



## ***Session 2 – James 1:19-27***

### **CARE WITH OUR OWN WORDS; DOING GOD'S WORD**

#### **Our words (v.19-20)**

James introduces a theme to which he will return in v.26 and again, at some length, in chapter 3: the tongue.

Here he observes how, if we lose our temper, the result will be something which is not in keeping with God's good and righteous ways. In particular, our hasty anger will very often lead us to say things which are rash and harmful and which we would have avoided if we had taken time to think about what to say. He has some straightforward advice.

***Be quick to listen and slow to speak*** The more heated the situation, the more important it is to listen to what the other person is saying, and then to think carefully before responding. (Compare Proverbs 10:19, 13:3, 17:28, 29:20.)

***Be slow to anger*** Anger is not forbidden; it is right to be angry at such things as injustice. But a hasty loss of temper is always to be avoided. God's anger at sin is an example of perfectly righteous anger; but he is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness . . ." (Exod 34:6 – this, the OT's great description of God, is echoed in eg Num 14:18, Neh 9:17, Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8.) There is a close link between loss of temper and the wrong use of the tongue; whenever an argument is brewing, we must recognise it as a source of temptation to misuse our tongue.

## **The word of God (v.21-27)**

The Bible uses the expression “The word of God” in three main ways.

- a) The gospel message (eg Luke 8:11, Acts 13:5, 1Pet 1:23,25).
- b) The written scriptures and the laws they contain (eg Ps 119:9-16, 105, Mark 7:13, Heb 4:12).
- c) Jesus, the living Word (eg John 1:1,14, 1John 1:1, Rev 19:13).

In v.21, James uses “word” in the first sense, as he did in v.18.

In v.22 & 23, he uses it in the second sense.

**Let God’s word grow in you (v.21)** The word has been “planted” in us. Accepting the word – the gospel message about the salvation offered to us through the loving sacrifice of Jesus – is at the heart of being a Christian. But becoming a Christian is not the end of the story. The word “planted” hints at Jesus’ parable of the sower and the idea of growth; we are encouraged to live as good soil – to accept the word/seed that has been planted (Luke 8:11) so that it flourishes and produces good fruit – and to be aware of the dangers of rocks and thorns stifling its growth.

To enable this word to grow in us, we need to make a conscious effort to do away with those things that will prevent its growth. “Get rid of all moral filth” is a rather tame translation of James’s words; one version translates it as “Strip yourself of all filthiness and excrescence of vice.” Getting rid of bad old ways is often depicted in NT by using this same word which means taking off clothes, and is often contrasted with putting on new good ways (eg Rom 13:12, Eph 4:22,25, Col 3:8, Heb 12:1, 1Pet 2:1).

**Do God’s word (v.22-27)** Don’t be someone who reads the Bible, hears a sermon and forgets it all so that it makes absolutely no difference to you. There is so much in the Bible to teach us the best way to live – for example, the ten commandments and the teaching of Jesus.

- *Study it.* “Look intently into it” (v.25). Treat it as worthy of your time and attention.

- *Stay with it.* “Continue to do this” – “Live in its company” is how one modern version of the Bible paraphrases it. Keep mulling it over.

- *Do it.* It is the “perfect law” – putting it into practice will be for the very best, it will give us the freedom to enjoy life, and it will be a blessing to us (compare Jesus’ words in Luke 11:28).

In v.26 & 27, James uses the words *religious* and *religion* – words which hardly appear in the Bible apart from here. They are words which refer to religious practices – eg what we do in church on Sunday morning. Taking part in the externals of worship, says James, is meaningless and hypocritical if it isn't matched by the way we “do” the word and live out our faith Monday-to-Saturday –

- keeping our tongues under control;
- taking practical care of those who are poor and vulnerable – acting like God who is “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps 68:5);
- not letting the world's attitudes (many of them, such as materialism or individualism, un-Christian or even anti-Christian) rub off on us, but instead living a distinctively Christian life.

### ***For homegroups***

- Read Proverbs 10:19, 13:3, 17:28, 29:20. Which, for you, is the best summary of how to be wise in our words?
- How can being quick to listen and slow to speak help us be slow to become angry (v.19)?
- James doesn't tell us never to be angry, but to avoid being quick-tempered. Can you give examples of when you have seen hasty anger have a bad effect? Can you give examples of when you have seen righteous anger have a good effect?
- What things should make us angry?
- What does it mean to accept the word “humbly” (v.21)?
- Can you explain the mirror parable in v.23-24?
- List the occasions when you hear God's word. What can you do to make sure that you do something with what you hear?

- If you asked a not-yet-Christian friend what they think it means to be a committed Christian (ie “religious”), what answers might you get? How would you respond to those answers?
- What more could we do to make connections between what we do in church on Sunday and how we live Monday-to-Saturday?
- James singles out orphans and widows (v.27) as people in distress. Who might he single out if writing to Christians in Ely today?
- How can we be fully involved in the world and its needs but also keep ourselves from “being polluted by the world” (v.27)?