

“Preparing the Heart to Receive”

May 2, 2012

Text: James 1:19-21

Preacher Charles Spurgeon once told his congregation=>

If you are to hear God’s Word with pleasure and profit to yourselves, you must “lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness,” for these things will prejudice you against the Word of God and render you incapable of that lively appreciation of it, which is so necessary to profiting thereby. God bless these words of mine and may many of you who have come carelessly here at different times, henceforth seek to come with preparedness into the assembly of God’s people.

It’s a self-evident truth that, when we read the Bible, or hear it preached/taught, the attitude of our hearts will determine how prepared we are, to receive profit/pleasure from it.

E.g. if the text deals with honesty, and we are feeling guilty for having recently told a lie, then either=>

- * Either our proud attitude will take offense at being reminded of its character flaws,
- * Or our humble attitude will repent of its dishonesty, confess it to the Lord, & regain a sense of inner peace/wholeness.

It all depends on the attitude of our hearts, as we enter this building, in preparation for the sermon.

It all depends on our attitude, as we approach God’s Word, in general, throughout the week.

When we come to hear the Word preached/taught, it is good do to so w/ the intention of getting everything we can, out of it.

God's Word has a whole harvest of spiritual delights & we shouldn't miss or lose even a single grain of that harvest and its blessings.

In today's text James will teach us 4 character qualities that can help prepare our hearts to receive God's Word, maximizing its blessing on our lives=>

teachability, equanimity, purity, and humility.

"Receive" is the word James himself will use, to describe a Xn's welcoming God's Word into his heart, so it will have maximum beneficial ("saving") impact.

He will say=> *"Receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."*

*** Teachability**

[James 1:19a]=> *"This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to **hear**, slow to **speak**"*

Referring back to last week's text, James writes=>

"This you know, my beloved brethren."

The truth we know, & to which James alludes here, is that God "brought us forth" (give us spiritual birth and regenerated our souls) by His Word.

James is writing to "*beloved brethren*"—Xns, who can be confident God has planted His Word in their hearts, & like a seed, it has germinated and sprung forth unto new life—eternal life.

Because the writer considers them "*beloved brethren*," he is concerned for their spiritual welfare.

“This you know,” James says, then continues on, “but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak.”

Regeneration is just the first step in God’s blessing us, as we believe/receive the truth of His Word.

But we must be attentive listeners as it teaches us, if we are to receive those blessings.

So let the Word abide in you, enabling it to have its full influence.

Let it direct your heart, and continue to do its saving, life-transforming work w/i you.

In order for that to happen, we must first come to the Word w/ a teachable attitude—quick to listen/absorb it.

We must approach the Word, ready & willing to learn what it teaches.

And we must be ready to assimilate its truths into our lives.

The reason we provide sermon notes each week, is to help you focus-on/understand the words of the text, so you’ll be quick to listen/learn.

God’s Word is precious/powerful, not something for us to merely trifle-with/dabble-in.

It is an inerrant/infallible revelation of His will/wisdom.

It is more essential to the believer’s life than the bread he eats.

In Deut 8:3, Moses told Israel=> *“He [God] humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He*

might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”

When we read God’s Word, or when we listen to it being taught, we must be quick to listen, but slow to speak.

Apparently, in some of the churches to which James was writing, arguments were breaking out in the services, w/ members of the congregation publicly challenging the teachers.

We are to be slow to challenge what the speaker has said, until we’ve studied the text ourselves, & can use Scripture (not just our own personal opinions) to either confirm/deny what he’s taught.

We should be like the Bereans, who were=> *“more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they **received** [dechomai—welcomed or grabbed onto and held tight] the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things [the things Paul was teaching them] were so” (Act 17:11).*

We should also be *“slow to speak”* in the sense of becoming Bible speakers/teachers ourselves.

Few things are worse for the Church than authoritative-sounding speakers, who are really novices teaching error.

In chapter 3, James will write=> *“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment” (Jms 3:1).*

**Today some churches have replaced formal preaching w/
casual/informal conversations about the Bible & lie as a
Xn.**

Just expressing casual opinions about a Scripture text, w/o
studying it in detail/depth to uncover its true meaning is
pointless.

