

“In the book of James, we find one of the clearest expressions of how Christians are to respond to God’s word in the New Covenant.” This is the view of Moe Bergeron in his 2024 article, “Understanding the Law of Liberty in James.” [READ ARTICLE](#)

What about you? Are you responsive to the Word of God? Or do you just give a nod of assent to it?

### Proposition

Our series is “**Navigating Faith: A journey through the book of James**”. We began by considering the unique audience – the diaspora. We were challenged to see the result of persevering faith. Last Sunday we considered the source of temptation – which is a challenge common to all who follow Jesus.

Our sermon today is “**Being A Doer Of The Word**” from [James 1:19-27](#). It is the sixth of eighteen paragraphs that make up the epistle of James. In this text Christians are called to react to the truth of God’s Word. Do we take Scripture seriously or superficially? Please note two introductory points.

- “*Take note of this*” (v.19) – (lit.) “you know this” is preferable and indicates the need to live what is known! James referred to the fact that the Christian is given life **through** the Word of God (v.18).
- “*My dear brothers*” (v.19) – this is the same phrase used in 1:16 and 2:5 and it suggests a shared experience. Though scattered in location, James longed for all to share in greater growth in Christ.

With this in mind, let us consider three realms in which we respond to the Word of God. As we do, we must remember the words of Bible teacher Alistair Begg (see [Truth For Life](#)): “*The imperatives flow from the infinitives.*” Today we will encounter such imperatives as to **know, receive, reject, prove, and do**.

This is not mere moralistic activity! It is the outflow of Jesus within the Christian – **spiritual fruitfulness**.

### [1] God’s Word and conversation – vv. 19-21

Rather than just a book of ideas to be debated, the Bible is to be embraced. In keeping with the style of wisdom literature, James touches on our conversation – which is a key gauge of obedience to the Word.

**a. An intensified response** (vv.19-20) – this involves three correct responses of rising intensity

- Swift to hear – by implication, we are to hear God’s Word
- Slow to speak – by implication we must avoid “human wisdom” or “folly” (see Prov 9:13; 10:19)
- Slow to anger – this is the antithesis of God’s transforming work

**b. Two contrasting responses** (v.21) – this involves two couplets containing “receive...reject” format

- Engrafted (implanted) Word **vs** moral filth; take off soiled clothes/weight ([Eph 4:20-24](#); [Heb 12:1](#))
- Humble and submissive **vs** wickedness, which is in excess (“*superfluity of naughtiness*” KJV)

Our speech is discussed in detail in chapter 3 – no one is free of failure in conversation! In WWII the slogan was “*Loose lips sink ships*”. “*Evil lips sink Christians or churches*”! An irony about our Christian conversation is that we become more interested in arguing over the Scripture, than in obeying it!

In addition to horizontal conversation, we need to attend to communication with God. We should think of it like breathing – exhaling the carbon dioxide of our sin; inhaling God’s Word as life giving oxygen. Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan famously stated, “*The medium that is the message*”.

Our communication with God is deeper than “academic information”. Our interaction with Him is personal and transformative: the Word of God “*is able to save your souls*” (v.21b). Do we grasp this? Do you speak to God in prayer and listen in His Word? “*Whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life...My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*” (John 10:24; 27)

## [2] God’s Word and action – vv. 22-25

Christians must “prove” obedience – (lit.) “*become* (γινεσθε) *doers* (ποινται) *of the Word*” (v.22). Listening to God’s law read was common in Jewish homes and synagogues. So James warned that we not “delude” (παραλογιζομενοι; “reason beside the point; miscalculate”) – **proximity** to God’s Word does not mean **practice** of it! James illustrated with a mirror. Scripture mirrors truth to us just as a mirror provides an accurate reflection. We can respond to what we see or be a “forgetful hearer” (v.25). In verse 25, James urged a progressive set of actions to ensure that God’s Word is obeyed:

- a. **Lean into it** – intense, active scrutiny of law that is perfect (τελειον cf. 1:4,17) and frees (ελευθεριας)
- b. **Linger in it** – this is continued, and sustained examination (note: endurance/perseverance, 1:3-4,12)
- c. **Live it** – being a (lit.) “doer of the work” leads to God’s blessing in our lives

How are you looking into the Word of God? A **negative look** is casual, cynical, condemning. But a **positive look** is careful, convicting, correcting, converting! Do you seek God in the Scriptures with penetrating absorption? Or do you take a casual glance and remain unresponsive and untransformed?

Psalm 1:2-3 tell of one whose “*delight is in the law of the Lord...He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*”

## [3] God’s Word and devotion – vv. 26-27

What impact does God’s Word have on “religion”? This term is highly charged, even confusing. “*What religion are you?*” we are asked! “*My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.*” (Dalai Lama) “*I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.*” (Richard Dawkins). These use the term to identify a structured system of spiritual beliefs and practices.

The term “religion” is used seldom in Scripture. Here it expresses the **outward expression** of what we believe – the theme of James! “*Real faith produces authentic deeds*” (Chuck Swindoll). So “religion” could be translated “piety” or “godliness” or “devotion”. Notice the sharp contrast which James presented.

- a. **False religion** (v.26) is “vain” (ματαιος) resulting in uncontrolled, offensive in speech. This flows from a self-deceived heart and produces worthless spiritual devotion. There is much activity but little fruit!
- b. **Pure religion** (v.27) is “clean” (καθαρα), “faultless” (αμικαντος) resulting in selfless, practical **service** to the most vulnerable. Such devotion includes **integrity**. It is “*faith working through love*” ([Gal 5:6](#)).

Should Christians focus on a “social Gospel” (respond to poverty, injustice) or a “proclamation Gospel” (respond to sin, salvation)!? Our passage reveals this as a false dichotomy. We noted in our first sermon that James teaches: “*persevering faith is productive*”. Remember the bicycle wheel? The hub is **FAITH** which is Christ’s life “in-worked”. The spokes are **ETHICS** which is Christ’s life “out-worked” in devotion.

## Conclusion – see Digging Deeper

Are we merely observers of the truth of God found in the Bible? Observant but unaffected! Or will we humbly obey what we are being told? What hangs in the balance between these two questions is the difference between empty and true religion. What kind of religion are you practicing? Are you just an **observer** of God’s Word? Or will you be an active, submissive **obeyer** of God’s Word?