



SUBMITTING TO GOD'S WORD

"18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

- James 1:18-27

Submitting to God's Word

One of the most familiar and helpful is in the first chapter of James, starting in verse 18, and I want to read down to verse 22. "Of His will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

The psalmist said the familiar words "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord." Psalm 119. True believers do that. True believers walk in God's law. They have the mind of Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians you have the mind of Christ. What did he mean? He wasn't talking about a subjective experience, he was talking about an objective revelation. If you want to know the mind of Christ, it's here. This is a direct reflection of the will and mind of God, which is synonymous with the mind of Christ. We who know God, we who know Christ, we who are true believers have the mind of Christ. We rejoice in the testimonies of God revealed to us on the pages of Scripture.

But that's not the case of unbelievers. Unbelievers do not seek God's law.

"Salvation" – says Psalm 119:155 – "is far from the wicked for they seek not thy statutes. Jeremiah 6:16 says, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk therein.'" Sinners are obstinate and disinterested in the way of God, the Word of God, the will of God.

Believers like the psalmist would say, "I have chosen the way of truth. I delight in your law. Your law is my delight. I hope in your word. I seek your precepts. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes. Teach me o Lord the way of thy statutes. Make me go in the path of thy commandments. Order my steps in thy word.

Let me not wander from thy commandments. Incline my heart to thy testimonies.
Quicken me in the way.”

The psalmist also said, “I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right.” And so said the psalmist, “The sum of all that, I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.” It is characteristic of a true believer to be obedient to the Word. To say, as Psalm 119:97 says, “Oh how I love thy law.”

Going to Psalm 1, and equally familiar psalm, we are reminded that Godly people, true believers, are described as those who “delight in the law of the Lord, and in that law, meditate” – how often? – “day and night.” The Godly can be described then in simply understanding their connection with the law of God. A person’s attitude toward the Word of God is a test of their faith. If there is a submissive, joyful, delighting attitude of response to the Word of God, that’s evidence of true transformation.

That’s really what James is saying here. James says in verse 18 of chapter 1 that it all started with the Word of truth. “It was of his own will that he brought us forth” – or begot us – “by the Word of truth.” That’s what made us a kind of first fruits of his creatures. That’s what made us new creations. It was the Word that did it. We heard the Word and the Word gave us the mind of God and the mind of Christ and God his holy – God the Holy Spirit excited faith in our hearts, and we believed the Word and were begotten again or born again. It all began with the Word. And that’s how it continues.

And so, he reminds his readers here that our response to the Word of God then becomes a test of our faith. If you want to know whether you’re truly a Christian or not, here’s the test. Now this I find very appropriate for tonight, since we’re reminded the 2 Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “When you come to the Lord’s Table, let a man examine himself.” And the most notable thing to be concerned about in this self-examination is the true condition of your heart. Are you truly God’s child?

James says believers have a right response that involves three features. We'll look at them just briefly, three features. Feature number one is a willingness to receive the Word with submission, A willingness to receive the Word with submission. Or to put it another way, a willingness to receive the Word without resistance, without rebellion. So then verse 19 says, "My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Now he says you were begotten by the Word of truth, you were born again by the Word of truth, you know the power of the Word of truth, you are aware of its regenerating capability. You have experienced the power of the Word that transformed you.

Peter said essentially the same thing in – in 1 Peter 1:23: "Having been born again not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible through the word of God, which lives and abides forever." You have already experienced the power of the Word that God has brought us forth by every Word that comes from His mouth. The Scriptures, we're reminded is – the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation. So we already know the power of the Word to regenerate. We get evidence of that real regenerating work by a continual hearing of the life-giving Word with an attitude of submission. And he discusses that attitude in a number of interesting ways.

Look at verse 19. "Let every man be swift to hear." He's not just talking about something generic. He's not saying be good listeners when people come and tell you their problems. He's not saying be good listeners when your wife unloads on you the things that concern her or your children want you ear. He's not talking in that generic sort of category. He's talking in the context of the Word of truth, which is the subject of verse 18 and also the subject of verse 21, 22 and following. The context is the Word of God, and what he is saying is be – be eager hearers, eager listeners to the Word.