Worse than that, it's damaging, because it leads people to
believe God didn't really mean anything in particular,
when He inspired the words of Scripture;
That in the end, it's OK to disagree, because we can
never be sure of what God meant anyway.

In reality, He had very specific ideas in mind, and our job is
to interpret His words, so we can discern those ideas;
Not simply to use them as occasions for a rambling
chat, in order to express our own opinions.

**When we successfully interpret a passage of the Bible, we
uncover a gold mine of truth.**

II Tim 3:16-17=> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and
profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction,
for training in righteousness; / that the man of God
may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*

In addition, Scripture can be profitable to us, by giving us
comfort in times of trouble, or guidance in times of
confusion.

But to dig through all the erroneous interpretations, & get down to the core truths in the text itself, we must interpret it carefully, & work diligently to do so.

That's why Paul instructed Pastor Timothy=> "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*" (II Tim 2:15).

There are reasons why we are to listen carefully/thoughtfully to those who accurately/faithfully teach us the Word=>

1st, it is the considerate/humble/loving thing for a Xn to do.

Really listening to others is a difficult skill to master, because it requires us to consider their thoughts/ideas w/ as much seriousness as we do our own.

Pride/indifference would rather cut them off, dismiss their words as worthless, or ignore them altogether.

2nd, listening is the best way to understand/assimilate the Bible's timeless truths, & apply them to our own hearts/lives.

If instead of truly listening, believers are formulating their own next response, just waiting for a gap in the conversation, the discussion isn't likely to be fruitful.

The Jerusalem Council reached good conclusions, in part, because the participants really listened to each other.

E.g. after Peter presented his argument, Acts 15:12

says=> "*All the multitude **kept silent**, & they were **listening** to Barnabas & Paul as they were relating what signs & wonders God had*

*done through them among the Gentiles. / And after they had **stopped speaking**, James answered” (12-13).*

It's a picture of a thoughtful discussion of ideas,
which is both serious/polite.

Slowness to speak restrained hasty/intemperate responses.

**In the churches to which James was writing, people were
having heated arguments about what was being taught,
right there in the worship services.**

Nobody wanted to hear/listen, many people wanted to
speak.

Apparently there was a great deal of congregational participation,
w/i first-century churches, generally.

So much, in fact, that at times it bordered on chaos.

E.g. Paul described the Corinthians' services=> *“When you
assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has
a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation
(I Cor 14:26).*

Paul directed them to=> *“Let all things be done properly &
in an orderly manner” (I C 14:40).*

So if the Word is to have its maximum impact on us, producing
its maximum benefit in our lives, we must be teachable—
quick to listen, slow to speak.

Recently a lady came & shared her view of the Church, as a bird
with 2 wings.

She said the left wing was men in the Church, the right
wing was women.

Dean/I tried to bring a biblical perspective into the discussion, but she never really heard a word of it. She was so quick to speak her own creative ideas, that she was deaf to Scripture.

* **Equanimity**

I chose this word simply because I couldn't think of a better one to describe this characteristic.

I hope you won't mind my using it.

Equanimity is calmness/composure of mind, which doesn't allow itself to be controlled by passionate emotions.

It's a calm reasonableness.

This is what James is referring to, at the end of verse 19=>

[Verse 19 (again)]=> *"But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and **slow to anger**;"*

Reluctance/slowness to dig in one's heels w/ persistent hostility towards others, is essential to receiving God's Word.

A person who is filled with anger cannot concentrate on the Word.

If his anger is an expression of his flesh, he's sinning, and the only good the Word can do for him at that point, is to convict him, so he'll repent.

In the context of James 1, the anger involved, is aimed at preachers, for what they have said.

I've had people get so angry over something I've preached,
that they've stomped out during a sermon, or met me
at the door afterward, and let me have it, both barrels.

It might surprise you to hear, that not all anger is sinful.

X never sinned in His life, yet Mk 3:5 describes Him as=>

*“Looking around at them [unbelievers] with **anger**,
grieved at their hardness of heart...”*

In Eph 4, Paul writes=> “**BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT
SIN**; do not let the sun go down on your anger, / and
do not give the devil an opportunity” (Eph 4:26-27).

So clearly, not all anger is sinful anger.

Anger is an instinctive human reaction to evil/injury.

