



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 6
James 1:19-27
“Authentic Church Meetings”

Study By
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Greek NT

19 ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχύς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, βραδύς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι, βραδύς εἰς ὀργήν, 20 ὀργὴ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ οὐκ ἐργάζεται. 21 διὸ ἀποθέμενοι πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν καὶ περισσεΐαν κακίας ἐν πραΰτητι δέξασθε τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον τὸν δυνάμενον σῶσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν.

22 Γίνεσθε δὲ ποιηταὶ λόγου καὶ μὴ ἀκροαταὶ μόνον παραλογιζόμενοι ἑαυτοῦς. 23 ὅτι εἴ τις ἀκροατῆς λόγου ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ ποιητῆς, οὗτος ἔοικεν ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ, 24 κατενόησεν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀπελήλυθεν καὶ εὐθέως ἐπελάθετο ὅποῖος ἦν. 25 ὁ δὲ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ παραμείνας, οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος ἀλλὰ ποιητῆς ἔργου, οὗτος μακάριος ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ ἔσται.

26 Εἴ τις δοκεῖ θρησκὸς εἶναι μὴ χαλιναγωγῶν γλῶσσαν αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ ἀπατῶν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ, τούτου μάταιος ἢ θρησκεΐα. 27 θρησκεΐα καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὀρφανοῦς καὶ χήρας ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν, ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου.

La Biblia de las Américas

19 Esto sabéis, mis amados hermanos. Pero que cada uno sea pronto para oír, tardopara hablar, tardo para la ira; 20 pues la ira del hombre no obra la justicia de Dios. 21 Por lo cual, desechando toda inmundicia y todo resto de malicia, recibid con humildad la palabra implantada, que es poderosa para salvar vuestras almas. 22 Sed hacedores de la palabra y no solamente oidores que se engañan a sí mismos. 23 Porque si alguno es oidor de la palabra, y no hacedor, es semejante a un hombre que mira su rostro natural en un espejo; 24 pues después de mirarse a sí mismo e irse, inmediatamente se olvida de qué clase de persona es. 25 Pero el que mira atentamente a la ley perfecta, la ley de la libertad, y permanece en ella, no habiéndose vuelto un oidor olvidadizo sino un hacedor eficaz, éste será bienaventurado en lo que hace. 26 Si alguno se cree religioso, pero no refrena su lengua, sino que engaña a su propio corazón, la religión del tal es vana. 27 La religión pura y sin mácula delante de nuestro Dios y Padre es ésta: visitar a los huérfanos y a las viudas en sus aflicciones, y guardarse sin mancha del mundo.

NRSV

19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. 21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; 24 for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. 25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

NLT

19 My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Your anger can never make things right in God's sight. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.

22 And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. 23 For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law -- the law that sets you free -- and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

26 If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. 27 Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

The Study of the Text:¹

With this next unit of scripture James shifts to another topic, with little connection to his previous discussion on trials and temptation. Now he shifts to an issue that surfaced occasionally among early Christians: an orderly and meaningful assembling of believers together as a religious group. Paul had to deal with a somewhat similar issue at Corinth in First Corinthians fourteen. Given the sometimes chaotic pattern of Christian gatherings in the modern world, the words of James continue to have vital relevancy even into our day.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Background:

Quite a number of background issues emerge from this longer passage of scripture. These need to be treated in order to understand clearly what James is trying to say to his readers.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the hand copying of this passage in Greek during the first thousand years of Christian history, only one place of variation of word surfaces that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* considered sufficiently significant to impact the translation of the passage into other languages. In verse nineteen, a variety of wordings surface among different manuscripts reflecting different understandings of the introductory phrases of the verse.² The different understandings range from tying v. 19a on to vv. 17-18 by inserting ὥστε, **so then**, in place of ἴστε.³ Also a few copyists drop the conjunction δὲ which seems to begin a new point, in favor of the ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί in v. 19a beginning a new point.⁴ In favor of ἴστε as an imperative rather than indicative, i.e., **know this** rather than **you know this**, is the pattern of the vocative form, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, being used with the imperative rather than the indicative in James.⁵ But the reading ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· ἔστω δὲ... is based on the strongest evidence and thus should be the adopted reading of the text.⁶ Difficulties surfaced



¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

²{B} ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· ἔστω δὲ κ² (κ* ἴστω) B C (81 καὶ ἔστω) (436 1067 1175 1243 omit δέ) 945 1739 2344 it^{ar}. ff, s, t vg (syr^{hmg}) cop^{bo} (ac) (arm) geo // ἴστε δὲ ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. ἔστω δὲ P⁷⁴ vid (A^c καὶ ἔστω, A* καὶ ἐστώς) 2464 vg^{mss} cop^{sa}. bomss // ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, ἔστω Ψ 0246^{vid} 322 323 1241 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 (1852 ἔστω δέ) 2138 2298 Byz [K L P^c (P* ἔστω δέ)] syr^(p).^h slav // ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, ἔστω *Lect at beginning of lesson* (l 422 omit μου ἀγαπητοί; l 596 omit μου; l 1365 ἀγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί)

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

³The KJV follows the inferior reading of ὥστε from the influence of the Byzantine text family that generally adopts it.

⁴Note mss. K P Ψ et als.

⁵“The vocative (ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί) in James is generally associated with an imperative (ἀδελφοί appears 15 times: 9 times it follows an imperative; twice it precedes one; once it introduces a clause leading to an imperative; twice it is in a question; and only once, in 3:10, does it come in a declarative sentence)” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91.]

⁶“The imperative ἴστε (know) is strongly supported by both Alexandrian and Western manuscripts. The following NIV translation of the text is similar to most translations: ‘My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.’ (Note that NRSV properly uses inclusive language here: ‘You must understand this, my beloved ...’) But the imperative makes an abrupt change from the preceding verse, so a number of manuscripts connect the imperative ἔστω more closely with v. 18 by dropping the conjunction δὲ and changing ἴστε to the conjunction ὥστε (so that). The KJV is based on these changes: ‘Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear ...’

“It should be noted that although nearly all translations treat the verb ἴστε as an imperative, it may also be translated as an indicative. Johnson (*The Letter of James*, p. 192) takes ἴστε as an indicative, with the implied object “this” referring back to vv. 17–18. His translation reads, ‘You know this, my beloved brothers. Then let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.’ REB similarly reads ‘Of that you may be certain, my dear friends. But everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry.’”

with the unusual Ionic Greek word, which is a different dialectical spelling than the usual one and evidently created confusion among later copyists who were not so familiar with the spelling.⁷

Among the majority of the now existing manuscript copies of this passage, quite a number of variations in wording surface, as are noted in the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.⁸



[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 470.]

