

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 18, James 1:16-21

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 18, James 1:16-21.

We're ready to move on now to the second half of James chapter 1, and this, of course, is verses 16 through 27.

Over it, we can give the title, Living According to the Reality and Resources of the Word with Emphasis Upon Doing and Hearing the Word. And here again we have four subunits that correspond to the four paragraphs even as we had four subunits corresponding to the four paragraphs in verses 2 through 15. It begins here with the recognition of the word which emphasizes the character of the word in 116 through 18.

And here he begins with a general exhortation: Do not be deceived, again my beloved brethren. The word for deceived here is *plenaō*. Then he goes ahead and gives the specifics of this deception, which involves really an implied contrast between what they are not to believe, this would involve deception, and what they are to believe.

They are not to be deceived into thinking that God is a source of temptation. Of course that's what he has emphasized back in verse 13. So, this reference to do not be deceived actually goes back to, as I say, this misunderstanding that temptation begins with, has to do with God, that's a preceding.

But also, what they are not to believe in terms of what follows, do not think that there is any variation in God. But what they are to believe, by way of contrast verses 17 and 18, both with regard in general to God towards us and then more particularly in terms of the word that God has given to us. In general, the gifts of God, he said, every good endowment and every perfect gift, notice incidentally the scope here, every, this is inclusive scope, allowing for no exceptions, every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights.

And here he mentions, he talks about the character of God as being invariable and unchanging. And as he says here, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change, and the Father of Lights, of course, considering light is good. And then, more particularly, not only the giving God and the good God, but more particularly the God who gives in his goodness the word.

One specific gift from God who gives birth by the word of truth. Now, we note the introduction here of the theme of deception, which will be a major theme and a uniting theme in verses 16 through 27. The exhortation is, do not be deceived.

It really assumes deception. The form of the prohibition here suggests that they should stop being deceived, that there is a deception that is already in place or is at least potentially at work within them. This deception is not simply an intellectual mistake.

It is a serious error, which is at the heart of sin itself. As a matter of fact, James will use this word, *plenaō*, to deceive once more at the very end of his epistle in verse 20. Well, actually, in verse 19, my brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, *plenaō*, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins, so that this deception, this *plenaō* is seen as sin.

This deception lies behind the inability to deal adequately with temptation. In fact, therefore, it lies behind all sin this deception does. Now, this problem of deception is addressed by revelation, which James himself provides, but James points primarily to the revelation of the Word, especially the Word of Truth, as he will describe it, which is the antidote to deception, according to verse 18.

Of his own will, he brought us forth by the Word of Truth. This stands in contrast to and is the antidote to deception in verse 16. There is then no reason or excuse for deception.

We are to live in light of the truth of the Word, which, because it is God's Word, bears true witness to God and especially witness to His entire goodness, both by what it says and by what it does. Now, the point of the deception is theological in the narrow sense of the term. That is, it has to do with the doctrine of God and specifically with God's motive.

James understands that this uncertainty or questioning, the motives of God, lies behind all sin, even as it did, we might say, in terms of scriptural testimony in the Garden of Eden. This deep-seated suspicion that God does not intend good and only good for us, that God has, this was coming from the mouth of the serpent there, of course, in Genesis 3, that God has ulterior motives in His commandment, that He is really out to get you, not to do you good. Now, James immediately sets the record straight.

He refers to God as a Father of Lights. This business that He's a Father of Lights points to the goodness of God. Light, of course, is used in the biblical tradition as referring to goodness over against evil.

It points to the goodness of God, but also, when He says He's a Father of Lights, it points to His desire to communicate light, that is to say, to communicate His goodness to His human creation. Even as a Father produces children, so the Father of Lights produces light, even as a Father reproduces Himself in natural reproduction. So, God is a Father of Lights as one who reproduces the light that is Himself.

He communicates light, not simply is light Himself, but He communicates light. He illumines. He gives light to His creation.

He gives goodness to His human creation. Now, by referring to God as a Father of Lights, James indicates that God is light, that He is a source of all light. He is a source of all goodness.

Of course, this goes back to Genesis 1 and really throughout the Old Testament, and that is that light is good and that darkness is evil. He is thus the epitome of goodness, which stands over evil darkness, and His character as light is manifested in the fact that He is a creator of the luminaries, the Father of Lights, the stars, the sun, and the moon. Note the plural, the Father of Lights.

