



Lesson 10 August 8th, 2020

Hearing and Doing the Word

Study Scripture – James 1:19-27

Background Scripture – James 1:19-27

Key Verse:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

James 1:22

INTRODUCTION

We are now studying a Book of the Bible which is the best one to make us understand reality. We learn that it is utmost foolishness to believe and have as our guiding principle of life that God respects a profession of faith which has only or mostly an external form of religious behavior.

This is biblical psychology. You should note that it is definitely very different from the psychology of the world, a psychology which will not really help you.

If you really want to know how to live as a Christian and what a Christian looks like here it is made plain and straight for you.

This Book has a single-minded focus on the matter of faith and so is concerned with explaining what faith is and how it works. James is emphasizing the theme of Christian behavior which if it is to be regarded as real and thus must reflect or express Christian doctrine. It teaches us that faith in God shows in the practice of Christianity which would show salvation manifested.

It is often pointed out that this Book is firmly rooted in Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, containing 18 references or allusions to Matthew 5.

He will give us the three tests for self-examination, namely

1. How we control our speech and discipline the use of our tongue,
2. How our lifestyle shows a genuine care for the poor, the widows and orphans, and
3. Whether or not we refuse moral compromise with the world, that is, keep ourselves from the deadly poison of worldly pollution.

The warning of the possibility of sin corroding the heart with its toxic waste bringing moral decline, moving from temptation, enticement, sin carried out, resulting in death is one that is most important for modern believers. James gives us a game plan for living in a godly way so that Jesus will be honoured and this pattern to follow will help us build a strong life of faith so that those watching will be able to see people in action that honor God day by day.

In noting Jesus' stress on the truths of God which all require holiness and righteous behavior one writer comments:

“The oldest version of such deception relies on religious appearance as a mask for reality. Dutiful attendance, correct phrasing, and proper appearance make a claim to right standing before God without reference to the heart.

Jesus denounced those who practice righteousness before a human audience – praying aloud to be noticed, fasting with a long face, ostentatious generosity (Matthew 6), and those who claimed titles and insisted on VIP seating (Matthew 23) that falsely suggested God’s favour”.

It is most important to pay attention to the fact that the book is structured by having at least three arguments which lead to the clear content of and exposition of **“pure and undefiled religion”**.

Emphasizing that all believers are going to be faced with temptation they therefore will face a series of moral choices. They are to be blamed and cannot avoid responsibility for these choices for there has been a clear contrast stated between the gifts that come from God following the birth that God gives, with the resulting actions that they should manifest, and the desires that leads us to sin and death.

There is a word that comes from God and there is a birth that makes one live today and in eternity.

The gifts from God are good and there was nothing missing in these gifts because they come from above from God who is the **Father of Lights**.

It is through His word that one is born and brought into the family of God.

In contrast to this is the desire or cravings which enable the spiral of temptation which works in life. This seduction of sinfulness does not have its source in God even though people are tempted to blame God, the perfectly holy God for their stupidity leading to them being in an unfortunate position. This attitude in man has led to all kinds of foolish behaviour and attempts to avoid personal responsibility. It is therefore important for us to pay special attention to what one writer says for that forms the backdrop to our Study Scripture and what it is trying to teach us.

It is most important for us to realize that this is true biblical psychology. It is not like the psychology of the world. This is how God looks at and analyzes human beings. We had better therefore be very careful and pay close attention to what James is saying. This writer states after he looks at why we behave the way we do:

“God cannot be tempted, and he doesn't tempt anyone else. God is holy, and he doesn't want us to fail or fall.

The truth of it is that temptation resides deep in who we, in a vulnerability to seduction away from God's ways to the glitter and superficial beauty of the things this world has to offer.

Deep within us, we are often confused about what is really valuable and what life is all about. There is a part of us that's looking for fulfillment, some sort of satisfaction, and when we see



the glitter of what is offered to us, we think “Aha.. that looks good.... that looks like it could get me where I want to go”.