⁷οἶδα, i.e. I know, used as pres.: plpf. ἤδεα (v. infr.), I knew, used as impf.:—pf. οἶδα, Aeol. οἶδα Alc.145; 2 sg. οἶδας once in Hom., Od.1.337, cf. h.Merc.456, Thgn.491, Hippon89, Hp.Acut.67, E.Alc.780, Philem.44.3 codd.; οἶσθα elsewh. in Hom., Att., etc.; in Com. also sts. οἶσθας Cratin.105, Alex.15.11, Men.348.5, cf. Herod.2.55; pl., ἴσμεν, Ep., Aeol., and Dor. ἴδμεν, also Ion., Hdt.1.6, al.; ἴστε, ἴσασι [ἴσ- Od.2.211, al., but ἴσ- ib.283, al.]; οἶδαμεν Hdt.2.17, οἶδατε AP12.81 (Mel.), οἶδασι Hdt.2.43, X.Oec.20.14 codd.; dual, οἶδατον Socr.Ep.22.1: imper. ἴσθι, ἴστω, Boeot. ἴττω, late ἰδέτω Phalar.Ep.122 codd.: from 3 pl. ἴσασι (ἴσασιν Epich.53) were formed Dor.1 sg. ἴσᾱμι Epich.254, Pi.P.4.248; 3 sg. ἴσασι IG14.644.4 (Bruttii); 1 pl. ἴσᾱμεν Pi.N.7.14, ἴσᾱμες prob. in Dialex.6.12; Cret.3 pl. subj. ἴθθαντι GDI5024; inf. φισᾱμην Kohler-Ziebarth Stadtrecht von Gorlyn34 No.3.19; part. ἴσας A.D.Adv.175.19, dat. sg. ἴσᾱντι Pi.P.3.29, Cret. pl. ἴθθαντες GDI5024: subj. εἰδῶ (εἰδέω, ἰδέω, Il.14.235, Od.16.236), Ion.3 pl. εἰδέωσι SIG45.21 (Halic., V B.C.); Ep. also εἶδω Od.1.174, al. (cf. Hdn.Gr.2.131), εἶδομεν Il.1.363, εἶδετε Od.9.17: opt. εἰδείην, 1 pl. εἰδείμεν Pl.La.190b, R.582a: inf. εἰδέναί, Ep. ἴδμεναι, ἴδμεν, part. εἰδῶς, εἰδυῖα, Ep. also ἰδυῖα, Elean φειζῶς Schwyzer409:—plpf. ἤδεα Il.14.71, Hdt.2.150, contr. ἤδη S.Ant.18, Ar.Av.511, Pl.Smp.199a, ἤδησθα Od.19.93, Eup.416, etc. (but ἤδειςθα freq. in codd., Ar.Ec.551, E.Cyc.108, Pl.Men.80d, al.), ἤδεε(v) Il.17.402, al., ἤδη 1.70, al. (also later Att., acc. to Aristarch.ap.Choerob. in Theod.2.86), Att. contr. ἤδει(v) E.Ion.1187, Ar.V.558, etc.; Ep.2 and 3 sg. ἠείδης, ἠείδη (v.l. -εις, -ει), Il.22.280, Od.9.206; Att. also 1 sg. ἠείδην D.37.24, 2 sg. ἠείδεις Ar.Th.554, etc.; pl., ἠείδμεν Aeschin.3.82, Arist.APo.87b40, ἠείδμεν Men.14 D. (to be read in S.OT1232), ἠείδετε D.55.9, etc. (ἠείδετε prob. in E.Ba.1345), Ion. ἠδέεατε Hdt.9.58 (συν-), ἠείδισαν LXXGe.42.23, Str.15.3.23, ἠείδισαν Hdt.7.175, Thgn.54, etc.; late Ep. ἠείδην, ἠείδειν, A.R.2.65, 4.1700, also ἠίσμεν, ἠίστε, ἠίσαν, Ar.Fr.149.4 (prob.), S.Fr.340, E.Cyc.231, etc.; Ep.3 pl. ἴσαν Il.18.405, Od.4.772:—fut., in this sense, εἶσομαι Il.1.548, Hp.VM20, Ar.Ach.332, etc.; also εἰδήσω Od.7.327, Hdt.7.234, Isoc.1.44, Aen.Tact.31.5, Arist.Top.108a28, Herod.5.78, Apollon.Perg.Con.1Praef., etc.; inf. εἰδήσμεν Od.6.257.—The aor. and pf. are usu. supplied by γινώσκω; aor. 1 inf. εἰδήσαι is found in Hp.Acut.(Sp.)22, Epid.6.8.25 (ἐξ-), Arist.EN1156b27, Thphr.Char.Prooem.4; imper. εἶδησον PCair.Zen.36.2 (iii B.C.); 3 pl. subj. εἰδήσωσιν Herzog Koische Forschungen No.190 (ii/ī B.C.):—know, have knowledge of, be acquainted with, Hom., etc.: c. acc. rei, ὃς ἤδη τά τ' ἔοντα τά τ' ἔσόμενα πρό τ' ἔοντα Il.1.70; νοήματα, μήδεα οἶδε, Od.2.122, Il.18.363, etc.: less freq. c. acc. pers., τοῦτους μὲν δὴ οἶδα Od.4.551, cf. Pl.R.365e, D.54.34, etc.; πρῶτος ὧν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν the first we know of, Hdt.1.6, etc.; παλαιάτατος ὧν ἀκοῆ ἴσμεν Th.1.4: strengthd. by εὖ or σάφα, εὖ τόδ' ἴσθι know well, be assured of this, E.Med.593; σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγὼ A.Supp.740, etc.: freq. in Hom. with neut. Adj., to express character or disposition, ἄγρια οἶδε has fierceness in his heart, Il.24.41; ἀθεμίστια ἤδη had lawlessness in his heart, Od.9.189; αἴσιμα, ἄρτια ἤδη, 14.433, 19.248; εἰ μοι ἤπια εἰδείη if he were kindly disposed towards me, Il.16.73; φίλα εἰδότες ἀλλήλοισιν Od.3.277; κεχαρισμένα, πεπνυμένα εἰδῶς, 8.584, 24.442: c. gen., perh. also Men.fr.434 K. K.-Th., Dyc.385 ὃς σάφα θυμῷ εἰδείη τεράων Il.12.229; ὃς πάσης εἰδῆ σοφίης 15.412; τόξων ἐν εἰδῶς cunning with the bow, 2.718; αἰχμῆς ἐν εἰ. 15.525; οἰωνῶν σάφα εἰδῶς Od.1.202; ἐν εἰδῶς τεκτοσυνάων 5.250; μάχης ἐν εἰδότε πάσης Il.2.823; κύνε εἰδότε θήρης 10.360; παῖδ' ἔτ' ἔοντ' οὐ πω μάλα εἰδότε θούριδος ἀλκῆς 11.710; εἰδῶς πυγμαχίης 23.665; θεοπροπίων ἐν εἰδῶς 6.438; χάριν εἰδέναί τινί acknowledge a debt to another, thank him, 14.235, Hdt.;3.21, etc.: imper., freq. in protestations, ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς αὐτός be Zeus my witness, Il.10.329; ἴστω νῦν τόδε Γαῖα 15.36, etc.; Boeot. ἴττω Ἡρακλῆς, etc., Ar.Ach.860, etc.: part. εἰδῶς, abs., one who knows, one acquainted with the fact, ἰδυῖη πάντ' ἀγορεύω Il.1.365; μετ' εἰδῶσιν ἀγορεύειν 10.250; μακρηγορεῖν ἐν εἰδῶσιν Th.2.36, cf. 3.53; μαθεῖν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότης Pl.R.337d, etc.; also ἰδυῖησι πραπίδεςσι with knowing mind, Il.1.608, al.

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 483.]

⁸Jakobus 1,19

* ἴστε δε P^{74vid} A 2464 vg^{mss} sa bo^{mss} (ἴστε is replaced by one of these alternatives)

- | – 1838 pc (ex lect.)
- | ωστε P Ψ m sy^h
- | txt κ(*) B C 81. 945. 1739 al lat sy^{hmg} bo ac

* 1 P^c Ψ 0246 m vg^{mss} sy^{p,h} bo^{ms} ac (ἔστω δὲ is replaced by one of these alternatives)

- | και εσ. A(*) 33. 81
- | txt κ B C P* 945. 1739 pc lat sa bo

Jakobus 1,20

* ου κατεργ. C* P 0246. 1739 m (οὐκ ἐργάζεται is replaced by οὐ κατεργάζεται)

- | txt κ A B C³ K Ψ 69. 81 al; Did

Jakobus 1,21

* σοφίας P 1852 (added to ἐν πραῦτητι is σοφίας)

* ημων L 049. 1. 623. 1241. 2464 al (ὁμῶν is replaced with ἡμῶν)

Jakobus 1,22

As is clear from the large number of variations, the original wording underwent numerous changes. But

Internal History. From the limited time and place markers inside the passage it is clear that James centers his discussion of hearing and doing as impacts from gatherings of believers in the various house church groups that met in the cities where this document was read. In modern church life a clear distinction between worship and Bible study meetings exists. But such distinctions did not exist in the early church, especially after the Gentile mission of Paul began changing the nature and content of the Christian gatherings. In the earlier Jewish Christian phase of the first two decades of the thirties and forties, Christians followed the Jewish synagogue model of the Friday evening sabbath gathering. This was not a 'worship service' by Jews in the first century world! Rather, according to Josephus and Philo, it was strictly a 'Bible study' gathering of Jewish males to hear God speak through the reading of the Torah and then to speak to God through prayers. Other activities such as benevolence giving were a part of the meeting as expressions of obedience to the Torah. It did not come to be regarded among Jews as a worship service until well after the middle ages of the Christian era. Worship of God by Jews during this era was done both in the temple at Jerusalem and in the home under the leadership of the male head of the house.

Thus Christian assemblies in homes, especially in the beginning decades, followed this essential Jewish model. Noticable differences, however, were observable. Women were present and participated, singing evidently played a greater role than it did in the synagogue, study of both the Hebrew Bible and the growing collection of Christian teachings, mostly oral but increasingly in written form, played a central role in the meetings. Prayers continued to be a central aspect of these gatherings. Luke provides us with a few

* (του 1501 pc) νομου C² 88. 621. 1067. 1852 al (λόγου is replaced with λόγου τοῦ νόμου)

* † B 614. 630. 1505 al latt (the words μόνον ἀκροαται are reversed)

| txt P74 & A C P Ψ 1739 M

Jakobus 1,23

* P^{74vid} A 33. 81. 945. 1241. 1739 al vg^{ms} sy^p bo (ὄτι is omitted by these manuscripts)

* νομου 88. 621 al; Casspt (λόγου is replaced by νόμου)

* της γνωσεως 614 pc (της γενεσεως is replaced by της γνωσεως)

| - 547 pc sy^p

Jakobus 1,24

* δε 614. 1505 pc vg^{ms} sy^h (γαρ is replaced with δε)

| - 429. 630 pc ff t; Hier

Jakobus 1,25

* ουτος P Ψ M sy^h (οὔτος is inserted in front of οὐκ)

| txt P^{74vid} & A B C 0173. 33. 81. (323). 945. 1241. 1739 pc latt sy^p co

* ακροατης νομου και 33 pc (In front of ποιητης ἔργου is inserted ἀκροάτης νόμου και)

* P⁷⁴ pc (οὔτος is omitted)

