

Responding to the Word

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[0:00] James, the book of James, chapter 1, and we're going to be looking at verses 19-21.

! For instance, in the first chapter, there is a test on how we as believers should react to trials. There's also a test talked about in the book of James, chapter 1, is how do we as believers react to temptation. There's another test, and it's actually the test we're going to look at this evening, and that is, as believers, what is our response to the truth that is revealed in the Word of God? How do we respond to that as followers of Christ? Let me read to you the 19-21. This you know, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

[2:02] When you read the Word of God, and I hope you're doing that every day, and when you read the Word of God, how do you react?

What is your reaction to what you are reading? Do you, these are questions to ask yourselves, not anyone yelling at an answer, do you have a love for God's Word, and once read, do you have a desire to do what it says?

Very fundamental. People are always looking for reliable evidences of genuine salvation. And one of the strongest evidences is having a hunger for God's Word.

Now James is going to focus on a couple of truths related to that evidence. And the first evidence is that saving faith is marked by a proper reception of Scripture.

When you are saved, you will receive the Word of God in a manner that isn't around as an unbeliever.

[3:30] Things change. You're a new creation in Christ. When we're saved, we treat it, we treat the Bible as instructions from God Himself.

God speaks to us through His Word. The second evidence is that saving faith is marked by a proper reaction to the Word of God, and the only possible proper reaction for the genuine believer, for the true saint of God, is reflected in an obedient life.

There's no other proper way to treat what we read in the Word of God than to live a life of obedient faith. If we read the Word of God, but make a practice of disobeying what we read, there is every reason to believe that salvation has not occurred in that individual.

Now, that doesn't mean we're not going to fail at times. We all fail, don't we? But the operative word there is practice. What's your practice in life?

And we may, if time allows, we'll talk about that in a little bit. We will deal with the first evidence this evening. Do we see Scripture as a message from God Himself?

[5:02] I've had people tell me, you know, well, if God would just tell me, you know, what to do, I would do it. He's told us what to do. God talks to us through Scripture. We talk to God through prayer.

That's how it works. That's how it works. Now, when my youngest granddaughter was born in 2014, no one had to teach her to eat.

They didn't have a class, you know, and the nurses come in and chat with her or anything like that. They brought her to her mother. I left the room.

Thank goodness. And the feeding began. I could hear it. There was a feeding frenzy in there, you know. The same are those who have been born again or born from above.

Spiritual birth, it comes down from God. As newborn children, we crave spiritual milk. Paul talked about that. We hunger for God's word as our spiritual nourishment.

[6:08] And, you know, that probably happened to maybe everybody in this room when you were a new believer. There was a zeal. A zeal to get into God's word and to nourish ourselves on the word of God.

When I was a new believer, I started reading the Bible. And I started reading books written by men that I trusted or that I was told that were good. I looked at commentaries on the Bible.

It's a very natural response for new believers to do this. Now, unfortunately, it is also true that for a lot of believers and professing believers, that seems to wane with time.

It just kind of diminishes. And that's really unfortunate. That's really unfortunate. We should have just as much zeal tonight as we had when we were saved for God's word.

The Lord had something to say about this. And we need to heed his words in John 8, 31. If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine.

[7:24] That's pretty powerful, isn't it? What happens to the professing believer who doesn't abide in his word? Who doesn't have time for his word?

What happens? What would the Lord say about them? I fear he might say, well, you're not one of my true disciples. I mean, if we take the opposite track of that particular verse.

People are always yearning for the assurance that they are indeed saved. And by far the greatest and quite frankly, probably the only legitimate evidence is an ongoing obedience to Scripture.

And where do we learn about that? The Word of God. The Word of God. The psalmist spoke of this eloquently in Psalm 119. I always remember when Billy Graham's mother was on her deathbed.

So, Dr. Graham stood there and opened up his Bible and started reading Psalm 119. And his mother picked it up. Dr. Graham went silent and she quoted the entire psalm.

