

Studies in James

James 1:19-27

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The Message

The Book of James is one of the most challenging Books in Scripture, and contains extremely practical guidelines about Christian life. The lessons we learn about in this book need to be etched on our hearts, and need to fundamentally change our basic attitude to ourselves, to other people, and to life in general. What we learn is applicable to every aspect of our lives, but we need to ask ourselves are we prepared to change?

In our last study on James, we talked about wisdom and the gradual erosion of the discrepancy between belief and action. In some respects, we in the Western world have so much to struggle with in the secular culture in which we live, whereas the early Christian Jews lived and breathed religion, and a religious way of life. Yet James tells us that it is not enough to live a strict legal code. Are we like the hypocrites who *“love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men”*? (Matthew 6:5). Are we like the rich young man whom Jesus talks about in Matthew 19:16-26. If we are then we need to repent and get things right.

Meditation on verses 19-21 should fundamentally challenge the way that we are, and the way that we interact with other people. We need to allow God to develop within us a positive attitude to life, and its difficulties. We also need to allow ourselves to be challenged on the critical attitude that we can so often have. In any situation do we truly believe that we have done what Jesus would do? Have we glorified God today, and how will we glorify Him tomorrow - and the day after? But the message continues with verses 22-27. These verses contain such a difficult message. It is almost too much to take them all at once.

On the face of it, we should find it practically impossible to follow this teaching. We must remember though that when we try to follow man's law we can often end up in bondage and condemnation. God's perfect law, however, gives freedom through our Lord Jesus Christ. The moral and ethical teaching of Christianity, which is based on the moral law we read about in the Hebrew Scriptures, as embodied in the Ten Commandments, was brought to completion (perfection) by Jesus Christ. By obeying God's perfect law, we are given joyous freedom to be what we were created for. There is no better place to be, and no better thing to do, than to be where God wants us to be, doing what God wants us to do. It is only our sinful self that would try and persuade us otherwise.

The Jews missed the point when they began to turn Torah into an extension of man's law, when in reality the true nature or spirit of Torah was grace. For many Christians too, the law we read of in the Hebrew Scriptures they believe to be a cold legalistic set of documents that stand in stark contrast to the extravagant grace of the new covenant. The word 'torah' comes from the root 'to teach'. It is a family word, the loving direction and guidance given by a parent to their child. Why do you think Jewish Christians are such liberated people? They can see the truth in a way that Christians find difficult to. We need to understand how exciting the old covenant was and then we can begin to get really excited about the new covenant.

Questions

1. What practical steps can we take to become better listeners?
2. What practical steps can we follow in our lives to become better 'doers' of the Word?
3. How can we encourage other Christians to also become 'doers' of the Word?
4. Can a law give freedom?

5. What practical steps can we take to remind ourselves that we are in the world and not of the world, and so keep ourselves from being polluted.