

**“What Doers of the Word Do” James 1:19-25, Sermon Notes**  
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This morning we will be taking a break from the book of Matthew and I want to address a topic that is particularly important in light of the church context we find ourselves in

In fact, it is really only relevant in an expository ministry that explains Scripture and upholds the centrality and authority of the Word

We’re going to talk about what a profitable relationship with the Word of God looks like. And just by way of introduction let’s begin by turning over to Luke 8:9-18

In this passage Jesus is going to explain to His disciples the meaning behind the parable of the sower

Pick it up in verse 9, “His disciples *began* questioning Him as to what this parable meant. <sup>10</sup> And He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.”

<sup>11</sup> “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> Those on the rocky *soil are* those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy;”

They are excited. They have an appetite for the truth. They are listening to sermons and reading good books

Middle of verse 13, “and these have no *firm* root; [d]they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.”

They appreciated the truth but they never genuinely applied the truth to their lives

Verse 14, “The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard,” (so they are exposed to the truth)

“... and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

They proved to be hearers only because they loved things more than God, which prevented them from profiting from the Word of God

Verse 15, “But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word *in an honest and good heart*, (a heart of sincerity, without hypocrisy) and hold it fast, and bear fruit with [d]perseverance.”

Honest interaction with the Word of God which endures over time. This is why we say that time and truth go hand in hand because over time they prove that they believe the Word by consistently producing spiritual fruit

Notice verse 16 “Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. <sup>17</sup> For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor *anything* secret that will not be known and come to light”

In other words, to neglect the light of God’s Word that you’ve heard is to lose it. And just because you chose to not remember it, to suppress it after you heard it, doesn’t mean God forgot you heard it. It will be made manifest on judgment day

And based on this warning, notice the inference in verse 18: “So *take care how you listen*; for whoever has, to him *more* shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

Those who suppress or scorn or simply passively interact with the truth will lose whatever understanding they appeared to have

It’s the language of being deceived. The point for us to consider is this: How do I know if my heart has the good soil? How do I know if the climate of my heart is conducive for the Word to take root and do its work?

In other words, is my exposure to the truth profitable?

Pastor Rick Holland wrote an insightful article on this topic. In it he is talking about the danger of equating an *appreciation* for the truth with the *application* of the truth.

He writes, “Think about it. Endless translations and editions of the Bible, conferences, blogs, mp3 downloads, live streams, video sermons, books, Christian music, CDs, podcasts, radio shows, social media, and the weekly classes and sermons we take in.

Never has there been a generation with more access to biblical truth. But is the church any better for it?

Are believer’s more holy, more content, more committed to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 3:18) because of this access?”

He continues, “Here is the challenge that my own heart faces daily. With so much truth available, it is easier to *appreciate* the truth than *apply* the truth. It’s too easy to think that if we have appreciated, or just plain liked, a quote, a book, a sermon, a blog post, etc., that we have accomplished the intended effect of that truth. Appreciation and application are two very different things.” End quote.

How would you go about evaluating that in your own life? Have I confused appreciating or liking the truth with actually believing and applying the truth?

In the language of our passage in James 1, what does a doer of the Word actually do? What does that look like?

Well turn to James 1:19 and we’ll see the answer to these very important questions

Notice with me James 1:19-25, “*This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* <sup>[v]</sup>that remains of wickedness, in <sup>[w]</sup>humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his <sup>[x]</sup>natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, <sup>[y]</sup>he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but <sup>[z]</sup>an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in <sup>[aa]</sup>what he does.”

