

## Doers of the Word

James 1:22-27

I have seen a lot of churches damaged over the years by people who knew a great deal about the Bible. I've known people well versed in the reformed faith become agents of division and even destruction within the visible body of Christ on earth. It's disheartening! Deeply grievous. These are churches I have known well, others I have been a part of, both as a pastor and a member. Churches harmed by those who would claim a knowledge of doctrine with which I might wholeheartedly agree, but who fail to do it, to DO what the Bible says. They fail, as James puts it so marvelously well, to be doers of the word.

As was the case in our study last week, James' words are so crystal clear, so obvious in meaning and application, that I anything I say has the potential to make them less clear. And yet, my chief object this morning is for you to grapple with these words as they apply to yourselves. It is not enough to gain the ability to identify others who might be classified as "hearers only." What is needed for each one of us is a healthy, honest endeavor at self-examination. So the question is simply, "What must you do to be a doer of the word?" And to put it negatively, as a challenge I want to lay before you today, "In what ways are you only a hearer of the word and not a doer?" I begin, then, with the plain,

### I. EXHORTATION.

v.22

James has just made a point, which we studied last week.

v.21

That's where you begin as a "doer." It requires outward action. "Lay aside all filthiness and wickedness." That might

require some effort and discipline, but most of all it requires an attitude of meekness. Meekness is the willingness to accept what someone else tells you! It is the willingness to receive correction without a response, without conditions or concerns. You simply receive the word as it is given, the word, James says, which is implanted in your hearts.

The truth of the word is not simply something you believe. It is something you practice. It is something that you live. John writes,

1 John 1:6 "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Literally, that verse says we are to "do the truth." It means "to walk in the light." It's the same idea as James. Doing the word. There is a great danger, a great delusion, that easily comes upon us all. It is,

#### **A. The deception of being merely hearers.**

And that is a deception. For who of you really understands and readily admits that you have become guilty of this offense? Often. Who of you is quick to admit that you have failed to do the word, to do what the Bible says and what it commands?

Perhaps you would make that confession. Perhaps your sins are evident and obvious, and perhaps you are genuinely sorry for what you have done. Yet even confessing your sins is not what James requires! Writing to Christians, he doesn't say, "Confess your sins." Rather, he says, "Be doers of the word."

So, beloved, don't be deceived by thinking all that is needed is

to confess your sins. James speaks of actually doing something about sin. So does Paul!

Eph. 4:20 “But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another. 26 “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

If you are a thief, it's not enough to confess it and even to stop stealing! You've got to start working to be able to give to others. It's not enough just to control your anger, you have to show kindness to one another. Do you see the point? You are called to DO what Bible says to do, not merely agree with what it says. Or even agree that you have fallen short of what it says. So don't be deceived. Confession is necessary when you sin, but it is not enough. Be doers of the word. That's an exhortation. A command.

Rom. 6:12 “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your

members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

So, for example, if the command is to love, then our obligation is as John describes,

1 John 3:18 “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

Therefore, don't tell me you love me, if you aren't going to show it!

There is another deception James must have in mind. The deception of proud self-righteousness. The deception of the Pharisee. The deception of thinking yourself, or judging yourself, to be mature and godly because of what you know! The deception of being diligent hearers of the word, but hearers who don't put into practice what they hear! The deception of being hardened and calloused in your own heart such that you really think that all of this applies to someone else, other than yourself!

Jesus is as plain as he could possibly be.

Luke 11:28 “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

And when mention was made to Jesus about his own mother and brothers trying to reach him through the crowds,

Luke 8:20 “... it was told Him by some, who said, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.” 21 But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

One more thing about this exhortation. It is,

### **B. A constant necessity.**

That is to say, the Greek verb is the present tense, with the idea of, “Keep on being doers of the word.” Keep on striving. Keep on working at this, every time you open the Bible, every time you listen to a sermon. Every time. Every day. Every moment of every day. That’s the obligation that James lays before us as Christians. And the stakes are very, very high. Jesus says with a parable,

Mat. 7:24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 “and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 “and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

He has defined that fall!

Mat. 7:21 “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. 22 “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

That’s the ultimate deception, isn’t it? Eternal condemnation to those who content themselves being hearers of the word. James then gives us,

## **II. TWO CONTRASTS.**

Two comparisons, with visual words and clear imagery, to help you understand what the words of his exhortation really mean.

v.23

A man looking in the mirror. A person looking at himself, evaluating himself. And the first contrast is between,

### **A. A hasty glance or a sustained study.**

The point is, when you examine yourselves, when you look into your own heart, do you do it quickly and merely perfunctorily? Do you examine your heart for sin very casually, with a very shallow probe? That is what James describes in,

v.24

This man is the one whom James calls “a forgetful hearer” in verse 25. This is the one who hears the word of God. He listens to good preaching. He prays to God, and even confesses his sins. But never, never does it affect him in the depth of his soul! Never does he ever really cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

This is the person to whom John addresses in,

Rev. 3:15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Ask yourself this question, “What would you be if you weren’t a Christian?” In other words, as you examine your own heart, figure out what you would be if God had left you to your own native sinfulness. Answering that question honestly ought to help you know yourself even as a believer, for the remnants of that old

man are still within you. Maybe you'd be a thief, or a murderer. Maybe a drunk, or an adulterer. What would you be, if God hadn't rescued you from the bondage of your sin? You know the answer to that question by seeing what native temptations still lurk deep inside your soul.

So when you look into the mirror, is it a hasty glance or a sustained study? When was the last time you were really overwhelmed by the awareness of your own sin? When was the last time you wept, literally, in repentance, because you understood the origins of your sin deep in your own heart? When was the last time you honestly and intently confessed your sins? Specifically. Pointedly. Painfully. When did you last admit, with grief and hatred of it, that sin still remained in your heart.

