissiveness is the negative command as to the nature of that submissiveness. We receive the Word with submissiveness and we have a certain reluctance even to step into the place of teaching, a certain reluctance to speak about Scripture.

Once a young man came to the great philosopher Socrates, we are told, to be instructed in oratory. The moment the young man was introduced to Socrates, he began to talk in an unending incessant stream. When Socrates finally stopped him and got a word in, he said, "Young man, to instruct you in oratory I will have to charge you a double fee." To which the young man replied, "A double fee? Why is that?" The old sage replied, "I will have to teach you two sciences. First, how to hold your tongue, and secondly, how to use it." Those do go together. There is to be a certain reluctance before there is a willingness to speak.

Now apparently in the fellowship to which James wrote, this was a problem. There might have been a lot of people sort of shooting off their mouth. Verse 26, "If anybody among you seems to be religious but can't bridle his tongue, he's a deceiver and his religion is useless." What probably was going on was a lot of people sort of popping off about their view of everything. There were a lot of would-be teachers and they were deceivers and their religion was useless. They are also indicated in chapter 3 verse 1, as I mentioned, "Stop so many of you being teachers." This must have been a big problem

there. And then he goes on for the next 17 verses till the end of the chapter to talk about the tongue, you better get your tongue under control. So obviously they were having a problem with this.

Chapter 4 verse 6 talks about the proud. There must have been some proud people who wanted to be heard. And verse 7 tells them to learn to submit. Verse 10 again talks about humbling in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up and not speaking evil of one another. He that speaks evil of His brethren, judges his brethren and it goes on to talk about that. So apparently there was a lot of wrangling, a lot of evil speaking and maybe some people who wanted to teach who had no right at all to teach. Verse 9 of chapter 5 says, "Some of them were murmuring against others."

So James says learn to listen to the Word every time you have an opportunity. And learn to be very slow to be a teacher. It should be such a compelling thing that you cannot hesitate teaching but you should apply yourself with such patience to it that you do not do it until your heart is prepared and until you are ready to speak the truth. Sometimes young men say, "Do you get nervous when you preach?" I can honestly say I don't get nervous in the sense of "Oh boy, I've got to go up there and give a speech in front of all those people." I mean, I'm over that. That's not anything new. The way I answer that is I am never apprehensive when I preach if I know what I'm going to say. If I am unprepared, I would have every reason to be nervous. Because if I don't know what I'm talking about or I don't understand the text or I haven't done my preparation, then I might represent God. That's what makes me nervous. I could probably entertain you for an hour but could I misrepresent God at the same time? That would be the test, or that's always the test. I mean, it's easy to get up and just entertain the folks if you've done that for a while. The key thing is to rightly divide the Word of truth. That's what puts the reluctance in ministry, or should put it there.

So, listen to the Word and be slow to become a teacher. The third thing he says in this sort of submissive spirit, submitting yourself to the Word, he says is slow to anger...slow to anger. Now anger is a human attitude. And the word used here, “orge,” speaks of an inside deep resentment. It's not explosive outward outbursts, that's “thumos,” that's the blowup on the outside. What he means is a smoldering resentment...a smoldering resentment, something underneath the surface, deep seated rejection.

Now listen to what he's saying. Listen to the Word, be eager to listen, be eager to listen, be very, very cautious before you ever speak the Word and thirdly, when you hear something from the Word, don't build up inside of yourself a resentment to it because one, it doesn't agree with what you thought, or two, because it confronts your sin. That's the issue here. It's your reaction to the Word. It refers to a disposition of rejection. The context here is hearing the Word, teaching the Word, so it implies anger against those who teach the Word or confront you with the Word.

Very often people who differ with me are hostile, I mean they are really hostile. I have seen less unregenerate anger than I have seen redeemed people angry because I said something they

disagreed with. I have had the wrath of Charismatics for years who felt that I was wrong on the gift of tongues, and to show me or to prove to me that they really have the Holy Spirit, they come at me in full flesh which I don't understand. But anyway, that's, that's not always the case, but often.

People who differ can be very hostile, very hostile. And my mail and my file has hundreds of illustrations. Often people who are convicted are hostile to that truth, they don't want to hear that. They may be believers but they're not ready to hear that. Try talking to somebody about God's view of divorce when he wants to unload his wife and watch the reaction. Hostile because they've already got a mindset. And you're coming against that with the Word of God and apparently in this assembly of people to which James is writing there was a lot of stuff flying around in the air and there were murmurings and there were evil speakings and hostility.