By way of outline, in this passage we’re going to see 3 essential evidences of a profitable relationship with the Word of God

Before we get into the outline, I want you to see where I’m getting that word “essential” from

Notice 1:19 again, some of your versions will translate it as an *indicative* – this you know my beloved brothers. Others will translate it as an *imperative* – Know this my beloved brothers

The reason for that difference is that verbs in the Greek text tend to have identical forms in the indicative and imperative moods, so it’s up to the context to determine how it should be translated

I’m taking it as an imperative, “Know this my beloved brothers” because if you were to read through the book of James you would see that this is the common way he begins a section

An imperative followed by the phrase “beloved brothers.” I’ll just show you one example of that. Look at 1:2, “count it all joy” an imperative, and then the address, “my brothers”

That is the pattern James uses throughout this letter. All that to say, these are *mandatory* attitudes, *mandatory* truths we must understand and be. That is the tone of the passage: “You must know this, you must understand this”

Hence, they are *essential* evidences of a profitable relationship with the Word of God

Moving now to the first evidence of a profitable relationship with the Word of God You’re teachable

This is the rest of verse 19, “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;”

Now, if you’re tracking with me you are probably thinking to yourself: What does this verse have to do with being teachable? It seems to be just be talking about our attitude and demeanor when interacting with others, kind of like what we see in Proverbs, “be slow to anger”

But if we took this passage like that we would miss the significance of what James is saying. There are contextual factors indicating he is talking about our relationship with the Word of God

First, go back to verse 18. There we see that we were brought forth, we were given new spiritual life “*by the word of truth*”

The next time we see “word” used is in verse 21, notice midway through, “in humility receive the *word* implanted”

It shows up again in verse 22, “But be doers of the “word” λόγος. Verse 23, “if anyone is a hearer of the “word” λόγος

So, verse 18 and verses 19-23 are connected thematically in that way

Furthermore, all of the instruction in verses 19, 20, halfway through 21 is what you must do in order to *receive* the Word at the end the verse 21

And then the clincher is that little conjunction “but” in the middle of verse 19. Some of your versions unfortunately have omitted it but it is there in the text

That conjunction is critical to note because it is highlighting a connection of continuity from verse 18 to verse 19

Now, if that’s not clear, let me read to you what I think James is saying

Beginning in verse 18, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be [s]a kind of first fruits [u]among His creatures.

Listen up, know this, understand this my beloved brothers, but *speaking of the word of truth*, everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;

James is saying here that the very word that was the instrument God used to cause you to be born again, verse 18, is the very word that must sustain your spiritual life if you will persevere in your faith

*But* there are reactions and attitudes to this Word that can hinder this from happening. That prove to be the pathway to self-deception

That is why he uses the imperative, *know this* in verse 19. You must understand this

So, with the context established, notice verse 19 again as we read it with this contextual idea in mind: *With respect to the Word of God*, “let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”

This is summarizing the teachable person

First, they are “quick to hear.” This implies that I’m a learner. I’m in a position that is *under* the Word, not *above* the Word

It is the attitude of when I come to the Word of God I am coming as a listener. I *need* to hear. This is a readiness and eagerness to listen and learn when I am exposed to the Word of God

And one implication of being “quick to hear” is that I am taking advantage of every opportunity I can to be under it

Not only at a personal level, but also at a corporate level. If there is a service or study going on at church, and I'm simply at home with no providential reason limiting my involvement, can I classify myself as being "quick to hear?"

When there are opportunities to grow and I choose to fulfill my own desires, what does that say about my eagerness and readiness to hear and grow?

This the first duty evident in a teachable person. But there are things that can hinder our ability to be quick to hear. Things that can stifle our teachability

One of those being when our own voice, our own thoughts get in the way. So the second duty highlighted there in verse 19 that reveals a teachable spirit: "slow to speak."

