

Sunday Mar 20, 2022 Pastor Sam Horn

**BE THE REAL DEAL!**  
***Developing and Displaying True Religion***

“A Journey through James”

Sermon 4

**Texts:**

**James 1:19-27:**

<sup>19</sup>This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be **quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger**; <sup>20</sup>for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup>Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> **But prove yourselves doers of the word**, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> 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**.

<sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> **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.** (NASB95)

**Luke 6:46-49:**

<sup>46</sup> “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and **do not do what I say?**”

<sup>47</sup> “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: <sup>48</sup> he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

<sup>49</sup> “But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.” (NASB95)

**Introduction:**

Several weeks ago we embarked on a journey through James together as a church. I hope as we have navigated the rugged terrain of trials and the dangerous terrain that comes when trials turn into temptations, we are all still together on the trail and that we have not lost anyone along the way! Without a doubt, the hike we are on leads right through the realities and difficulties we all experience as we strive to live as

authentic, obedient believers in a world that is not only ignorant of what this means, but is actively opposed and even hostile to those who display authentic, living faith to the dark and dying world around them.

Thankfully, our guide is a loving pastor who is well acquainted with both the dangers we face, and the marvelous protection God has made available to us. That protection is found in a “perfect and good gift coming down from the Father of Lights – the word of truth” (1:17-19). This “word of truth” is the “wisdom from above” (1:5-8) that, when appropriated and received properly, will both guide and protect us on the trail.

This morning, we are going to listen to James teach us **how to display the living faith that God has been developing** in us through our response to trial and our resisting the temptations that comes as Satan uses the difficulty of trials to tempt and entice us to turn away from the wisdom God has given to follow the alluring wisdom of the world.

Keep in mind James has been urging us to develop and display a certain kind of faith – *a living faith* that is whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully-trusting in God and in His Word.

This kind of living faith is developed as we endure trials and resist temptation by means of the “good and perfect gift” God has sent down from above – namely, the “word of truth” God used to bring us into salvation and give us new life when we believed the gospel, repented of our rebellion against God, and put our faith and trust in a new Lord, Jesus Christ.

And all these “reborn” people are first fruits of the shalom God intends to restore to all His creation. And as first fruits of the amazing power of the Gospel, our lives should display the beauty and power of a living faith to a dying world that desperately needs to see credible evidence of the gospel’s power to free them from the bondage and misery of sin.

Having reminded us of how this kind of faith is developed in us, James now directs our attention to how this kind of faith must be lived out and displayed so that it is acceptable in the sight of God and credible in the sight of men. The term James uses for “displaying a living faith” is “**religion.**” And James has a strong warning

for all of his beloved listeners: ***There is a real danger that the religion you claim and display could be “worthless to God” and “useless” in its gospel impact on others*** (1:27-27).

There is something tragic about a true Christian who has experienced new birth through the power of the “word of truth” (1:18) but whose religion is worthless and powerless to fulfill the purpose God intends to accomplish through their living, authentic faith! ***So, what does James have to say to us this morning that will help us display our faith in ways that are acceptable to God and credible to men?***

What does an authentic, living faith look like in the market-place of life? And more importantly, how is it enabled and energized in our lives? James is going to answer both these questions **by painting a picture and pointing out three indispensable qualities** that should mark the display of our faith ... or as James puts it, the practice of “true religion.”

In other words, “What does true religion actually look like in action?”  
And, “What will be required for such a religion to be acceptable to God and impactful/credible among men?”

## **I. True Religion is Depicted by a Proverb (1:19-20)**

*This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*

### **A. The Observation**

*This you know, my beloved brethren*

- James uses an interesting verbal construction here. The term “know” in the text could be a command (ESV) or an observation (NASB).
- James could be pointing back to what he has just observed and exhorting them that, because they know they are first-fruits brought to salvation by the will and Word of God, they now must respond to the Word and do the Will of God.
- Or James could be looking ahead and giving them a strong warning/reminder – “Know this!” Either way, it is clear that what James is saying is both urgent and essential to living out our faith in ways that are approved by God and credible before men (1:27).

