

Place: Lurgan Baptist 9:11:2003

Reading: James 1:16-20

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

8. A GOD PLEASING LIFE

Everyone who knew the story of Justin Fashenu was distressed by how his life ended. Britain's first million pound coloured footballer, who had made a decision to become a Christian, seemed to have everything the world longs for looks, talent, fame and money. What a glittering future seemed to stretch before him. In 1980 when he scored Match of the Day's Goal of the season for Norwich he was asked what life did he want in the years to come and he replied, "*more money and more fame.*" Yet in May 1998 his body was found in a lock-up garage in London's east end. He had apparently, hanged himself. This goal-scorers goals in life had let him down. My it is absolutely crucial to have the right goals. You instead of asking what sort of life do I want, we should ask what sort of life does God desire for me ? How does our Creator expect us to live ? I want to talk to you this about "*A God-Pleasing Life.*" Now do you recall that in our previous study in this little book, we were climbing the heights of theology, looking at God's majestic, mysterious purposes before the foundation of the world. But now James introduces us to the plain issues of everyday life, listening, speaking, and getting angry. You see, although there seems to be a sudden change, there is here in fact a valid pattern. *Although there may be much in our lives of unbiblical thinking, there is no such thing in the Bible as unpractical theology.* There may be much in our lives that does not match up to the Bible, but there is nothing in the Bible that is not relevant to our lives. The word "*Wherefore,*" in (1:19) shows us the intimate connection between what has gone before and what now follows. In (1:18) we have *the fact of the new birth*, in (1:19) we have *the consequences of the new birth*. James is simply saying that the new birth is followed by the new life. That is, if we have been born again, then there must be an outward expression of an inward experience. The new life is the outworking of the new birth. Do you recall what Paul says, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.*" (2 Cor 5:17)

There it is, the new birth followed by the new life. Indeed is this now James's great burden ? *That belief and behaviour should go together.* Indeed here he touches on three areas where the new life should be seen to express itself. Every Christian should be "*swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.*" (1:19) And when we do that our lives will be pleasing to God. In other words here are three traits that ought to characterise the truly born again person. He should:

(1) HASTEN TO LISTEN

“ *Be swift to hear,*” or “ *Let every man be quick to hear, a ready listener.*” Two psychiatrists met at their 20th college reunion. One was vibrant, while the other looked withered, and worried. “ *So what’s your secret ?*” the older looking psychiatrist asked, “ *listening to other people’s problems, every day all day long has made an old man of me.*” “ *So,*” replies the young man, “ *who listens.*” My is this not our problem ? One reason there are so many broken relationships is that people stop listening to each other. Communication can break down between husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. Now what is it we are to listen to ? Well, the context makes it clear. You see (1:18) talks about “ *the word of truth.*” My God’s Word is not only the means of our salvation, but the means of our sanctification as well. Do you recall the Saviour’s high priestly prayer ? “ *Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth.*” (Jn 17:17)

Do we come longingly to our Bibles day by day hurrying to hear, because we love the One who speaks and because we know both the sweetness, and the importance of what He says ? You see, the first clue to spiritual growth is a readiness and eagerness to listen to the Word. (Acts 14:22 Eph 4:12-13) Now we should be ready listeners in:

(a) **PUBLIC WORSHIP:**

It sometimes seems to me that in all the fever of new idea’s, and all the technology of Christian communication that we have lost sight of one thing, and that is the unique place that preaching occupies in the economy of God. Paul asks the question, “ *how shall they hear without a preacher ?*” (Rom 10:14) To the church at Corinth he says, “ *it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*”

(1 Cor 1:21) I was reading the other morning in Titus, that God “ *manifested His Word through preaching.*”

(Titus 1:3) My if preaching is the God ordained means of communicating the truth, if this is the kind of store God sets by preaching, of God puts preaching in this position, then how carefully, and seriously we ought to listen. Do you know something ? The average Christian in this country hears between 50 and 100 hours of preaching a year, but I wonder how he hears ? The Lord Jesus said, “ *take heed therefore how ye hear.*” (Lk 8:18) My how do you hear ? How do you listen to the preaching of the Word of God ?