Jakobus 1,26

* ει δε τις C P 0173. 33. 69. 945. 1241. 1739 al lat bo (δε is inserted between Εἰ τις)

| οτι 614

* εν υμιν 049 M (^spc) (after εἶναι is inserted ἐν ὑμῖν)

| txt & A B C P Ψ 0173. 33. 81. 323. 614. 1241. 1505. 1739 al latt sy co

* χαλινων B (χαλιναγωγῶν is replaced by χαλινῶν)

* †εαυτου B P Ψ (049). 0173. 614. 1505. 1852 al (αὐτοῦ is replaced by ἑαυτοῦ)

| txt & A C 33. 1739 M

*1 †εαυτου B C 1505. 1852 al (αὐτοῦ is replaced by ἑαυτοῦ)

| - 1611

| txt & A P Ψ 0173. 33. 1739 M

Jakobus 1,27

* γαρ A 610. 621 pc sy^p (either γὰρ or δε is inserted after θρησκεία)

| δε pc ff vg^{mss} sy^h** co; Spec

* &* C² 049 M; Did (τῷ is omitted by these mss)

| txt P74 &^c A B C* P Ψ 33. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al

* επισκεπτεσθε ei υπερασπιζειν αυτους P⁷⁴; Lact (ἐπισκέπτεσθαι is replaced by ἐπισκέπτεσθε)

* ασπιλους εαυτους τηρειτε 614. 1505 pc (sy^h) (ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν is replaced)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 589-90.]

scattered glimpses into what took place in these meetings: cf. Acts 4:23-37; 5:1-12; 6:1-7; 9:17-19; 9:26-28; 9:32; 12:12-17; 13:1-3; 14:22-23; 14:27-28; 15:4-5; 15:5-21; 15:22-29; 15:41; 16:4-5; 16:40; 18:7-11; 18:23; 19:9-10; 20:1-2; 20:6-12; 20:18-38; 21:4-5; 21:8-15; 21:18-25; 28:14. Unfortunately, no detailed pattern of meeting practices or agenda emerges from Luke's references. Clearly the chaos at Corinth in the Christian gatherings (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26-40) prompted Paul's call for order and decency (πάντα δὲ εὐσημημόνως καὶ κατὰ τάξιν γινέσθω). James proposes something a little similar but still distinct from Paul's words.

Given the clearly defined nature of early Christian gatherings from the pages of the New Testament, one can more easily understand why chaos could erupt in these meetings. With the readings of scripture and the reciting of the oral Christian traditions, the opportunity for discussion and even debate over meanings and applications was normative. When everyone insisted on speaking at the same time and was not respectful of the views of others in the meeting, chaos and anger was the outcome of such gatherings. Paul called for εὐσημημόνως and κατὰ τάξιν to characterize these meetings. James says bluntly, "Be quiet and listen!" (ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχύς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, βραδύς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι, βραδύς εἰς ὀργήν) Otherwise the message of the Gospel does not have a chance to make a life changing impact on the listeners.

Literary:

Literary factors also play an important role in understanding this passage.

Genre:

Most of the text follows general paraenesis patterns of thought expression. But in verse nineteen James clearly reaches back into Jewish wisdom tradition to pull out a proverb about listening: ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχύς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, βραδύς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι, βραδύς εἰς ὀργήν.⁹ Although not an exact quotation from any known source it does bear close similarities to many such ancient Jewish wisdom sayings.¹⁰ It comes closer to Sirach 5:11:

Be quick to hear, Γίνου ταχύς ἐν ἀκροάσει σου
but deliberate in answering. καὶ ἐν μακροθυμίᾳ φθέγγου ἀπόκρισιν.

James signals a general principle taken from his Jewish religious heritage that he now applies to the specific situation of listening to the Word in the gatherings of believers. This will have some affinity with his discussion about teachers and the tongue's use in the church in 3:1-12. Often commentators miss the clear signals of what James is doing and thus try to see the discussion in 19-27 as dealing with speech in general. Actually the interpretative landscape is littered extensively with farfetched proposals.¹¹ Clearly this is not what James

⁹“This δὲ and the tripartite proverbial style of the rest of the verse are the key to its form: the introductory address has led to the citation of a proverb, a quotation of a familiar thought from Jewish oral or written parenetic tradition.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91.]

¹⁰“The content of the proverb is simply that one ought to listen carefully and neither speak rashly nor get angry, advice as wise now as then. While the saying is probably from a Palestinian Jewish context, for the Semitism πᾶς ἄνθρωπος (*kol 'ādām*) appears instead of the more Greek πάντες, the concept appears in both Hellenistic and Jewish contexts: Pr. 13:3; Pr. 15:1; Pr. 29:20 (‘Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him’); Ec. 7:9 (‘Be not quick to anger, for anger lies in the bosom of fools’); Sir. 1:22; 4:29 (‘Do not be reckless in your speech ...’); 5:11 (‘Be quick to hear, and be deliberate in answering’); 6:33 (‘If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise’); 6:35; 21:5; Pss. Sol. 16:10; IQS 4:10; 5:25; m. Ab. 2:10; 5:12; Test. Lev. 6; b. B. B. 16a; Dio Chrys. 32 (‘Don’t be quick to anger but slow’); Lucian Dem. 51; Diog. Laert. 8.23; Ovid 1.2.121; Seneca Ira (cf. Mussner, 100).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91-92.]

¹¹“How can one evaluate Adamson’s assertion, 78, that the text means to listen to the teachers who preached the word of 1:18 and that the speaking and wrath refer forward to the slander of chap. 3, or Reicke’s claim,²¹ that the anger refers to political agitation (i.e. Zealotism)? Doubtless one must interpret this verse first within a wisdom context which valued listening and careful speech in all areas of life, as a perusal of the references already cited or even a casual reading of Proverbs or Sirach would prove. On the other hand, in the light of 3:1 and the known problem with channeling charismatic (or self-willed) ministries in the church (1 Cor. 14; 1 Thes. 5:19–22; 1 Tim. 1:3ff.; cf. Cantinat, 100), one cannot resist the feeling that James is letting his concern with communal harmony surface (cf. Ward, 183–189). To push for such a specific reference as political agitation appears to go beyond the thought-world of James and to set it in a foreign context (Introduction, 28–34); to see a reference to 1:18 would appear to violate the structure and the break between 1:18 and 1:19; but to see this passage as introducing the theme to be dealt with in chap. 3 (not simply slander, but also the urge to set oneself up as a teacher, to speak in the church) appears justified by the structure of the book

is attempting to do. A proverb by nature expresses a generalized timeless truth in clear, easily memorizable form, and this is the nature of the proverb here. It may have multiple applications to different specific situations because of the generalized principle expressed. James takes this proverb and applies it specifically to Christian gatherings where the message of the Gospel was presented and discussed among the house church groups in their meetings.

Then in verse twenty-five James utilizes the second beatitude of his writing in order to invoke the blessing of God upon the individual whose listening to the Word led to proper doing of it. This ancient prayer form often captured the heart of an issue in a short succinct expression. Thus it could easily serve to sum up a discussion in climatic manner. This is its role in both James 1:12 and 1:25. James in this second instance pulls together essential points of the preceding discussion in vv. 19-24 and presents the heart of the matter in the beatitude found in v. 25.

The form used here by James is also apocalyptic in nature, via the future verb form ἔσται. But the divine blessing is not limited just to end times as ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ makes clear. The required condition for divine blessing is spelled out in detail by the subject οὗτος alluding to the complex participle phrase ὁ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ παραμείνας, οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος ἀλλὰ ποιητῆς ἔργου.¹² The four key assertions of requirement come together to develop the full picture of divine expectation before blessing is possible.

Context: As is clear from the outline below 1:19-27 does not possess a logical connection to the discussion of trials that precedes it, and only possesses the slightest connection to 2:1-13 that follows. The random selection of paraenesis by the editors of this document reflect not only a pattern very common with ancient paraenesis but also the insertion of another preaching theme heard from James in the Christian community of Jerusalem and considered to be important for the diaspora readers.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
Of James¹³

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY 1-194	1.2-5.20	
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17

(Introduction, 22–28). This also obviates Dibelius’s problem, 111, as to why James should quote such a saying in this context; contra Dibelius, rather than calling the last two sections of this quotation an unwanted part, one should consider them to be his point and remember that the hearing-doing theme first appears in 1:22.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 92.]

¹²ὁ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας the one gazing into the perfect principle of liberty
καὶ and
- παραμείνας, --- ---- remaining
- οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος --- ---- not becoming a forgetful hearer
ἀλλὰ but
- ποιητῆς ἔργου --- ---- a doer of work

¹³Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285.

Statements indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

What this passage does accomplish is to put on the table the issue of orderliness at Christian assemblies in house church meetings. Inside this basic theme are secondary themes such as controlling the tongue (cf. 1:26) presented here in summary form and later expanded in much greater detail (cf. 3:1-12). The theme of holy living (1:27b) is developed in 4:1-10, and care of orphans and widows (1:27a) is indirectly addressed in 2:1-13. But this should not be taken to signal a clearly defined organizational structure, as a few commentators try to do. Such efforts represent yielding to the temptation of putting Pauline glasses on when trying to read James. The Jewish wisdom thought world of James did not function that way. Plus the selection of random themes from James' preaching did not push the editors that direction either.

