

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-8-15 AM NOTES
"DOERS OF THE WORD"
JAMES 1:22-27
#6 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

"I am convinced the deep, dark secret of our religious subculture in the southern United States is that we want Christianity and we want church on our terms, according to our preferences, aligning with our lifestyles. We are a people happy to go to church just so long as nothing in our lives has to change. We are a people glad to be Christians just so long as we can define Christianity according to what accommodates us. The only problem is that in order for the religion of Christianity to be authentic, true, and actually acceptable before God, we have to let Him define what it looks like. And His definition of religion, His definition of true Christianity, is radically different from ours."
—David Platt

1 John 2:3-5 (NKJV) "3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him."

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV) "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven."

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We are to be separated **IN** the world, but not separated **FROM** the world.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-8-15 AM
“DOERS OF THE WORD”
JAMES 1:22-27
#6 in Series, “James: Practical Wisdom”

I agree with David Platt who said, “I am convinced the deep, dark secret of our religious subculture in the southern United States is that we want Christianity and we want church on our terms, according to our preferences, aligning with our lifestyles. We are a people happy to go to church just so long as nothing in our lives has to change. We are a people glad to be Christians just so long as we can define Christianity according to what accommodates us. The only problem is that in order for the religion of Christianity to be authentic, true, and actually acceptable before God, we have to let Him define what it looks like. And His definition of religion, His definition of true Christianity, is radically different from ours.” [David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James*, page 26-27]. One of the purposes James has in writing this book (letter) is to show us what true Christianity looks like. The constant emphasis of the book of James is that we are to be “doers of the Word” and not just “hearers of the Word” who pick and choose what we obey and what we ignore or explain away. James does not speak in lofty, pious, eloquent words. He is very practical. Over and over in many different ways he tells the readers that it is not what we know; it is what we do with what we know. Look just in our text how many times he says that. **James 1:22a (NKJV)** “But be doers of the word...” He approaches it from the negative in **James 1:23a (NKJV)** “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer...” He says in **James 1:25b (NKJV)** “...not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work...” In verse 26, he describes what true Christians do not do and in verse 27 what true Christians do.

Here is the clear message of James in some other words. True Christianity is evidenced by a pattern of obedience. Many in history and even today have misunderstood James and thought that he was teaching salvation by works. Many of those same people thought that James contradicted what Paul wrote about justification (our being declared righteous before God by faith). We will see when we get to chapter 2 that James and Paul did not in any way contradict each other; they complimented each other by giving two different sides of the same truth. Paul emphasized that salvation cannot be earned by obedience. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. James emphasized that the faith that saves is never alone. True salvation is evidenced by a pattern of obedience to the Word of God, not just knowing and saying nice things about the Word of God.

James is certainly not the only biblical writer that emphasized obedience. John emphasized obedience. We read in **1 John 2:3-5 (NKJV)** “³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments [obedience]. ⁴ He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word [James calls that *doers of the Word*], truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.” Paul, agreeing with James, taught the importance of evidencing salvation by being a doer of the Word. **Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)** “⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [doers of the Word], which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Jesus Himself made it clear that those who were His disciples were doers of the Word. **Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)** “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

In today’s passage James is emphasizing the importance of being a true doer of the Word.

I. The Command to Be Doers of the Word (V22)

Hearing a sermon doesn’t bring spiritual growth! When we fail to connect what we hear with a corresponding change in what we do, we simply harden our heart. You learn a lot when you are the Pastor of the same church for over 28 years. I have watched people attend who have never been under the expository preaching of the Word (messages out of the text). They make comments to me and others about how much they are learning and how they look forward to coming to church to hear the Word. I don’t get puffed up with the compliments because I know that I am a mediocre preacher at best. It is the Word of God explained, applied, and illustrated that is doing a work in their life. I can relate. I had been a Christian for about 18 years before I ever recall hearing an expository message from the pulpit. When I heard an expository message

