

James 1:19-21

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[0:00] After a couple week break from the book of James, we're back to our verse by verse exposition. And today's text is James chapter one verses 19 through 21.

! The first 18 verses of James in this way.

I think the kids have more energy for fussing than less. This is what Zach said of the first 18 verses. What James is saying then is that the trials themselves are good because they are from God who is good.

And these trials produce in us good, which is for our good. And then he added, that is a pretty decent summary of James one, one through 18.

I asked Zach for a summary this week and he actually copied and pasted it out of his notes. And included in his notes was, that is a pretty decent summary of James.

[1:11] I agree. That is a good summary of the first 18 verses of the book of James, which brings us to verse 19, 20, and 21.

Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It's written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

James 1, 19 and following. Know this, my beloved brothers. Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Now, it would seem at first appearance that James is beginning already to kind of shotgun commands out together. Perhaps you've already looked at verse 19 and 20 and seen the relationship between the two of them and then wondered how verse 21 connects to the rest of it.

[2:29] I hope this morning to show you this as we study it together. Our outline for our study of today's text will be as follows. I will repeat these for your note taking.

Number one, James teaches us how to receive the word. Number two, James gives us a reason to receive the word.

Number three, James commands us to receive the word. So how a reason and a command. So first, James teaches us how to receive the word.

I believe that James is making this very specific point. It has some broader implication and we'll talk briefly about that broader implication, but a very specific point because of the final verse of the previous section of this letter.

He says in verse 18 of his own will, God of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[3:41] Right. He brought us forth. This Greek phrase can also be used of giving birth, a child being brought forth from the womb. But we know that James isn't talking about the first birth in this case because we see the means by which we're brought forth.

He's talking about the second birth. Right. Us becoming Christians, being born again because the means by which is by the word of truth of his own will.

He brought us forth by the word of truth. Right. We are utterly lost in our sin. We are enemies of God. And it is by the word of Christ employed by the spirit of Christ speaking into our hearts that we are made new.

We are made capable of believing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Right. This is the doctrine of regeneration. Right. We are made alive spiritually speaking once dead now alive. We have categorically shifted, not changed simply in degree, not made a little better, but made entirely different than who we once were.

[4:59] So it's in that context that he then moves on to verse 19. It would seem like such a random transition, but it's not at all. All he says in verse 19, know this, my beloved brothers.

Right. So he is addressing those within the church, those that he can call brothers. And even more than that, those who are called beloved.

You hear me use this title for you. Right. As I'm addressing Christians in our fellowship together. And I do this because I want you to know that I love you. I often say this before I say difficult things you may catch.

But more than that, I say it because I want you to be reminded that God loves you in Christ. God loves you. This word is very significant.

We see a record in Matthew chapter three in verse 17. After Jesus is baptized, the spirit descends on him like a dove and a voice from heaven says, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

[6:12] This title given to Christ beloved is transferred to us when we believe in Jesus. Right. His righteousness is given to us.

His penalty for our sin is taken by him. We are called beloved. James does this here. Many of the other biblical writers do it as well.

It's why I use the phrase because I want you to be reminded that God loves you immensely in Christ. Right. So this is who he's talking to. Know this, my beloved brothers.

Now, according to Robert Gundry, who's a contemporary New Testament Greek scholar, the beginning of verse 19 could also be translated. And in fact, in the Greek, it more specifically is translated, be knowledgeable, my beloved brothers.

Now, all of our English translations have some weaknesses at some point. And I have a massive amount of respect for the people who have labored to put together these translations for us. I always want to be so careful that I don't sound like I know best because I don't.

[7:24] I am not a Bible translator. I'm very weak in Greek. However, Robert Gundry is not. And I really like his work that he does here. Be knowledgeable, my beloved brothers, which I think is appropriate for the flow of where we came from in verse 18 and on into the rest of the verse.

It might help us understand the reasoning that James is following as he's about to say some very specific things. The specific point that James is making is this.

If you are to be knowledgeable, you will need to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. I believe that what James is doing is giving them instruction as to how to gather around the word.

You remember when he writes this letter, they have the Old Testament scriptures, which would have been open to them on the Lord's day. These believers would not have had copies themselves the way we have copies in such abundance of the scripture.

They would have come together each week and had somebody open to them, the scrolls open to them, the scripture and give explanation of it. Things like this letter, right, that have now been canonized would have been brought to them for them to hear the instruction of the word.

