

James / James 1:19-27

Introduction

It is often the case, when an author or a movie director or a public speaker wants to make a point. They will do so by drawing comparisons and contrasts between two characters. There is a famous personal finance book named *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* where the author does this in order to contrast two approaches to finance: one by the rich dad and one by the poor dad.

This is a helpful technique and it should be no surprise that it can be found throughout the Bible. Jacob and Esau contrast with one another. David and Saul likewise are in contrast. The book of Proverbs might be the best example where contrasting characters are constantly placed next to one another.

In our passage this morning, James does something very similar. In three different ways, James presents contrasting ways to his audience.

I'm going to approach the passage this morning by showing three contrasting characters in each section:

1. The angry and the meek (vv. 19-21)
2. The doer and the deceived (vv. 22-25)
3. The godless and the Godlike (vv. 26-27)

The Angry and the Meek (vv. 19-21)

The first contrasting pair that James presents is the angry and prideful man versus the meek man.

At the heart of this first section is James' teaching that "***the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God***". This statement is surrounded by five instructions that relate to this central statement.

For James, these 5 commands are directly related to his point that **man's anger does not produce the righteousness of God**. But what does James mean by "**producing the righteousness of God**"?

James is using the term in a way that reflects how it is used in the Psalms. In the psalms, God's people appealed to God's righteousness to make things right. In [Psalm 31](#) David appeals to God's righteousness to deliver him from his distress.

James' audience is likely suffering persecution. They have believed that King Jesus is in the process of making the world right again. But things don't seem to be "right" around them. They want to see God's righteousness take root in the world but they are being persecuted by wicked men.

They are being tempted toward anger. They are likely being tempted to take vengeance in one form or another. What James says to them is, "This anger of yours won't produce what you are wanting it to produce. You want God's righteousness to be produced in the world? You're going about it the wrong way."

This helps us make sense of James' five commands. The first three all fit together because they James is drawing the connection between anger and how it impacts our speech: (1) be **quick to hear**, (2) **slow to speak**, & (3) **slow to anger**

When you are slandered, persecuted, or simply disagreed with your natural response is one of anger. In our anger and pride we want to defend our reputation, our livelihood or our ideology. Anger often lashes out in harsh. Anger follows an "eye for an eye" approach to conflict. James shows another way. James commands his readers to take actions that will begin to shape their hearts.

We often think that the only way we change is from the "inside out" basis. But the Bible shows that God changes us through many means. The actions you take and the habits you form impact on your "inner desires." If you develop the practice of **being slow to speak** and **quick to listen** even when you are angry, you will find that we become slower to anger over time.

James gives two final commands in this first section: (4) **put away all filthiness and wickedness** and (5) **receive with meekness the implanted word**.

Putting away filthiness and rampant wickedness describes the response of the angry, quick tempered person. When you respond in anger your response is filthy and wicked.

You may be able to think back on an argument you've had with someone and remember saying something you regretted. You were mad at the person and so you took a "verbal shot". If you came to your senses, you apologized for those words and asked for forgiveness. James tells us to put away these angry responses.

Instead, James commands you to receive God's word in meekness.

The anger of man doesn't produce God's righteousness, but the word of God does bring salvation. Instead of allowing anger to dwell in your heart, allow God's word to be planted in good soil so that it might bear fruit.

Jesus accomplished this for us. In Christ we are dead to sin. Live to God by receiving His word.

The Doer and the Deceived (vv. 22-25)

Verses 22-25 show the next contrast: the "doer" of the word and the "deceived".

The meek are those who "count it all joy" when they are persecuted instead of responding in anger. They don't seek their own revenge but receive the implanted word. Now James teaches what it looks like to receive the implanted word with meekness. James presents two scenarios.

The first scenario is a negative one. James describes the self-deceived person who is **a hearer of the word and not a doer**. This person **is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror and goes away and forgets what he was like**.

Just like last week, James uses specific language to talk about immaturity and maturity in this section. The phrase "natural face" literal means "beginning face". The deceived man is immature. He is only willing to hear the word and not willing to do it. He like the man who asks God for wisdom without faith. The person who isn't willing to do God's word deceives himself and remains immature.

The second scenario shows the **doer who acts**. Rather than looking into a mirror with his “beginning face”, the doer “**looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres.**” James uses the same word for “perfect” here that he used back in verse 4. The word for God’s perfect law means *final* or *mature*.

When you look at the **perfect** or **maturing** law of God *and do it* you will be a man or woman who **perseveres**. What’s more, you “**will be blessed in your doing**” of God’s word.

These verses serve as a warning to all of us. Notice why the deceived one doesn’t persevere and obtain blessing. The reason is because they are a “**hearer who forgets**”. It is easy to think that you are “off the hook” if you *forget* something. But God’s word says the opposite. Forgetting God’s word is no excuse. James admonishes you to *hear, remember, and do* God’s word.

The Godless and the Godlike (vv. 26-27)

The final contrasting pair is between the godless and the Godlike.

You learn to “Count it all joy” when you put aside your anger and receive God’s word in meekness. Not seeking your own vengeance with hateful words but entrusting yourself to the Father who will bring about His righteousness.

This meekness leads to blessing because it **does** God’s word. When you **do** God’s word you gain a steadfast and mature faith that can stand in hard times.

In this last section we see what a mature faith looks like. James shows what it looks like to **do** God’s word.

He begins by showing what it *doesn’t* look like. It doesn’t look like the prideful and angry person who cannot bridle his tongue; deceiving his heart. The man who cannot bridle their tongue has a worthless religion that cannot bring about the righteousness of God. This man is godless. This man is unable to trust in God and resorts to his own devices.

What does mature faith look like? It **does** God’s word by **visiting orphans and widows** and **remains unstained from the world**.

This person is truly Godlike because they do what God does. The Bible shows time and again how God cares for the poor, the needy, and the downcast.

Consider that for a moment. The almighty creator God who is control of all things takes care of the poor and the needy.

In his book *An Experiment in Criticism* C.S. Lewis describes the act of “Morbid Castle-building”. He describes a kind of sinful daydreaming that humans are prone to. These are those moments in your life where you allow your imagination to run wild and you fantasize about being rich or powerful or popular. In these daydreams we pretend we are God, able to make our lives however we’d like them. But we show ourselves to be godless, not Godlike.

What does the almighty and all powerful God do with His glorious might? He is mindful of man and He despiseth not the broken and contrite.

To be Godlike looks like caring for the widow and the orphan. To use your energy and abilities to help those who are in need is what Godlike maturity looks like.

In fact the word used here to “visit” the orphans and widows is the same word that the Bible uses to describe how God visits his people. When God came to his people to deliver them from their enemies he “visited” them. When God came to us in Jesus, he “visited” us in this way. We were poor and needy and God visited us and delivered us from our sin. What’s more, God continues to dwell with us by the Holy Spirit.

As his sons and daughters, we are called to image God in these ways. We are to care for one another and for those who are in need. This is what Godlike and mature faith looks like. It looks like Jesus, who did not come in great power to serve himself but in order to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Let us give thanks that we serve such a loving God and seek to grow mature in our faith so that we might show God’s love to those who are in need.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!