

# Be Doers of the Word – Part 1

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – the essence of true faith is to be active doers of what God’s word commands of us
2. aim – to cause us to be active in faith, recognizing who we really are before God and doing his will
3. passage – James 1:19-27

### b. outline

1. Be Quick to Listen (James 1:19-20)
2. Be Doers of the Word (James 1:21-25)
3. Be Properly Religious (James 1:26-27)

### c. opening

1. the **outline** of the letter
  - a. James’ statement in **1:22** is the **thesis** of the entire work: “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*”
    1. **i.e.** he is concerned that Christians would “*deceive themselves*” into thinking incorrectly about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, **and then living in that deception**
    2. **remember:** he has used the word (deceived) in **1:16**, and the idea of Christians “deceiving” themselves continues throughout the letter:
      - a. **in 1:1-18**, being deceived about how life is going to *go along* after becoming a believer
        1. failing to see that the Christian life is *hard*, and trials are *essential* to growing in faith
  - b. the **tendency** within us: to “disconnect” what we *believe* from what we *do*; the “natural” condition of the flesh whereby we tend to think one way but act another (**a self-deception**)
    1. **IOW:** to *assume* (in our minds) that we are followers of Jesus, but not to act **consistently** in those beliefs – to *say* that we are believers, but to *deceive ourselves* (and others) in either:
      - a. not actually having come to genuine faith in the first place (**i.e.** claiming to be a “Christian” [expediently] but showing no evidence of a regenerated heart), or
      - b. not making the *moment-by-moment connection* of faith to life (**i.e.** being inconsistent in claiming certain truths but not actually *living out* the *ramifications* of those truths)
    2. **IOW: what is genuine saving faith (vs. a faith that is just “professed”)?**
      - a. what does it mean to be a person of “faith” – what does it mean to *truly trust in Christ*?
      - b. **answer:** to be a doer of the word, not just a hearer ...
  - c. **IMO:** the letter of James can be outlined along this line of thought – that *saving* faith is always **consistent** between what we believe and what we do
    1. **The Testing of Saving Faith (1:1-18)** – the recognition that the Christian life is *hard*, trials are an essential part of faith, but we must seek wisdom, humility, and steadfastness from the Lord
      - a. faith, *by definition*, must endure through trials *or it is not actually faith*
      - b. and, these trials of faith are actually good and perfect gifts of God *setting us apart to him*
    2. **(now) The Consistency of Saving Faith (1:19-2:13)** – the statement of the thesis, the importance of aligning true belief with true action as the measure of true religion
      - a. so, **vv. 19-20** are an **introduction** to the importance of faith being *consistent* – **i.e.** the *point* of such testings are to see if we are truly willing to trust the Lord *in utter obedience*, or will simply “back away” because it is “too hard”

## I. Be Quick to Listen (James 1:19-20)

### Content

#### a. be informed, beloved brothers (v. 19a)

1. “*know this, my beloved brothers*” = a call to hear and understand a profound truth
  - a. **note:** the phrase is a strong *parallel* to the statement in **v. 16**
    1. James is now making the “positive” case over against the “negative” one he made before
    2. in **v. 16** it was: do not be deceived into thinking something *wrongly* (**i.e.** that the testing of faith is not valuable or important in what God is doing to make us a *unique* people)
    3. in **v. 19** it is: here is something to think *rightly* – a *positive* “spin” on the same thought
  - b. so, “*know this*” is similar to “*the saying is trustworthy*” (**1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8**)

1. **i.e.** something profound that we must pay close attention to – something that is *theologically* and *doctrinally* rich that must have a profound effect upon our thinking processes
  2. **IOW:** a perfect introduction to the thought he now brings ... **listen!!**
- b. be quick to hear (v. 19b)**
1. “quick to” and “slow to” = not “speed” (per se), but a matter of **prioritization** – putting certain things *first* (quick) and letting other things “slide” as less important priorities (slow)
    - a. **i.e.** being “quick to” = “soon” re: the return of Christ (**Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20**) – the reality of Christ’s return *and the priorities that we should hold in the face of his return*
      1. the importance of being “ready” for his return, found doing what he commands as he arrives
    - b. **i.e.** being “slow to” = an opposite to what is important re: the nature of Jesus (**Luke 24:25**)
 

*“And [Jesus] said to [the disciples on the road to Emmaus], “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”*

      1. here (in James), seeing as a *lesser importance*, putting less priority to
  2. “quick to hear” = prioritizing what is important to know and understand; listening closely
    - a. **question:** quick to hear *what* – *what is it* that we are to prioritize hearing?
      1. in this context: “*the word of truth*” (**in v. 18**) – the message that “*brought us forth*” to become the “*firstfruits*” of humanity – the unique message that *distinguishes us* from the rest of the human race, the message that *underlies* the “good” and “perfect” gifts God has given us
        - a. the concept of the “word” continues *as the point* from here on (**see vv. 21, 22, 23**)
    - b. **minimally:** the *basic* message of the gospel; the message that produces *conversion*
      1. **i.e.** that we are sinners, under the wrath of God; that Christ has come to bear that wrath in himself on the cross; that we must turn from our sin and trust in his completed work to be saved
      2. **i.e.** the basic message that any 8-year-old can understand in Sunday School or BYBC
      3. but ... the context *screams* that this “basic” message *is not enough for us to “know”* (**v. 19a**)
    - c. **optimally:** the *full* message of the revelation of God; the *totality* of the gospel *and its ramifications*
      1. **i.e.** the totality of what God has revealed *in his word* – the sum total of doctrine and theology that is revealed in the Scriptures – all of the *details* regarding the person and purpose and work of Christ from eternity past to eternity future *and its relationship to our daily existence*
      2. **IOW:** James is not concerned about people “getting saved” (with that minimal message) but with people *persevering* in genuine saving faith ...
        - a. **and that only happens as we “hear” (prioritize) the totality of what God has revealed**
        - b. **e.g.** the Wash. Post: “democracy dies in darkness” – **the Bible: “faith dies in ignorance”**
          1. there is a direct correlation between *apostasy* and *ignorance* (**Eph. 4:14**)
 

