

Exhortation to Obey the Word

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[0 : 00] I'm going to finish up chapter 1 in this little book of James.

! We've been looking at the subject being the Word of God, but again, without doing too much review.! The Word of God is very much connected to that.

If you remember, before we got into this particular section, we were looking at what James says about temptation, and that was attached, is attached, in James' teaching, to trials, being tempted in our trials.

And not just the temptation to blame God, but actually being tempted to sin in the midst of a time where God is testing us, proving us.

And so we don't respond properly. The Word of God is attached to that, of course. And so, we're kind of on that subject. Under this heading, Receive and Do God's Word.

[1 : 25] I will give you just a short little review. We look at the exhortation to receive the Word. That was the first part of this kind of two-part teaching out of this section of chapter 1.

And that's what is found in verses 19 through 21. And so this is what we talked about last week, all right? So we talked about the preparation to receive God's Word. Tune in, remember, be swift to hear.

Tone down, be slow to speak. And sweeten up, be slow to anger. I actually taught this lesson to the guys at Dick Connor Correctional Facility.

And I was looking out there, you know, all these guys, and I'm thinking, is it really, really right for me to say, sweeten up? I didn't know if I would cause a riot, but it went well.

So that's the preparation. Then we talked about the reception of the Word, the actual reception of it, the manner of receiving it, humbly, meekness, with meekness.

[2 : 34] And we talked about the nature of that Word, Receive. We receive the implanted Word. It's the implanted Word because God plants it and grasps it in us.

It's something that's not there naturally. And God is the one who's gracious to implant it into our life. And then thirdly, the motive for receiving the Word, which is able to save your soul.

So this is all kind of a quick review of where we were last week. Under this topic, the exhortation to receive the Word. Now we're ready to go forward. The exhortation to do the Word.

All right? Receive and do. They have to go together, don't they? Receiving's not enough. Doing is what receiving must lead us to, or we really haven't received it.

In fact, these verses obviously are an expansion, as well as an explanation of the commands that we've had in verse 19.

[3 : 37] To hear and receive the Word. This is an expansion of that, and an explanation of that.

Because one really has not heard the Word, nor has one really received the Word of God, unless it results in obedience.

Now that's pretty simple, isn't it? And yet, it is our number one mistake. I'm just convinced, as believers. We know this.

No one here would deny this, the truth of this. And yet, that's exactly where we fall short. We hear it, we receive it, but we don't do it.

Which, technically speaking, means we didn't really receive it. We may have heard it. And there are three parts to the exhortation to do the Word. So I'm saying that these final verses, verses 22 to 27, can be divided into three parts.

And I'll give you the three parts here on the front end, though you'll get to fill in your little blank as we go along. But there's the exhortation, the actual exhortation, and then the illustration.

[4 : 45] So James is going to illustrate this particular principle. And then there's an application, a particular application that really, on the surface, seems a little strange as an application for this

subject of doing the Word of God.

We'll get to that by and by. All right, so first, the exhortation. Verse 22. Here it is, kind of in a nutshell. Very much like we had what I call the admonition, you know, or rather the preparation for receiving it in verse 19.

All in one verse. There was the, kind of all of it in a nutshell. And here is the actual doing of the Word, the principle, the exhortation to do the Word in kind of a nutshell.

Be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Deceiving yourselves. All right? So there is the exhortation. And it's a pretty strong exhortation.

In fact, it's really more than just an exhortation. It's a command. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

[6 : 00] So a couple of points under that. As believers, we are to show ourselves to be continually doers of the Word. That's the idea here.

I'll explain here in a minute, but let me say that again. Again, he's speaking to believers, he's writing to believers. We are to show ourselves constantly, continually showing ourselves doers of the Word.

Not in a prideful way. I'm not saying showing yourself, showing off in that sense. But we are actually always demonstrating that we are doers of the Word and continually.

