

# James 1:19-27

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[0:00] I am going to be finishing up James chapter 1, verse 19, all the way through. But by way of introduction, probably most of you guys are already familiar with this.

It's a very famous passage talking about listening. But before I get into it, I just wanted to give a little bit of my background on this passage. This has been a topic, listening, that's been extremely pertinent in our marriage.

But also, just by way of me being stubborn and bullheaded, I actually went to school for counseling and life coaching. And an enormous amount of the time that I spent was in practicing and learning to be a good listener.

For which, the day I got married, I completely discarded. And we had really knocked down drag-out fights for the first few years.

And it was actually the Lord's grace. A couple of our really good friends were sharing with us some of the things that they have learned when they were doing marriage counseling that were really helpful for them.

[1:05] And one of them was a little listening exercise where one person has the responsibility of listening while the other person speaks. And then it switches. And you take turns listening.

You take turns prioritizing listening. You essentially take turns prioritizing what the scripture is about to tell us. Now, the ironic thing was, I actually already knew all of this stuff. And I'd already practiced all of this stuff, especially with my friends.

But in the context of marriage, I had very little desire or patience to implement what I had already learned. But by that point, we both started practicing and practicing listening to one another.

And we were able to resolve our fights. And in general, we've gotten better over the years at resolving fights to the point that many people, when they do come to us for counsel in marriage, the main thing we spend time doing is trying to help them learn to prioritize listening rather than winning their arguments.

Okay, I say all that to say, this week, I'm preaching on this topic. On Thursday, we got in a huge knockdown drag out fight. And it fundamentally was because I was refusing to listen.

[2:13] I was fundamentally defending myself. I was fundamentally refusing to listen, even to the point that I knew I wasn't listening and aware that I was preaching on this on Sunday. And she brought it up and I still didn't.

All that to say, I am not the all the time exemplar of these things. A lot of these things are easier to say than they are to do.

And a lot of the reason that it makes it difficult to listen well is because the sacrifice that takes place in real time in order to maintain a disposition that prioritizes listening to the other party rather than defending yourself.

Full disclosure. Sometimes I do a decent job at this. Sometimes I do a decent job. I do a decent job at this. Anyway, I'm going to go ahead and read this first part and then we're going to keep on going.

Starting in verse 19. Am I loud enough back there? Louder? Wow. Man, I hope I can speak loud enough, you guys. All right.

[3:11] Just yell. I think I just got to yell. Go for it. It's right here. Wow. Okay. Verse 19. Know this, my beloved brothers.

I love that he starts this by speaking of them as beloved. It's an inclusion. He's including them in relationship. He's speaking to people who are in relationship to him.

My beloved. Know this, my beloved brothers. Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Just by way of priority, we're going to keep on going. But by way of priority, he's saying, when you're in conversation, the most important thing, listen.

The lesser important things, getting your point across and defending yourself. Which I'm saying, defending yourself as being equivalent, being slow to anger.

[ 4 : 09 ] Why do we get angry? Because we're trying to defend ourselves. Okay? So if we can decrease in importance, speaking, getting our own point across, defending, being quick to anger, and exalting, listening to the other party, there's something of a promise in this sequence.

I'll keep on going. Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

What's he saying there? When we are defensive and quick to anger, we are not being a catalyst of sanctification in the lives of other people.

We are being a hindrance to sanctification in the lives of other people. Okay? The scripture doesn't tell us not to be angry. It says, be angry and sin not. Or be slow to anger.

There is a time to defend. Jesus was very angry when he cleared out the money changers in the temple. They were desecrating the house of the Lord and required intervention.

[ 5 : 23 ] There is a time to be angry. To have anger. According to this, though, we need to remember that when we extend anger to people, maybe it's appropriate. We are not sanctifying them.

Anger does not build up and sanctify a person. It opposes them. It crushes them. I think it's similar to the law. The law certainly points out our defects, but it does not help us in our sanctification at all. When we extend anger, when we are quick to anger with people, we in no way are building them up. I think we should remember this even for our own children. You can facilitate compliance in other people that is not improving their character at all.

