



# International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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## Lesson 3 James 1:19-27 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Study Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

**(James 1:19) You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;**

Let's think deeply about what this verse can mean to those of us who believe in Jesus, for James wrote his letter to Christians. James knew and we know from experience that Christians, just as all others, can be *slow* to listen (or not fully listen) and *quick* to speak (which usually does not help anyone) and to *quick* flares of anger. Let's go back to the beginning and remember that no one becomes a Christian or helps another Christian by being *slow* to listen, *quick* to speak, and *quick* to flare up in anger.

Having first learned how to listen to God and follow God's directions from the Bible, Christians usually help unbelievers come to faith and trust in Jesus by being "quick to listen" or swift to hear them express themselves. They listen carefully to what the other person is saying. By being quick to listen, they express their concern for the other person, and they begin to discover the truths the other person needs to learn about God and Jesus and the changes they may need to make in their lives. After they have been "quick to listen," Christians need to be careful thinkers and prayers and "slow to speak." They can pray before they speak, and they can speak slowly

to say what they hope and pray God would have them say to help the other person. The “other person” may also be a believer who needs help, and so the Christian can be “slow to speak” to give them the right words to help them. As believers grow in the grace and knowledge of God, they will be slow or become slower “to anger” in response to what they hear a believer or unbeliever say that might lead them to express angry and hurtful words.

Christians want to practice listening to others and speaking with love and understanding. Out of love for others, we must be quick to listen and quick to listen completely. We must pray for God to help us restrain from speaking too quickly, out of respect for others, and only speak what we believe will be helpful to all concerned. If we talk too quickly, we may not learn what a person’s true needs are and have the time to pray and seek God’s way to help them. If we speak out in anger, we may lose all opportunity for further conversation, problem solving, or help giving. In all situations where believers may be provoked to speak quickly in anger, they can pray for wisdom and God’s grace (God’s merciful power) to help them and the other person say and do what is right and loving.

**(James 1:20) for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.**

The Bible tells us to listen carefully to understand others, perhaps their intentions were good, but they were misunderstood and need time to explain fully themselves and what they were experiencing. If we wait to speak until we have understood as fully as possible, we should be able to speak love, truth, and God’s righteousness into a situation or relationship—which can require additional prayer for guidance and wisdom. Angry words spoken in haste and without understanding do not lead to right thinking and can also lead to hurtful and wrong responses that can last and ruin a relationship for a lifetime and sometimes beyond a lifetime.

**(James 1:21) Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.**

God gives spiritual life, the new birth, and the new beginning, by “the word of truth,” and God gives spiritual growth and development by implanting “the word of truth” into the souls, hearts, and minds of true believers. We implant “the word of truth” as we prayerfully read and study the Bible, the Word of Truth written. Believers apply “the word of truth” in the way they behave, converse with, and relate to God and others. The believer needs to think about and obey the implanted “word of truth” to quit thinking about and quit doing anything sordid, evil, wicked, or that allows wickedness to grow within them. The believer can pray and ask the Holy Spirit to make “the word of truth” work effectively within them and help them repent of their sins, overcome their sinful practices, and obey “the word of truth” to walk in holiness of life and speech.

**(James 1:22) But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.**

Some people go to Bible study groups and church one or more times a week and hear the word of truth, but they deceive themselves when they fail to practice the word of truth that they hear explained week by week. They need to pray about what they hear and open themselves to the changes God wants them to make according to the word of truth, the Bible. God and His word will help them stop practicing sin, to which they have become accustomed and enslaved, and they deceive themselves if they think they can save their souls and please God by simply listening to His word instead of also doing His word, instead of obeying the commandments of Jesus by God’s grace through faith in Jesus. Jesus Christ has freed His followers from slavery to sin so they can do His word. Having been freed from slavery to sin, believers love Jesus and want to serve Jesus according to His will.

**(James 1:23) For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror;**

Hearers of the word learn what they need to do to live right with God and others, and they need to be doers of the word of truth and make all the changes they need to make in their behavior, thinking, and practices. The word of truth and the light of God can make people uncomfortable when

seeing themselves as God sees them, but rather than turn away with an uncomfortable feeling, hearers of the word need to pray for God's grace and the Holy Spirit to help them make the changes God expects them to make in accordance with the Bible, which reveals the shortcomings in their lives to them and gives them hope that change is possible as they obey God.

**(James 1:24) for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.**

People need to read and hear the Scriptures and see themselves in the light of our holy and loving God, who sees them. They need to note carefully what they learn. They need to pray and resolve (with the Lord Jesus Christ being their Helper) to trust in Him and His word to change them, rather than leave church or their Bible study group without deciding to conform their lives to the image of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**(James 1:25) But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.**

The perfect law commands people to love God with their whole being and others as themselves. Love inspires Christians to obey the law of liberty, turn their eyes upon Jesus Christ and by His grace follow Him rather than do what is evil when they were formerly enslaved to sin. As long as they live in this world, Christians can be tempted to sin, but Jesus has freed them from the power of sin and has empowered them by the Holy Spirit to do God's will according to the Bible; thus, they can receive God's blessing and the assurance of God's happiness with them as His obedient children.

**(James 1:26) If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.**

James returns to talking about our tongues and how harmful what we say can be in the lives of others and ourselves. It is possible for those who think they are religious (because they perform many of the rituals their religion requires) to fail at practicing ways of Jesus. They continue to say harmful,

hurtful, or angry words. They speak without thinking or understanding, and they do not speak the truth in love. If they do not seek to speak words of truth in love and understanding, they deceive themselves and their ritualistic practices have no value.

**(James 1:27) Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world**

True Christians do more than practice rituals or listen to speeches or praise the words of truth without doing them. True Christianity will lead believers to care for the most needy people; those who cannot care for themselves as completely as necessary; those who suffer various troubles; those who can give nothing but thanks in return; those most vulnerable to abuse and neglect, especially widows and orphans. True Christians will refuse to practice the ways this world approves and promotes; they will seek the Lord's help to live according to His will and word.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. In our relations with others, what ways of speaking does James want us to do or avoid doing?
2. How can praying and resolving to be quick to listen and slow to speak help prevent us from speaking quickly in anger?
3. From what are we to rid ourselves?
4. How can we best nurture the growth of God's implanted word in our hearts and minds?
5. What does James say is pure and undefiled religion? How might someone misunderstand his teaching on this?

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