

Doers of the Word
James 1:22-27
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INTRODUCTION

1. This morning as we share in the Lord's Table together, I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to James chapter 1.
2. This morning I want us to look at verses 22-27 as we see James' call for self-examination with the Word of God.
3. Read James 1:19-27.
4. If there is ever a phrase to describe a Christian it is the one found here in James 1:22.
5. They are characterized as "doers of the word."
6. They don't just "hear" it, but they "look" intently at it and make the necessary adjustments in their life to it.
7. Their mind, emotions, and will is taken captive by the Word of God.
8. The unbeliever, on the other hand, does not do the Word but "immediately forgets what kind of man he was" after the Word exposes his sin.
9. The reason for that according to Ephesians 2:1 is because he is dead in trespasses and sins.
10. In his helpless, dead state, he cannot see the rottenness of his soul without divine intervention.

11. As we look here at James 1:22-27, we see a test of true living faith.
12. In verses 19-21, James gives the test of the reception to the Word, and now in verses 22-27, he gives the test of obedience to the Word.
13. You can properly receive it by being convicted by it and not speaking out against it or its messenger but still not apply it to your life.
14. I've said on many occasions, hearing and doing are two separate acts.
15. Just because you hear the Word, don't think that you have applied it to your life.
16. Doing the Word is the proper response to hearing it.
17. Every time you hear the Word, you are charged with being obedient to it.
18. That's James' point in verses 22-27.
19. He begins in verse 22 with *the command*.

I. The Command (v.22a)

“But prove yourselves”

“But” (de) is a continuance indicating that something further must be said. James is not only concerned with how they receive the Word but also that they obey it.

“Receiving the Word is not the believer’s whole duty. Active obedience must follow” (D. Edmond Hiebert, James, 132).

“Prove” (ginomai, pres.mid.imp.), literally means, “be continually,” or “keep on striving to be” (MacArthur).

John MacArthur says, “When people are blessed with regular, in-depth preaching and teaching of Scripture, they may become so enamored with their knowledge and forsake the effort to live out the profound truths they have come to understand. But a true believer will not be inwardly satisfied with merely knowing the Word. His conscience and the prompting of the indwelling Holy Spirit will keep convicting him of his failure until he becomes obedient” (James, 80).

John Walvoord says, “The growing numbers of sermon-sippers who flit from one doctrinal dessert to another like helpless hummingbirds are deceiving themselves” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: James 1:22).

II. The Character (v.22b)

“Doers of the Word”

“Doers” Gr.poietai (noun, nominative, masculine, plural). It is used 6 times in the NT; 4 of the 6 occur in James (1:22, 23, 25; 4:11).

“The use of the noun, rather than a verbal form, calls attention to the individual characterized as carrying out the demands of the Word. James wants his readers to be individuals who habitually submit to and comply with the requirements of the Word of God” (Hiebert, 133).

A. Believers Live the Word

1. This is their new disposition

It affects their “whole personality, all of a person’s inner being—mind, soul, spirit, and emotions” (MacArthur).

“The Word of God characterizes their lives.” They are not just “doers” but those who live the Word.

2. This is their new desire

a) They love the Word

- (1) Ps.119:97
- (2) Ps.119:113
- (3) Ps.119:119
- (4) Ps.119:127
- (5) Ps.119:132
- (6) Ps.119:159
- (7) Ps.119:163
- (8) Ps.119:165
- (9) Ps.119:167

b) They delight in the Word

- (1) Ps.119:16
- (2) Ps.119:24
- (3) Ps.119:35

- (4) Ps.119:47
- (5) Ps.119:70
- (6) Ps.119:77
- (7) Ps.119:174

c) They long for the Word

- (1) Ps.119:20
- (2) Ps.119:40
- (3) Ps.119:131
- (4) Ps.119:174

d) They meditate on the Word

- (1) Ps.119:15
- (2) Ps.119:23
- (3) Ps.119:48
- (4) Ps.119:78
- (5) Ps.119:148

B. Believers Obey the Word

1. They don't just call Jesus Lord they obey Him as Lord

- a) Luke 6:46 - (Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount - cf. Mat.7)
- b) John 14:15 - "If you love Me, **keep** My commandments."
- c) John 15:14 - "You are My friends if you **do whatever I command you.**"

2. They "hear the word of God and do it"

- a) Luke 8:19-21 (Jesus had just finished the parable of the soils)

This is what characterizes a true believer!

