

James 1:21-27 Sermon — Be Doers of the Word

James 1:21-27

TEXT

James 1:21-27 “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. **22** But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. **23** For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: **24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. **25** But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. **26** If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. **27** Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

INTRODUCTION

Before we get to verse 21, remember the chapter. James begins with trials: the trying of your faith works patience. If you lack wisdom, ask God. He also warns about being double minded and unstable.

Then James moves from trials to temptation. God does not tempt us with evil. A man is drawn away of his own lust; lust brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death. Then James points back to God, the giver of every good gift, and says in verse 18 that He brought us forth with the word of truth.

Verses 19 and 20 tell us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. Then verse 21 begins with Wherefore. Everything James has said about sin, the word, hearing, speaking, and righteousness now leads to this: What will you do with the word God has given you?

That is the question running through this passage: What are you doing with the word you hear?

You can sit in church, know the verses, agree with the preaching, and still stop at hearing. James says the word must move into doing.

I. RECEIVE THE WORD AND DO IT — JAMES 1:21-22

James 1:21 “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

James says lay apart filthiness and the superfluity of naughtiness. Superfluity means an overflowing abundance. Naughtiness here is wickedness. Put away the moral filth that fights against the very word you are trying to receive.

Then receive the engrafted word with meekness. Come humbly, ready to be taught, corrected, and governed by what God says.

Then James says the word is able to save your souls. Somebody may read that and say, “Then James must be teaching salvation by works.” But James is already talking to these people about the word of

truth, and verse 21 begins with Wherefore. The passage then moves into hearing, doing, continuing, and blessing.

Romans 3-4, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-10, and Titus 3:5-8 are clear that eternal salvation is not earned by works. The strongest sense here is that the word can save, deliver, and preserve the hearer from the destructive course and consequences of sin as it is received and obeyed. Do not force save your souls farther than the evidence allows, and do not turn James into salvation by works.

Then he tells us what to do with that word.

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

The problem is hearing only. You can hear truth, agree with truth, and still deceive yourself because you never act on what you heard.

Jesus gave the same contrast.

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: **25** And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. **26** 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: **27** And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Both men heard. One heard and did. The other heard and did not. The difference showed up when the storm came.

Now go back to James.

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

Some people also use this verse as though every failure in obedience proves a person was never saved. James does not say that here. Works can show whether our conduct matches our profession, but eternal life rests on God’s promise to the believer, not on whether our Christian performance has been good enough this week.

What has God already shown you from His word that you know you need to do?

II. LOOK, CONTINUE, AND BE BLESSED — JAMES 1:23-25

James 1:23-24 “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: **24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

The glass is a mirror. The man looks at himself, sees what is there, walks away, and forgets.

James says he really did behold himself. His problem was not that he never saw. He saw and then forgot. God’s word can show you exactly what is wrong, and you can still walk away without changing anything.

Maybe the Bible shows you a problem with your temper. Maybe it shows you your mouth is wrong. Maybe it exposes bitterness, dishonesty, laziness, or worldliness. Seeing it is not enough.

James gives the opposite response in verse 25.

James 1:25 “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

This man looks and continues. He stays with what God showed him. He remembers it. He acts on it.

James calls God’s revealed standard the perfect law of liberty. So what is biblical liberty? **Biblical liberty is freedom from the bondage of sin so that we can willingly live according to the truth of God.** It is not freedom from God’s authority, and it is not permission to do whatever the flesh wants. God’s truth sets us free to live the way God intended us to live.

That is why James can put law and liberty in the same sentence. God’s commands and biblical liberty are not enemies. The man walking in liberty is the man looking into God’s truth, continuing in it, and doing what it says.

Jesus connected that same continuance in His word with freedom.

John 8:31-36 “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; **32** And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. **33** They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? **34** Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. **35** And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. **36** If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Jesus tells us what the bondage is: sin makes a man its servant. And He tells us where freedom is found: in the Son and in the truth of His word. Biblical liberty is liberty from sin’s bondage to walk in God’s truth.

Now look again at James.

James 1:25 “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

James says blessed in his deed. He does not say saved eternally by his deed. Obedience carries real blessing.

John 13:17 “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

Knowing is good. Doing what God says brings the blessing connected with obedience.

III. LET THE WORD REACH YOUR LIFE — JAMES 1:26-27

James 1:26 “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

James gets very practical. A bridle controls a horse. To bridle the tongue means to control what comes out of your mouth.

A man can seem religious and still let his tongue run wild. He can attend church, know Bible language, and still speak with anger, cruelty, gossip, or foolishness. James says his religion is vain—empty or useless.

And James is not finished with the tongue. In James 3:2-6 he comes back to it and shows how much damage an uncontrolled tongue can do. So verse 26 is not a side comment. James is showing us that the word we hear has to reach our speech.

Notice exactly what James judges: this man's religion is vain. The verse does not say his uncontrolled tongue proves he was never eternally saved. James is showing us religious practice that is not producing obedience.

Then verse 27 tells us what acceptable practical religion looks like.

James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

James immediately gives us action. Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. In the Bible's examples, that means practical care. You see somebody vulnerable, hurting, or in need, and you help.

James is not giving a new plan of salvation based on charity. He is describing what obedient religion looks like in practice. Good works belong in the Christian life, but they are not the price of eternal life.

Then James says keep yourself unspotted from the world. Do not let the world's corruption stain your life. That does not mean hiding from every unbeliever or withdrawing from everybody outside the church.

Jesus prayed about that distinction.

John 17:14-15 "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **15** I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Jesus did not pray that His people would be taken out of the world. He prayed that they would be kept from the evil.

Now return to James.

James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Stay in the world. Preach the gospel. Work your job. Raise your family. Help people. But do not let the world put its spots on you.

CONCLUSION

James 1 asks us what we are doing with the Bible we hear.

Receive the word with meekness. Put away the sin that fights against it. When the word shows you something, do not walk away and forget. Continue in it and do the work.

Let it reach your tongue. Let it change how you treat people who are hurting. Let it govern what you allow the world to put into your life.

You already know many verses. You have heard a lot of preaching. The question James leaves us with is simple: Are you doing what you heard?

If this helped you, please consider giving to this ministry.

True Words Baptist Church | truewordsbaptist.org