



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Mirror, Mirror...

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James 1:19-27. James has introduced us to trials and the temptations that arise. Throughout the book he asks us to evaluate the genuineness of our faith with various tests. Am I truly a Christian? One test is to look at how you respond to the Word of God. A believer should receive it humbly, wanting to do what it says.

“Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes.” These were the final words of William Tyndale before his execution in 1536. His crime? Translating the Bible into English.

More than a thousand years had passed since common men and women had read the Word of God for themselves. It was published in Latin, and scarce few could read it. Translation was illegal, and attempts to do so were burned as the translator was condemned. This was sixteenth century Europe. People had no choice but to blindly trust in all the Church taught and commanded.

Educated at Oxford and Cambridge, Tyndale had mastered eight languages. His passion was that the uneducated Englishman might read the Bible. For this reason, he left the country, created a pseudonym and translated in absolute secrecy. He chose a life of isolation with the exception of a printer and a few others. Tyndale never married, lived as a fugitive, experienced starvation and knew his translations would be burned with every edition. Yet, with each year, more Bibles were smuggled into England, and more people read for the first time what God had written.

The authorities eventually captured Tyndale when a friend betrayed him for money. By this time his work had spread, and thousands owned sections of Scripture illegally. He died that his countrymen could read the Word of God, and ironically, within a year of his death all of them could do so. His dying prayer was answered when King Henry VIII opposed the Church and publically displayed English Bibles throughout the nation. Nearly every page had been translated by William Tyndale.

HUMBLY HEARING THE TRUTH

The psalmist hailed the Word of God as perfect, sure, right, pure, clean and true. It was his delight, and he desired it more than the finest gold (cf. Psa 19:7-10). God was His passion: “Oh, how I love your Law!” (cf. Psa 119:97). This is how highly a believer should esteem and value the Bible. Those who do are saturated by it and speak of it often (cf. Deut 6:4-9).

We have seen that God uses trials in the life of His people to mature their faith (cf. Jas 1:2-12). Temptations arise with each trial, and how a believer responds will either affirm or deny his profession of faith (cf. Jas 1:13-18).

As one’s response to trials and temptations say much about the authenticity of his faith, so it is true of his response to God and His Word. A man may say he is a believer, but his profession is largely affirmed or denied by what he does with the Bible. James urges that we become “quick to hear” what Scripture says (cf. Jas 1:19).

When Paul wrote Timothy, he warned of ungodly people. They came into churches with an appearance of true faith, but their greed, arrogance, slander and duplicity revealed their true character. Rather than being quick to hear or eager to learn the Word of God, the ungodly actually “oppose the truth” (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-8). They simply don’t want to hear it.

What Paul warned Timothy against is worth considering of our own hearts. Do you want to hear the Word of God taught? Do you look for ways to grow in your understanding of Scripture? Are you eager for opportunities to strengthen your grasp of it? Though one might not oppose the Word of God, a sluggishness to hear and learn still indicates a spiritual problem.

Working like wax in the ears of a Christian, sin can build and cause spiritual deafness. This is why James says, “to put away all filthiness” in order to receive the “implanted Word” (cf. Jas 1:21). Like a surgical implant, God has spiritually implanted the Word within every believer. It is only by humbly letting God’s Word work within that we grow and change to become more like Christ. When sin takes hold, one resists and becomes slow to hear or listen to Scripture. “Filthiness” (*rhypois*) has built up as wax does in the ears. Figuratively speaking, James is saying to clean out your ears and be “quick to hear” the Word of God.

FAITHFULLY APPLYING THE TRUTH

It is possible to read the Bible regularly and do no more than move the bookmark forward. Many read Scripture, listen to sermons and faithfully attend Bible studies, but hardly apply the Word of God to their lives. They are spiritual auditors, interested in learning but not in the homework of doing or obeying.

Ezra 7:10—Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

The level of wholehearted commitment and devotion a soldier may give to his general is the kind Christ desires of His followers. He does not want us merely to hear Him, but to obey Him (cf. John 14:15). In Luke 9:23, He explained, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” The Lord desires our allegiance even to

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the point of death if necessary (cf. Luke 14:26-27, 33). All of us disobey, and He is gracious. Yet, a soldier who regularly disregards and challenges orders needs to ask if he is actually a soldier at all.