They're just scared of you. They're just appeasing you while you're around. There is nothing being sanctified here. Anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

So I want you guys to hear here. Anger does not produce the righteousness of God. But I want to keep on going because there is something that produces fruit. Next verse, verse 21. Most people, I think there's a tendency with James to chop up his quotable quote verses too much and not realize that they're all in continuity.

[ 6 : 35 ] They're actually referring to each other. This one especially, everyone knows, be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry. But we tend to chop off the two verses that come right after it that provide more meaning in my opinion.

Verse 20. For the anger of man does not produce righteousness of God. Verse 21. So again, he's talking about receiving again.

We're back to listening. How should you listen? By receiving with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. So now we are talking about sanctification.

We are talking about being saved from things. There is a way both before the Lord and before other people that we can have a spirit of meekness and soft-heartedness that if they happen to be telling us something that we actually need to change and repent in, we are soft ground that that might produce fruit.

And if we might be in a position to extend something to them that they need to hear, we have a disposition of listening and meekness that they would receive it better from us.

[ 7 : 48 ] Make sense? One of the big errors I think that we make in listening, let's say, is believing that we are the rescuer, believing that we are right, and believing we already know.

These are all the opposite of meekness. When we are approaching someone so as to listen to them, I think it's of the utmost importance that we're viewing the Lord as His grace is eminent, and that when we listen well to others, we can extend something to them of gracious fellowship that sets them up to be able to hear from the Lord and be extremely fruitful.

It is my experience. There's many, many times when a person is having a very difficult time, and you really take the time to listen to them, listen to them well, anticipating giving a bunch of counsel, anticipating having to persuade them.

But when you give it some time, you can see many people start untangling the knot that is themselves because they're in an environment where the Lord's grace is evident, and they have the Holy Spirit, and they can hear from the Lord themselves.

I would submit to you, the most powerful outcome by way of conversation is when a person just hears from the Lord. Be that by you, or be that by their own reflection, or be that by the many different ways.

[ 9 : 34 ] You know what I'm saying? And I think that there is a meekness in conversation that is anticipating the Lord revealing something and us just being receptive, and doesn't assume you're already right.

I think oftentimes we already assume we know and we're right. So, I just want to give a couple of suggestions, or by way of practice.

I think that one really good principle as we're trying to grow in listening is to, especially in conflict. I think actually this is what I would suggest. When you are anticipating conflict or disagreement, first and foremost, planning on entering in with truly listening.

I really want to completely hear out the other side. Number one. Number two, trying to limit your speaking. This is the most important thing.

[ 10 : 37 ] Try to limit your speaking to questions, and if you need, reiterating what the other person said. What do I mean by that? When we prioritize listening and ask good questions, it helps a person divulge more.

It helps a person come more into the light. And, sometimes when we're exposed, we can be naturally defensive because of shame, that when someone takes the time to reiterate, it helps them lose their defensiveness.

Okay? I believe listening to a person is something like therapeutic anesthesia for counsel. What do I mean by that? If you're needing to replace someone's heart, we could anesthetize them so that their body's totally limp and we can be extremely surgical and accurate, careful, or we could just go ahead and like give it a run while they're fully awake.

Old school. Old school. There is a way of rearranging these priorities where we approach confrontation like that thinking that it won't go any worse.

[ 12 : 00 ] But it is my experience that when you listen to people well and they feel listened to, you gain a level of trust that when you go to speak, they don't fight you on every point because they feel like they don't need to defend themselves.

You're essentially removing the veil of self-defensiveness. This is a, the more important a disagreement is, the more important this is. Which is why I would really recommend if you feel like you need to grow on this, think of confrontations or difficult conversations, approach them with the high priority of listening, and then try to entirely limit yourself for a certain duration, maybe even just pick 10 minutes to only asking questions and reiterating their points.

Not even putting forth your own perspective or defending your own position for a certain duration. I think there are many people that haven't even had the hope of how well disagreements can go because they've never seen them go well in these criteria.

You can disagree and get on the same page with people in such remarkable ways. And I think there's two things that we do advocate whenever we don't do this well.

The other person could be right and we might need to be learning from them. And if we have this meekness, it'll produce much fruit. But also, the other person might be wrong and they might need to really hear from us.

