

Be Doers of the Word – Part 3

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 **thesis** 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*”
 - b. “*the word*” =
 1. the “*word of truth*” that has God has used to set us apart from the world (**v. 18**)
 2. the word that we are to be “*quick to hear*” – the word that we *prioritize* as the message from God himself over all other forms of *self-justification* or *subjective thinking* (**vv. 19-20**)
 3. the “*implanted word*” that we are to embrace with humility, the message that comes *out of our new nature* in Christ that reminds us now of *what we truly are before God* (**v. 21**)
 4. the “*word*” that we are to go out and be “*doers*” of, living out the true nature within us of holiness that should show itself through our whole life, rather than just being a “*hearer*” who is “*deceived*” into thinking something else about how we are to live (**v. 22**)
 - a. **IOW**: to avoid one of **the most fundamental self-deceptions** that tempts the believer: to forget who we truly are *by God’s own reckoning* and go out to live *in another way*

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

Content

c. the illustration of being a doer of the implanted word (vv. 23-25)

1. the nature of the illustration as a **simile**
 - a. simile = a figure of speech comparing one thing to another, enlightening the original point by way of comparison – **i.e.** using “*like*” – this point is *like* this example from real life
 - b. similes are always **similar** and **simple**
 1. similar = the illustration has a similar sense to the original assertion so that the hearer is able to see the point that the teacher is attempting to make
 - a. **e.g.** Jesus’ use of similes in parables: like mustard seeds, leaven, hidden treasure, a merchant, a net, a master hiring workers, a man on a journey, a man building a house, a woman hiding a valuable, etc. – stories with a “moral” that is similar to the point being made
 2. simple = the illustration is simple enough that the hearer does not get bogged down in the details and misses the original point (**i.e.** a five-year-old understands the use of a mirror)
 - a. **question**: could the use of this form of teaching be *similar* to Jesus’ as members of the same upbringing – having similar experiences and methods of being taught *themselves*?
2. the substance of the illustration by its **details** (**vv. 23-24**)
 - a. the illustration describes the “*hearer*” who is deceived – **i.e.** the individual who is a “*hearer only*”
 1. the contrast in **v. 25** will then make the “*doer*” obvious over against the nature of the “*hearer*”
 - b. the “*hearer*” who is “*deceived*” is the man who stands before a mirror, looks “*intently*” at his “*natural face*” (**i.e.** studies himself), and then goes away and “*forgets*” (or neglects) what he looks like
 1. he has seen and understands what he sees, but he goes away and begins to act *differently* than what he saw in his reflection (**e.g.** he “forgets” his hair color or facial features)
 2. the illustration is *designed* to be **preposterous** – although we may not remember *every detail* of our face in the mirror, we do remember the *general nature of what we look like*
 3. **i.e.** we *do* recognize ourselves – the **self-deception** is the *purposeful* sense of ignoring what is “right before our eyes” – we *choose* to forget as an **active choice**

