

The things we say and the things we do

James 1 v 19 – 2 v 13 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. What's the main thing you remember from the last study from James that we did?

Wrap up the discussion by remembering that in James 1 v 18 we saw that God give us spiritual new birth through his word. Explain that we're going to continue on the theme of words, ours and Gods, as we start this study.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

The things we say

*2. **SHOUT-OUT** Read James 1 v 19-21. What happens when we are *slow* to listen, *quick* to speak and *quick* to become angry?

Write the answers on the flip-chart. We make bad judgements, we argue, things get out of proportion etc.

*3. Why is human anger a problem? (see v20)

Because it doesn't produce righteousness. Spend some time thinking about the difference between human anger (usually self-oriented, gets out of control and out of proportion, not always appropriate or fully informed and, most importantly, coloured by sin) and God's anger (caused by insult to His honour, controlled, just, appropriate, informed, unaffected by sin). We see Jesus get angry without sinning (appropriate anger and without losing control = his anger is the expression of the emotion he feels, not a way to lash out at the circumstances) e.g. Mark 10 v 13-14, Mark 11 v 15-17.

It may come as a surprise to some that God gets angry because anger is seen as sinful. Anger is not sinful when it is appropriate, measured and controlled. People can be righteously angry e.g. at the way other people are treated, but even then, our appropriate anger quickly becomes sinful as we lose control and start to hate and judge the perpetrators.

*4. 'Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires' v20. What does James tell us to do, in v21, and what does this look like in our lives?

1. *get rid of 'all moral filth and... evil'. These things won't disappear by themselves, we need to engage in a battle over them.*

2. *'humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you'. The tense of 'save' here is active, meaning that we should start to live out what the Scriptures say. He's talking about being changed (the subject of most of his letter), rather than being converted.*

James is implying that this will make a difference to our anger management as well as many other areas of discipleship. Spend time with the group thinking about what change might look like in their lives, particularly with regard to anger management, and try to make some specific applications.

Questions 5-7 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*5. **SDL** Read James 1 v 22-25. Why is v22 so important for us to hear?

James has just told us in v21 to accept the word. To accept it we need not just to hear it, but to act on it. It's easy for us to read the Bible / turn up at Bible study / go to church etc. without taking anything in. We hear the words but we're not listening and they make no difference to us. In fact, we're in a really bad position, because we think we're listening when we're not – we're self-deceiving and falsely assured. We are not saved by hearing the gospel, we are saved when we respond (but not by our response – we are saved by Jesus!). We are not changed by hearing Scripture – we are changed when we obey.

*6. **SDL** How does James picture the person who hears the Bible but doesn't act on it (v23-24)?

As someone who can't even remember what his own reflection looks like seconds after seeing it.

*7. **SDL** What does he tell us about the person who really listens to God's word? (v25)

They remember what they have read / heard, they put it into action and will be blessed (by being saved and changed).

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Does James's picture of looking in the mirror and immediately forgetting what you've seen help you to see your danger of reading the Bible and missing the message? What needs to change?

We all do this, to a greater or lesser extent – anyone who claims not to is self-deceived!

*8. **SHOUT-OUT** Read v26. James has been writing about self-deceit in listening, now he writes about self-deceit in talking. What kind of talk is not honouring to God?

Write their answers on the flip-chart and leave it up for them to see as you do the next few questions.

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Is there anything in your speech that you feel God is prompting you to change, in order to honour Him?

9. Read v27. What does James mean?

James does not mean that looking after orphans and widows and living in a monastery will save you. He means that putting our faith into action will demonstrate Christ's love for the outcast and mean that we are actively engaged in a battle against sin, both of which are evidence that we are already saved. They are a result of our salvation. ('Religion' = a pattern of behaviour, a path you follow as an outcome of your faith. 'Faith' = belief, trust).

10. You would think that the hardest person to deceive is yourself. The Bible says not. Why is it so easy and so dangerous to deceive yourself (as in v22 and v26)?

It's so easy because we are sinners and it's dangerous because it means we persist in sin. We don't want to believe bad things about ourselves – we don't want to believe that we are sinners standing defenceless before the angry Almighty God. We want to believe that our religion (behaviour) will save us. We justify certain sins, with verbal sins being a common problem. When we deceive ourselves about our sin, we may need someone else to point it out.

The things we do

11. **SHOUT-OUT** Read James 2 v 1. Why should Christians not show favouritism?

Write their answers on the flip-chart.

12. Read James 2 v 1-6a. What does the Bible say about favouritism and why it is wrong?

(Up to 'But you have dishonoured the poor.') The Bible says that favouritism is discrimination and evil judging and that it dishonours someone, in this case the poor. The poor (as the rich) are chosen by God to be rich in faith and to inherit his kingdom. James is not saying that the poor are more special to God, rather that everyone is of equal value to God, even though the world does not see them that way.

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Are there any ways that you show favouritism and does this passage challenge your behaviour? What needs to happen?

13. Read James 2 v 8-11. James' main point is in v10. What is this telling us about human ability to keep God's law?

We are unable to keep God's law. We are all sinners (Romans 5 v 12 tells us that it's actually even worse than this – we are sinners by descent from Adam). We only need to break God's law at one point to be a law-breaker. Alberry (2015, p66) gives the helpful example of breaking a window – 'Look, the ball only hit one part of the window. And look how much of the window isn't broken...' is no defence. Favouritism breaks God's law to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' by loving one neighbour more than another.

Although some sins are much worse on a human level, with much bigger consequences, e.g. murder, rape, drug dealing, than other sins e.g. gossip, getting drunk, consensual sexual sin, we cannot point to the terrorist and say 'I haven't done anything as bad as he did' to justify our innocence. No-one is innocent 'for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', Romans 3 v 23.

14. Read James 2 v 12-13. James tells us to 'speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom'. What does this mean?

James is not talking about the final judgement regarding salvation, but the judgement of our deeds, as in 1 Corinthians 3 v 12-15. Our obedience to the law will be judged, but the outcome will not affect our salvation as that is already a given, as a believer in Christ. 'It will expose the kind of lives we have led, and whether or not we have been impacted and shaped by a real faith in Christ.' (Allberry 2015, p68).

15. Read James 2 v 13. What does it mean to be merciful? What does it mean for us if we do not show mercy?

To be merciful is to not give someone what they deserve. As followers of Jesus we should be merciful in the way we treat others, for example, not showing favouritism. If we do not show mercy it shows that we have not understood the mercy of Christ for us. God's mercy triumphs over his judgement, 'In the plan of salvation... respect is done to justice, but mercy triumphs. Justice demands, as what is due, that the sinner should be condemned; mercy pleads that he may be saved – and mercy prevails.' (Barnes in Motyer 1988, p103).

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