

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-1-15 AM NOTES
"ALLOWING THE WORD TO COMPLETE ITS WORK"
JAMES 1:19-21
#5 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

James 1:2 (NKJV) "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NKJV) "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*."

James 1:18a (NIV) "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth..."

The word of truth is not only God's agent in our spiritual birth; it is His agent in our spiritual growth.

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV) "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

"The person who is truly related to Christ through saving faith responds gladly to His Word. Conversely, the person who has no interest in hearing, much less obeying, God's Word gives evidence that he does not belong to Him." —John MacArthur

I. Readiness for the Word (vv. 19-21a)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV) "¹⁶All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Mark 4:24a (NKJV) "Then He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear.'"

Luke 8:18a (NKJV) "Therefore take heed how you hear."

Matthew 13:13b (NKJV) "...hearing they do not hear..."

Hebrews 5:11b (NKJV) "...you have become dull of hearing."

A. Listen Up (v. 19a)

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV) "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

B. Zip It Up (v. 19b)

Proverbs 10:19 (HCSB) “When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise.”

Proverbs 17:28 (NKJV) “Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; *when* he shuts his lips, *he is considered* perceptive.”

Proverbs 29:20 (NKJV) “Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him.”

Job 40:4 (NKJV) “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth.”

C. Give It Up (vv. 19c, 20)

D. Clean Up (v. 21a)

1. Filthiness

Hebrews 5:11 (NKJV) “of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

2. Overflow of Wickedness

Hebrews 12:6 (NKJV) “*For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*”

II. The Reception of the Word (v. 21b)

A. The Attitude of Receiving the Word

B. The Picture of Receiving the Word

III. The Expected Result (v. 21c)

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Allow me to set these verses in their context. James has been focusing on the Christian’s trials and temptations. I’ve often said that the Christian life is no pleasure cruise! In a fallen world where every believer is constantly bombarded with **the world system** seeking to conform us to its values, **the flesh** seeking to control us, and **the Devil** seeking to deceive us, we are vulnerable unless we are taking advantage of every means the Lord has given us to walk in victory. Two of the means that God has ordained to strengthen us and equip us to walk in the victory that is ours over the world, the flesh, and the devil are trials and temptations. Every trial that comes to us is either engineered and sent by or at least allowed by God. He is sovereign over our trials – all of our trials. When we see how he desires to use our trials and troubles, we can actually as **James 1:2 (NKJV)** says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials”. How can we count it all joy? It is because God has promised to perfect, mature, and complete us as we turn to Him in those trials and learn every truth He desires to teach us through them. What about temptations? A temptation is a solicitation to evil. James tells us in James 1:13 that God is not the source of temptations. However, because God is sovereign, every temptation is permitted by God and 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells that those temptations permitted by God are also **limited** by God so that we are not tempted above what we are able to bear when drawing on His strength.

In verse 18 gives us the immediate context of today’s text. We saw in the last message that the reason true Christians can grow through trials and even through temptations is because we have been born again, or as verse 18 puts it, “brought forth by the word of truth”. That new birth is accomplished by the Spirit of God (John 3:8 speaks of being “born of the Spirit”) and the Word of God. **James 1:18a (NIV)** “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...” What we see in today’s text is that the word of God has not completed its work in our life when we are born again. The Word of God continues to work in the life of the one who is truly born of God. In fact, one of the evidences that a person has been born again is that they have a supernatural, God produced love for and desire for the word of truth. **The word of truth is not only God’s agent in our spiritual birth; it is His agent in our spiritual growth.** Just as a baby naturally desires milk and does not have to be taught to want it, even so a person who has been born again by the Spirit and the word of truth will have a God produced desire for the Word. **1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)** “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”. John MacArthur gives a great summary. “The person who is truly related to Christ through saving faith responds gladly to His Word. Conversely, the person who has no interest in hearing, much less obeying, God’s Word gives evidence that he does not belong to Him.” [John MacArthur, *James, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, page 66].

Today’s text is simply telling us how the Word of truth continues to work in the daily life of a new creation in Christ. I long for you to leave today with a new awareness of, and a new appreciation for the amazing Word of God. The Word of God matures us and enables us to see trials as God’s tools to perfect us and temptations as one of the God ordained means of spiritual strengthening as we walk in victory over them.

