

Place: Lurgan Baptist 16:11:2003

Reading: James 1:16-21

## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

### 9. THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS BIBLE

I heard the story of the lady who lived in the country and a vacuum cleaner salesman came by with a high pressure sales pitch. He said, “*listen lady, I’ve got the greatest product you have ever seen. This vacuum cleaner will eat up everything. In fact, if I don’t control it, it will suck up your carpet.*” Before she could say anything, he said, “*Lady I want to give you a demonstration.*” He immediately went to the fireplace and threw some of the ashes in the middle of the carpet. He also had a bag of stuff which he dumped on the carpet. Then he said, “*I want you to watch it suck every bit of that up.*” Well, she was just standing there looking aghast. Finally, he said to her, “*Lady if this does not suck up every bit of this, I will eat it all with a spoon.*” She looked at him right in the eyes and said, “*Well, Sir, start eating because we ain’t got electricity.*” Now its pretty tough to be in a situation where your product does not work. But that never happens with the Bible, it is always effective. It always does exactly what it says it will do. The Bible is effective and powerful.

Walter Scott, the British novelist and poet, and a great Christian was dying when he said to his secretary,

“*Bring me the book.*” His secretary looked at the thousands of books in his library and said, “*Dr. Scott which book ?*” He said, “*the book, the Bible, the only book for a dying man.*” And I would have to add that the Bible is not just the only book for a dying man, but it’s the only book for a living man, because it’s the Word of life as well as the hope in death. In the USA one survey found that 27% of all Americans own at least five Bibles. Yet a poll in USA Today found that only 11% of Americans read the Bible every day. More than half read it less than once a month or not at all. Even worse, George Barna conducted a survey of “*born again,*” Christians and found that only 18% that is, 2 out of 10 read the Bible every day, and ever worse 23% that is, 1 in 4 professing Christians say they never read the Bible at all.

Now in these verses that we have been looking at the Word of God has figured prominently.

For example in

( 1:18 ) we discovered that the Word of God is the means of our salvation, and then in ( 1:19 ) the Word is the means of our sanctification. Now here again in

( 1:21 ) it’s the Word that James focus’s attention on. You see, James is teaching us simply and succinctly that as God’s people we should Hear the Word: ( 1:19-20 ) Receive the Word ( 1:21 ) and Obey the Word. ( 1:22 ) Now I want to speak to you this .... on “***The Christian and His Bible,***” and I am going to base it on ( 1:21 )

There are three things here I want you to notice.

#### (1) SOMETHING WE NEED TO REMOVE

“ *Wherefore ....*,” ( 1:21 ) Dr. Moffatt renders it like this, “ *Clear away all the foul rank growth and make a soil of modesty,*” for the Word. In other words, if there is going to be a reception of the Word, there must be a preparation for the Word. James is calling to mind here the Parable of the Sower. The Sower sows the seed, he does the planting. But if there is to be fruit from the planting the seed must be received into a honest and good heart. ( Lk 8:15 ) As James sees it this involves two things, weeding and sowing. Now I haven’t got green fingers, but I know this that the ground must be cleared to receive seed, and also if the ground is cleared and then left unsown the weeds return overnight. My .... what is true in relation to the ground is true in relation to our lives. There is the process of weeding out sin and planting in the Word of God. Before we can receive the Word we must remove the sin. Did you notice what James says ? “ *Wherefore lay apart,*” the Greek word ( apothemi ) means, “ *to put off, to strip away.*” It was the word used for “ *stripping off ones clothes.*”

You see, just as we would take off a dirty shirt or soiled garment so we are remove sin in order that we might receive the Word. Do you remember what God said to Moses concerning how Israel were to approach Him on Mount Sinai ? “ *And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes. And be ready against the third day, for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai.*”

( Exod 19:10-11 ) In other words, there was to be preparation before there could be worship. My .... have you prepared yourself for coming to worship this .... ?

Oh you say, “ *I didn’t get much out of it this ....*,” how could you when you’ve come reeking in your sins into God’s presence ? My .... if you come without preparation you go without sustentation, if you come without expectation you go without satisfaction. Before we can *receive the Word* we must *remove the sin*. Well, are the things we must remove in order that we might receive the Word. Look at them:

### **(a) IMPURITIES MUST BE REMOVED:**

“ *All filthiness,*” ( 1:21 ) this denotes all that is impure in God’s sight. The same word is translated “ *vile,*” in

( 2:2 ) It speaks of anything which is dirty. Yet I think we can be a little bit more specific. For James may be linking what he says in ( 1:21 ) with ( 1:19-20 ) Do you see the word “ *wherefore,*” which links them together ?

So when James speaks about filthiness he is speaking about what Matthew Henry called, “ *sins of the tongue.*” James is applying this word “ *filthiness,*” to an unwillingness to listen, the spirit of criticism, and to unrighteous, unjustified anger. Far from passing over these things as being of minor importance, he does not hesitate to describe them as “ *filthiness,*” in God’s eyes.