Thus, God's character of light is reflected in the lights that He has created, not simply that they are light, but they communicate light to us. Yet, even these created luminaries do not adequately convey the goodness of God, for they change, pointing to the movements of the sun, moon, and stars in their courses, and they can be changed, pointing probably to eclipse. That's why He actually says with regard to the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

He is implicitly drawing a contrast between God as a Father of the luminaries, sun, moon, and stars, and the luminaries themselves, which are characterized by variation. They're never in the same spot in the sky. They're constantly moving in their courses so that they change; there is variation with them, and there is shadow due to them.

That is to say; they can be changed by way of the eclipse, by the shadow of the eclipse. By way of contrast, God neither changes nor can anyone or anything else cause Him to change. There is not a speck of turning away from God from His desire always to give good gifts.

Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Even the withholding or removal of gifts is a gift, a better good. James will mention this, of course, in 4:3. You ask and do not receive because you ask it wrongly to spend it on your passions.

So, as I say, even the withholding of gift is a gift from God. Perhaps the most fundamental affirmation of the New Testament is the assertion that God is for us. He is totally and completely on our side.

This is a basis for loving God. Verse 12, blessed is a man who endures trial for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those

who love him and is known by wisdom, verses 5 through 8, and revealed materially by the Word, verses 18 through 27. Now, James particularizes every good and perfect gift by going on to describe one specific and perfect gift, namely the Word of Truth.

Notice you have particularization here. Every good endowment and every perfect gift. By the way, this business of every perfect gift, dosis here, points to the act of giving.

Dorema is the gift itself here. So, the act of giving as well as the gift itself. But anyway, you notice the movement from general to particular.

Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above. Then he goes ahead and particularizes to talk about one specific gift that God is responsible for, and that is the gift of the Word. Of His own will, He brought us forth by the Word of Truth.

He particularizes every good and perfect gift by going on to describe one specific good and perfect gift, namely the Word of Truth. Of all the gifts God gives, in some ways, this is the best, for it provides humankind with His most fundamental necessity, the truth, in the face of deception.

That is the revelation about the truth of God. It is this good and perfect gift that lets us know that all good and perfect gifts come from God. This Word of Truth is presented here as the means of the new birth of life.

Of His own will, He brought us forth by the Word of Truth. It is, therefore, the essential cause of the new birth. The new birth can come only through the Word.

Now, really, the new birth that is achieved by the Word really points to the character of the Word itself. It is life-producing. It is powerful.

It points to the power of the Word. It is truth-giving. Now, I would, though, and really, therefore, too, He's suggesting that the Christian life as a whole is Word-oriented.

It is shaped by the Word. It is created by the Word, and therefore, it is shaped by the Word. Now, I would note the emphases in this description of the new birth through the Word.

First of all, the will of God. By His own will, He brought us forth by the Word of Truth. The intention of God in the new birth is emphasized here in this phrase.

By His own will, He brought us forth. This new birth through the Word is not accidental. It is not arbitrary.

It is not coerced, but it is according to His own will, over against, incidentally, our desire, verse 14, but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. By the way, you have the recurrence of the word *apokuaio* here, which is used here in verse 15. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

But here, He says in verse 18, the anecdote of that is by His own will, He brought us forth. Again, the same word, He gives birth to, He has given us a new birth by the Word of Truth so that this new birth by the Word reflects God's deepest desire.

Can the God who thus desired so deeply within Himself to give us new birth possibly desire in any way to harm us? Also, the second emphasis here in this description of the new birth through the Word is the power of the Word, the process of the new birth. He has brought us forth over against the birth of death by sin. Again, the same word is used there in verse 15.

The term *apokuaō* here is employed, which usually refers to the role of the mother in the birth process, referring here to God the Father, the Father of Lights. But usually, it's used as the role of the mother in the birth process. In order to point to the radical contrast between the new birth of believers here and the birth of sin in verse 15, where again, that same word is used.

As children of God, we ought to be like God, reflect His nature and character, especially His unity and comprehensive integrity, and love God. Two characteristics of children in relation to parents are suggested here. That is likeness and love.