Some of the greatest and most feared generals ever to have lived include Hannibal, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Genghis Kahn and Napoleon. Much of their genius in battle lay in their ability to inspire commitment and loyalty. Men would die to win their approval, and so their armies fought to the fullest extent of human ability. May that kind of devotion characterize our obedience to Christ.

James gives many tests to evaluate one's faith, and each is an issue of obedience. For instance, the way one uses his tongue or manages his finances are issues of obedience (cf. Jas 3:1-12, 5:1-6). One may hear the Word on a regular basis and know it well, but the believer who regularly does not act on it and willfully disobeys needs to reconsider his faith. James says such a person is self-deceived (cf. Jas 1:22).

“THIS BOOK IS WORTH ALL THE BOOKS THAT EVER WERE PRINTED, AND IT HAS BEEN MY MISFORTUNE THAT I NEVER FOUND TIME TO READ IT...” — PATRICK HENRY.

The Word of God is a mirror to the soul of man (cf. Jas 1:23-24). First-century mirrors were made of polished metals, and one had to gaze at them for a time to discern his appearance. One who is a “hearer” of the Bible but not a “doer” is like a person who looks into a mirror and does nothing. Though dirt might be on his face or his hair uncombed, he walks away as if all is well. Distracted by other concerns, his mind drifts, and he forgets what the mirror revealed. How easy it is to read the Bible, realize areas of concern and forget as they are drowned out by the things of life.

WORDS OF WARNING FROM JAMES

Mirrors never lie. If the Word of God is given more than a cursory reading, it is no different. Look intently into its pages, and two reflections will come into focus. We begin to see ourselves as we truly are, and we are brought face to face with Christ. Not all who look into the Word come back for more. Some become angered by it. Others hold it at a distance, believing what they want it to say. James warns both, for there are few who “in humility receive the Word” (cf. Jas 1:21).

God called the prophet Jeremiah to warn the nation of Judah that He would soon judge them (cf. Jer 1:5). The people so despised Jeremiah that they beat and harshly imprisoned him. King Jehoiakim, in fact, shredded and burned the words of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 36:23). He along with the entire nation believed in God, but they refused to believe that God would actually judge them. Instead, they believed what they wanted God to tell them and found prophets to say what they wanted to hear (cf. Jer 26:8-11). As it was then, so it remains: The Word of God is hard to receive, and there is no shortage of teachers ready to soften or change its meaning.

James warns us to be slow to become angry when confronted by God's Word (cf. Jas 1:19). Rather than being corrected by it, some seek to correct Scripture: “The historical Jesus did not perform miracles or rise from the dead...”, “King David is simply a Jewish King Arthur legend...”, “The Bible is just a book of faith experiences not to be taken literally...” A heart that resents what Scripture clearly conveys grows in pride. Lacking the meekness and humility necessary to receive the Word, a God-honoring life cannot result (cf. Jas 1:20).

Taking resentment or anger towards the Bible a step further, one will propagate his ideas. This is the thought behind James 1:19 and 1:26—a person who is quick to speak, failing to bridle the tongue. He does not evaluate his thoughts against the Word of God, but uses the Word only to somehow support his set opinions.

A Christian desires to know the Word and should be growing in humility. He wants others to understand this Book and willingly allows it to scrutinize his thoughts (cf. Heb 4:12). Such a person is cautious to speak and careful of becoming resentful. Looking into the mirror, a believer should want to change and grow to become more like his Lord.

We may not like what the Word of God reveals about us. Its priorities at times will conflict with ours. Doing what it says is often hard, but obedience always rewards a believer with freedom (cf. Jas 1:25). Though painful at times, it is liberating to look intently into God's Word. A train without a track may be entirely free, but it cannot travel far. The track may seem restrictive, but its restriction becomes the train's freedom. Much in the same way, you and I need the Word of God to direct us, for there is nothing freeing about sin. May we follow James's wisdom, humbly listening to and applying the precepts of Scripture in our lives. Here is true freedom, blessing and happiness.