Now, I don't think this is merely referring to audibly blurting out things during a sermon or when you are reading your Bible

The principle behind "slow to speak" is exercising restraint upon *hasty reactions* to the truth. It is allowing time for further thought and reflection before an inappropriate reaction. This becomes a valuable safeguard against shallow, emotional reactions to the truth

This is a form of humility that is very rare in our day

Let me illustrate that with what happens if a Christian has been part of man-centered ministry for a while and they are shown the doctrine of election from the Scriptures for the first time:

I can still remember the first time I heard it explained. I was listening to a sermon someone had recommended for me and the preacher was explaining a passage on predestination and God's meticulous sovereignty over all things

And my immediate response was a hasty and emotional reaction that sounded something like this: "Well, if that's true, then why do we evangelize? Why do we pray? This is all pointless, why do anything if God has already ordained everything?"

Those aren't questions of humility, those are expressions of pride. A lack of teachability. That's being quick to speak. A hasty and emotional reaction to the truth

What a message for the church today. You've probably noticed that evangelicalism is drowning in a sea of people who are quick to speak, hastily responding to the Word of God with mere human wisdom and human opinions

Responding with knee jerk emotional responses to articles they read or sermons they hear without ever walking through the Scriptures and demonstrating why their outrage is appropriate and a reflection of the truth

James says here, if you are truly under the truth, if you're teachable, you will be slow to speak

Instead of reacting hastily you will allow time for a fuller and thoughtful evaluation of what you've just been exposed to

And when the Word is clear you're not going to *demand* further proof to believe and accept it

In other words, you won't demand that tension be erased before you will accept it or come under it

James says, "Be the person that is judged by the truth, that comes under the truth, not rises above it in judgment."

Now, there's one final duty here that also can hinder our teachability. Not only are we to be quick to hear, slow to speak, but also notice, we are to be "slow to anger"

This is just the next step in the process

This is the Word for anger (ὀργήν) not describing the violent temper or outburst of wrath, this is the word referring to an inner, deep resentment. It's a settled displeasure about the Word of God

This most likely isn't going to show up in slamming your Bible on the ground or standing up in the middle of a sermon screaming at the preacher, that would obviously be anger

But rather this might show up in defensiveness or deflection or stubbornness. For instance, a person hearing something from another believer or in a sermon, "You need to obey Christ, you need to be faithful to what he has called you to"

And in their heart or outwardly they respond by saying this: "that's easy for you to say, you don't know what my life is like. I can't possibly obey in these circumstances, besides, are you saying you don't sin, who are you to judge me?"

That's anger at the Word of God. It exposed unbelief in the heart and the heart became angry and defensive

It could also happen when you encounter a doctrine you don't like, or perhaps a stubborn area in your life that you don't want confronted but the Word keeps shining a light on it

When you stubbornly dig in long enough, you'll eventually be angry at the Word. *Neglect of the Word will lead to contempt for the Word*

Anger and a lack of teachability often go hand in hand. Because an angry person is a proud person, and proud people are not teachable

As we're going to see next, we're never allowed to have that type of reaction to the Word: James says it this way in verse 20, "for the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God."

Human anger cannot meet the demands of God's standard. It never accomplishes what is right in God's eyes

We don't even have to deal with the issue of *righteous* anger here because first of all, it can never be appropriate to be angry at God or His Word. Contextually that's the type of anger James is referring to

Secondly, he qualifies it. The anger *of man*. Anger originating in and terminating on man

That frustration and anger is never appropriate. Why did James have to expand on the topic of anger here and not the other two duties he highlighted?

I wonder if it was because he anticipated resistance. As we mentioned, angry people are proud people and tend to justify their anger, thinking their anger is appropriate

So James says, if you have any resentment or anger in your heart toward the truth, don't think at the same time you can actually be living in conformity with God's will

Don't think you and the Lord are on good terms relationally when you resent His Word

Think about how it would go if you tried to make a distinction about that in your personal relationships, where you claim to still love another person but you just can't stand being around them when they communicate

They ask you what's wrong? And you say, "oh, it's not you, it's just what you're saying." "I just can't stand hearing you talk. I get angry every time you talk, But I love you, our relationship is fine, just don't open your mouth, don't communicate to me"

That is the same level of irrationality in thinking we can resent something in God's Word but still be on good terms with Him

