

### **James 1:17-27**

**Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights, who does not change or shift like a shadow. <sup>18</sup> Just as he planned, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of firstfruits of his creations.**

**<sup>19</sup> Remember this, my dear brothers: Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. <sup>20</sup> Certainly, a man’s anger does not bring about what is right before God. <sup>21</sup> So after getting rid of all moral filthiness and overflowing wickedness, receive with humility the word planted in you. It is able to save your souls.**

**<sup>22</sup> Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves. <sup>23</sup> In fact, if anyone hears the word and does not do what it says, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> Indeed, he carefully looks at himself; then, he goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues to do so—since he does not hear and forget but actually does what it says—that person will be blessed in what he does.**

**<sup>26</sup> If anyone considers himself to be religious but deceives his own heart because he does not bridle his tongue, this person’s religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God the Father is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.**

Dear children of God.

Is it wrong for a Christian to talk about doing good works? Boy, that is a loaded question, isn’t it? If the only book of the Bible that you ever read was the book of James, you might think that we don’t talk enough about good works and being a good Christian consist in doing lots of good works. But that would be missing the rest of the Bible which clearly points out we can never do any good work to save ourselves and good works are not necessary for our salvation because we are told that we are saved by grace alone.

So the question might be after hearing these words from James is what part do good works play in the life of a Christian. As we stated earlier, our good works can’t in anyway save us and they don’t in anyway contribute to our salvation. So are good works necessary? The answer is that good works are not necessary for our salvation, but James correctly points out in his letter that a Christian will want to do good works out of love and thanks to their gracious God. A faith without doing good works is a dead faith and is worthless. With that in mind let’s look at what James has to tell us about our Christian living using the theme:

### **Sermon Theme: Live as God’s Children**

- 1. Quick to listen**
- 2. Slow to speak**
- 3. Eager to serve God and others**

James was writing these word for Christians we were not living their faith. He was admonishing them for their shortcomings in the ways that they were living. The people that James was writing to were

people who had heard God's Word, but they were not living God's Word. James was encouraging them to let their faith show itself by their fruits of faith. He said that a faith without fruits of faith is a dead faith. It never ceases to amaze me that people who call themselves Christians are many times so quick to live lives that are so apart from what God has command us to do. Many people know who Jesus is, but God wants us to remember that God isn't looking for a faith that is dead or is not living for him. Our text is a lesson from James that teaches the Christian how to use his ears and tongue in ways that glorify the God of salvation who has blessed him with eternal life.

James starts out, **“Remember this, my dear brothers: Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Certainly, a man's anger does not bring about what is right before God. So after getting rid of all moral filthiness and overflowing wickedness, receive with humility the word planted in you. It is able to save your souls.”** James begins a new line of thought with the tender greeting, **“My dear brothers.”** James urges us to take note of the gifts God has given us and to understand that God chose us to receive these gifts of salvation. With this understanding we want to hear the instruction of James to avoid whatever would prevent us from possessing these gifts of salvation which come through the Word of truth.

Those whose hearts are changed by the gospel are to be **“quick to listen”** and **“slow to speak.”** We cannot hear when our mouth is open. How often haven't parents and teachers had to remind children to stop talking and start listening? James teaches the same thing to God's children. We can't learn the gospel well if we are talking while it is being taught to us. This means that we need to work in being better listeners. Listening takes work and effort. It needs complete and full attention and concentration. This applies to us when we are sitting in God's house or when we are at home listening to our spouse or to our parents.

Life would be much better for us if we took this to heart. Husbands and dads – think what this means to you as you work on communication in your homes and in your marriages. Don't listen with one ear and read the paper and watch the TV. This is not being quick to listen. We are not working at it and are most likely missing the things that need to be discussed. Moms and wives need to stop whatever they are doing to listen and act on what is being spoken by their children or spouses. As we sit in God's house we sometimes aren't working at being good listeners. We are daydreaming or thinking about what we will be doing after church. This is not good listening.

