

## Personal Preparation for Receiving the Word

James 1:21a

11/14/1999

Let's open our Bibles please to the book of James, chapter 1. In James, chapter 1, we have been considering together what James has to tell us as to how we should respond to the preaching of God's word of truth. We are told in verse 18 that he begot us with the word of truth. And then he tells us, in relationship to that word of truth, in verse 19, that we are to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

So we have seen that our relationship with God's truth is prescribed to us as to our *conduct* in relationship *to* it. So in our previous studies, we have seen that we are to be swift to hear. That is, we are to be ready to listen and learn when God's truth is preached. We are to be quick to take advantage of opportunities to hear the word of God *taught* to us. And so we are to be very ready and quick to listen to the teaching of God's word, and to avail ourselves of those opportunities with a willing mind.

And then we saw that we were to be slow to speak. That is, in relationship to the Scriptures, we are to be slow to set ourselves forth as teachers of the word and beware of jumping to conclusions too rapidly regarding what the Bible teaches on any subject. We are to be slow to declare that it says this, or says that, until we have responsibly and thoroughly studied the matter. We are not just to pop off opinions that are half-baked and half-thought through. We should be, as people who are slow to speak, more ready to listen than to talk when in the presence of those who are more knowledgeable of the word of God than we are.

And then we saw that we were to be slow to wrath. That is, the word of God must neither be taught nor received with anger. Differences over the meaning and the application of the word of God should be dealt with by the use of facts, by the use of sound reason, and by the use of biblical data, not with anger or with wrath.

And so James, having provided us with these three admonitions in terms of our relationship to the word of God, is not yet *done* instructing us in the matter of our relationship to the preached Scriptures. He has further counsel for us in verses 21 through 25. And so we want to read those together today and begin to explore what they have to say to us about our conduct in relationship to the word of God as it is brought to us.

Having told us we are to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath, he tells us in verse 21, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

Now in this passage, we have further instructions about our relationship to the word of God. And in this passage, James gives us three very clear directives regarding our conduct when we hear the preaching of the word of God. He tells us how we are to conduct ourselves in relationship to it. *Before* the preaching of the word, verse 21 says, we are *lay apart* wickedness.

*During* the preaching of the Word, we are told we are to *receive* it with meekness. And then *after* the preaching of the Word, in verse 22, we are told to *implement* it—be *doers* of the Word and not hearers only.

And so the point that James is making is simply this: We must give very careful consideration as to *how* we hear the word of God. He is telling us that there must be personal preparation *before* the preaching of the word of God. There must be a laying apart, it says in verse 21, of all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. And then there must, secondly, be an active participation *during* the preaching of the word of God. We are to *receive* it with *meekness*. And then, there is to be a practical implementation *after* the preaching of the word. Verse 22, we are to be *doers* of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

And so it is my intention this evening and the next two Lord's Days to cover each of these points in turn. So today we will consider together that there must be personal preparation *before* the preaching of the word. And then next Lord's Day evening, God willing, there must be an active participation *during* the preaching of the word. And then, following that, a practical implementation *after* the preaching of the word. So this evening, then, let's consider together the first of these three points that James gives to us. There must be personal preparation before the preaching of the word of God.

Now oftentimes, people show up to hear preaching, and they do so with absolutely no preparation or forethought before arriving for that event. And this is something that is entirely inappropriate and it is something that really limits the blessing and benefit that we can receive from the preaching of the *word*. Oftentimes, the reason why there is so little profit gained from the preaching of the word of God is that people are not adequately *prepared* ahead of time to *receive* it.

It's kind of like planting a garden. If you do not rototill the ground, and then rake it, and then properly fertilize it *first*, then it does little good to cast seed upon it. If someone just went out there into the backyard, and there's a bunch of grass and weeds, and they just start throwing out corn seeds, or bean seeds, or potatoes, or whatever it is you plant, without adequately preparing the ground, would you expect to get much of a harvest? You certainly would not.

Well so it is with the word of God. If our hearts are not properly prepared before the seed of the word is sown upon it, then it very likely will die before it can take root and grow within us. And so just like we have to clean out the weeds and the rocks and the trash before we plant a garden, in the same way we have to clean up our hearts and prepare them before hearing the preaching of the word of God.