How do you listen to the preacher ? Casually ?

Critically ? Conscientiously ? I love the story of Peter coming to the household of Cornelius and when he arrived do you recall what Cornelius said to him ?

“ *Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*”

(Acts 10:33) That’s how to listen to a message Biblically. Do you ever go out on Sunday morning saying, “ *Well, I didn’t get anything out of that this morning, or perhaps around the dinner table, “ did you him this again ?*” Well, let me ask you, how do you come this place of worship ? How do you listen to the Word of God ? You see, it seems to me that we need to

develop a **Regular Habit**: Cornelius said, “ *we are all here.* ” Are you always here for the preaching of the Word ? Then we need to develop a **Spiritual Attitude**: we need to realise we are in the presence of God, for he said, “ *we are here present before God.* ” What about a **Teachable Mind** ? “ to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” Then we need to have an **Expectant Spirit**: for Cornelius said to Peter, “ *thou hast well done that thou art come.* ” (Acts 10:33) Now that’s how to listen to a message Biblically ! Is that how you listen ?

A young student went to hear George Whitfield preach. It was a rainy day, the congregation was small in number and the young man was disappointed with the preacher. He felt that George Whitefield had been overrated. Looking about hi he saw a drowsy congregation and those people who always went to sleep were enjoying their usual nap. Suddenly Whitefield’s countenance changed until he looked like a thunder cloud. Deliberately he said, “ *if I had come to speak in my one name you might sleep, but I have not come in my own name, no I have come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts,* ” and bringing down his hand and foot so as to make the whole house he cried, “ *I must and will be heard.* ” What an insult to God and His Word when we sleep under it, when we chatter during its proclamation. My how do you listen ? Do you come to hear the Word of God having Samuel’s eager attitude ? “ *Speak for thy servant heareth.* ” (1 Sam 3:10) “ *swift to hear,* ” ready listeners in (a)

(b) IN PRIVATE WORSHIP:

Incidentally do you have a time each day with the Lord ? Are you satisfied with it ? Have you discovered that private prayer is one of the most difficult spiritual exercises ? It seems that Satan aims his heavy guns on the spot where a believer prays ! Perhaps its here that we most often “ *wrestle against principalities* ” (Eph 6:12) Yet some parts of prayer are not difficult. Praise is not difficult, for surely not one of us have difficulty in finding things with which to praise the Lord ? Confession is not difficult, for we all need daily forgiveness. What about supplication ? Making our requests known to God ! Praise, Confession, Requests. But in all these things we do the talking. The really difficult thing is to listen. We call our devotional periods Quite Times, but is it not true that our Quite Times are filled with the noise of our voices from beginning to end ? Would we not all be enriched if we would learn to listen. To pray with the hymn-writer,

**“ *Speak, Lord in the stillness
While I wait on Thee
Hush my heart to listen
In expectancy.* ”**

My are you “ *swift to hear, ?* ” The Saviour said, “ *Take heed what ye hear.* ” (Mk 4:24) Oh, we’re so quick to listen to the gossip, the scandal,

the voice of the talebearer, but how quick are we to listen to the voice of the Lord ? (Rev 2:7)
(1)

(2) HESITATE TO SPEAK

Someone has said, “ *we have two ears and only one tongue, in order that we may hear more and speak less.* ”

**“ *A wise old owl lived in an oak
The more he knew the less he spoke
The less he spoke the more he knew
Does that same thing apply to you ?* ”**

Now James is not exhorting us to take vows of silence.

How could a Christian who has good news to tell everyone he meets take a vow of silence ? Nor is James encouraging us to be unsociable. Rather he is concerned about blurting out words thoughtlessly. Its reported that Disraeli once said about one of his contemporaries, “ *he was intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity.* ” And is that not the problem with all of us ?