And, in fact, if you notice chapter 4 I'll bring it right to a focus. He says, "From where comes wars and fightings among you." Have you ever heard about the church that was warring and fighting? "How is it that you are all at war with each other? They come out of your lusts...get this...you lust and you have not, you kill, you desire to have." That's some church. "You fight, you war." What kind of outfit is this and why was it going on? Because they were pitted against each other. Everybody wanted to be heard. Everybody had his view. Everybody had his opinion. And there was anger and there was hostility and vitriolic attitudes were flying around in that church and he says you're not to be that way, you be very, very slow to ever have a rejection or a resentment.

There would be a time when you might resent something someone taught. There might be a time when you see something as an error, but you ought to be very patient and very cautious before you reject things. Paul illustrates this in Galatians 4, he's writing and I think this is right at the issue. He says he's given them pretty straight stuff and he says, "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" And the answer was what? for some people yes, we don't want to hear the truth, don't tell us the truth. So James says you listen to the Word of God every opportunity you have, you be reluctant to speak until you're really prepared to speak and you patiently accept what is taught and be very slow before you build up a resentment to that. He's trying to put a lid on the hostility and the confusion in that congregation.

Why? Because, look at it in verse 20, "The wrath of man produces not what? the righteousness of God." The deep resentment and rejection and resistance to the teaching of the Word does not produce the righteousness of God. What does he mean by the righteousness of God? That which pleases God. That which is right before God. You can't produce what is right before God with resentment and anger.

There is a just anger. There is an anger over holy things. There is an anger over the devil. There is the Lord Jesus making a whip and cleaning out the temple and saying, "You've turned My Father's house which is a house of prayer into a den of thieves." There is a holy indignation. There is a holy

wrath. But that's different. Don't you resent and build up bitterness and animosity and anger in your heart because you don't want to hear what somebody says, because you don't personally agree or because it confronts your sin.

So the true believer will desire to hear the Word willingly. He'll speak the Word only when he should because he is prepared. And he will never exhibit hostility or smoldering resentment against biblical truth or the one who teaches it. That was a very important message for the chaos of that assembly to which James wrote.

In other words, to sum those three things up, receive the Word with submission. Don't get angry. Listen carefully. And talk only when you're prepared.

So, first of all, how you receive the Word is crucial and you are to receive it with a submissive spirit. Secondly, there should be a willingness to receive the Word with purity. This is a very very basic truth. But there should be a willingness to receive the Word with purity. Look at verse 21. "Wherefore...dei which means for this reason, because anything else hinders the righteousness of God, as he says in verse 20-- because anything else stops doing what pleases God...for this reason put off all filthiness and abundance of wickedness."

Another way you have to receive the Word is with a pure life because it hinders the righteousness of God. Anger and any other sin will hinder the righteousness of God from being produced, does not please God. So he says put off all filthiness and abundance of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted, is the best word, the implanted Word.

The key word is receive. But there's a vital participle before receive, that's the participle “apotitheminoi” and it means "having put off." You can't receive until you've already put off. Both are in the Aorist. And if you go back to your old Dana and Manti text book you will read that when the main verb and the participle depended on the main verb are both in the Aorist, which is the tense of the past, the participle can be understood then as proceeding the action of the verb. So it would be translated "having put off, receive." You cannot receive the implanted Word until you have put off sin.

The point is, before the Word can produce the righteousness of God, a putting off has to take place. You've got to unload some things. This verb "to put off" originally meant to put your clothes off, to take off dirty, filthy, soiled clothes. But it came to refer to rejecting evil vices, get rid of evil vices is what he's saying. Put it off. Get rid of it.

This is a very, very familiar word to the Apostle Paul. He uses it in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 22, "Put off concerning the former manner of life, the old man corrupt according to its deceitful lusts, be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man." So that idea of putting off is used there in Ephesians 4. Also Colossians, I believe it's chapter 3 about verse 8 or 9 yes, verse 8, "Put off all

these anger malice wrath blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds." So putting off is a very important issue. In Hebrews 12, "Laying aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, then let us run with patience the race that is set before us." And perhaps the best illustration, 1 Peter 2, "Wherefore, same verb, putting aside all evil, all deceit, all hypocrisy and envy and all evil speaking, then as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow." Before you can take the Word in and grow you have to put the garbage out of your life, that's what he is saying. By the way, all of those that I read you use the very same verb, the very same verb, “apotithemi,” it means to strip off, to put off.