- It is also clear that however difficult what James has to say might be, it is coming from a pastor who dearly loves his sheep – “My beloved brothers” (1:19).
- ***So what is the urgent thing James wants believers to know?***

## ***B. The Instruction***

*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;*

- James uses a proverb here to make his point clear and memorable – those who have experienced the life-giving power of God’s Word (1:18) and given personal insight into the wisdom contained in that word (1:5) ***must be quick to hear that Word.***
- The meaning behind the image James uses is that of eager pursuit. God’s people eagerly pursue the wisdom God has placed in His Word.
- The idea behind “hearing the word” is not private listening or reading. In James’ day, most people did not have access to a personal copy of the Scripture. They would hear the Scripture read and expounded in a service much like this.
- ***James is urging believers to pay eager attention to the careful and accurate teaching and instruction of the Word of God as it is delivered by means of the pastors God has placed over you.***
- The evidence that a person is eager to pursue the truth God has placed in His Word is they are ***slow to speak*** against the careful and accurate instruction from the Word. And they are especially ***slow to allow anger*** to build up in their hearts and explode out of their hands at the injustice they see around them or experience personally. They do not respond to injustice against them or others in unrighteous ways driven by unrighteous anger.

## ***C. The Reason***

*for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*

- There is a righteous conduct that God desires His people to live out in their lives, even under persecution. There is also a righteous purpose that God is sovereignly bringing about in His time and by His providence (*the righteousness of God*). And the anger of man – angry words and deeds – do not achieve either of these purposes.
- James’ readers were suffering under the fierce and prolonged trial of unjust persecution. Many of them were suffering unbearable loss and massive economic reversals. Some of them were being brutally reviled, unjustly treated,

unfairly maligned, and ruthlessly persecuted by their neighbors and co-workers for their faith. And the temptation to take matters into their own hands and use their mouth to curse and malign their oppressors or their hands to fight and resist their oppressors was very great. And this is true in our day— we grow angry at the unfair, untrue, and unjust statements and actions that go on around us all day long and that have real impact on our lives and our families – and at some point, it is easy to let our anger boil over and spill out of our mouths and hands.

- James hits this squarely by saying this does not please God nor does it accomplish the righteous purpose God is working out in our lives and in His world.
- This was a real problem for James’ readers and sadly, their angry words and actions were not just directed to outsiders who were persecuting them; by the time we get to chapter 3 and 4, their angry words and actions were being directed against each other!
- So, in light of the strong warning James gives to his readers by means of this proverb, what are we to do if we want our living faith to be acceptable to God and credible among men? What is the alternative to angry words and actions?
- There is something that will accomplish and “effectively work out” what human anger can’t – and it is the faithful fervent praying of people who are living righteously before God and man (5:16). ***And the true religion born out of fervent prayer is marked by three distinct qualities*** – the first of which is ***grace-enabled humility***.

## II. True Religion Depends on Grace-Enabled Humility (1:21)

*Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.*

### A. The Urgent Command

*receive the word implanted*

- After giving his beloved readers wisdom by means of a well-known proverb, James comes right to the point. They must respond in a certain way toward the word of truth that brought them to salvation and that functions as wisdom from above for trials and temptations.
- And James has a very specific idea in mind when he uses the word “receive” that he will flesh out more fully in the next paragraph.

- The term “receive” *precludes* the idea that believers can come to the teaching of God’s word with *a negative, jaded predisposition* to challenge everything – “*I won’t accept it until you prove to me there is no other viable option.*” *Nor is a neutral term* that describes someone who sits down and listens with a neutral mindset that can either take or leave what is being said.
- James is actually commanding his readers to come to the teaching and preaching (hearing) of God’s Word with an attitude of *joyful eagerness – ready to welcome* whatever God has to say to them from His Word because this word not only gave them birth, it has been implanted in their new inner man (heart).

## ***B. The Necessary Manner***

*putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility*

### **1. Putting Off Certain Actions and Attitudes – all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.**

- “Putting off” describes the idea of putting off a filthy garment.
- Peter uses this same concept to describe what believers who hunger to grow by means of the pure, strength-giving milk of God’s word must do – they must put aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and malice because they have tasted (experienced) the kindness of God in salvation (1 Peter 2:1-3).

