

James 1:21-27

James 1:21-27 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (22) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (25) But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (26) If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. (27) Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Questions On The Text

What is able to save our souls?

Verse 21: It's the implanted word that is able to save our souls. This is the same imagery that Jesus used in the Parable of the Sower in Mat 13:3-23. In this parable, the soil represents our hearts that receive the implanted seed, the Word of God. How the seed then grows depends on the quality of the soil.

One important factor in how well God's Word is able to grow and produce fruit is humility. We are to receive the word humbly.

Is it enough just to hear God's Word?

Verse 22: Not at all. The person who hears God's Word also has a responsibility to do it. The Greek word for "be" (as in "be doers") is in the continuous sense. In other words, James is saying, "Keep being doers" of the word.

If a person merely hears the word, but fails to do it, they are self-deceived. This shows us that deception does not just relate to things that are blatantly demonic. Deception occurs when a person hears the word and fails to put it into practice. This is self-deception, the worst kind of all, because it is really the equivalent of doing the devil's job for him.

What is the person who fails to practise the word like?

Verses 23-24: James' analogy speaks volumes. Ancient mirrors were made of highly polished metal, not glass, but still gave a clear image. The disobedient person is like someone who looks into a mirror and then forgets what they looked like. After all, the purpose of looking into a mirror is to fix up anything we see that isn't right. Similarly, the word is like a mirror that reveals our spiritual flaws, giving us the opportunity to correct them. To just forget about what we saw and not do anything about it is plain foolishness.

What sort of person does God bless?

Verse 25: The Greek word for "looks" (as in "looks into the perfect law") implies a deliberate intention to look rather than just a passing glance. The person who looks carefully into God's Word, doesn't forget about it, but is prepared to put in the work, that's the kind of person that will experience God's blessing in what they do.

What is the key to genuine religion?

Verses 26-27: According to James, genuine religion has three components. First, it means to have the tongue under control. An unbridled tongue is an indication of self-deception. The "world" in vs. 27 refers to the present world system which is under Satan's influence (1 Jn 5:19).

Second, genuine religion cares about others in a very practical way by visiting those who are in need. Its spirituality is not just theoretical, but expressed with authentic acts of kindness.

Third, true religion means pursuing a lifestyle of purity.

Further Questions For Discussion:

How can you be humble in receiving the implanted Word of God?

What's the best way not to forget what you've seen in the mirror of the word?

What are practical steps you can take to bridle your tongue?

In what ways can you be better at making your "religion" practical?

How can you keep yourself unspotted from the world?