



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 1:19-27)

As we mentioned at the beginning of the devotions of James, the focus is upon the practical expressions of faith and not the matters of theory. So the Book of James is full of logic and wisdom in the manner in which we must respond to that faith, first delivered to the saints, in our lives. The opening verse (19) is simple yet pregnant with wisdom. 19 ***“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”*** It is in the nature of man to think too highly of his own opinion and ability. The assertion of self is formidable and wants expression. Actually, we learn and understand more readily if we hear a matter out completely before taking positions on them. The Federal President, Abraham Lincoln made the wise observation that “It is better to remain silent, and be thought a fool, than to speak out and remove all doubt.” There is a little school poem that goes:

The Wise Owl

The wise old owl
Sat high in an oak.
The more he saw,
The less he spoke.
The less he spoke,
The more he heard.
Why aren't we all like
That wise old bird?

James wisely adds the dimension of wrath and anger to the failure to listen before speaking. When we only have half a story, we may misinterpret the ending or the intention. Many arguments could be avoided by simply listening until the whole of the story has been spoken. Many military defeats have occurred by acting on half a truth in intelligence. 20 ***“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”*** The extreme anger of man acts out of irrational emotion. It is not guided by justice or any righteous consideration. It is ready to make war with even the flag of truce. It seeks gratification for its own satisfaction and not for a peaceful cause.

21 ***“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”*** This has meaning which does not readily appear. The term “lay apart” carries the meaning in the Greek of laying apart, once and for all. It is like unto laying aside forever your filthy garments of sin when you have taken upon your shoulders the spotlessly white Robe of Christ. The preceding verses also lend meaning here by pointing out the importance of hearing before professing since faith and belief come from hearing. ***“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”*** (John 15:3) Our words are filthy and unworthy, but the Word of God cleanses our souls. ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** (Romans 10:17)

A sound principle of learning is this: “Meaningful learning results in a change of behavior.” When I taught military pilots in days gone by, many could understand the principles that I taught on flying, but they could not apply them. Had they learned so well that their motor responses followed, they would have been able to act on the knowledge they had learned. Meaningful learning for the Christian is the hearing of the Gospel, and then acting upon that Gospel learned. 22 ***“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”*** Any man who is entrusted with a great investment of money to manage must not sit on the money, but INVEST it to earn an increase for his client. Anyone who has knowledge that a mountain bridge is out then incurs, not only a moral, but a legal obligation to make the fact known. Knowledge alone has no effect unless acted upon. Though we are saved by Grace and not works, the Grace by which we are saved then mandates evidence through good works. We might say that we are not saved by works but by grace unto good works.

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.”*** Looking, perhaps for the first time, at our visage in a mirror, we will have an intense interest in the way we appear. We will mark every feature and go away with a strong recollection of our appearance. The same is true of our Bible studies. The Bible is very much like that mirror. We see our own feeble selves in the adultery and murder of which David was guilty. We see our lack of obedience in Adam and Eve before the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We see our own selves in the lies Abram told the pharaoh of Egypt. We see our treachery in the deception of Jacob. We see our own selves (both men and women) in the Woman taken in Adultery. We see, too, the forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation made available to all of those biblical figures....and finally to even US! If we have come face to face with Christ, and believed in our hearts and not with our tongues only, our life is made new. The old man is dead, but the new man has received life eternal. Our manner of living and conversation will be changed profoundly.

There is a popular bumper-sticker in Alabama which reads, “Jesus Christ died for your soul; the American soldier died for your Liberty.” I have never liked that

slogan because it is absolutely untrue. Jesus not only died to save your soul, but to set you at Liberty. *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.* (Isaiah 61:1) The body can never be free if the soul is not free; however, the soul can be free if the body is chained in the dungeon. The thief on the cross was nailed there and had no use for hands or limbs, yet he was made free by Christ. 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.*" God hides no blemishes of His people from our reading in Scripture. He frankly tells us of the egregious sin of David, yet David was the Apple of God's Eye. David and Saul were much alike in some respects. In fact, I do not read that Saul sinned openly to the degree that David did; however, Saul never repented of his sins to the Lord, and David did indeed. When we look into that Bible Mirror at ourselves, we see that we are no better than the worst sinner therein. We see our depravity. But, we also see that perfect Law of Liberty whereby we are made free from the old self. Like Peter, who denied the Lord THREE times, we may be restored and forgiven – even made stronger in faith. Of course, Judas was different. He betrayed the Lord only once, but never sought forgiveness of his Lord and died miserably and eternally.

A horse is a very strong and courageous beast, yet it may be controlled by a small bridle. The bridle functions to direct the horse according to the will of its owner. So the tongue is a small organ but very dangerous and powerful. Kingdoms have fallen by the wagging of the tongue. 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.*" There are so many 'professing' Christians who seem to be holy and religious, but they are empty shells of faith. They slander and libel their neighbors with impunity. They slyly pass off their veiled insults as compliments. They outnumber the devout Christians in most every church. To believe the Word, and not act upon it is vain. James reinforces his meaning in chapter 3: *"Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."* (James 3:3-6)

Pure religion is not treasured as an impressive cathedral church building, or a handsome salaried clergy, or with great numbers of attendees thereto; true religion can exist, and most plentifully does, in the hearts of the simple who place the value of love above that of prestige, power, money, or self. 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.*" Titles and dress do not establish our faith, but our regard for the weak and hurting among us does. How many widows and orphans have you helped this year, this month, this week, or today? How many old ladies who are in trouble have you hurriedly passed by on the other side as the priest and Levite passed by the robbed and injured Jew on the Road to Jericho? The life of a generous and down-trodden patron of the poor is more joyful than the opulence of the wealthy who cling to their coins like leeches. Which would describe you, Friend?