When that happens, James says, it starts a cycle. This evil desire comes up from within us. What we do with that is what James is talking about here. When we entertain that desire for a moment, when we begin to let it take root in our hearts and minds, it becomes images and possibilities, and the enticement grows. And then, James says, desire gives birth to sin. After we have let the desire percolate longer than it should have, rather than stopping it and choosing life, it begins to develop within us, and all of a sudden we act on it: we make sinful choices based on the impulse.

Then what happens? The cycle deepens. It always becomes easier to make that choice to sin the next time. Choices to let sin be born lead to habits that lead to destruction. The spiral keeps going, and sin gives birth to death. And here we thought we were finding life, and it looked so promising! But that moment of pleasure becomes a lifetime of pain. That moment of pride set of laws around the that are very hard to scale and very hard to tear down”.

It is no wonder therefore that the Book of James is one of the books of the Bible that initially faced delay in acceptance by the early church into the canon of Scripture. This book along with Hebrews and one of the epistles of John was considered to be among the disputed books, but many of the early church fathers, so-called, did quote from it and regarded it as Scripture. Many scholars regard this book as the earliest book of the entire New Testament written before A.D. 50 and the Jerusalem Council and before any of Paul’s epistles.

Because of its rather strong doctrine about human behaviour and psychology some have tended to regard James and Paul as teaching and holding contradictory positions, because James wrote about and stressed works in chapter 2:24 after a discussion that believers had no difficulty or qualms in practicing the serious sin of partiality and despising the poor. He wrote: *“Ye see then how that by works of man is justified and not by faith alone”*.

At the same time after a powerful discussion that it was the grace of God alone which saved men, Paul wrote in Romans 3:28, *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”*.

Though a close examination of the writings of both men reveals that they were complementary to each other rather than contradictory, some have propagated the idea that the book of James was not a powerful book to which one should pay close attention. This position is not sustainable, for it ignores the fact that Paul was dealing with the inner faith of a man’s heart, a state which God sees and knows, while James was discussing the outward fruits of faith as men see them.

In fact, Jesus in Matthew 7: 16-21 had taught that one could distinguish between the true and false only by examining a man’s fruit. There should be extreme caution in rejecting books of Scripture which deal with practical holiness before men. These books cannot be regarded lightly or rejected.



It is clear in Scripture that the people of the world need to see the love of God, the purity of life brought about by God, and the power of God in the lives of the people of God. Satan and his demons will do anything to destroy the holy walk of every believer before God and man. Satan will do anything in his power to change, subdue, modify, or destroy such a witness.

James writes in a simple and concise way, so that none of us can say that we do not understand what he's saying. Because of his simple, straightforward and convincing style we might be uncomfortable with what he says, but he hits the nail right on the head.

Practical holiness is an extremely important matter, and there was no conflict between James and Paul.

The Book or Letter is considered to be written by James, the brother of Jesus Christ, a man who did not believe that his brother Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God until after Jesus was resurrected. He did eventually begin to grow in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and he became a leader of the church in Jerusalem. (See Acts 15:13-22). No wonder he is tough on us and how we look at the things that are true.

James was well acquainted with Scripture and stressed the proper behavior required of a servant of Jesus Christ. For him it was not sufficient to simply say 'I' believe. Our action should reflect our faith.

An examination of the Book of James and the Sermon on the Mount shows remarkable similarities in emphasis. His discussion also rests quite heavily on the book of Proverbs and it is helpful, if we read Proverbs 10:19, 11:12-13, 13:3, and 17:28, as well as Ecclesiastes 5:2-3 with this lesson. In the sections on anger we should pay attention to Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 29:22 and Ecclesiastes 7:9.

James was obviously versed in Scripture and much of his exhortations to follow the word of God reiterates Exodus 13:3, Numbers 15:39, and Deuteronomy 6:10-12, among other Scriptures. As well, he repeated much of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah cautions to Israel. In order to set the tone for what he was writing, James begins by describing himself in the very first verse of the chapter as a slave, a bondservant and one who was in permanent servitude to another. This was a very degrading position but James was not ashamed.

