

# “Obedient”

## Real Faith Part II

### James 1:19-27

**CIT:** A mature faith listens intently to the word of truth and actively obeys the King.

**Purpose:** To challenge the people of Calvary to embody Christian maturity through active obedience to the word by observing three vital themes in James 1:19-27.

Read Text – Pray (Hunter)

Good morning! Today we are in James 1:19-27, so please open your Bibles there if you haven't already as we look into “Real Faith” in Part II of our series through the book of James.

The book of James, as Ben talked about last week is this hard-hitting book of contrasts where James is holding up for the people he is writing to in his day, as well as for us in our own day this contrasting picture of what a true faith, a real Christian faith looks like on the one hand, and what a false faith, a phoney or make-believe faith looks like on the other.

We want to pay close attention as we work through this short book, noticing that with James as with the rest of Scripture that there is no neutrality, no neutral ground here..... there is no Switzerland for the true Christian to run to.

James relies heavily on the “way of wisdom” teaching traditions much in the same style that we see Jesus’ using, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, especially what was called “two-way teaching” which goes roughly like this;

There is one kind like this ..... and another kind like this..... which one are you?

So, this is how the book of James is asking us to evaluate, to examine, our profession of faith in Jesus. The point being, that we as creatures, as human beings, to paraphrase David Platt, can easily profess what we in reality do not possess.

We will be continually challenged to ask ourselves this question throughout the book of James; am I an empty, dead professor, or a re-born, living possessor of the life-giving Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Are we truly abiding in and living out God's new creation purposes in our lives, in our families, in our churches, and in our communities through the power of God's kingdom purposes in Jesus Christ to ultimately sum up all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth, or are we simply going through the motions, checking the boxes for some kind of get out of hell free card in the future.

Last week we saw that a "real faith", a mature faith is steadfast; not driven around by external conditions, nor dragged away by internal temptations. We saw that there is a lineage of death, but that God is offering us a legacy of life, by His will through His word. That there is a distinct contrast between the world and the church, and that in the context of God's church, He is creating a new people.

Today we will see that a "real faith", a mature faith is obedient. A mature faith listens intently to the word of truth, the implanted word, as James calls it here, and actively obeys the King. I want to challenge all of us this morning, all of God's people, to embody Christian maturity through active obedience to the word by observing three vital themes in the text here, and first we'll see in verses 19-21 that James is telling us all that we must **receive the word humbly**. We must receive the word humbly.

James begins by directly addressing his "beloved brothers" telling them to understand, to pay close attention, to know something and this is given in the form of an imperative, a command of scripture; that "every person", all of the people are to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger".

Here James gives us a set of 3 actions that work together so intricately that how we act in relation to these three actions are in many ways an indication of whether or not we have truly received this implanted word, the word of truth.

First, we're told that we are to be "quick to hear". What James is not saying here, is that we all need to tell our pastors and teachers to talk a little faster so we can hear faster. That way we can get out of church earlier for lunch, right?.....

No, what we are being told here is to be in constant readiness to listen in order to learn. To listen first to God through his word, but then also to others, especially our brothers and sisters in the church. **We must listen intentionally**.

We are not to be listless or sluggish in our hearing of the word of truth. We are not to be “dull of hearing” as the writer of Hebrews has it. This is the first step in Christian obedience and discipleship. To hear with an eagerness and desire to understand and then obey the word of God.

Next, we’re told to be “slow to speak”, and we’ll begin to see how these three actions really tie together. Notice that we are not told that we should not speak at all. And James intention here surely isn’t that we all redevelop the slowest Southern drawl that we can.

Any of y’all ever listen to audio on your phone and turn the speed down to like .5? You get this real slow distorted voice..... y’all try that sometime.... it’s entertaining.....you can turn the speed way up too, that way if you’re listening to a sermon on-line you can listen to a 30 minute sermon in like 10 minutes..... Yea, But anyway.....

That is not what James has in mind here. Just as we are being commanded to listen intentionally to the word of God in order to learn and to understand, we are now being told that we shouldn’t speak without first deliberating over the word of truth. **Our speech must be informed** by the word of God. What we are being told is that in all things, we should carefully consider what is coming out of our mouth, before we speak.

Paul, in 1 Cor 13 says; If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

We find this theme throughout the wisdom teachings in God’s word, especially in the Proverbs, Proverb 15:1 will show us the third action. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a hard word stirs up anger.”

The point being that our speech should always be careful, deliberate, informed by the word of God, and always overflowing with compassion for the others who hear us.