[8:48] And there must have been some measure of chaos in the meetings of these Jewish Christians. And James means to correct that chaos for their good.

James, in the entirety of his letter, is very concerned about the words that these Christians were speaking. This letter would have been read in its entirety. And I know that we tend to piecemeal it off, and I think it's worth the attention that we give it.

But I would say to you, make the practice when we're studying a book of the scripture to read through it on the regular and sort of pick up these themes, right? James really is thoughtful.

He's really thinking about and helping correct the way that they speak. He seems to really understand what Jesus said, which is recorded for us in Luke chapter 6 and verse 45.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

[9:51] Look with me just briefly beyond verse 19 at the rest of our letter, right? We're instructed to be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to anger. But look at some other places in the text.

You may flip with me. It's okay. I'll try to keep you with me. If not, verse 26 of chapter 1, if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

In chapter 3, beginning in verse 2 and following, I'll read a number of verses here. He says, For the tongue is set ablaze by such a small fire.

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

[11:23] With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not be so.

Strong words. Something is happening in the life of this fellowship, right? These are some really intense words that he is using to bring correction to the way these Christians are using their tongue. Down in verse 14 of chapter 3, he says, Do not boast and be false to the truth. In chapter 4, in verse 11, he says, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.

And then in verse 13 through 15, he says, Come now, you who say. And he talks about people who make boastful claims about the future. And then in verse 15, he says, Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

In chapter 5, in verse 9, he says, Do not grumble against one another, brothers. And then in verse 12, My brothers, do not swear, but let your yes be yes and your no be no.

[12:29] So he has a lot to say. He's being very mindful of how it is that we speak to one another. So he gives three progressive instructions.

They build upon one another. He says, First, let every person be quick. To hear. You can think more good listeners.

And beloved, we have become very poor listeners. There are few of us that really take in anything substantive on a regular basis and take the time to really understand it and apply it.

And this should not be so with us and God's word. There's a lot of stuff in this world that you have all of the Lord's permission to ignore, but not God's word.

God's word is the very sustenance for those who have believed in Christ. Why have we become such poor listeners?

[13:38] Just a couple of thoughts of mine. One, I think that we are so busy. We are just busy. We have filled up so much of our time. And some of this is unavoidable.

Just a lot of it's expected of us. We have a lot going on. And very few of us have nighttime hours where nothing can be accomplished but sitting by the fire. We have things to do all the time.

But perhaps we don't need to be quite as busy as we are. Maybe there are some things in our life that we could do away with that feel so necessary but really aren't.

I think that we are on information overload. There is so much information coming our way so often. And I don't know about you, but I feel the pressure to know it all.

I feel like I ought to be able to pick up every single thing that's coming my way and process it and know it. And it is utterly impossible. I am finite.

[14:41] I have a limited amount of hours in the day. I have limited brain capacity if this surprises you. I just have only so much bandwidth in my day to know things, to process information, to even read all of the reading that is out there that can be done.

Another reason I think we've become such poor listeners is that our world is full of dumb entertainment. Just absolutely stupid things to consume.

And there are times that it's okay for our brains to disconnect and for us just to relax. But I cannot believe the proliferation of reality TV. That is the evidence that our culture is just getting stupider and stupider.

We take in stuff that is just so unfruitful. And if you watch shows these days, they cut scene to scene to scene to scene to scene to scene.

You can't watch a conversation in a TV show, right? Like the plot thickening place you need to be in a TV show without it cutting scene, scene, scene, scene, scene, scene, scene, scene.

[15:48] Like a single camera just hardly exists anymore with a couple of people standing around having a conversation. Why? Because we can't pay attention. Creators of these shows know to keep people engaged in what these people are saying.

They have to cut the scene, cut the scene, cut the scene, cut the scene. And so as we watch and consume such dumb entertainment, we are becoming dumber.

We're becoming poor listeners. So what can we do about this? Some things we can affect and change. Some things we can't.

There's a couple of ideas for you. Number one, we need to discipline ourselves to read God's word. It needs to become a habit in our lives that we take it up and we read it, right?

We make the effort to read it. And I think that we're often driven by our emotions and we read God's word and we don't feel the thing we wanted to feel when we read God's word. And so we tend to not do it, right?

[16:51] We don't get the gains that we were hoping for when we opened it up, right? Discipline yourself to open his word and to read it, right? To think deeply about it.