Note that this Lesson is addressed to people of God, who consider themselves to be bondservants of God. Once this position is understood the exhortation of James that the believer be *doers of the word and not hearers only* is most logical.

He also made it clear that Jesus was his "Lord", a word used by Hellenistic Jews as a name for God. It was this name that the Roman Emperors used in order to tell people of their deity. But James used it to stress that he considered Jesus as God. He thus spoke of himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.



It is instructive to clearly understand James' self-identification. If we are to regard ourselves as servants of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, our new position means that we have been taken out of 'darkness', from slavery to Satan and sin, and transferred by the redemptive process into becoming 'a bond servant of Christ'. That servant has been purchased by Jesus Christ from the 'slave market of sin' to become the possession of Jesus; here clearly ranked with God as a co-equal. (See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 7:23).

Clearly the servant of God must necessarily be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should read the Text remembering that Romans 8 teaches that those in Christ Jesus are very different and that they

"walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"

So believers are reminded who they really are and with whom they are identified. Their life must reflect this difference from the world:

"So they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his..

For if you live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live...

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God".

Before he even begins to exhort believers to be *doers of the word*, and this means that believers must be working in a particular way, James proceeds to address the dispersed people of God and explain that there was a need for patient endurance in trials, for trials were inevitable.

The child of God should expect to pass through many and various trials, admittedly a difficult teaching. But this is the way that God has chosen to produce the "fruits" that He desires.

The word "temptations" do not suggest that anything wrong has been done. These are varied and manifold (many) tests believers undergo. They are not a sign of God's displeasure. 1 Peter 4:12 tells us that we should not consider these things strange. These tests produce patience, a virtue which helps in developing Christian character. God's goal is to develop perfection, that is, completeness with nothing lacking.

Faith is tested through trials, it is not produced by trials, but trials reveal what faith we do have. Faith according to Romans 10:17

"...comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God".

By patient endurance we will move to completeness. During this time of testing all one needs is wisdom from God. Wisdom is as one writer states:

"a fixed, righteous order to which the wise man submits his life".



James urges believers to understand God's view of life by studying His revelation, and ask God not only for knowledge, but for wisdom. Wisdom shows a person how to use knowledge. God gives this divine wisdom liberally and would never reproach anyone who asks Him for wisdom.

Requests to God however must be made in faith, with no doubting God's ability or desire to give us His wisdom. One writer explains the problem of those who ask without faith as follows:

“Such a person's problems are not only subjective, feeling circumstances are directing him or her rather than God, but they will also be objective. He or she really is at the mercy of circumstances and events beyond our control. This type of inconsistent person resists God's work in his or her life. Rather than simply perfecting maturity in the person through his trials, God now also has to discipline (educate) him regarding his attitude toward his trials.”

The *double minded* person has a divided allegiance and therefore is fickle, unsteady, staggering around like a drunken man. In the eyes of God this is not a good situation for that person.

Both rich and poor should rejoice when they are passing through trials, for trials mean that the person is being lifted up by God, and being separated from the temporal. There is a blessing to those who endure temptations, for it is worth *the crown of life* which comes with success.

James teaches us that God will never entice us to evil. God is not to be blamed when our fleshly desires and the encouragement of the Devil entice us and we fall. Corrupt desires will always lead to sin and death. We should never like Esau consider the birthright to be of little value and go in the wrong direction. We should not blame God for our mistakes, for the real cause of our problem is our lust.

Satan tries to convince us that our corrupt desires will result in life and goodness. He is a liar whose real intent is to steal, kill and destroy, (see John 10).

With these teachings clearly stated, James now turns believers away from the deception of sin, and shows that God is the author of everything that is good. This realization will lead us to always 'doing' despite the circumstances, and not just 'hearing'.