[8:35] Of course, that's the longest chapter in all the Bible. When she finished, she said, Billy, don't you remember? I tried to teach you that when you were a kid. She knew the whole psalm.

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. With all my heart I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies as much as in all riches.

And I would suggest that the law of the Lord there is the Word. The Word of God. True believers love God's Word. Their highest joy is to read, to understand, and to live obediently to what the Scriptures say.

And by doing so, we please the Lord. We please the Lord. Listen to these words of Jesus. And again, this is in John 14, 21 to 24.

He who has my commandments. Okay, we've got his commandments. And then the Lord's going to add something to that. And keeps them.

[9:50] So now he's gone from preaching to meddling, right? He wants to not only have them, but to keep them. Is the one who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him. And will disclose myself to him. And Judas, not Iscariot.

Remember, there were two Judases. How would you like to have the last thing going around? Not Iscariot. This is the other Judas. This is not the betrayer. Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, what then has happened that you're going to disclose yourself to us and not to the world?

And Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him. And we will come to him and make our abode with him.

He who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.

[10:59] The world doesn't keep the words of Scripture. They don't have the power to do so. Living in them. As believers do. And there's really no room for confusion in this section of Scripture.

A person related to Christ through the new birth responds gladly to God's word. The person who has no interest in hearing and much less obeying God's word gives ample evidence that they do not know the Lord.

They've never been saved. So we can see from Scripture how the believing heart and mind receives and submits to God's truth.

And it is all based upon our continuing trust in him. Folks, it's not that we're saved because we trusted Christ one time in the past.

It's a continuing trust. A continuing commitment. Some people assume they are saved because there was a brief moment years ago.

[12:14] They uttered the prayer. They repeated the prayer. They equated that trust. But our trust in Christ lasts forever. Even in eternity.

Even in eternity. It is always in the forefront of our minds in this life and in the life to come. James then is going to address three essential attitudes that are necessary for true believers to rightly receive God's word.

Three attitudes that we're to have. First of all, do we have a willingness to receive the word with submission?

Can we receive it with submission? Second, are we willing to receive it with purity?

And then third, are we willing to receive it with humility? We're going to talk about those three. The first one we're going to look at is submission. Are we willing to receive the truths of the word of God with submission?

[13:28] Let me read again. Verse 19 and 20. This you know, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Now, James here refers here to the power of the word to regenerate believers.

That's really what he's talking about. We know that the power is where? It's in the word of God. It's in the word of God. The power is not in the person that delivers it.

He's but a messenger. The power is in the word. When Jimmy Swaggart fell, and we all of a certain age remember that, and he fell hard, and people said, well, weren't there people saved under his ministry?

The answer is yes. Why? Because the power is in the word. But it's not in the deliverer. I think Graham was asked not too many years ago.

[14:43] Ruth was still alive and said, how many people do you know for sure have been saved under your ministry? He said one, maybe two. I'm pretty sure about Ruth. He meant himself and his wife.

Because he didn't know people's lives. The power of God to save through his word has been with us from ancient times. It is with us to this very day.

It will be with us to the end of time. Because we have experienced the transforming power of God's word and are now new creatures, new creations, we must continue to submit to and be guided by his word throughout our entire life.

Throughout our entire life. It is true that scripture is given to bring men and women to salvation, but there is much more. We submit to the word. I went to a conference. Mike, I think you were there.

Steve Farrar. I've been to a couple of his conferences. Really great guy. Great guy. And really, he has a commanding presence. He's six foot eight, about 275. Quite a guy.

[15:54] He said, every morning he gets up early. And this is when his father was still alive. I think he's passed on. But he said, at 530 in the morning, though we were a thousand miles apart, I knew where my father was at.

He was at his kitchen table with a cup of coffee and the word of God. And he would be there until about 8 o'clock when mom got up to make breakfast.

But he knew that his dad was totally committed to the word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 talks about more from the word of God that we are to gain.