Have you come to recognise that the slip of your tongue, the flash of your anger, your hot outburst the Bible calls

“ *filthiness,* ?” My .... is this why you never get anything out of the Word ? Do you come into God’s presence with bitterness in your heart against some fellow-believer ? Against the

preacher ? Against the oversight ? Oh, the multitudes of Christians who are running around with a chip on their shoulder. A spirit of bitterness, that they are going to take down to the grave and up to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Do you want God's Word to work in you effectively ? (a)

**(b) INCONSISTENCIES MUST BE REMOVED:**

“ *Superfluity of naughtiness,* ” ( 1:21 ) Do you see that word “ *superfluity,* ” ? It speaks of that which is in abundance, a surplus. It's the same basic word as was used to describe the leftovers when the Lord Jesus broke the fish and bread and fed the 4000. We read, “ *So they did eat and were filled and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.* ” ( Mk 8:8 ) Now that phrase, “ *that was left,* ” is similar to this word

“ *superfluity.* ” Now what did it mean on that day when the 4000 were fed ? You see, when all these people had eaten, the grass must have been littered with crumbs and leftovers, but then at the command of Christ, they went carefully around and removed all traces that they had ever been eating there. Now do you see the application of James's words ? Everything in the Christian's life that shows the presence of the old nature must be got rid off as soon as it appears. You know when we first got saved it did not take us long to realise that there some things in our new life that were carried over from our old life. There were some old habits and ways that clung to us. And James is telling us to get rid of the “ *leftovers,* ” of our past life. These inconsistencies, like lust, and unjustified criticism and uncontrolled temper must be removed. “ *Superfluous,* ” means anything there ought not to be. And as far as sin in the believers life is concerned that means that all of it is superfluous !

But why does sin appear in the Christian ? Why does there have to be this never ending battle ? Isn't the whole question of sin dealt with at conversion ? Isn't the old nature removed there and then ? No ! My .... The old sinful nature remains, and unless constant action is taken the signs of its presence will appear even in the most mature among us. A lady once came to her minister and said, “ *I want you to know that all sin has been completely eradicated from my nature.* ” He carefully replied, “ *Really, then, you must be very proud.* ” Falling headlong into the trap, she said, “ *Oh, yes I am.* ” My .... (a) (b)

**(c) IMPEDIMENTS MUST BE REMOVED:**

Do you see that word “ *filthiness ?* ” Its derived from a Greek word ( *rupos* ) which when used medically means

“ *wax in the ear.* ” You see, when James says “ *lay apart all filthiness,* ” he means anything and everything that would stop us hearing, receiving and understanding the Word of God. Do you know what happens when wax gathers in the ear ? It can cause deafness, and when we permit sin in our lives it makes us deaf to the voice of God. Do you recall what the Saviour said ? “ *Let these sayings sink down into your ears.* ” ( Lk 9:44 ) Do you see the point ? Get rid of anything that becomes, as it were, wax in the ears, everything that prevents you hearing, receiving and understanding, the Word of God.

(a) (b) (c) How can this be done ? By confession ! *It's a wonderful principle to remember that whatever we uncover God covers, and whatever we cover, God uncovers.* “ *He that covereth*

*his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*” ( Prov 28:13 I Jn 1:9 ) (1)

## **(2) SOMETHING WE NEED TO RECEIVE**

“ *And receive with meekness ....*,” the word “ *receive*,” has in it the notion of “ *welcoming, appropriating.*” It was said of the Bereans, “ *they received the Word with all readiness of mind.*” ( Acts 17:11 ) Is that how you come to hear the Word ? With a mind alert.

( 1 Thes 2:13 ) To “ *receive*,” the Word is to make room for it in your heart, to so open your inner self to the influences of God’s Word that its truth is transfused into your heart. Now:

### **(a) WHAT ARE WE TO RECEIVE ?**

“ *Receive .... the Word,*” Under his mother’s guidance, Harry Ironside began to memorise Scripture when he was three. By the age of fourteen he had read the Bible fourteen times “ *once for each year.*” During the rest of his life he read the Bible through at least once a year. A pastor spoke of a Bible conference at which he and Ironside were the two speakers. During the conference the speakers discussed their approach to personal devotions. Each man shared what he had read from the Word that morning. When it was Ironside’s turn he hesitated, then he said, “ *I read the book of Isaiah.*” He was saturated with the Word of God. Are you ? You see, its so easy to be taken up with Christian literature, but not with the Word itself ! Amy Carmichael said, “ *Never let good books take the place of the Bible. Drink from the well, not from the streams that flow from the well.*” John Bunyan said, “ *I was never out of my Bible,*” John Wesley said, “ *I am a man of one Book.*” My .... what’s your attitude to the Word ? Do you have a hunger for it ? Can you say “ *Oh how I love Thy Law it is my meditation all the day.*” ( Ps 119:97 ) (b)

### **(b) HOW ARE WE TO RECEIVE IT ?**

“ *And receive with meekness ....*,” the Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *and in a humble, gentle, modest spirit receive and welcome the Word.*” This word “ *meekness*,” indicates a humble and teachable spirit.

