

## James 1D

- Chapter 1 has taken us through an examination of trials and temptations
  - And I think I can sum up what we've learned in a few simple words
  - Trials are reasons for joy
    - They are tests from the Lord and give us opportunity to show Him how much we've matured
      - How much He has grown us through the Spirit of the Lord working in us
    - And we pass them when we seek wisdom from the Lord and listen to His direction
      - They are open book tests so long as we are willing to rest, remain stable, in His instruction
  - Temptations are a different kind of trial, the natural result of our sinful nature
    - And there is a process by which they lead us into sin
      - And if we seek the Lord's strength and wisdom to confront those temptations, He will give us a way to escape them
  - The Lord is prepared to appoint an eternal reward to those who succeed in these test
    - Paul affirms this teaching in a short passage from Colossians

**[Col. 1:9](#) For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,**

**[Col. 1:10](#) so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

**[Col. 1:11](#) strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously**

**[Col. 1:12](#) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.**

- James has said repeatedly that the solution to facing trials and temptations is to seek God's wisdom
  - And I defined that process as seeking God in His word and in prayer
    - But now James concludes the chapter on trials by focusing on one of those ways: God's word

[James 1:19](#) This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

[James 1:20](#) for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

[James 1:21](#) Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

- If we are to understand these verses, we have to keep them together
  - The "hearing" James mentions in v.19 is related to the "receiving" that he mentions in v.21
  - James starts by saying, "This you know, brethren."
    - They know what James has been teaching...
      - They know that the Father is all light, and brought us forth by His will to make us a first fruit among creatures
    - But they aren't living according to that knowledge
      - They were likely reacting in anger and doubt over the trials they were experiencing
      - They were speaking instead of listening
  - So James says this you know, but...
    - But everyone should be quick to hear
      - In the day this letter was written, people didn't have personal copies of the Bible (Old Testament)
      - The scriptures were kept in the synagogue and were read aloud during the weekly services
    - So when James says be quick to hear, he's talking about quick to receive God's word in the way it was received in that day – by hearing

- Listening to God's word was to take the place of speaking and anger
- James says that we know that trials are tests, but just knowing that fact won't be enough in many cases to get us through the trial in a godly way
  - We or our spouse or child may have a life-threatening illness
  - We may lose our job, our spouse has an affair, our business fails
    - Or a million other circumstances of life come along
    - And they bring stress and worry and fear
  - And we may remember that God is testing our spiritual maturity, and our response is being graded
    - And we know we are supposed to seek God's wisdom in His word or in prayer
  - But then we start to tell ourselves things
    - We say it's unfair, that God is treating us this way
    - We say unkind things against the people in our lives who are involved in the trials
    - We strike out at others in frustration
    - We tell ourselves nothing God has told us matters, that there's nothing in God's word that can help us deal with our situation
      - We entertain thoughts of self pity
  - And maybe we get angry and frustrated, and start looking for ways to escape our trial
    - We turn to the world for wisdom or help
      - These are the ways our flesh respond to trials, but it's not the godly way to respond
- James says the anger of men can't produce the righteousness of God
  - And producing the righteousness of God is the whole point of the trial
    - God wants to grow us
      - He wants to give us opportunity to show our growth

- He doesn't bring trials to frustrate us...unless frustrating us is the best way to mature us
      - But if we stubbornly persist in letting our flesh drive our response to trials, we won't grow
      - We'll just see more anger and frustration and despair
- Instead be quick to hear God's word (read it) but be slow to speak
  - As in my examples, speaking refers to our tendency to explain or rationalize our circumstances to ourselves
    - We talk to ourselves and others about why something has happened or how we should respond
  - We talk so much in fact, that we stop listening
    - Winston Churchill once said, "'Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.'
  - If we are truly going to hear God's own wisdom and direction as we contend with trials, we have to first silence the voice in our head and in our mouth
    - Remember Psalm 46:10

[Psa. 46:10](#) Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!

