

Pentecost 15
James 1:17-27
September 13, 2009

God used James to make it clear that God expects more than a theoretical Christianity, more than pious thoughts or pious talk. Faith is far more than believing this or that. For God, faith is a powerful, living, active, moving thing that goes to work by, through, and with love. And love is defined by God. Love centers and focuses on service to the needs of others. It does not focus on self advantage.

And listening to God's Word involves more than the ears. It certainly includes the ears, but it certainly does not stop there.

God, through James, wanted everyone to

Listen to God's Word with Action.

God wants to bless all people. He wants to bless you and me. God gets His blessing to people, also to each of us, through His Word. Did you notice how in these eleven verses, James mentions The Word of God eight times.

God wants to bless everyone with His good and perfect gifts. That's the only kind of gifts God, our heavenly Father, gives – good and perfect ones.

All of our Father's gifts are good. They are never bad. They are good because God intends them for our good. They are good for us. We may not even recognize some of God's gifts to us as gifts because they may not seem good at the time. He gives them to us. When I have sinned and trouble, sorrow and hardship come to me because of it, that is one of those good gifts from God. God is trying to show me the truth about sin. Sin is always evil, harmful and deadly. God's trying to lead me to say to Him, "I have sinned!" Why does God want me to repent? So that I can have and personally enjoy His full, free forgiveness. That saves me.

God's gifts are perfect. No gift of God has flaws or defects. I have flaws and defects. God does not and neither do any of His gifts to me. I may ruin God's gifts to me by refusing them or by abusing them. Again, the problem is me, not the Father's gifts.

Just in passing those good and perfect gifts coming down to us from our Father – The Mighty Creator of the heavenly lights, beautiful and awesome heavenly lights – are gifts. We haven't earned them or they wouldn't be gifts, would they?!

These gifts come down to us reliably. Our Father in heaven does not shift like shadows. We can rely on God. We know from sad experience that people shift. They say one thing one day, something else another day. They change their minds. Even dishonesty is a problem! God is reliable!

One of the greatest gifts from God to us through His Word is our next birth, rebirth, regeneration, to be born again. "Our heavenly Father chose to give us birth through the Word of truth." This is birth into God's family. This makes us God's sons and daughters. This makes us His heirs. What do we inherit? We will inherit with Jesus, the eternal Son, eternal life, eternal glory, eternal joy, eternal fellowship in heaven with our God and Savior.

Before that the new birth gives new life. That new life has Jesus and His forgiveness as our motivation for living; Jesus' salvation as the strength for our new living.

All these gifts and more God gets to us through His Word of truth. The Word itself is one of those good and perfect gifts that has come down to us from the Father of lights. It is the truth. So, it doesn't shift either.

So, let's both listen to and do God's Word.

To look into a mirror and to discover a bit of disheveled hair, a blob of food, a tie totally askew and so forth, and then to walk away from the mirror and do nothing defeats the whole purpose of looking into the mirror in the first place. You might as well not have even bothered looking.

So it is if we listen to God's Word and then go walking off into living our own lives without doing what God's Word says.

By all means, do listen to the Word of God. We as a congregation are and have been especially emphasizing this for some time. We worry that some of our members, our children too, are not hearing God's Word. We are here to preach and teach and share God's Word with people, and the more people, the better because it is God's saving Word. As James says, "Humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can (is powerful) save you."

Note in that sentence that God wishes to go beyond the ears. He wants to get His Word into us. That involves the mind and heart and soul! Since heart, mind, and soul have to do with living. Clearly, God wants His Word to direct, control, motivate and empower our daily living, how we act, what we do (and don't do).

So, be quick to listen, to listen to what God says. That's the context! Let us be slow to speak and to get angry. Anger often leads to hasty words. Anger does not often lead to the righteous life God deserves. When you feel your ears getting hot, stop, think, pray, before you say anything or do anything! Anger comes fast to both children, teens, and adults. Be slow about anger. Be fast to listen to God. Control the tongue. James has much more to say about the abuse of our tongues later in his book.

Help people like orphans and widows in their distress. Hard times had befallen many people at the time James wrote his letter. Hard times have befallen many today. Help people in whatever ways you are able. Do what is the best way to help.

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Keep self from being polluted by the world. It doesn't take a lot to pollute. So keep yourself from all moral filth. Don't think you can add just a little more filth. That is pollution. Get rid of all evil. Evil is very prevalent. It is everywhere, even in us. So listen to God's Word and daily repent of evil and daily rely on Christ's freedom in forgiveness. Listen to the Word in action. Amen.