

James – Faith To Obey

James 1:22-25 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.

1. It's all about obedience

It's not enough to hear God's Word; hearing is not obeying.

In our previous message, we learned how important it is to be able to hear God speak.

But God expects us to take the next step and to obey God's Word.

In fact, James says that the person who hears God's Word but doesn't put it into practice, deceives himself.

The person who knows that it's wrong to get drunk but does it anyway, is a victim of self-deception.

The person who knows that it's wrong to commit adultery but does it anyway, is a victim of self-deception.

Let me illustrate how foolish it is to be self-deceived.

ILLUS – Many of you have heard of John Dillinger. He was a notorious American bank robber in the 1930s. His life was a waste of intelligence, because he was actually a very smart man. One time, he and his men went into a bank pretending to be part of a film company looking for a place to shoot a bank robbery scene in a movie. The people stood by and watched and smiled as Dillinger and his men actually robbed the bank.

That's deception.

ILLUS – Imagine this though: Dillinger and his men have just robbed a bank. And they've done it by using their film company trick. They are sitting around in their hideout, laughing about the whole thing, wondering how long it took the onlookers to figure out that it was a real robbery, and one of Dillinger's men says, "Hey, John." "Yeah," says Dillinger. "That bank we just robbed..." "Yeah, what about it?" "Don't you own it?" And Dillinger suddenly realizes that he just robbed his own bank, and says, "Oh, man! I can't believe I just robbed my own bank."

That's self-deception.

That's why it's been said, "If you deceive somebody else you are wicked but smart; if you deceive yourself you are wicked but stupid."

The person who deceives himself is a goose, and that's exactly how it is for a person who hears God's Word but doesn't do it.

ILLUS – Imagine what the devil is thinking when God's people deceive themselves. He just calls over his henchmen and says, "Hey, take a look at this. They're doing my job for me!"

2. Hearing the Word is like looking in a mirror

James 1:23-24 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; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Let's ask ourselves a question here: What's the purpose of a mirror?

The purpose of a mirror is self-examination; you can see the flaws, and hopefully fix them.

ILLUS – So imagine a guy who wakes up one morning. He jumps out of bed, goes to the bathroom to splash some water on his face. He looks in the mirror and says, “Yech!” His hair is a mess, his eyes are bloodshot, he’s unshaven, eyebrows need a trim, pimples. He squints at himself and says, “I’ll fix it after breakfast.” He goes into the kitchen, gets his breakfast, and reads the newspaper. But he gets so absorbed in the newspaper that he forgets the time. Suddenly, he realises that he’s late for work. He runs into the bedroom, gets dressed, and he’s out the door. And he forgets about what he saw in the mirror.

James says that’s what the person is like who looks into God’s Word, sees what they need to do, and then does nothing about it.

ILLUS – It’s like you hear a sermon or read God’s Word and you think, “I must do something about that.” But then you get home and life just gets busy. You’ve got things to do, people to see, places to go. And you just forget.

3. The perfect law of liberty

James 1:25 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.

What is the perfect law of liberty?

Ps 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;

James is still talking about God’s Word; God’s Word is perfect.

But why does he call God’s Word the law of liberty?

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. (32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

The Word of God has the power to set you free.

You can be free from bondage, sin, fear, addictions, guilt.

ILLUS – Once upon a time there was a little bird. He wasn’t an ordinary little bird. He was a spine-tailed swift; spine-tailed swifts have been clocked flying at 171kph. One day, he thought, “I’ll be the best flyer in the country.” So he practised, and exercised, and did special bird exercises. And he got faster, and faster, and faster. But he wasn’t satisfied, he wanted to go even faster. He wanted to be the fastest bird in the world. So he pondered the problem and came to a conclusion. He thought, “I know what’s wrong. I’m too heavy. I need to get rid of some extra weight.” He wasn’t fat, and wondered what he could do. Suddenly, he realised he could be a whole lot lighter if he got rid of his feathers. So he did. And guess what? Then he couldn’t fly at all.

Sometimes people think, “All these constraints on my life! God says, ‘Do this, do that, don’t do this, don’t do that. It’s just weighing me down.’”

But God wants us to fly; and if you start shaking off God’s requirements, you’ll never fly.

But obedience to God’s Word sets us free to be what God wants us to be.

Christ takes our heavy burden and replaces it with His yoke – we need Christ’s yoke. His commandments are not a hindrance, but our freedom.

4. Looking into the Word

James talks about the person “who looks into” the law of liberty.

That phrase “looks into” literally means “stoops down”.

What a strange thing to say!

Why would he use an expression like that?

Here’s an illustration to help you understand what this means.

ILLUS – You’re taking a nice leisurely walk one day. And a flash of colour on the ground catches your eye. You look down and notice that the colour is moving. And you think to yourself, “I’ve got to take a closer look at that.” So you stoop down to examine it, and you realise that it’s some kind of insect. And you give it much closer attention.

This isn’t just a casual look where you say, “Interesting”, and walk on.

You’re giving it your full attention and taking a good long look.

That’s what this phrase means.

It’s more than just a casual reading of the Bible; it’s something that has caught your attention, and you stop to let it sink in.

You let it absorb your mind.

This is all about placing a high value on God’s Word.

5. Continuing in the Word

James 1:25 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.

James contrasts the person who is a forgetful hearer of the word, with the person who continues in it.

What he’s doing is repeating a thought that he introduced in vs. 22.

He said, “But be doers of the word”.

In English, that word “be” is easy to pass over, but in Greek, there’s a lot more information.

This word is in the continuous sense, so that it means “keep on being”¹ a doer of the word.

It’s not enough to dabble here and there in obeying God’s Word.

It has to be a lifestyle, and that’s why James says to continue in it.

I’ve heard far too many people over the years say, “But I tried that and it didn’t work.”

People even say that about Jesus: “I tried Jesus and it didn’t work.”

Like Jesus is some kind of recipe you try out to see if you like it!

God doesn’t want us just to dabble in His Word; He’s looking for commitment.

And there’s something special for that kind of person.

6. Blessing

James 1:25 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.

What person does the blessing come to? The one who continues in the word.

So does this mean that we earn God’s blessing through our obedience, or does it come by grace?

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

The blessing is already ours through grace, but there’s something we need to understand.

Mat 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

There are two roads; one leads to destruction, and the other one leads to life.

The one that leads to life is the road with blessing, and the one that leads to destruction is the road without blessing.

You can't earn God's blessing, but you do have to make sure you're on the right road.

ILLUS – So think about this: You've decided to follow Jesus; you're on the road to life. This road is difficult. It can be tough going. And you look over to your left and see this beautiful, broad highway. There aren't many people on your road, but there are lots of people on that road. And they are having so much fun. Life seems to be so easy for them. And you think to yourself, "Man, I've had enough of this. This is too hard. I want to try what they are doing for a change." So you climb over the hedge and start travelling with all those other people.

But what you've done is you've just changed roads.

You're no longer on the road to life where the blessing is; now you're on the road to destruction, and that's not where the blessing is.

We're not talking about a person who's on the difficult road to life, trips over, gets up again, and keeps walking.

They know they did the wrong thing, but they get back up, and keep walking down that road.

But what we're talking about is the person who has changed direction.

It's not a slip-up; it's a conscious choice that they want to travel down a certain path, a path that God doesn't want for them.

If you want the blessing of God on your life, you have to be walking down the path of blessing.

God is looking for an obedient people.

He's looking for people who have real faith, the kind of faith that brings obedience.

¹ Adamson, James B. *New International Commentary on the New Testament* p82