

# JAMES

## *Pearls for Wise Living*



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## Session 2 – Questions

### James 1:19 - 27 – Wisdom and Pure Religion

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#### A. Review the Context

James moves from the wisdom needed to face trials and temptations to the wisdom needed in the daily practice of the faith. What does the Christian life look like, rightly practiced? What is “pure” religion? The situation of those to whom James wrote (living in a foreign land but isolated by their faith from their Jewish brothers and sisters) may have given them more than the usual opportunities for anger as well as temptations to keep belief a private matter rather than on applying God’s Word to daily life. In addition, many of them were among the first generation of Jews to become Christians: which meant that their previous focus on the Temple and practicing their faith via sacrifice and an exterior observance of the Law needed to shift to the New Covenant emphasis on Jesus Christ, the New Temple, and on a practical application that starts in the heart.

Before you finish reading chapter 1, a word or two on the meaning of “word,” which is an important focus of this section. The impact of the Protestant Reformation has been such that it is hard to think of the word of God as referring to anything other than Scripture. The Catholic understanding, however, is richer and deeper than that. Following Sacred Scripture itself and Sacred Tradition, which helps us receive the Word and understand it properly, the Church understands that “word of God” refers first and foremost to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Word made flesh (John 1:1). In addition, God’s word has come to us through the preaching and teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, both oral and written; through the inspired writings of the Old Testament; and through God’s creative word such as that which gave rise to creation in Genesis 1. God’s word is more than just ink on paper. As the author of Hebrews put it, “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).”

Read on, and you will see that this concept of the living, discerning Word plays a key role in James’ practical advice, which in turn reflects an understanding of the Word as Christ himself.

#### B. Read the Story

Now carefully read James 1:19-27.

*As always, pray before you read.*

### C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of James' message. If you don't understand something, make a note to bring it up in the discussion.

#### The Importance of Receiving the Word (James 1:19-21)

1. The path to spiritual maturity continues along the lines of James' wise advice in verses 19-21. Read these verses carefully and record the things James says to do. What does each thing mean to you?

Things James Says to Do	What They Mean to Me

2. Being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger reflects advice given in other parts of Scripture (see for example Proverbs 29:11, 22 and Sirach 5:11-12).
  - a. What reason does James add for why this is important? Can you explain?
  - b. In what ways have you experienced being quick to hear and slow to speak as antidotes to anger?
3.
  - a. James says to receive the implanted word with "meekness." How is this attitude opposed to the quick speech and thoughtless anger mentioned previously?
  - b. How does that attitude enable us to better receive the implanted word?
  - c. **Think about it:** What is the problem with *not* being meek in response to God's word? What are the

eventual consequences to one's heart and soul? (For example, think of the way Pharaoh received the word of God he heard from Moses in Exodus 7-10.)

### The Importance of *Doing* the Word (James 1:22-25)

4. James admonishes his reader to go beyond simply hearing to *do* the word; to obey. What does he mean by saying that when you are a “hearer” only, you deceive yourself? See also *Catechism* No. 546.
  
5. Explain James’ use of the image of a mirror to illustrate his point.
  
6. How does Jesus’ parable in Matthew 21:28-32 add to your understanding of this teaching?
  
7. “Looking into the law of liberty”<sup>1</sup> is a good way to perform an examination of conscience before receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation. Have you found a helpful way to do this that you can share with the group?

### Pure Religion Defined (James 1:26-27)

8. According to James, not just the mind but the whole person is involved in pure religion. What three criteria for pure religion are given in verses 26-27?
  
9. James will address the importance of the tongue later in his letter. Visiting “orphans and widows in their affliction” is just one example of corporal works of mercy. Read *Catechism* No. 2447. Why does it say these things are pleasing to God?

<sup>1</sup>The “law of liberty” James refers to in 1:25 is God’s law, which has set us free from the law of sin and death. It is the same as the “royal law,” the “law of love” epitomized by the love of God and love of neighbor.

10. Now read *Catechism* No. 788. How does James' teaching help us to complete Christ's ministry?
11. What does it mean to keep "unstained from the world"?
12. The perseverance James called for at the start of chapter 1 is necessary if one is to properly receive the word of God and be a doer of it. What encouragement is offered in Hebrews 12:1-3?

## D. Application

- **Memory verse: James 1:21**

*"Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).*

As you meditate on this verse this week, consider practical ways in which you can "receive with meekness the implanted word." What is one thing you can do today to put what you have read into practice?

- What "pearl" of wisdom spoke to you most in this lesson from James, and how? Write it here and on the back of your *Pearls for Wise Living* card as a reminder to put it into practice this week.

Ask our heavenly Father, "who gives to all men generously and without reproaching" (1:5), to give you the wisdom and steadfastness you need to become a "doer of the word."

*Dear Lord...*

## Session 2 Talk Notes

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### A. God's word, the source of wisdom for living

1. God's Word: not just Scripture alone
  - Goal of "catechesis" (*Catechism* No. 5)
  - Catechism: a systematic and organic presentation of the faith
2. How we come to know God: the need for divine revelation
3. Divine Revelation comes to us in two ways:
  - Sacred Scripture
  - Sacred Tradition
4. The *Catechism's* systematic, organic plan
  - 4 Pillars:
    - Continual maturation
    - 1 Timothy 3:15

### B. Be doers of the word, not hearers only

1. Example of the mirror: act on what you see
2. Our response, the obedience of faith (*pistis, emuna*)
  - *Catechism* No. 142-143

- *Catechism* No. 53

3. Models of obedient faith:

4. Abraham (Genesis 15)

5. Blessed Virgin Mary (Luke 1,2)

6. Others: Noah (Genesis 6); Abraham (Genesis 12); Moses (Exodus 3); David (1 Samuel 16); Amos; Jonah; 2 Kings 4, 5; Hosea 10; Joel 2; John 6; Matthew 14

- The challenge
- Vs. 19: be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger
- The value of Adoration and Confession
- Receive with meekness the implanted Word
- Respond with intellect and will. DO.