He has told us that:

- There is good that comes from trials
- We can have comfort in trials because of who God is.
- Things do not happen haphazardly to Christians. God is the one who brings adversity into the lives of His people. There is meaning and purpose to anything that happens to believers.
- God is in control. He is sovereign.
- We can trust Him in trials for He uses trials to mature us and make us more like our Savior.
- We should resist the doubts that the enemy throws in our minds when we are going through trials.
- Ask God for wisdom and keep on asking Him in faith.



- God is generous and will give us the wisdom that we need.
- If we yield to temptation, we sin, and cannot blame God.
- We do not sorrow as those who do not have hope.

The words of comfort and assurance logically precede the demand that the behaviour of believers should reflect a seamless fit with their doctrine of truth. Verses 17 and 18 are therefore essential as verses of context for our text.

Verse 12 - 15. In and of itself, these verses are a lesson on its own, however a small summary shall be given to lay the foundation of what is to come in the upcoming verses connected to the lesson.

First and foremost, we are told that God is not the author of any man's sin, and so God is not to be charge with it. No exigence of affairs can ever tempt the Almighty God to dishonour or deny Himself, and therefore He cannot be tempted with evil. Simply put, God cannot be a promoter of what is repugnant to His nature. The error once again lies with man in his conception of who God is. The moral evil within man is tied to some disorder in the being itself and so is chargeable to it. The source could be a want of wisdom, or of power, or of decorum and purity in the will. We see this early on in Adam, as he says "*The woman thou gavest me tempted me ...*" trying to throw the blame upon God for giving him the tempter. The carnal mind is willing to charge its own sins on God. We can only say this of God, and that is the afflictions sent by God are designed to draw out our graces, but not our corruptions.

We are taught where the true cause of evil lies, and where the blame ought to be laid, that is, the true origins of evil and temptation is in our own hearts. The Scriptures may call the devil *the tempter*, and other things may at various times concur to tempt us, but in truth, neither the devil nor any other person or thing is to be blamed, and ourselves excused.

If sin and holiness are contrasted, we see sin draws away, then entices whereas, holiness forsakes that which is evil and cleaves to that which is good.

Lusting after or coveting some sensual or worldly thing, leaves us estranged from the life of God, and so then we become fixed on a path of destruction. When *drawn away* it signifies a forcibly compelled action, and *enticed* signifies being beguiled by allurements and deceitful representations of things. A great deal of turmoil has now beset our minds, and it is easy to see how sin through cunning, deceit and flattery gain us to its interests. All this amounts to the fact that sinners who perish do so by their own destruction. God is justified forever in their damnation, that they destroyed themselves, as they have let sin in. The successful corruption of the heart is likened to planting a seed and watching it grow. All conditions are present, and as we begin to allow sin to excite desires in us, we soon see it take root and grow. This is the consent that we have given to sin, so that it can act in our lives. As it takes root and grows, meaning it will be strengthened by frequent acts and settled into a habit, no longer will the heart or mind of man look towards God, but sin will block out the calls of Wisdom, the voice of



God, and so sin will yield death in the end. Death upon the soul is achieved, death upon the body follows both the spiritual and temporal have fallen to sin.

God has no pleasure in your death, as He has no hand in your sin, but both sin and misery are owing to yourselves.

God is constant and does not vary in His behavior. He never changes. There is no shadow in Him. He is always good and the source of goodness. His nature is unlike our fallen natures and He is not like our enemy Satan. He is the *Father of lights*, and therefore there is no shadow in Him.

Therefore every good *“gift”*, the word here means *“the act of giving”*, and every *“perfect gift”*, this is a different word which is the noun *“gift”*, conveys a beautiful series of ideas. Both the act of giving, and this includes the motive for giving and the extent to which giving is done, as well as the gift, are good.

When God gives He gives liberally. He does not give to get anything in return. God gives out of love and He gives bountifully, with the cup running over. His approach is so perfect that Romans 8:32 states: *“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*

All these blessing come *“from above”*. These blessings like the new birth come from above, from a different world, where the Father dwells.