Structure:

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at certain points.

25 ^{1.19} **Know this,**
my dear brothers.

26 **Let every person be quick to listen,**
slow to speak,
slow to anger;

^{1.20} for

27 **man's anger does not produce what is right before God.**

^{1.21} Therefore
having stripped off all moral filthiness
and
every evil growth,
in humility

28 **receive the implanted Word**
which can save you.

^{1.22} And

29 **become doers of the Word**
and

30 **----- not just listeners**
who thus deceive themselves.

^{1.23} For
if any one listens to the Word
and
does not obey it,

31 **he is like a man**
who glances at his own face
in a mirror;

'tests' are set forth in statement 37 in the sacrificial language of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Two traditional Jewish reflections of genuine piety are set forth: (1) ministry to the helpless ones of society (orphans and widows) and (2) personal holiness.

Exegesis of the Text.

The exegesis of the passage is therefore based on the threefold subdivision of vv. 19-27. This more naturally sets up the flow of ideas as found in the text itself, rather than imposing an artificial structure from outside the text.

1) Listen to the Word correctly, vv. 19-21.

19 ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχύς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, βραδύς εἰς τὸ λαλήσαι, βραδύς εἰς ὀργήν, 20 ὀργὴ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ οὐκ ἐργάζεται. 21 διὸ ἀποθέμενοι πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν καὶ περισσεῖαν κακίας ἐν πραΰτητι δέξασθε τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον τὸν δυνάμενον σῶσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν.

19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. 21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

The first assertion of James, ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, is best understood as introducing the proverb that follows. Thus the Greek semi-colon (;), followed by the UBS and N-A Greek texts, is the correct punctuation mark to express this. The use of the imperative mood form ἴστε serves as an attention grabber to alert his readers that something important is to follow.¹⁴ The translation is better rendered as "Know this!" The vocative case expression ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί adds a personal, pastoral aspect to the admonition. James is not fussing at his readers; rather, he solicits their serious attention for something important. The presence of the conjunction δὲ at the beginning of the proverb has bothered some copyists and some modern commentators, but it does seem natural enough, without resorting to a quotation source explanation for its presence.¹⁵

The logic of these sentences seems clear enough. James begins with a proverb stating a generalized principle of listening over talking. Such ideas were very common in the ancient world.¹⁶ Next he applies this principle to the specific case of hearing the Word by believers. This signals the context of Christian gatherings largely in homes both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora where the oral tradition of the teachings of Jesus would be cited and this discussed, along with the Hebrew scriptures.¹⁷

Given the primary thrust of such meetings to learn how to live the Christian life from the teachings of the Lord and His apostles, that many individuals sought to speak at once and perhaps without due respect

¹⁴Although the same spelling can also be the indicative mood, the evidence strongly favors the imperative mood as an exhortation to alertness. The KJV and a few other translations follow a much later and inferior text reading (Ὦστε...) that links verse 19 to the preceding verses: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

¹⁵"In the next clause one must accept the more difficult reading, ἔστω δέ, with p⁷⁴ & B C against K P Ψ etc., which drop the δέ. This δέ and the tripartite proverbial style of the rest of the verse are the key to its form: the introductory address has led to the citation of a proverb, a quotation of a familiar thought from Jewish oral or written parenetic tradition. The difficult δέ probably fitted in easily enough in the context from which the saying came, but now appears awkward in its new setting." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91.]

¹⁶"The content of the proverb is simply that one ought to listen carefully and neither speak rashly nor get angry, advice as wise now as then. While the saying is probably from a Palestinian Jewish context, for the Semitism πᾶς ἄνθρωπος (*kol 'ādām*) appears instead of the more Greek πάντες, the concept appears in both Hellenistic and Jewish contexts: Pr. 13:3; Pr. 15:1; Pr. 29:20 ('Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him'); Ec. 7:9 ('Be not quick to anger, for anger lies in the bosom of fools'); Sir. 1:22; 4:29 ('Do not be reckless in your speech ...'); 5:11 ('Be quick to hear, and be deliberate in answering'); 6:33 ('If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise'); 6:35; 21:5; Pss. Sol. 16:10; 1QS 4:10; 5:25; m. Ab. 2:10; 5:12; Test. Lev. 6; b. B. B. 16a; Dio Chrys. 32 ('Don't be quick to anger but slow'); Lucian Dem. 51; Diog. Laert. 8.23; Ovid 1.2.121; Seneca Ira (cf. Mussner, 100)." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 91-92.]

¹⁷That his mentioning of τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον (1:21) implies the Christian message of the Gospel becomes clear from subsequent references ποιηταὶ λόγου (v. 22), ἀκροατῆς λόγου (v. 23), νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας (v. 25). Additionally the phrase λόγῳ ἀληθείας (v. 18) sets up the references as Christian Gospel.

for others in the group -- such a scene is easy to understand in the ancient church. Each house church group had at least one πρεσβύτερος giving leadership to the group, but there would not be a "sermon" at these gatherings unless a visiting leader such as Paul were passing through and chose to speak at the meeting. Instead, individual members were free to contribute to the discussion as they felt led by the Spirit of God. These gatherings of groups of Christians were lively and very participatory meetings.¹⁸ For such to work effectively, every member needed to respect the views of others in the group, and give them the opportunity to express themselves.

In a manner consistent with ancient Jewish educational patterns where challenging specific viewpoints was the norm, each view would be closely scrutinized for its accuracy and correctness by others in the group.¹⁹ But without the necessary respect and allowance for each to contribute, the meeting could quickly degenerate into a shouting match and chaos with individuals insisting on just their views being heard by the group. Additionally, as Paul indicates to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:3-7 meaningless rambling on topics with no connection to authoritative words of Jesus or the Hebrew scriptures could become disruptive to the meetings as well. This is not to mention the disruptive nonsense of glossalia taking place in such meetings at Corinth that Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 14.

It was the duty of the synagogue president, ἀρχισυνάγωγος, or plurality of leadership in the Jewish synagogue sometimes called πρεσβύτεροι, to guide the flow of content in the Jewish meetings (cf. Lk. 13:14; Acts 13:15; 14:2; 18:8, 17). The Christian πρεσβύτεροι functioning as ἐπισκοποί and ποιμῆνοι would have had this responsibility in the house church meetings. Thus one of the guidelines for such leaders in Titus 1:9 is "He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to encourage with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it." (ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδασχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου, ἵνα δυνατὸς ᾖ καὶ παρακαλεῖν ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας ἐλέγχειν). In Eph. 4:11-12, the local leaders who are called τοὺς ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους have the responsibility of equipping the members for the work of ministry that builds up the body of Christ and brings the believers together in unity (cf. vv. 12-16).

Thus James in his emphasis on proper reception of the Word of Christ is very much in line with both his Jewish synagogue heritage and the emphasis found elsewhere in the New Testament on orderly Christian meetings that contribute to the spiritual well-being of the believing community. In the Diaspora Christian community perhaps there was a tendency to feel superior to the Gentile members was present due to the long religious heritage of being Jewish and having more exposure to the Hebrew scriptures.

The general proverb places greatest value on listening: ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχύς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, βραδύς εἰς τὸ λαλῆσαι, βραδύς εἰς ὀργήν. The contrast is between being ταχύς, quick, and βραδύς, slow. The point here is the context of interaction with other people at the point of talking. The quickness is in τὸ ἀκοῦσαι, listening. The slowness is in τὸ λαλῆσαι, speaking, and in ὀργήν, wrath. While the essential point of the proverb is general, James has in mind its application to the specific situation of the Christian gatherings. With his added comment on the basis of the proverb (v. 20), we see his real interest for the Christian meetings: avoiding a spiritually destructive anger. When anger comes out of conversations among people it often is generated by lack of respect and little toleration for the viewpoints of others in the group. It does not imply naive acceptance of whatever is said. The ancient Jewish background of James' words make this point dramatically clearly, for every viewpoint both in the synagogue gatherings and in certain parts of the Jerusalem temple gatherings implied vigorous evaluation and challenging of one another's thinking. This was the essential path to discovering the truth of God's revelation in scripture for Jewish people.

What James' had observed over time was that these gatherings when allowed to degenerate into 'one ups-manship' displays of power control and dominance produced an anger that was spiritually unhealthy.²⁰

¹⁸Signaling of variations of this pattern are found in 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 5:19-22; 1 Tim. 1:3-7.

¹⁹The Jewish background is made clear by Luke in examples like Acts 17:2-3, in the synagogue at Thessalonica:

2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you."

That Jewish Christians following the synagogue model for meetings would engage in spirited discussion and debate of the meaning of the words of Jesus as well as the Hebrew scriptures is clear and certain. Also note the somewhat similar pattern at Berea in 17:10-11.