[ 13 : 26 ] And we've set them up for having experience of our input not being something that's like the surgeon that just goes ahead and tries to do it without anesthesia. You know what I'm saying?

This is of the utmost importance. However important the truth that is under this umbrella of conversation is, our listening should, we should feel like the listening has that same level of priority. Because really, when you come in believing that you're right and advocating for your own position and defending your own position, you automatically put the person in a position of being back on their heels and defending themselves.

Which is a horrible, horrible environment. Not only for the Lord to speak, but for us. It's, what is it? It doesn't produce the righteousness of God. It's not building up the body.

It's leading to division. And I think that's really the difference in disposition here. One path creates fellowship and creates unity. And another path creates tearing down and even divisiveness.

[ 14 : 31 ] Because we can't listen. I believe that fundamentally listening in the way the Lord calls us to creates an environment where people are able to graciously see how they really are and be eligible for the Lord's input in a very powerful way.

This is the environment of speaking the truth in love. The environment that marries grace and truth. It says that Moses brought the law, but Jesus Christ came in grace and truth. There is an environment where we are being meek before the Lord and actually creating a fellowship and connection to the Lord's intervention that makes the Lord's grace be catalyzed by our being more like Him to another person.

If that makes sense. Incredibly important. Okay. I'm going to hop on down to verse 21. Therefore, put away all filthiness, rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

I believe this is a reference both to the previous paragraph that was talking about desire, giving birth to sin, and sin, giving birth to death. That there's an extent to which things creep up in our hearts and that we need to pull those weeds.

But I also think that this is referring to us needing to repent of the things that get in the way of us having this meekness and good listening. Having a disposition of meekness and listening well to other people that actually can be very fruitful and I think even his reference here, able to save your souls, there's an extent to which sanctification is a constant saving of a person from specific things. [16:16] If you think about it, even in our conversations and disagreements, most of them do pertain to things that are an issue that need to be addressed. There's weeds in real life that need to be pulled. You know what I mean?

And we are being sanctified by being continually saved from the many things that beset us. And I believe that this verse here is giving us these two different paths where we defend ourselves and actually tear people down and it doesn't produce righteousness of the Lord or receive with meekness and it produces much fruit and it can even save.

What a beautiful thing. That's actually another synonym for sanctification is being saved. Okay? Okay, I'm going to keep on going. Now we're going to switch to a little bit of a different topic but there's actually enormous overlap between these two concepts.

Verse 22. But be doers of the word and not hearers only. Deceiving yourselves. So he's talking about hearing and listening and now he's moving to what you learn and know let it be reflected in your life.

Okay? But be doers of the word and not hearers only. Deceiving yourself. So, when we know something, when we have learned something but don't live it out, James is calling us deceived. [17:39] But we are deceived. We are deceived. Okay? Many of the points that James makes over this entire book have to do with what proceeds from us and have to do with us having half of the equation and not the other half and therefore having nothing.

So in this regard, he's saying if you have learned but don't live, you're deceived. Okay? He also cares a lot. This is across the book of James, not just here.

He cares a lot about what proceeds from us. What we speak and what we do. This is what proceeds from us. What we do and what we speak. James cares a lot about these things.

In the same spirit of what Jesus said, it's not what goes in you that defiles you, it's what comes out of you. James is very concerned about what is coming out of you. You're supposedly learning what are you doing?

What does your life say you know? Not your words. Okay? Be doers of the word, not hearers only. Last point I want to make. I think N.T. Wright said this, that Christianity is a play that the Lord revealed for us to act out, which is to say Christianity is a lift.

[18:49] Okay? Similar to my intro to James. Wisdom is lift. Well, I think Christianity is lift. James is going to say this a bunch of times. When I was in the conservatory, I was in class with one of the graduate students and he said something to me that stuck out with me because he was actually referring to it.

he's a believer. One of the things he said a lot of, in the school I went to, a lot of people would argue about music. There's a lot of criticism and critique. A lot of being in the critical position where you're not the one in the arena.

You're the person critiquing the people in the arena. One of the things he said that I thought was very wise is he said, music is not understood in its notation. It's understood in its performance. What he means is, I know how well you know the music when I see you play it.