So the first essential evidence of a profitable relationship with the Word of God is you're teachable in the Word

The second essential evidence of a profitable relationship with the Word of God is you're submissive to the Word. This is the principle of yieldedness

You do the things necessary to *allow* the Word of God to have full operation in your life. In that sense you submit or yield yourself to it

Notice verse 21, "Therefore (in other words, because your hostility toward the Word doesn't accomplish any righteous ends) therefore, putting away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

First of all, look back at that phrase in verse 21, "putting away all filthiness." If you don't have a version that translates that word for "put" as a participle "putting" it has let you down in this verse.

In fact, the majority of English versions miss it, the NASB does get it right here - "putting away." It is a participle

And you say, "What's the big deal about that? Well, it means that James is not giving us two separate commands when he first says "put away" and then later in the verse says, "receive with humility the word."

Rather, he is telling us *how* to receive the word with humility

In other words, you put yourself in a position to receive the word as you are putting to death sin in your life

There is a direct correlation between your relationship with sin and your relationship with the Word of God

There's a similar cross reference in 1 Peter 2:1 where we see the same verb and same concept taught: "therefore, putting away all malice and all deceit and all hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word."

Peter says, the intense craving you should have for the Word of God, the longing, is made possible by putting to death sin in your life

Back in James, it's the same idea. Here in verse 21, the "putting away" language is used to show us that this must take place in order for us to humbly receive the Word

This is why John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, rightly said, "Sin will keep you from this book..."

Notice in verse 21 what we are to be putting away? Specifically, all filthiness and rampant wickedness

Anything that is inconsistent with Christian character and conduct. And all of the remaining evil, the surplus of evil remaining in you

Emphasis on the word "all." *All* filthiness, and the abundant evil inside you, needs to be stripped off

That word "all" exposes that of compartmentalization. "I'm good in every area but this one." I'm a mature Christian, I just refuse to obey the Lord in this one area over here, but for the most part I'm mature."

I just have this one relationship I won't humble myself in, I'm bitter, holding a grudge, I stubbornly won't forgive. But other than that, I'm good

This passage is showing us that if we are harboring *any* sin we cannot profit from the Word

Charles Spurgeon noted: "If there is one darling sin that you would spare, Christ and your soul will never agree. There can be no peace between you and Christ while there is peace between you and sin."

Same is true for the Word of God. If there is peace between you and sin, there is a rift between you and the Word.

We just saw our submission stated negatively, putting to death sin. Now, our submission is stated positively and this is the main command in verse 21, "therefore, putting away all filthiness and the surplus of evil in your lives, with humility, *receive the implanted word* which is able to save your souls."

We humbly welcome the Word and allow it to carry out its work

And notice the sphere in which we receive the word: Humility (πραΰτης). This is the positive godly counterpart to all of the ungodly characteristics we've seen so far in this passage

The humble person has the inner attitude of wanting to grow and be teachable. Humility when it comes to the Word means there's no disputing, there's no resisting, there's no room for anger or resentment toward the Word

You're coming to it, not doubting it. Not evaluating it suspiciously to see if it can fit with your feelings or circumstances, and then determining which parts you will heed and which parts you won't

No, this is the humility of trembling at the word of God, Isaiah 66:2, "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

Without that attitude, you can't have a profitable relationship with the Word. Because this comes before the main imperative "receive" in verse 21. It's the qualification to receive the Word

And when we see that word "receive" (δέχομαι) there in verse 21 it is a mistake to interpret that word "receive" the same way we would use it to say "I received news today. I received a letter in the mail." I received a flyer on my windshield when I was parked at the store."