Yet the Word of God warns us time and again against using the tongue too rapidly and too readily. My are you concerned about a life that is pleasing to God ? Then listen to what God says, “ *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin but he that refraineth his lips is wise,* ” (Prov 10:19) “ *He that hath knowledge spareth his words.* ” (Prov 17:27 Matt 12:36) “ *Let every man be slow to speak.* ” Is this not a caution against speaking:

(a) **HASTILY:**

Especially in relation to the “ *Word of Truth.* ” You see, there may be a reference here to those in these early churches who were so eager to be teachers that they had no time to be students. (3:1) Like some in our day they loved to hear their own voices. Now I know that we are to witness unto Christ (Acts 1:8) and that we must confess Christ (Rom 10:9) but believers must first become quick to listen before they can become useful in teaching others. I am all for encouraging the young convert to take part, but I need to be careful for their place initially is in the Bible class not the evangelistic platform. Someone has said, “ *hasty births make poor preachers.* ” My the ministry of the Word is a calling from God not a cajoling from men. I’ve often said to young men thinking about this issue, don’t set a foot in full time ministry unless its impossible for you to do anything else, until with Paul you can cry, “ *Woe is me if I preach not the gospel.* ” (1 Cor 9:6) You see, hasty and rash speech is condemned in Scripture. The Bible says, “ *Be not rash with thy mouth,* ” (Eccl 5:2) “ *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words ? There is more hope of a fool than of him.* ” (Prov 29:20) (a)

(b) **BOASTFULLY:**

One of the greatest tragedies in the spiritual realm is to see a growing Christian, and sometimes one who is gifted whose speech is dominated by the capital “**I**.”

I tell you, when some folk get into the pulpit all they talk about is themselves or their family. Do you know the mark of a child ? Self-centredness ! My we have not to boast about what we are: we’re only the children of the king because of His saving grace. (1:18) we have not to boast about what we have: what do you have in the way of gift, or ability, or influence, material possessions or spiritual resources ? Paul says, “ *what hast thou that thou didst not receive ?*” (1 Cor 4:7) and we have not to boast about what we do: Paul says,

“ *For though I preach the gospel I have nothing to glory of,*” (1 Cor 9:16) “ *Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unreachable riches of Christ.*” (Eph 3:8) You see, whatever work we do for the Lord, however costly, however faithful, however effective is still a “ *grace given,*” therefore don’t boast about it. (a) (b)

(c) **CRITICALLY:**

“ *Slow to speak,*” do you see what James is saying here ? He’s saying that the life that pleases God shows itself in our language. *Our tongues are a barometer of whether we are living a life that is pleasing to God or not !* I tell you, the tongue is a dangerous weapon. Some believers use their tongues for *Blasting*. They gossip. Some use it for *Blistering*. They tear down others. Some use it for *Boasting*. Few use it for *Blessing !* Have we not all at times used our tongues and said things that were unkind, unjust, untrue, unfair, and unloving ? A woman after years of malicious tongue-wagging became convicted and went to see her minister, for his advice. He listened and then said, “ *If you want a clear conscience, you must take a nag of goose feathers, go around the neighbourhood and put a feather outside the door of every person you have slandered.*” Away she went, and some time later returned and said, “ *I’ve done what you have said, but I feel no better.*” “ *Ah,*” said the minister, “ *you’ve only done half the job. What you must do now is to go around and pick all the feathers up again.*” A strong wind was blowing that day and when she returned hours later her bag was empty. *Weary and dejected she said, “ Its no good. I can’t find a single feather. It was easy enough to put them down, but I can’t get even one of them back again.”* “ *Precisely,*” said the minister, “ *and in just the same way it was easy to scatter your words of criticism and rumour, but now that they have gone it is impossible to bring them back.*” Have you been scattering words of criticism in recent days ? Over the phone, in person, by innuendo. Do you what God hates ? “ *He that soweth discord among brethren.*” (Prov 6:19) Sowing discord among the saints ! It was J.B. Simpson who once said, “ *I would rather play with forked lightning than speak a reckless word against a servant of Christ.*” (1) (2)

