

July 19, 2020

Willerup United Methodist Church

Sermon Notes

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The Book of James, Lesson 2

Practical Religion: Hindrances to Spiritual Receptiveness

The Book of James

This is the second in our series of meditations based on the book of James for the month of July and August. This was written by the brother of our Lord Jesus, who called himself a servant of God and Jesus Christ. It was primarily written to Jewish Christians who were scattered in many nations. James talks in this book about trials and tribulations, how to apply the Word of God in our daily life, the worldliness in the church and Christian perspective.

Hindrances to Spiritual Receptiveness

James 1:19-27

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Re-

ligion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Outline: Hindrances to Practicing our Faith

1. The hindrance of not listening but being eager to talk
2. The hindrance of not restraining your temper
3. The hindrance of not getting rid of all moral filth and evil
4. Our failure to cultivate the practical Christian character

Faith is to be expressed.

Professed faith must also be Practiced.

Vs. 22 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Caution: What you speak and how you speak is very important. The tone and the content of your words are very important in living out your faith.

Vs. 26 “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.”

Two Rabbinical sayings:

“Talk little and work more.” (*Pirke Aboth*, cap i.15)

“The righteous speak little and do much, the wicked speak much, and do nothing.” (*Bava Metzia*, fol 87)

Jesus explained the practice of faith by the parable of the sower and the seed. The reason some were hindered in their growth was preoccupation, shallow mindedness, and worldly cares, (Matthew 13:1-23). Because they could not receive what God offered to them, they could not be fruitful in their faith.

1. **The hindrance of not listening but being eager to talk**

There are people who talk before giving any thought of the reactions. There are people who have “too much to say” – those who talk too much are not welcomed. James counsels us to be “slow to speak.”

Proverbs 10:19, “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

(Good News Translation, “The more you talk, the more likely you are to sin. If you are wise, you will keep quiet.”)
Proverbs 17:27, “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.”

2. The hindrance of not restraining your temper

“Slow to become angry” - The person showing anger shows that she/he wants to be in control, and has lost anything like ordinary proportion between the cause and degree of emotion. The lack of control is a condition in which evil can work effectively.

How does anger originate? It begins when our ego is hurt. When our “I” is touched. The self is seated in the center. We all notice that in the word S-I-N, “I” am in the center. In the word P-R-I-D-E, “I” am in the center. We do not want to be compared to others, looked down on. We want to be number one.

Proverbs 14:17, “A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.”

Proverbs 18:21, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Get rid of your “I” to follow Jesus.

3. Hindrance of not getting rid of all moral filth and evil

The relics of our old corruptible life of wickedness are in us and need to be put away. Paul talks about the “old man,” by which he is referring to the “flesh.” Evil habits can regulate us and result in unsubdued desires and passions - like injurious friendship and all that is related to the flesh.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”

Ephesians 4:22-24, 26 “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ... In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

How can one go to the mirror and not take care of the deformity which is seen.

The filth which we see in the mirror – the impurity that cleaves to the body, is what we can see. The true mirror of the soul is the Word of God.

Here the idea is applied to the mind. We need to have the good soil of listening and applying, to be on guard for the birds which can take away or weeds which suppress the seed, which is the Word of God.

Colossians 3:8, “But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.”

4. Our failure to cultivate the practical Christian character

Be not just hearers but doers.

It is not pleasing the self but God.

True religion is living and operative faith, which will save souls. The world is created by God, and He is not requiring us to renounce the world and live in a monastery, or abandon society, but to renounce corruptions, pleasures, riches, and honors to keep ourselves free, even as Jesus did. We are not to be confounded by its sentiments and habits, nor court nor desire its friendship. “Friendship with this world is enmity with God,” James 4:4.

Good influence can only enter in at the doors which meekness, and quietness, and anxiety to learn and serve, can open.

The Preacher’s Homiletical Commentary, pg.521

- a. Meekness needs to be cultivated and nourished.
- b. Active grace can be nourished by direct dealing with people.
- c. Passive grace can only be cultivated by attention to the things which form it – good soil and atmosphere.

We are not only to listen to the Word of God – “quick to listen,” but do it.

What it says. Practice is important.

It is not austerity, or a ritual which can be centered on man himself. It is also not based on piety which is interested in excited feelings.

It is practical religion with which the Father God is well pleased.

It is kindly interest in, and care for, others. James is suggesting we take care of widows and orphans. It is religion not based on self but “life for others.”

The Preacher's Homiletics Commentary, Excerpts Pg. 528-529

Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

One cannot be self-centered and practice a Christian life. To visit and take care of widows and orphans is the true character of a Christian.

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Love is the life and soul of religion.

Be compassionate and look after the needs of those you see every day, especially widows and orphans.