

LIFE AFTER FAITH
A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES

LESSON 10 – YOUR PART OF THE SERMON – JAMES 1:19-21

If you're faithful in your church attendance, you will hear at least 50 sermons in any given year. With that in mind, ask yourself, "Is my only role in all these sermons simply to sit and listen until they're over and I can go home? Even though I don't preach sermons, do I have a part in them? What is my responsibility when I hear the Word of God preached?" In verse 18 of chapter 1, James told us that by grace God gave us new life through the Word of truth. Now in these few verses, he points us to the kind of response we should have to the Word. At the end of verse 21 he says to, "...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

The reality is whether you're listening to a Sunday sermon or reading the Bible in your private devotions, YOU play a big part in how the Word of God will affect your life. As Christians, we recognize the Bible to be more than just a book. It is the inspired Word of God. So, whenever it's read or preached, it deserves special respect and regard. We must do our part to see that it accomplishes its purpose in our lives. Notice some of the things James teaches us about our responsibility when we hear the Word of truth...

The Kind of Hearing the Word Deserves

I'm sure we all know there is a difference between hearing and listening. James reminds us that the Word of God deserves a special kind of hearing...one that involves us really listening. He says in verse 19, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." In this verse, James point us to the ways in which we should listen to the Word of God.

The first way is with a closed mouth. Jewish Rabbis used to say, "we have two ears and one tongue, and our tongue was put behind a wall of teeth to control it." It seems that maybe the reason God gave us two ears and one mouth was so we would listen more than we talk.

Now, this doesn't literally mean we are never to speak, but that our speech should be slower than our hearing. We should listen first. There are some who never listen to the Word of God because they are too busy talking...either out loud or in their own minds. Listening to the Word of God requires a quiet focus on what it is He's saying through His Word.

The second way we should listen is with a calm mind. Verses 19 and 20 tell us, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." Have you ever told someone what the Bible says only to have them get irritated with you? They say, "I know what the Bible says but..." That's exactly the kind of agitated, argumentative spirit that James is confronting in these verses. There are those who never give the right kind of hearing to the Word of God because they don't like being told they're wrong. As a result, the righteousness God wants to produce in them will never come about because their angry spirit prevents it. So, our first responsibility when it comes to the Word of God is to have the right kind of hearing. James also tells us about...

The Kind of Holiness the Word Demands

As we move into verse 21, James informs us that our part of the sermon...our responsibility to the Word of God...not only involves how we listen, but also how we live. He says, "Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent..." Why would James challenge us to deal with sin in our lives as part of how we hear and receive the Word of God? Well, just as you wouldn't pour drinking water into a dirty glass, we

should not...and cannot...receive the living water of the Word into dirty lives. Truly receiving the Word of God demands holiness.

Who is it that James says is responsible for getting rid of the sin in our lives? This verse carries with it an implied "you"...something that we do ourselves. In other words, he is literally saying that we are responsible for committing our lives to God and being holy. God gives us the power to be holy through His Holy Spirit, but we must be willing to do away with the sin in our lives. It's interesting to note that word translated "filth" in verse 21 comes from two Greek words that literally mean ear wax. Think about that for a minute. James is talking about hearing the Word of God and the sin that keeps us from hearing it is like ear wax clogging up our spiritual ears so we can't hear what God says.

James says that before we hear and receive the Word of God...before we listen to a sermon...we should search our hearts and put away the sin that would hinder our hearing. There is a holiness of life that is demanded by the Word of God. Our listening as well as our living matter in how we receive the Word of God. Let's look at a third responsibility we find regarding our part of the sermon and how we respond to the Word of truth...

The Kind of Heart the Word Delivers

Notice that last part of verse 21, "Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." Back in verse 19, James said, "My dear brothers and sisters..." It's clear that he's speaking to Christians here. So, what does James mean when he says the Word of God "can save you"? James is NOT talking about the initial point of salvation here. What he's referring to is the ongoing process of daily delivering our souls from the world, the flesh and the devil. This really goes back to an understanding of the tenses of salvation...past, present and future. A Christian has been saved, and is being saved every day. To achieve this daily process of salvation, we must have a right heart.

When James says, "Accept the word planted in you", he is reminding us that in order for the Word to have its proper impact on our daily lives, the Spirit must communicate it beyond our ears and plant it in the soil of our hearts. This is a work that only God can do. Only He can speak directly to our hearts. Only God can plant truth into our innermost being. The seed of the Word is powerful but it is only effective when the Spirit of God plants it into our hearts. Unfortunately, it's possible to understand the Word with our heads and fail to receive it with our hearts.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who implants the Word into our hearts, but we are responsible to see that we make our hearts fertile soil in which that Word can take root. This is what James is talking about when he says for us to, "humbly accept the word" that's been planted. The right kind of heart comes to the Word of God with a submitted will, saying, "Whatever God says to me, I will receive it and obey it."

God wants to implant His life-giving, soul-saving Word into your heart every time you hear it. He wants to deliver your soul from the sinfulness and selfishness that will destroy it. That is His goal whenever you hear His Word. But you must be willing to submissively and humbly receive God's Word for it to be effective in your life. James says we must be willing to submit our will to the surpassing knowledge of God and receive His Word with meekness.

So, what's your part of the sermon? When the Word of God is preached to you, it's your responsibility to listen closely, to see that you are living cleanly and then to let Christ do His work through His Word in your life. With every sermon you ever hear, your prayer should be like that of young Samuel when he said, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."