*“[God gave leaders to teach the fullness of Christ] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*
      - c. **reality:** the majority of church-going evangelicals have been led to believe that learning theology is utterly unnecessary (and only for the eggheads)
        1. **e.g.** only 41% of seminary students will go into fulltime ministry upon graduation – the rest are there because it is the *only* place they can learn theology (**Christian Post**)
        2. **e.g.** is it a fair comparison to see a connection between the steep number of people who now profess “no religious affiliation” and the dearth of theology in the church?
3. **principle: to be quick to hear is to be one who prioritizes “the whole counsel of God,” who desires to know more and more about this Christ and his word because that is what God has ordained to hold us steadfast in faith**
- c. be slow to speak (v. 19c)**
1. **note:** the immediate reaction to this phrase would be to assume the *opposite* of “quick to hear”
    - a. **i.e.** to be slow to speak about all that God has revealed
    - b. however, it is *virtually impossible* to believe that James would be counseling his audience to remain mum (or silent) in the world about all that God has done in Christ Jesus
      1. **i.e.** in a pagan society *and under deep persecution* to just “listen” to the world around them
    - c. so, slow to speak must have a different connotation ...
  2. “slow to speak” = deprioritizing our natural instinct to defend *our own beliefs* or presuppositions
    - a. **e.g.** it is common to interrupt someone to “insert” our opinions or beliefs – instead of listening to what is being said, we are thinking *more* about our own opinions and how to “turn” the conversation
      1. **note:** some will *accuse me* of this in preaching ... only speaking, never hearing ...
    - b. **the only “opinion” that matters on any subject is the Lord’s – what does he believe is true?**
      1. **e.g. tradition** is the single largest “reason” why most evangelicals believe what they do
  3. **principle: to be slow to speak is to be willing to allow our “traditions” to be turned by the full revelation of Scripture because that is the only way we survive our tests of faith**

#### d. be slow to anger (vv. 19d-20)

1. **question:** anger about *what* – what anger are we to *deprioritize*?
  - a. **note:** some will interpret this as “Christians should never show anger; it is sinful” (**a proverb**)
    1. however, Jesus exhibited *righteous anger* towards the religious leadership (e.g. **Matt. 23**), and Paul was *extremely angry* with the Galatians for perverting the gospel (e.g. **Gal. 1:8f**)
    2. no, there are *legitimate* times when we should demonstrate a righteous anger (**Eph. 4:25f**)  
*“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,”*
  - b. **question:** how do people *tend to respond* when they are *corrected*? **answer:** in anger!
    1. it is our *reflexive nature* (a concupiscence of the flesh) to respond in anger when our beliefs are challenged – the *sinful nature* tends to defend itself rather violently
      - a. e.g. the deacon at Hebron who challenged my “use” of the word *predestination*
  - c. **principle: to be slow to anger is to be willing to be challenged by the word of truth at our most basic level – a willingness to respond positively to correction because it is essential to our righteousness**
2. James explains this principle in **v. 20**:
  - a. there are two (2) forms of righteousness, intertwined with one another: **positional**, which is the declaration by God that we are righteous in his sight *by faith* (i.e. justification), and **practical**, which is the operation of the Spirit to conform us to holiness *through faith* (i.e. sanctification)
  - b. in this letter, James is *clearly* arguing that *practical* righteousness is the outworking of our *positional* righteousness throughout all of life – that the two are *indistinguishable* within our faith
    1. **contra** the “mistaken” belief that faith is a *one-time act* that causes God to make a *one-time* declaration that we are justified in his sight
    2. James argues that faith *is a continuing action*, thus our justification is a *continuing declaration* by God as he sees that faith in action (i.e. in his “eternal present”)
  - c. thus, the “*righteousness of God*” (either positional or practical) is not produced in us by *resisting* (in anger) the corrections we need (i.e. to “dig our heels in” and “hold fast” to what we believe)
    1. we need to repent of our *reprobate beliefs* in order to be saved (initially), thus ...
    2. we need to repent of our *stubborn beliefs* in order to be sanctified (continually)
3. **application: to be a doer of the word, to hold a genuine saving faith, is (firstly) to be listening to that word, not holding to our “opinions” of what is true and right, and certainly not resisting what the Lord desires to teach us in the process of making us righteous in his sight**
  1. **another form of testing of faith: the struggle against our own “traditions” (presuppositions)**

**II. Be Doers of the Word (James 1:21-25)**

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**III. Be Properly Religious (James 1:26-27)**

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