



This Sunday we concluded our exploration of the introductory chapter of James' very practical letter to Christians scattered all over the ancient middle east.

We began by reflecting that James 1v19-27 isn't very hard to understand; it's fairly straightforward and easy to comprehend. The challenge comes in doing it.

1 – our attitude: accept the word that has been planted in you (v19-21)

James begins with a very practical instruction that we must be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (v19). All too often, we are slow to listen and quick to speak because we think that we are right. When we don't feel heard, we get angry, and we feel justified for doing so.

But this anger produces nothing good, James writes (v20). Instead, we are to “humbly accept the word” (v21). For our anger when we don't get our way in our human relationships can be a dangerous sign of how we feel towards God.

But God's word has given us new life (1v18). It has been planted within us (v21). It grows in us towards righteousness, and it can and will save us (v21). All we have to do is “accept” it (v21). So accept God's word over your own!

2 – our actions: do what the word that has been planted in you says (v22-27)

James instructs us that we must not simply “listen to the word” but “do what it says” (v22). He follows this with an (intentionally ridiculous) illustration of a person studying their reflection in the mirror but doing nothing about it (v23-24).

Yet we love to listen to God's word but struggle to love (Psalm 119v97) and obey (v22) it as Scripture commands. We struggle to love God's word because we prefer thinking to feeling. We struggle to obey because we don't like to think that we need correction, and like to think of ourselves as autonomous.

We don't always keep tight reins on our tongues, James goes on to say (v26), not realising how much what we say in unguarded moments undermines our faith. And we think that being a Christian is all in our heads – all about thoughts, feelings and words. We don't realise that it requires our whole lives. Our lack of concern for the poor and for our godliness reveal our faith's shallowness (v27).

If we think of God's word as outdated and a cruel taskmaster, we will struggle to love and obey it. But if we realise that it is “perfect”, “gives freedom” and makes us “blessed” (v25), we will find it much easier to love and obey it! And if we remember that God's word became a human being, a person who gave his whole life (not just his words) to save us, our attitude would be transformed!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. In what situations and relationships do you find it particularly hard when you don't feel 'heard'?
 - Can you see any anger in your response in these situations? Why is that?
 - Does this verse mean we should not speak up (or even observe) when we feel a wrong may have been committed?
 - How can we feel and raise concerns in a way that is honouring to God?
2. Why is 'humbly accepting God's word' the thing James contrasts to indulging in human anger?
 - How can we be encouraged by James' gardening imagery (“planted”)?
3. Do you agree that, as individuals and as a Christian culture, we find it easier to listen to God's word than to love or obey it?
 - Why do you think that is?
4. What problems does James identify among 'Christians' in v26-27?
 - Do any of them resonate with you?
5. How could changing how we think about God's word help us grow to love and obey it?
 - How can we help ourselves and each other learn to love and obey God's word more wholeheartedly?
 - Why would that be a good thing to do?