

Sermon Outline

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

(James 1: 18-27)

Introduction

- God's word is the originator of our new birth (v. 18).
- The word of God is the heart and soul of our Christian experience. Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).
- True believers are those who delight in the law of God (Ps 1:2).
- So the concern of James here is: If the word truly regenerates us, it will continue to bring about progressive spiritual growth in us.
- James has different concern from Paul for the people. Paul wrote about the doctrine of justification, but James concerns about the genuineness of the people's faith and justification.
- So the whole Epistle of James contains a series of behaviours used to measure the reality of their faith or its lack of reality: (i) The response to outward trials (verses 1-12); (ii) The response to the inner temptation to sin (verses 13-18); (iii) The response to the Word of God which is our passage today, etc ...

I. A correct reception of the Word (verses 19-21)

1. There is the *eagerness* to receive the word with submission, without resistance, without rebellion (verses 19-20).
 - Trials are difficult, they demand wisdom from above, beyond this world, a wisdom which only the word of God can provide (verses 1-18).
 - Christians are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. They are to eagerly learn and obtain wisdom from the Word of God.
 - A great talker is rarely a great listener. The duty of a student of Scripture is to listen quietly and attentively to the teaching of their teachers.
 - An angry spirit can never be a submissive and attentive listener. Anger here means a deep seated resentment. It is not some kind of sudden explosion when you lose your temper.
 - *Application:* Are we listening to sermons always with complaining and resenting spirits?
2. There is the willingness to receive the word with *purity* (verse 21a).
 - How? A putting off has to occur, a putting off of sin, before there is a putting on the truth.
 - What are we to put off?
 - a) "all filthiness" (Greek: "*ruparea*". From root word "*rupas*" = the wax in the ear). James may imply: You are deaf because of the accumulation of sin that blocks your ears from hearing the truth. So to receive the Word productively, you need to have the wax of sin removed from your ears.
 - b) "the *overflowing* of wickedness." The wickedness continues to linger (overflowing) in our human flesh. We dig out the weeds of wickedness in one place to find them

growing in another, and then reappearing with vigour where we thought we have eradicated them. It is a word which clearly refutes any theory of sinless perfection in this life.

- James, however, does not think that our battle against sins is lost forever as he continues to say that the *'implanted word'* is *'able to save'*.
3. There must be the willingness to receive the word with *humility* (verse 21*b*).
- The idea here is not passive acceptance, but active acceptance: a humble and teachable spirit.
- When was the Word planted in our heart? It is at our salvation (verse 18).
 - If it is already implanted, then why still need to be received? Jesus taught the same thing in the 'parable of the sower' where there is both the planting of the seed and the reception of the seed that has been planted. The good reception in the good soil brings fruitfulness.
 - To save your *souls* means the whole person. Alec Motyer commented, "This provides us with a pattern for that total salvation which Jesus came to accomplish. It can be spoken of as past, because the work of salvation was completed by Jesus when he died for us. It can also be spoken of as future, because the full experience of salvation will not be ours till Jesus comes again. But it is also present in that day by day we can experience a greater and greater measure of what has been done for us by our Lord. In this passage in James the tense of verb used (aorist) underlines the power of *the implanted word* actually to make salvation a positive reality in daily experience."

II. A correct doing or application of the Word received (verse 22-27).

- The character of man is basically to be decided by his conduct (Mat. 7:17).
- The word "*doers*" carries with it a characterization of a whole personality: put the word of God into practice by life habit, not just once in a while only.
- The word "*bearer*" is the ancient term for auditor. An auditor will only check and listen but not apply.
- The word "*deceive*" is used in mathematics to refer to a miscalculation.
- So the proper response to the Word of God for a true believer is obedience and commitment. Those who don't, deceive themselves.
- That kind of deception is eternally fatal. So over and over again, in the Scripture, the cry of the Spirit of God is that one should not be deceived about the reality of faith.
- Verses 23 and 24 are an analogy to explain this deception.
- The word "*looks intently*" (Greek: "*katano-ounti*") means to look carefully, not just a casual glance.
- His "*natural face*" literally means the face of his birth.
- The point is this, if you don't do something on the spot when you see (carefully) what needs to be done, you'll get busy in life and you'll forget that anything needs to be done at all. You've got to do it while you see it.
- Verse 25 clarifies the analogy by contrasting another person.
- The word '*look*' (Greek: "*parakupsas*") means to stoop over, to bend down to examine something with care and precision.