The idea is here that someone who is truly regenerate is going to be eager to grasp every opportunity to increase their hearing of God's Word because, in fact, they do desire to have the mind of Christ. You do have the mind of Christ when you think like Christ thinks, and that's when you think, as the Scripture has revealed, the mind of God. The idea is to be eager to pursue every privileged occasion to obtain the

knowledge of God and His divine will. To never get enough. Literally it says, be swift to the hearing. Be swift to the sermon, if you will. Be swift to the exposition of Scripture. Be swift to the resource to bring you the truth of God.

You go back in this chapter to verse 2 and all the way through verse 12, and it's all about trials. Trials that are difficult, trials that demand wisdom from above, that demand a wisdom beyond this world, a wisdom which only the Word of God can provide. When there are trials in life, well, you want to be swift to hear, you want to run to the Word where you find there the truth of God that meets the trial. And when there are temptations, verse 13, transitions out of the trials into the temptations. And from verse 13 down through verse 17, there's a discussion of the matter of temptation.

And the only way to deal with lust, and the only way to deal with being drawn away into temptation, drawn away, it says in verse 14, by "your own desires" and enticed; drawn away so that desire conceived gives birth to sin. The only way to avoid that, as David knew, was to hide the Word in his heart that he might not sin. When there are trials, a believer runs to the Word, which provides the comfort. When there are temptations, the believer turns to the Word where there is strength to resist.

Charles Wesley cultivate this in his own life, and he expressed that in a hymn when he wrote, "When quiet in my room I sit, thy book be my companion still/My joy thy sayings to repeat, talk or the records of thy will/And search the oracles divine 'til every heartfelt word is mine." That's what David meant in Psalm 119:111, when he said, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart." Be quick to hear, pursue every opportunity to be exposed to the Word of God and to receive it with submission.

And along that line, slow to speak. That also is not just some generic command that is telling you keep your mouth shut. Just don't talk, don't say anything in general. Swift to the hearing of the truth of God, slow to the speaking. What does that mean? Eagerly do you pursue, hearing every – every Word from God. But cautiously, slowly, patiently and with some reluctance would you become the speaker. In James 3:1, we are reminded that it's a very serious thing to speak the Word of God. "My

brethren, let not many of you become teachers knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” Don’t be in a big hurry to be the teacher.

Corresponding then to the positive command to receive the Word with submissiveness is the negative command as to the nature of that submission. And there will be in that kind of submission a certain reluctance to speak. A holy fear that you might misrepresent the truth. A reticence that holds you back until you really grasp it. Hard to imagine in the English-speaking world that there were many who were greater preachers than John Knox of Scotland. He basically brought the reformation to Scotland with his great, powerful preaching.

His biographer says when John Knox was called to preach, “he burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His face and behavior from that day until the day he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching did sufficiently declare the trouble and grief of his soul.” He was frightened to death, frankly, of the responsibility to preach. He was slow to speak. Slow to speak.

There may have been some in the fellowship there that James was addressing who wanted not to listen but to talk. He tells them you need to listen submissively to the Word of God and be silent until such a time as you are prepared to speak accurately in right representation of divine truth.

And then James says in verse 19, “Slow to wrath.” Because this does not produce the type of righteousness, which reflects God’s nature. The world wrath here is the world *orgē* from – basically, from the Greek, which means a deep-seated resentment. It means rebellion. It means rejection. It is used in Scripture of God’s rejection of sinners, Romans 1:18, which we read this morning, Romans 9:22. It refers to a disposition of hostility. And the context, again, is the context of hearing the Word of truth. And this implies that there are some people who get hostile against the Word. They don’t like what they hear. When the truth is presented they don’t want to hear it.

My own mail has many illustrations, by the way, of that kind of hostility. That kind of anger, that kind of human anger, called the wrath of man, that kind of deep resenting resistance to the truth of God does not produce the righteousness of God. It doesn't produce what is right before God. It doesn't produce a righteous life. If you are going to receive the Word, you must receive it with submission. That means you must listen to it, take every opportunity to hear it expounded to you, every opportunity to hear it explained to you, or to read the Word of God or that which comments on the Word of God.

You must be slow to speak until you have come to a full understanding and can rightly represent what God is saying. And you must never develop hostility toward the truth of God because it runs counter to your own desires. So those who are true believers are known by the attitude with which they receive the Word of God, and it is an attitude of submission. I might question the salvation of someone who professes Christ, but I never question the salvation of someone who demonstrates an ongoing passion for the Word of God and does so with a heart of submission.