Now, the third emphasis in terms of this new birth through the Word focuses upon the means of the new birth, the Word of Truth. He has given us new birth through the Word of Truth. This Word of Truth is most likely the gospel, probably what you have encapsulated in Mark 1:15. The time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

This Word of Truth most likely is the gospel, really, faith in Jesus Christ as one who brings in His kingdom. He'll make reference to this in chapter 2, verses 1 through 5. My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Including, the Word of Truth is, as I say, the gospel, including the law as

interpreted by the gospel, which you will call the royal law there in 2:8 through 13, and the law of liberty in 1:25. Since the Word of Truth was a means of the new birth, it continues to be the central force in Christian's life.

This is the antidote to the yetzer hara, the evil desire that is the basis for temptation and leads to sin and death. This Word of Truth is a central force in the Christian's life. It is the antidote to the yetzer hara.

It is that which, in the framework of Jewish theology, holds this desire, this undifferentiated desire, in check and keeps it from going outside of bounds. As the Word of Truth, it is able to keep one from being deceived. It leads to knowledge.

Verse 19: Know this, my beloved brethren. Now, God's purpose in the new birth is that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures, which puts us at the center of His redemption, of His redemptive plan for the whole universe. Our new birth is the assurance that the cosmos will be restored and renewed.

Our new birth is foundational for the redemption of the entire cosmos. It is central in the cosmos. It is critical for the redemption of the cosmos.

It is part of and indeed central to God's universal redemptive plan, which points really to two realities, this notion of being firstfruits. First of all, that we, as His firstfruits, are the unique possession of God. Consider the fact that the firstfruits in the Old Testament belong to God.

Firstfruits in the sense of being the special possession, having a special claim from God upon us. And second, it points to the promise of the restoration of the entire earth. Reminiscent, incidentally, of Paul's statement in Romans 8.23, the whole creation groans in agony or in despair in anticipation of the revelation of the sons of God.

Because God has given us such a central role in the restoration of the entire cosmos, it is inconceivable that He would desire in any way to do us harm. By the way, another function of the firstfruits in the Old Testament was that the firstfruits represented the promise of the goodness to come. Now, he goes ahead and moves from the recognition of the word, and pardon the alliteration, but if it works, why not go ahead and use it, and it's not forced here, reception of the word in verses 19 through 21.

Know this, my beloved brethren, let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. Receive the word, reception of the word.

Now, he begins with the general here. He says, know this. Again, this stands over against being deceived in verse 16, and again in verse 22, and again in verse 26.

In contrast to being deceived, know this. He says here that the first exhortation then involves knowledge, know this, and of course relates to the word of truth. Note that this passage points ahead here, and it does, to 3:1 through 4:12, and possibly also to 5:9 and 5:12, and is particularized there.

Here, in other words, James introduces a whole notion of the tongue. Let every person, he says, notice the inclusive scope. Let everyone be quick to hear. Now, this probably refers to the business of being quick to hear in context, which probably refers both to listening to the word, hearing the word, being quick to hear the word, verse 18, verse 21, verse 22.

As a matter of fact, he'll say in verse 22, be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves, but also being quick to hear human words. That is suggested by the remainder of verse 19. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, which has to do, of course, especially with relationship to other human beings, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Let everyone be quick to hear. As I say, this refers to not only listening to the word of truth but also being quick to hear human words over against those things that would impede true listening to others. What are those things, according to James, that impede listening, true listening to others? Well, for one thing, obsession with one's own concerns and advancement and importance, 3.13 through 18.

This wisdom that is from below that is related in this passage is linked in that passage, as I say, chapters 3 and 4, to speech. Also, anger. This is immediate context.

Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to anger. One thing that impedes real listening to others is anger towards others, anger when one's concerns and self-advancement appear to be threatened. They say you have this in the immediate context here in verses 19b through 20, but also, he draws this out in chapter 3, verses 6 through 12, and also again in 4:1 through 10.

I would note the relationship here between the commitment to listen to the word of truth and to the words of others. In other words, the fact that our new birth, our relationship with God, is established by word, by hearing the word, points to the significance of hearing words generally. The importance of hearing the word of truth points to the importance of hearing human words.

By the way, another thing that can lead to not listening to others is an attitude of judgmentalism, 4:11 and 12. Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that

speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. But not only quick to hear, but also, notice, slow to speak. That stands in contrast with quick to hear.

