



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Hearing Without Doing Is Useless (James 1:19-27)

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*Is your kid like mine? If I call out to get her attention or ask her to do something, my effort is sometimes met with silence. That means calling out again because, surely, she didn't hear me the first time. When I try the second (or third or fourth) time, a common response is, "I heard you!"*

*Hearing is not enough. As parents, we know that because we don't stop with calling to our children to feed the cat or clean their room or do their homework. We don't stop calling just because we know we have been heard. We expect action. There is a step (or steps) beyond the transfer of information on which we follow up to make sure a task is completed. "I heard you" is only the first step and it is not an end in itself.*

So it is with the Word of God. He has spoken and mankind is expected to read, hear and respond to what He has revealed. Many who reject God don't even make that first basic move, but in our study today, James makes it clear that there is a crucial distinction between hearing and then acting on what was heard.

*James 1:19-27 - <sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

### I. WISDOM OF THE WORD (1:19-21)

Our passage starts with one of the toughest commands we could receive, because it goes to the heart of our natural tendencies. When we go through difficulties or are wronged in some way, you and I both know what our knee-jerk, instinctive reaction will be. It

includes, but isn't limited to defensiveness, lashing back, anger, or shutting the other person down with a quick response. We feel it, have seen it and have probably done it. But just as the call to "consider it joy" when we suffer seems backwards, the call here to calm down and diffuse a problem situation with wisdom is the opposite of what we may want to do. Even Solomon said:

*Proverbs 16:32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*

*Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

The reason behind this approach is clearly shown. According to verse 20, man's way isn't God's way. God's way is righteous, but a human's bent toward anger does not bring about righteous relationships.

James then gives us the source to turn to as we seek guidance in our response to difficulties: the Word of God. He tells us to put away the way of man ("filthiness and rampant wickedness") and receive the way of God, found in his revealed word, the content of which is "able to save your souls."

What are the implications of this in the capitol? How would relationships be different if people would be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger"? Let me encourage you to depend on the Lord and his Word to change your habits of reacting to the trials of life - whatever they may be - for after all, we can only control our response, not others'.

*Romans 12:18 - If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

### II. AUTHENTICITY OF ACTION (1:22-25)

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that you looked in the mirror this morning. Why did you do that? The mirror reveals imperfections and problems that need addressed. You would be embarrassed or would make your boss look bad or offend others if you didn't look in the mirror to see what needed attention. We all thank you for whatever you did to make yourself presentable, but it just makes sense and is needed on a constant basis.

## BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS AT 7:50AM, ROOM 153 (HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING)

# Maryland

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But the point is that you DID something. James is speaking here of someone who looks at the mirror (a nice start) but then walks away, either too lazy or indifferent to make the appropriate changes. What does it say about that person? Their appearance will plainly show that they have avoided an indispensable ritual.

A person who looks at God's Word, even if it is carefully and accurately done, and yet does not apply the truths he has discovered to his own life, is like someone who immediately forgets what he has just seen in a mirror – except that the consequences are immeasurably worse. He sees his sin portrayed for the horrible evil that it is and he also sees God's gracious provision in Christ for a remedy, yet he goes on his way as if he were never exposed to those realities.<sup>1</sup>

Action is what is needed; not just knowing action is needed. The mirror illustrates God's Word. It shows us our sins and imperfections, but just hearing about how we fall short is not enough. To be authentic, we must act based on what we have heard. If not, we are deceiving ourselves that we are alright.

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**IN A WORD, NEITHER DEATH, NOR EXILE, NOR PAIN, NOR ANYTHING OF THIS KIND IS THE REAL CAUSE OF OUR DOING OR NOT DOING ANY ACTION, BUT OUR INWARD OPINIONS AND PRINCIPLES.**

**EPICETUS**

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### III DEFINITION OF DEVOTION (1:26, 27)

If it were up to us to define religion, what would it look like? Cathedrals, organs, robes, suits and dresses, guitars, jeans, quiet, exuberance – I doubt if we would all agree on the same things. God's definition is pretty simple. In this text, he simply says that if we are people of faith, it will be evidenced in our character and care for needy people around us.

James continues his homage to the themes of justice and compassion as emblematic of pure religion by choosing a common idea found in the Prophets: God has special

concern for the widows and orphans, as these are emblematic of all groups open to exploitation. People at the margins of the social, economic and legal landscape are always open to exploitation and thereby suffer distress.<sup>2</sup>

Just as caring for the vulnerable around us is an action based on what we read in God's Word, so is the rest of the definition of pure religion: keep unstained from the world. But what does this look like?

*1 John 2:15, 16 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

*Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

This is a restatement to us that the ways of the world around us (and even our own natural sinful tendencies) are contrary to God's ways. This emphasizes again the importance of reading, knowing, studying and memorizing the Bible. How else will we successfully break away from the pattern of the world unless we follow this blueprint for life from the Creator? This kind of obedience, though, has to be lived out in the society we find ourselves.

We should not miss the important point that [James] does not teach removal from the world. Rather, he stresses living in the world but doing so with intelligence and forethought in order to keep one's life, one's reputation, and one's faith pure and secure. For James true faith enters the surrounding culture but remains free from the evil to be found there.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody) 1998, 84, 85.

<sup>2</sup> David Nystrom, *The NIV Application Commentary: James* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 97.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*