Now James begins to deal with the subject of regeneration, which can be defined as the act of God in bringing new life to a believing sinner. This is the greatest of God’s gifts for it is the gift of new life in Christ.

God deliberately initiated and provided this gift for us. This shows that God is good, for it is He of His own free will, initiated our salvation and brought us spiritual life. So James tells us that God *“begat”* us, and that this is one of the perfect gifts from above.

God wants all men to be saved but men often do not say *“I will”* to God. They reject being recipients of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So we are reminded of John 1:12-13 *“But as many as receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

So it is clear here that James agrees with Paul that our salvation comes from the sovereign will of God, and it is He that initiated salvation. This argument that Paul and James are clashing is ridiculous and dangerous.

The language indicates that God willingly brought us forth for no other reason than His will.

The instrument of regeneration is *“the word of truth”*, the entire teaching of God in the Bible. One writer writes about this as follows:



“It is something more than the written Word of the Older Testament Scriptures, or even the spoken word of preachers. It is the whole message from God to man, of which the written or spoken word is but one of the channels and which to those who receive it rightly is the beginning of a higher life”.

Note that James is telling us that nothing else we use can properly substitute for the teaching and preaching of the word of God. Films and music might be important, but as Jesus said in John 5:24,

“Verily verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life”.

James tells us why God regenerated us. He did it so that we would be the *first fruits* of His creatures, and bring glory to Him as *first fruits* of His harvest.

To properly understand this we must remember that at the Passover celebrations, every Israelite was to present the first- fruits of the harvest to God. This was an act of consecration, where the offering of a part was a pledge of the whole. According to Leviticus 23:9-14, those worshippers acknowledged by their action that everything came from the Lord and everything belonged to Him.

So when James uses this word which is translated “first- fruits” as one writer says: **“it refers to what is first in honour as well as what is first in order. The biblical writers used it “of persons superior in excellence to others of the same class.”**

Therefore, the regenerated person, the believer, is a purchased possession and is owned by God. The believer is not his own.

God wants to bless believers and so they should look at temptations to leave the will of God as potential enemies to their spiritual growth. These tests must be faced squarely, and there should be no yielding to sin.

James has thus in his discourse warned us about the source of temptation, the steps that occur when we are tempted, and he has provided the solution when we face temptations and trials.

THE TEXT

Verse 19. As a result of the regenerated life brought by God, the taking out of the believer from spiritual death into life by His word, the believer must be quick to receive the truth of the word of God. They should be most ready to listen and learn, for God has assured believers that if they lacked wisdom, they should ask in faith and God would give what they asked. The will of God is to be carefully studied and well understood for it is presented as the key to resisting temptation and having the proper response when trials and troubles come.



To protect themselves, the believers must inculcate the teachings of the Word of God. This will help each person deal with the issue of impatient arrogance and the anger which results.

This is very crucial admonition for as we live and meet the world we can easily become frustrated when our personal agendas are not being met.

The focus given the teaching already given is on communication. This is something desperately needed in today's culture. James therefore begins by homes in us to keep a cool head and he stresses therefore the value of listening. These are valuable things in themselves but not only that if they are absent the believers' behaviour will not lead to God's justice or righteousness.

Clearly therefore we are expected to be liberated from our bad habits. Our bad habits are dangerous things and we need to get a grip on them and get rid of them, for if we don't we will not see God as our loving Father and we will not be able to trust Him day by day.

We expect that our spouses, children, and co-workers, the person driving the car too slowly in front of us, the bank teller who will not come and open up her or his service area when the line gets long, and the many other persons we interact with on a daily basis, will understand our needs and rush to cater to us. When they do not do as we expect we can easily get demanding and then frustrated by their behaviour. Anger then wells up in us and this often makes matter worse.