The word is profitable for teaching. It's a whole different lesson. For reproof. Another lesson.

For correction. For training in righteousness. So that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

[17:06] That's the power of the word of God. And do all those things and much more. Now James here, writing by inspiration, gives three important commands that every believer must receive with a submissive attitude.

We receive these in submission. The first command is that we must be quick to hear. Now that sounds simple enough, but it's really important.

We must be quick to hear. What does that mean? We are called by God to be careful listeners.

We're to be listeners. We're to be listeners. We don't really live in an age of listening, do we? We live in an age of talking. I'll be so glad when this election's over.

That's all. It's just... Don't go there. Don't go there, Tom. We're to be careful listeners. We are supposed...

[18:18] Everyone wants to talk, don't they? Don't go there. We're supposed to pay close attention to what we read in the Bible. And by the way, reading is a form of listening, right?

Hearing. We want to pay close attention so we can get the message right. We want to know what that truth is. That nugget of truth is laying there waiting for us.

This means we should seize every opportunity to increase our exposure to Scripture. Seize every moment.

We need to read God's Word. We need to hear it faithfully preached and taught. Personally, I believe that the best way and the only true way to do that is to expository preach.

Precisely what Brother Don does. Verse by verse. I remember teaching Hebrews years ago and our dear brother, no longer a member here, he came up to me and said, Why can't you do this in five weeks?

[19:21] And I said, Well, there's more involved in Hebrews than that. He said, Well, just pass over the unimportant parts. Well, which ones are those? You know, can you outline those in yellow or something?

I was only there for two years. I don't know what he was complaining about. We need to read God's Word as it is and hear God's Word as it is faithfully preached.

Eagerness to learn, again, is the surest mark of genuine faith, of being a true follower of Christ. But you know what?

Increasing our exposure to the Word of God may require some lifestyle changes. We might have to change some things.

Now, I'm going to go from preaching to meddling. Maybe we need to turn off television. Maybe we need to do that. Diane, of course, has been in Texas for three weeks and there's no light at the end of that tunnel.

[20:24] And my TV has barely been on. I've been digging into the Word of God. It's just been, you know, fun to just walk away from television and really, really do that.

When she's here, there are certain things she likes. And we've got some of those ear things that she can put on. And I don't hear the television. It's nice. Paul commands us.

We know this. Paul commands us to examine ourselves. Part of this divinely ordered examination may be to take stock or to do a personal inventory regarding our hunger and thirst for God's Word. Are we like the psalmist in that we meditate upon it day and night? But true believers yearn to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God by exposure to His Word.

Beloved, as believers, we're going to spend eternity with God, right? Let's get to know Him now through His Word. It's not going to change. Change is not. The second command, in addition to be quick to hear, the second command that the Spirit of God gives us here is, these are the inspired writings of James, be slow to speak.

[21:50] I've really got to work on that. Be slow to speak. And let me say something here. This will happen when we are truly submissive to the Word.

Obviously, this command is related to the first one that we heard. Be quick to hear. You cannot be a careful listener while you're talking.

They cancel out each other. And that's why James and the Spirit of God say, just be slow. Slow to speak. You can't be a good listener.

If you're thinking, if you're thinking about how you're going to respond at what's being said. Do you ever catch yourself doing that? You're formulating an answer, and the person's still speaking to you. They're still speaking to you. Just slow down and listen. Listen, you can always formulate the answer after they're through. The only way to be a good listener is by listening quietly to what is being said or to what you are reading.

[23:08] I find myself rereading a lot because my mind might wander, and I'll say, well, stop, and I'll go back, and I'll start reading again because I want to catch it.

Now, this isn't easy, and particularly, I think, in our culture. To be slow to speak captures the idea of being careful not to be thinking about one's own thoughts and ideas while someone else is teaching or preaching God's Word.

We're to be silent both inside and out. I remember Mark Twain, one of his short stories, and of course, he was an agnostic, and Mark Twain wrote a short story about this guy that was in church, and the pastor asked him, did you get much out of a message?