Notice if you will verse 21. He says, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," and in *that* context, "receive with meekness the engrafted word." So when the word of God is preached to us, there's something we have to do before we're ready to *receive* it. And that thing that we have to do is we have to *lay apart* something. We have to *get rid* of something. Before you ever put seed in the ground in your garden, you get *rid* of some things. You get rid of the rocks, you get rid of the weeds, and you get rid of the rodents. And having gotten *rid* of those things, then you get rid of the hardness that is in the ground by grinding it up and making it soft. And then, and only then, are you ready to put in the seed. And so we have to, before we come to have the seed of the word of God implanted in our life, have to do some heart preparation first.

Now we're told here specifically to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." The word here for "filthiness" simply means moral impurity, that is, any sin in our behavior, or any sin in our relationships. It's a word that refers to a very broad range of moral impurity. And then the next phrase, "superfluity of naughtiness," simply means abundant wickedness, or abundant malice. The word "superfluity" just means overflowing. And so he's saying that these wickednesses, and these moral impurities that are in our lives, need to be *laid aside*.

Now the word "laid aside" means to *cast away*, or to divest yourself of something. It's kind of like, if you're sitting there at the table, and you feel something on your hand, and you look at your hand and there's a spider on it, you go—like that. Right? And you get rid of it. You shake it off. You *get it away* from yourself. And that's the idea that's contained in this passage. *Cast* it away. It's not the idea of just laying it aside, like you might your suit coat after you take off in the evening, it's the idea of getting rid of it—getting it out of your life, throwing it away—casting it away.

And the point is simply this. Before we come to the preaching of the word of God, there must be on our part a conscious self-examination. And if in that conscious self-examination we become *aware* of sinful attitudes or sinful behaviors that we have or have had, then we need to repent of them and *confess* them and get right with God regarding them before we are prepared to hear further *teaching*. After all, how can we receive new teaching when we are not obeying the teaching that we have already received?

Turn in your Bibles please, if you will, to Luke, chapter 8. Now we want to spend a couple of minutes considering some statements of Jesus with reference to this matter of properly preparing the heart to receive the word of God. The gospel of Luke, chapter 8. Now in this passage, we have the very familiar story of the parable of the soils. We'll start reading together at verse 4. Luke 8 and verse 4:

"And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spoke by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

"And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

“No man, when he has lighted a candle, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but sets it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore *how* you hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be *taken* even that which he seemeth to have.”

Now this passage is very parallel to the one in the book of James. And what Jesus is saying here is this: If the soil is not adequately prepared to receive the word of God, then it will not bring forth *fruit* in the life of the person in whose life it was *sowed*. And so we have here an example of the wayside soil—it’s not even been plowed up. And so the word of God doesn’t have any effect on it, it just bounces off, lays on the surface, and the birds can easily come and peck it up. It’s not even covered. And then you have the rocky ground. Here’s the case where the rocks weren’t gotten out, and because of that, the soil was thin and it easily dried out, and the plant died. And then you have the ground that the weeds weren’t properly taken care of. And the point is, is that in each case, the word of God was the same, but what was different was the preparation that occurred in each of the soils. And the soil that was properly prepared, the word of God had a great *effect* upon it, and it brought forth fruit.

Now notice Jesus’ statement in Luke, chapter 8, and verse 18. He says, “Take heed therefore *how* you hear.” And what He’s saying to you is, Ask yourself, what kind of soil are you? Are you wayside soil? Are you rocky soil? Are you thorny soil? Or are you *good* soil? And the answer to that question is going to depend upon *how* you have prepared your *hearts* to hear and receive the word of God.

Now you see, those in the first three types of soil didn’t clean up the soil well enough. They didn’t lay aside the wickedness and the abundant wickedness and malice and the moral impurity, and all of those things. So when the word of God came, it didn’t bear *fruit*. It didn’t *last*. It didn’t grow. So He says to them, Take heed *how* you hear. He says, “For whosoever *hath*,”—hath what? Hath a well-prepared heart, hath plowed-up ground, with no rocks, no weeds in it—“to him shall be given.”