This is why we are told to be “slow to anger”. Again, it doesn’t say there is or will be no anger and there is a “righteous anger” that is good for us. We should be angry over things that go on in our world that would anger our God.

But notice as well in this text that James says that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. David says in Psalm 4 “Be angry and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent.”

The command to be slow to anger tells us that anger can and will ultimately lead us into rash, and hasty words, which will contradict what we have heard from the word of God and what we have learned from God’s word.

So, what we are seeing is that **anger interferes with obedience**. It will cause us to speak too quickly and say too much (Moo). It can cause us to use rash, harmful, and irretrievable words against our loved ones, our neighbors, and even our enemies.

What we see then is that by God’s will we have been born by the word of truth as new creations in vs 18, and so we now desire to be obedient disciples who listen intentionally to the word of truth with a desire to put it into practice, tempering our speech and having our speech informed by the word of truth in order to rightly guide and direct others, guarding our speech at all times against anger which interferes with our obedience and causes us to speak rash and harmful words which shows that we are not loving our neighbors. It is by obediently practicing these things that God enables us to begin to put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and with meekness, with humility, thinking of others more highly than ourselves, to **receive the implanted word**.

We have gone from being born by the word to growing in the word, growing in maturity of faith, which James says is able to “save your souls”.

We receive the implanted word and this is not just a present, one time event. And we’re not going to go into a bunch of grammar here, but what is said is that we receive the word as a present reality and that the receiving continues, is on-going into the future. It happens and is happening at the same time. And in the

same way we need to take a few minutes to look at what is said here about the word which is able to “save your souls”.

We see that term.... and many of our minds tend to go to the idea that we just get saved so that our disembodied soul can go away to a heaven in the sky somewhere forever after we die. Which as Ben pointed out last week is more Plato than it is Christian. True to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ, but the final state that we long for, that is our ultimate hope, is bodily resurrection and new life in the new heavens and the new earth forever with Christ.

What James intends when he says this in the text here is a parallel with vs 18 where God is now creating a new people, so here the word “save” is a present reality being lived out and is on-going into the future. **Salvation inaugurates new creation** now, in the present. It is a radical transformation. We, if we are His people, are saved and being saved and this salvation is being worked out through our joyful obedience to Jesus Christ and to His word in this world, His good creation, now in the already present and all the way to the final end, the not yet of the fullness of the new creation.

And, when we see “soul” here, James is not referring to some separate piece or part of us that will one day be snatched out of us and saved by being sent to heaven. In the OT, as well as in the new, the word soul or psyche refers to everything that we are. **Soul indicates the “whole” person.** The whole person, body, mind, and spirit being renewed day by day by the power of humbly receiving the implanted word and living in obedience to it.

So, this faith and this obedience cultivates physical, mental, and spiritual resilience, or perseverance, day by day through constant practice – hearing to learn, informed speech, and receiving and growing in the “implanted” word.

This brings us to our second vital theme.... we receive the implanted word humbly, and **we obey the word urgently.**

We obey the word urgently. Now James, wants us to see this obedient faith in practice contrasted with a false faith that doesn’t practice. He does this by contrasting “doers” with “hearers only”.

Lest we read and hear the preceding verses and think that as long as we hear and receive for ourselves the implanted word we're going to be alright in the end, James wants us to know that an obedient faith, a true faith, is not primarily about you and what you receive, not primarily about your individual, personal relationship with Jesus, but that it is primarily about God and how he would have us to serve others in His world in order to bring forth the beginnings of real restoration and kingdom flourishing today, within our families and our churches, but then also out into our communities and society, and to the nations.

This isn't about changing the existing pagan culture that is all around us, but it is about building a new culture, a gospel culture in the midst of the pagan culture. A new culture that shows the world the beautiful, restorative, rightly ordered, flourishing and powerful beginnings of what is to come in the new creation.

This is the mission of God's church, God's people, to be "doers" of the word. A "doer" shows **genuine faith**. Doers of the word are the genuine article, not fools gold. It's not that we now do these things to be saved, no, we obey because we have been saved and are being made new. It is our joy to obey even when our obedience causes us suffering in this world.

A "doer" is a true disciple of Christ that seeks to make disciples of Christ thus expanding and advancing God's kingdom on earth.

As Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2; "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."

There's a song that says, "it takes a soldier who knows His orders, to walk the walk I'm supposed to walk." So, a doer hears the words of the King, and obeys because his aim is to please, to honor, to bring glory to the King and to advance His kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

If you can remember, back when Ben was preaching through Ephesians, in Ephesians 2:10, we saw that we as God's children are "God's workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” And we talked about the word workmanship, being the word “poema” which would mean that we are His masterpiece, His poem.

