

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Notes w/c 17th June 2018

True Religion- Listening and Doing- James 1 v19-27

James is a very practical writer! His writing is full of practical advice on how to live our faith. If you haven't yet read the book in one sitting, this week/at home could be a good time to do it. This section focuses on what constitutes true religion, and James calls out three things we need to do (v 26-7); control the tongue, look after the needy and have a personal life, uncontaminated by the world. (Notes are two pages)

1. **Active listening.** v19, v 26. The Bible has a lot to say on the tongue (Proverbs 13:3, 14:3, 29:20). For most of us, the tongue is the hardest part of the body to control, and there is a rather quaint old adage about remembering we have two ears and one mouth. Listening to someone is a great gift to them but cultivating the art of listening also grows our faith. v19 it will lead to us being slower to anger. This isn't saying you can't have righteous anger but most of our anger is selfish, and often it employs the tongue very negatively; we gossip, we nag, we are irritable and annoyed. An ear is never more closed or a tongue more active than when it is angry. If we listen, we understand things better, we reflect more, and we are less negative.
 2. **Active listening** to God's work to lead to **positive 'doing'**. James wants us to use active listening when we come to God's word. He uses the image of a mirror (v23); one you look into and then forget what you saw. James calls us to look *intently* into God's word. (A careful, earnest gaze). Do we reflect on what we hear preached in church? Small groups are a brilliant way to engage further but we need to ensure we include practical application in our discussions. Guy Kind, *A Belief that Behaves*, says this of the person who does not actively listen to God's word '*The habit of inattention will grow on him until his reading is solely mechanical*'. Conversely, if we create an attentive spirit the rest –finding time to read/to listen to the talk on the web etc.- will come naturally.
 3. **More doing.** Listening intently to what God says will also lead us to action. v27 echoes Micah 6:8. God calls us to care for those in need and since we are aware of so many needs, we may feel overwhelmed. Whilst we can pray for many, and even give financially to quite a few, perhaps we would benefit from focusing on two things like James has, considering ones that are most relevant to us. One of these might be a particular cause- a charity or an individual that we can commit to both financially and in time to listen/pray/practical action. Our second need might be closer to home; maybe a father on Father's Day, or a neighbour, or just practice the art of when we say How are you? to actively listen.
 4. **Unpolluted by the world** (v27, v21) We can read this as avoiding 'sin', but there are so many softer ways we are 'touched and perhaps 'contaminated' by our culture. As our culture changes, we change ourselves, and as we get older it can get harder to resist being part of our culture- the world's value system of money, power and pleasure will influence us. What we read- in science, psychology etc. may challenge our faith. However, God does not call us to step outside the culture completely (John 19 v15). James points to ways for us to understand our culture whilst still keeping our distinctiveness. Listen to what is really happening, observe what our culture is, and how it is changing. And then apply God's word to it and discuss with other Christians. We can take practical action; regularly 'clean up' our thinking, bin the things that we do not want, 'file' things in priority order. And, keep returning to Jesus. Jesus choose to wash the feet of the disciples, saying the rest was clean already. When we walk in the world, we will get our feet dirty. But we need to keep coming back to Jesus to ask him to wash us clean. Our feet might be changed by our experiences, but they can be clean again. In this way, we can understand and experience our culture without it contaminating our faith.
-

Questions for your group to consider (nb not all of them!)

1. Listening to each other. How hard is this, and what practical steps can we take to ensure we do it? (Try this exercise; in pairs, A talk to B about something they would really like to do in their life, at some point, for 3 minutes. First time, B must not listen; be distracted, look at phone, interrupt etc. Second time B listens intently! How does it feel? What difference does it make?)
2. When we say How are you? to someone, what do we expect to hear? Can we change this? Who do we know that is good at listening intently; what can we learn from them?
3. Listening intently to God's word; do you skim read/listen? Did you engage with the Grow series to the point it made specific changes to your life? Can you think of a particular sermon that changed your life/way you do something? Many things happen indirectly, but are we making enough of the

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Notes w/c 17th June 2018

True Religion- Listening and Doing- James 1 v19-27

ways we can do it directly? Do you think we need a new service format/small group format to help with this?

4. Do you agree with the Guy Kind quote? How can we give more time to reflection and absorption of God's word? Be practical in your solutions!
5. Being purposeful and caring for those in need. Are you specific about those you support, and do you go beyond financial? What else could you do, either for a broader need (e.g. a charity) or for the needs of those around us?
6. Unpolluted by the world. Do you agree that we can be in the world yet not of it? How can we help each other achieve this balance? Does the church/our church achieve this balance?
7. Do you feel you have changed over the years as our culture changes? What parts of culture do you feel have had a negative effect on you- e.g. are you influenced by consumerism, of material objects or experiences? Is this a totally negative thing?
8. What do you think of the two solutions offered here; practical action in reflecting and tidying up what we have seen/experienced, and the image of having our feet washed by Christ.? What do you think of this quote from Alec Motyer, Bible Speaks Today. *"It's likely that in the big decisions of life most of us don't go far wrong/far from Jesus path. But faced with the world's ceaseless bombardment of our eyes, ears, thoughts and imaginations, the worlds insidious erosion of our values and standards and clamour on our time money and energy, it's easy to adopt a general way of life which, although it avoids the open pitfalls of sin, yet is not discernibly different from the style of one who does not yet know Christ".*
9. Which of these 'listening and doing' areas is hardest for you? Try to be specific about the action you would like to take and share with the group for prayer.