(3) **HOLD ON TO YOUR TEMPER**

“ *Slow to wrath,*” or “ *slow to take offence and get angry,*” now the Bible:

(a) **ENCOURAGES RIGHTFUL ANGER:**

James does not say, “ *never be angry,* ” for there is an anger which is not sin. Paul says, “ *be ye angry and sin not.* ” (Eph 4:26) The psalmist says, “ *Ye that love the Lord hate evil.* ” (Ps 97:10) And although the Lord Jesus was in all points without sin, He was not at all times without anger. (Mk 3:15 Jn 2:13) My there are issues in our society and churches about which we ought to be angry more often. Ought we not to be angry when a gay bishop is ordained as a minister ? Ought we not be angry at the alternative “ *lifestyles,* ” that are being thrust upon our children ? But mark this, there is often a thin line between rightful anger and sinful anger.

Paul says, “ *Be ye angry,* ” but he immediately adds “ *and sin not.* ” You see, if we would be angry and not sin, we must be angry at nothing but sin. Lets be careful lest we excuse bad temper by calling it righteous anger, for while the Bible (a) it:

(b) DISCOURAGES SINFUL ANGER:

Paul includes “ *wrath,* ” as one of the works of the flesh and therefore must be put away. (Gal 5:20 Eph 4:31 Matt 5:22) I think in this context we can say that God’s Word must not be *Preached in anger:* a preacher must never give himself up to the sway of his own passions. Still again, God’s Word must not be *Received in Anger:* for sometimes believers rise up because the Word has rebuked them and instead of humiliation there is irritation. (Acts 2:37 7:54) Listen to James’s word, “ *Slow to wrath,* ” why ? For such sinful anger is:

1. UNSPIRITUAL:

My a blazing, uncontrolled is not the kind of thing one expects to see in a person indwelt by One who is described as being, “ *merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.* ” (Ps 103:8) My bad temper does not speak of the new life, nor of the righteousness of God. Such sinful anger is (1)

(2) UNPRODUCTIVE:

“ *It worketh not,* ” (1:20) The end product of anger is not the righteousness of God. It does not result in the righteousness God loves to see in our lives. A young boy was studying history one night and asked his Dad how World War 2 began. His Dad said, “ *Well, the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbour.* ” His wife jumped and said, “ *No, that’s not right it was when Hitler was invading Europe.* ” The husband scowled at his wife and said, “ *he didn’t ask you, he asked me, would you just butt out.* ” The wife stormed out of the room and just before she slammed the door she said, “ *Well, if you are going to teach him, you had better know the facts yourself.* ” The father turned back to the son to continue the conversation but the boy said, “ *that’s ok Dad, now I know how wars get started.* ” Paul says “ *Be ye angry and sin not let not the sun go down upon your wrath.* ”

Do you see that word “ *wrath,* ” ? Its not static. You see, anger festers, it develops, its spawns

ill-feeling. Do you know what I am talking about ? Have you let the sun go down on your wrath ? Perhaps you have let hundreds of suns go down. Are you holding out in unjustified anger against someone, perhaps a fellow Christian ?

If you are, then one thing is sure, your life is not pleasing to God. For the three marks of the New Life are these. (1) (2) (3) Can you see Peter ? He's in the Garden of Gethsemane ! Do you see him ? He is slow to hear the words of Christ, "*all ye shall be offended because of Me this night,*" (Mk 14:27) he is swift to speak,

" Although all shall be offended yet will not I,"

(Mk 14:29) and he is quick to anger for taking out his sword he nearly killed a man. (Jn 18:10) My let us not follow Peter's example, but heed James's advice. *Thus our lives will be pleasing to God.*