

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

James 1: 19-21

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We will continue with the first chapter of James, today reading verses 19-21.

We read previously that people sin not just because of Satan's temptations, but because the desires within men are drawn by the external temptations, leading to a union between inner and outer influences. As a result, desires conceived. Where does this conception take place? James did not elaborate. Through today's scripture, we will understand that James is referring to our soul, meaning that the desire stirs up emotions within the soul, bypasses the reasoning and analysis of the mind, and finally influences the will to make decisions—this is the conception. Next, the physical body acts according to the determination of the soul, leading to sin. Ethical teachings typically emphasize what is right and wrong, listing some principles like laws and rules for people to follow to avoid mistakes. However, here, James does not mention the law at all; instead, he emphasizes life.

James tells us that God the Father is the Father of lights, the source of all good things. He gave birth to us through the word of truth, and He supplies us with every good and perfect gift, using His faithfulness to protect us and help our lives grow, allowing us to be like the firstfruits of His creatures, meaning that the virtues of Christ are manifested in us. If we view the Book of James as a book of ethical teachings, its value would be low. This is similar to Martin Luther's evaluation of this book during the Reformation. We cannot blame the leaders of the Reformation too harshly, as their background was in a context where the Catholic Church had been in power for 1,000 years—from the 6th century to the 16th century. During that time, the Bible was closed off, the truth was obscured, and the Pope abused his power, even selling indulgences to raise funds for building churches, attaching a price tag to the free grace of redemption described in the Bible and openly selling it. People were required to do good deeds to earn salvation. At that time, the truth

of salvation in the Bible was completely distorted. Martin Luther restored the truth of justification by faith, which was a tremendous contribution to church history. That happened 500 years ago, when the truth of salvation was distorted, and people did not know how to be saved. Martin Luther emphasized the truth of salvation by faith alone, and that was beyond reproach. Five hundred years later, if we still stop at the foundational and initial truth of justification by faith, it is not sufficient.

The teaching in the Book of James is about how believers, after being saved by grace, should live a life full of virtues in faith. This is not ethical teaching, nor is it about regulating people's lives with laws and rules, but about the manifestation of a spiritual life that has grown to completion and perfection. The emphasis in the Book of James is completely consistent with the teachings in 1 and 2 Peter, which is about the salvation of the soul. It is like 2 Peter 1:4 tells us, to partake in the divine nature in our souls. The teachings of Peter and James are also completely consistent with Paul's teachings on the salvation of Christians.

In 2 Corinthians 1:10, Paul tells us: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us." Paul divides a person's salvation into three stages. The first stage happened in the past: He delivered us from so great a death, referring to the salvation of the spirit. When our spirit is reborn, we are freed from eternal perdition, which is the great death. For believers, this has already happened. The second step is currently ongoing: He does deliver us, referring to the salvation of the soul, which is the process of sanctification experienced by every believer, allowing us to partake in the divine nature. The third stage will happen in the future: He will still deliver us, referring to when Christ returns, and our bodies will be redeemed. Paul's explanation is more complete, while Peter and James focus on the salvation of the soul, which is the most important lesson for a saved believer living in this world—the salvation of our souls.

Today's scripture, at first glance, may seem like ethical teaching—everyone understands it, yet everyone fails to practice it. However, this is not the true intention of the Book of James. We should delve deeper to understand James' true teachings and practice them in our lives to gain practical experience.

Verse 19: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;"

James also knows that these are common sayings, so he says, "This you know, my beloved brethren." If everyone already knows, why say it again? Because although everyone knows, they are not able to do it. Most people remain on the level of knowledge, treating the following words as principles or lessons, which makes it unsurprising that they cannot do it. In the previous verse, James tells us that it is God who brought us forth by the word of truth; this is a matter of life, and therefore, we must experience it in life. What should we experience? James tells us, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

First, this is something that everyone must personally experience; it is a necessary experience in life's growth. Others cannot help you; you must take responsibility yourself. "Be swift to hear": Hearing, is involuntary; when others speak, you naturally hear them without special effort. Every matter will have different people saying different things, so you need to be swift to listen, not to listen selectively, but to listen comprehensively, so that you can get a complete picture of the matter. Besides people's words, there will also be the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, which you must also learn to listen to. Often, you need to be quiet to hear it. We need to be swift to hear; only after understanding can we respond.

"Slow to speak": Speaking, is usually our first response. James asks us to be slow to speak, not to mean that we should cultivate a leisurely manner of speaking, but rather how we should respond. Generally speaking, the flesh's response is quick and reflexive. Therefore, when you encounter a matter, do not let the flesh react first; do not respond immediately.

How should you respond? When you hear something, listen comprehensively, then use your mind to understand the situation. Due to personal likes or dislikes, the will forms an initial way of responding, and at this point, you should refrain from responding because the matter has only been processed by the soul. It still needs to be processed by the spirit. This means bringing the matter before the Holy Spirit

in prayer, asking for the Spirit's guidance and instructions before finally responding. This is what it means to be slow to speak.