Uh-oh. I thought that was recorded, but it was my pen. I'll pick apart a few of the words there in the verse. The word be. I mean, two letters in the English language.

It's a little bit longer in the Greek language. Genomai, and it's a very common word in the New Testament. It means to become. It means to become, all right?

[7 : 05] So what? Well, let's take this step further. If you pick apart the verb, it gives us a little bit more understanding. It's, and, you know, I know we're not Greek scholars here, but, you know, where English uses a particular word to convey the idea of a second person plural, what would that be?

You. Or you all. You all. You all. The Greek incorporates that second person plural in the word itself.

So it doesn't separate it. It's just the way the word is spelled that tells the reader that this is second person plural. So here's the idea. Every one of you become doers.

All right? Every one of you. It's plural. It's imperative. That means it's a command. All right? So this is a command.

It is present tense. And as often as I mention that, everybody ought to know what that means. Continual action. When a Greek verb is in the present tense, and again, it's the way it's spelled that tells you that.

[8 : 22] So we'll just trust the Greek scholars to tell us that this is present tense. Okay? It means continuous action. All right? Now this is leading to something. All right? So it's not do something you're not now doing.

Remember, who's James writing to? He's writing to believers. If you read this and you say, you know, I haven't really ever been obeying God's word, doing God's word, then you really ought to examine where you are spiritually.

You don't really have a whole lot of warrant to believe that you're a believer, a true believer, truly born again, if doing the word of God has never been to your desire. All right?

And so he's speaking to believers, and so rather he's saying, keep on showing yourselves to be doers of the word.

Don't ever slack off on that. Now, this ties us back to, again, the larger subject of trials, hard times, difficulties, where there is the temptation to get out of fellowship with God.

[9 : 40] I mean, hard times always affect adversely relationships that we have.

You've discovered that, haven't you, in your own relationships you've had in life, whether it's a relationship of husband and wife. When big tragedies come into a family, one of the first attacks the devil makes is against the relationship of the husband and wife, to divide them, to cause that relationship to come apart.

And so in the context of trials, then he's saying, we're to be doers of the word. We're to keep on doing it. Keep on showing yourself to be a doer.

Don't slack off on that. Don't let anything, no trial, no problem, no persecution, you know, no failure. That can be a part of it.

Don't let anything keep you from continuing to show yourself, to demonstrate that you are a doer of the word of God. So that's the idea behind the word be.

[10:51] There's a whole lot behind that word be. Well, let's take a second thing. This speaks also of a productive activity. This is very important.

Again, rather than just a doing something habitually. We're talking about doing the word, being doers of the word. Not just talking about getting to some kind of routine, some kind of habit. It's good to have that kind of habit. I'm not suggesting that habit has nothing to do with it. But it's a whole lot more than just simply some routine that you just kind of take your steps each day and you mind your P's and Q's and you, you know, you have a little check off list that I've obeyed God's word today.

It's much more than that. Doers, poietes, it means to be a producer. To produce something.

This is kind of interesting. The word appears in Acts 17:28. We'll not turn to it. But there, that same word is translated poet.

[11:59] What does that have to do? How do you get a, you know, the word doers here in James? How do you go from there to poets in Paul, what Paul wrote about, or rather testified about in Acts 17?

And Luke recorded, of course. All right, well, what's, how could those two be the same? Well, the idea conveyed here is a creative performance, or this is the idea behind the word doers.

A creative performance, a productive action with an intended result. You see, when we take the word of God, we hear it, we receive it.

That word is intended to produce something. Not only in our own hearts, but through us to produce other things that fall in line with God's purposes and larger purpose and plan than just, just our individual lives.

And so, we're, we're intent on this word of God making a difference. A difference in my life, and a difference in the things I do, a difference in the people I know.

[13:15] It is a productive action. Doer is a productive action that always has with an intended, you have in your mind an intended result. Whatever that result is, I'm going to learn from this, I'm going to teach this, I'm not going to make the same mistake again, I'm going to contribute, you know, to the body of Christ because of this word.