- b) Luke 11:27-28 - (Jesus just cast out a demon and the crowd accused Him of doing this by the power of Satan)
- c) Those who belong to Christ, believe and abide in His Word, just as Jesus said in John 8:30-31 - “Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you **abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**”
- d) John 13:17 - (Jesus washed the disciples feet) “know...do them.”

James is exhorting his readers to keep on becoming doers of the Word not just hearers.....as a hearer you “delude yourselves.”

The word “delude” (paralogizomai), is also translated “deceive” in AV literally means “to reason beside, or alongside, and therefore refers to incorrect reckoning or reasoning, often including the idea of deliberate false reasoning for the purpose of deceiving.

In mathematics, the meaning is that of miscalculation. Professing Christians who hear the Word without obeying it make a serious spiritual miscalculation, which causes them to *delude themselves*. They are self-deceived” (MacArthur, 84).

Kent Hughes says, “Truly accepting God's Word logically means doing it. This spiritual logic was given memorable illustration by Chuck Swindoll in his book *Improving Your*

Serve: Let's pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I'm the owner and I'm interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you direction and instructions.

I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist's room and she is doing her nails, chewing gum, and listening to her favorite disco station. I look around and notice the waste baskets are overflowing, the carpet hasn't been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I ask about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, "I think he's down there." Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office (which has been temporarily turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas).

"What in the world is going on, man?"

"What do ya' mean ... ?"

"Well, look at this place! Didn't you get any of my letters?"

"Letters? Oh, yeah-sure, got every one of them. As a matter of fact ... we have had letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided all the personnel into small groups and discussed many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You'll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your

sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two! Great stuff in those letters!"

"Okay, okay-you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed and even memorized them. BUT WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?"

"Do? Uh-we didn't do anything about them."

Such behavior is professionally absurd. It is, in fact, professional suicide! But how much less absurd are we when we hear God's Word without the slightest inclination to obey it? At the very least we are self-deceived" (Faith that Works, 71).

III. The Contrast (vv.23-27)

A. The Hearer of the Word Only (vv.23-24)

1. He carefully observes it (v.23)

"In New Testament times, mirrors were typically made of highly polished brass or bronze, although a wealthy person could buy one of silver or gold. But even the most expensive mirrors were primitive compared to glass ones, which were not developed until the fourteenth century. Consequently, those early mirrors gave a dim and distorted reflection of the person using them. But by carefully turning the mirror and finding the best light, a person could eventually see a fairly accurate image of his face, and that is the idea James has in mind. By careful and patient observation, as indicated by *katanoeo* he could eventually discover what he actually looked like" (John MacArthur, James, 84).

"Observing" Gr.*katanoeo*, translated "looks"

(NASB). This is a strengthened form of the verb *noeo*, which means simply “to perceive, or look at something.

The compound verb that James uses here carries the additional idea of *careful, cautious consideration of what is being looked at.*

2. He quickly forgets it (v.24)

This is characteristic of one who hears the Word only and never applies it to his life.

He listens, gives a careful, cautious consideration of what the Word is mirroring back to him, then he “goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”

“A person who looks at God's Word, even if it is carefully and accurately done, and yet does not apply the truths he has discovered to his own life, is like someone who immediately forgets what he has just seen in a mirror-except that the consequences are immeasurably worse.

He sees his sin portrayed for the horrible evil that it is and he also sees God's gracious provision in Christ for a remedy, yet he goes on his way as if he were never exposed to those realities” (MacArthur, 85).

B. The Hearer and a Doer of the Word (v.25)

1. He looks deeply into it (v.25a)

“Looks” Gr.parakupto, this is a stronger verb than the one used in verse 23. It means “to bend over and

carefully examine something from the clearest possible vantage point.

- a) It is the verb used by Luke to describe Peter looking into the empty tomb after Jesus' resurrection (Lk.24:12)
- b) It's used by John of both Peter's and Mary's looking into the same tomb (John 20:5, 11)
- c) The person who looks intently at God's Word, "the perfect law of liberty," examines it to discover its deepest and most complete meaning

John MacArthur says, "The key to James's analogy is this: The faithful hearer and doer of the Word does not study the mirror itself but rather what the mirror reveals, namely, God's revealed will and truth."

- d) Paul said if it wasn't for the law of God, he would not have known covetousness, because the Law said, "You shall not covet" (Rom.7:7).
- e) The Word of God reveals man's heart—it cuts to the deepest parts - Heb.4:12-13

"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. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

2. He continues in it (v.25b)

“Continues” Gr.parameno, “to stay, remain, continue” (UBS). Literally, “to dwell beside”

- a) Ps.119:16 - “I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.”
- b) Ps.119:60-61 - “I made haste, and did not delay To keep Your commandments. The cords of the wicked have bound me, But I have not forgotten Your law.”