²⁰ The use of ἀνὴρ for generic humanity is typical in James; cf. 1:8, 12; as in v 8 here it comes quickly after ἄνθρωπος, giving

This is his point in saying ὀργὴ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ οὐκ ἐργάζεται, [for man's wrath does not lead to God's righteousness](#). Various understandings of δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ have surfaced over the centuries, usually because the phrase is read through the perspective of Romans and Galatians in Paul's writings.²¹ Very likely ὀργὴ ἀνδρὸς alludes to an outburst of anger spoken at another in one of the meetings. Such inappropriate behavior clearly does not produce a level of godliness demanded by God (δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ). Jesus' words in Matt. 12:36-37 stand in the background of James' expression here:

36 I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

36 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν ὃ λαλήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἀποδώσουσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως· 37 ἐκ γὰρ τῶν λόγων σου δικαιωθήσῃ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων σου καταδικασθήσῃ.

The later expansion on the destructive nature of the tongue in 3:1-12 throws a lot of light on James' meaning here as well.

Against the warning against angry outbursts in Christian meetings, James proposes the correct way for God's Word to get through in these meetings to produce positive spiritual outcome: διὸ ἀποθέμενοι πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν καὶ περισσεῖαν κακίας ἐν πραΰτητι δέξασθε τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον τὸν δυνάμενον σῶσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν. The inferential conjunction διὸ draws out the implication assumed in the preceding proverb that has relevance to the situation of church meetings which James is addressing.

The core admonition of this sentence is δέξασθε τὸν...λόγον, [welcome the Word](#). Believers collectively (cf. 2nd pers plural verb) are to gladly receive God's Word into their lives.²² The use of the Aorist tense verb heightens the urgency of the exhortation. In the church meetings the quoting of the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel already preached to them by missionaries etc. should be received enthusiastically by the members of the group. In the minds of early Christian leaders it was these words which had been saturated with the life-giving breath of God, θεόπνευστος, and thus could correctly shape the contours of the life of believers.²³ The challenge was getting this Word incorporated into the life and living of believers both as a community and as individuals.

In the expansion elements of the sentence James sets up a set of requirements for incorporating the variety to the style; still, Hort, 36, Adamson, 93, and Cantinat, 101, may be right that James is thinking of the anger of an individual person, 'petty passion' rather than human anger in general as opposed to divine anger. That human anger is in fact undesirable and destructive is clearly an ancient Jewish or Hellenistic idea (cf. 1:19; note b. Pes. 66b; m. Ab. 5:11; Test. Dan 4:3; and H. Keinknecht, TDNT V, 384–385, who points to the particular rejection of anger by the Stoics). James may have received it from that background, but it was certainly underlined for him by the teaching of Jesus (e.g. Mt. 5:6, 20; Mt. 6:33)."²⁴ [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 92-93.]

²¹"Several possibilities suggest themselves: (a) God's righteous standard, (b) the righteousness God gives, (c) righteousness before God, or (d) God's eschatological righteousness. It is obvious on this point that one cannot interpret James by Paul (cf. Dibelius, 111; Ziesler, 9–14), but even internally in James one could have two possibilities. Jas. 5:7 refers to the eschatological justice of God for which one is to wait patiently; precisely in the light of this event Paul denies retribution to Christians (Rom. 12:19). In view of his strong eschatology James may have this in mind. But there is also Jas. 3:8–12, where the author condemns cursing one's brother (a theme of conflict carried on into chap. 4). Since 1:19 has been dealing with speech and since the structure of the work points toward chap. 3 (Introduction, 22–28; cf. Adamson, 79–80), it is probably the latter he has in mind, the angry outburst against another Christian. This sense is close to the first meaning above: the human outburst of anger does not produce the type of righteousness which reflects God's standard. It does not meet his demand (cf. G. Schrenk, TDNT II, 200 and 195–196, where he points to this concept in ancient Israel)."²² [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 93.]

²²"The positive command corresponds to the negative one. Rather than speak of 'putting on' certain qualities in contrast to those 'put off' (as in Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), however, James counsels them to ('receive') that which comes to them from another. The verb *dechesthai* ('receive') has a rich range of applications in the NT, including the reception of Jesus (Matt 10:40) and of the apostles (Luke 10:8–10; Gal 4:14); the things of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14); and the grace of God (2 Cor 6:1). Most striking, however, is the use of this verb with respect to 'receiving the word of God/Gospel' (see Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; 2 Cor 11:4; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:13). In the light of James' use of *logos alētheias* in 1:18, there can be little doubt that the 'implanted word' here also refers to the Gospel (see the scholia)."²³ [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 202.]

²³**2 Tim. 3:16-17.** 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

16 πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, πρὸς ἐλεγμὸν, πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν, πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, 17 ἵνα ἄρτιος ᾦ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρτισμένος.

Word into the life of the community. First comes the responsibility of getting undressed: ἀποθέμενοι πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν καὶ περισσεΐαν κακίας, [after having rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness](#).²⁴ The language of undressing, ἀποθέμενοι, provides James with a graphic image of the importance of cleaning up one's life in preparation for reception of the Word. The antecedent action of the Aorist participle stresses that this undressing is necessary before the Word can be properly incorporated into one's life. If believers come to the church meetings with an unrepentant attitude that is unwilling to deal honestly with the spiritual filth in their lives, they cannot receive the Word into their lives in a life changing manner. Thus chaos follows in the arguing and debating at the meetings.

James' depiction of spiritual filth is dramatic: πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν καὶ περισσεΐαν κακίας. First he depicts it as πᾶσαν ῥυπαρίαν, [complete filthiness](#).²⁵ This includes any sinful action and perceives of it as making the person spiritually filthy before God. For a Jew with a religious heritage of spotless ritual purity and cleanliness before God, such an image spoke powerfully of the danger of sinful actions. In the immediate context of the negative warning about the wrongness of ὀργή (v. 20), James clearly includes wrath as one of the staining sins that must be discarded from one's life. The second defining filth to be tossed away like dirty clothes is περισσεΐαν κακίας. From the miss translation of the KJV in 1611, "[superfluity of naughtiness](#)," onward, there has been some tendency to see some sin as okay; it's just the excessive sin that has to go. But this is clearly not what James is saying! Rather, his point that any sinful action is an excess and has no rightful place in the believer's life.²⁶

Second, this Word must be received ἐν πραΰτητι. The idea of meekness or humility here centers on complete submissiveness to God. This is the proper mind-set in which we welcome God's Word into our lives. Later James will remind us that meekness is the product of wisdom and provides the context for our actions of obedience to God: Τίς σοφός καὶ ἐπιστήμων ἐν ὑμῖν; δεῖξάτω ἐκ τῆς καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πραΰτητι σοφίας (3:13). These words echo those of Jesus in Matt. 5:3-5 in the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, if believers come into the church meetings fully committed to obeying God in what ever He says to do, then the Word can truly be heard and received.

James makes a couple of important points about this Word that underscore its importance. First, it is τὸν [ἔμφυτον λόγον](#), [the engrafted Word](#).²⁷ The sense here is of something of high quality inserted later with a

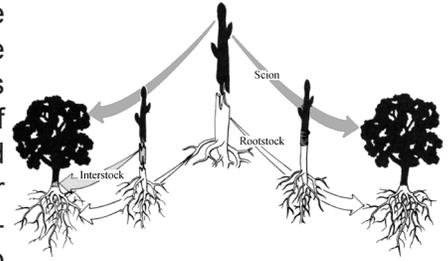
²⁴The turning of the participle into a finite imperative verb form, as some commentators seek to do, reflects a fundamental lack of understanding of the imperatival role of ancient Greek participles, as has been well established by grammarians such as A.T. Robertson et als. Greek participles took on a possible imperatival role only when not connected to a finite verb in a sentence. See the classic illustrations of this in the NT at Rom. 12:9-19 and 1 Peter 2:13, 18, 3:1. When attached as an adverbial modifier to an imperative finite verb, the force of the command in the finite verb would influence the sense of obligation in the participle, but only as a secondary responsibility growing out of the primary obligation expressed in the finite imperative verb. It seems to me that most modern commentators just don't know their Greek very well, nor the basics of language grammar.

²⁵"Instead of a specific enumeration of sins, our passage mentions simply 'filth' (ῥυπαρία) and 'abundance of wickedness' (περισσεΐα κακίας). Also in the case of 'filth' the original metaphor is no longer vivid; the word and its cognates occur elsewhere with a moral sense, but with a very generalized meaning, sometimes with a specific reference (of greediness, like our word 'sordid': Plut., *Adulat.* 60E; Teles, pp. 33, 4 and 37, 5 Hense [2nd edition]), sometimes with a general one: Epict., *Diss.* 2.18.25, used of an 'impression' (φαντασία); Philo, *Deus imm.* 7 and *Mut. nom.* 49 and 124: 'to wash away things that defile' (ἐκνίψασθαι τὰ καταρρυπαίνοντα); Ign., *Eph.* 16.2, of the heretic: 'He who has become defiled like this shall depart into the unquenchable fire' (ὁ τοιοῦτος ῥυπαρὸς γενόμενος εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον χωρήσει) [Trans.]. [Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 113.]