3. the substance of the illustration by its *truthfulness*
 - a. **truth #1:** we need a mirror to know what we look like – the mirror *reflects*
 1. without something reflecting our face (e.g. mirror, metal, water, phone, etc.), we do not know what we look like – we cannot see our own face through our own eyes (e.g. **Papillion**)
 2. **here:** the “*word of truth*” is a “reflector” that shows us our nature
 - a. without such a mirror, we are *utterly ignorant* (blind) as to our spiritual nature
 1. we can *speculate* (as most people attempt to do), but our spiritual eyes are blind to our *actual condition* – we “grope around” *thinking* we know who we are
 2. the Scriptures act as a *mirror* – they reflect our spiritual nature back to us
 3. **principle: we need a mirror to understand our spiritual condition**
 - b. **truth #2:** a mirror reflects *exactly* what it sees – the mirror reflects *faithfully*
 1. **true:** there are modern technological aids that “filter” our natural look (e.g. **iPad app**), but James is referring to a simple mirror that reflects an unaltered view of the individual
 - a. **i.e.** the man who “*looks intently*” at his “*natural*” face = he studies carefully what the mirror faithfully reflects back to him, what he *really looks like* ...
 2. **here:** the “*word of truth*” reflects *faithfully* our spiritual condition – it tells us who we *really are*
 - a. the **article** on *theological anthropology*: that most of the *theological* problems besetting the church today are failures of *anthropology* = the failure to *start* with a proper view of the human condition or to assume human spirituality is something *other* than lost (e.g. synergism’s assumption that human beings are “morally neutral”)
 - b. the Scriptures *honestly* and *faithfully* reflect our true spiritual condition
 1. for the *unregenerate*: the *mirror* of Scripture clearly shows that they are spiritually dead, unable to satisfy the righteous requirements of God or cooperate with him
 - a. it reflects a nature that is *rebellious* against God *even in the midst* of morality, religion, philosophies, spiritualities, etc. – it is *brutally honest* about the reprobate
 2. but, for the *believer*: the *mirror* of Scripture reflects that we who have been set aside by God, reborn by the Spirit, led to Jesus through the gospel, and have repented and put our faith in the completed work of Christ are deemed **holy and righteous**
 - a. it reflects that we are children of God, indwelt by the Spirit, covered in the imputed righteousness of Christ, with a perfect high priest advocating for us
 3. **principle: the word of truth faithfully tells us who we are in the sight of God**
 - c. **truth #3:** the reflection in the mirror cannot be *denied* – the mirror reflects *honestly*
 1. **true:** there are some who “see” something different reflected in the mirror (e.g. in gender dysphoria), but that is the fault of *the eye*, not the mirror
 2. **here:** what is important is **how we respond** to the “*word of truth*”
 - a. **i.e.** the man who “*goes away and at once forgets what he was like*” = an **active** “forgetting”; a purposeful act of *neglecting* what he has seen
 - b. **i.e.** the man who says “I don’t *believe* what I have seen” or “I won’t *act* on what I’ve seen”
 - c. the “*word of truth*” reflects to the believer that he is holy and righteous in the sight of God, but he walks away from that revelation and *denies what he really is* ...
 3. **illustration:** the *deception* of Adam and Eve in **Genesis 1-3**
 - a. in **Genesis 1**, God decrees to create humanity, and then give humanity *dominion* over all things, establishing man as “king of the world” (**i.e.** to expand the Garden [and the race] until it fills the whole earth, glorifying God through everything that has been made)
 - b. in **Genesis 3**, Satan comes to deceive Eve
 1. he first asks “*did God really say that you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?*”
 - a. he questions the *veracity* (truth) of God’s word, and *twists* what God actually said
 2. he then states “*you will not surely die ... you will be like God, knowing good and evil*”
 - a. he implies that God has been “withholding” something from them
 3. Satan tempts them by deceiving them on their *position* as having dominion over all things
 - a. instead of Adam recognizing his God-given position, and grabbing Satan by the throat and burying him under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - b. Adam is *deceived* about who he *is* and succumbs to sin
 4. the primal sin was a **self-deception** – Adam and Eve are deceived about who they *were* in the sight of God – knowing what God had said about them, but “forgetting” it
 - c. Jesus (then) came as the **last Adam** to take dominion over all things – he did so *because he knew who he was*, the eternal Son of God given such dominion by the Father
 4. **principle: the “hearer” who does not act on what God has said about him or her is self-deceived – the Christian who “walks away” from the word of truth and denies its reality**

4. the point of the illustration by its *contrast* (v. 25)
 - a. the contrast is the individual who looks into *“the perfect law, the law of liberty”*
 1. law = a statement of *truth* that demands a *proper response* (i.e. it is unsafe to travel faster than 55mph on AL-59, therefore you should keep your speed under that *or face a fine*)
 - a. the Mosaic law was a statement of the *nature of God* (i.e. faithful, generous, life-giving, etc.)
 - b. and, the Mosaic law declared Israel to be *his own people* (i.e. bearing his “image”)
 - c. therefore, the *proper response* to the law was to act *consistently* with it *or face rejection*
 - b. **here:** the *“perfect”* law (or law of *“liberty”*) is the declaration that we are **by nature free** from the *slavery of checklists*, systems of outward *“morality”* that can never satisfy us (or God)
 1. **e.g.** (do not try this at home): make a checklist of your sinful habits and record your “success” over the course of a week – you will only focus on the *failures* (e.g. **the box of donuts**)
 - c. **Pauline:** the view of the law in relation to believers in **Romans 7:4-6** (read and exegete)
 1. to serve in the *“new way of the Spirit”* (and not in the *“old way of the letter”*) is to understand *who we really are in Christ* and to live accordingly, not in slavery to Adam’s way
 2. **note:** the desire for us to return to “checklists” is an **attempted deception by Satan** – to cause us to “forget” who we really are in Christ, and return to the old slaveries
 5. **Rev. 20:6:** the saints who reign with Christ – although there is still a *future* sense to our ruling with Christ, he has *already* included us with him in his dominion over sin, thus we must always remember who we truly are, so that we are not deceived about our power over sin (**Rom. 6:14**)
 - a. **the Christian life consists of a right view of who we really are, and we face sin by casting the devil away from us when he attempts to deceive us into thinking less of ourselves**