

God's Word – Our Solution to Deception

#7 in series “Doing What We Believe”

(A Study in the Book of James)

James 1:19–27 (NASB)

¹⁹ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. Deception is such a dangerous thing...

We come to a section in the book of James where we encounter an emphasis – a highlighting of a truth that simply cannot be ignored or glossed over. It is the issue of deception – in fact – there are many dangers that come from “self-deception”...

Verse :22 – which has been called by many as “the key verse” to the book says – “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

The word “delude” in verse 22 is found only here and in –

Col 2:4 (NASB) “I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.”

What does it mean to “delude”?... Literally – it is “*to deceive by false reasoning*” (Strong's Concordance) ... And from these two places alone, we see that it is possible for others to “delude” us, or for us to “delude” our own selves...

We will also see in :26 that there is the capacity for us to “deceive our own hearts”... You know, it's one thing to have Satan and other “deceive” us – it's quite another for us to “deceive ourselves”!... That, I think, is a far more serious problem...

Why do I say that? It's because there are so many people who are deceiving themselves into thinking they are saved and ready for eternity – when in fact they are not!

Jesus had a lot to say about the seriousness of such self-deception:

Matt. 7:22-23 (NASB)

²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles [Or *works of power*]?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ Non-believers who think they are ok is one thing... But listen... For a true believer to be guilty of fooling himself is quite another thing!... There are true believers who are *deluding* themselves concerning their Christian walk... They think they are spiritually mature when they are not... It is a mark of genuine maturity when a person can honestly face themselves and admit they have the ongoing need to mature... It is the immature person who pretends – “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” (Rev. 3:17).

Spiritual maturity occurs as we grow in our relationship with God through His Word!

Jesus' great desire for His disciples – both then and now – is that we would be ever-growing and maturing in our relationship with God!

John 17 records what has been called the “High Priestly Prayer” that Jesus offered up to the Father the night before His crucifixion... Think about it for a moment. If you knew tonight would be the last night before you face the most important challenge of your life – in fact – you are about to face your very death – *what* would be on your mind?... I’ll tell you what it would be!... It would be whatever is of greatest importance to you! Whatever is most important to your heart!

For Jesus – that was you!... In fact, in that prayer, He prayed for Himself, His disciples then, and the disciples who would come later – and that’s me and you!... One of the key things Jesus asked the Father to do for His disciples is to “grow us up”... That is what is meant by the word “sanctify”. To be sanctified means to “be set apart” – literally – to be “set apart for God’s purpose” ... and that IS what it means to “grow up”!... Jesus prayed in –

John 17:17 (NASB) “(Father) Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Notice – Jesus equates truth with the very Word of God!... God’s Word is truth, and if we are rightly related to God – and growing in His revealed truth – we cannot be living dishonest, hypocritical lives! In our focal passage today – we will learn three responsibilities we have when it comes to the Word of God!... If we fulfill these responsibilities – we will be the ones to benefit from its fruit in our lives! We will be on the journey toward genuine maturity and be assured of walking in the truth and NOT being deceived!... We will also be living in honesty with God and people.

Just what are these responsibilities we have to God’s Word?

1. The Reception of God’s Word (:19-21)

There are some necessary prerequisites to preparing us to receive God’s Word:

Have a Teachable Attitude: Be Ready to Listen (:19a)

¹⁹ This you know [or *Know this*], my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear... What has become one of my favorite quotes of **Ravi Zacharias** is – “*We now learn to listen with our eyes and think with our feelings...*” – and he goes on to speak of the danger of that... Well..., in a similar way, James is warning us of the danger of failing to listen... We can’t listen with our mouths wide open... In other words – there are times we need to “close our mouths and open our ears”! We are to be learners first and foremost!... A disciple is a learner – a follower!... If we are truly following Christ – we must first learn to sit at His feet and listen!... We must have a teachable spirit.

Watchman Nee (1903-1972, Chinese Christian, who died, after 20 years in prison for his faith) – “A lowly person is a teachable person, easily entreated and open to explanation. Many of our spirits are too arrogant: they can teach others but can never themselves be taught. Many possess a stubborn spirit: they stick to their opinions even if they realize they are wrong.” (The Finest of the Wheat, Vol. 2, p. 66)

Have a Teachable Attitude: Be Ready to Listen

Have a Calm Attitude: Be Guarded Against Anger (:19b-20)

... slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. **Frederick Buechner** (pronounced “*Butch-ner*”) (An American Presbyterian theologian, with whom I may disagree about much – but he is onto something when he wrote:) – “Of (all the great sins), anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past ... to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back -- in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.” (As quoted by Neil T. Anderson and Richard Miller in Getting Anger Under Control, p. 139.)