He said, well, I really didn't get anything. I was trying to figure out in my mind what 14 times 14 was. I don't know what that means, but he said, I got caught up in that, and I didn't hear anything after I, I didn't want to do it with paper.

I wanted to do it in my mind. Mark Twain had a perception about stuff like that. When we are speaking for God, whether preachers, teachers, witnesses, people should listen.

[24 : 24] Now, let me give you a graphic example of a violation of this command, and I've experienced this. It's when some Hollywood star gets saved, and if you could be down there, you'd see I've got those in quotation marks.

He or she is immediately high profile. High profile. They take the stage. They give their testimony. They then launch into advice and counsel on how to live the Christian life, and they supposedly got saved 48 hours ago.

I've actually seen this happen. The truth is, they should be silent until they know what they're talking about.

That might take years. They should be silent. And I saw this happen at a, remember Promise Keepers? And there was a lot of good that came out of that, and some not so good.

Well, they had little satellite Promise Keepers, brethren. They had one in Tulsa. Just about filled the maybe center. And I could almost call this guy's name. I won't do it, but I almost can.

[25 : 43] And he had gotten saved a day or two earlier out in California. They flew him in. He took the stage. He went over an hour.

And he didn't know anything. He used buzzwords, and there were a lot of charismatics, I'm being very frank with you in the audience. And he talked about the power of the Spirit of God to save. Everybody just, you know, oh, and the indwelling Spirit. But it was all phrases and words that he picked up. And finally, the organizers in Tulsa had to go out and physically, gently, but physically remove him from the stage.

And at that point, I was already headed for the exit with both my boys because it was just ridiculous. He didn't know anything about the Word of God. He'd just gotten saved, quote, unquote.

I've seen him since, and there's some questions. But it was absurd. The third command is, be slow to anger. Be slow to anger.

[26 : 56] And the word there for anger in the Greek language is not that sudden outburst. It is an inner, deep resistance that seethes and smolders kind of under the surface.

It can even go unnoticed by others. They don't know that they're seething in anger because it's all internalized. The anger that James is speaking about can be caused even when someone reads something in the Bible or something they heard from the pulpit.

Wait a minute. I never read that before. I never heard that before. I don't know about this. And this often can happen when a person's sins are confronted primarily because that person doesn't see a problem based upon his or her conduct.

They don't see a problem. Anger and bitterness can never serve the cause of Christ. It has the opposite effect.

An angry man does not achieve the righteousness of God. And that is doubly true if that anger has been generated by a truth from God's Word.

[28 : 22] Because you know, let's face it, that's really a way of being angry at God, isn't it? It's like the Hebrews of old. They murmured against Moses. They weren't murmuring against Moses. They murmured against God.

They were just afraid to call it what it was. I remember a lady that joined here 20 years ago and the next day she got robbed. She came doctor and bride and she said, I want to be part of this.

Forget my coming forward yet. She wasn't a member. And she said, forget it. I got robbed. Why would I get robbed when I'm now a Christian? And Mike said, this isn't heaven.

You're not in heaven. She walked away from it. As far as I know, she walked away. Then we must be willing to receive the Word with purity.

First part of verse 21. Therefore, put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.

[29 : 24] Put it aside. Put aside filthiness and wickedness. So just what does that verse say?

Before we can receive the truth that leads to righteous living, we must renounce and put away any sin that is in our life and stands between us and our righteous God.

Whatever it is, if you're aware of it, deal with it. deal with it. We are first told to put aside filthiness.

Again, this is from a Greek word referring to any type of defilement or impurity. Very interesting. In the Greek world, it was used to refer to wax in the ear which was impeding hearing. to hear properly, one needs to clean the wax out of his or her ears and to receive the word impurity, one must clean the sin out of their life.

Clean it. The verse also says that we're to put aside all that remains of wickedness. That denotes moral evil.