When it's a response to man's sinful rejection of God &
His Word (as it was when Jesus cleansed the
Temple), it's not sinful.

Unpleasant, yes; sinful, no.

But even such godly anger can quickly degenerate into fleshly
human anger, that bursts forth in hateful/hurtful words and
deeds, or settles into sullen/bitter resentment.

Which is why we aren't to let the sun go down on our
anger.

When that happens, there's no doubt but that it's sinful.

In fact, it's so wicked that Jesus said (Mt 5:22)=>

*“Everyone who is **angry** with his brother shall be
guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his
brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme
court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be*

guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

Anger is such a powerful passion, that, given enough time, it always produces sinful/hurtful actions, which give the devil an opening to damage us, spiritually.

When anger is mentioned in the Bible, it's often grouped with a hornet's nest of other sins, all caused/driven by anger.

E.g. Col 3:8=> *“Now you also, put them all aside: **anger**, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”*

Anger heads the list because it's the basic cause of the other sins.

If we harbor anger in our hearts for long (even until the sun goes down), it spawns a whole brood of ugly sins.

So it's something we must get rid of, as quickly as possible.

One of the worst consequences of anger, is that it closes our hearts off spiritually, making us incapable of truly receiving God's Word, so the H.S. can use it to do His work w/i us.

Peter wrote=> *“**Putting aside** all **malice** [one of the byproducts of anger] & all guile & hypocrisy & envy & all slander, / like newborn babes, **long** for the pure milk of the **word**, that by it you may **grow** in respect to salvation”* (I Pet 2:1-2).

We can't long for the Word while holding onto our anger, so we must drop it, and push it aside.

Someone: My anger is righteous indignation, like X's, & it gives strength/backbone to my character.

Jer 17:9 says the heart is so deceitfully wicked we can't know it ourselves, so we're very likely to deceive ourselves about our own anger.

If it becomes an ongoing resentment, that shuts out love, it's definitely not righteous, because X has commanded us to love even our enemies.

In addition, anger is never an asset to character, and nothing truly good ever comes out of anger.

[Verse 20]=> *"for the **anger** of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."*

"For" points to the reason why we must be slow to anger=> it never accomplishes the righteousness of God.

It's a misshapen tool that cannot produce anything good.

No matter how you think you're ministering, if you're angry as you do it, you're accomplishing nothing for the Lord.

Not only does anger block us from preparing our hearts to receive God's Word, it also blocks our prayers to Him.

That's why Paul told Timothy=> *"I want the men in every place to **pray**, lifting up holy hands, **without wrath** [orge—anger] and dissension"* (I Tim 2:8).

As Saul of Tarsus, he'd believed he had accomplished righteous deeds for God, by angrily persecuting Xns.

He believed he had to do things hostile to Jesus' name.

But his anger had simply turned him into a hatefulheartless beast, “*breathing **threats** & **murder** against the disciples*” (Acts 9:1), “*furiously **enraged** at them*” (Acts 26:11).

Some of God’s best men have struggled w/ their anger.

E.g. when God told Moses to speak to the rock before the nation of Israel, so that water would pour forth from it, he disobeyed, shouting: “*Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?*” (Num 20:10).

Then in a fit of rage, Moses struck the rock, twice.

He might have felt it was an act of righteous indignation, but if so, he was self-deceived.

God immediately judged him, declaring he’d never be allowed to enter the Promised Land, since he hadn’t treated the Lord as holy, in the sight of the people.

Prov 29:22=> “*A hot-tempered man abounds in transgression,*” & he does so because his anger cuts him off from his spiritual resources—the-Word/prayer.

Angry people’s hearts are totally unprepared to receive the Word, and assimilate it.

Those who rest in the Lord w/ calm equanimity, can do so.

They can avoid the mindless seething of anger, drop all their hatred, relax, open up their hearts to Scripture, and enjoy the feast of good things God has revealed w/i it.

*** Purity**

[Verse 21a]=> *“Therefore putting aside all **filthiness** and all that remains of **wickedness**,”*

Not only must we rid our hearts of anger in order to receive the true benefits of God’s Word, we must also rid ourselves of every other moral impurity as well.

“Therefore” connects this back to the anger in verse 20, implying that we opened ourselves up to it, when we first allowed the filthiness/wickedness of sin, to reside in our hearts/lives.

