

## **Additional Notes**

### **James Session #3**

#### **Important To Remember!**

James is writing to religious people. They have probably grown up in the Jewish faith. They know God's law. But James keeps pushing them to take the next step. Don't just hear it—do it! Don't just reject the immorality of the culture around you, but also be careful about your own anger and pride. And if you think you're religious, great! But what do you mean by that? Saying no to worldly temptation is a great start—God loves that—but He also loves it when we care for the neediest people in the community. And beyond that, are you careful about what you say?

Maybe you consider yourself religious, too. Maybe you have been a Christian for some time now. You have this faith thing figured out. But James keeps pushing us to move on. Do we listen more than we speak? Do we keep our anger in check? Are we careful about what we say? Do we put into practice what we hear in God's Word? Do we let God's implanted Word grow within us?

#### **1:19-20**

The key to persevering through external trials (1:1-12) and internal temptation (1:13-18) now comes to a climax as James discusses the importance of being doers of God's word (1:19-27). James begins this section by identifying with his readers ("my dear brothers and sisters")—an address used 15 times in this letter! He then tells his brothers and sisters in Christ to note three things. The Greek here literally reads "know this" (Gk = iste).

They are to know these three things: (1) be quick to listen; (2) be slow to speak; and (3) be slow to become angry. Instead of overpowering others in anger, James commands his readers to assume a position of humility as one who both listens and speaks carefully. Human beings rarely have the capacity to represent the character of Christ in anger. For this reason, James explains that our anger hardly produces the actions that God's character demands (1:20).

#### **1:21**

In light of this threefold charge (1:19), it is essential to get rid of "all moral filth and evil" that is present in one's life. The verb used here for "to get rid of" elsewhere refers to the taking off of clothes. This imagery, moreover, is supported by the phrase "moral filth" (Gk = ryparian). The same root is used in 2:2 to describe a "poor person in filthy clothes" (Gk = rypara). James is commanding his readers to take off "all moral filth and evil" like one would take off dirty clothes. In contrast to the moral filth and evil that is to be removed, one is to humbly accept the word of God that has been planted in the human soul.

#### **1:22**

Accepting God's word (1:21), however, implies much more than merely hearing what God has to say. It is not enough to simply hear God's word. Hearing God's word is absolutely useless if it does not translate into action. In addition to hearing God's word, one must respond to it with obedient action. One who simply hears or knows what God's word says but does nothing further with it can easily be tricked into thinking that listening to God's word is all that is necessary. In contrast to the notion that one only needs to listen to God's word, James gives his readers the charge to "do what it says."

### **1:23-24**

James now employs a metaphor that builds on what has already been stated. He argues that failing to put God's word into action is like looking at yourself in the mirror and then forgetting what you look like the moment you walk away. Such a look into the mirror would prove to be utterly useless.

### **1:25**

Looking into the mirror of God's word, therefore, requires an actual response that brings about life transformation. One must look intently into God's word with an unwavering commitment to put it into active obedience. The word for "look intently into" (Gk = parakypsas) literally means "to stoop down" in order to get a better look at something. The "perfect law that gives freedom" may sound like a paradox to many since the notion of "law" seems to imply restriction rather than freedom. God's perfect law, however, brings true freedom. The freedom that comes from practicing God's law stands in stark contrast to those that are enslaved to sin (1:15). Putting God's word into action, therefore, will bring blessing.

### **1:26-27**

The word religious here (Gk = threskos) refers to outward acts and observances of religion. Such outward religious acts are to be considered "worthless" if not matched by a tamed tongue. The individual that is genuinely religious will be marked by controlled speech (1:26). True religion, according to James, will be reflected in one's conduct ("looking after orphans and widows") and one's character ("keeping oneself from being polluted by the world"). Both conduct and character should be fully submitted to God's word.<sup>8</sup> Note also that James' intention is not to posit a definition for religion. Rather, he is merely contrasting ritualistic religious acts and observances with signs of genuine obedience to God that manifest true religion.