And James uses the same type word hear for a “doer”, the word is “poietai”, like a poet, one who performs or produces something beautiful. The point is that the “doer” is doing something that is productive. “Doers” produce fruit. **They produce fruit.**

The “doer” is the seed that falls in the good soil of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13; who “hears the word and understand it” and bears fruit.

He is the wise man of Matthew 7; who Jesus says, “hears these words of mine and does them”. He builds, he produces, on a foundation of solid rock, and what he builds there is unshakeable, unstoppable.

He is like the blessed man of Psalm 1; who meditates on the law day and night, and is like a tree planted by streams of water that bears it’s fruit in its season and it’s leaf does not wither.

The one who hears the words of the King and does them shows a genuine faith and produces the fruit of the kingdom, but the one who is a “hearer only” the one who hears and does not obey is deceived. **A “hearer only” is grossly deceived.**

They are grossly deceived. They are like the chaff in Psalm 1 which is driven away by a puff of wind, light and worthless. They are deceived, they hear the word, but will not listen to understand, will not receive the word for it to take root in their lives, they are consumed with the cares and comforts of this world and are blind to the sufferings of others around them. And like the foolish man of Matthew 7, who hears Jesus words and does not do them, they are building on sand, and all that they do will ultimately be thrown down and destroyed. **They are foolishly indifferent** to the commands of the King. Whatever they may say, their actions show little care or concern for the hard work and the joyful, but sacrificial service that obedience requires.

Their indifference shows that they are self-deceived. They profess a faith that is all about themselves and what they can get out of it. They may show up for

church a couple of times a week, and may even serve once in a while, but their daily lives show no desire for the purposes of God or the kingdom of God, they show by their actions that they just don't care. The opposite of Christian love is not hate. The opposite of Christian love is indifference. An indifference that says "I just don't care." It says "I got mine, and I'm not worried about yours, go get it for yourself".

And the ones who hear only and aren't doers, in their indifference show themselves to be ignorant. **They are purposefully ignorant.** They look into the mirror and are perfectly happy with what they see of their natural face, and in their indifference to the word of God which commands them to be transformed by the renewal of their minds, to be made new creatures through an active and obedient faith and faithfulness to King Jesus, a faith, an allegiance that loves God supremely and their neighbors as themselves, they purposefully turn away and remain ignorant of what God has called them to be and to do in His kingdom.

A lack of urgent obedience shows indifference to Jesus which leads to ignorance which leads to ineffectiveness, which leads to carelessness.

The one who hears only and doesn't practice lacks discernment and loses any kind of usefulness in even helping others rightly, much less in discipling others, which is what every single follower of Christ is called to do, in our families, in the Church, and in our communities.

Which one are you?

The ones with a real faith will not be "hearers only" but doers, and as we now look at verse 25 we will see the contrast of a doer who is not indifferent or ignorant. We will see that **maturity grows with practice.**

We have moved from the word of truth in verse 18 to the implanted word in verse 21 and now in verse 25 the perfect law, the law of liberty or the law that brings freedom. These are synonymous to James, but we see that the maturing of the one with real faith comes from the word, the perfect law, and first we see that it is the one who looks into it.



The doers **attend** to the word. The word “looks” here depicts a stooping over to look, it depicts a careful and meticulous looking into. It is a looking with an urgent desire to know and to understand what God has said. A hunger and a thirst for the righteousness of God.

When my two youngest kids were in youth group, and we would attend an event of some sort, I would often need to instruct them when other students were asked to share their favorite verse and they would say “and this is what this verse means...to me”, and really it’s our own fault because we trained our kids to do this.

Honestly, why should we be concerned about what that verse means to you. We are asking the wrong question if we are. We want to be doers that attend to the word of God and therefore our desire is not to know what it means to you or anyone else, but what does God mean. We want to understand what God has to say to us, and to understand that rightly, by training ourselves to rightly divide the word of truth.

The doers attend the word, and **the doers abide in the word**. James says the “doer” is the one who perseveres, the one who “continues always near” to something, which in this case is the word, the law of liberty. As Jesus says we are to abide in Him as branches to a vine in John 15, and by abiding in Him we will be a doer who acts, who bears fruit.

Not a hearer only who in his indifference, and ignorance forgets what he sees, but a doer who does not forget, those who remember the law of liberty and what has been done for us in Jesus Christ, the mercy that has been shown us and then acts in obedient mercy and kindness for others, desiring for them to receive the same mercy as what has been given to us by the Father in Christ Jesus.