### **2. Putting On and Consistently Displaying a Particular Attitude and Life Orientation – Humility.**

- The term “humility” is not primarily a verbal term – someone who thinks or speaks poorly about himself/herself to others. It is not talking about humble talk although humility will change the way we speak to others.
- The concept behind this term is submission to God, His Word, and to the authorities He has placed over you. And in this case, Pastor James is a spiritual authority giving instruction and teaching from the Word of God. But for that instruction to “work” the righteousness God expects, they will have to have to come to this word with a certain life posture – **submission**.
- That is the real question for all of us – “As ‘first-fruits’ of the marvelous work God is doing to restore all of His creation, have we cultivated and are we displaying throughout our live a joyful willingness to submit to Him, to His Word, and to the authorities He has placed us under?”

- Most of us are willing to come to hear good preaching and teaching. And we are willing to go along with those in spiritual leadership over us .... until they present something from the Word of God that we disagree with or that we would rather not obey and our inner posture changes from submission to resistance. And from that moment on, if we keep coming, we come with a less welcoming heart and soon or later, it shows up in our words and actions and eventually our feet.
- Some people are skilled enough to mask this inner resistance by outward agreement and agreeableness or even by self-effacing or self-deprecating speech, but inwardly they are seething – and eventually they become passive-aggressive toward God’s Word and will. And this should not surprise us because we have a flesh that refuses to obey God and in fact, cannot.
- So what will be strong enough to overcome our natural inclination to resist God’s Word and rebel against His will?

### ***C. The Gracious Enablement***

*in humility receive the word implanted*

- “Implanted Word” is a reference to an amazing reality that makes all the difference in the world to believers! That reality is the arrival of a brand new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and described by Ezekiel (36:24-32). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak about a day when God would do three things:

#### **1. He would replace our hard heart with a soft and receptive heart:**

*Ezek 36:26: Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

#### **2. He would internalize His word in our heart so that we desire it:**

*Jer 31:33: “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

#### **3. He would put his spirit in our hearts to help us understand that word and enable us to obey His will:**

*Ezek 36:27: I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*

### ***D. The Compelling Reason***

*which is able to save your souls*

- The reason we should eagerly receive this word is that it has the amazing capacity to save and deliver our lives (souls).
- It has already saved us from the wrath of God that is coming down on sinners. It is saving and delivering us from the hostile world around us and the sins that so easily beset us. And on the day of judgment, He will keep His Word to deliver us from His coming wrath on sinners. And it will save us from our own sinful wrath!
- ***But what exactly does it mean to receive the word?***

### **III. True Religion is Developed through Word-Based Obedience (1:22-25)**

*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> 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.*

#### ***A. The Instruction: Prove yourselves doers of the Word***

- This is a very pointed, rubber-meet-the-road statement to believers who claim to love God with an authentic living faith.
- James is actually asking them to prove their claim by producing specific and consistent evidence – that they actually practice the Word that has been taught to them by him and others.
- James speaks very directly. If you claim to be a spiritual person whose worship is acceptable to God, then produce evidence for your claim by a life that is ***joyfully receiving*** and ***consistently obeying*** what you are being taught from the Word. How do you respond to the word when it is taught? How do you receive the careful, thoughtful, prayerful counsel of your pastors? Do you welcome it or do you resist it when it cuts across what you want or desire?
- And to drive the point home, James contrasts two believers who are both hearing and receiving the same instruction from God's Word.

#### ***B. The Contrast: Two Men Who Study the Perfect Law***

##### **1. The Word-Hearer: The Professional Hearer**

- The first believer James calls to our attention is the Christian who looks into the Word of God but does not retain its teaching or apply its instruction.



This man is like someone who looks intently in a mirror, sees his reflection, and departs without doing anything about what he/she saw in the mirror.