3. He is blessed because of it

- a) Ps.1:1-3
- b) Ps.112:1-2 - “Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, Who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed.”

C. The Religious and the Religion (vv.26-27)

1. The one who “thinks he is religious” (v.26)

“Religious” Gr.threskos, refers to “external religious rituals, liturgies, routines, and ceremonies” (MacArthur).

The Jewish historian Josephus used the word to describe worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Paul used the noun form of this term when speaking of his former life as a zealous Pharisee (Acts 26:5).

The most common word in the NT for genuine, God-honoring and God-pleasing worship is *eusebeia*, which basically means, “godliness” and “holiness.”

“Such things as attending church services and activities, doing volunteer work, following various rituals and ceremonies, saying prayers, and even having right theology have no spiritual value in themselves apart from true saving faith and honorable motives to glorify the Lord. The person who trusts in those outward things sooner or later will expose his faithlessness with his mouth, because he does not have the inner power to bridle his tongue. Trusting in those things to please God and receive His blessing are deceptive and worthless. Even if a ritual or liturgy is biblical in its wording, it is as futile as pagan idolatry unless the heart is right with the Lord. A corrupt and unholy heart eventually will be exposed by corrupt and unholy speech.

The tongue is not the only indicator of true spirituality but is one of the most reliable. It has been estimated that the average person will speak some 18,000 words in a day, enough for a fifty-four-page book. In a year that amounts to sixty-six 800-page volumes! Many people, of course, speak much more than that. Up to one-fifth of the average person's life is spent talking.

If the tongue is not controlled by God, it is a sure indicator that the heart is not, either. Jesus told the self-righteous Pharisees, "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ... For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:34, 37). Religion that does not transform the heart, and thereby the tongue, is

totally worthless in God's sight" (John MacArthur, James, 88).

a) He does not "bridal his tongue but deceives his own heart"

(1) "Bridal" Gr.chalinagogo, "to lead with a bridal" referring to "control, hold in check" (UBS)

(2) "Deceives" Gr.apatao, to "deceive, lead astray" (UBS), to "mislead" (Fri), "to cheat or trick" (LS)

b) His "religion is useless"

"Useless" Gr.mataios, "vain, worthless, futile" (UBS)

2. The one who has "pure and undefiled religion" (v.27)

"Pure" (katharos) and "undefiled" (amiantos) are synonyms, the first emphasizing cleanliness, the second denoting freedom from contamination

"James is not speaking of what may seem best to us, best to the world, or even best to fellow believers, but what is best *in the sight of our God and Father*.

The genuineness of anyone's *religion* is not determined by his or her own qualifications or standards but by God's" (MacArthur, 89).

a) He "visits orphans and widows in their trouble"

- (1) “Visits” Gr. *episkeptomai*, means more than dropping by for a chat. It carries the ideas of caring for others, exercising oversight on their behalf, and of helping them in whatever way is needed.

It is from the same root as *episkopos*, which means “overseer” and is sometimes translated “bishop”.

This word is used frequently in the NT of God’s visiting His people in order to help, strengthen, and encourage them (see Mat.25:35-36).

- (2) “Orphans and widows”

God has always had special concern for *orphans and widows* and has commanded His people to reflect that same concern.

- (a) David affirmed that “a father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation” (Ps.68:5).
- (b) The Mosaic Law included the instruction, “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan” (Ex.22:22).
- (c) Deut.14:28-29 - “At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the

stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”

- (d) Deut.27:19 - “Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, 'Amen!’”

- b) He keeps himself “unspotted from the world” (Rom.12:1-2)
 - (1) “Keep” Gr.tereo, indicates a regular, continuous action
 - (2) “Unspotted” Gr.aspilos, “unstained”
 - (3) “World” Gr.kosmos, used here to represent fallen mankind in general and its ungodly spiritual systems of philosophy, morals, and values

CONCLUSION

1. “Godly religion, that is, biblical Christianity, is a matter of holy obedience to God’s Word—reflected, among other ways, by our honesty in regard to ourselves, by our selflessness in regard to the needs of others, and by our uncompromising moral and spiritual stand in regard to the world” (John MacArthur, James, 92).

2. Are you a hearer of the Word who is self-deceived?

3. Or are you a doer of the word who is “blessed” ?
4. Ask God to reveal what your heart is like this morning.
5. Let’s pray.