

## James 1:19-21

### I. You should not act as if you were in control of the world (19-20)

The main message in this passage is to have a good, humble attitude as opposed to a selfish, arrogant attitude. A Christian should not behave as if the world revolves around them, because Jesus is the only Lord. Rather we should humbly realize our calling to be servants of all our neighbors, putting them before ourselves, because we serve the Lord, and expect our reward from Him.

#### A. My beloved brothers, know this (19a)

This is a formula introducing an important statement, giving it emphasis. It functions as an attention getting device for what follows.

### B. What you should know: You should forsake arrogance and wrath (19b-20)

#### 1. Let everyone be speedy to hear (19b-c)

##### a Let every man be speedy (19b)

“speedy” in this context probably has more the connotation of eagerness or willingness, not primarily the relative speed of listening. It is a contrast to “slow” in 19d.

##### b Result: to hear (19c)

James uses a grammatical construction that is typically a marker of result  
The point is that the person should be eager and willing to listen and learn, which is a sign of humility.

#### 2. Let him be slow to speak and slow to anger (19d-20)

##### a Let him be slow to speak (19d-e)

###### 1) [Let him be] slow (19d)

“slow” is the opposite of “speedy” in 19b

###### 2) Result: to speak (19e)

This uses the same grammatical construction as 19c  
to be slow to speak is the opposite of insisting that one’s own opinion always be heard immediately. It is the valuing of other people’s views and being willing to listen to them. We have all probably experienced people who don’t listen to others, but just look for an opportunity to hear themselves talk. And we recognize how selfish and off-putting that can be.

To be slow to speak is to recognize that we don’t know it all, we don’t have all the answers, and we need to give others the opportunity to share.

##### b Let him be slow to wrath, which is not godly (19f-20)

###### 1) And [let him be] slow to wrath (19f)

To be slow to wrath is the opposite of getting angry at the smallest provocation. Some people have a short fuse and are easily enraged. James warns his readers not to do this.

###### 2) Reason: Because the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God (20)

It may seem like fighting back in anger will solve the problem. And it certainly feels good in the moment to do so. But two wrongs don’t make a right. Yes, sometimes Christians need to fight back against injustice. But it is done in a Christian manner with sober, prayerful consideration, not under the control of violent passions. But normally, the Christian way is to overcome evil with goodness, trusting the Lord to administer justice. cf. Rom. 12:17-21

Therefore: live as one dependent on God (21)

**C. By putting off all moral filth and excess of evil (21a)**

These are both fairly generic terms for moral uncleanness and wickedness. James calls his readers to cease doing all of it.

In this context, all types of evil are related to the selfish, self-centered attitude related above, and contrasted with the humble, repentant attitude described in the next proposition.

**D. Humbly receive the Word that can save your soul (21b-c)**

**1. In humility, receive the implanted Word (21b)**

“humility” is defined as “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance” (BDAG). This reinforces the opposition to the attitude described in the previous verses.

“implanted” conveys the meaning that the Word is permanently established within the Christian, and will continue to develop – it has been plugged into our life, and James says we should let it have its way to change our attitude and lifestyle.

**2. Reason: Because it is able to save your soul (21c)**

The power in the implanted Word is the power of salvation, just as Paul said in Rom. 1:16-17.

James’ point is that the Word has the power, not just the potential, and it will save the soul of all in whom it is implanted and does its full work.