I can promise you that you will get better at this if you will discipline yourself to do it. Secondly, make time for meditation.

It's one thing to read God's word. It's another thing to think upon it, right? To really have it sink down deep within you, right? To take the time to think about what it means and what it means for you.

The application for your life in that day and the days to come. To really consider it. You will not meditate well if your phone is in your pocket.

At least I don't meditate well. Did you know that we can walk away from our phones? Young people, I lived in a day where our house had a phone. There was the phone.

[17:49] It was a phone. And now everybody has their phone. People don't need to get a hold of you on their whim. It is okay for you to turn your phone off. It's okay to walk away from it.

There's this great thing called do not disturb. You can shut your phone up. If you find yourself when you're opening up God's word impulsively having to pick up something and look at something, you need to discipline yourself away from this.

Watch how technology is affecting your soul. Is it beginning to control you or are you using it as a tool for the glory of God? So make time.

Carve out space for meditation. Third, read the word and listen to sermons prayerfully. Ask God to help you as you do this.

Lord, help me be attentive. I am finite. I am easily distracted. Technology is rewiring my brain. Lord, help me as I open up your word to take it in carefully, to be shaped by it as I listen to a sermon, to be undistracted, to pay careful attention to what is being said.

[19:03] And I believe that the Lord will faithfully answer that prayer. Similarly, prepare for the Lord's day. Take some time as you gather with God's people to prepare yourself to come and to gather with God's people.

We quite by design start our members gathering at 10 o'clock. And we start the public gathering of our church at 11 o'clock. You've got hours on Sunday morning to prepare yourself to come together.

But I get it. Our household can be in a flurry on Sunday morning. Perhaps it's a great work of the devil that everything that can go wrong seems to go wrong on Sunday morning.

When all of our three boys were little, little, they inevitably would wake up way earlier than we wanted them to every day of the week. You'd want them to sleep until a certain time.

You'd want them to give you quiet time in the morning and they would wake up. Except for Sunday. Sunday seemed to be the day that they wanted to sleep and sleep and sleep and sleep.

[20:09] And when you disturbed them, they would wake up grumpy, right? Something seems to happen on Sunday morning as we're coming to do this

very, very important thing to do. And we can't prevent every diaper blowout.

But we can prepare ourselves the day before better than we typically do. We ought not stay up late on Saturday nights.

Stay up late on Friday. Prepare yourself on Saturday to come together with God's people. You will be less distracted. You'll pay more careful attention if you are less tired on Sunday morning.

You'll be less likely to fall asleep. Think about what you need to bring when you come together with God's people and the word is open to you. Maybe you benefit from note taking.

Perhaps you don't. I'd suggest to you that you would all be better listeners if you listened with a pen in your hand. To do a better job through thinking about what's being said and writing down things that need to be thought about later on.

[21:12] You can do very practical things. Prepare yourself to be quick to hear. And lastly, just quickly, think about limiting your exposure to visual and to print media.

These things are changing the way we think. Be quick to hear. Become a good listener. Second, in this progressive instructions, right?

If we're going to be good listeners, we're going to tend to be slow to speak. We're going to take things in and we're going to process things and we're not going to respond quite as quickly.

These early gatherings of the church were not very structured. And it would seem that the teaching of the word would be regularly interrupted by those being slow to hear and quick to speak.

I think that James is correcting that here. Our times together are more structured. And I doubt that any of you would feel the liberty to interrupt a sermon, to ask a question or make a rebuttal.

[22:19] I would encourage you not to do that. But I would like to encourage you to quiet your inner dialogue.

You tend to talk to yourself as you're listening. I cannot count the times that I've had someone ask me a clarifying question, come up and say, hey, you said this, but did you mean when I offered the clarification during the sermon?

When I would make a statement and the next thing I would say is, I am not saying this. Or I am clarifying it right then. But the brain gets stuck. They hear a sentence and they go, wait, could that be fully true?

And they didn't stop and listen, really listen to the clarifying points that are being made. None of us are going to do this perfectly, so please ask clarifying questions.

But it's the thing that we ought to work at doing, slowing down our inner dialogue, really listening to what is being said. The contemporary pastor Kent Hughes in his commentary on James cites a rabbinical saying.

[23:24] I really like this. This is the reason why we have two ears and only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less. The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction.

But the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth to hedge it in and keep it within proper bounds. So, be quick to hear and be slow to speak.