Now let me ask you a question. If the farmer goes out and he casts his seed on these four kinds of soil, and he sees the results, where’s he going to cast the seed *next* time? He’s going to cast it on the good *ground*. I mean, if you were a farmer, and you put some seed here, and it didn’t bring forth *anything*, and you put some seed over here, and brought forth lots, where would you cast your seed next time? *On the good ground*. And so what is being said here is that whoever *has* a plowed-up heart, one that’s adequately prepared, to him shall be *given*. And he shall have *abundance*.

And so when people come to the word of God in its preaching, and their hearts are prepared and plowed up, and the weeds are pulled and the rocks are cast away, and they’re ready to hear the Scriptures, when the Scriptures are preached, then that word of God lodges in their heart, brings forth fruit, their understanding grows and expands, and their life changes and *matures*. In other words, they bring forth fruit.

But for others, when they come to the preaching of the word of God, if they’re not prepared, notice what it says of *them*. “Whosoever hath *not*,” that is, does not have a good plowed-up ground in their life, “from him shall be *taken* even that which he seems to have.” Now what this simply means is that the seed that seemed to be there will be taken away, and it will be put on the good ground.

And so we have here a personal responsibility. Take heed *how* you hear. We have a blessed promise. To him that *hath* a prepared, receptive heart to the word of God, to him shall be given *more*. He will continue to profit and grow from the Scriptures. But to him that hath not, you see, there is a solemn warning issued to that person: “From him it shall be *taken*, even that which he seems to have.” Here, he says, the birds take it away, the sun withers it, and the thorns choke it out. And so just like farmers do not keep casting seed on ground that does not produce, and ground that does not produce is unprepared ground—it is untilled, rocky, and filled with weeds—in the same way, God in His Spirit applies His word to hearts that are prepared to receive that word.

And so the ground *must*, it *must* be prepared before it can receive the seed. And the heart *must* be prepared before it can receive the word of God. And so there must be, as James says, a *putting away* of all of those things that will *hinder* the *rooting* and the growth of the Scriptures in our *life*. This is not an isolated concept.

Notice if you will, First Peter, chapter 2. Peter enunciates the same principle as James when, in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, he says,—notice—“Wherefore *laying aside*.” Have you seen that phrase before? Sure. It’s the same one as in James. “Wherefore laying aside all *malice*,” that’s hatred, “and all *guile*,” that’s lying, “and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” And so what Peter is telling us is that there must be a *laying aside* of sin before there can be a *taking in* of the milk of the word. He says, Lay aside these things, and then, Take in the word of God.

Now why is it that there has to be this preparation before we receive the Scriptures? Well the reason why is because a receptivity to the word of God and the harboring of sin in our lives is mutually exclusive. You must either get rid of one or you must get rid of the other. You’ve either got to hang on to your sin and become hard-hearted to the word of God, that just bounces off of you; or, you’ve got to get rid of your sin so that the word of God can take root in your lives.

Sin and receptivity to the word of God *cannot coexist*. In John, chapter 3, and verse 20, it says, “For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.” And so if we are harboring sin in our hearts, what does that make us do? It makes us not want to come to the light. We don’t want to come to church, we don’t want to read our Bibles, we don’t want to talk to Christians, because *that is incompatible* with the harboring of sin.

And so James recognizes, we have to get of the sin before we’re going to receive the word of God. So if we come to the preaching of the Scriptures with unconfessed sin in our hearts that we harboring and justifying, then we are going to sit there hard and resisting and closed-minded towards what we are hearing, and the word of God will do us little or no good. We cannot be rebelling against God by *harboring* sin, and at the same time be *receptive* to God as He speaks to us through His word. It just doesn’t work.

Notice if you will, Matthew, chapter 13, verses 9 through 16. The gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 9 through 16. Now in this passage, Jesus is also speaking, and He has some additional things to say which Luke omitted with reference to the parable of the four soils. And in verses 9 through 16—Matthew 13, verses 9 through 16—He says in Matthew 13 and verse 9, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” Why are you telling these stories? Why don’t you just tell them the truth straight up?