Have a Resolute Attitude: Be Determined to Repent(:21a)

²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness [Lit *abundance of malice*]... Let me be clear – repentance is more than an attitude – it’s an action!

C. H. Spurgeon – “Repentance is as much a mark of a Christian, as faith is. A very little sin, as the world calls it, is a very great sin to a true Christian.”

Have a Humble Attitude: Be Ready to Receive **(:21b)**

... in humility [Or *gentleness*] receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

2. The Application of God's Word (:22-25)

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face [Lit *the face of his birth; or nature*] in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he [Lit *and he*] has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Applying God's Word involves Commitment to Its Authority

²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. Application begins with a settled demeanor... What is "settled" is our attitude of submission to God and His Word! We understand that God's Word is something more than ideas that need to be entertained – it is instruction that needs to be followed!... Being a "hearer" only – leads to delusion / deception... Being a committed "doer" – leads to maturity.

Warren Wiersbe – "It is not enough to hear the Word; we must do it. Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or Bible study is what makes them grow and get God's blessing. It is not the hearing but the doing that brings the blessing. Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them!"

Applying God's Word involves being committed to its authority over our lives!...

Applying God's Word involves Receiving Its Evaluation (:23)

Many people get this point exactly backwards!... They want to set themselves up as the authority to evaluate God's Word and judge it to be truthful or not... But the reality is – God's Word evaluates us! It declares the reality!... God's Word declares what **Francis Schaeffer**, perhaps the greatest apologists of the 20th century, called "*True truth*"... "True truth" is absolute truth. It is true even if you don't think it is true. It is always true!...

When we approach God's Word – we must be open to allowing God's Word to evaluate us:

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face [Lit *the face of his birth; or nature*] in a mirror
What is the main purpose for even owning a mirror?... It is so that we can be able to see ourselves and then make somewhat presentable...

As we look into the mirror of God's Word, we see ourselves as we really are!

Listen – a cursory, superficial reading of the Bible will never show us our deepest needs... It is the lingering at the mirror – that will show us the details we need to address... It is not a mere glance – but the gaze that will then show us an X-ray of our souls – and the true needs in our lives that the Lord is wanting to address...

The applying of God's Word to our lives involves coming under its authority, receiving its evaluation of us – and –

Applying God's Word involves Valuing Its Honesty (:23-24)

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he [Lit *and he*] has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

Don't miss this point!... We must value its honesty! By that I mean – we will so value what the Word

shows us that we will be determined to hang on to it!... We hang on to what we have been taught – and not forget what we have been shown...

It is exactly what the writer of Hebrews cautions us against:

Heb. 2:1 (NASB) “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.”

If we look deeply into the Word of God – and linger at what it reveals – we will find it to be unforgettable!... We will find it to be so valuable that we will be difficult to take lightly or dismiss so easily...

Applying God’s Word involves Living by Its Instruction

²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

“Abiding” is a term for “living” / “taking up residence” ...

A Christian is a learner – a follower of Christ. And the genuine Christian is one who is following God’s instructions for life!...

[] During my first year of college, I was walking up a stairwell in the dorm. On the wall was a poster with a picture of a wide-mouth hippopotamus... And under the picture was this caption: “After all is said and done – there is usually more said than done.”... I don’t know why that moment became so imbedded in my mind – except to say that caption has proven to be a true statement about life!...

If we are not careful – we can become guilty of having endless committee meetings – going to countless conferences about the gospel and evangelism, and think we are making progress in our Christian life...

And while there is certainly nothing wrong with conferences and meetings – they do become sinful when they are but a mere substitute for doing and applying such truths in our lives...

The emphasis in the book of James is on the practice of the Word...

Why did James call the Word of God “the perfect law of liberty”? It is because when we come to obey God’s Word – God sets us free!

It is exactly what the psalmist was saying in –

Psalms 119:45 (NASB) “And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.”

Jesus said –

John 8:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

This freedom, of which Jesus speaks, is the fruit of spiritual maturity as you and I learn to live in the Word of God!

Our first responsibility is to receive the Word of God into our lives... Then, we must apply God’s Word to our lives – otherwise we are deceiving ourselves... Then – this leads us to a third responsibility – and that is –

3. The Communication of God’s Word (:26-27)

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle [Or *control*] his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by [Lit *from*] the world.

The word translated “religion”, in :26 and :27, means “the outward practice, the service to a deity”...

