

James – 1:19-27 Behavior In Trials

Verses 19-20

Beloved brethren – James assumes that the hearers (readers) of his message are believers.

These verses can be viewed as thematic for the entire epistle.

1:21 – 2:26 deals with being *quick to hear*. When we undergo testing we need to be especially attentive to the wisdom that God offers through His word.

3:1 – 18 deals with being *slow to speak*. Our eagerness to pour out our thoughts and feelings under trial needs to be restrained.

4:1-5:6 deals with being *slow to anger*. Improper wrath is a natural reaction to hard times.

The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God – The goal of trials is that we become Christ-like. Hebrews 12:11 gives the outcome of discipline as the *peaceable fruit of righteousness*. If we respond with improper wrath then we have missed the purpose of the trial.

“Briefly, the subject of the Epistle of James is testing, and its theme is the proper behavior under testing. Such behavior consists of eagerness to listen, reluctance to talk, and restraint in the expression of anger.”
Zane Hodges, *The Epistle of James*

Verse 21

Therefore – James is now going to examine the ramifications of verse 19.

Negative = *Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness...*

Positive = *In humility receive the word implanted...*

Notice the parallel in 1 Peter 2:1-2.

The word implanted – It is reasonable to take this as a reference to the believer’s new birth as in verse 18.

Able to save your souls – Although many try to equate this with salvation from hell, that is, justification, this is clearly not the context of James. As a matter of fact, almost every reference to this phrase in the entire Greek Bible speaks of deliverance or salvation of a person’s physical life.

Verse 22

To be swift to hear implies that we do the things that we hear.
Delude themselves – Knowledge of the Word does not automatically make you spiritual. You must apply it!

Verses 23-24

The mirror was used in that day as a metaphor for moral instruction.

His natural face – Literally this phrase is, “*the face of his birth*”. This may be a reference to the new birth. The idea being, see yourself as you really are and then live that way.

He has forgotten... To forget that we are born again, justified children will result in improper behavior.

Verse 25

The perfect law of liberty – This is the spiritual mirror that a believer looks into when he hears the implanted Word. It is a law of liberty because when we are acting according to our new nature, our true nature, we enjoy the liberty of being ourselves. See Galatians 5:1, 16, 6:2. The OT law was a yoke of bondage and impossible to fulfill (2 Corinthians 3:6-7) but the law of Christ is a law of liberty because the Holy Spirit now lives in us and gives us the power to live holy lives (Romans 7:6).

Verse 26

Religious – It is easy to reduce obedience to God to the performance of religious routines.

Bridle his tongue – The Spirit produces self-control. Religious activity is useless if the heart of the ‘doer’ is wrong.

Verse 27

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father – James now gives an example of actions that please God.
To visit orphans and widows... To fail to assist those with greater material needs is to be infected by the world’s selfishness, greed and indifference.

To keep oneself unstained by the world – Moral purity is a true demonstration of the character God wants for His children.