

The point that James is making here is vital to building and maintaining harmony and longevity for the community of faith, for even though at times being angry about injustice or wrong doing within the community may seem justified, if the manner in which justice is pursued is not in accordance with God's righteous ways, such actions may overcome the current injustice but will almost inevitably do little more than substitute a new of kind of injustice for that which was overcome. James says it succinctly: seeking to dispel unrighteous activities by using unrighteous means simply does not achieve the righteousness of God.

...the righteousness of God is the righteousness that God requires, approves, brings about. In this sense in Scripture things are said to be of God or of Christ when they are effected by his power or commanded in his Word. Thus faith is said to be the work of God (see Jn 6:29). It is clear that James is using a figure of speech here by which more is intended than said. The apostle means that human anger is so far from working righteousness that it brings all kinds of evil.<sup>1</sup>

**21 – Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.**

The opening "Therefore" is *διό* (*dio*) in the Greek and in this context is a very strong admonition as it connects to the previous context. While a number of options present themselves as to what "Therefore" is referencing, it seems best to see it as the general truths put forth by James in vv. 18–20. In v. 18 James states the foundational reality for all who have come to true saving faith in Yeshua, namely, that we have been "born again," i.e., "brought forth by the word of truth." Remember that the phrase "brought forth" (*ἀπεκύεω*, *apekueō*) most often is used in the process of birth. To be "born again" means to have come to "new life," and that life is one of growing in righteousness, that is, becoming more and more like Yeshua.

Thus James utilizes an aorist participle which is translated as "putting aside" (*ἀποθέμενοι* < *ἀποτίθημι*). Being an aorist participle it would indicate that this "putting away" began when coming to faith in Yeshua and has inevitably become the pattern of life. His point is clear: if we have

<sup>1</sup> Manton, *James*, p. 138.

been born again and given new life in Yeshua, then the true pattern of our lives will be to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to have lives more and more characterized by that which pleases God.

As Paul writes:

Now those who belong to Messiah Yeshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:24)

That Paul can speak of this process as finished (“have crucified the flesh”) is because the Scriptures make it clear that all who are truly saved by God’s grace are assured of final and complete sanctification.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until [with a view to] the day of Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 1:6)

Thus, in our verse James exhorts us to be who we have become in Yeshua. He instructs us to live up to God’s standards by being self-controlled in the way we interact with each other. Thus he first tell us what needs to be put away and overcome and then goes on to instruct us regarding what we must embrace.

...*putting aside all filthiness* – Having died with Messiah and raised to a new life in Him, we must continue to put aside “all [any kind of] filthiness” (πάσαν ῥυπαρίαν). The Greek word ῥυπαρία (*hruparia*) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is used twice in the Lxx to describe “filthy garments” (Zech 3:3–4) and used here metaphorically of one’s actions as making known one’s basic disposition. Taken as a metaphor to describe one’s actions, it means “dirty” or “filthy” in the sense of

a state of moral defilement or corruption, moral uncleanness, vulgarity.<sup>1</sup>

James exhorts us to put away *all filthiness*, i.e., “every kind of filthiness” which therefore emphasizes both that which is inward as well as our outward actions. Indeed, our deeds begin as inward thoughts.

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man...For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies... (Matt 15:18, 19)

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<sup>1</sup> BDAG, “ῥυπαρία,” p. 908.

Moreover, the idea of “filth” as used metaphorically of evil emphasizes that which is immoral. As Kistemaker notes:

“Get rid of all moral filth,” says James. He uses the word filth figuratively to describe moral uncleanness. . . James orders his readers to get rid of all moral filth that soils their souls and to put aside prevailing evil that blights their lives.<sup>1</sup>

...and all that remains of wickedness, – Having emphasized the inward thoughts of the heart, the very place where sin is conceived, James now reminds us that outward influences for evil must likewise be “put off” or “put away.” In this fallen world there exists innumerable influences for evil which draw people into ungodly thoughts and actions. This is the intent of the Greek, for the NASB’s translation “all that remains of wickedness” is more literally “abundance of sin or evil” (*περισσειαν κακίας*).<sup>2</sup> James therefore admonishes us likewise to “put away” any and all things that would draw us into sinful behavior.

In the modern world we have even more access to the “abundance of wickedness” through the technologies that have been developed. While these technologies, such as the internet, cell phones, modern advertising, etc., are gateways to wickedness, they also afford opportunity for sowing the seeds of righteousness. Once again, the believer must be ready to turn from what is evil and embrace that which is pleasing to the Lord.

and receive in humility the implanted word – Having exhorted us regarding that which must be “put away,” now James gives us the means by which we will be successful in this endeavor, and it is to have the living truth of God’s word well implanted within us.