It started w/ our filthiness/wickedness, but that inevitably led to uncontrollable anger.

Sin must be removed & replaced w/ God’s Word.

The verb tenses indicate that this is all to be done abruptly, in a decisive moment of commitment.

The double use of the word *“all”* rules out partial measures, & requires a thorough housecleaning of our hearts.

The Bible often calls for us to make radical moral decisions, that will change our lives once/for-all, by the power of the H.S.=>

* E.g. Rom 13:12=> *“Let us therefore **lay aside** the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”*

* Eph 4:22=> *“In reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside** the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, / and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, / & put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (22-24).*

Paul is describing a major change in lifestyle,
resulting from a momentary decision.

Don't waste time thinking about it—just do it, & do it now!

Decide/commit to it, then follow through.

What is it, that must go? “*Filthiness*” and “*wickedness*.”

* “*Filthiness*” is moral uncleanness/impurity.

In Jms 2:2, this word is used to describe a man dressed in
dirty clothing.

So it seems to refer to the outward manifestation of an
unclean nature—a meanness/baseness that can be
seen/heard outwardly, in behavior that is
lewd/godless/selfish/sinful.

* “*Wickedness*” appears to be the inward moral depravity of
heart, which produces such outward filthiness, & it's the
root cause of fleshly anger, a/w/a all our other sins.

I once met a wicked/profane man, in the swamps of S. Carolina,
whose words were saturated w/ foul-cursing and filthy-
humor.

Ironically, I saw him the next day as he was coming from
church w/ his wife, & all the outward filthiness had
disappeared.

Although he looked/sounded like an altogether different
man, he'd only changed his outward appearance by
putting on his church-clothes, & his Sunday-manners.

The inward wickedness was still there, covered up by his temporary, respectable, church-going persona.

When James writes of putting aside “*all that remains*” of wickedness, he means by that, the abundant-prevalence of wickedness w/i us caused by our flesh.

There’s a lot of it in every one of us, & it all needs to go.

We will never become completely cleansed from all the sins of our flesh in this life, but we must seriously address our need to do so.

The Word can help us do that.

But James’ whole point is that, to truly receive the Word & all its benefits into our hearts, we must first prepare them.

And 1 of the conditions of that preparation is to put aside both our outward filthiness, and inward wickedness.

* They spoil our hunger for the Word, and block both our understanding/assimilation of it.

* They harden our hearts, causing them to resist the Word’s demand that we surrender all our favorite sins—envy, lust, fornication, evil-thoughts, murderous-hatred, greed, and all the rest.

Once we’ve put aside our own filthiness/wickedness/anger, we are ready to wholeheartedly receive/embrace the Word, in all its truth/holiness/power.

We are prepared to turn its power loose on our own hearts
to do its surgery, bringing them into closer
communion & conformity with God's own heart.

*** Humility**

[Verse 21b]=> “*in **humility** receive the word implanted, which is
able to save your souls* (your whole life & the
essence of your whole being).”

**When you think about it, pride is behind every one of those
sins we've just cleaned out: anger/filthiness/wickedness.**

In every case, they represented man's proud flesh
resisting/defying God's command for us to be
holy/righteous/loving, like Himself.

Humility pushes pride out, confesses that God was right all along,
repents, and surrenders its willfulness to His grace/wisdom.
It's a gentle graciousness of spirit that accepts God's Word
without dispute/defensiveness, keenly aware of its
own unworthiness to receive such a precious gift.

And that's the final hurdle to our fully receiving the Word.

Humility is capable of receiving the Word as pride never could.

James chooses a very special word *dechomai* for “*receive*,”
which means more than passively receiving—it is
welcoming and embracing the Word with open arms.

Dechomai is the same word used of the Bereans, who=>

“*received the word with great eagerness*”
(Acts 17:11).

The rest of verse 21 sounds a bit strange, & raises questions=>

Question #1—James says we “*receive the word implanted,*” but if it’s already implanted in us, in what sense do we receive it?

Question #2—How can it save our souls if we’re already saved? Remember, James has referred to his readers as “*beloved brothers,*” so they must be born-again Xns.

Question #1—How do we receive, the implanted Word?

