

**January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006**  
**“The Three Points of Wisdom”**

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**James 1:21-26**

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

**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 observing his natural face in a mirror;**

**24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.**

**25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.**

**26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we reviewed the purpose of wisdom in our lives, that being to help us to live our lives in such a way that, at the end of our lives, we have a resume that indicates that we took on the tasks that the Lord set to our hands, even as Jesus took on the Cross and became our intercessor at the right hand of God. While it will probably not be ours to endure a sacrifice analogous to that of the Cross, we are admonished to run the race that God has given us to run with endurance, taking on the trials that our race entails.

Well, how do we do that? How can we prepare ourselves to put this great gift of wisdom into practice? James gives us a three point plan to implement the Word of God. We discussed the first point last week, which is given in **James 1:19-20**, which says:

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

We are born in sin and shaped in iniquity, and our innately sinful nature makes anger a very dangerous emotion for us to entertain. God does have a plan to remedy the evils of the world, as we can see if we read of the book of Revelation, but when we become angry, we also become impatient with God's plan to remedy the evils that other perpetrate on us personally. This reduces our ability to follow God's instructions.

Anger causes us to replace God's comprehensive agenda with our own narrowly focused one, and thus become more susceptible to the snares that the wicked one puts in our path, as those sinful suggestions appear to be more efficient to us in meeting our short term goals.

James warns us against indulging that sentiment in the first verse of our text for today. The conjunction "therefore" at the beginning of **James 1:21** joins the idea of avoiding anger from verses 19 and 20 with the idea of laying aside filthiness and wickedness. It reads:

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

How do we think when we are angry? Are we not generally punitive towards those with whom we are displeased and thus think of ways to "get even" or at least get that which we consider "justice" from them? The problem that we have when we are in this situation is that we are more susceptible to thoughts of evil, filth and wickedness when getting even is on our mind.

When someone does something to us that we interpret as evil, we have the naturally sinful propensity to decide to use their own filthy, wicked, evil tactics to get back at them, but we are admonished by the Psalmist to wait and let God handle the situation, in **Psalm 37:7-9** admonishes us:

**7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.**

**8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.**

**9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.**

It is, however, most difficult to wait on God, because His timeframe may not be the same as ours. The Psalmist says that if we wait on the Lord, we will inherit the earth, but the question is:

When?

Our adversary is misusing us right now, so why must we wait for our justification? It would be so much more satisfying to keep those who are injuring us from getting away with it. God is telling us to rest and be patient, but why rest when we can do something about it right now!!!

Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, admonishes us in **Ecclesiastes 7:8-9, 13-14** (NIV):

**8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.**

**9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.**

**13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?**

**14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.**

Regardless of our schemes to get even with the one at whom we are angry, we need to keep the thought in mind that although God does not cause evil, He allows evil to exist in the world because of His gift of free will to His creation. We do not know exactly what God is going to do to remedy this evil that we cause, even as the Jews did not anticipate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead. The most wise thing that we can do when we encounter evil would be to follow God's instructions, since God is the one that allowed the situation to come to pass and God is the one that has the plan to remedy the situation that will

cause us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which should be the ultimate aim on our agenda. The key is to lay aside that which our evil desires tell us to do and develop a spirit of meekness, which will allow us to endure the trials and tribulations of life with the assurance that God is still sitting at the pinnacle of the circle of the universe with all power in Heaven and Earth in His Hand, and will come to rescue us in His own way in His own time.

No, my plan for life may not come to pass.

No, my personal prayer may not be answered immediately in the affirmative.

No, I may not get what I want when I want it.

No, people may not do what I want them to do, and

No, I ought not transgress the law of God to try to coerce people to do what I want them to do.

So, James' first point is that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God

James points out, secondly, that if I want to receive the blessing from God, it is my responsibility is to not just hear the commandments of God, but to follow them, regardless of that which others may do. **James 1:22** says:

**22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

Wisdom requires more than knowledge. Once we have the knowledge of the Word of God, we need to execute the plan that the knowledge of God's Word gives us. I took a management class in which the lecturer clarified this point for me. The lecturer said that any failure to complete a task in life is a function of one of two deficiencies, those being, either a deficiency of knowledge or a deficiency of execution.

A deficiency of knowledge means that you don't know how to perform the task. If you were having a medical emergency, I would have to call 911 because I am neither a paramedic nor a doctor, and I don't know what to do in such a situation.

A deficiency of execution means that you know what to do, but you choose not to do it. If you called me to help you with your computer, I could choose to not come at your request. The method that the lecturer used to ascertain whether a deficiency was that of knowledge or of execution was to ask the question;

"Could you perform this task if your life depended on it?"

If you have a deficiency of knowledge, then you could not perform the task even if your life depended on it, because you actually do not know how to perform the task. If, on the other hand, you could perform the task if your life depended on it, then your deficiency in performing the task is one of execution, that is, you have decided not to do that which you know how to do.

