

## Session 5

November 13, 2022

### OBEY GOD'S WORD

#### James 1:19-27

In a nutshell, I would say the book of James is all about putting real faith into real practice without hypocrisy. This theme is demonstrated by verse 22, “But be doers of the word and not hearers only,” a clear exhortation for *godly action*, while verse 27, “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this...” speaks to us about *godly attitude*. Both exhortations are founded on a proper understanding of God’s word and application of it. In this week’s lesson, James gives three characteristics of the believer’s obedience.

**Obedience with humility (vv. 19-21).** By its very nature, obedience requires submission. Whether by happy acceptance (“Sure, I’d be glad to do that for you”) or because of dreaded force (“Okay, okay, I will do it...Geez!”), obedience requires the willingness to bend and bow. The first sign of humility is the willingness to listen to others. To be “quick to hear” (v. 19) means to be *ready to listen*. So hearing others comes first. Our speech, on the other hand, should be *hesitant; measured; and controlled*. This is in direct contrast with both human nature and human habit. *Human nature* wants our personal opinions to be heard, defended, and validated by others. I teach a class on communication theory, and even in the most complex communications, our *human habit* is to formulate our own responses before the other person even finishes his sentence! Slower still should be our reaction to those who disagree. The arrogant braggart who refuses to listen to others, but spouts his own views, and then gets angry at anyone who disagrees with him can in no way accomplish anything righteous for God (v. 20). How is a boastful, know-it-all believer transformed into a humble, thoughtful, and obedient servant? By the word of God which is humbly *received* and deeply *rooted* (v. 21); the same word of God that *saves us*. For reflection: *James exhorts believers to be quick to hear, but slow to speak. My father used to put it this way: “You’ll seldom get into trouble by saying too little.”*

**Obedience with immediacy (vv. 22-25).** Central to this passage is the “mirror” illustration. To hear God’s word and then ignore its implications, is like a man who looks in a mirror and then walks away. Note that the word “looking” (v. 23) doesn’t refer to a quick glance at the mirror on the way by. Rather, it’s a participle that means *continues to gaze*. Two implications come from this illustration. First, the one gazing turns away and immediately *forgets* what he looks like. But second, he does so *without fixing* whatever flaws were apparent! Verse 25 offers the four-fold solution to hasty glances at ourselves: (1) study the word of God; (2) abide in the word of God; (3) remember the word of God; and (4) apply the word of God. And do so *immediately*. The result? Our work for God will be blessed. For reflection: *Why do you think we should respond to God’s direction immediately? What are the benefits of doing so? What are the dangers if we put it off?*

**Obedience with sincerity (vv. 26-27).** While James saves his most scathing rebuke regarding *the tongue* for chapter 3, he introduced it in 1:19 and revisits it here. In Luke 6:45 Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,” and James is quick to warn of the poison that so easily oozes out of us (see 3:8). In its strictest context, the author implies that the most obvious flaw that we fail to correct is our speech. The one who thinks he is dedicated to God, but

can't control what he says, isn't so dedicated after all! In fact, if he genuinely considers himself to be religious, but can't control his speech, he has no legitimate religion. He has only deceived himself (v. 26). Verse 27 corrects that faulty way of thinking. It's true: real religion isn't about talking the talk...it's about walking the walk. The simplest demonstrations of pure piety are *selfless service* to the most needy, and *intentional holiness* for one's self. For reflection: *Why do you think ministry to widows and orphans was so prominently taught in the early New Testament church? Do you think that ministry is neglected by churches today? Why is that?*