

JAMES 7 – Wisdom about Salvation
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We are continuing our Bible study on the book of James. The theme of our study is Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today we are finishing up the first chapter of James with a message called Wisdom about Salvation. Our text is James 1:21-27. Let's start with verse 21 which says:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and humbly accept the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

To lay aside meant to cast off and put away. Cast off and put away all filthiness – that means to be dirty or soiled. The imagery here is that of taking off dirty clothing.

Cast off and put away all overflow of wickedness –
 KJV says - *Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness...*
 That means superabundant or excessive evil, badness, or wickedness.

This does not mean that getting rid of evil will save you in the sense of being born again. You don't get saved by stopping being bad. James is not talking about getting saved or born again here. He was writing to people who were already believers. Remember James 1:18 says:

God chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.

So, James was writing to believers who had been saved by believing the word of truth about Jesus. Yet he tells people who are already saved that they need saving. And wherever you are in your journey with Christ, you still need saving!

This does not mean we need to get born again over and over. You see - our spirits are saved in an instant when we are born again by placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Our souls are being saved as we are conformed to the image of Christ. In order for your soul to be saved – your spirit must be saved first! But then our souls need saving! Salvation begins in our spirits and works its way out into our lives. That's why Philippians 2:12-13 says

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

This is not saying to work FOR salvation – Salvation is a work of God for you and in you – but you must work it out into your life. Salvation starts in the heart, but it does not stop there. To understand this, we need to understand that we are made up of spirit, soul and body.

Our body is the physical part of us that we see of each other.
 The soul is composed of the mind, will and emotions.
 The spirit is the innermost part of us where the Holy Spirit lives.
 We see this all that way back at the creation of man in Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

God formed the physical body first – then He breathed life into the man. The Hebrew word used for breath also means spirit. God breathed spirit into man's body and man became a soul.

When we are born again, the instantaneous changes are all spiritual changes. But you still have the same body and the same soul. Our spirit is saved, but not our soul. It is in the process of being saved.

Many Christians have a major misunderstanding about what happens when they get saved – when they choose to follow Christ. Some of this misunderstanding comes from misinterpreting verses like 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

People read this and think when I become a Christian everything instantly changes. Not true! Some very marvelous and wonderful things do happen when you get saved. You have a new heart and a new destiny. But many things about you are still the same. Your soul still needs saving!

That makes some people wonder if they ever really got saved! What they've not realized is this: getting saved is not the end – it's the beginning of a new life. Just as physical birth is the beginning of a life characterized by growth, so being born again is just the beginning of a lifetime of growth and change as we are transformed into the image of Christ.

You see – Salvation is past, present and future

- We have been saved – past tense
- We are being saved – present tense
- We will be saved – future tense

I'm not saying you get born again over and over – but I am saying that salvation is more than getting born again. Where do I get this? From the Bible!

2 Corinthians 1:10 says:

God rescued and saved us from a perilous death, and He will still rescue and save us; and on Him we have set our hope that He will save us again.

This passage shows us salvation on 3 levels – past, present and future.

- 1) Past Salvation – justification – freedom from the penalty of sin
- 2) Present Salvation – sanctification – freedom from the power of sin
- 3) Future Salvation – glorification – freedom from the presence of sin

Another way to say it is: We have been saved - We are being saved - We shall be saved. If you're not sure about this – let me read you several Scriptures that prove it. Philippians 1:6 says:

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you (past) will carry it on to completion (present) until the day of Christ Jesus (future).

Romans 5:1-2 says:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith (PAST), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (PRESENT). And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (FUTURE).

Hebrews 10:14 says:

For by one offering (Past) He has perfected forever (Future) those who are being sanctified (Present).

We were saved the very moment that we committed our lives to Jesus Christ.

We were saved from Hell and saved from the wrath of God.

But there are still some things in us that need to be saved!

We are being saved right now as we are being changed into the image of Jesus Christ. And one day - in the resurrection - our salvation will be complete.

We are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

So, God's salvation impacts the past, the present and the future. Salvation also includes spirit, soul and body. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 says:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

God wants to save us – spirit, soul and body! Our souls are the place where we think, feel and decide. And we still have some thoughts that are sinful. We have emotions that can get out of control. When our will is weak - we give in to things like selfishness or addiction.

And all 3 of these soulish areas need saving.

Our minds need to be renewed by the word of God.

Our wills need to be submitted to the will of God.

Our emotions need to be led by the Spirit of God.

Some of us are saved spiritually, but not mentally or emotionally.

If you are going to live like you're saved, you must first think saved thoughts.

You know what I mean? You can be saved and think lost thoughts! You need your mind saved. Some of us need our attitudes saved or our perspectives saved. That's how we can be a disciple, but still have some weak areas that need changing. That change comes by renewing our minds with the word of God.

Ephesians 4:23 says: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*

To renew our minds, we must recognize thoughts that are not from God. Then we must resist those thoughts and replace them with the truth of God's word. You renew your mind by choosing to believe God's word over Satan's words or your feelings or your circumstances. Satan wants you to doubt your beliefs and believe your doubts! Satan wants you to question God's answers!

Satan loves for us to be soulish or carnal rather than spiritual. He wants us to act on our own thoughts or feelings because he knows they change all the time as our circumstances change. But God's Word never changes! So, if we base our lives on God's word, we will be consistent and we won't be tossed around by every wind of doctrine. We will be spirit-led, not led by our souls. Hebrews 4:12 says:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God's word is the only thing that can divide soul and spirit. We should be led by the spirit, but sometimes our spirit gets so intertwined with soulish thinking that God has to come in with His Word and divide the soul and spirit. God's word shows us what is of God and what is of us or of Satan.