**James 1:23-25** says:

**23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;**

**24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.**

**25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.**

James makes an analogy between a deficiency of execution and “forgetfulness”. A forgetful church member is one that listens to the sermon on Sunday and then, on Monday, when faced with the trials and tribulations of life in the world, reverts back to the non-spiritual position of getting angry at and even with those who treat him or her in a manner that he or she does not appreciate. Listening to the exposition of the Word of God ought to build up our resistance to injury, and make us more able to be a “doer of the work”, following the commandments of God that we hear enumerated during the sermon. We may dress up, come to church, say “Praise the Lord” and “Amen” at the appropriate times, and shake hands with our fellow church members, but coming to church is like going to practice, while the real game is played out on the field of everyday life. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 5:38-48**:

**38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**

**39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

**40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.**

**41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

**42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

**43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’**

**44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

**45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.**

**46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?**

**47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?**

**48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

We can generally be pleasant to the person sitting next to us in the congregation praising the Lord with us, which is practice. But what is our response to be when we are faced with the real world?

What are we supposed to do if someone slaps us? Is Jesus serious about our turning the other cheek? Really? What does He think that an evil person will do if we give them more opportunity to abuse us?

How does He expect us to love our enemies? If we show love to those that show hate to us, won't they just take advantage of us and make our lives more miserable?

Are we really supposed to pray for those that are spiteful toward us? Now, I can follow that commandment. I pray for those who treat me badly, but I pray that they might fall into a hole. I'm not sure that that is exactly what Jesus had in mind as He speaks here.

Are you having the same problem dealing with the realities of the Word of God that I am? God's word is not obeyed by our church attendance, although church attendance is very important as at Church we receive reinforcement of His Word.

The Word of God call for us to voluntarily embrace that which we are instructed by the Spirit of God, which is given to each of us when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior. Paul

gives us an excellent explanation beginning **Romans 8:1** which says:

**1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

We who are in Christ are admonished to walk, not according to the flesh, which means that which makes us physically and emotionally comfortable, but according to the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, or, as we call Him, the Holy Spirit. The verb “walk” used in **Romans 8:1** stipulates that the trip with the Spirit is voluntary. We cannot be carried along by the Spirit unless and until we first make the decision to walk with the Spirit. Listen to the genealogy of the patriarchs Jared and Enoch given in **Genesis 5:18-24**, which says:

**18 Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot Enoch.**

**19 After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and had sons and daughters.**

**20 So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.**

**21 Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah.**

**22 After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters.**

**23 So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.**

**24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.**

If we were to review the genealogies of the other patriarchs given in Genesis 5, we would see the word “lived” in the place (in verse 19) where the genealogy of Enoch says “walked with God” (in verse 22). This differentiates from this early part of the Bible between “living” and “walking with God”. The relationship between man and God that is described as a “walk” is a totally voluntarily relationship on the part of man, based upon our individual, personal assessment that to follow God’s commandments is the most beneficial way to live. Like any voluntary walk that we take, we can decide to discontinue walking whenever we wish. I used to walk my dog Neo through the neighborhood almost every day, but I have not been on that walk since we had to put Neo to sleep. When our new dog gets past the puppy stage, I may resume my walks again, but I don’t have to.

I appreciate the companionship that those here give me on Sunday mornings as you come out to hear and discuss my presentation, but I recognize that your attendance here is voluntary, and you can decide not to come at any time that you wish.

So, just as you have decided to walk with me today in this worship and learning situation, we have to decide, daily, whether or not we will walk with God. People often make a public confession of their belief in God and His Son Jesus Christ, but then fail to walk with Him in their daily lives. Jesus explains this behavior in a parable, in **Matthew 13:19-23**:

**19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.**

**20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;**

**21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.**

**22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.**



**23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”**

Note that in verse 19, the wicked one snatches away the word of the Kingdom, taking the person off of the journey with God. In verses 20 and 21, the person’s own reaction to both the troubles of the world and to the riches of the world is to voluntarily leave the journey.

We can be taken off of the journey by the devil, or we can voluntarily leave the journey. We can leave the journey because things are too troublesome, or we can leave the journey because things are too rich. My point is that the journey is completely voluntary, and that we must make the decision to walk with God each and every day we wake up. **Romans 8:5** tells us: **5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**

Where do you set your mind? Walking on the journey with God means that you have a pretty good idea of how God wants you to react to situations, and if you find yourself in a situation in which are not sure about God’s will, you consider a prayer for God’s wisdom to be in order. The problem that we generally have, however, is not usually a lack of knowledge about the will of God, but rather a personal focus on our own nature, on that which we ourselves want, which is how the Scripture defines living according to the things of the flesh. Is your focus on being successful as you personally define success, or are you more concerned about successfully doing that which the Lord wants you to do?

When faced with a decision, do you sell out to self, endeavor to come to a compromise between your will and God’s will, or sell out to God? Listen to **Matthew 5:39** once again:

**39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

As I asked earlier, what are we supposed to do if someone slaps us? Is Jesus really serious about our turning the other cheek? Really? What does He think that an evil person will do if we give them more opportunity to abuse us?

The real question is: with whom are we deciding to walk; are we walking with God, or have we decided to walk our own way?

