

Hear and Do

James 1:22-27

Intro

In most Christian homes you will find a Bible or perhaps a few Bibles lying around. The fact that nearly every Christian has a Bible is rather a modern privilege. The first fifteen hundred years of church history, Bibles were very scarce and protected. The printing press was not invented until 1455, and the ability for each Christian family to have their own Bible came much later in the 1700's.

Our freedom to have Bibles as we do was one of the great achievements of the Reformation. Thus, today, each Christian home probably has several Bibles. Yet for all those Bibles, how much time do we spend not just reading but expecting to hear God speak in and through His Word? We are surrounded by God's Word, but do we rarely listen to Him speak through it and do what it says? This is what James deals with in the passage that we are going to look at today.

James 1:22, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

In this passage James elaborates on what it means to accept the Word of God, showing that genuine acceptance of the Word is marked by **doing** what the Word of God says. The reality of one's faith is demonstrated by one's obedient life! In short, James says that our hearing must be balanced with and backed up by our doing. Your actions need to match the Word of God.

A survey that was done by George Barna found that one out of three "born-again Christians" accept same-sex unions. 39% believe it is morally acceptable for couples to live together before marriage. (Source: World [12/6/03], p. 33).

James would be filled with shock and horror! Although the readers to whom he wrote differ from the church today, his message is just as relevant now as it was when he wrote it. He's saying to hear the Word and not do it leads to deception, but to hear the Word and do it leads to blessing.

"Do what it says" The word "do" in the original Greek is the present imperative which means the habitual practice of obeying the Word of God. James emphasises that doing should be our continual practice. Believers are never to stop being doers of the Word! Keep on striving to be doers.

Jesus taught this truth when He said, *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine, and does them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."* (Matthew 7:24-27).

Jesus gave a stern warning when He said, *"not everyone who says to Me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21). Folks this is serious, very serious for those who do not DO the Word of God.

James 1:23-24, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”

In ancient times mirrors were not like the ones we have today, but were often a piece of flat metal of bronze or brass and they were polished to reflect one's image. Glass mirrors were not invented until 1835.

James says that a person who just listens to the Word and does not practice it is like someone who looks at their image in the mirror and then immediately forgets what they look like.

When that person “**Goes away**” it carries the idea of leaving permanently. The person does not want to return to the Word because it exposes them for what they truly are.

“**Forgets**” James is not necessarily describing a person with a poor memory, but rather a person with poor priorities. The person doesn't remember what he or she saw in the mirror because they don't regard it as very important. God, eternal life, and all of the other teachings in the Bible are interesting and nice, but this person has other priorities to pursue in life. They got to make money. They got their hobbies and toys. They forget what God's Word says about their sin because, really, it just isn't all that important.

The problem of forgetting God is a frequent theme in the Old Testament. Moses warned Israel after they got into the promised land, “*then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Deut. 6:12).

Israel didn't have an amnesia problem. They had a priority problem. God's commandments just weren't all that important to them. They had other things that were more pressing.

All parents have experienced this with their children. You ask them to clean their room. You come back in an hour, and they're playing, but their room hasn't been touched. You say, “I told you to clean your room,” and they reply, “I forgot!” Yeah, Right! It's not that your child has a memory problem. Cleaning his/her room just isn't very high on the priority list. So hearers only take a quick glance in the mirror of the Word of God, but they don't do anything to fix the problems that they see. They forget what they see and read because other things are more important.

James 1:25, “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

James says that whoever looks intently into God's Word bends over as it were in order to make a penetrating look into the "mirror" of God's Word of truth, and when they notice a "blemish" (that which is not in accordance with the Word of truth) on his "face", he takes time to deal with the defect such as sin.

You can see a lot by looking intently! Have you ever had the experience when looking intently at a passage of God's Word that you may have read many times before and then suddenly the Holy Spirit illuminates some new insight in that passage which you had never seen before? This joyful experience of illumination reflects our willingness to meditate on the text and put it into practice.