As long as we are dominated by the soul rather than the spirit, we will be easily overcome. As long as we are led by our wisdom rather than God's wisdom, we will be easily deceived. As long as we are moved by our emotion rather than by the Spirit of God, we will find it difficult to stand in tough times. As long as we go our way rather than God's way, we will go the wrong way.

God's answer is His Word. It will divide soul from spirit so we can live in the freedom of His Spirit. True change comes through the Word of God. Romans 12:2 says:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Satan wants to conform us through his words.

God wants to transform us through His Word.

We must understand that the soul is a battlefield. Romans 7:22-25 says:
I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. (SPIRIT) But I see another law in my members, (BODY) warring against the law of my mind, (SOUL) and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (BODY)

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

The war between the spirit and the flesh takes place in our souls. That's why our souls need saving. Our spirits are saved by the blood of Jesus. Our souls are saved by the word of God!

Our spirits are saved because Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Our souls are saved when we take up our cross and follow Him.

Our spirits are saved because Jesus laid down His life for us. Our souls are saved when we lay down our lives for Him.

Our spirits are saved on the basis of faith in Christ. Our souls are saved on the basis of following Christ.

God has saved us, God is saving us and God will save us! He will never give up on us and He will finish what He started in us! And how does He do it? Through the engrafted Word – the word that's planted in you.

Vines Biblical Dictionary says it means that the Word roots itself like a seed in the heart. And that takes more than just hearing the Word. James 1:22-25 says:

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, and so deceive yourselves. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But if you look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continue to do this, not forgetting what you heard, but doing it — you will be blessed in what you do.

It's not enough to hear or know God's Word, we must do it. God gave the 10 Commandments, not the 10 Suggestions.

Billions are spent on medicine each year, but statistics show that "more than half of all patients fail to follow their physician's instructions." Isn't that ironic? We go to the doctor, pay him money, and then go out and ignore what he told us to do.

What occurs in the doctor's office also occurs in the Church. God's prescription for well-being is outlined in scripture, but many choose to ignore the Great Physician's orders. And we wonder why we have problems and our lives don't work properly.

Obedience requires knowing and doing God's will. Another word for this is discipleship. Jesus said that disciples abide in the word – continue in the word.

They don't just read the word - they also DO the word. James 1:22 says:

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

The Bible is to be read – but not just read – it is to be obeyed. Mature Christians read the word, hear the word, pray the word, do the word, speak the word and defeat the enemy with the Word!

The enemy wants to deceive us, but many times we blame the devil for things that are our own fault. Deception is caused by not knowing God's Word. Self-deception is caused by not doing the word.

We deceive ourselves anytime we know what the Bible says – but we excuse ourselves from obeying it. We say things like: Yes, I know the Bible says we should not have sex outside of marriage, but God knows I have needs. Yes, I know the Bible says we should tithe, but God knows I have bills. Yes, I know the Bible says we should use our gifts and talents in church, but God knows I'm busy or burned out. And the list goes on and on! And I want to say, "Really? You really think God is going to give you a pass on obedience?" If you think so, you are deceiving yourself!

James says that hearing the word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in the mirror and then forgetting what you look like. You see God's word shows us who we should be – like Christ! It also shows us who we really are at any given time. So, when we read the word, we see ourselves in the light of the word. And the word promises that our obedience to the word will result in freedom and blessings in our lives! So, James gives us some ways to be doers of the Word in verses 26-27.

If you claim to be religious and yet do not control your tongue, you deceive yourself and your religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep yourself from being polluted by the world.

I've heard people say things like Christ did not come to start a religion or Christianity is about relationship not religion. I get it, but in these 2 verses we see the word religion used 3 times. The word translated religious here means God-fearing, devout and demonstrative in worship. James is saying you can call yourself religious all day long. You can jump and shout at church. You can think you are a devout Christian. But if you don't do these 3 things – you are self-deceived and your religion is useless!

Religion that God considers pure includes controlling your tongue, caring for people in need, and keeping yourself from being polluted by the world. I'm not going to speak on controlling your tongue today because James gets deeper into this later in his letter.

I do want to close by saying that pure religion takes care of people in need and keeps oneself from being polluted by the world. Both of these take effort.

James specifically mentions helping widows and orphans. You have the opportunity to do that by giving to our missions fund. One of the missions we support is BESTWA in Liberia who feed 1200 children a day. This is one way for you to obey this command.

Also – James says to keep yourself from being polluted by the world. The word polluted means to be contaminated. Spiritually – you keep yourself from being corrupted by controlling what you take into your mind and life.

This requires us to not watch some things on TV.

To not listen to some music or people or social media!

Do not participate in worldly things that will contaminate you.

By hearing and doing the word, we are saved on 3 levels – past, present and future – spirit, soul and body.

So, when Satan brings up a past sin - you tell him God already saved you from your past.

When Satan brings up something you are currently struggling with – you tell him God is saving you from that!

When Satan tries to make you fearful of your future by saying, “You’ll never get free,” – you say, “God has saved me, God is saving me and God WILL save me!”

Oh, I’ve got a ways to go, but thank God I’m not what I once was! You see God started something in me – and my Bible says that what God starts God will finish! God is the author and the finisher of my salvation!

He will never leave me, forsake me, or give up on me!

My God is able to save me to the uttermost!

He saves me past, present and future!

He saves me spirit, soul and body!

He saves me in all times, all places and all circumstances.

I’m doing what Peter said to do in 1 Peter 1:8-9

Rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

God has saved me, God is saving me and God will save me!

Can you thank God for saving you to the uttermost this morning?

Can you thank Him that He HAS saved you?

Can you thank Him that He IS saving you?

Can you thank Him that He WILL save you?