I. Readiness for the Word (V19-21a)

The “so then” in verse 19 connects what follows to verse 18 and the new birth that is proclaimed there. In verse 19-21a James is telling us what we need to do in order to allow the Word of truth to do its continuing supernatural work in our lives. To put it another way, there are some things that we need to give attention to so that the Word of God can do its work described in **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)** “¹⁶All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction in righteousness**,¹⁷ that the man of God may be **complete, thoroughly equipped** for every good work.” James gives us four things that we need to do to hear clearly the Word and then allow the

Word to do its powerful work in our lives. Some of you will hear this Word of God today and quit listening after a while and just try to endure until I finish. I heard about one man who was known to mostly catch up on his sleep during the pastor's sermon because he had been up late on Saturday night. Upon entering the sanctuary one Sunday he asked the Pastor to offer up a prayer appropriate for him as he came to the service. The Pastor bowed his head and said, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." Others this morning will listen intently and be changed by the Word.

Here are four commands that result in a readiness for the receiving of the Word.

A. Listen Up (V19a)

The Greek word translated "swift" is the word we get tachometer from. It speaks of velocity. We are to be eager to hear the Word; we are to turn quickly to the Word when we are in a quandary or when we have a decision to make when we are not sure which way to go. When we face a trial or a temptation, we are to be swift to go first to God's word and hear what the Word of truth says about the situation. There ought to be an expectation when we listen to a sermon that we are going to hear in the Word of truth how to deal with a situation we are now in or will be in sometime in the future. When you come to church on a Sunday morning or Sunday night, you have a right to expect me to be prepared by being **prayed up** and **studied up** to present to you the Word of truth and not just a bunch of stories. I think I have a right to expect you to be prepared to listen. Any time you are facing a decision, your first thought ought to be, "What does the Word of truth have to say about this situation?"

My prayer is that God would make us like the early disciples at Thessalonica. We read of them in **1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV)** "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." Allow me to give you a challenge that if accepted will impact your life. Become what the world would call a **fanatic** about the Word of God. Personally, have a plan for devotionally reading the Scripture daily. By that I mean reading systematically through the Scripture asking God and believing God to speak to you through His Word. In addition, take every opportunity to hear the Word being taught. Get in a small group where you can build relationships with others around the Word. Be here when the word is being taught. I generally spend more time preparing the Sunday night messages than I do Sunday morning (that is because we tend to deal with subjects and passages that go deeper on Sunday PM). Take special classes that are offered. Look for opportunities to fill your mind with the Word of truth that you might experience its amazing maturing and equipping work in your life. Listen up!

B. Zip It Up (V19b)

Most of us fail to hear as we should because we talk too much. **Proverbs 10:19 (HCSB)** SAYS, "When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise." That doesn't really need much commentary, does it? **Proverbs 17:28 (NKJV)** "Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; *when* he shuts his lips, *he is considered* perceptive." Most all of us could profit by speaking less. **Proverbs 29:20 (NKJV)** says, "Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him." The context of James 1:19b is removing barriers that hinder the Word of truth from doing its work in our lives. We all need to learn from others who are further down the road of spiritual maturity than we are concerning the application of the Word of God to our lives. There is a reason that God gave us two ears and one mouth. Spend time with them, listen to them. I remember several years ago a younger man (not in our church) who had a ministry that he believed God had led him to start asked me if I would spend some time with him on a regular basis to mentor him. When I met with this man, he talked almost non-stop. The focus of his constant talking seemed to be his opinion on a lot of subjects and why he was right. The few times I met with him seemed to be a waste of time. An older friend of mine brought this young mans name up and asked if I knew him. When I told him I did, and my older friend said something to the effect of "I tried to mentor him and he did all the talking. He acted like he had been vaccinated by a phonograph needle". Learners are listeners.

There is also an application here to listening to God. In prayer, sometimes we just need to be quiet before Him and allow Him to speak through His Word. It is interesting that when Job was suffering so

greatly, his “friends” would speak and Job would answer. A summary would be that a friend would say, “Here is the problem, Job”, and Job would respond, “No that’s not the problem”. Then at the end of the book, God began to speak. Here is Job’s response to God in **Job 40:4 (NKJV)** “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth.”

If you would hear from God’s Word of truth, listen up and zip it up.

C. Give It Up (V19c, 20)

There is more than one word for **anger** in the New Testament. The word used here does not refer to a giant blow up. It refers to a stuffed down anger that does a “slow burn”. It is an inner deep resentment that seethes and smolders and is often not even directly known about by those closest to you. It usually is anger that has turned into bitterness. For a person with this inner smoldering slow burning anger, the Word of truth is being blocked. This smoldering anger may be toward God. If so, the word of truth will be blocked and hindered from doing its maturing work. It may be toward an individual who has cheated you or cheated **on** you. It may be some expectation that was not met or a personal right that was violated. It might be a promise that was not kept. You must give it up – repent and confess this sinful type of anger. Your maturing in the faith will be put on hold until you give up the anger confess it to God. The Word of God will be a locked book to you as long as this “slow burn” continues.