It is used only five times in the entire NT (Jam. 1:26–27; Acts 26:5; and Col. 2:18, where it is translated “worship”)... “Pure religion” has nothing to do with rituals, temples, or the observance of special days... Pure religion means living according to God’s Word and sharing it with others – through what we say, what we do, and even through what we DON’T do:

First, let's consider how –
We Communicate Through What We Say (:26)

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle [Or *control*] his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

There are many references to speech in this letter... It seems that the use of the tongue was a serious problem in the church in those days... (James 1:19; 2:12; 3:1–3, 14–18; 4:11–12).

Jesus says that it is the tongue that reveals the heart –

Matt. 12:34-35 (NASB)

³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.

In short – if the heart is right – the speech will be right!

As we will see when we get to chapter 3 – a controlled tongue means a controlled body...

We not only communicate the truths of God's Word through what we say – but –

We Communicate Through What We Do (:27a)

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress...

After we have seen ourselves and Christ in the mirror of God's Word – we will then see others and the true needs they have...

In Isa. 6, when Isaiah first saw the Lord, he then saw himself as he truly was... and then he saw the people as they truly are – He then said in verse :5 –

Is. 6:5 (NASB) "... Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Words are no substitute for what we should be doing (Jam. 2:14-18; 1 John 3:11-18).

[] Remember the Hypo...

We communicate through what we say – through what we do – and –

We Communicate Through What We Don't Do (:27b)

... and to keep oneself unstained by [Lit *from*] the world.

Now stay with me on this... Our attitude toward the world says something about us! It COMMUNICATES! Our attitude discloses our values!... And God, through James is saying we are to NOT value the world!... Now, just what does that mean?

By "the world" James means "*the society without God*".

C. H. Spurgeon – "I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church."

D.L. Moody – "If I walk with the world, I can't walk with God."

In his commentary on this passage **Warren Wiersbe** says a lot that is worth your consideration! It is lengthy, but well worth it: –

"Satan is the prince of this world (John 14:30), and the lost are the children of this world (Luke 16:8). As the children of God, we are in the world physically but not of the world spiritually (John 17:11–16). We are sent into the world to win others to Christ (John 17:18). It is only as we maintain our separation from the world that we can serve others.

The world wants to 'spot' the Christian and start to defile him. First, there is 'friendship of the world' (James 4:4), which can lead to a love for the world (1 John 2:15–17). If we are not careful, we will become conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1–2), and the result is being condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). This does not suggest that we lose our salvation, but that we lose all we have lived for. Lot is an illustration of this principle. First he pitched his tent toward Sodom, and then he moved into Sodom. Before long, Sodom moved into him and he lost his testimony even with his own family. When judgment fell on Sodom, Lot lost everything. It was Abraham, the separated

believer, the friend of God, who had a greater ministry to the people than did Lot, the friend of the world. It is not necessary for the Christian to get involved with the world to have a ministry to the world. Jesus was 'unspeckled' (1 Peter 1:19), and yet He was the friend of publicans and sinners. The best way to minister to the needs of the world is to be pure from the defilement of the world." So, what should we do with God's Word? Receive it, obey it, share it!

Questions to consider in Community Group:

Once again the issue of deception is raised in the message. Why is deception such a big deal?

There is coming a day when Jesus is going to address many people who are deceived. Matthew 7:22-23 "²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" According to this passage, what will some people depend on as a defense for their belief that they are in good standing with God, when in fact they are not? What will be Jesus' charge against them?

The context of Colossians 2 speaks to our confidence and assurance we have in Christ and encourages us in our "good discipline and stability of [our] faith in Christ" (:5). In verse :4, Paul said; "I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument." According to this verse, what is the method often used to "delude" (deceive) people? What are some of the major arguments used to try and undermine your confidence / assurance in Christ? How can we counter those arguments?

In John 17:17, Jesus specifically prayed; "(Father) Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." In that prayer, Jesus equates truth with the very Word of God. In James 1:19-21, we read; James 1:19-27 "¹⁹ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." What are the four attitudes identified in this passage that we should maintain in order to "receive" God's Word well? (Teachable attitude: ready to listen. Calm attitude: guard against anger. Resolute attitude: determine to repent. Humble attitude: ready to receive.) Do you struggle in maintaining any of these attitudes in your life? Why is there such a struggle in believers?

According to James 1:22-25, what does "applying God's Word to our lives" look like? (Commit to its authority in our lives. Receive its evaluation of us. Value its honesty by not forgetting it. And live life according to its instruction.) Which point of "application" speaks to you the most today? How can we help each other apply God's Word in these ways?

God's Word is not only to be received and applied. It is to be shared. According to James 1:26-27, how do we effectively communicate God's Word to others? (By what we say, by what we do, and by what we don't do.) Can you provide some practical examples of what this looks like?

Which quote offered in the message most encouraged you?

In light of this message, what do we need to pray for each other about this week?