from the new young Pastor (Ralph Harris) that came to our church in Nashville, I was amazed! I had never heard the Bible clearly taught and applied to my everyday life. I had always gone to church because I had been taught growing up that Christians should go to church. I am ashamed of myself, but after I became a married adult living 3 hours away from where I grew up, I primarily went to church because that was less uncomfortable than feeling guilty when I didn't go. Now, Kathy and I couldn't wait to go to church and see what we would learn that Sunday. We loved going back on Sunday night. I took every class this new Pastor taught – especially on how to share the Gospel with others. I had always been told to share the Gospel but I don't ever recall anyone showing me how. Brother Ralph (as we called him) also told us how we needed to be filled with, empowered by, under the control of the Holy Spirit (which I don't ever remember hearing about) and then how to take the Bible and show people how to be saved. He even took me out with him one Saturday, and I watched as he led a young architect to Christ in his home. Later, I began sharing the Gospel on Tuesday nights as we gathered at church and then went out to share Christ with others. Let me tell you what God did in my life (and Kathy could give you a similar testimony about her life). I went from being a genuine, but very immature carnal Christian who loved his job in the planning department of a large garment company, totally eaten up with materialism and rising up the corporate ladder, and dreaming of moving to a big house in Brentwood to the radical seeming action of quitting my job, selling our home, and moving my wife and 8 month old son 800 miles away to Fort Worth, Texas to enroll in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Do you know how long it was between that new Pastor coming to our church and my sitting in a seminary class preparing for vocational ministry? It was 8 months! What happened? I heard the powerful Word of God proclaimed and I surrendered to God's leading and trusting in the enabling of the Holy Spirit I did what I believed He was telling me to do. Kathy's testimony is similar. I know the power of God's Word! I have seen it in my life and in my wife's life!

Let me go back to my point I was making when I started that long personal parenthesis. Having been here so many years, I have had the opportunity of seeing many of those people who have come and heard the Word of God (taught expositively) changed just like I was. Some of them are in vocational ministry, but even more are now teachers here in small groups, Godly business owners, factory workers, medical people, school teachers, full-time homemakers, and some working in other churches where God led them. However, I have seen other people who expressed how much they enjoyed hearing the Bible taught, but nothing changed in their life. Many of them dropped out after a while; others kept coming, but all they did was sit in a Sunday morning worship service and then go home without any observable change in their lives. Many don't go to church anywhere now. What is the difference? Hearing the word is essential, but we must not stop with being hearers only. James tells us that we must be doers of the Word and not hearers only! The Greek word translated "hearers" in verse 22 literally means to audit. Did you ever audit a class in college? To audit a class means that you must attend the classes, hear the lectures, but you don't take the tests or get a grade. When exam time comes, you can head out to the beach or wherever, because you are only auditing the class. When term papers are due, you go take a hike in the mountains or sleep in – you are only auditing the class. There is no pressure. However, when graduation comes there is no cap and gown for the student that has only audited the classes. That's what a "hearer only" is in verse 22! They just audit, but never do any of the hard work of applying the word.

The phrase "deceiving yourselves" in verse 22 can be translated "defrauding yourselves". Both translations are correct. When we are auditors, hearers only, we are deceiving ourselves that we are OK, but we are also defrauding ourselves, cheating ourselves, because we are missing the opportunity to gain maturity by being doers of the Word. Some may even be deceiving themselves, defrauding themselves that they have ever been born again.

II. The Illustrations of Being Doers of the Word (V23-25)

James lingers on this vital point of being a doer of the Word and not just a hearer or auditor of the Word.

A. The Negative Illustration (V23-24)

Glass mirrors with quick silver backings weren't available until 13 centuries after James was writing. The mirrors of the first century were made out of highly polished metal. The clarity was not even close to the clarity we have in modern mirrors. To observe whether your face was dirty or your hair looked OK meant that you had to spend some time looking closely. A hearer of the Word who does not become a doer of the

Word is like a person who quickly looks at himself in a mirror and then walks away without doing anything about the dirt it revealed on his face or how disheveled his hair was. The Bible is like a mirror. Someone said, “You not only read the Bible; the Bible reads you!” That is certainly true. We look in the Word and get an accurate reflection of ourselves. That’s why some people don’t like to study or hear the Scripture taught. At some point, the Scripture like a mirror revealed some things about them that required action on their part and they were unwilling to do it. They aren’t interested in looking again. When it comes to our physical appearance, the mirror doesn’t lie, though others may tell you that you look wonderful. Even so, no matter how much other people tell you that your life is fine; there’s nothing wrong with a lifestyle you’ve chosen; it’s your money and you have a right to spend it the way you want to, etc, when you look in the mirror of the Word, you get what the God who created you for His glory says about those same things. If you are not willing to be a doer of the Word and deal with what God says is wrong, you forget quickly what the word reveals and the last thing that you want to hear or read is the Word of God.

B. The Positive Illustration (V25)

The word translated “looks” in verse 25 is a completely different word than the one translated “observes” in verse 24. The word translated “looks” in verse 25 means to stoop down and look intensely into something. In other words when we look intently at the Word of God and see ourselves as we really are, action is required. This is not speaking of a glance; it is a “continuing” to look. This is the one who is going to be a doer of the Word and thereby be blessed.