²⁶"περισσεΐαν κακίας, 'excrement wickedness,' 'superfluity of naughtiness' (A.V.), cf. Rom. 5:17 τὴν περισσεΐαν τῆς χάριτος. κακίας is genitive of apposition, and the phrase calls attention to the fact that wickedness is in reality an excrescence on character, not a normal part of it. Cf. Philo, *De somn.* ii, 9, where he uses the figure of pruning off sprouts, καθάπερ γὰρ τοῖς δένδροισιν ἐπιφύονται βλάσται περισσαί κτλ.; *De sacr.* 9 τὰς περιττὰς φύσεις τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ, ὅς αἱ ἄμετροι τῶν παθῶν ἔσπειράν τε καὶ συνηύξησαν ὄρμαι καὶ ὁ κακὸς ψυχῆς γεωργὸς ἐφύτευσεν, ἀφροσύνη, μετὰ σπουδῆς ἀποκείρασθε and the figure of pruning used in Jn. 15:2." [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 171.]

²⁷"ἔμφυτος, ὄν (ἐμφύω 'to implant'; since Pre-Socr., Trag., Hdt.; ins, pap; Wsd 12:10; Ps.-Phoc. 128; Philo; Jos., *Bell.* 1, 88, *Ant.* 16, 232; *Just. Ath.*, R. 63, 19 al.; ABurger, *Les mots de la famille de φύω en grec ancien* 1925) in gener. lit. mostly in the sense 'implanted by natural process, inborn' (Hdt. 9, 94, 3 ἔμφυτον αὐτίκα μαντικὴν εἶχε) in our lit. only in fig. extension of mng., with ref. to subsequent implantation but with connotation of quality (in contrast to someth. that is developed, e.g., through personal effort *Pla.*, *Eryxias* 398c; cp. *Pind.*, N. 3, 40f) implanted λόγος ἔ. *the word of the gospel implanted in you* **Js 1:21** (as someth. implanted

positive impact. The ancient world knew and practiced the grafting of more fruitful buds into other plants of the same species in order to increase the productivity of certain plants such as fruit trees.²⁸ What James describes here is the Word of God being inserted into our lives with the impact of making us fruitful people. Implicit in the grafting process is that the bud must bond with the plant and become one with it. In just such manner merely hearing the Word spoken by others in church meetings is not adequate. We must 'receive' it in the posture of complete submissiveness to the leadership of God over our lives. In this way, the Word begins to impact our life in terms of producing ever growing levels of spiritual fruitfulness in our lives.



Second, James declares that the Word is τὸν δυνάμενον σώσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν. This second modifier of λόγον makes a powerful claim about the potency of the Word. It has the ability to effect spiritual deliverance all the way down to the very core of our existence, τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν. Thus what we need to hear in Christian assemblies is not human words which are severely limited in their potential impact. Instead, it is God's Word alone that possess the power to bring about such profound change in human life. Through the Gospel we come into right relationship with God. By the Gospel we are able to live in obedience to God. In the Gospel we possess hope of eternal fellowship with God.

When so understood one can easily understand James' concern that the Christian gatherings function in ways that maximized the impact of God's Word on the group. Given the structure and meeting patterns of the first century house church groups, human interference with authentic hearing of the divine Word had to be eliminated. Egotism and elitism that led to attempts to control and dominate the gatherings were totally forbidden and must not be allowed.

Although modern church meetings have evolved into patterns different from the first century biblical model, the same fundamental principles still apply to our gatherings in Bible study and worship. Central to every gathering of believers should be a passionate desire to hear God speak through sacred scripture. Discussion and reflection must center around understanding correctly what God seeks to say to us through His Word. Personal opinion, especially with little or no legitimate basis, does not count. What does matter is God having the opportunity to speak to the group clearly and powerfully in every meeting. James lays out clearly how that can happen in these verses.

2) Obey the Word genuinely, vv. 22-25.

22 Γίνεσθε δὲ ποιηταὶ λόγου καὶ μὴ ἀκροαταὶ μόνον παραλογιζόμενοι ἑαυτοῦς. 23 ὅτι εἴ τις ἀκροατὴς λόγου ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ ποιητὴς, οὗτος ἔοικεν ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ, 24 κατενόησεν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀπελήλυθεν καὶ εὐθέως ἐπελάθετο ὅποῖος ἦν. 25 ὁ δὲ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ παραμείνας, οὐκ ἀκροατὴς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος ἀλλὰ ποιητὴς ἔργου, οὗτος μακάριος ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ ἔσται.

22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; 24 for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. 25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act — they will be blessed in their doing.

The second important aspect of an authentic Christian gathering happens after the meeting has concluded. When believers genuinely hear God's Word, the inevitable impact of this is obedience. James is so adamant here that if obedience doesn't follow hearing then true hearing has not taken place.

He makes this point by admonition (v. 22), followed by an analogy (vv. 23-24), and concluded with a beatitude invoking God's blessings on the one whose hearing leads to obedience (v. 25). Taken together they the word is permanently established in the individual and like inborn assets functions in an exceptional manner; s. WKnox, JTS 46, '45, 14f). ἡ ἔ. δωρεὰ τῆς διδασκαλίας αὐτοῦ the implanted gift of his teaching B 9:9. οὕτως ἔ. τῆς δωρεᾶς πνευματικῆς χάριν εἰλήφατε so implanted have you received the benefit of the spiritual gift 1:2 (i.e. God's beneficence is productive, as attested by the illustrious spiritual character of the recipients, vs. 2a; οὗ τό v.l.: whose implanted blessing, the favor of the spiritual gift, you have received; s. Windisch, Hdb. ad loc.).—DELG s.v. φόμα. M-M. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 326.]

²⁸For the history of grafting see Ken Mudge, Jules Janick, Steven Scofield, and Eliezer E. Goldschmidt, “A History of Grafting,” at <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/janick-papers/c09.pdf>.

form a powerful argument for obedience as essential to authentic hearing of the Word.

Admonition, v. 22: Γίνεσθε δὲ ποιηταὶ λόγου καὶ μὴ ἀκροαταὶ μόνον παραλογιζόμενοι ἑαυτοῦς. Probably this admonition is the best known and most often quoted verb in the entire document of James. The admonition is structured to emphasize the responsibility of both hearing and then doing.²⁹ It is false to see this as setting up tension between hearing and doing; the adverb μόνον clearly eliminates such as legitimate understanding.³⁰ The present tense form of the imperative verb, Γίνεσθε, mandates ongoing responsibility, not a random obligation. The predicate nominative nouns ποιηταὶ, **doers**, and ἀκροαταὶ, **hearers**, both play off of λόγου, **Word**. The Gospel is first heard and then obeyed. If this pattern isn't followed, then the individual is παραλογιζόμενοι ἑαυτοῦς, **deceiving himself**. The essential idea of παραλογίζομαι is thinking or reasoning beyond; that is, one's reasoning has moved beyond the reality and thus become delusional.³¹ Note the second person plural forms consistently used here in addressing the groups of believers in gatherings. The participle then functions as a cautionary note to the core admonition so that the readers do not falsely read the admonition.

Doing the Word means simply to obey its instructions.³² In the church meetings the hearing of the Gospel should make clear just how one is to obey it. This is where the discussion among members of the group comes into the picture. Out of presenting ideas back and forth about applications there should emerge clear understanding of how to implement the teachings of the Gospel into one's daily living. For Diaspora Jewish Christians such discussion would have seemed quite natural. In the Friday evening synagogue sabbath service the Torah was read and then discussion centered on possible applications of it to daily living. Out of these discussions, especially as they originated at the temple among recognized scribal authorities such as Gamaliel (cf. Acts 5:34; 22:3), there gradually emerged the oral collection of interpretive opinions by the scribes that was codified in written form in the Talmud some three to four centuries after Christ. James assumes that the early Christian gatherings among Diaspora Jewish Christians will follow the model in seeking appropriate interpretive understanding of the Gospel as taught by Jesus and preached by the apostles.

²⁹“The verb ginomai needs to be translated as ‘become’ (with Mayor, 69) rather than simply as ‘be’ (Ropes, 174; Dibelius, 114), in line with James’ use elsewhere (1:12, 25; 2:4, 10, 11; 3:1) and other NT constructions with the imperative ginesthe (Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 4:16; 7:23; 11:1; 2 Cor 6:14; Gal 4:12; 5:26; Eph 4:32; 5:1, 7, 17) for it is becoming rather than being that is at issue, namely, turning profession into action.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 206.]

³⁰“and not simply hearers: The contrast here is highly illuminating for several reasons. First, the use of the adverb monon (“alone”) alerts us to the exact parallel construction concerning “faith and deeds” in 2:24. Second, the present contrast shows that the basic issue is “living out” profession in practice, with the language of “doer” here exactly matching that of “deed” in 2:24 and of “demonstrating” in 3:13. Third, that which is to be done has nothing to do with the ritual demands of Torah but rather with the “word of truth” by which God has engendered the community and whose “reception with meekness” is equivalent to “faith” (1:3, 6). Finally, the contrast of hearing/doing (or speech/practice) is one of the most widespread in ancient moral instruction. For the sense of akroatēs as a “listener to moral instruction,” see Plato, Rep. 536C, and as a “disciple/learner,” see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1095A. And for the need to translate theory into practice, see Seneca, Moral Epistles 20:1; Plutarch, Stoic Self-Contradictions 1 (Mor. 1033B); Progress in Virtue 14 (Mor. 84B); Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers I,53; IX,37; Philo, Life of Moses 1:6, 19; 2:8, 48; Special Laws 2:14, 53; Preliminary Studies 67; The Sentences of Sextus 177; Did. 2:5; Epictetus, Discourses II, 1, 31; II, 9, 21; III, 22, 9; Julian the Apostate, Or. 7:255A; Dio Chrysostom, Or. 35:2, 3, 11.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 206-07.]

