

In his letter James has dealt with our response to trials (1:1-12) and has explained about temptation (1:13-18). We are responsible to respond to temptation in a godly manner. James uses practical examples like anger (1:19-20) to illustrate how we should live. We can summarize his instructions under three general commands.

1. ***Humbly accept the word (1:19-21).***

Having a righteous life (v 20) requires getting rid of evil (v 21). To do that we must humbly accept the word (v 21). Humbly accepting the word requires three actions.

a. *Be quick to listen.*

We should always be good listeners (*cf.* Proverbs 18:13). It is especially important that we listen to God's Word. Listening to God's word is paying attention to what it says. It is being ready to do it. Being quick to listen means desiring to know what God says and being quick to obey.

b. *Be slow to speak.*

The Bible warns about speaking too quickly and about saying too much (*cf.* Proverbs 29:20; 10:19). Controlling what we say is the most challenging of God's instructions in wisdom. If we do not control what we say, our religion is worthless (James 1:26). If we can control what we say, we can control our whole body (James 3:2). When we speak too quickly, we may give our opinion rather than God's truth. We might wrongly reveal secrets. We may respond before hearing the whole story. We may commit to something which we shouldn't commit to. We may hurt someone with our words.

c. *Be slow to become angry.*

When people get angry, they often stop listening and say wrong things. Although anger can at times be righteous, most of our anger arises out of our own sinful hearts. Such anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires in us or in others. Instead it produces moral filth and evil. Anger grows out of evil and produces evil.

Instead of becoming angry, and giving a quick response, we should listen to God's word. We should "humbly accept the word planted in" us (verse 21). As in the parable of the soils, true believers "hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (*Luke 8:15*).

2. ***Do the word (1:22-25).***

It is important that we hear and read God's Word, but we need also to do what God says.

a. *To hear and not do God's word is to deceive oneself.*

Just as we look into a mirror to see what we need to do – wash our face or comb our hair – we look into the Bible to do what we should do. Not to do what we read or hear, is like looking into the mirror and then forgetting to do anything.

The Bible functions like a mirror. God reveals to us what we really look like. It can reveal our motivations (Hebrews 4:12), our wrong doing (2 Timothy 3:16), our guilt (Romans 3:23). The Word also tells us who we are in Jesus Christ. We should look into the Word and act upon what we see.

b. *To hear and do it brings blessing.*

The law is perfect and brings freedom. To attempt to be right before God by doing the law, that brings bondage. When we come to God by faith, we are declared right with God. Then we want to do what God says. We can understand what God says. The "restrictions" of God's Word free us to become what is best for our own selves. This is like a train that runs best when it stays on the tracks. When we do that which we hear or read in the Word, God's gives joy and He blesses.

3. ***Don't be merely religious, but practice the word (1:26-27).***

Verses 26-27 appear to be an application of what James has been saying. Being religious is not a correct response to temptations. Being religious does not show victory over sin. Pure and faultless religion, as James describes, is a true practice of the word.

a. *Worthless religion:* pagan worship usually required certain forms and practices. By doing them people considered themselves religious. But if they do not control what they say, there is no true worship of God. Their religion is worthless. Jesus said that we are to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). When we have humbly accepted the Word, we will control our tongues.

b. *Pure and faultless religion:* According to James pure religion is looking after orphans and widows in their distress. It is doing good to those who need it and who cannot give back. Jesus said, "you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (*Luke 14:14*). Pure religion does not have selfish motives, such as being seen by others or receiving something in return. Pure religion also means to keep oneself unstained or unpolluted by the world. James will go on to mention fighting, jealousy, bitterness, lying, evil deeds, rebellion, evil desires, and being merciless. If we practice such things, we would not be those who do the Word of God.

God is not seeking people to be merely religious. He wants His true children to battle against sin. He wants His children to express His righteousness in their lives.

We need to look closely at ourselves in the mirror which is the Bible. If we see sin, repent. If it encourages, believe what it says. If it challenges us to do good, then pursue that good.

Don't look into the mirror and forget what you see. Remember what you see and act upon it. God has given His Word to equip us to fight sin and to do good.