Once again, when faced with a decision, do we do what we want, endeavor to find a compromise between that which God is telling us in His Word and that that will make us comfortable, or do what God tells us to do?

Are we setting our minds on the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit of God? Do we realize that God has an agenda, the specifics of which we may not know, that we can fulfill by following His commandment, even though our flesh does not really want to do it?

Declaring ourselves Christian is a declaration of the person with whom we are walking. When we declare our Christianity, we are saying that we are now walking with Jesus Christ. Joining a church is not intended to be a declaration of our allegiance to an organization, but our declaration that we intend to walk with Jesus in parallel with the other members of the church organization. Jesus made this clear to His small, twelve member church, in **Matthew 16:24-26**:

**24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**

**25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will**

**find it.**

**26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?**

Think of church as practice and our daily walk with the Lord as the game. Paul tells us, in **Romans 8:12-14:**

**12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**

**13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

**14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

Access to life in the next world is granted because of our walk in the Spirit of God with the Son of God as we do the will of God. It is my hope that this information will make us preoccupied with doing the will of God once we leave the doors of the sanctuary. If not, we will not be able to claim a deficiency of knowledge at the bar of judgment, but we will have to accept the verdict that our deficiency was one of execution, that is, that we knew what to do but failed to do it.

So, first of all, we must avoid anger and secondly, we must be doers of the Word of God. The third point that James gives is in **James 1:26**, which says:

**26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.**

Our words are as important as our actions. We can wound with a word, and we can help heal with a word. Malicious words spread untruths and tear down the reputations of others, while kind words encourage and build up the spirits of the downtrodden.

It is important to recognize that the only way that we communicate with most people is by what which we say, and, especially if the other person considers us influential, the mind receives those thought pictures that we communicate through our words and can make them physically real. People get caught up in fiction that they know is not true. In some of the offices that I supervised during my management career, I overheard people talking about talking about situations and circumstances that I assumed, from the conversation, were family problems, only to hear later that the two people talking were discussing a fictional situation in a television show. As a matter of fact, television works so well because it is a verbal communication medium. Television dramas did well at one time without pictures. It was called radio. Television has worked without pictures, but try television without sound. Go to the video store and rent a movie with an additional sound track in a language that you do not understand, and then play the movie with the sound in the foreign language. You will find that unless the movie is an action movie, you will not enjoy the movie very much if you cannot understand the dialogue.

Even God is influenced by that which we say. **Deuteronomy 5:11** tells us:

**11 'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.**

Why would God care that I misuse His name? Why is blasphemy such a big problem for God? Why does He even care what I say? I have no power over God. If I lie on Him, how does that negatively affect Him? I can understand God finding me guilty if I do something that I am not supposed to do, but why does mere talk upset Him so much? After all, I learned when I was a child; "Sticks and stone may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Why is God's name so important to Him? Listen to **Matthew 12:22-24:**

**22 Then one was brought to Him [Jesus] who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.**

**23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”**

**24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”**

The Pharisees ascribed the power of Jesus to the devil. But, so what? The man whom Jesus healed was just as healed no matter to whom the Pharisees ascribed Jesus’ power, right? Yes, that is true, but that is not the way that Jesus saw it. Jesus did not ignore the malice of the Pharisees, but found it necessary to correct them publicly. Listen to **Matthew 12:25-28:**

**25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.**

**26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?**

**27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.**

**28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

Jesus goes on to condemn their blasphemy, in **Matthew 12:31-37:**

**31 “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.**

**32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.**

**33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.**

**34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

**35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.**

**36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.**

**37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

God wants positive credit for the good things that He does for us. God wants appreciation and praise for the benevolent power that He wields on our behalf. God wants us to speak good things about that which He does for us, and tells us that our idle, blasphemous words will be judged; our words are being recorded and can either condemn us or justify us.

Our text tells us to bridle our tongues. Paul says it more expansively, in **Ephesians 4:29-**

**32:**

**29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.**

**30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

**31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.**



**32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**

To be pleasing to God, our words to one another are to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving. Our words to and about God are to be truthful and grateful.

So we have the three points of wisdom of which James speaks in this first chapter of his book:

1. We are to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.
2. We are to do that which the Word of God tells us, regardless of our feelings about our situation.
3. We are to govern our speech so that it conforms to that which God expects from us.

Remember Jesus Christ, who had all power, but was also able to endure the agony of the cross because it was part of the Plan of God. He did not display anger, either in word or deed, during His Passion, but rather prayed for the eventual salvation of those who were driving the nails through His wrists and into the wood. Even as He died, He committed His Spirit into the hands of God, and then decreed that the Plan of God for His life was successfully completed. If Jesus Christ could give Himself to implement God's plan, undergoing the torture of the Cross without become angry and blessing rather than cursing even in His most undeserved agony, we ought also be able to walk with Him and endure the small reversals and setback of life with the same grace. In conclusion, let us walk in wisdom according to the example of Jesus Christ as we govern ourselves according to His instruction in **Mark 11:25-26**:

**25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.**

**26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."**

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