- Note: in ancient times, mirrors were not readily available, so when most people had the opportunity to look at themselves in a mirror – it was a big deal. They looked intently into the polished brass to get a look at what others saw every day. This was not likely a quick glance but rather a deep study since it was not an everyday experience.
- This is like many Christians who delight to hear and listen to good preaching, read good books, have a well-marked study bible, a notebook full of notes, and a list of favorite preachers they love to hear .... BUT ... for all their hearing, their lives remain unchanged because their will remains unsubmitted to God.

## **2. The Word-Doer: The Faithful Obeyer**

- James contrasts the professional hearer with the person who comes to the Word and does the same thing. Like the “hearer-only”, this person is also looking intently into the “perfect law of liberty.”
- James has identified this “perfect law” as the “word of truth” (1:19). It is perfect because Christ has fulfilled it for us. James describes it as a ***Perfected Law that perfects believers*** because now that Jesus has fulfilled it for us, we have the Holy Spirit to help us obey its demands. And those demands actually free us to live out our faith in ways that please God and impact men.
- The difference between this man and the professional hearer is that he actually continues in the word by obeying it. In other words, rather than just walking away glad for a good sermon, he takes the time to consider how to obey and implement that word!

## ***C. The Promise: Only One of the Two Will be Blessed by God***

- James’ point is that the blessing of God does not come on hearing or even understanding God’s Word – it comes only on those who humbly obey and do what God has said in His word.
- Could this be an explanation as to the absence of blessing in your own spiritual condition in spite of all the time and opportunity you have invested in hearing and studying the Word of God – classes, church services, seminars, books, memorization programs, etc.?

- Is your life marked by a subtle arrogance instead of a gracious humility that comes out of your mouth, is displayed in your responses, and confirmed by your attitudes and actions toward your neighbor, your brother, and your spiritual leaders?
- **So what does this actually look like in our lives and why is it so important for James and his readers?**

#### **IV. True Religion is Displayed through Gospel-Shaped Living (1:26-27)**

*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.** <sup>27</sup> 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.*

##### ***A. The Real Danger – if any man thinks ... he deceives himself***

- The subtle danger of being a “word-hearer” without being a “word-doer” is that it occasions a massive deception – you are convinced that your practice of religion is acceptable to God when in fact it isn't! (Micah 6:6-8)
- James could easily have pointed to his careful and distinct living, his ritual observance right down to his attire (linen garment), and to the spiritual disciplines that produced actual calluses on his knees as evidence that his “religion” was acceptable to God.
- But instead, he warned his readers to be on guard lest they think their knowledge of God's Word and external words about God constituted acceptable worship before God when in fact it was worthless to God and useless to men. (Is 29:13; Matt 15:8-9)

##### ***B. The Evidence of True Religion that God accepts and men believe:***

1. ***A Spirit-Controlled Tongue*** – bridle your speech so that it ministers grace to the hearers.
  - James has already alerted us to the danger of hearing and not doing. Now there is a second danger he calls to our attention, the danger speech that appears to be informed and shaped by the Word but that do not produce deeds that are aligned with and conformed to the Word.
  - This was happening in two ways in the lives of his readers: **First**, there were believers who used their mouths to bless those in dire need by saying to them, “Go in peace! Be warmed and filled.” (2:15-17). But that was

what came out of them – words. This is the equivalent today of us saying, “May God bless you! I am praying for you and hope things get better!”

- But, **Second** and even more serious was the reality that some of James’ readers were using their tongues to praise and bless God and to curse and revile others (3:9-10)
- 2. **A Compassionate Heart Like God’s** – care for the downtrodden so that you reflect what God is like.
  - If you claim God as your Father with your mouth, then be like God in your conduct toward the oppressed (Is 1:15-17)
- 3. **A Consecrated Life** – keep yourself unstained by the world.
  - Constantly consecrate your life to God and Carefully guard your life so that you remain fully aligned with God and His Kingdom values. (Is 1:18-20).