So James gives us good advice. Control that arrogance and impatience as well as the me- first attitude and the need that others serve you the way you want. Today we all expect instant gratification, instant information and so we aggressively multi-task. That is a dangerous posture. Today everything is urgent. But to benefit from communication with God the rules to be followed are different.

James over and over again raises the alarm again sinful speech. Words can hurt, twist the truth, deceive others, and make one seem to be more important than they are. In all this there can be a thoughtless zeal and so James admonishes us to be slow with some things and to be quick with others. Note that the word quick means "eager".

Note also that rapid listening is impossible.

This of course is important for even when we are meeting God and God speaks we are supposed to be eager, open and receptive to His word so that it is implanted in us. One writer paraphrases what James tells us:

"If we are going to be quick (eager) about anything, let it be the slow business of listening to the truth; listening and reflecting, wondering and learning, and wrestling with the word of God".

The phrase "*swift to hear*" is considered to be a sign one is ready to learn. On the other hand, understanding that the anger of men can lead to sinful things, special care that the believer be slow to wrath should be undertaken. It is not sufficient to learn, it is also necessary to integrate learning into behaviour, so that one avoids responding to what is said in the wrong way.



Being “*swift to hear*” should lead to being “*slow to speak*”, and “*slow to wrath*”. Proverbs 17:27 and 28 was well known by James for it states

“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge”.

Notice advice about being ‘quick to listen’ and ‘slow to speak’ would be very difficult for us because with the kind of the technology around us people advertising want us to get a quick impression and to leap before we look. The society therefore specializes in empty slogans and it cultivates shallow opinions so that for many people being heard is more important than having something sensible to say. People are not interested in researching a subject deeply but they are quick to say something about the subjects on which they know very little. But they feel that they have a right to pontificate on every subject and make their opinions known. But remember that that is not what God wants from believers. He wants their character to be formed by knowledge of the truth and meditation on the truth of God.

We are also told in Proverbs 10:19,

“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise”.

Jesus himself warned in Matthew 12:36,37,

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

The Scriptures must be read and then put into practice. When we want to meet God and learn from Him we should restrain our “quickness”. Listening and learning the truths of God, reflecting on it, and wrestling with the word of God requires a different attitude. This slowing down will help us to understand others better, and we will not so easily get confrontational and riled up with every little discussion. Our pattern of life in every respect must be changed, whether in dealing with others, listening to their contrary views, or in worship.

Verse 20. This advice was given because the anger of men invariably produces sin and never achieves the righteousness of God.

Anger is more often than not a manifestation of the ‘flesh’. Paul reminds us of this in Galatians 5:16-26 and he lists ‘outbursts of anger’ as one of the works of the flesh. In contrast to that the fruit of the spirit involves gentleness and self-control.

When temptations occur and one responds angrily this does not advance righteousness, nor does it display the character and conduct that God wants to produce in believers.

We are told that God’s “*right hand is full of righteousness*” (Psalm 48:10) and that “*righteousness and judgments are the habitation of his throne*” (Psalm 97:2). We are also told that; “*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.*” Psalm 145:17.

One commentator warns:

“Ceaseless talkers may easily degenerate into fierce controversialists”.



Another states:

“The great talker is rarely a great listener, and never is the ear more firmly closed than when anger takes over”.

Every believer must therefore in conduct and practice aim at displaying the righteousness of God. The wrath of man will never show this righteousness.

Note that Jesus sometimes got angry, but only when people fought against and corrupted God’s agenda. This was directed at the religious leaders who oppressed the people with their rules which enabled them to abuse the people and become rich at the people’s expense. Remember therefore that Jesus lived by God’s agenda, not His own. His perspective was always God’s perspective and so He had the right to be angry at the perfidy and iniquity of those who knew better.

It is therefore important to recognize that James does not warn against all speech or anger. But he does warn against the kind of attitude that enables people to speak too quickly and become easily angered.

Verse 21. No unclean behavior or impure way of living is acceptable, for these things are outside the ways of God and should not be part of the believer’s life. No remnant of wickedness, the evil habits we practiced when we were not redeemed should be evident.