³¹“**παραλογίζομαι** mid. dep.; 1 aor. παρελογισάμην (Isocr., Demosth. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; PsSol 4:11).

1. w. acc. of pers. (Aeschin. et al.; Epict. 2, 20, 7; Dio Chrys. 10 [11], 108; PMagd 29, 5 [III B.C.]; PAmh 35, 12; LXX; Jos., Ant. 11, 275) **deceive, delude Col 2:4**; IMg 3:2. ἐαυτόν deceive oneself **Js 1:22**.

2. w. acc. of thing reckon fraudulently, defraud, perh. **distort** (OGI 665, 15 δαπάνας ... παραλογισ[θει]σας of expenses fraudulently reckoned; Gen 31:41 τὸν μισθόν) τὰς ἐντολὰς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 2 Cl 17:6.—DELG s.v. λέγω. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 768.]

³²“The phrase ‘doers of the word’ is clearly a Semitism, for the phrase in classical Greek would mean a wordsmith or poet (Plato, Phaedo 61A; Ep. Arist. 31). The textual variant, ‘doers of the law’ (*poiētai tou nomou*) is undoubtedly to be attributed to the influence of 4:11 (*poiētēs nomou*), but also to the remarkably similar construction in Rom 2:13: *ou gar hoi akroatai nomou dikaioi para tῇ theō, all’ hoi poiētai nomou dikaiouthēsontai* (‘not the hearers of the law are righteous before God but the doers of the law will be declared righteous’).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 206.]

What needs to be learned by believers in the modern world is the importance of gaining correct understanding of scripture through group exchange of ideas in Christian meetings. The methods of deducing legitimate applications from the scripture text will differ somewhat from the intricate methods of Jewish scribal interpretation in the first century world. But drawing applications from the statements of scripture text is both necessary and at times challenging. In the historical principle of biblical interpretation, a fundamental principle must always be remembered: the closer the cultural gap between the ‘then’ meaning and the ‘now’ application, the easier to make legitimate applications. Thus, when a text is addressing a theme commonly found both in the ancient world and in the modern world, application can be made with greater confidence of accuracy. But the converse principle is also important. If the cultural gap between ‘then’ and ‘now’ is wide, great caution must be exercised in making applications. The classic example is how to apply the principles set forth by Paul in First Corinthians seven for when both a man and woman preach and pray in public assembly. Paul indicates that the woman must have her head covered, but the man must not cover his head in such situations. The Roman Catholic tradition of women having their heads covered while at church completely misses the point of Paul’s instructions. The principle behind both patterns for males and females in the ancient Jewish world was an outward symbol of proper reverence for God. Here is where legitimate application comes into the picture.

Analogy, vv. 23-24: 23 ὅτι εἴ τις ἀκροατῆς λόγου ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ ποιητῆς, οὗτος ἔοικεν ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ, 24 κατενόησεν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀπελήλυθεν καὶ εὐθέως ἐπελάθετο ὅποῖός ἦν. James sets up the reason (ὅτι) for his admonition in vv. 23-24. The scenario envisioned by James is the opposite of his admonition -- a hearer who does not obey -- and such a person is then compared to a man following a normal daily routine. The routine depicted is of a man checking his face in a mirror but not paying attention to what the mirror reflected back to him in terms of the needs to clean up his appearance. The illustration makes the point of the waste of time in checking his face in the mirror if he makes no effort to address problems reflected back to him by the mirror.

James’ point in the illustration is clear: the Word functions like the mirror in reflecting to the individual spiritual problems needing to be addressed in his life. But hearing without obeying is to not pay attention to these problems reflected back to the individual by the Word. Thus the hearing was a waste of time and had no impact on the individual, as God intends His Word to have.

The impact of James’ illustration has been substantial down through the centuries. The language used, some quite unique to the New Testament, grows out of ancient paraenesis and stresses failure to respond properly to principles that can change life.³³ James possesses the special skill of clarifying his point by appealing to dynamics found in everyday life in the ancient world. Clearly the illogic and even the dumbness of what the man does by looking in the mirror highlights greatly the spiritual dumbness of trying to only hear the Word without any commitment to obeying it.

Beatitude, v. 25: ὁ δὲ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ παραμείνας, οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος ἀλλὰ ποιητῆς ἔργου, οὗτος μακάριος ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ ἔσται. James concludes this section by invoking divine blessing on the one whose hearing leads to obeying. It should also be noted that an informal chiasmus is followed by James in his treatment of this material. That is, an AB//b’a’ pattern is developed below the surface level expression with the A and a’ being the positive side of hearing and obeying, while the B and b’ reflect the opposite of hearing without obeying.

The beatitude is developed uniquely with major elements from the traditional Jewish apocalyptic beatitude form used but modified. The prerequisite requirements for divine blessing are set up as a substantial participle phrase employing three stated and one implicit participles: παρακύψας, παραμείνας, γενόμενος, and (γενόμενος). The objects and /or predicate nominatives attached to each participle sets the defining tone of the construction, which can be charted out as follows:

³³“The *euthus* (‘immediately’) further stresses the haste of glance and departure. The verb *epilanthanō* in its aorist form makes a *parechesis* with ‘leaves’ (*apelēlythen/apelatheto*). Although the verb is not used frequently in the NT (Matt 16:5; Mark 8:14; Phil 3:13; Heb 6:10; 13:2, 16), its use in the LXX sometimes bears the sense of moral failure (see Deut 4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:14; Prov 2:17). The theme of memory is a staple in paraenesis. See, e.g., Pseudo-Isocrates, *Demonicus* 9; Lucian of Samosata, *Demonax* 2; Nigrinus 6–7; Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 94:21, 25; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 17:2. In the NT, see above all 2 Tim 1:3, 4, 5, 6; 2:8, and (for forgetting) see 2 Pet 1:9; 3:5, 8. The phrase ‘what he looked like’ is literally ‘what sort he was (*hopoios ēn*).’ The construction is an indirect question; more vividly: ‘what were you like?’ ‘I forget.’” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 208.]

- ὁ παρακύψας
 εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας
 καὶ
 - παραμείνας,
 - οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος
 ἀλλὰ
 - (γενόμενος) ποιητῆς ἔργου,

The Greek article ὁ governs all four particles, thus identify these four actions as originating with a single person. This person ‘gazes’, ‘remains,’ ‘doesn’t become,’ and ‘becomes.’ The second set stand as ‘step parallelism’ meaning that they advance the idea set forth in the first set. Thus hearing is the point of the first set and doing is the point of the second set. What is heard is the νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας, [the perfect principle of liberation](#). This is but another way of defining the Word referenced in vv. 21-22. The Gospel is a liberating spiritual dynamic that sets the believer free from the strangle hold that sin has over his life. Hearing is defined in terms of both παρακύψας and παραμείνας. These gnomic Aorist tense participles stress serious examination and reflection on this Word so that it is incorporated into our minds and our lives. Thus James defines here the serious importance of the church assemblies where the opportunity to closely examine the Word is offered. For such to happen means then that the individual doesn’t turn into someone who can’t remember what the Word said to do. Instead, he becomes one who does what it says to do. Interestingly, a ποιηταὶ λόγου, [doer of the Word](#) (v. 22) now becomes a ποιητῆς ἔργου, [doer of work](#) (v. 25). The absence of the Greek article with both predicate nominatives in the second set both helps link the third and fourth participles back to the article in the first participle, and also emphasizes a qualitative tone to the expression almost impossible to translate clearly into most modern western languages.

For the individual meeting these requirements there comes the divine blessing (μακάριος) both in this life and in the eschatological future (ἔσται). In this life the blessing shapes τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ, [his actions](#). That is, whatever is done in obedience to hearing God’s Word will have God’s blessing saturating it. Ultimately this sets the individual up for a positive final judgment at the end of his life. He will be able to withstand the judgment by fire that Paul alludes to in First Corinthians 3:12-15.

The now implications of this are substantial. When we believers meet for either Bible study or worship, how often is God able to speak to us clearly from the Word? The spiritual leader has a divine mandate to do everything possible to enable this to happen by his / her preaching and teaching. But the believer is ultimately responsible to God for proper hearing and obeying.

3) Note the areas of obedience, vv. 26-27.

26 Εἴ τις δοκεῖ θρησκὸς εἶναι μὴ χαλιναγωγῶν γλῶσσαν αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ ἀπατῶν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ, τούτου μάταιος ἡ θρησκεία. 27 θρησκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὀρφανοὺς καὶ χήρας ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν, ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου.