To sort of pull the thought together since the Word is a seed, it needs good soil to grow in. In order to be fully yielded to the divine influence of the Word of God the heart must be circumcised. It must, evil must be cut off. That's what a circumcised heart was, one where evil was cut away and there was a receptivity.

The word "filthiness," this is fascinating, the word "filthiness that is used there in James 1:21, a very interesting word, “rhuparia.” That word basically can be translated filthiness, it's also all filthiness, meaning comprehensive cleaning. But there's a very interesting thing. The word is used of dirty filthy clothes, it's also used of moral vice. But it comes from a root word that's fascinating to me. The root word of “rhuparia” is “rhupos,” in English it would be “rupos.” What is interesting to me is “rhupos” refers to wax in the ear. It is so used by Hippocrates and by Clement. And what he is saying is get rid of any dirty wax in your ear that keeps you from hearing the Word of God. Very vivid thought.

I'll never forget reading an article about a person who was deaf until they went to a medical doctor and he washed, it was a lady, her ears. And she was deaf because of, sickening thought, the accumulation of dirty wax. My mother ran around most of the years of my life with Q-Tips in her hand to make sure that didn't happen to us. My wife has done pretty much the same. But he's saying don't let an accumulation of evil wax block your hearing so we are to be willing to hear the Word of God with purity and get rid of all, that is every instance and every occurrence and every kind of evil, every filthiness.

And he adds, as if we needed to add anything to that...any overflowing of wickedness. The word "wickedness" is kakia, it means general evil. It also refers to evil intent. So he may be saying in the first one, all the filthiness which is the actual evil and all the evil intent which underlies it. Not only evil action but evil desire. The word "overflowing," “perisseia” means abundance. All the abundant evil, all the prevailing evil around you, get it out, get it out. The whole filthy mass of wicked moral vice both in action and intent must be confessed, repented and removed. Get it out.

And then you can hear the Word of God with the right kind of ears. And in 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul says, "I'm so thankful for you Thessalonians because when you received the Word of God which you

heard from us you received it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the Word of God which effectually works in you." You heard it, you listened. It changed your life. "And you became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus." You obeyed because you heard, because your ears were clean.

Finally, we are to be willing to receive the Word with submission, willing to receive the Word with purity and willing to receive the Word with humility, with humility. Would you notice this one at the end of verse 21? "Receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls." Meekness means humility. A submissive heart, a pure heart, and a humble heart, a humble heart, in humility. What does that mean? It means you are teachable, you are tractable...to borrow an old word. You are teachable. You listen. You submit. You purify your heart and you set yourself and your ego down.

The word "meekness" is almost untranslatable, “prautes.” It could be translated humble, or gentle, or meek or a willing spirit, but the best translation is teachable...teachable. Receive is a command. It carries urgency. You are to welcome the Word with a teachable spirit. It's not passive, it's very active. Take it in, receive it, a teachable spirit without resentment, without anger, without pride.

And what is it you're receiving? Look back at verse 21. You're receiving the implanted Word “emphutos.” Boy, that's a rich word. It means just that, planted. When was the Word planted in your heart? At salvation. The preaching of the gospel mixed with faith implanted the Word already in your heart. You understood it. The Holy Spirit taught it. It was put there at salvation. It is there. It is rooted in your heart. It is the vital element of your new life and now he says the power and effect of that rooted Word is dependent on your willingness to receive it. It's like the signal is there, you just got to turn the volume up.

And why do you want to hear it? Why do you want to receive it with meekness and with a teachable spirit? Because it is able to what? save your souls. Present participle it is powerful to continually be able to save. Not only will it offer you a past salvation but it will keep on saving you until the day of full and final and ultimate salvation. There's a sense in which we are saved, there's a sense in which we're being saved, there's a sense in which we will be saved, right? And the Word is that which sustains us through that whole process to ultimate salvation.