[30 : 43] Moral evil. It is used to describe sins that are deliberate, and determined. We could call these the hidden sins of our heart.

Now remember, whatever we are hiding from our spouse, from our church brothers and sisters, or from the world, we're not hiding from God, right?

We're not hiding anything from God. He knows everything about us, about our conduct, about our thoughts, down to the subconscious level.

Since God already knows, shouldn't we just deal with it with Him? He already knows. So how do we put it aside? That's the key here. How do we put it aside?

one of the great verses in Scripture and one of the first verses I memorized after Jesus wept in John 3.16 was, we put it aside through confession, repentance, before, now mark this in your minds, before you undertake anything with God, including reading the Word, go to 1 John 1.9.

[32 : 11] Go to 1 John 1.9. We should invoke that passage anytime we are going to engage in anything spiritual, including sitting under the teaching of the Word.

Before you get to church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, go to 1 John 1.9. Well, okay, what does it say? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

All unrighteousness. Confessing means we tell God what we have done. Name it. We see that sin through the lens of God, through the eyes of God.

Remember, He already knows. He already knows. Name that sin to Him. Now, we're talking about one-on-one with the Lord here, okay? We're talking about being alone with God.

And based upon a genuine confession, Scripture promises God will forgive us and then He will go a step further and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[33 : 41] You know, the best explanation I ever saw on that, I don't remember who it was, but they said, God will forgive us the sin we are confessing and then He will cleanse us from sins that we have committed and either forgot that we committed them or didn't realize at the time we were even sinning.

He cleanses His child. He cleanses us. And then, are we willing to receive the word in humility? in humility. James 1, the last half of verse 21. In humility, receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls.

Do that in humility. Receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls. humility is a New Testament word that is often translated meekness or gentleness.

We find that word often in the Beatitudes. don't we? But though it is meekness or gentleness, it's not weakness. It's power.

[35 : 01] It's powerful. Humility is a powerful thing. Humble or humility best works in the translation here.

we must humbly put aside both self and sins to receive a word from the Lord.

To receive a word from the Lord. And humility is a tough thing in the 21st century. It was tough in Moses. You know, I think I can prove that Moses had a secretary because there's a passage in the Pentateuch that says Moses was the most humble man that ever lived.

I don't think the most humble man would say that about himself. They had to be the scribe. Of course, one person put another was the Holy Spirit was telling us that. We must humbly put aside self.

Humbly put aside sins as we've just discussed like through confession. To receive a word from the Lord. Humility makes us teachable.

[36 : 13] There's a direct link. You want a teachable spirit? It needs to be a humble spirit. Humility makes us teachable. We are to receive the word that has been implanted in us with a submissive, gentle, and teachable spirit.

And to do that, we've got to get rid of some things, don't we? Pride? Does that come to mind? Resentment? Anger?

Any form of moral corruption? Deal with it before the Lord. And he closes for tonight, saving our souls.

That refers to salvation. But remember, salvation is really in three stages. salvation is three stages. We have been saved from the penalty of sin. Christ took that penalty and nailed it to the cross. He died in our place.

[37 : 29] He who knew no sin became sin that we might become righteous of God. So we've been saved already from that penalty. We are presently being saved from the power of sin.

How do we do that? Get into the word. Confess. Do that daily, hourly if you have to. But we are being saved from the power of sin by the indwelling spirit of God.

one day we will be saved from the very presence of sin when we are with Christ Jesus in heaven.

Now there's three other ways to put this. We have been saved. Past tense. That's justification.

Justification is a legal term.

It happens one time. That's it. You have been justified. Then we embark on sanctification.

[38 : 33] We're being recreated in the image of Christ. A lifetime process. So we have been saved, made just. We are being saved. That's justification.

And we will be saved. That's glorification. That's heaven. We will be like Jesus because we'll see him as he is. And it all occurs through the power of the word of God.

Of the word of God. Thank you.