- So then James gives us the secret to receiving God's wisdom in a trial
  - In v.21 he says, receive God's word in humility
    - The word for humility is *prautes* which means meekness
    - We have to humble ourselves, eliminate the pride from our response to trials
      - We don't deserve anything, God doesn't owe us anything
      - We have nothing good in us save for Christ Himself
    - And trials are good for us

"We pray for safety instead of purity because we do not see impurity as dangerous." - George Stulac

- We pray for health and wealth and ease because those things sound good to our flesh
  - But when the Father sends us trials instead, we respond in ungodly ways if we fail to recognize the goodness of God in those trials
- Because everything we need to face trials is available from God as well

[2Pet. 1:2](#) Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

[2Pet. 1:3](#) seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Did you notice that both Peter and James refer to this word as something already granted, already in you, implanted in you?
  - James says the word of God is implanted in you, which is the word that saves your souls
    - The word "soul" in Greek means the whole life, or the full measure of the person's earthly life
    - God's word is the way we are saved, and that word is also a Person Who lives in us
      - And we "receive" that Word when we turn to it and seek His counsel over our own voice and emotions
      - When we understand our circumstances from His perspective
  - So when we are suffering from illness and feeling weak, we hear God's word tell us that our body is going to fail...look forward to the new body
    - When our businesses fail, God reminds us that our eternal business is to seek first the righteousness of God
  - These words are words of life that can save our souls

- Receiving the word implanted in us means yielding to the instruction of the word as the Spirit convicts us and prompts us to a different walk
- But once we receive God's word, we have to act upon what we hear

[James 1:22](#) But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

[James 1:23](#) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

[James 1:24](#) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

[James 1:25](#) But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

- If there was one indictment against the evangelical Christian today, it might be that many have become merely hearers of the word rather than doers
  - This is the classic critique of Bible churches
    - Groups of Christians who give lip service to the Bible and to God's word
      - We love to read it, we love to study it, we put the word on our sign out front
      - But do we let it change our thoughts and actions?
- Let's break down what James is saying here
  - James says prove yourselves doers of the word
    - The word "prove" in Greek means something that has been done or accomplished
      - Demonstrating through action
    - And in the context of trials, it refers to living according to God's word in the midst of a trial
  - James sets up a choice of two paths once we have consulted God's word
    - We can hear it and tell ourselves we're OK
      - We assume it's talking about someone else

- We sit in the pew and say to ourselves, I hope so-and-so is listening to the pastor this morning
  - That point was meant for them (but not us)
- We delude ourselves either by thinking it was written for someone else
  - Or we assume we're already living according to God's word
    - This is a Pharisaical way of thinking, because it's rooted in an overly positive view of self
    - And an unteachable heart
    - Ultimately, it's pride rather than humility
- James uses a beautiful analogy to describe that kind of person
  - The word of God is like a mirror, in the way it causes us to examine ourselves in an honest and true way
    - It speaks with authority and truth, and the Spirit in us takes those words and uses them to convict us of our sin
  - In that way, hearing the word of God is like seeing ourselves in a mirror
- I don't know about you, but I don't really like staring at myself in a mirror
  - The longer I look, the more imperfections I notice
  - The less I like my appearance
    - I seem to remember myself as looking better
    - But then I study my features in a mirror, and stark reality hits home

Three recent college graduates visit their pastor seeking advice on their careers. The pastor tells them that there is a magic mirror in his office. If they can look into the mirror and tell the truth about how they could serve God, He would respond instantly in answering their prayer. But if they look into the mirror and lie, they would instantly disappear and go directly to hell.

The UT graduate walks in, looks in the mirror and says, "I think I will become a successful business man and use my wealth to support missionaries." Instantly, he sees a vision of

himself in his corner office at the top of a New York skyscraper.

The Texas Tech graduate walks in, looks in the mirror and says, "I think I will become a successful Christian author who reaches the lost with the Gospel." Instantly, he sees a vision of his books at the top of the bestseller list.

Finally, the Texas A&M grad walks in, looks in the mirror, and says, "I think..." Instantly, he disappears.