Quick to hear but slow to speak. Now, this is typical of wisdom instruction, this business of being slow to speak. You find it, for example, in Proverbs 13.3 and again in Proverbs 29.20. But it also ties in really with Hellenistic, as I say, with Greco-Roman Paranesus instruction.

It was Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, who first pointed out that God has given humans two ears and one mouth with the intention that we should listen twice as much as we speak. The tongue as an occasion for sin is dealt with in great detail in chapters 3 and 4. We might note here just some of the major emphases of this instruction regarding being slow to speak. I think he had three things in mind here.

First, this business about being slow to speak involves amount of speech. This instruction regarding slow to speak may indicate that one should be careful not to speak too much, but to use words sparingly. Now, you actually, I think, have a profound theological point being made here, and that is the fact that we experience new birth through the Word of Truth, which leads us to consider words sacred.

The sanctity of the Word of Truth leads to the sanctity, the sanctification of human speech. Human speech, then, there's something sacred with regard, or at least there's a sacred shadow involved in human words reflecting the sacredness of the divine Word. And therefore, we are careful not to vulgarize speech by speaking too much.

Now, this is an emphasis that's found elsewhere in the New Testament. By the way, you find it elsewhere in James, one thing. Notice in James 3, 1 and 2. Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

For we all will make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. As we'll see when we get to the interpretation of James 3, what he's indicating here is that there is an occupational hazard involved in teaching because teaching necessarily involves the use of words, and there is a real danger with much speech. But you also have it, for example, in the gospel tradition in Matthew 12:36.

You'll remember that Jesus says, I tell you on the day of judgment, men will render account for every careless word they utter, every careless or idle word that they

utter. So, let's speak speech pertains to the amount of speech. Do not speak too much.

Use words sparingly. But it points not only to the amount of speech, but also, I think, to deliberation of speech. This instruction may indicate that one should think and consider carefully before one speaks.

Be slow to speak. This would involve especially considering the relationship of what one is about to say to the word of truth. How does what I'm about to say relate to the word of truth? This concern seems especially prominent both here, notice the next exhortation, slow to speak.

I should say that I think that this concern seems especially prominent here, both here, because as we go ahead to say in the next exhortation, being slow to anger and the like, and what he will go ahead to say in 3.1 through 4.12, and especially in 3.9 and 10. This notion, in other words, of how the word of our words relate to and whether they are in conformity with the character of the word of truth. How does, in other words, even as the word of truth is of such a character that it brings forth life, it results in goodness?

Well, our words result in goodness and positive effects. Does what I'm about to say stem from filth within my heart? Later in this paragraph, he will talk about putting away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness. So, in terms of motive, in terms of source, does it stem from filth within my heart? And in terms of effects, does it lead to or contribute to the righteousness of God? As he will say, the wrath of humans, human wrath does not work the righteousness of God.

The third thing I think that's involved in terms of this being slow to speak is that this instruction may indicate that one should establish the habit of pausing before one speaks, thus avoiding angry outbursts. This concern with regard to angry outbursts is especially prominent in James as he will go ahead to say here, not only being quick to hear, slow to speak, but also slow to anger, as well as the role of anger in the filthy use of the tongue and the destructive use of the tongue in chapter 3 and 4. Now, then, of course, he does go ahead to the next exhortation, slow to anger, which may imply that a certain type of anger at certain times is appropriate. He doesn't say never be angry, but be slow to anger.

But James is arguing against an angry disposition, being quickly or easily provoked or provoked for the wrong reasons, and angry outbursts. Now this he goes ahead and substantiates, for he says, the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. That is, human anger does not produce the state of righteousness, wholeness, and justice that God desires and that God is at work to establish upon the earth.

318, and the harvest of righteousness is sown by peace for those who make peace. This stands against deluded righteous indignation and all attempts to justify anger and angry outbursts as a way to protect or advance the work of God. One should never think, James insists, one should never think that the righteous cause of God can be advanced by something as vile and malicious and violent as angry speech.

This, of course, in terms of evaluation application, stands against the modern value system that privileges self-expression and especially the expression of anger, often bolstered by the psychological notion of catharsis, as I say, this notion of purification or of cleansing by expression. That repression is a great evil. Expression is, of itself, a value, a good.