Always some intended result that you are determined about, intent on, in receiving the word, doing the word of God.

Believers also are to show themselves to be doers of the whole counsel of God's word. I guess this really goes without saying, but we're just kind of picking apart this and trying to get from it all we can from every single word, the word word.

Be, be you doers of the word. That's logos. And the word logos, by the way, you know, just a common word in the Greek language.

You know, Paul and John and the biblical writers and here James used the word logos quite often, but so did pagans like Aristotle, you know, and other Greek writers.

[14:39] They didn't mean the same thing. Logos is just a word simply means a speech or word uttered. And now in this sense, it's logos in the singular.

It doesn't mean a word, but it's talking about a speech, a whole body of words. Now, what is logos referring to here?

Well, in this context, of course, it refers to the word of God. And it refers not just simply to the, you know, the Old Testament.

It refers to both the Old and New Testament. It refers to the Old Testament. It refers to Jesus' sayings, teachings. It refers to the epistles and the doctrinal epistles and other writings in the New Testament.

The whole thing. It refers, maybe in the larger category, refers to the gospel. the gospel in the largest sense of the word. All right, so, for example, John 3:21, he who does or, and there's the word does, or practices the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God.

[15:59] 1 John 1:6, if we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. It's the same concept of doing the word, practicing the truth.

Jesus said in Luke 6:46, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say? It's a contradiction.

In the very next verse there in Luke 6.47, whoever comes to me and hears my sayings and does them, he is like a man building a house and laid the foundation on rock.

We know that parable, don't we? All right, the one who hears and doesn't do is like what? On the sand, the shifting sand. And so, when the storm comes, it's totally destroyed, but when the storm comes for the one who hears his sayings and does them, then he stands strong.

James then contrasts with those, this, with those who are perpetual hearers but not doers.

[17:09] That's the next phrase in the verse and not hearers only. An interesting word. It's a little bit different than the normal word, the standard word for hear, which is akuo, but this is akroates, akroates.

And it means, it's talking about those who sit and listen to lectures. That's the technical definition. It refers to people who just sit and listen to, you know, to lectures.

Describes those then who are continually, who continually listen but have no real intention to act upon what they hear. You think we have anybody who attends our church on Sundays that churches anywhere, you think there's a great body of people who attend church for different motivations but they listen but haven't really made up, made any decision that they're going to obey what they hear or act upon what they hear.

I like the example out of Acts 17, 21. Paul's talking about the Athenians and he says the Athenians they like to spend their time in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing.

And that was kind of the way they were, these intellectuals you know, in fact they even approached Paul remember and said we'd like for you to come tell us about this, about these two gods you've been talking about.

[18:44] Resurrection was one of the names of the gods they thought he was talking about and Jesus. And because it's not that they wanted to believe or had any intention of responding acting upon any of it they just like to hear it, like to hear about some new thing.

And that's the idea behind the word hearers who are just hearers only. And James gives us a warning about self-deception. This all kind of caps off this exhortation caps off with a warning. Self-deception is common place in the church. And here's the deception. The deception is the belief that knowledge is the same as maturity.

Do you think anybody is deceived by that? Has that deception? I think so. You know, somehow, you know, just getting it in the brain is all I need. And if I know more than the next person, then I'm more spiritually astute, spiritually mature than the next person, and it's just not true.

It's not true. Knowledge is not the same as maturity. It is, rather, it is what we do with what we hear that defines our spiritual maturity.

[20:04] That's the big difference, isn't it? All right, then we move to the illustration. The illustration, verses 23 to 25, first comes kind of this analogy, an interesting analogy, famous analogy, a hearer of the word and not a doer is like, is like, that clue that this is an analogy, a comparison.

This thing is kind of like this other thing. And so, what is the analogy? analogy is the common everyday activity of looking at oneself in the mirror. How many of you did that today?