Instead there should be a teachable heart and the reception of the word of God with meekness. The saints of God must look into the Word of God and be careful to obey each and every word. The Word of God exposes every sin, every weakness, and shows every need. God’s implanted word should be welcomed. The believer would therefore turn away from filthy and evil behaviour. One writer advises:

“The believer should accept submissively what God has revealed and should respond cooperatively to what He commands. The word of God will then have good soil in which to grow, and it will yield an abundant harvest of righteous conduct in the believer.”

This word of God is what has been revealed to save us and keep us on the right path. It preserves us despite the terrible situation around us. When the believer heeds the word of God he can save his life and prevent trouble. When the believer does not there will be premature death. When one obeys the word of God one receives the *crown of life*.

Verse 22. A person should not simply confine themselves to hearing the word of God but must practice what the word instructs. Jesus wants disciples to be doers or in other words ‘workers’, says James. A person is blessed when they study the word but they are more blessed when they ‘do’ the word. Listening is very necessary but listening without action creates a very big problem.

Note that we are not to read the Bible just to accumulate data. One writer comments:

“It is not a source for sentimental sayings or fodder for scholarly debate.



The Word of God is a sword. It is sharp on both edges. It is the power of god for salvation and calls on us to obey”.

James is direct about the fact that at the center of his teaching is doing what the Word of God says. He wants believers to put in practice what they say they believe. Verse 22 is clearly not a very subtle verse. It is blunt and direct. It exposes a believer deceiving themselves.

James is here simply repeating what Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-27. Jesus said:

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house up on a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat up on that house; and it fell not: for it was founded up on a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat up on that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

When a person hears the word of God and disobeys or ignore the message, they are only deceiving themselves.

Verse 23. James now uses a clear illustration to make this point and he uses a Greek word to describe a man carefully scrutinizing himself in a mirror. This is not a hasty superficial glance. This is serious self-examination. This is the clear meaning of the Greek word used.

Verse 24. This person examines him or herself carefully and penetratingly, admires or accepts the image that is seen and then immediately forgets what he saw. The information he gains from the examination does him no good. Some believe that this verse applies to believers. Their behaviour indicates that they are deceiving themselves.

Clearly then James is telling us that there are people who carefully scrutinize the word of God and might even become real Scripture experts. But this does not necessarily result in them doing anything to improve themselves, by applying the scriptural knowledge that they acquire. They might admire their image, examine the word of God to learn something, keep the facts locked up in their heads, and do not use it.

There is no change in their life. They turn out to be hypocrites. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for saying one thing and doing another. They believed several things to be true but they did not act on them.

James rejects such behaviour. He wants believers to listen, hear the word of God and put it into practice. This involves a series of personal steps.

First, he wants believers to carefully look into the Word. The emphasis is clearly on the Torah especially the 10 Commandments, but it certainly will refer to the entire revelation of God, the entire Bible. See James 2:11 and Leviticus 19:18.



When this is done and the word of God reveals something, the second step is they apply the instruction, so that the word of God can transform their hearts and renew their minds.

If this is not done it is a bad situation. Exodus 13:3, Numbers 15:39, and Deuteronomy 6:10-12 emphasize the terrible danger in disregarding the instructions of the Lord. Believers should never get into that bad situation. One writer makes the “mirror” illustration very powerful. He states:

“Imagine you’re from a family disposed to melanoma. One day the mirror reveals a discoloured patch of skin on your cheek. Over time the mirror informs you that the spot is spreading and growing darker, yet no action is taken until the cancer becomes deadly and it is too late to alter.

The choice to see and walk away has consequences. We cannot claim ignorance of the truth. James warns against allowing a gap to exist between what we know and how we live. The stakes are very high”.

Verse 25. James describes a word of God in a beautiful way. God reveals His law in Scripture. It is a perfect law for it reflects the perfect will of a perfect God. The law of God shows His nature, and presents a true and clear picture to men. The Law of God is perfect. Read Psalm 119 carefully. Believers must study the law of God and react in obedience.