In those examples we are using the word "receive" to refer to the *objective act of obtaining something*

But the word James uses here is not talking about the objective fact of reading your Bible or sitting under a sermon and in that sense *receiving* the Word

In that case, anyone who happens to be exposed to the Word of God receives it. This is a Word that goes much farther than that

Glance over at 1 Cor. 2:14 where the same word is used for "receive" and we'll get a sense of what James means here:

Paul is actually going to use it in the negative sense: "the natural man does not "receive" the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

The natural man, outside of Christ, may very well read his Bible and come to church and listen to sermons, and appreciate good teaching, and be able to articulate truth and sound doctrine, all the while never actually *receiving* the truth

Because this is a word which implies *acceptance, a welcomed, eager receptivity*. It's a *volitional* term

What Paul is saying is that the natural man is *unwilling* to accept the truth. He'll listen to it, he'll read it, but he won't accept it

Back to James, the humble believer is commanded to accept the truth. To welcome it eagerly. [[Acts 17:11]]

Be teachable, put to death sin, cultivate humility, and in so doing you provide good soil in your heart for the Word to be planted

This characteristic won't be perfect in anyone but it will be present to some degree in every genuine believer

Now, maybe you are hearing this and thinking: "Often times I don't have it. I feel resistance to the Word, it often times feels lifeless and dry, even boring. I don't really have an appetite for it

I know I need to have this yielded submissive spirit, I want to have that, but it's just not there. Why is it day in and day out such a chore to come to the Word of God. If I'm honest I'd rather be doing anything else."

James just told you why that is so. And notice, it's not because you don't have time. It's not because you don't like to read. It's not because you're too busy. It's not because you have a poor attention span

No, verse 19 through the first half of verse 21 is your answer. When the Word of God is unappealing to you and you have no evidence of its work in your life, here is the divine testimony explaining that:

Are you teachable when it comes to the Word? When you read your Bible, or listen to a sermon, or when a Christian friend or spouse brings the Word of God to bear on your life, do you scoff at its authority?

Do you resent its precision? What would that look like? "Who's to say your interpretation is any more sound than anyone else's? Besides there are godly people who interpret that differently."

Do you deflect when the spotlight of conviction shines on you? What would that look like?

Immediately putting the attention on the person who spoke the Word of God to you, getting the spotlight off of you and on to them: "so are you without any issues, you don't struggle with anything?"

Deflecting also comes in the form of discrediting. "you're just judgmental. You're not loving enough. You think you're the only one who has things figured out."

Do you justify your resentment and anger toward the Word due to hard circumstances? In light of how hard my life is, my worry is appropriate. My discontentment is justified. How can God expect me to be righteous when this is my lot in life?

Do you only accept doctrines without tension, or doctrines which agree with your emotions?

Do you any known area of sin, anything in your life you know the Lord is not pleased with, but you are unwilling to repent of it?

These are the types of questions we should be asking ourselves when this eager receptivity toward the Word is not present

The Word itself tells us why we don't long for it and welcome it into our lives the way we ought. The Word itself tells us why it isn't working in our lives

Now, back in James 1:21, perhaps you're wondering why James refers to the Word here in verse 21 as the "implanted" word. [[hapax in NT]]

This is a reference to the word being "implanted" or taking root in the heart of the believer at the time of salvation

I think it is the principle highlighted in the New Covenant in passages like Jeremiah 31:33, "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it;"

So the command to *accept the word implanted in you* is not a command to unbelievers to be converted, but to believers to allow the Word, which was implanted in them upon conversion, to continue to influence them in all parts of their lives

It sounds paradoxical to us. How can I be commanded to receive something that is already in me?

Well, we can draw a parallel with the Holy Spirit in us. Upon conversion we have as much of the Holy Spirit as we will ever have

You cannot have more or less of the Spirit. You either have the Spirit or you don't

Ephesians 1:13, "having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, [[also see 2 Cor. 1:22]]

But then just a few chapters later Paul can say in Ephesians 5:18, "but be filled with the Spirit."