In Romans 13 Paul says, "Your salvation is nearer now than when you believed." And somebody says, "Well, I thought I already had it." Well, in one sense you had it, in another sense you haven't got it yet. I'm saved but this isn't all there is, right? And so, what is it that keeps us unto that salvation fully realized in glory, that Christ likeness that is ahead of us? It is the Word of God which is able to start the salvation, to keep the salvation moving and to bring it to final glory. Marvelous it is packed with the power of God unto salvation, Romans 1:16 says. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is able to save the whole person. When it says to save your souls, the idea there is the whole person, to

save your person, to save your life could be a fair translation.

In the past it has shown the power, the Word has shown the power to save you from sin's penalty. When you put your faith in Christ you were saved from the penalty of sin. And the present, it continues to show its power to save you from the power of sin. You no longer are under the power of sin; you are no longer under the dominion of sin. And it in the future will save you from the presence of sin. Someday we'll be taken out of this world into a place where there is no sin at all. So we have been saved, we are being saved, we will be saved. Watch this, we have been saved through the power of the Word, we are being kept saved through the power of the Word, we will be saved through the power of the Word of God. God has spoken it and God energizes that in us through His Word. It has the power to deliver us from sin, to continue to keep us from sin and to deliver us out of the realm where sin exists forever.

So, the whole section then is a call to a right reception of the Word of God. How are we to listen? With a submissive heart, with a pure heart and with a humble heart. And when we do that we mark ourselves as those who are true believers, true believers. And you can do the inventory in your own life. What a message. What a powerful message. Those who are truly the Lord's in the middle of trials, in the middle of temptations, are listening and listening and listening for His Word, are receiving it willingly, submissively, humbly into a pure heart.

We should be like Mary, shouldn't we? Of whom it says in Luke 10:39, "She sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word." And not like the crowds stoning Stephen, of whom it says, "They cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and stoned him," Acts 7:57 and 58. We should be like Cornelius. Cornelius in Acts 10:33 said to Peter, "We are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Eager to hear. We should be like the noble Bereans, Acts 17, "In that they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily." We should not be like those, 2 Timothy 4:3 and 4, who turn away their ears from the truth and will not endure sound teaching.

So ask yourself a question. Are you a receiver or a rejector? You say, "Well, John, I think I'm a receiver but I don't know whether my, my receiver is functioning. There seems to be a lot of static."

Well, maybe there are some things in your life that aren't right. Do a little inventory on what's the deepest desire of your heart. Is your heart's desire to hear the Word of God? Can you identify with the Psalmist? Can you identify with the people in Nehemiah 8 when they stood up and read the Word of God, the people stood all day and listened to the Word of God and were filled with such exhilaration that first they wept and mourned over their sins, and then they celebrated and celebrated and celebrated the joy of their hearts in hearing the Word of the living God? Where are you? Are you with that crowd or are you with those who come and you hear it and you feel skittish and you want to plug your ears and something in you rejects it and resents it?

Or maybe you say, "I really want to hear but my life is so cluttered up with sin that it's just not coming through the way it should." Do an inventory on your desire and then if your desire is right, take your life before God and ask Him to purify you so that you don't have any static in your lines anymore. A pure heart, submissive heart and a willing heart clears the channel and the message comes through and with it comes the blessing of God. Let's bow in prayer.

The privilege, our God, is beyond our words to even describe the privilege of having Your Word, the living Word. O Lord God, we thank you for this treasure, this which is more to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, this most lovely, most desirable, most necessary of all things we possess, Your Word. How grateful we are. And, Lord, give us that willingness to listen. Be slow to speak and slow to resent what confronts us. Help us to hear with a pure heart, getting rid of all of the evil action and evil intent and to humble ourselves to a Word which is powerful to eternally save our souls and submit to it.

Father, for those that may be realized tonight that they don't know Christ, for no such desire exists in their heart, by Your Spirit, O God, move upon their life. Bring them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sin, the new nature wherein is the desire for Your truth. Those of us who love You and hear Your Word, encourage our hearts with the blessings of what we receive. For those who are truly redeemed, whose deep desire is to receive the Word but whose channels are blocked by impurity or a lack of submission or pride, Lord, remove those things that that pure desire might be fulfilled. And, Lord, we pray that each of us might go away tonight with a new and a fresh commitment to hear Your Word. And we thank You for such a privilege in Christ's name. Amen.

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