### **Conclusion: Be Word-Doers and not just Word-Hearers!**

- The directness of a message like this is difficult for believers in any age – but it may be particularly difficult for a church like ours filled with believers who have spent years listening to sermons, owning and reading bibles, taking notes, and even going to bible classes and bible studies.
- You and I are the very people James is talking to in very direct and pointed ways – it is very possible that some of us came in this morning happy to be at church, eager to hear the word, and even singing – but our spiritual speech is all mere words. And James has a message for us – this practice of religion is worthless because it is only words. There are not ongoing obedient deeds produced by all of your religious hearing and speaking.
- It might help to know that James got his message right from Jesus who told a similar story about two builders (Luke 6:46-49). Listen to how Jesus introduced this very famous story – *Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*
- Do you want to experience the blessing of your loving heavenly Father? If so, listen what Jesus had to say to his closest and most intimate friends on the night before He fulfilled all the good words He had been saying to them by washing their feet and then going to the cross on their behalf in joyful submissive obedience to the Word and Will of God:

*John 13:12–17: When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, **blessed** are you if you do them.*

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Keep in mind James has been urging us to develop and display a certain kind of faith – a living faith that is **whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully-trusting in God and in His Word.**

This kind of living faith is developed as we endure trials and resist temptation by means of the “good and perfect gift” God has sent down from above – namely, the “word of truth” God used to bring us into salvation and give us new life when we believed the gospel, repented of our rebellion against God, and put our faith and trust in a new Lord, Jesus Christ.

***What does James have to say to us this morning that will help us display our faith in ways that are acceptable to God and credible to men? What does an authentic, living faith look like in the market-place of life? And more importantly, how is it enabled and energized in our lives? James is going to answer both these questions by painting a picture and pointing out three indispensable qualities that should mark the practice of “true religion.”***

**I. True Religion is \_\_\_\_\_ in a \_\_\_\_\_ (1:19-20)**

*This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*

**A. The \_\_\_\_\_**

*This you know, my beloved brethren*

**B. The \_\_\_\_\_**

*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;*

**C. The \_\_\_\_\_**

*for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*

**II. True Religion Depends on Grace-Enabled \_\_\_\_\_ (1:21)**

*Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, **in humility receive the word implanted,** which is able to save your souls.*

**A. The Urgent \_\_\_\_\_**

*receive the word implanted*

**B. The Necessary \_\_\_\_\_**

*putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, **in humility***

**1. Putting Off Certain Actions and Attitudes – all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.**

## **2. Putting On and Consistently Displaying a Particular Attitude and Life Orientation – Humility.**

### **C. The Gracious \_\_\_\_\_** *in humility receive the word implanted*

#### **1. He would replace our hard heart with a soft and receptive heart:**

*Ezek 36:26: Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

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*Ezek 36:27: I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*

### **D. The Compelling \_\_\_\_\_** *which is able to save your souls*

***But what exactly does it mean to receive the word?***

## **III. True Religion is Developed through Word-Based \_\_\_\_\_ (1:22-25)**

*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.<sup>23</sup> 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;<sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.<sup>25</sup> 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.***

### **A. The \_\_\_\_\_: Prove yourselves doers of the Word**

### **B. The \_\_\_\_\_: Two Men Who Study the Perfect Law**

1. The Word-Hearer: The Professional \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Word-Doer: The Faithful \_\_\_\_\_

### **C. The \_\_\_\_\_: Only One of the Two Will be Blessed by God**

**So what does this actually look like in our lives and why is it so important for James and his readers?**

**IV. True Religion is Displayed through Gospel-Shaped \_\_\_\_\_ (1:26-27)**

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**A. The Real \_\_\_\_\_ – if any man thinks ... he deceives himself**

**B. The \_\_\_\_\_ of True Religion that God accepts and men believe:**

1. **A Spirit-Controlled \_\_\_\_\_**
2. **A Compassionate \_\_\_\_\_**
3. **A Consecrated \_\_\_\_\_**

**Conclusion: Be Word-Doers and not just Word-Hearers!**

- Do you want to experience the blessing of your loving heavenly Father? If so, listen to what Jesus had to say to his closest and most intimate friends on the night before He fulfilled all the good words He had been saying to them by washing their feet and then going to the cross on their behalf in joyful submissive obedience to the Word and Will of God:

*John 13:12–17: When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, **blessed** are you if you do them.*