That's not saying, get more of the Spirit than you have, it's clear in that context that he's saying you need to *completely yield yourself to the influence of the Spirit of God*

Remove anything in your life that hinders His influence, and pursue anything in your life which promotes His influence

It's the same principle back in James 1. The Word that God used to cause you to be born again, doesn't leave. It takes root in conversion

And believers are to be motivated to continually welcome the Word into their lives and allow its full operation

What's the significance of this? The last phrase there in verse 21, "which is able to save your souls."

Your salvation depends on continually receiving the Word. This isn't referring to justification. He already referred to them as "beloved brothers."

This is the current and future aspects of salvation. You know the Scriptures speak of salvation in 3 ways: it speaks as those who have been saved (Eph. 2:8), are being saved (1 Cor. 15:2), and will be saved in the future (Matthew 10:22)

In fact, turn over to 1 Cor. 15:1-2 where Paul uses that language of being saved and shows us the relationship between it and the Word of God:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, *if* you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.”

You are currently being saved, referring to the sanctification process, if you are holding fast to the Word

But if you aren't holding fast to the Word, it could indicate your belief was empty, in vain

Back to James: the Word is able to save your soul

That is why these first two essential evidences of a profitable relationship with the Word of God are so important

Teachability and submissiveness, not only make one able to profit from the Word, but also prove one has been born again by the Word

So, you're teachable in the Word, you're submissive to the Word, and now the third essential evidence of a profitable relationship with the Word of God is that you are abiding in the Word. This will be verses 22-25

Notice verse 22, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

The ESV is actually more helpful here: “But be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

The main verb is “be.” Keep on being or keep on becoming doers. It's the idea of persevering in doing, remaining in a state of doing, hence abiding

As opposed to a mere hearer, who is one who listens passively. It's sort of similar to the concept of “auditing” a class

What's the difference between a person who audits a class and a person who is enrolled for credit in that class?

One of them is accountable for what they hear and one of them isn't. One of them is required to do all of the work assigned, and the other is not

There's not the *obligation of doing* on the auditor. You can be an auditor and take a mental break whenever you want, you can skip class whenever you want, there aren't any consequences because you are just a passive spectator

James is saying, if you are *merely* an auditor of God's truth, if that's as far as your interaction goes, you are deceived

Meaning, you are blinded to the reality of your religious state because of fallacious reasoning. A massive spiritual miscalculation

What are examples of fallacious reasoning leading to this deception?

Because I love theology, because I like reading the reformers and puritans and listening to expository preaching, therefore I am a Christian

Because I always do my devotional time, never miss a day, I never miss church, I attend every opportunity, therefore I'm a Christian

Because I can recognize false teaching and defend against it, I'm a Christian

Because I have sound theology I am a Christian

It is the great error of assuming that a knowledge of the truth and an appreciation for the truth is equivalent to living and believing the truth

And you say, "People can actually appreciate the truth, expose themselves to rich theology and teaching, but be lost, be unbelieving?"

There's a great illustration of this in Ezekiel 33:30-32, "As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.'"

Modern version: Come to this ministry or that ministry, listen to this great expositor. Listen to how clear and compelling and theologically sound he is. This guy can bring it

That was Ezekiel's reputation

Verse 31, "And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, (they are there, they aren't avoiding. They show up like clockwork, they are exposed to the truth.)"

*...and they hear what you say but they will not do it; Why? "...for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain."*

Remember earlier we said that if you have unrepentant idolatry in your heart you can't profit from the Word of God

Here's that idea in practice: Their heart is set on their gain. So their exposure to the truth is not sincere

Verse 32, "And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument,

They just like the entertainment. You're a compelling speaker. They like to see how a true prophet preaches, they're attracted to your passion and enthusiasm

But now notice the end: *"for they hear what you say, but they will not do it."*

Their heart is set on their own pleasures and earthly gain, and therefore they have no appetite for the truth or desire to obey the truth

But they appreciated it. They would sit under Ezekiel's sound prophetic preaching, even recruiting others to come and hear this man of God