Anybody can just dog on someone. But can you play it? What is it? What are you showing by the way you're playing it? And I think that James is making a similar point here.

We don't get any credit in Christianity for knowing the right answers. We get credit for living them out. And I think if there's any one great heresy on the conservative what's called the conservative Protestant side of things, the not liberal holding two historical doctrines, you know, not off our rocker traditional gender roles, all this stuff, the conservative Protestant we, it's by, I think there's any one great area that seems to permeate.

[ 20 : 24 ] It's treating Christianity like a religion that gives you credit for knowing the right answer irregardless of your practice. I think there's a lot of scholarly hearers and not doers, not practitioners of the word, hearers of the word.

I think that's what James is talking to here. Maybe not be so. You know, maybe we know we get no credit for having the right answer. He's going to say the same thing when he talks about faith without works, which again, he makes a lot of the same points here.

Okay, sorry. That was a long time. One verse. For if anyone is a hearer of a word, hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

I always think of this verse, again, fighting with my life. We'll get in fights and a few days later she'll be like, have you thought any more about what we were talking about and I'll be like, ah, what were we talking about?

I remember it didn't go well. How unselfaware. Again, guys, I'm not the best example of these things. Okay.

[ 21 : 40 ] For if he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he looks like, but the one, this is where James goes in a very different direction than you would anticipate about someone who's not living out what they believe, he takes it a very different direction.

He doesn't say you need to practice more. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Okay. There is a mirror that you can look into called liberty. It's called the law of liberty. This is in contrast to the law of Moses that condemns.

There is another law that you can look into that shows a reflection of who you are but sets you free. There is a law that is the law of Moses that shows us how wicked we are but gives us no hope.

Okay. There is another law called liberty that you can peer into that will set you free. And the kind of freedom I'm talking about is the kind of freedom to where what you believe and what you do and what you love are all unified.

[ 22 : 57 ] That kind of freedom. You're no longer divided against yourself. You're set free. I believe that this law, the law of liberty, is really coming boldly before the throne of grace.

I believe that what this is talking about is in Christ we can have so much grace and mercy extended to us that we're able to see ourselves exactly as we are and have no condemnation but actual freedom from our sin.

Okay. The big analogy I think of here is one of my favorite scenes. If you guys have seen the musical Les Mis, I love that story but one of the things that's so powerful about that story is he you know the bishop takes him in is caring for him and then he steals from him and even knocks him out so that he can escape and the police catch him bring him back and when he brings him back the bishop tells the police thank you so much for bringing him back you forgot the candlesticks and really this changes his whole life.

Why? He saw himself exactly as he was and how much he had wronged this man but he received so much mercy and grace in the midst of it that it literally set him free.

He became one man that day. Right? There is a way in which when we first come to the Lord we receive so much grace we experience so much liberty because we can see exactly as we are and not shrink back and become a mess like we would under the law but we actually find ourselves experiencing freedom.

[ 24 : 36 ] When we beat our chest and say forgive me oh God a sinner we actually go away set free. There is a law called liberty that is a mirror that gives us what I would call divine self-awareness.

I think divine self-awareness is a Christian ideal. I don't think self-obsession is a Christian ideal and I don't think pretending like our sin doesn't stink that bad is a Christian ideal.

I think that because of the cross we can peer and see ourselves exactly as we are and come boldly before the throne of grace and partake of this law.

This is like this is not like a law like a bunch of rules this is like a law of the universe. Like this is something like the laws of aerodynamics that keep planes in the air. This is like a law that allows for the train to traverse because of the way that it is able to be fully supported by the steel rails that go under it.

This is a law that gives freedom not restriction. We think of a law as restriction but let's say a fish is very thankful for the ability of their gills to be able to interact with the environment and the laws of physics that provide oxygen in the water and the fish is not going to do so well when outside of the water and I think there's an extent to which we as Christians experience great freedom and liberty but then move on from it not wanting to see ourself in our shame if that makes sense.