- This tells us about our attitude which is the key to everything. A serious obstacle to salvation is man's natural aversion to serious spiritual thought.
- The "*perfect law*" is the Scripture. It is perfect, firstly, because it perfectly expresses God's nature and, secondly, because it perfectly matches ours. It is called the law because it is the authoritative instruction from God.
- The "*law of liberty*" because as we look into that law, it liberates us. Why? Because it frees us from sin's bondage. And it frees us in the sense that we do not serve God out of bondage but out of love.
- Verse 25 ends with "*he will be blessed in his doing.*" The blessing is not in the hearing, but in the doing.

	Hearer only (vs 23-24)	Doer (v 25)
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look intently and listen • See the problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look, listen and search • See the problems
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goes away • Forget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make covenant to obey • Acts

- There are 3 elements in applying the Word rightly: (1) a bridled tongue which links to heart; (2) a caring ministry to the needy orphans and widow; and (3) personal holiness.
- Why only three? James, of course, does not intend them as a comprehensive list of religious activities, so that if we do these things we can count ourselves religious, even if we never pray, read the Scriptures, meet in a worshipping fellowship, receive baptism and share the Lord's Supper.
- Alec Motyer gives us the answer. It is because the same three features are also central to the acts of God the Father: he first reached out to us through the life-giving word he spoke and regenerate us, and so we, on our part, should be marked by sincerity and a bridled tongue. Behind his spoken word lay that act of his will whereby he determined what he would do for us, the needy, depraved in nature and death-bound. Our Father cares about the needy, and so should we. But his life-giving work for us has a purpose, namely that we should be 'the first fruits', specially his and notably holy.

1. A right and repentant heart without deception or hypocrisy (verse 26).
 - The word "*thinks*" means "has the opinion" that he is religious. The word implies it is a personal opinion.
 - The word "*religious*" means external formalism.
 - So James is saying that there are those people who believe that just doing the religious duty itself (outward show) is enough and equivalent of being religious.
 - But their speech gives them away when they do not bridle their tongues, because "out of the abundance of the mouth, the heart speaks."
 - The ritual might be evangelical, biblical, but it is as futile as pagan idolatry, the religion is worthless, unless the heart is right.
 - These people are deceived because they think they are religious.
 - The Lord Jesus warns us that there are many who called Him, Lord, Lord, but He never knew them because they do not do the will of the Father who is in heaven (Mat 7:21).

2. A caring ministry to the needy (verse 27a).
 - Now it is God who evaluates (“*before God*”) our religion and it is judged based on not the outward activity, but on the inward love and compassion for the needy and troubled.
 - The word “*to visit*” means more than just to go by and say “Hi”. It has an aura of care built into it.
 - Orphans and widows because they are a segment of the population within the church at that time that demonstrates a need for compassion.
 - God has always been concerned with the fatherless and widows (Ex 22:22; Acts 6; 1 Tim 5:3).

3. Personal holiness unstained from the world (verse 27b).
 - The “*world*” means the system, the culture, the life-style around us, its philosophy, its morality, and its ethics. It is the whole human scheme of things organized in terms of human wisdom to attain a human goal, without reference to God, his law, his values or his ultimate judgment.
 - What is the difference between how we live and our non-believer friends whom we meet everyday?

Conclusion

- Our Lord Jesus commands us, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mat 5:48).
- Sinless perfection is the goal after which every Christian should strive.
- We need to examine ourselves, we need to know, we must be sure for our salvation.
- To be born again and to have the life of God in us but to remain unchanged is unthinkable and this person’s religion is worthless, he deceives himself.
- You have heard the Word, what then are you going to do about it?