And then he adds to that, be slow to anger. Now, remember, I think that these things are progressive. If you are a good hearer and a careful speaker, you're going to tend to also be slow to anger.

It is probable that what was taking place in these churches is one man would listen carefully to what was being taught and would interpret the teaching. And then another would become angry at the interrupt the teaching and the other become angry at the interruption.

And then another would get angry. Pride would begin to reign in their fellowship instead of humility. And soon, no one would be profiting from the word. Or perhaps you sat in a Bible study that goes that way.

[24:31] Like one guy trying to outclass the other guy with his knowledge of the word. And it typically becomes very unhelpful as pride takes over in that fellowship.

An angry spirit is never a teachable spirit. It's a proud spirit. It says, I know what the truth is rather than taking, listening, being slow to respond.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 29 and verse 11, a fool gives full vent to a spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back. And in Proverbs 16 and verse 32, whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. We want to be wise people. We want to be mighty people by being slow to anger.

Now, I previously stated that I believe that James is making this very specific point. But the implication is broader and we shouldn't lose it this morning. We ought to always be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger as we gather with the church.

[25:43] But we also ought to always be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger in general. Oh, what trouble this world would be spared if we would all just slow down a bit, really seek to understand another's position and respond kindly with carefully articulated truth.

James would be appalled by the behavior of Christians on social media in our day. I think he would say, I wrote a letter about this.

I am grateful that he is fully enthralled with the glory of Christ and is spared knowing just how vitriolic we have become. I think he is enraptured right now with the glories of Christ and doesn't care what's going on here.

But I think our Lord and Savior cares very much. And so should we. Beloved, it should not be so amongst us that we would not be careful in the way that we speak to one another.

And I want to make a further application specifically for husbands. Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 3 in verse 7.

[26:57] Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way. You could also read that as according to knowledge.

Showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Listen to James chapter 1 in verse 19 with Robert Gundry's translation of the opening phrase. Be knowledgeable, my beloved brothers.

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Husbands, we have very little, if ever, any space for becoming angry with our wives.

Our wives are precious vessels. They're given to us as a gift. How dare we be slow to hear and quick to speak and become angry with our wives?

[28:02] I am guilty of this. Many of you have known me a long time. And I have been at times an angry person. Typically a brooding, slow, kind of simmering anger.

But at times it would boil out and it would always boil out on my wife. It was wrong. It was unkind toward her for me to do so.

I went to a counseling conference where a guy said very boldly, and this will be a really bad example of being a good listener because I was a bad listener in this moment. But he said very boldly, if you show me what worries you or what makes you angry, I'll show you your idols. He just said it matter-of-factly. So in my mind I went, oh, I've got to see if that's true or not. So I took the time in that counseling conference, while he said, I'm sure, a bunch of wonderful things following that, but I listed out things that make me angry.

And prior to that, a man had also said that we tend to use disguising words for anger. So I was writing out things that made me angry or frustrated me and really thinking about it.

[29:07] Lord, is this idolatry in my life? Is there a way that this is sin in my life? Things that I had justified, thought that I was right for being angry about, and again, and again, and again, and again.

I wadded it up and threw it away. I probably should have kept it and pulled it out. These are the things, the way that I was sinning and being angry. And there is no space for this in the life of a Christian husband.

Should not be so. All right. Back to the primary point. James teaches us how to receive the word. We'll be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to anger.

And then he gives us a reason to receive the word. Why we should be doing this. He says in verse 20, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

The anger of man is self-righteous. It is self-justifying. It is self-serving and does not produce the righteousness of God.

[30:12] We ought not be characterized by the anger of man. It takes two forms. We all need to recognize this. Usually when we see the word anger, we think of like hot, vented anger.

Right? We think of yelling. Right? We think of road rage type of anger. Right? A fist through doors kind of anger. And that is anger, to be sure. But many of us miss smoldering, bitter anger. And as I mentioned, we use all kinds of words to disguise it. My go-to word has been frustrated. I'm frustrated by something. Something is frustrating to me.

It is the thing that is making me angry. It is one in the same. And we don't have time to explore anger in totality today. I wish we did. But I want you to hear that we are far too angry.

Far too often. And it needs to be explored in your life. You could probably think across this past week at something that made you angry.

[31:18] And if it's sin, and it probably is, we need to repent and live lives that are pleasing to our Lord. Now, there isn't such thing as righteous anger.

Anger can be holy. Anger that is produced in us by God for the sake of others and his glory.