Generally speaking, if a matter does not have much to do with oneself, it is easier to be slow to speak, allowing the matter to be processed by the spirit before responding. If the matter deeply concerns oneself, especially when one is wronged, it is easy to become angry and want to defend oneself immediately or even retaliate. James reminds us that, especially in such situations, we should be slow to wrath.

Verse 20: "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Human anger stems from the flesh, and naturally, the flesh cannot produce the righteousness of God. "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" is an excellent statement and a great reminder. We should all write these words in calligraphy, frame them, and hang them in the most prominent place in our homes. In our daily lives, between husbands and wives, parents and children, or siblings, it is easy for small matters to lead to conflicts and provoke anger. At such times, it is crucial to remember not to make any decisions, not to speak, and not to act; because anger cannot produce the righteousness of God. Decisions made in anger are merely expressions of fleshly emotions, not only failing to achieve God's righteousness but often resulting in overreactions that lead to regret. Especially in the relationship between parents and children, parents must remember not to discipline their children in their anger. When children provoke your anger, it is best to leave the scene, calm down, and then consider how to handle the situation.

"The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" is a profound truth regarding sudden bursts of anger. However, even in non-emergency situations, human anger still cannot produce God's righteousness. For instance, as society's morality continues to decline, behaviors that contradict Christian values are not only tolerated but even endorsed. Christians often get angry over these issues, sometimes labeling it as righteous indignation, claiming it is anger for God. Though it is called righteous anger, it is still anger. Any actions taken out of anger, whether demonstrations or through the legal and administrative systems, cannot produce

God's righteousness. Only actions born out of life can produce God's righteousness, meaning leading people into the light of life, allowing them to be enlightened, see their errors, and be willing to repent, resulting in life transformation—this can produce God's righteousness.

When Jesus Christ was fulfilling His ministry on earth, He always dealt with human weaknesses and failures based on the principle of life. Take Peter's three denials of the Lord as an example—this was the greatest failure in Peter's life. Jesus had already told Peter, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times tonight." But Peter did not accept Jesus' warning and even declared that he would never deny the Lord, even if it meant dying. Jesus did not rebuke Peter's arrogance and ignorance in anger; instead, He said to Peter, as recorded in Luke 22:31-32, "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.'"

Jesus' words were meant to prepare Peter for after he denied the Lord three times, so that he could remember what Jesus had said and be restored. Here we see that Jesus allowed Peter to fail, so that in his failure, Peter could be enlightened by God, recognize himself, and learn not to trust in his own strength. Through his failure, Peter received enlightenment, repented, and continued to move forward. His life growth accomplished God's righteousness. After James tells us that human anger does not produce God's righteousness, he then explains how to achieve God's righteousness.

Verse 21: "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

The first step involves discarding all filthiness and excess of wickedness. If we truly recognize ourselves, we will see that our soul contains much filthiness and many forms of wickedness. These can be considered as encompassing all filthiness and overflowing wickedness, which are obstacles in our souls that prevent us from

accepting God's word. We must first discard these corrupted thoughts and intentions.

The second step is to receive the implanted word of God with meekness. James likens God's word to a plant, which perfectly aligns with the parable of the sower told by Jesus in Matthew 13:3-8. In the parable of the sower, God's word is likened to a seed of life that is generously and indiscriminately scattered on four types of soil, which represent the hearts of men.

There are four different conditions of the human heart: some are like the sideways, some are like rocky ground, some are like among thorns, and some are like good soil. When the human heart is full of filthiness and wickedness, the seed of life scattered on such soil naturally cannot grow or bear fruit. Among the four types of soil, only the good soil allows the seed of life to bear fruit—thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

When a person's heart is like good soil, it is akin to receiving the implanted word with meekness, which enables the life to grow and bear fruit. For every believer, the word of life has already been implanted; if we want to achieve God's righteousness in our lives and produce the fruit of life, we must receive all the provisions in our circumstances with meekness. This includes the supply of grace as well as various trials. These trials help us to lay aside all filthiness and excess of wickedness, removing everything in our soul that hinders the growth of life. Thus, the seed of life can take root, sprout, grow, and eventually yield a harvest of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

James then says, "the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." The Chinese Union Version translates this as "souls," but the Greek word here is 'psuchē', which is better translated as "soul." This means that the word of life is meant to save our soul. Here we see that James' burden is completely in line with Peter's; both speak of the salvation of our soul. However, Peter emphasizes the sanctification of the soul, focusing on inner holiness, while James emphasizes the virtues lived out in one's life, which serve as a testimony in outward living.

Inner sanctification and outward virtue complement each other and operate from the inside out. James himself was a very devout person who knew that only inner growth in life can bring forth the manifestation of virtues in outward living. Therefore, he was a person who often knelt in prayer. Through praying about everything, one can be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry; one can receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You not only brought us forth by the word of truth but also remind us to receive the implanted word with meekness. Help our hearts to be good soil. Through the life-giving supply of Your word, may our souls be saved, and may we remove all filthiness and wickedness. Cleanse our souls so that we may live a life full of virtue. May our daily Bible reading help cleanse our souls. Bless my life today. In the holy name of Jesus Christ, we pray.