- So if we look into the mirror of God's word, we need to come with an honest heart ready to learn something about ourselves
  - And if we learn something from that self-inspection, we have to put it into action
  - Unlike the person who sees the problems in the mirror, but instead of addressing the problems, the person just leave the bathroom
    - It's as if we can't see the problems, then we don't have any
- Instead, James says we need to act differently
  - In v.25 James says look into the mirror of God's word, the perfect law of Liberty
    - The word for "look" is *parakupto*, which means to stoop down to get a better look, to study intently
    - And we're looking at the entire truth of Scripture, the law of liberty which isn't the Law of Moses
      - It's the entirety of God's word, the full measure of God's revelation that brings freedom and grace
      - And power, as Peter said, to face our trials successfully
- Remember that James' audience were Jews who had recently come to faith and learned that they were no longer compelled to keep the Law of Moses
  - But then we said that raised a problem for some who now wondered if they had any obligation to do anything in response to their faith

- They were still willing to hear God’s word, but they had come to think that the only proper response was to keep the Mosaic Law
  - But if the law was no longer a requirement, then what do they do
- Imagine new Christians without the Christian culture to guide their service to God? It resulted in an aimless life
- Stoop down, study it, learn God’s word intently
  - And as you stare into the perfect word, abide by it
    - And such a man is blessed in what he does
- We’re not talking about being busy
  - James is arguing for us to be better Christians simply by assuming a more active Christian lifestyle
    - The context of the first chapter is facing trials
    - And in that context being a “doer” means being someone who puts God’s wisdom and instruction into action
- When you put God’s words and His instructions into action, you will be blessed in what you do
  - But if you hear from God in His word, consider it, but then never take the steps to put it into action in your own life, you are the forgetful hearer
  - And ironically, if we get busy in the church doing things
    - Serving in one way or another
    - But we never take the word of God and actually apply it in our own lives, we may feel like we’re the “doer” James asks us to be
  - But in reality, we’re still the forgetful hearer
    - We’re still the one who looks at ourselves, and instead of hearing and taking steps to adjust our life to Christ...
    - We’re distracting ourselves by our works at religion, at doing Christian things instead of being a Christian

- James ends the chapter with exactly this kind of exhortation

[James 1:26](#) If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

[James 1:27](#) Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- Who is the one who thinks himself “religious”?
  - The word in Greek is *threskos*, and it means someone who fears or worships God
    - We're still talking about a believer
    - But the point is a believer who sees himself as someone doing the right things in keeping with their faith
      - Someone who lives his faith properly
  - James says if someone thinks he has already achieved the perfect reflection in that mirror
    - And they can look upon God's word, hear it, and come away thinking there is nothing they need to change in their lives
      - Then that Christian is the one who thinks himself religious, according to James
    - To that person, James offers a simple test: can you bridle your tongue?
      - Is everything you say to yourself and everyone else perfectly in accordance to God's word?
    - You never lie, you never gossip, you never utter a hurtful word, you never speak out of pride or arrogance?
      - If we can't even control something as small as our tongue – never mind the rest of our bodies
      - Then we deceive ourselves if we think there is nothing in our lives we need to change in response to God's word
      - And in trials, we are going to fail rather than be blessed because we are going to rely on our own thoughts and instincts

- That kind of religion is worthless, but its worthlessness is in respect to ourselves, not God
  - It's not God Who loses out, it's us
    - It's worthless to us, because it leaves us self-deceived and without the possibility of receiving the blessing God offers to obedience in trials
- If you want a picture of what pure religion looks like to God, a pure response to God's word
  - It involves an external and internal change
    - Externally, it takes the form of ministering to those who have nothing to offer in return
      - A selfless act of love
      - Consider the power of that idea
      - You are suffering in trials, and your response after consulting God's word is to go to others who are even more vulnerable to trials and minister to them
      - Leave your pity party and seek to serve others in their time of need
        - Notice the widows and orphans are in a time of distress themselves
  - Finally, the inward change is to keep oneself unstained by the world
    - Do you want to be a doer of the word?
      - It isn't measured by the busyness of your religious activities
      - Or the accomplishments of your ministry
      - It's measured by the degree of Christlikeness in your life
- Stare at God's word, compare it to the reflection of your own life, and be prepared to make the necessary changes to conform yourself to the One who is revealed in its pages