The Word was implanted in our hearts at our regeneration.

Jesus made that clear in His parable of the 4 soils, when He compared a heart prepared by H.S., w/ good/fertile soil.

He said=> “*The one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some 100, some 60, & some 30*” (Mt 13:23).

God regenerated us, causing us to be reborn spiritually, by planting the seed of His Word in our hearts.

But now, we are to welcome the Word again in our hearts, by adopting that same receptive attitude we had at our conversion.

We must now allow it to continually direct/control our lives.

Question #2—How can the Word save those who are already saved?

It has saved those who believe in Jesus, from the penalty of sin,
but now it's continually saving our souls from sin's power.
To put it differently, we have been saved in the sense of
justification, but we're still in the process of being
saved in the sense of sanctification.

2 Cor 3 says we are being transformed into the image of the
glory of the Lord; from glory to glory (3:18).

The Word is a living/active sword that is freeing/delivering
us from sin itself, as we wholeheartedly welcome it
into our hearts.

It is giving us both the desire/ability to obey our Lord.

As its roots penetrate deeper/deeper into our hearts, esp. in
times of trial/difficulty, it's weakening the grip of sin
on our will.

And in that sense we're progressively being saved.

In the words of I Pet 2:2, we are=> *“growing in respect to
salvation.”*

**Someone: Where do I start, so that I can enjoy the sweet
richness of the Word and of a life being freed from sin's
domination?**

Start where James has instructed us to start=> Becoming quick to
hear/submit-to God's Word, banning anger as an acceptable
& habitual response to the Word, declaring the impurity of
sin to no longer be acceptable in your life, and humbling
your heart before the Word in obedience to it.

Believe in the power of the Word, not only to regenerate your soul, but to save it from the devastating rule of sin.

Receive it, & let it penetrate every nook/corner of your soul.

Let it change your will/nature until you gladly bow before Jesus X, as your Lord/Master, as your life and as your all.

Thank God for softening/breaking up the hardness of your heart, so that every blessed drop of truth in His Word will soak-in, to restore/renew your entire being.

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1. When we read the Bible or hear it preached, the attitude of our hearts will determine how prepared we are to receive [14 profit] and pleasure from it.

In today’s text James will teach us four character qualities that can help prepare our hearts to receive God’s Word, maximizing its blessing on our lives...

*** Teachability**

[James 1:19a]

2. Regeneration is just the first step in God’s blessing us as we believe and receive His Word; but we must be [22 attentive] listeners as it teaches us.

Deut 8:3

3. When we read God’s Word or listen to it being taught, we must be quick to listen, but [10 slow] to speak.

Acts 17:11; Jms 3:1

4. When we successfully interpret a passage of the Bible, we [16 uncover] a gold mine of truth.

II Tim 3:16-17; 2:15

5. Listening is the best way to understand and assimilate the Bible’s timeless truths and [12 apply] them to our own hearts and lives.

Acts 15:12-13; I Cor 14:26, 40

*** Equanimity**

[Verse 19b]

6. A person who is filled with anger [14 cannot] concentrate on the Word.

Mk 3:5; Eph 4:26-27; Mt 5:22; Col 3:8

7. If we harbor anger in our hearts for long, it spawns a whole brood of ugly sins; so it is something we must get [8 rid] of as quickly as possible.

I Pet 2:1-2; Jer 17:9

[Verse 20]

8. Not only does anger block us from preparing our hearts to receive God's Word, it also blocks our [16 prayers] to Him.

I Tim 2:8; Acts 26:11; Num 20:10; Prov 29:22

*** Purity**

[Verse 21a]

9. Sin must be removed and replaced with God's Word in a decisive [14 moment] of commitment.

Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22-24; Jms 2:2

10. To truly receive the Word and all its benefits into our hearts, we must put aside both our outward filthiness and [14 inward] wickedness.

*** Humility**

[Verse 21b]

11. Humility pushes pride out, confesses that God was right all along, repents, and surrenders its willfulness to His [12 grace] and wisdom.

Mt 13:23

12. God regenerated us by planting the seed of His Word in our hearts; but now we must allow it to continually direct and [16 control] our lives.

II Cor 3:18

13. Believe in the power of the Word; let it change your will and nature until you gladly bow before Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master, your [10 life], and your all.