



Doing What You Hear

James 1:19-27



What About Hasty Speech and Anger?

1. Read James 1:19-20. What is the relationship between being “quick to hear,” “slow to speak,” and “slow to anger”? In your experience, how does one affect the others?

📖 “The one who guards his mouth protects his life;
the one who opens his lips invites his own ruin. (*Proverbs 13:3, HCSB*)¹

📖 “The intelligent person restrains his words,
and one who keeps a cool head is a man of understanding.
Even a fool is considered wise when he keeps silent,
discerning when he seals his lips.” (*Proverbs 17:27-28, HCSB*)



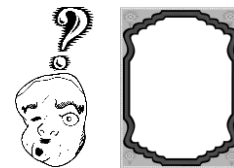
- ☐ Man’s [and woman’s] anger “does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (*James 1:20, NIV*). Is anger *always* wrong? See “What About Anger?” on the ICF website.

Hearing and Doing

2. Read James 1:21-27. James says, “Put away all moral filth and evil, and humbly receive the implanted word,² which is able to save you.” (*1:21*) What does it mean to “humbly receive the implanted word”?³

📖 “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (*1:22, HCSB*)

3. In what way is the man who looks in the mirror (*1:23-24*) different from the man who looks into the perfect law⁴ (*1:25*). What is the main point of the contrast?⁵



- Are you more like the first man or the second man?

¹ Of course, there are many times we need to speak up! The emphasis here is speech that is hasty, thoughtless, careless, unrestrained, contentious, harmful or otherwise negative.

² The ‘implanted word’ refers to God’s word – the gospel (good news) concerning Jesus Christ along with his teachings. God’s word is found in the Bible (God’s written revelation) and is applied to our lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, God made a promise called the New Covenant. God said, at a time in the future, ‘I will put My teaching (law) within them, and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people ... [and] they will all know Me’ (*Jeremiah 31:33-34, HCSB*).

³ To ‘humbly receive’ the word means more than intellectually accepting it. It means appropriately responding to it; that is, doing it. As we continue in our study of James, we will consider specific applications of this command.

⁴ Concerning the ‘the perfect law,’ see page 2.

⁵ The main point of the contrast is probably not how ‘intently’ they looked, or what they looked at (mirror vs. perfect law), but rather their different responses *after* they looked. How were their responses different?

□ The “perfect law” is the Law as interpreted, supplemented, and fulfilled by Jesus.⁶ The “perfect law” is substantially equivalent to the “word” in verses 22-23, which is connected to the “implanted word” in verse 21.⁷ “Freedom” is a result of the New Covenant promises of forgiveness of sins (including freedom from sin’s penalty and controlling power) and the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to do what the word says.

4. According to James, those who are “hearers only” deceive themselves (1:22; cp. 1:26). In what way(s) do they deceive themselves?⁸



5. How can we apply this passage to our lives? How can we be better “hearers” of the word? How can we be better “doers” of the word?

Pure & undefiled Religion

□ Read James 1:26-27. James contrasts “useless religion” with “pure and undefiled religion.”⁹ Pure and undefiled¹⁰ religion is characterized by “doing the word.”¹¹ James mentions three ways to “do the word” which will be further discussed in his letter.

- Controlling the tongue (3:1-12; 4:11-12)
- Caring for the needy (2:1-13, 15-16)
- Avoiding worldliness (4:4-10)



Reflection and Application

- What “moral filth” do you need to get rid of? Commit yourself to get rid of it, but remember the power for genuine moral change comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Do you consider yourself a “doer” or “hearer only” of God’s word? Maybe you are a “hearer only” because you do not believe God’s word. If so, commit yourself to seek the truth with genuine humility. If you are a Christian, commit yourself to “humbly receive the implanted word” and be a “doer!” None of us is perfect in this, but we need to genuinely commit and recommit ourselves to be doers of God’s word, as an expression of our love for Him.

⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 94. Jesus said, ‘Don’t assume that I came to destroy the [Old Testament] Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill’ (*Matthew 5:17*).

⁷ Moo, 94. See footnote 2.

⁸ Some people are ‘hearers only’ because they hear but do not believe God’s word. They might say, ‘If the Bible is not true, why should I do what it says?’ Others may accept God’s word as true, but they are still ‘hearers only’ because after hearing it, they fail to ‘remember’ and actually do God’s word. Based on this passage (and also James 2:14-26), those who are ‘hearers only’ are mistaken in thinking they are okay or truly right with God (1:22, 26).

⁹ ‘If anyone thinks he is religious’ may refer to a person who does ‘religious things.’ He may go to church every Sunday. He may give money to the church. But his tongue (speech) is out of control, and he does not try to bring it under control. He does religious things, but he has not ‘humbly received’ the word, so his religious activity is useless. God doesn’t want religious ritual. He wants our hearts.

¹⁰ ‘undefiled’ – free from stain or blemish; uncorrupted

¹¹ It should be emphasized that God’s acceptance of us is not based on our good works, even our sincere ‘religious’ activities. We are accepted by God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness received through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:20-24). Thus truly ‘pure and undefiled religion’ is first of all based in Christ. The point here is that our actions reveal what type of ‘religion’ we really have. The Christian faith is not merely about moral improvement. It’s about relationship with God, which results in moral improvement – that is, ‘pure and undefiled religion.’