But a mere appreciation for the truth is irrelevant without applying the truth

A person who appreciates theology and sound preaching but there is a massive divide between that theology and their life, they prove their *motive for study and exposure to the truth is not godly*

Back to James 1. In verses 23-24, James shows us a simple analogy in order to illustrate this deception:

Verse 23, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

He looks intently at his face in the mirror. The verb means careful, cautious consideration of what is being looked at. There's nothing really defective in his approach

He's in a solid ministry, he has a good Bible version, he's reading it, he's listening to it, he's getting exposure to the truth

The problem is, this man purposes to not be proactive in his approach. He doesn't fix the imperfections that he sees while they are in front of him

He doesn't allow the mirror to fulfill the reason it exists. *What's the point of having a mirror if you never act on what you see in it?*

When someone in society is extremely messy, un-kept, disheveled hair, food in their teeth, dirt all over their face

And that's how they are consistently, as a pattern. What do we conclude about them? We could conclude that they don't have access to a mirror, they don't have a way to objectively evaluate themselves

But since basically everyone has access to a mirror we have to conclude that *their perception of reality is off*. They don't see themselves accurately, the way they really are

Or they are so preoccupied with other things in their mind that when they do look in the mirror and see how unkept they are, they can't retain it, they immediately forget what they see

That's the man of verses 23-24. He can have crystal clear clarity when he is exposed to the Word of God, he can see his idols and his sin and his unbelief

But because he does not allow the mirror, the Word of God to operate in his life, he forgets. His mind is set on things of self

Everyone else can see his imperfections, but because he has habitually forgotten what he sees, he is completely blind to his spiritual appearance

Now, by way of contrast, James shows us the picture of a sincere and appropriate relationship to the Word of God

Notice verse 25, “But, the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty,”

Now, although a different verb is used here for the word “look” as in verse 24, that is not really the difference being highlighted between these two men

Both verbs for “look” can be used to look intently and purposefully at something. They are used synonymously in the NT

So that’s not the contrast being highlighted

Notice first how James refers to the Word of God in this verse: “the perfect law of freedom/liberty.”

The law implies authority. The nature of the Word demands obedience

He also describes it as perfect. It’s without flaw, it’s totally complete, it lacks nothing. It’s inerrant, sufficient

Meaning, the instruction you receive from this law, the picture you get of yourself in the reflection of this law is always right, accurate, reliable. It can never be wrong or lead you astray

And it’s also a law of liberty or freedom because when we submit to it, it frees us from the power and bondage of sin

The world thinks freedom is being able to do whatever I want whenever I want with no authority telling me otherwise

That’s freedom, the world says. God says, that is bondage. While true freedom is coming under the authority of another, an authority that protects you from your own sin and compels you to live a righteous life

This man looks intently into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and, here’s the main difference: “not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer,”

The real difference here is that the first person forgets what he saw and the second person perseveres (παρρησίας) in his look and does not forget what he saw

The difference isn’t their *reception* but their *response*

He *abides* in his doing. As a way of life, he continually exposes himself to the truth, receives clarity about the truth and himself, and purposes to not forget. He deals with the imperfections. He is characterized as a doer who acts. A pattern of life that is lived under the authority of the Word of God

Literally that phrase “effectual doer” is “a doer of work.” It’s obvious. It’s as obvious as the difference between a person who has a job and the person who is unemployed

What’s the result? Notice the end of verse 25, “he will be blessed in his doing.”

This is the positive aspect of verse 22. To be a hearer only is to deceive yourself. To have a serious and soul-threatening miscalculation about your spiritual state

But an abiding doer of the Word, this one will be blessed in his doing. This is the one who will truly inherit the blessings of salvation. Not earning it, rather evidencing it

What needs to characterize us to inherit this blessing?

Teachability in the Word  
Submissiveness to the Word  
And abiding in the Word

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