[ 26 : 12 ] I think a Christian never loses we should never lose the willingness to see ourselves exactly as we are and I think this even comes back around to listening. I think that listening is in the spirit of divine self-awareness let's say an environment of grace where people see how they really are and get freedom from it but I also think even how we are before the Lord has enormous amount to do with this like where is our heart when issues come up when we see ourselves in fault are we defensive or can we see ourselves in the way that the Christ sees us which is everything is paid for and we can actually have freedom and this is again coming back around this idea of the truth will set you free and here's my question is the truth setting the hearer free or the speaker free I believe the truth can set both of them free sometimes you need to speak the truth and confess what's going on in your life and sometimes you need to graciously speak the truth to someone else that they might be free and I think the truth can set both of those people free and I think what makes the truth what is it what makes the truth surgically effective is grace and listening and how those things overlap okay

I think there's some divine self-awareness that is transformative for relationships both husband and wife let's say but also with the Lord it's a very powerful thing all right thank you he can tell my mouth is very dry I almost I meant to bring some water up thanks Sam all right I'm bringing this full circle and this plane all right verse 26 if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart this person's religion is worthless what are you talking about James I thought Christianity is a relationship not a religion sorry I had to say that James is referring to Christianity as a religion okay he's meaning religion in the capital

R sense what is the most important and meaningful metaphysical reality of all of life what is God like and how does he want you to live Christianity is a true religion it is the true religion and James is saying if anyone thinks he's participating in the true religion let's say and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart this person's religion is worthless James is going to say a lot of things like this James probably maybe more than any other author in the all of scripture has the most things to say about being careful about what you speak I can't think of another author that brings up being careful about what you speak as much as James does if you do not bridle your tongue also coming back to listening the thing that gets us in trouble is not being able to bridle our tongue right how many things this is actually a good thing for you guys to even remember even for our own parents the things that most wounded us about our parents was it what they did or was it what they said

I think often times the most wounding things a parent ever do is the things that they say with unbridled tongue there's other things too that make a huge impact abandoning a child things like this I think one of the most relatable failures as a parent is speaking to their children with the unbridled tongue how much do we do that to others how much do I do that I just do that on Thursday sorry babe all right verse 27 religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world one of the reasons I love this verse is he is talking about what Christianity is which is the Lord fundamentally confronting the orphan nature of humanity and welcoming them into the father into the family of God okay that is what Christianity is we are all orphans and the Lord has come for us right when we are transformed by the gospel one of the implications of that is our relationship to this kind of issue the issue of family the issue of orphans the issue of widows and there is something that the Lord is producing in us that is a transformation of the heart that believes in the power of the Lord's kingdom the Lord's family advancing okay and I believe that to visit orphans and widows in their affliction is another way of saying there are people that experience

great suffering they're orphaned and widowed and those are the people that the gospel pertains most evidently to you know what I mean I think actually this is another irony of the gospel sometimes it can be tempting when we're trying to preach the gospel to look to preach to people who have their life together when the people who are actually most accessible to it are the people who are hot messes you know what I mean this is even in part what the parable of the wedding feast is where we invite all the friends of the family and they don't come but then we go out to the street and invite the homeless and they all come there's an extent to which again this pertains to us as evangelists we should be looking for people who are hungry for the gospel not just people who don't look like a huge piece of work because most of the people who receive the gospel the best are a huge piece of work the orphans and the widows you know what

[ 32 : 16 ] I'm saying liability liability persons just like us and then he says and to keep oneself unstained from the world which I guess I think too one of the great dilemmas in being a Christian is being in the world but not of the world you know what I mean even as we go forth being in a position where you maintain influence and honor before the Lord but don't get like caught in the snares of this world it's a beautiful thing it's a beautiful thing that we could navigate this world and be unstained by it that's what the Lord is so just in summary I think that listening and having let's call it divine self-awareness these are incredibly important things by way of living a wise Christian life and there are also things that there is so much of our life that can become untangled whenever the Lord builds us up in these things there's so many issues in our marriages and even with our kids that need to be reconciled by way of listening and there's so many things in our own heart that we're perhaps burying by way of hiding from the light

I think that in a lot of ways what he's saying is we should live in the light you can receive a lot of grace from the Lord such that you believe in the power of the light to deliver I think living in the light and the law of liberty are the same thing I think that's what the Lord's willing to set us free into so I'm going to go ahead and close in prayer