Well notice the answer: “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” He’s saying, These people are never going to know the truth. Why? Notice verse 12, “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. *Therefore* speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive”—now here’s why, verse 15—“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes”—notice—“*they have closed*; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

In other words, these people have intentionally made their heart gross and their ears dull and their eyes closed, because they don’t want to give up their *sin*. They don’t *want* to be converted. And so they have made themselves into rocky ground and thorny ground and wayside ground hearers. And Jesus says, I’m speaking to them in parables, because of the nature of the ground, we don’t want to waste any truth on these folks. However, *your* eyes are open. Your ears are open. And so to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Rebellion and sin had destroyed their ability to understand and interpret the Scriptures. What a prison to put oneself in! You can’t get yourself out of it once you’ve put yourself in it. It’s got a latch on the outside, but once you step in and shut the door, there’s no latch on the inside. They closed their ears because they were clinging to their sin.

Now the Spirit of God is specifically declared to be the One who illuminates our minds regarding the truth of the word of God. In John 14:26, and in John 16:13, we are told it is the Spirit who will guide us into all truth. It is the Spirit who will teach us all things. But if the Spirit of God in the life of the believer is grieved by *unconfessed* sin, then how will the teacher to the Spirit teach us more when we are resisting what He has already *taught* us? He will not do so.

John says in Revelation, chapter 1, and verse 10, he says, “I was *in the Spirit* on the Lord’s day,” and was in that context of being in submission to the Spirit and being open to the Spirit that he was brought to the revelation that we know as the book of Revelation. But notice the condition he was in before the word of God was brought to him. He was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day. He wasn’t in *rebellion*; he wasn’t in *self-justification*; he wasn’t in a state of *grieving* the Spirit; he was in a state of communion and of submission to the Spirit.

Now we are told in First Peter 5, and verse 5, that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And if a sinning man is anything, he is a *proud* man. And therefore, he is resisted by God until he humbles himself through *repentance*. And so therefore, if we want to grow and we want to have the word of God work in our hearts and lives, and we want to have it bring forth fruit in us, then before we come on the Lord’s Day to hear the preaching of the word, we need to prepare our hearts to *receive* that word. In other words, there needs to be a time of self-examination before we ever present ourselves to hear the preaching of the word of God.

And so I would encourage each one of you to begin to prepare on Saturday night for hearing the preaching on Sunday *morning*. On Saturday night, before you go to sleep, you need to examine your heart, reflect on the past week, ask yourself, Is there any sin in my life that I’ve been

harboring and justifying that I haven't confessed? And get right with God anything that He brings to mind, and pray the prayer of David in Psalm 139, and verse 23, when he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." It is imperative that before come here that we have already had dealings with God, and we have already laid aside all of the wickedness and all of the abundant malice and sin that is in our heart, and we have put it away. And we have plowed up our hearts so that they are good ground.

Not only should we begin to prepare Saturday night, but we need to do a *final* review in examination prior to the *service*. This is the reason why we have introductory music and a period of silence before the start of the service. That is not the time to be rustling around, it is not the time to be engaging in conversation with other people. We should be seated. We should be silent and we should\* be engaged in examination as we come before the preaching of the word of God in order to *hear* it. And so we need to be praying, Lord, forgive me of my sins—if we're aware of any—prepare my heart to receive your word. Father, may there be nothing that would hinder the Spirit or grieve the Spirit from taking that implanted word and revealing it to me that I might learn from it and grow thereby and profit. It is when we are in a state of confession, it is when we are in a state of humility, that God is *most* likely to pour out His grace upon us, for He gives grace to the humble. And there is no man that is a more humble man than a man who is confessing his sins before the Lord.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to the book of Daniel, chapter 9. What we have in the book of Daniel, chapter 9, is an example of a man who is confessing his sins before the Lord. Daniel, chapter 9. We'll start reading at verse 3. Daniel, chapter 9, and verse 3. He says in this passage:

"And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; *We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spoke in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*"

Now it is obvious that what Daniel is doing here is he is confessing his sins and the sins of his people. He goes on, verse 7: "O Lord, righteousness belongs unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

"Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spoke against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law

of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.” Did you notice that phrase, “that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth”? You can’t understand the truth unless you’re turning from the iniquities. And if you *won’t* turn from the iniquities, then you cannot understand the truth.