You looked in the mirror. Okay. What, what, what did you think? Well, I should ask, how much time did you spend watching in the mirror?

And so, there's the analogy. He is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, his appearance in the mirror. And, by the way, you know, women look in the mirror too, not just men.

And so, the same analogy applies to women as well. So, you can't just say, all right, this is for the men, and this doesn't have anything to do with me. Well, depending upon what you see in the mirror, you might react in one of three ways.

[21:33] Smash the mirror. That'd be a person. Of course, then you have, what, seven years of bad luck? That kind of stuff, I'm sure you don't. Smash the mirror, you can get rid of the mirror.

That's a reaction, that's one thing you could do. I guess maybe you could, you know, the second one, ignore what you see in the mirror. I see it there, but forget it.

You kind of walk away from the mirror in disgust. Maybe, I'm just speaking for me. And then three, you can do what is required to alter the image.

What you see in the mirror, there's some things you might be able to do about it. And does the mirror fix those things? No, the mirror doesn't, but the mirror reveals, doesn't it?

Reveals. So this is an analogy. And what is it analogous of? Well, God's word, of course. like a mirror, I'll give you two things that the Bible is, a mirror is like the word and a couple of things that is

unlike the word.

[22 : 45] Like a mirror, the Bible reveals some unflattering things about us. You know, right? It always does. something that, you know, anyway, we don't need to dwell on that.

Unlike a mirror, however, the Bible reveals the deeper flaws about us. You know, not just what's on the surface, like that old adage, beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes all the way to the bone. I thought I'd give that to you. You can use that sometime, but I'd be careful who you use that with. Right? All right, so a mirror can't do that.

A mirror cannot reveal what's underneath the skin, what's deeper. The Bible, of course, can and does. It goes all the way to the very heart of a person.

Unlike a mirror, we'll go back to the unlike, unlike a mirror, the Bible reveals how those flaws can be permanently fixed. All right, so where a mirror has no power, no authority, nothing in the mirror that can give you instruction on what to do about whatever the flaw might be, the Bible certainly does.

[24 : 14] So it reveals as well as instructs how to permanently fix those flaws. Like a mirror, we can respond in one of three ways.

All right, we can smash the Bible. All right, smash the Bible. You can just destroy it. If you don't like what it says, then get rid of it.

Anybody doing that these days? I mean, there are entire governments that have worked and worked and still working to destroy the Bible.

It's happening in our own country today. we just gradually get rid of it out of the schools and other public places.

Pretty soon, we're not careful. Things continue to go as they are. We're going to start taking it out of our homes. Why should we think that would never happen when it's happening all around the world and has been for centuries and can it happen here?

[25 : 23] Of course it can. And it is. So that's one answer, obviously, right? You don't like what it says, don't like what it reveals, then get rid of it.

Or you could just ignore what you see in the Bible. So you see the analogy. It's a very, very good analogy. So you read God's word or you hear it preached or taught and it reveals something very quickly.

Not just surface things and cosmetic things about your life, but deep things that only you know. Or at least you thought it was just you.

God knows. The Bible reveals those things. It's like a two-edged sword. It cuts and reveals things. I'm not sure what that was. And so we hear it, but we don't want to deal with it, so we just ignore it. And that's really in keeping with what James is going to say about this particular application of this analogy. Or three, we can do what is required to alter the image revealed by the Bible.

[26 : 34] And of course that's God's intent that the Bible change us. all right, so we have an analogy and then we come to our reality.

The reality, this is kind of the, all right, now here's the lesson from this analogy. Because the Bible is not like a mirror.

The Bible is something quite different. Verse 25, but he who looks intently, I put in parentheses intently, that's kind of explanatory of the word looks, 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. So, the real thing is the perfect law of liberty. We're not talking about analogies here now, this is the real thing.

And the real thing, more real than anything, is God's word. And James describes it as the perfect law of liberty.