Secondly, James says there is another feature to this willingness to receive the Word. We are willing - those of us who are true believers - to receive the Word not only with submission but with purity. Look at verse 21: "Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word." First of all, he's talking about putting aside. Lay aside simply means to divest yourself of, to put off. In fact, it's an aorist middle participle, having already put off.

The point is before the Word of God can be received productively to produce the righteousness of God, it must be received submissively and it must be received with purity. A putting off has to occur, a putting off of sin. Peter talks about that. First Peter 2:1 and 2, very, very familiar portion of Scripture. "Therefore laying aside all evil, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking, as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word." First there's a laying aside. Romans 13, I think it's around verse 12, essentially says the same thing. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

There is a putting off before there is a putting on of the truth. And there is a putting off here, he says, James does, of all filthiness, rhuparia. It's a word used of dirty clothes; it's a word used of filthy garments which soil the body. And, of course, in a – in metaphoric sense, it came to be used to speak of moral vice. It's a very vivid word. It's like taking off your immorality. In fact, the word rhupariacomes from a root, rhupos. Interesting word; it refers to the wax in the ear, so used by Hippocrates and Clement.

Get rid of any dirt that hinders your hearing. Deaf because of the accumulation of wax, deaf because of the accumulation of sin. Get rid of it, unload it, clean it out. All of it, not just some of it, all filthiness. And then he adds “overflow of wickedness.” Literally, in referring to a vast amount, an abundant amount, prevailing, prevalent amount of general evil, kakia, just means, in general, evil. The evil that still lingers in our humanness. The flesh that is still there. The whole filthy mass of wicked moral vice must be confessed, repented of and dealt with.

Those of us who are genuine believers understand this and we desire this. We desire to repent, we desire to be cleansed, we desire to have the wax of sin removed from our ears so we can hear the Word of truth. Because our delight is in the law of God. We want to meditate it – on it day and night. We love the law of God. So if one is true Christian, there will be a willingness to receive the Word with submission. There will be a willingness to listen, a reticence to speak and no anger toward what God says. There will also be a willingness to receive the Word with – with purity. There will be a strong compelling desire to divest oneself of filthiness and an overflowing of wickedness that would hinder the production of righteousness that the word can accomplish.

And then lastly, James says, “There will be a willingness to receive the word with humility.” With humility. And that's what he says there in verse 21. “Receive with meekness the implanted word.” Welcome the Word meekly. That basically means to have a teachable spirit. A heart that longs to be taught by God and is a willing student. The idea here is not passive acceptance, the idea here is active acceptance. A teachable spirit, shapeable, moldable to receive the implanted Word. That's humility really.

To humble yourself beneath the Word of God. Now that's a challenging thing to do. You know, sometimes you get your theology so well established and so well wired that you become less than teachable. And one of the great challenges of someone who studies the Bible all the time - certainly it's true in my own life - is to go to the Word of God every time with a meekness and loneliness that makes you teachable. All of this: submission, purity, and humility so that you can receive the implanted Word. Beautiful phrase. So that God can literally plant the truth in your heart. It's where it can take root and be productive. We should want this because "it is this word" - end of verse 21 - "which is able to save your souls."

It is the Word, which continually delivers you from sin. Not just in justification at the time of your being begotten by the Word, but in sanctification in the process of that ongoing salvation. The Word continually delivers your soul from sin, and someday present you faultless - will someday present you faultless before God. It is this Word that saves you that also sanctifies you. It delivers your souls. It rescues your souls from sin and iniquity and all that goes with it. Unto us who are being saved, the Word continues to be the power of God. It delivered us from sin in the - in the first place in our justification; it continues to deliver us from sin in the second place through our sanctification.

We ought to be then like Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word, and not like the crowds, stoning Steven, you remember, who cried out with a loud voice and plugged their ears. You can tell a true believer. They want to hear the Word of God. They're like the Bereans. They received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily.

And then James, for us anyway, draws our thoughts tonight to a conclusion in verse 22. It's not only how you receive the Word that marks out the genuineness of your salvation but how you react to the Word. Verse 22, "Be doers of the word and not" - what? - "hearers only." Do I see in your life a great eagerness for the Word to come in and an equal eagerness for the Word to be lived out? Be being continually, the Greek says, doers, so that the characterization of your life would be as one who puts the Word of God into practice by life habit.

Don't just be a hearer. That's really not enough. There are a lot of people who are curious about the truth, who are fascinated by it. The picture is not complete, however, until you see in their life the evidence that they not only are hearing it, they are living it. Those who don't, he says, "deceive themselves."