We celebrate Veterans Day this week. I am glad that we have had men go places and be angry for the right things. You don't fight well unless you have anger.

You must. To destroy something else, you must be angry at that something. There are times for this kind of thing. If I ever caught somebody beating a toddler in a parking lot, you better believe my anger would burn and it would be righteous anger to stop what's happening to this child.

Right? There's times for this. Right? For the sake of others and for the glory of God. But this is not the typical anger that we experience. Right? The typical anger we experience is when somebody pulls out in front of us and heaven forbid we have to get on our brakes a little bit and slow down from our busy day.

[32:30] Right? That kind of anger is self-serving. It's self-righteous like you've never pulled out in front of somebody before. Right? It says that this entire world revolves around you and your schedule.

Everyone on the road should know that you overslept your alarm and you need to get to work on time. Right? It's about you. It's about self-service. Most of our anger is that way.

What we typically experience is the anger of man that does not produce the righteousness of God. And this is the reason that James gives us to receive the word.

We need God's word to work in us to live lives that are pleasing to him. This is why we need to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

So thirdly and lastly, James commands us to receive the word. Right? He gets more emphatic. He says, verse 21, therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

[33:35] Anger is just one sin. So James now expands his point by saying, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. Right? And that's the negative command of verse 21.

He's saying you need to stop doing some things. Things like these things are getting in the way of your receipt of God's word.

Jesus says in John chapter eight and verse 37 in a rebuke of the Pharisees. Right? And hear this carefully. The Pharisees were people of the word.

We would say that as a church. We are people of the word. Right? Right? The Pharisees knew the scripture. Right? They studied it daily. They took much pain in studying the scripture.

They memorized great lengths of the text. Right? All of this was self-righteous activity. They were pretty good at it. And Jesus says this in a rebuke of the Pharisees.

[34:31] John 8, 37. I know that you are offspring of Abraham. Yet you seek to kill me. Why? Why are they looking to kill the Christ? Because my word finds no place in you.

They were so full of self-righteousness. They were so full of their activity. That there was no place in their hearts. For the word of God to take root.

And bring forth fruit in their lives. As I think about this. I'm drawn to the parable of the sower. Mark chapter 4. Beginning in verse 3. Jesus says, listen.

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And I love this parable. Because Jesus explains it. It's always nice when he says exactly what he means. In the parable. So further in Mark chapter 4.

He tells exactly what's going on. So the sower was out to sow. And what is the sower sowing? He's sowing the word. He's sowing the truth. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path.

[35:34] And the birds came and devoured it. And he tells us later that this is Satan coming and taking away the word. I would suggest to you that this is people hearing the truth.

But then competitive lowercase truths come in. And they ceased to believe what they should believe is true. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil. And immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched. And since it had no root, it withered away.

So there are people who seem to believe the truth. They give outward expression of that. He says that it doesn't have roots. It springs up immediately. You see people receiving the word with joy. Seeming to make credible professions of faith in Jesus Christ. But when, he tells us later, tribulation, trouble, or persecution, direct opposition to the gospel arises.

[36:34] It withers away. The word does not have root in their life. Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it. And it yielded no grain.

Jesus tells us later that these thorns are the cares and the riches of the world. This Christianity is not promising to me the things that I wanted it to promise to me.

And they produce no fruit. But then, and this is who we want to be. Other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding 30-fold and 60-fold and 100-fold.

People who are fruitful, who are putting away filthiness and rampant wickedness, who are being quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to anger because we take in the word.

And Jesus ends this parable by saying, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. So he drives the point home with the positive command of verse 21.

[37:45] Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. And there's a juxtaposed posture here to the man who is slow to hear and quick to speak and quick to anger.

But the proud man, he says, receive with meekness. Which is a bridled strength. Meekness is an expression of humility.

It says, I need to quiet myself and I need to listen to the word. Beloved, we have the word implanted in us, right?

If you have believed in Christ, he has worked this great thing in you. But we must put away our sin and receive the word.

This is an activity for us to be about. We must continually make room for it in our hearts. It is the word of Christ employed powerfully by the spirit of Christ that will save our souls, right?

[38:51] That will see us through to the end. So James is careful here to teach us how to receive the word, to give us a reason that we ought to receive the word.

And a command to receive the word. May we be a people who receive the word. A people who are shaped by the word for our good and for the glory of our great God.

Let's pray together.