[27 : 50] And we need to kind of understand this. It is the perfect law. I think we could probably this doesn't need a lot of explanation. It's the perfect law because it is complete.

It's the complete whole truth, full truth of God. And it contains all that we need to live righteously before God. We don't have to go outside the Bible, beyond the Bible, we don't have to go to other books written about the Bible, though some of those are helpful.

Word of God is complete. It has everything we need there for us to live righteously before God.

Now, that is for the believer.

and it has everything the unbeliever needs to know about his or her sin and know who the Savior is, know that repentance is required, faith.

But then he says it is the perfect law of liberty. This one is a little bit more confusing to us. The law of liberty. Some translations have the word freedom.

[29 : 00] What's that mean? We need to think about this a minute. Because I don't know about you, but perfect law of liberty, law of liberty, that sounds like a paradox.

I mean, when you think about it, how the law, I mean, how can you have those two together? The law requires a certain kind of behavior, certain belief, no gray area, it's black and white.

And that's not liberty, is it? And in the strictest definition of the word, if it requires specifically, dogmatically requires certain things of us, then how is that liberty, freedom?

How can law and liberty go together? Well, they of course can, and only when it pertains to the word of God can, in our relationship with Christ. First of all, God has given us, let's just admit, God has given us the strictest possible laws to live by, stricter even than the Old Testament law.

So, how so? Well, his law, for example, and this is a few examples, his law requires every thought to be brought into captivity, every thought. That's pretty strict.

[30 : 22] we're getting further away from liberty now. His law requires us to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds.

That's very strict. His law demands all that we are and have. That God demands all we are and everything that we have.

not just a tenth. I believe in the scriptural tithe. I think it's still valid and still in force in the New Testament.

But if anything, you could say, actually, he requires all of it. It's all he is. And all that we are and all that we have. I'm just pointing out that, you know, this kind of difficulty of reconciling the two things, law and liberty, law and freedom.

It doesn't sound like they go together. Especially when you consider how strict God's law is for his people. So how could there be freedom there?

[31 : 33] Well, that's the second thing. God works through our hearts to produce exactly what his law requires. It's kind of interesting that God is the one who does that in our hearts but he does it through his word.

So the more we get of his word in our hearts, the more freedom we have to do his law. And I've used the analogy before in this church maybe a couple of times.

It's like playing the piano. How many of you can play the piano? John didn't even have his hand up. So there's very few of us in this room.

I had my hand up but I was just using it as a demonstration. I cannot play the piano. And so why can't I? Because there are laws to piano play.

And the more of those laws you know, the better you are at playing the piano, the more freedom you have to play the piano. And, you know, Jonathan's a good example of that. I could get up there and bang around on it but I don't think I could ever put anything together except maybe chopsticks.

[32 : 52] I'm not sure if I remember how to play that. But it's because, it's not because, you know, I'm free. I'm not free. I'm in bondage.

Because I don't have the laws to play piano. I'm not free to make a beautiful piece of, play a beautiful piece of music and, you know, for anybody's enjoyment.

I guarantee you. It's the same thing more so with God's word. The more we have of God's law, God's word, the freer we are to do all that he requires of us.

His law tells us to love him and then he works in our hearts to produce a pure love for him. But you don't do that, that doesn't happen apart from his word. If you are just a hearer of it only and have no desire to do it, then there's no connection there and no freedom, no freedom to please God.

His law tells us to live a certain way and then he works in our hearts to produce a desire to live that way. his law liberates us to pray and we just kind of list several things.

[34 : 06] You can pray, hate sin, please God, and on and on we could go and it's his word in our hearts that gives us the liberty.

So that's the perfect law, full, complete law of freedom. freedom. Alright, the reality has four requirements.

One, to seriously study God's word. Looks into the perfect law of liberty.

And the very word conveys this idea of deliberate, intent, intently looking. it carries the idea of study, paying close attention, digging deep to make obeying God's word a lifestyle.