No matter, apparently, what is being expressed, it is important to express it. This is really very common. I remember teaching on James at a church in Indiana several years ago, and we were at the point of this passage. There was a lay person there, a man, who objected seriously to this whole thing about being slow to anger and insisted that it was a cathartic and a good and wholesome and helpful thing to express anger over against holding it in and the like.

I remember thinking to myself, I'll bet you're a real problem here. And talking with the pastor afterward, I discovered that that was, in fact, the case. Now, he goes ahead with further exhortations in verse 21.

Therefore, he says, notice the causation on the basis of what he said in verses 19 and 20, therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness, that's negative and then positive, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. So, he uses then the language of take off and put on, takes off negatively all filthiness, here. This may suggest that the sins of the tongue are manifestations of deeper moral problems.

Of course, he's going to make this case explicit in chapter 3. So, he says here, put away all filthiness that lies behind this business of angry outbursts. You note the inclusive scope, all filthiness, and also the connection, therefore. This, therefore, indicates that this filthiness involves all malicious and destructive attitudes toward persons, especially anger.

Note that the term is used here is not primarily sexual or sensual, as we tend to automatically think in terms of filth. It's not here used primarily in a sexual or sensual way but refers primarily to angry speech and that which gives rise to angry speech. The word filthiness points to unfitness and thus uselessness and separation.

This business of filthiness, of course, stands against the notion of cleanliness or being cleansed and really stems from the cult. It stems from the realm of the cult, the Old Testament cult. And, of course, being cleansed from filth in terms of Old Testament

cultic language means being made fit for worship of God in the temple, tabernacle, for the worship of God, for service to God, hence this business of the purification and the cleanliness, the cleansing of priests and the like, for worship of God, service to God, and for fellowship with God.

So, the word filthiness points to unfitness and to separation from God. That reflects the cultic emphasis that uncleanness separates one from God from the worship of God, from service to God, and from the community of God. He also mentions here putting off excess or remainder of wickedness.

This is difficult to translate, actually. It probably should be understood in the sense of every trace of evil. Now, note that he is speaking to Christians here.

Know this, my beloved brethren. He's speaking to Christians who have been brought forth by the word of truth. Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth.

This implies that wickedness in some form and to some extent does continue to exist or at least may continue to exist in the lives of those who have been brought forth by the word of truth. This points to the Christian doctrine of sin remaining in the heart. But it also implies that such evil can be entirely put off, put away, he says, all filthiness and every trace of evil.

And more positively, receive, this is what you're to put off, now to replace that, receive positively the implanted word with meekness which is able to save your souls. Now, note we have the put-off, put on schema here. It's frequent in New Testament epistles.

The principle of replacement is at work, possibly linked to the practice of baptism at which persons would take off their old garments and their filthy clothes when they went into the baptismal water and would put on new clean clothes when they came out. As a matter of fact, he uses that very same word, filth, here, talking about clothes in verse two of chapter two. For if a man with gold rings and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing, that really is filthy clothing, comes into your assembly.

But we do have, so in other words, if that's what he has in mind, live according to your baptism. But we note the tension here between receive and implanted. Note the tension.

Receive with meekness the implanted word. After all, if it's implanted, it's within you. You don't need to receive it, right? Now, this I think, but I do think that this tension is resolved by the recognition that we probably have a relationship between the indicative and the imperative. It is implanted.

That is to say, it is natural, it is innate, it has become part of our very nature. Really, it has become part of our souls, really, our essential persons and the like. But that is who we are.

We are people of the Word. We have been bought, and we have been given new birth through the Word. But, so it is implanted, but we need to receive that which we already have.

We need to embrace that which we already are. You have the word. It has become part of you.

Now, embrace it. Now, act on it. This, of course, prepares for verse 22: be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Really, as a matter of fact, receiving with meekness the implanted word is essentially defined by verse 22, being doers of the word and not hearers only. Well, this leads then to 1:22 through 25, which refers to the requirement of the word, which we have just cited: be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. This actually is a good place to break as we move into the next segment of our video here.

So, let's just pause here and then pick up here with the next segment.

We're ready to move on now to the second half of James chapter 1, and this, of course, is verses 16 through 27.