



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

TRUE FAITH IS BEING “DOERS OF THE WORD”, Part 2 – JAMES 1:23-24

COLORADO

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James knows obedience is no simple matter. But we must commit ourselves to God and His Word, daily seeking the Lord and doing His will by the power of the Holy Spirit which enables us to live godly lives that please Him. Everything we are and have must be devoted to hearing and doing, loving and honoring, adoring and serving God. And really loving God means honoring Him by obeying, for true faith not only receives the Word of God resulting in salvation, but is willing to put the Word into practice.

I. HEARING BUT NOT DOING THE WORD-JAMES 1:23-24

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 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.” James 1:22-24

James says that true faith receives the Word of God and the result of giving way to God’s Word in our life is obedience. If that doesn’t happen then we are deceived about our true salvation. That is not to say that obedience saves us, but it shows what is really true about the condition of our heart for true faith will result in obedience to the Word of God. Any response to God’s Word other than obedience is deceptive, and because James doesn’t want us to be deceived about our spiritual condition, he provides an illustration to give clarity to this truth in the next few verses.

A. HEARER BUT NOT A DOER– JAMES 1:23-24

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer...” James 1:23a

James will give an illustration that draws a distinction between the one who hears the Word of God but doesn’t do it, contrasted with the one who hears the Word of God and obeys it. He begins in James 1:23-24 by looking at the one who hears the Word of God but then falls short of putting it into practice.

1. LOOKS AT HIS FACE IN THE MIRROR– JAMES 1:23B

“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...” James 1:23b

James gives a simple picture of a man who looks at his face in the mirror to effectively illustrate his point. First, this man “looks” in the mirror. This word means more than just a casual glance so we are not talking about a quick look.

“look” Greek word “*katanoeo*,” meaning to observe, consider or contemplate. It means to look carefully.

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This man looks carefully, intently observing, considering and contemplating. What is this man to look carefully at? He is looking at his natural face.
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“natural” Greek word “*genesis*,” which means the beginning of existence, the form of his being.

“face” Greek word “*prosopon*,” meaning the countenance of another, the face.

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So, this man looks in a mirror intently, carefully observing his own face, his being, his life. Keep in mind, at the time of the Roman Empire, not everyone had a mirror like we do today. In fact, they didn’t have glass mirrors. Usually a piece of metal would be used made of bronze, silver or gold (if you were wealthier). The metal would be pounded into a flat shape and then polished. When you looked at this mirror, it would be adequate enough to see your image, though not perfectly. Because the image would be dim, you would have to really stare at the mirror, looking carefully to see your face. If you looked carefully enough, then you could see your image dimly. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face...*” This is what James is picturing here as he writes.

One who looks at God’s Word is compared to a man who looks in a mirror, carefully observing, considering and contemplating his life. The mirror that reflects his image is the Word of God. The image he studies is his face, his form, his being or his life in light of the truths reflected by the Word of God. As he looks intently at Scripture comparing his life to the truths found therein, there is a responsibility to allow the Word to work, giving way to God’s will. Colossians 3:9-10 says, “*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...*”

The image God desires to be reflected by the mirror of His Word is of Jesus Christ. The more we allow God to work, the greater our lives reflect His image more clearly as we are transformed from the inside out by the work of the Word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is a life changing, life transforming book as Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*” God intends for His Word to change our lives and Scripture is clear regarding that change. We have a responsibility to submit to Scripture and obey it.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR & SPOUSES: TUESDAY AT 7:15AM, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

STAFF, LOBBYISTS, JOURNALISTS & SERGEANTS: TUESDAYS AT NOON, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0107

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2. FORGETS WHAT HE SEES– JAMES 1:24

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 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.” James 1:22-24

So this man looks intently in the mirror of God’s Word and sees his life in regards to Scripture; sees the sin, contemplates the problems and gives consideration to areas in his life that don’t please God. This man then walks away and immediately forgets what he has seen. He forgets what kind of person he is, that the Word has revealed. He forgets the sin that has been clearly exposed, and he ignores the life that doesn’t please God.

Hebrews 4:2 helps us understand what has happened. It says, *“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”* James continues to emphasize this kind of faith that is real and genuine as one that receives the Word of God and responds to the Word of God.

Have you ever looked in a mirror and seen something you should fix? Maybe it was some hair obviously out of place, a smudge of grease on your face or a place that you missed while shaving that morning. You get ready to take care of it and then the phone rings. Following your conversation, you realize you are late for work so you gather up your things, completely forgetting that grease mark on your face as you hurry away. Of course, it comes back to haunt you later in the day at work. But James is saying that one who looks intently at Scripture; seeing the dirt of sin, the life that needs to change and walks away without doing anything about it is deceived and has made a grave miscalculation.

James would say that hearing God’s Word without doing, without obeying grossly miscalculates the importance of obedience to the Word as a part of true faith. James doesn’t make light of this one who has forgotten what he has seen in the mirror of God’s Word and walked away. This forgetful hearer is contrasted with the *“effectual doer”* of the Word in James 1:25. And it is clear that the forgetful hearer doesn’t possess real and genuine faith. James warns that if that man thinks he is a believer simply because he is a hearer of the Word, he sits in church every Sunday and may even go to Bible study, talks as though he is a Christian but will not submit his life to the scrutiny of Scripture and obedience God demands, that man has made an error of severe, momentous proportions with his life. For the mark of true faith is not just hearing the Word of God, but doing the Word of God.

Obedience is the dividing line between any who would call themselves believers and those who truly are.

Yes we must listen to God’s Word. But the listening James exhorts us to is a listening and hearing that leads to right living! When God’s Word convicts our hearts, and it will, we must act on what needs to be changed or what needs to be done; we must obey. We can’t wait, or put it off or we may never get around to doing it. Worse, we will forget. The consequences of not acting on God’s convicting Word with obedience will result in apathy towards Him.

What right do we have to ignore God’s Word or twist the meaning? Who are we to think that our ways are better than His? The only logical response to the Word of God is obedience. Thomas Watson wrote the following, “he who gives men their lives has most right to give them their laws.”¹ We must commit ourselves to prayerful and careful examination by God’s Word, repent of any sin that Scripture reveals and submit ourselves without reserve to God and His Word.

In James 1:23-24, we have the example of one man who observes his face in a mirror and goes away, forgetting what he looks like. James will contrast this in the next verse with a man who observes the Word, perseveres by it, remembers it, and acts on it. That man is truly blessed. The former is deluded and is merely auditing Christianity, being a forgetful hearer only and not a doer of the Word. That man is deceived about the genuineness of his faith and is not blessed

Examine your life. What is your response to the Word of God? Does it convict in areas you would rather leave alone? Does it reveal light in areas you would rather keep secret and dark? Does it make you uncomfortable in the pew? Submit to it allowing the beautiful conviction of the Word to bring about maturity. Let the mirror of God’s Word do its effectual work and bring about godliness in your life!

¹ Watson, Thomas. The Ten Commandments. London, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959.