An openness, a willingness to hear whatever God has to say without any preconceived ideas of our own. Do you recall Cornelius ? How enthusiastically he met Peter with the words, “ *Thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things what are commanded thee of God.*” ( Acts 10:33 ) What a thrill for Peter. What a moment for any preacher, when those who sit before him do so with an openness and a readiness to hear “ *all things that are commanded .... of God.*” My .... is this not the spirit in which we ought to approach the Word ? We should say prayerfully each Sunday morning, “ *Lord I am here and I am glad that You have come, and I am ready to hear whatever You have to say to me from the Word. Whatever you have to say .... be it a word of cheer, of chastening, of comfort, of challenge.*”

Is that the spirit in which you come ? Is that how you receive the Word ? Is it not true that

sometimes we come to the Word with the baggage of our own backgrounds influencing us ? We come to the Word wearing the blinkers of our own pet theological school of thought, of doctrine, or tradition ? My .... do we allow the whole of God's Word to speak to us ? Or only those parts which agree with our ideas and convictions ? (a) (b)

### **(c) *WHERE ARE WE TO RECEIVE IT ?***

You see, James speaks of "*the engrafted Word.*" Or "*Receive and welcome the Word which implanted and rooted in your hearts contains the power to save your souls.*" Now that helps us to get the right picture. You see, the seed of God's Word is meant to sink deeply into the soil of your heart and soul so that it can germinate effectively and produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Do you recall what the psalmist said ? "*Thy Word have I hid,*" where ? "*in mine heart.*" ( 119:11 ) He simply meant that he placed the Word of God at the very centre of his life. This Book was the governing and predominant factor in his life. Now its good to have the Bible in *your Hand*, lovely to have the Bible in *your Home*, great to have the Bible in *your Head*, best to have the Bible in *your Heart*. Is this not what James is getting at ? My .... where have you hid your Bible ? In the drawer, the cupboard, the corner of the room to gather dust ? Or is it rooted deep in your heart ? (1) (2)

### **(3) SOMETHING WE NEED TO REMEMBER**

"*Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.*" ( 1:21 ) "*But wait a minute,*" I hear someone say, "*Surely this letter is written to Christians ! Are they not already saved ?*" Does James not speak of them as "*brethren,*" ? ( 1:2 2:1 2:7 ) My .... they were already saved but what we need to remember is that the word salvation covers three tenses.

Past, present and future. There is:

#### **(a) *THE POSSESSION OF SALVATION:***

Paul says, "*By grace are ye saved.*" ( Eph 2:8 ) That speaks of a once for all, unrepeatable, unalterable experience, the thing that happens the moment a person puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are saved from the penalty of sin, hell itself ! My .... have you had that experience ? Are you saved ? Have you put your trust in the Saviour ? (a)

#### **(b) *THE PROGRESS OF SALVATION:***

Do you recall Paul's words ? "*The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us which are saved it is the power of God.*" ( 1 Cor 1:18 ) Now the verb "*saved,*" here is in the present tense. It means "*being saved.*" In this sense, "*being saved,*" is a gradual process, a developing experience, a maturing, refining work which begins at conversion and will continue unto a believers dying day. We are being saved from the power of sin. But don't stop there ! (a) (b)

**(c) THE PROSPECT OF SALVATION:**

The book of Romans states, “ *Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* ” ( Rom 5:9 ) Here is the final, glorious prospect which awaits every believer. We shall be saved from the presence of sin. Now when James speaks of “ *the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls,* ” he is referring to saved in the second sense. He is not referring to the salvation of the soul from damnation but from damage. He’s saying that God’s Word is able to save us from the power of sin in our present life. Its able to save you from that unclean practice, that unjustified criticism, that uncontrolled temper, that unruly tongue ! My .... its God’s Word received meekly and rooted deeply which is used by the Holy Spirit to promote holiness, to stimulate growth and to develop Christ-likeness. No wonder D.L. Moody wrote on the flyleaf of his Bible, “ *This Book will keep me from sin, and sin will keep me from this Book.* ”

“ *The Christian and his Bible,* ” (1) (2) (3) Now where do you stand on this particular issue ? Have you been a Christian for many years, perhaps active in the Lord’s service, yet in your inmost being you know you’re nowhere near the state of maturity that ought to be yours. Is this because God’s Word is not being implanted in your heart ? And is it not being implanted in your heart because you’re not approaching it with openness and willingness ! And are you not doing that because there are so many other things crowding out the Bible. Things that need to be removed, so that the Word of God can be received and your soul made healthy, built up, nourished. ( Acts 20:32 ) My .... I have never met a weakly Christian yet whose difficulties did not include the lack of disciplined, devoted reading and meditation of the Word of God. Is there were your problem lies ? I tell you, it will be a turning point in your Christian experience, if by the grace of God, you begin in a new way to “ *lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your souls.* ” Do you know the lines of that hymn ?

***“ May the Word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through His power.”***