Verse 20 tells us that this kind of anger does not line up with God’s righteousness. There is a righteous anger that pleases God. What is the difference between anger that is righteous and anger that hinders the Word of truth from doing its maturing work? We have dealt with the distinctions between sinful anger and righteous anger several times before, but let me just give you the main difference. Sinful anger is instigated when my plans are blocked or I am made to look bad. The anger that is in line with the righteousness of God is when God’s revealed will is blocked and God is made to look bad. The perfect example of righteous anger is when Jesus on two occasions cleansed the temple of the money changers and those practicing extortion to get money out of people who came to offer sacrifices to God.

Here is the question for you. If the Word of truth is not doing an astounding work of maturity and growth in Christ likeness in you, could it be that there is some deep anger that is smoldering in you? You need to give it up and forgive and confess the sin of not forgiving others as you have been forgiven by God.

If you would be ready to grow through the Word doing its maturing work in you, you must listen up for God to speak to you through His word, zip up your mouth, and give up the smoldering anger.

D. Clean Up (V21a)

Verse 21 gives us some things that have to go before the Word of truth can bring about spiritual growth. The Greek word translated “lay aside” is used of taking off a garment. We are to take off like a garment everything that is hindering us from receiving the Word of truth so that it can accomplish the maturing work that God has designed for it to do in our lives. What do we lay aside?

1. Filthiness – This is an interesting word. Primarily it refers to any sort of moral defilement or impurity. In other words it is unconfessed sin that has not been repented of. The word translated “filthiness” is also closely related to the word for ear wax. The probable reason for the excretion of a waxy substance in our ears is to keep insects out of the inner ear, but when there is a buildup of the wax, it makes us unable to hear. Sin in a believer’s life makes him hard of hearing when it comes to God’s word. The writer of Hebrews is speaking of the same kind of sin that keeps us from hearing in **Hebrews 5:11 (NKJV)** where he says, “of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

2. Overflow of Wickedness – This likely refers to the leftovers from our old life. It is probably referring to our old programming which is the primary meaning of the flesh. He is saying that if we are going to hear the Word of truth and allow it to do its work in our life, we must put off the flesh, the programming of our old life.

Here is the point of verse James 1:21a: Before the Word of truth can do its work in our life, there is some cleaning up that needs to be done. We need to lay aside like the taking off of a dirty garment every sin that stops up our spiritual ears and every function of the flesh – the programming of our old life. To fail at this is to make the hearing of the Word of truth impossible. When you have sin in your life that you

just refuse to deal with, you have shut the door to growing in Christ; you have said to the one who has birthed you by the Spirit and the Word of truth that are going to stay where you are and no longer hear His voice and live in disobedience. If that is where you are and you truly are God's child, here is what you can expect. **Hebrews 12:6 (NKJV)** *"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* Why would you want to hang on to sin? Do you enjoy being miserable? Do you enjoy grieving the One who has reconciled you to Himself and bought you out of the slave market of sin? Do you have no desire for a loving walk with the One who created the planets and desires to conform you to the likeness of His Son, your Savior?

We see the readiness for the Word.

II. The Reception of the Word (V21b)

Once we have dealt with the barriers to the Word of truth doing its intended work, we are ready to receive this life changing Word.

A. The Attitude of Receiving the Word

It is with "meekness" that we receive the Word of truth. This word translated meekness is also translated "Humility" and "gentleness". The word in this context means to receive God's dealings with us as good and to refuse to resist or have a bad attitude. It means that we submit with a good attitude to whatever God chooses to do in our life as He applies His Word to us.

B. The Picture of Receiving the Word

He calls it the "implanted" Word. This can be the picture of planting the Word of truth in our lives like planting a seed that will grow and bear fruit. It also can be translated "the engrafted Word" (KJV). I like that picture best. Horticulturists understand how a limb or branch from one tree can be grafted into a tree and it becomes a part of that tree. We are to receive the Word of truth in such a way that it becomes a part of us. Our thoughts are thoughts of the Word; our responses are the responses of the Word. Spurgeon said that the Word should be so engrafted into our lives that when we are cut, we bleed "Bibline".

III. The Expected Result (V21c)

The context here is not initial salvation from the penalty of sin or future salvation from the presence of sin when we go to be with Christ. It is that present tense of salvation from the power of sin as we apply the Word of truth to our daily lives and live out of the identity that is ours in Christ and allow the Spirit of God to fill us and apply the Word of truth to every aspect of our lives.

CONCLUSION

Where do you stand with the Word of God?