



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Book of James, Quick to Listen

APRIL 4, 2011

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James 1:22-25

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man, who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Introduction

Here we take up “quick to listen,” one of the three topics we previously found in verse 19 (quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry).

In this passage we find two bookends with a parable in the middle. The bookends are described as the words of Scripture. James uses the term “word” in verse 22 and the term “law” in verse 25. The parable is almost humorous and it describes looking into a mirror and forgetting what is seen there.

Verse 22 has its word order reversed by the NIV. If the NIV had kept the original order, it would have begun with the words, *Do what the word says and do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.*

We say this not to be picky, but to show the emphasis of James, calling us to action by being a doer of the word. This priority of action fits his general call to us, and starts with a positive exhortation rather than a “do not.” With that in mind we will turn to the text.

Do not merely listen to the word,

James says listening is not enough. If we read our Bibles, go to a Bible study, listen to preaching, or any other way of receiving God’s Word, there is an imperative placed upon us by God. Mere listeners are not obedient to what they hear and are not faithful to the implanted word of salvation we mentioned in

the last study. James even uses a little Greek conjunction that is not apparent in the English, and it indicates that he is now describing how a Christian reacts to the implanted Word (verse 19). He hears it and it compels him to act upon it. I think of the tulip bulbs in my yard—now they are blooming and becoming what their nature compels. So it is with the implanted Word in the souls of believers. The implanted Word should blossom.

... and so deceive yourselves.

In essence, James says if we merely hear and do no more, we have deceived ourselves. We are living under a delusion.

True hearing is learning wisdom, and not acting on what is true is irrational. You are deceiving yourself. Many believe they are acting and living according to God’s instructions, but if they examined themselves carefully they would be forced to admit they really know little of His Word.

Do what it says..

This may sound overwhelming. How can we do what it says when it sets such a high bar and says so many things? It is doubtful that anyone knows the full extent of what it says. The most mature believer is constantly finding new things never noticed before. James is moving us toward maturity and completeness. He has us on the road that brings us closer in conformity to who Christ is.

But remember this is written to those who do profess to read, listen and receive instruction. This suggests one way we make our salvation sure is to use the self-test of being “word doers.” If we remain inactive when the Word provokes us we are likely spiritually asleep or spiritually dead.

A Parable, Verses 23-24

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

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

To underscore the importance of heeding God's Word, James offers the parable of someone looking into a mirror. The idea is not glancing or casually looking, but carefully studying the reflected image. This parallels the duty of Believers to fully absorb the Word into their hearts and minds. Scripture tells us to read, memorize, and meditate on the Word (Psalm 1:2, 119:11). We should not take it casually, and yet most observers of modern Christianity decry the lack of biblical literacy. The heart filled with God's Spirit longs for His Word as if it were food. This is a troubling commentary on those who "say" they have faith (James 2:14).

If you do take the Word seriously and make it a part of your life; then you are still faced with the necessity to do what it says. Failure to heed the Word is like the person who cannot remember what he looks like in the mirror.

But the man who looks intently...

Here, James switches verbs to heighten the meaning of *looks intently*. We are naturally drawn to our own image and we are prone to study our reflected face. The Scripture should attract us more than a mirror. We should desire to *look intently* into all it is and all it reveals.

...into the perfect law that gives freedom,

Scripture has many names and here it is called the perfect law that gives freedom. It is perfect because it is inerrant, infallible, sufficient and comprehensive for all we need to know pertaining to salvation and living as a disciple of Christ.

This perfect law gives *freedom* or we could translate it as *liberty*. The perfect law has the message of gospel and how we are freed from the bondage of sin. Those who love sin, think of the law as a set of mean rules taking away their freedom. To be free from sin and real guilt is to be free indeed.

... and continues to do this,

Our Christian duty calls us to live His way hour by hour and day by day. We need to continuously strive to do the right thing. Paul used the image of one running a race and

completing the course (1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:7). God desires us to push toward the finish line.

... not forgetting what he has heard,

We are prone to forget. The Fourth Commandment tells us to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy. Of all of the commandments it is the one God told us to remember and in some ways it is the commandment we are quick to forget. When we receive the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) we are told to take the bread and the wine and to eat and to drink as a remembrance of Christ. When John wrote to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:5) he scolds them as having lost their first love, and admonishes them to remember how far they had fallen.

... but doing it—

For James, the act of true remembering is expressed by doing. It reminds me of what I have said to my children when they were young. They would be neglecting some instruction and I would say to them, "Did you hear what I said?" That is similar to what James says. If we have heard from God then we ought to be doing it.

... he will be blessed in what he does.

There is a general sense that anyone who acts in accordance to God's law is blessed by the doing of it. But here James has more in mind than doing something for a payoff. The "doing" of what we hear demonstrates the blessing we already possess. God does not love us because of our performance, but our good actions demonstrate our ears are tuned to His voice.

Questions to Ponder...

- 1. Do you pay more attention to your reflection in a mirror or to God's Word?**
- 2. Is the Book of James merely a set of "how to" instructions to live the Christian life? Why or why not?**
- 3. What can you do today, right now, to put God's Word into action?**