Attending to the word carefully, abiding in the word constantly, and obeying the word faithfully is what is able to ‘save our souls’. It is how we grow up into a mature faith, a real faith, a faith in which God’s blessings abound. We find that in Christ, in obedience to Him and His words that ultimately God’s blessing for us **abound** in our obedience.

God's blessings **abound** in obedience. This is again a depiction of the Psalm 1 "Blessed Man". The one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. His delight is in attending to God's law, his joy is in meditating day and night, in abiding in God's law, and being a doer who acts he is blessed in his doing. He becomes a hearty, healthy, flourishing tree, planted by streams of water, bearing fruit for the kingdom and the glory of God on earth. The one who hears and does is blessed, in all that he does he prospers.

We then are called in these verses to an obedient faith that receives the word humbly, and obeys the word urgently, and lastly to **apply the word compassionately**.

In obedience to Christ and His perfect law we are to apply the word compassionately. In verse 26 James immediately goes back to the problems of our speech, our tongues, and he will go back to this problem again and again throughout his short letter.

That is just how important it is for us to be more and more thoughtful and deliberate in what we allow our speech to be informed by. James says that we can think that we are religious and yet show ourselves to be deceived in our own hearts, deceived in our own selves by what comes out of our mouths.

Jesus tells us that it is not what goes into the body that defiles a man, but what comes out of his heart. Our words, our speech if it comes from angry, rash, and harsh words, or if it comes from the mouth of one who is a "hearer only" who is mouthing empty professions and opinions has a religion that is worthless.

A **careless tongue is useless**. Useless in service to the kingdom, useless in discipling others within the church, useless for reaching people outside the church in any meaningful way. A careless tongue throughout the book of James shows the fearful reality of a false faith, in contrast with a real faith, a maturing faith of the one who controls his tongue. A careless tongue is useless but, a **controlled tongue is fruitful**.

Let us then be careful with our speech, and I am talking to myself here as well. It is real easy sometime to speak truth in a way that is to brash and hurtful when we could slow down and moderate our speech.

We want to speak the truth, yes absolutely, but we are commanded to speak the truth in love. We are told even when giving an apologetic, a reason for the hope that is within us, that we are to always be ready, be prepared to give a defense, but to do so with gentleness and respect. Let our speech be seasoned with salt, and yet full of compassion.

In verse 27 James is going to tell us, in his abrupt and hard hitting way precisely what a real faith in obedience looks like. A religion that is pure and undefiled. Today we will only cover this briefly and next week, we are going to look much deeper at this verse.

But here we have it; a pure religion, a faith that is undefiled by our sin or the world, a true faith, a doing faith, a faith trusting wholly in Jesus and His perfect law, the law of liberty. This kind of faith, **a real faith cares for the helpless**. Real faith cares compassionately and sacrificially for the orphan, the fatherless, and the widow, for the poor and the powerless. Real faith seeks real justice for the downtrodden and oppressed.

I just want to read a short section out of “Church in Hard Places” here, I think this shows us precisely what James is talking about, it says:

“There is not a “no sacrifice” plan that you can sign up for. If you are going to follow Jesus, then you are getting on board to serve him no matter what the cost. If Jesus is Lord, then he must be the controlling principle in all of our plans and decisions. To put it bluntly, this means that we don’t get to say “no” just because ministry to the poor might be costly or scary. Following Jesus means that we might lose our lives, and anyone who is unwilling is unfit to be his disciple.”

Martin Luther, who ironically at one point wanted the book of James out of the Cannon, said this; “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing is worth nothing”

Let's live our lives at Calvary in light of this kind of real faith, this kind of steadfast and obedient faith. Let's aim together to please, to honor, to bring glory to King Jesus through our obedience. Through a loyal and allegiant faith that cares sacrificially for the helpless and cleanses us from worldliness. **Real faith cleanses us from worldliness.** It is only by the power of the Spirit dwelling in us through the finished work of Jesus Christ that we can accomplish this, but it is clear that our obedience is to be cultivated and practiced with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our Lord and Christ who is the author and the perfecter of our faith.

This kind of steadfast, obedient real faith is what truly shows the contrast, the absolute difference and distinction between the world and the church, the true people of the true and living God.

Come and let us together as the body of Christ at Calvary and by the power of Jesus our King and through His Spirit; Receive the word humbly, Obey the word urgently, and Apply the word compassionately.

Pray with me.

McConnell, Mez, McKinley, Mike. Church in Hard Places (9Marks) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.