The first step is to “receive” the word of God “with meekness.” As Manton notes,

Receive, that is, give it more way to come to you; make more room for it in your hearts. Thus it is charge upon them, 2Thess. ii.10, that ‘they received not the love of the truth.’ So it is said of the natural man, ‘He receiveth not the things of God.’ This is a notion so proper to this matter, that the formal act of faith is expressed by it, John i. 11, ‘To as many as received him,’ &c.<sup>3</sup>

1 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 58.

2 Note the ESV’s translation, “rampant wickedness.”

3 Manton, *James*, pp. 144-45.

Indeed, it is the very work of the Ruach HaKodesh to urge the believer to “receive the word implanted,” that is, in a spiritual sense to hunger and thirst for its satisfying truths and the nourishing strength it gives.

The concept of “implanted” is that which is “inborn,” that is, something that is the natural disposition by way of birth. Once again James has employed a Greek word (ἐμφυτος, *emphutos*) found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and only in the Apocryphal book of Wisdom (12:10). But it is regularly found in the non-canonical Greek literature with the meaning “inborn,” meaning that with which one is born and thus is a natural characteristic.<sup>1</sup>

James uses this term to remind us that it was the very word of God by which we were brought to repentance and faith in Yeshua, and thus it is the hunger for God’s word that continues to be the “inborn” reality of those who are saved. Peter speaks of this when he writes:

like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1Pet 2:2–3)

That the “word of God” is said to be “implanted,” i.e., “inborn,” speaks to the reality of the New Covenant, for the New Covenant is the Torah, the very word of God, written on the heart. And here we should be reminded that from an Hebraic perspective, the heart is where one does one’s thinking and decision-making. Thus, to have the very teaching of God “written on the heart” means that more and more one’s thoughts and decisions will align with God, the source of all truth.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my Torah within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer 31:33–34)

By what means does the Lord write His Torah, His Teaching, upon the heart of each of His children? Most obvious is the fact that we must

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<sup>1</sup> Note also the related verb, ἐμφύω, “to implant,” found often in the early Greek classical writers. See Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1973), p. 551.

read it and mediate upon it, hiding it in our hearts (minds) so that it becomes the very means by which we make our decisions.

Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. (Ps 119:11)

This writing of the word of God upon the heart of the child of God is a cooperative work, for the true child of God will seek to know and live out the word of God. Thus, we must note carefully that the inward perspective for receiving the word of God, the Scriptures, and the truths which the Ruach intends us to know, is that we must receive it "in humility" (*ἐν πραύτητι, en prautēti*). This same word (*πραύτης, prautēs*) can carry the sense of "gentleness" as it does in James 3:13.

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (James 3:13).

James' point here is clear: we must come to the word of God, the Bible, and read it with a full willingness to accept it as the word of God to us, and thus a ready willingness to submit to its eternal truths and to live them out in our world. Accepting Yeshua as one's Savior means also to accept Him as one's Lord. Thus our initial confession of our sins and acceptance of Yeshua as our Savior, is the beginning of our spiritual journey, not the end. Having been born from above (Jn 3:3) we are new creations (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) and therefore have an "inborn" hunger to feed upon the word of God, for it is by this spiritual "food" that we are nourished and nurtured.

Given this reality, we must also be fully aware that the enemy of our souls works to turn us away from the Scriptures or to foster the idea that they are less than important or even unnecessary. Likewise, the sinful nature, the flesh, is contrary to the Spirit and thus to the Scriptures (Gal 5:17). This speaks to the necessity of the humility that we must have as we approach the word of God, for the humility which the Spirit fosters prepares the believer to readily accept the inspired word as fully applicable to his or her own life. Surely the Lord is always faithful, and when by the continuing prompting of the Ruach we feed upon the word of God, we find not only strength and ability to defeat the enemy but also the joy that comes from feasting upon the promises of God and upon His instructions for life. For when we live in accordance with the word of God, we experience the life He has so graciously given to us.