James continues by saying Christians are to be **“slow to anger.”** People easily become angry with each other when they stop listening to each other and start talking too soon and too much. When they disagree, they are not inclined to listen but to talk more. Arguments erupt and anger results. When Christians stop listening to the gospel and God's commands and tell others what they think the Word of God says, the result is often times going to be an argument that results in anger. Such anger does not work God's righteousness. When one is angry he is not receptive to the message of God that he has declared us right before himself through Jesus. Thus the instruction of James: **“Be slow to become angry.”**

Why do we get angry so quickly? Is it because we are tired and under lots of stress? Is it because we someone is always bugging us so much that we can't help but lash out in anger? Is it because our personality is such that we respond quickly in anger? As we think about anger we realize that most often it is coming out of hearts that are filled with sin – hearts that think anger is the only way to control the situation. It doesn't work in our job. It won't work in our families. It won't work in our marriages, and it most certainly will not work as we seek to share the message of salvation with those who are lost. James goes so far as to say Christians who are unjustly angry are not doing **“what is right before God.”** Anger can even lead us to

not see the truths of God's Word and may hinder the truth of God's Word as we seek to share it with others. The Word is valuable because it can save us and others. With this in mind, we should be willing to avoid whatever would prevent the Word from coming to ourselves and from sharing it with others.

But James points out that God is not satisfied that the Christian only hear the Word. God wants us to follow the Word, which is more than hearing it. He writes, **“Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves. In fact, if anyone hears the word and does not do what it says, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own natural face in a mirror. Indeed, he carefully looks at himself; then, he goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like. But the one who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues to do so—since he does not hear and forget but actually does what it says—that person will be blessed in what he does.”** Too often Christians are satisfied to be only hearers of the Word. This was a great fault of the Jews of Jesus' day. They heard the Word on Sabbath after Sabbath. But most failed to believe in the subject of the Word, Jesus Christ. The trap of Satan deceived them. “Listen and God will be pleased. Go to church and that is all that is necessary.” How many Christians today are deceived by this trap of Satan? Are we sometimes guilty of this as we become lax in coming to hear God's Word at Church or study it in our homes? Are we just going through the motions of being a Christian as we speak the right Word to make everyone happy, but God is really far from your heart? James teaches that it is necessary to follow the Word that we hear.

To follow the Word is to believe and live accordingly. When Christians follow the Word, their lives will be a demonstration of the true saving faith in their hearts, for they will perform the works that please God. James is not teaching work-righteousness here or anywhere else in this letter. He is teaching how true saving faith, which is worked in the heart by the gospel, makes us doers of the Word. As doers of the Word, **“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10).**

James puts it this way, **“Religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God the Father is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”** James concludes our text for today with two examples, which demonstrate the types of works a true believer can do in response to the saving gift of salvation he receives from God. The first is a work of love: **“to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction.”** These were people who were forgotten by society. Even today, those who are poor and homeless are often forgotten by those who are blessed with many possessions, along with the gift of salvation. God has not forgotten these people, and neither should God's people forget him. Certainly these are only two examples, but we can see many more opportunities to show the faith that is burning so brightly in our hearts.

The second response of the Christian is a work of faith: **“to keep oneself unstained by the world.”** The Christian strives to live so that none of the world's evils permanently resides in his heart. He also has an eye of faith on Jesus, who cleanses him from all impurity and sin. This leads us to ask ourselves some pretty personal questions. Have we been just going through the motions of being a Christian? Have we forgotten what it means to live in God's Word and to let that Word give us the strength to put aside the evils of this world.? Are we just giving lip service to the word Christians or are we truly living as children of our heavenly Father we in love made us part of his family. James was seeking to lead the people who read his book to remember that being a Christian means that we will need to change things in our lives with God's help of course. Let us daily strive with God's help to get rid of the impurities of sin that are leading us away from God and turn to his forgiving love as we live for him in all that we say and do. Amen