

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 9 Text: 1:21-27 Date: 3-19-23

Trinity Lutheran Church - Pastor David Nehrenz

www.tlcnorman.org

Therefore lay aside all
filthiness and overflow of
wickedness, and receive with
meekness the implanted word,
which is able to save your
souls.

TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(21) Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness **the implanted Word**, which is able to save your souls.

(Mt 13:19-23; Rom 13:12; 1 Cor 15:2; Eph 1:13; 4:22; Col 3:8)

(22) But be doers of **the Word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

(23) For if anyone is a hearer of **the Word** and not a doer,
he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

(24) For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

(25) But the one who looks into **the perfect law, the law of liberty**, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

(Ps 1:1,2; 19:7; 119:92-94; Mt 7:21-27; Lk 6:46-49; 11:28; 8:21; Jn 8:32; 13:17;
Rom 2:13; 8:2; Gal 2:4; 5:1,13; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 2:19)

(26) If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart,
this person's religion is worthless.

(27) **Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father**, is this:

to visit orphans and widows in their affliction,
and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

(Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:19; Job 31:16-21; Ps 34:13; 39:1; 141:3; 146:9;
Is 1:17-23; Jer 22:16; Hos 14:3; Mt 25:36; Lk 7:11-17; Ac 26:5; Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 5:22;
1 Pet 3:10; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:20; 3:14; 1 Jn 2:15; 5:18)

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

The exhortation to put away evil and to receive the implanted Word is freighted with baptismal imagery.⁴ Before receiving Christian baptism the individual must renounce Satan and his works. John the Baptist in his preaching called for this radical conversion from evil to good. As sin continues to reside even in the Christian, it continually beleaguers him. The word "put away" (*apotithēmi*) is the New Testament's theological term for renouncing the sinful nature remaining in the Christian even after conversion. Rom. 13:12 finds in this nature "the works of darkness," and Eph. 4:22 calls it "the old man" (KJV). First Peter, recognized by many scholars as an epistle on Baptism, contains an exhortation to do away with evil (2:1) in terminology similar to James. It is difficult to avoid the suggestion that 1 Peter develops themes of James in certain places.

Some attention should here again be given to define more precisely what meaning James intends with his use of “Word.” In v. 21 the Word has the ability to save. Within the context of the present section “the Word” is synonymous with “the perfect . . . law of liberty” (v. 25). This of course gave Luther great difficulty, because he saw the Law as offering only punishment and slavery. James’ “law of liberty” is the Gospel and not the Law as condemnation and punishment. Paul seems to develop James’ concept of “law of liberty” in Rom. 8:2, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.” For both Paul and James this new law is God’s revelation available in Jesus Christ.⁶

“The perfect . . . law of liberty” might be paraphrased as: “The law which has now been perfected by Christ’s atonement releases Christians from the fear of condemnation by it in their fulfilling it.” Since Christ has taken away the sting and condemnation of the Law, the Christian may live according to the Law without any fear of coming under the Law’s condemnation, now made defunct by the cross.

The words “Law” and “Word” are interchangeable with both James and Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount the doers of the Word are called those who do the will of Jesus’ Father (Matt. 7:21). Those who do not carry out the will of the Father are called evildoers (Matt. 7:23), literally those who work against the Law (*hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*). The Sermon is not speaking about general lawbreakers, but specifically against those opposed to the Gospel, i.e., God’s revelation in Christ.

The word “blessed” (*makarios*) ties Messianism, the church, and eschatology together. The person in whom the Word reaches its designated goal is blessed not *because of* what he does, but his blessedness is recognizable *in* what he does. The thought is rooted in Psalm 1, where the righteous brings forth fruit in his season as he is expected to (v. 3), and is furthered by the Beatitudes, where the blessed are again recognized by what they do. After they have died, the blessedness of the Christians is still recognizable on earth by what they have done (Rev. 14:13). Here again it would be easy to fall into the trap of seeing the blessedness of Christians as compensation for their moral perfection.⁹ Their blessedness is seen in that they resemble God in refusing to pass condemnation over sinners with whom God is no longer angry. They forgive as they are forgiven. They are the ones who refrain from passing judgment in God’s stead and are receiving God’s salvation with the meekness of Christ (1:21).

LIFE APPLICATION

“Receive with meekness **the implanted Word**, which is able to save your souls.
Be doers of **the Word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

What are the means by which we receive the implanted Word?

How are we then empowered to be doers of the Word?