Let’s go on. Verse 14: “Therefore has the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for *our* righteousnesses, but for *thy great mercies*. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

Now is that a prayer of confession, or *what*? Now *notice* the next two verses. “And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am *now* come forth to give thee *skill and understanding*.” Now when did the skill in understanding come? *After* the *confession* of the *sin*. That’s the whole point.

You see, Daniel was given skill in understanding when he had laid apart all wickedness and superfluity of naughtiness. It was when he had *laid aside* all his moral impurity and his abundant wickedness, and that of his *people*. It was then that God came to him in the person of the angel Gabriel to give him skill in understanding.

And you know, the reason why I think so often we have so little skill in understanding the Scriptures is because the Spirit is so *grieved* because of our sin that He doesn’t *give* us skill in understanding it because we have not laid aside our *sins*. God will pour His truth into pure vessels. And so it is imperative for us to be a people who are properly prepared to receive the word of God. And it was *when* he confessed his sin that his skill in understanding increased.

And so when we come to hear the preaching of the word of God each Lord’s Day, we need to come with an attitude of *humility*, with an attitude of *contrition*, with an attitude of *self-examination*, and with an earnest desire to get rid of the rocks and the weeds and the hard-heartedness that has built up in us, for whatever reason and over whatever period of time, so that we can sit there and say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth, instead of coming with the attitude of the arms crossed across the chest, saying, *I dare* you to try and persuade me.



And so if we're going to receive the word of God, we must first of all have personal preparation *before* the preaching of the word. Can you imagine the degree of growth and understanding and knowledge and insight into the Scripture that would exist in this congregation if everyone here showed up with an attitude of a plowed-up heart, a contrite heart, a teachable heart, a willingness to hear what God has to say? I think we would grow a lot more than we do.

And, beloved, the same thing goes for me as goes for you. As I prepare these messages, and even before I prepare them, I have to get totally right with God, or I can't hear His voice. I can't get together something to say and have insight into the Scriptures. It doesn't *work*.

And so may God help us then, as a people and as *His* people, to come with plowed-up hearts and prepared ground, that the word of God might bring forth fruit abundantly, and that we might be given *skill* in understanding. How many times have you heard teaching, and then at some point, it finally, like, it finally hits you that, *Yeah*, okay, I got that now! And you know you've heard it several times before, but it just didn't click. Well, there's lots of reasons for that, but perhaps one reason is that our hearts just weren't *prepared*. And so that is something that we need to each examine ourselves with reference to.

So spend time on Saturday night preparing yourself to come, and then before the service, quiet your hearts, bow your head, close your eyes, spend time with God in preparing your hearts to hear the word of God, so that when it *comes*, we will have that disposition and attitude of Cornelius, who said to Peter when he came to him, We are all now gathered together here in the presence of God to hear the things that are commanded thee of God. Is it any wonder that the word brought fruit in that circumstance, with that disposition?

Well, let us pray together. Our Father, we thank you so much for the fact that there is forgiveness with you. And Lord, we pray that every one of us would take heed *how* we hear. Lord, that we would lay aside all malice and all guile and all hypocrisies and all envies and all evil-speaking, and that we would receive the word of God with an attitude of meekness, that we would desire that milk that we might grow thereby.

Lord, may we *hear* with prepared hearts. May we hear with *contrite* and *confessed* hearts, and *clean* hearts, not because we have been perfect in our behavior, but because we have been complete in our confession. For if we confess our sins, you indeed are faithful and just to *cleanse* us from our sins and from *all* unrighteousness, to forgive us, Father, of all of our transgressions. Thank you for that.

Lord, may we be a people who demonstrate receptivity to the word of God, and thus may *more* be given to us. Father, we just pray that in the week to come, you might give us less reason to have to confess our sins, because we've lived better for you. But Oh, Father, at the end of the week, we all have much to confess and we do pray that we might come with prepared hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

• Page 7, second full paragraph. "engaged" supplied.

- Page 8, second full paragraph. Daniel 9:22, KJV, says: “And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.” You use the phrase “skill in understanding” in this quote, and also in your following exposition.