It seems that James is using the phrase, “the perfect law of liberty” in a general way to refer to the word of God. Why did he use that phrase? It is because the Word of God when obeyed, when we become doers of the Word, brings real liberty and freedom into our lives. **Psalms 119:45 (NKJV)** “And I will walk at liberty, [how?] for I seek Your precepts.” Jesus said in **John 8:31b-32 (NKJV)** “³¹ “...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free [give you liberty].” The blessing is not so much in the hearing as in the doing.

I am afraid that the church today has manufactured a form of Christianity that is out of balance. We often hear, “Jesus loves you just the way you are”. There is certainly some truth to that sentence, but if we don’t hear the rest of the truth about His love, we get a distorted picture of not only the Savior, but also our sin. The fact is Jesus loves you so much He hates your sinful ways and desires to change the way you are. If the “way you are” is in bondage to sin, He loves you so much that He calls you to the perfect law of liberty (God’s Word) to be set free from your sin and to live a life of holiness and surrender to His Lordship. In that repentance and surrender is freedom, liberty, and release from bondage. When we look into the law of liberty – the Word of God – and do what that Word says, we are brought into liberty. The last phrase of verse 25 literally says, “...this one will be blessed in his doing.”

III. The Application of Being Doers of the Word (V26-27)

In these verses James uses a word that in our day is considered negative. The word is “religious” and “religion”. Today, we think of religion as dead rituals and human ceremonies and acts that are generally void of biblical truth. That is not how James uses the word. He is speaking of public ceremonies and rituals designed to portray biblical truth. An example would be the ordinances of the church – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. James is certainly not denigrating the public displays of our faith. He is showing why they are sometimes empty and even phony. Doers of the Word practice pure and undefiled religion.

A. Application with Regard to Unbridled Speech (V26)

James is not giving an exhaustive list of what makes our religion useless. Generally what makes our religion useless is being a hearer and not a doer of the Word. The example he gives is an unbridled tongue. True religion does what the Scripture says about the tongue. There are so many references to the tongue (speech) in James that you might get the idea that the tongue is important to God. Why is the tongue so important? It is because the Words out of our mouth generally reflect our heart. **Matthew 12:34b (HCSB)** “... For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.” The last part of verse 26 is saying that we have deceived ourselves when we separate our speech, our tongue from the genuineness of our religion. The tongue reveals our heart. A negative, lying, cursing tongue reflects a negative, lying, cursing heart. What’s in the heart tends to come out the mouth.

B. Application with Regard to Unconditional Love (V27a)

The true outward display of genuine religion, a life that goes beyond hearer to doer, is to love those who can't give you anything in return. In New Testament times there was no government help for those in need. The poorest, defenseless, most vulnerable people in society were orphans and widows. That is still true in most societies today. With the birth of Christianity, it became the responsibility of the church to care for and help these vulnerable people. Even here where the Government has taken on tasks that God intends the church to address, we are to give special attention to orphans and widows. God has a special care for these two groups in society. **Psalms 68:5 (NKJV)** "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, *is* God in His holy habitation." The word translated "visit" means to seek out, to inspect, and to care for. It is not speaking of a casual "drop by visit". We are not to wait for them to come to us; we are to go to them. True religion is to take the initiative to help the most vulnerable people in our culture. I am so grateful for our Deacons who give special attention to our widows and I am also thankful for the large number in our congregation who have foster children and the many who have adopted. Most of you would be surprised if we had them stand here before the congregation. Caring for orphans and widows and all the vulnerable in society with unconditional love is evidence of being a true doer of the Word and not just hearers.

C. Application with Regard to Being Unspotted by the World (V27b)

The word "world" is not talking about a place, but an ordered system. Basically the world in this negative context is fallen society that leaves God out. It is society that has its own system of morals, its own system of philosophy, and its own system of values. These morals, philosophies, and values will almost always contradict with the Scriptures. True religion does not adopt those values, moral, and philosophies of the godless world system. James uses the terminology that adopting or accepting these is being spotted by the world. The perfect example of being spotted by the world is Lot, Abraham's nephew. In Genesis 13 and 19 we see a progression in Lot's relation to the world system he was in. First, he pitched his tent toward Sodom (and evil city); next, he moved into Sodom, and finally Sodom moved into him and he lost his testimony even with his own family. We are to be separated **IN** the world, but not separated **FROM** the world in the sense of refusing to develop witnessing relationships so that we can make disciples of those in the world. We are spotted by the world when we adopt the world's philosophies, morals and / or values. We are told to not be friends with the world (James 4:4), not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17), not to be conformed to the world Romans 12:2), but we are not told to be isolated from those in the world. In isolation, the salt and the light can't do its work toward those in rottenness and in darkness.

CONCLUSION

Are you a doer of the Word or a hearer only? If you are a hearer only listen to these words from our text once again. **James 1:22 (NKJV)** "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."