26 [If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.](#) 27 [Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.](#)

The final section of this pericope in vv. 26-27 touches on three specific areas of application in obeying the Word properly heard. Interestingly, they do not focus on ministry or leadership roles. Instead, three fundamental areas of responsibility are stressed, which come largely out of James’ Jewish heritage. First, is the responsibility to control our speech so that our words are God’s prompted words (v. 26). Second, comes the responsibility of taking care of orphans and widows, the most helpless and vulnerable members of our group (v. 27a). And third, is the obligation to keep ourselves holy in the way we live (v. 27b). These three areas reflect a traditional Jewish perspective on obeying the Word of God. For non-Jews in the Diaspora Christian communities these would have been demanding, but from existing historical records they often were the very qualities that attracted Gentiles to the Jewish religion. Clearly such qualities distinguished the individuals as living a much higher quality life than found among paganism in the ancient world. James saw the opportunity for his Diaspora Jewish Christian readers to bear a powerful witness to their world that Christ was the One who made the real difference in this way of living. The Gospel did not in any way diminish the importance of such qualities from the teachings of Judaism. Instead, it provided the same high standards but with a distinct

difference, since in this Word of God there came a liberation from sin that the Torah could not provide.

First is the issue of controlling the tongue. In the first class conditional Greek sentence of verse 26, James frames the issue quite bluntly. He assumes that individuals τις δοκεῖ θρησκὸς εἶναι. The verb δοκεῖ carries a dual thrust that is not possible to completely translate. The individual both appears to be religious and also thinks himself to be religious. The concept of θρησκὸς stresses the outward impact of something genuine inside the person. Thus a wide variety of English words will be found in translation: religious, pious, obedient, devoted etc.³⁴ But it is not just the assumption of piety that is made by the individual. This assumption comes in the midst of a consistent failure to control his tongue: μὴ χαλιναγωγῶν γλῶσσαν αὐτοῦ which James further defines as ἀπατῶν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ, *deceiving his heart*. In the ancient world the heart of the volitional side of humans that made the decisions, rather than the feeling or emotional side which in that world was the σπλάγχνοις (cf. Phil. 1:8). James thus asserts this individual has made the deceptive choice that he is pious without controlling his language and this decision is a delusion.³⁵

To such a person, the value of their claimed piety, ἡ θρησκεία, is μάταιος, an adjective used in the New Testament to assert the utter worthlessness and reprehensibility of pagan idolatry in the eyes of God.³⁶ The Lord adamantly rejects any claim to devotion to Him that does not bring its speech under full control so that it is appropriate and consistent with God's own character. A much greater exploration of the tongue and speech will re-surface in 3:1-12.

Second, a θρησκεία that is καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ is one that ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὄρφανους καὶ χήρας ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν. James' point is that authentic religion (καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος)³⁷ will

³⁴For a detailed examination of this concept see my lecture first written and given in German, "Frömmigkeit in den urchristlichen Gemeinden," and then later translated into English, "Piety in Primitive Christianity." These are located under *Lectures* in the *Spiritual Recourses* page at cranfordville.com.

³⁵Luke Johnson offers an interesting alternative reading here:

It is possible to make sense of the sentence as presently construed, especially since the theme of self-deception has run through the chapter (1:6–7, 14, 16, 22). We are not surprised to find it here. But what if something else is being said? A way is opened to a new reading by the possibility of reading *apatān* not as "deceiving" but as "giving pleasure to." The noun *apatē* frequently has the sense of a kind of pleasure that leads to vice (see Philo, Decalogue 55), and it is used in that way by Herm. Sim. 6:2, 1; 6:4, 4; 6:5, 1; Herm. Man. 11:12. This is quite possibly the meaning in 2 Pet 2:13 as well. But can the verb, which most often means "deceive" (see T. Naph. 3:1; Josephus, Life 302; Eph 5:6) also mean "give pleasure to?" There is a reading in LXX Sir 14:16 that offers some support for this suggestion: "Give and take and give pleasure to your soul (*apatēson tēn psychēn sou*) because in Hades there is no indulgence (*tryphēn*)." The parallelism of *apatān/tryphē* suggests synonymous meaning. See also Sir 30:23: *apata tēn psychēn sou kai parakalei tēn kardian sou* ("indulge your soul and comfort your heart"). In this verse, the meaning "deceive" is simply impossible. In light of these instances, a number of other Septuagintal passages can be reexamined, such as Jdt 9:3; 12:16; 13:16. If the translation of *apatān* is possible—and it almost appears necessary—then the clause can be translated: "without controlling his tongue and while indulging his heart." The gain would be to eliminate the awkwardness of this phrase in the protasis. Furthermore, it would anticipate the condemnation of those seeking the fulfillment of their *hēdonai* and *epithymiai* in 4:1–3, as well as that of the oppressive rich who have lived in luxury and pleasure and have "fatted the heart" for a day of slaughter (5:5). Finally, this reading would provide a fuller contrast to 1:27, which emphasizes the sharing of possessions with the needy.

[Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 210-11.]

³⁶The term *mataios* denotes vain, empty, worthless (Exod 20:7; LXX Ps 59:13; Prov 21:6; Titus 3:9; 1 Cor 3:20; 15:17). Two specific connotations can be noted: first, in wisdom contexts, *mataios* can mean 'foolish' as opposed to 'wise' (see LXX Pss 5:10; 11:3; Wis 13:1); second, such foolishness is particularly associated with idolatry (Wis 13:1; Esth 4:17; 3 Macc 6:11; Acts 14:15; Rom 1:21; 8:20; Eph 4:17). It is not too much to think, therefore, that James sketches a supposed religion of uncontrolled speech and self-gratification (or deception) as idolatry." [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 211.]

³⁷What gives the definition particular point, however, is the adjectives James uses for 'authentic religion.' The term *katharos* is associated in Judaism with cultic objects and persons in a condition fit to approach God (Gen 7:3; 8:20; Lev 4:12; 7:19; 11:32; 15:13; Num 8:7; Deut 12:15; see Luke 11:41; Rom 14:20; Titus 1:15; Heb 10:22) but can also, as here, be taken in terms of sincere moral behavior (see LXX Ps 50:12; Prov 12:27; Plato, Rep. 496E; T. Ben. 8:2; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Tim 2:22). The adjective *amiantos* has similar connotations, since *miainein* is repeatedly used in the LXX for rendering someone or something ritually impure (see Lev 5:3; 11:24; 18:24; Num 5:3; Deut 21:23) and also has the figurative sense of moral or religious purity in Plato, Laws 777E; Wis 4:2; 8:20; Heb 7:26; 13:4; 1 Pet 1:4." [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 211-12.]

reach out in caring concern for widows and orphans. And this is particularly true when these two vulnerable groups in the ancient world were caught up ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν, *in their afflictions*. Of all groups of people in the ancient world who distinguished themselves by their deep commitment to take care of their own people, the Jews were unique in their commitment to take complete care of orphans and widows. The roots reach back to Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy to do this.³⁸ Both Jesus (Luke 7:11-17) took care of a widow by raising her son back to life, and Paul lines out detailed instructions for the church to take care of widows in First Timothy 5:3-16. Ministry to those in need and vulnerable to abuse has been a distinguishing mark of Christianity since the first century. James stresses the critical importance of such ministry (ἐπισκέπτεσθαι) in times of crises by these individuals. The infinitive ἐπισκέπτεσθαι stresses "take care of" from the literal meaning 'to see after.' It is enormously more than just 'visiting' these individuals.

The third area of expression by authentic religion is in the sphere of personal holiness: ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου. The language to keeping oneself 'unspotted' by the world is the language of living a holy life. James 4:1-10 will amplify this substantially. But living a holy life is critically important, in light of Jesus' use of the OT command Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν, *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*. (Matt. 5:48). Authentic religion must express itself in incorporating the holiness character of God the Father into its pattern of living.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

The cultural gap between 'then' and 'now' is very small in this passage. Thus application is simple and clear. And it centers on what happens when believers come together in church meetings for either worship or Bible study. Central to those gatherings MUST be a passionate desire to hear God speak through His Word. Figuring out how this then applies to daily living should be a group process involving the give and take of members of the group with one another. Such dialogue must occur in the context of respect and regard for the views of others, but each view is, and must be, subjected to close scrutiny by the group to determine its correctness and appropriateness.

Once the hearing of the Word has properly taken place in the meeting, the implementation of that Word into obedience to God must follow. If it doesn't then no genuine hearing of the Word has taken place, and the gathering has been a waste of time. The application of the Word touches on three basic areas of our life: our speech, our ministry to others in need, and our personal holiness in living. These specific areas will be impacted positively when we correctly hear and obey God's Word.

1. Why do you go to church?
2. What comes out of your attending church and Bible study?
3. How well does your professed religion impact your speech? Your ministry to others? Your holiness?

³⁸Orphans and widows are joined because they represent two social classes open to exploitation and θλίψις ("affliction") in Israel, as in Isa 1:10-17; 58:6-7; Zech 7:10; Mark 12:40; Luke 18:2-8 (Jeremias, Parables, 153). Yahweh is known as the special protector of these needy ones (Deut 10:18; Ps 68:5); and a special blessing is given to their human preservers:

Be like a father to orphans,
and instead of a husband to their mother;
you will then be like a son of the Most High,
and he will love you more than does your mother.
(Sir 4:10)

[Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 52-53.]