

James 1:9-27 Questions (HH, 4/6/18)

0. For those who committed to C(ontinuously)P(ray)F(or)W(isdome), how did it go?

1. Commentators used to think verse 12 is connected to verse 13ff. Now, however, they look at it as connected to the poverty/prosperity theme of verses 9-11. Furthermore, the Greek word often translated as trial in verses 2-3 is the same word often translated as testing in verse 12. So, we can look at verses 2-3 as linked to verses 9-12. If we do this, the poor/rich piece of verses 9-11 can be seen as examples of two different kinds of trials that test people (Tim Keller points this out in a sermon series on James). Let's focus on poverty and prosperity separately.

a. Poverty: Many, likely most, in James' initial audience (the Jewish diaspora living in Palestine and Syria) would have been poor, even by the standards of the day. What message does James have for the poor and why would he provide this type of message? What is James encouraging the poor to do?

b. By any metric (e.g., the standard of living of our current age; the US standard of living relative to the developing world), **we** are the rich in this comparison. What message does James have for the rich and why would he provide this type of message? What is James encouraging the rich to do?

2. In the Greek, the words for "entice" and "drag away" in verses 14-15 are words used in fishing or hunting (trapping) – they are used to refer to *bait* used to catch and *reel or bring in* fish or game. Let's focus on the fishing metaphor. We are the fish and the tempting thing is the bait; the fish just reacts to the present moment: See the desired object → move toward and consume the desired object. The fish is not aware that the current reaction/decision to follow the desire to consumption has major "lifelong" ("lifeshort") consequences. How is this similar to us and sin? How is this similar to the response to trials that is encouraged in verses 2-4?

3. Exhortations to control the tongue, as in verse 19, and to listen more and speak less are common in Jewish wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs 10:19, 11:12-13, 13:3; 15:1; 17:27-28). James also encourages us to be slow to anger, which is also a common theme in Jewish wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs 16:32a; Ecclesiastes 7:9a). These are considered signs of Christian maturity, which links mundane, concrete behavior to lofty concepts such as spirituality. In the moment, when you are striving to control your tongue or your anger, do you feel mature/spiritual? Thoughts on the mundanity of spirituality in James?

4. Three times within 11 verses, James (1:16, 22, 26) exhorts his readers not to be deceived. The focus of the latter two are about hearing yet not doing. James refutes the idea that belief is sufficient and argues that if belief isn't linked to concrete action it is not true belief (you are

deceiving yourself if you think it is). When your actions (carefulness of speech, slowness to anger, care for the poor) don't match your beliefs, do you reflect on whether it is a belief problem or do you tend to attribute it more to bad habits, laziness, or self-centeredness? Psychologists believe that self-deception in the form of multiple types of bias is the norm, and that we typically aren't aware of it (see handout). James provides us with a concrete deception/bias check – are we actually doing what we believe we should do? Do we need close others to help point out where we might be deceiving ourselves, given how difficult it is to discern in ourselves?

5. Regarding to the other “being deceived” verse, Tim Keller believes that verse 16 links to verse 17, and that verse 17 is the key to responding well to the “trial” of having wealth. That is, viewing wealth as a gift from God, rather than an entitlement or something we own due to our skill or effort, is the key to growing from it, rather than being led astray from it. Thoughts?

6. In verse 22, James uses the nouns “doers” and “hearers” rather than the verbs “do” and “hear”. This is a general, person-based focus, rather than a specific, behavior-based focus. He wants us to become people that characteristically do, not just people that sometimes do. Take a few minutes to think about a situation or area in which you are currently a hearer but not yet a doer. What might move you from hearer to doer?

7. If you had not just read James 1:27, how do you think you would complete the sentence: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: _____”.

Sources: Bauckham, R. (1999). *James; Dictionary of the later NT and developments* (1997); Johnson, L. T. (2004). *Brother of Jesus, friend of God: Studies in the letter of James*; various Tim Keller sermons; McCartney, D. (2009). *James*; Moo, D. (2015). *James*; Samra, J. (2016). *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*; Selvaggio, A. (2008). *The 24/7 Christian: Practical help from the book of James*; *The Bible Project* (2016)