Beloved, there is a great self-delusion that comes upon us very quickly and very easily, when you treat your sins ever so lightly. And when you fail to remember what we studied a few weeks ago,

v.14

So how do you examine yourself? With a hasty glance, immediately forgetting what you see? Or do you look into that mirror intently, with a sustained, even painful examination. People of God, a biblical self-examination is more accurately pictured by the process of a root canal than that of putting a band-aid upon a bleeding scratch. Self-examination is illustration by the oncologist taking the knife and literally cutting open your body in order to cut away the cancer cells that are killing you. If you need bypass surgery, a cardiac surgeon will have to cut through the bones of your rib cage and spread them open for his work to even begin.

And if you would be a doer of the word, and avoid the

deception of being a hearer only, then you need that surgery performed. And you need it done now! So don't observe yourself in a mirror and then go away and immediately forget what kind of person you really are.

There is a second contrast here. Still with the image of a mirror, the contrast is whether you are looking at yourself the way that you now exist, or the way that you ought to be! Is your self-portrait,

### **B. A mortal, physical self-portrait or the ideal pattern of law-keeping.**

The first part of that contrast is looking at what James calls in verse 23, your "natural face." Literally, the face of your genesis, the face of your beginning or your birth. Simply looking at who you are as a human being.

We're good at look at ourselves today. We have counselors upon counselors trained to help you learn how to look at yourself. We have therapists and psychologists. In fact, this whole therapeutic culture in which we live is too often so totally self-absorbed that you can hardly do anything else. So we look at ourselves constantly. And we love to get labels to describe ourselves, for when you get a label, you're off the hook. The reason you can't control your temper is because you are obsessive-compulsive. The reason you engage in illicit sexual immorality is because you have a low self-esteem. The reason you are lazy and negligent in your responsibilities of life is because you have clinical depression. You can't concentrate or do the things you need to do because you have ADHD.

And it goes no farther! And that's the problem, not the identification itself. The problem is that we are so good at evaluating ourselves, and labeling ourselves, that we forget about

what God says we ought to be like! Here's the contrast to all that,  
v.25

So when you are evaluating yourself, what should you be looking at? Your family background. Your parents. The traumatic experiences of your life. The disappointments you feel. Your sadness, or your grief, or your anger. NO! When you examine yourself, and look in that mirror, what you need to gaze upon is what James calls "the perfect law of liberty."

If you struggle with drunkenness, then don't merely look in the mirror and declare, "I'm an alcoholic." Rather, look at the perfect law of God as it applies to your life.

Eph. 5:18 "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."

If you are tempted by sexual impurity, then look at the perfect law of God which Paul declares,

1 Thes. 4:3 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God."

There is such a deception in our day, in that people go to counseling in order to understand themselves, "observing their natural face in a mirror," but they fail to gaze fully and deeply at that perfect pattern of God which is revealed in his law, what James calls "the perfect law of liberty."

And isn't that interesting, that he calls the law the "law of liberty!" In the law, there is freedom. Freedom from sin! Declaring yourself to be an addict isn't freedom, but slavery. When sin is redefined as an illness, then you're a slave to it, just

as the cancer patient is a slave to the tumor growing wildly inside his body. Beloved, indulging in sin isn't freedom, but bondage. Yet on the other hand, meditating upon God's law isn't a yoke of bondage but rather the object of greatest freedom.

And that can be true only for Christians. For non-Christians are, indeed, enslaved by the law. By the condemnation of the law due to the perfect righteousness and exacting justice of God. So the law leads you to Christ, to be freed from that curse. But for the believer, for whom there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, the law is,

Ps. 19:10 "More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

We read also in,

Ps.19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalms 19 continues,

Ps. 19:11 "Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward."

With that, we come to,

### **III. THE BLESSING OF TRUE RELIGION.**

It is the blessing of going to the dentist for that root canal. The blessing of going in for that open heart surgery. The benefit of gazing upon the perfect obligations and glorious descriptions not of who you are, but of what God wants you to be. The blessing of being a doer of the word.

v.25

The blessedness is actually that your religion becomes acceptable to God, as James indicates in,  
v.27

“Before God” could well mean “accepted by God.” “Pleasing to God.” And to be very clear, what greater blessing could there possibly be! So we have defined for us religion that is so blessed.

**A. Genuine religion must be practical.**

How about an example?

v.26

If your religion doesn't include bridling your tongue, it's worthless! How's that for practical! If you say you are a Christian, but can't control what you say to other people, your faith is not genuine! If you say that you love God, but have a filthy mouth, or speak in uncontrollable temper, your religion isn't worth much. If you are a gossip or a slanderer, speaking badly of others, your faith is empty.

James understands the standard he is setting here.

James 3:8 “But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”

How true it is that “Observance of outward ritual is no substitute for interior righteousness, nor attendance at church services for performance of Christian service.” Holding a form of godliness while denying its power to transform your life renders

the profession of your Christian faith empty. Practical religion, putting your religious convictions into proper practice is the only way of knowing and experiencing the blessing of God.

James gives another example,

v.27a

Practical. Applied to life, everyday life. Helping those most in need, those without other recourse. Widows and orphans. That's genuine religion. And then,

**B. Genuine religion must be pure.**

v.27b “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this...to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

We looked at that last week.

v.21

It simply must happen. You cannot claim God over here, and live a life of polluted and immorality over here. The warnings of Scripture are plain,

2 Cor.6:9 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

So I'll end with the blessing fully expressed. The blessing of genuine religion, practical and pure. Perhaps nowhere else in Scripture is that blessing made clear than in,

Ps. 1:1 “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of

the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”

People of God, there is a well-defined path to such blessing.  
v.22 “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”