“**Perfect law.**” In calling the Word “*law*,” James refers to that authoritative body of truth that is the foundation of the Christian faith. It is the message contained and embodied in the Scriptures.

In Mark 12:29-31 a religious scribe asked Jesus what was the most important commandment. This was Jesus' reply, *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Also the perfect law is in essence the law of Christ as Paul mentions in Galatians 6:2. Jesus stated, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* (John 13:34).

The perfect law, the teachings of Jesus gives one freedom, freedom from sin. Jesus said *"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* Jesus also said, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:31-32).

Not forgetting the law of Christ is by doing it. You will be blessed in doing it.

Blessed, in Greek is *makarios* which means possessing the favour of God, experiencing spiritual prosperity. It describes a state of being marked by fullness from God. Do you want to live a fulfilled life then put into practice the Word of God, the perfect law.

James 1:26, "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."

In this verse James gives an example of someone who hears the word, but does not do it and so deceives himself by thinking that he is religious. James is describing people who pride themselves in the outward trappings of the faith, but who are not applying it to their heart. Their religion is a matter of pride and outward performance. They perhaps pray, fast, tithe, but they don't bridle their tongue.

James says that these people only deceive their own heart and their religion is worthless. James will deal more with the tongue in chapter 3, but it can encompass a multitude of sins like lying, half-truths, slander, gossip, angry words, hateful words, cursing, telling filthy jokes, and much more. The Bible has very specific and practical commands on each of these areas. If you profess to follow Christ, but don't apply the Bible to your speech, you're fooling yourself if you think that you're religious. Your faith is empty and your profession is worthless.

Jesus gave a warning, *"For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken"* (Matthew 12:34-36).

James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

When we practice and apply the Word of God from a pure heart it results in selfless conduct. We will have a concern in serving the Lord especially in serving the helpless and the needy. Those that were most needy in James' time were the orphans and widows. In that society, they were poor and not able to work and they could starve to death.

To show concern for orphans and widows requires that a person take their focus off of themselves and their needs and think about others and their needs. Usually, there is no payback when you care for orphans and widows.

What motivates you to care for them is that you apply the golden rule (how you would want to be treated if you were in their situation), and you do it to please God. The point is that when God's Word takes root in our hearts, it shifts our focus from self to others.

“And to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

A proper way to practice the Word of God is a willingness to apply it to one's life without moral or spiritual compromise. Believers who follow God are to be characterized by moral purity and not allow the world to pollute them. They long to speak and do only that which is pure, loving, honest, and truthful.

Conclusion

Today Bibles are so plentiful but this was not the case in Ezra's day around late 400 BC. After being exiled from Israel for many years in Babylon, the Jews had finally returned to their land. Something wonderful happened when Ezra read the Word of God to the people as they gathered in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 8:3 we read, *“And he (Ezra) read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”*

And then further in Nehemiah 8:5-6, *“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”* Wow! What a response to God's Word.

This passage in Nehemiah describes their reaction to hearing the Scriptures. We may have easy access to Bibles today, but we'd do well to learn to approach God's Word in the same manner as the people did in Ezra's time.

- The people listened attentively as Ezra read Scripture *“from daybreak till noon”* (Neh. 8:3). How eager are you each day to open God's Word and devote time to reading, study and practice?
- When Ezra opened the scroll, all the people stood up in reverence and then bowed down to worship the Lord (Neh. 8:5-6). Scripture reveals who God is and increases our awe of Him and respect for His Word.
- There were people who helped others understand what they heard, similar to the way pastors and teachers do today (Neh. 8:7-8). Do you skim over passages you don't understand, or do you rely on the many sound teaching resources available?
- After hearing God's Law, His Word, they were convicted of sin and repented with mourning and weeping (Neh. 8:9). God's Word is sanctifying, revealing sin and guiding us into righteousness.

It's easy to take for granted what is commonly available, but we should never lose sight of the most valuable possession God has given us—His inspired, inerrant Word.

Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Get into the Word of God, mediate on it and DO IT!