The law is the revelation of God’s will and so is able to give anyone who looks at it **“a true and undistorted picture of himself”**.

When one obeys the law of God one finds liberty; liberty from sin and the consequences of sin. This is true freedom. Now under the New Covenant, this law of God is written on our hearts by the Spirit of God. The Spirit enables us to obey and please God.

When a believer clings to the word of God they will experience God’s blessing in the present life as well as in the future. There must be faithfulness and a continuing holding onto the word of God personally.

Just remember that if you are a child of God, the Word of God, the seed, is planted in you. You should never ignore that.

Verse 26. Now we are told by James what a doer of the word looks like. Religion is not shown by hearing the word but by doing it.

One writer describes the word here used for “religious” (this word is used only here in the New Testament) as describing someone who fears or worships God. It refers to all the outward actions which follows what one believes and not to exactly what he believes deeply. It was therefore possible to do pious works, praying, fasting, attending synagogue or church, observing holy days and feast days, without the correct true spirituality. These are only signs of spirituality.



The better test of true spirituality was God's control of the tongue. Those who were truly religious and were really right with God would show that by bridling the tongue.

If there was not this control of the tongue and the use of the tongue to please God, that person's religion was simply self-deception.

Verse 27. To please the Father, to walk with Him involves doing what is close to the heart of God. Simply saying that one walked with God was useless if the way of life did not show the appropriate godlike treatment of others.

A real walk with God shows itself in practical ways. Those walking with God will help the needy, the fatherless and the widows. They will never abuse the vulnerable and the weak. In addition those walking with God will keep themselves away from the corruption of the world.

Taking care of the orphans and widows was always important to God. See Exodus 22:22-24, Deuteronomy 10:18, Isaiah 1:17 and many other Scriptures. Yet many in Israel who professed to love God were in neglect of this injunction.

James wants us to be real and not to deceive ourselves into believing that we are spiritual, when our behavior shows only a superficial relationship to God.

A person's religion must do more than engage in formal religious activity. Spiritual truth must be put into practice. Life must be filled with love for others. There must be moral purity, godliness and a practical love for others.

We can here look at the example of Lot as recorded in the book of Genesis. One writer says: **"From the book of Genesis, Lot is an example of a man who was spotted by the world. He started living towards Sodom, disregarding the spiritual climate of the area because of the prosperity of the area. Eventually he moved to the wicked city and became a part of the city's leadership. The end result was that Lot lost everything- and was saved as by the skin of his teeth."**

CONCLUSION

James has unpleasant practical truths for us. No wonder this is not a very popular book.

Note the practical advice. One writer reminds us:

"We don't have to think in terms of big schemes. We can think of little daily things like interactions with our roommate, our neighbours, relatives who are hard to love, and the poor and the needy in our immediate neighbourhood. And yes, we can extend that out as far as God lets us".

Note the stress carefully. For James true religion means guarding speech, acting out faith which of course involves caring for the marginalized and vulnerable people in the society which is



often represented in Scripture by “widows and orphans’, and it keeps itself unstained from the world.

It certainly contrasts God and the world and appeals to every believer to reject friendship with the world for friendship with the word is enmity with God.

So do you want to know what it means to live as a Christian? Well James begins by giving you some opening answers to help you to examine yourself.

James warns us not to blame God.

We must seek wisdom. We must praise God for whatever He does in our lives.

We are not to intellectualize our faith, but we are to do as commanded by God. We must be eager listeners and not leave it at that, but we must also be eager doers.

James does not portray suffering as an evil. He urges us to embrace our trials, knowing that they are from God and He has sent them for a purpose. Adversity should point us to Christ.

We must obey the Commandments of God and to do what God says and to what pleases God. We must be doers of the word.

Please do not deceive yourself. Our actions will always speak louder than our words. So we encourage each other to make the necessary changes and we can be blessed continuously by God.