...which is able to save your souls. – Here we see that salvation encompasses both initial repentance toward God and faith in Yeshua as well as the ongoing sanctification of the believer. Surely as James wrote these words he had believers in mind, for he has already described them as “having been brought forth by the word of truth” and as “the first fruits among God’s creation” (v. 18). Why then does James state here that the word of God, the Scriptures, are “able to save your souls”? It is because the process of sanctification is likewise a necessary part of our eternal salvation. Having been born again, we are to become more and more set apart unto God and away from participation in that which is contrary to Him, i.e., that which is of the “world,” where “world” refers to the fallen world that stands against God and His righteousness.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1Jn 2:15)

While “justification” is the once-for-all declaration of God that the believer is “righteous” before Him, “sanctification” is the inevitable, ongoing work by which the Ruach enables the believer to become what God has declared them to be, that is, to grow in holiness and thus to become more and more like Yeshua.

In stating that the “implanted word” is “able to save your souls,” James makes it clear that the “word of God” in the “child of God” is a primary means by which God has ordained and brings about the sanctification of His children. Given this fact, how greatly we ought to prize and cherish the word of God! As Calvin notes:

It is a high eulogy on heavenly truth, that we obtain through it a sure salvation; and this is added, that we may learn to seek and love and magnify the word as a treasure that is incomparable. It is then a sharp goad to chastise our idleness, when he says that the word which we are wont to hear so negligently, is the means of our salvation, though for this purpose the power of saving is not ascribed to the word, as if salvation is conveyed by the external sound of the word, or as if the office of saving is taken away from God and transferred elsewhere; for James speaks of the word which by faith penetrates into the hearts of men, and by it means that God, the author of salvation, conveys it by his Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *James*, p. 296.

## 22 – But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

The opening word “But” translates the Greek *δέ* (*de*) which can just as well be translated as “and.” It would seem that James intends this sentence to begin with “and” since it is better understood to connect with the previous context than to what follows. Granted, the contrast between those who “hear” but do not “do” is made in the following verses, but as we have seen, the previous verse emphasizes the fact that for the believer in Yeshua, the word of God is “implanted” and thus becomes the very pattern by which the redeemed live and progress. The point of the current verse, then, is that “doing” is the sure mark of the true believer who has been given a new birth, one in whom the word of God has been and is being written upon the heart.

To “prove” oneself means “to show the reality of what one truly is.” This is emphasized by the word *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*) which is here a present imperative in the Greek. Present imperatives often carry the sense of a necessary, regular action. Thus we could woodenly translate: “Keep on being doers of the word....” Here we have a clear emphasis upon a regular teaching of the Scriptures, namely, that genuine, saving faith in God will always cause the believer to grow in obedience to the word of God.

Note as well that our verse emphasizes the fact that the believer’s sanctification is a cooperative work with God. As Paul writes:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:12–13)

Here we are admonished by the word of God to “work out our salvation” because it is “God who is at work in you.” Thus, the life of faith is one of submitting to the leading of the Ruach, putting to death the deeds of the flesh, growing in the faith, and in conformity to that which pleases our God and Savior. And what are the guidelines for how we may know what pleases Him? “Doers of the word” is the answer.

*and not merely hearers who delude themselves.* – Here James uses the word “hearers” to reference those who profess to be “believers” only because they have said “yes” to something they have heard, but in reality have not received the gift of salvation which brings about a “new

birth” in them and thus a change in their “doing.” This reminds one of Yeshua’s words in Matt 7:22.

Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ (Matt 7:22-23)

Here we see a picture of the final judgment day, when those who have deluded themselves into thinking that their saying “yes” to a religious appeal has earned them final salvation. They have been deceived by the words of men and have not submitted to the word of God. Instead of the word of God being “implanted” by the work of the Ruach, it has been brushed aside in favor of a man-made substitute.

**23-24 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man *who* looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.**

James now continues to describe what is the inevitable outcome of the “implanted word” as it “lives” within the child of God. He thus begins our verse with the connective “For” (ὅτι, *hoti*), which is used here to substantiate what he has taught us in the preceding verses.

When a person professes to have received the divine gift of salvation by faith in Yeshua, the proof that such a confession is true is the manner in which that person’s life and actions increasingly conform to the righteousness of God as revealed in the Scriptures. A man or woman who says they are a believer in Yeshua must “prove” their confession by “being doers of the word,” (v. 22). For James has already told us that the means by which a person is saved is the very “implanted word which is able to save your souls” (v. 21), that is, the word of God as brought to life within the repentant believer by the Ruach HaKodesh. This being the case, one who is truly “born from above” will evidence the reality of being “made new” by how they live.

As is the pattern of good teachers, James now gives us an illustration, in the pattern of a parable, to drive this fundamental point home.