Continues in it. It's not just from time to time, it's just part of who you are. Day in and day out, it's part of your lifestyle, obeying God, doing his word.

[35 : 23] That's what defines you. Three, to remember God's word. Put in parentheses, memorize it. He says, he is not a forgetful hearer.

You know, like, again, the analogy, he looks at himself in the mirror and he walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like. You know, what manner of person he is. lean forward to purposefully obey God's word, but a doer, a doer will work.

And this one will be blessed in what he does. I'm going to wrap this up here real quick. Application is the third division of this portion of the chapter.

Again, under the exhortation to do the word. Application, verses 26 27. And so here's how he applies it. All right, you're to not just be a hearer of God's word, but a doer of it.

That's the exhortation. And then, you know, those who are hearers and not doers are kind of like a person who looks into a mirror.

[36 : 39] And then you have that analogy, so there's the illustration of it. And now we want how to apply this. We might even call this an example. An example and it's interesting.

The example is used. He begins with a false religion. False religion. If anyone among you thinks he is religious and that very word means an outward ritualistic kind of religion that really doesn't have any substance, it's all form, it's a facade, it's a ritual, ceremonial, a lot of religions that are based upon that kind of approach.

And so that's what he's talking about when he thinks he's religious. It does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart. This one's religion is useless.

I say he just uses this one kind of example, an application of the kind of person who has a false religion because his or her entire religion is based upon just simply being a hearer and not a doer. And so an example of that, what that kind of looks like is does not bridle the tongue but deceives his own heart. And so he kind of says three things about it.

[38 : 11] This religion lacks reality. It's not real. You understand what he's saying? You know, those who are just professional hearers, you know, they just hear.

They're just always kind of taking it in but have no intention to believe or act upon it. It's just kind of part of their ritual.

then their religion is a false religion. It's not real. He just thinks it is. He just thinks that it's a true religion.

There's so many people that you would meet right here in Bartlett that are very, quote, religious. Christian. And they equate religion with Christianity, true Christianity, and yet they're not living out the faith.

Now, they may be moral people, good people, but they just are that way because they're part of a culture that is, quote, Christian.

[39 : 24] Christian. They have no real relationship with Christ. And so, you know, they may go to church and may go through some forms and rituals and, you know, things like that, and they'll hear a little homily given on a Sunday morning or sometime.

And, you know, may not even be out of scripture. It may just be some ethical, ethical little, little message or whatever. And then they go home and, you know, I'm just so glad that I'm such a good Christian.

You know, it makes me feel good. And he just simply thinks he's religious. Lacks reality. And, using this illustration, lacks restraint.

Does not bridle his tongue. And, you know, James is going to talk a lot about the tongue. And I think this is kind of a heads up on where he's going to go here pretty soon in the book of James.

He's kind of stuck on this one particular example of a person whose religion is false. They have no restraint of the tongue.

[40 : 45] And then lacks reason. I mean, being reasonable about something here is deceived. Deceives his own heart. He's not just simply deceived by someone. This is a person who deceives himself or herself.

And, you know, thinking, it's just not even reasonable to think that this is all that's required. Just to, you know, to, you know, hear a little, short little sermon ad and then just the rest of the time go on with my life.

did not affect me. I haven't given any thought. I mean, it really doesn't have any bearing on the way I live my life. I'm not drawing closer to God, knowing God more, you know, those kind of things. So it's just, it's not even reasonable. And then lacks results. And this one's religion is useless. Useless. And that is never more profound than, or will be profound when this life is over. And that person stands before a righteous and holy judge. And so what he thought was true religion was actually worthless, useless.

[42 : 04] but then he caps it off with true relationship, a true relationship. And I use the word relationship to have religion, even though James uses once again the word religion, pure and undefiled religion, the real thing, the true thing, before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.

Is that something you would naturally think would be listed there, you know? is this mandating something for us, that in order for our religion to be true, we must visit orphans and widows in trouble?

Well, I mean, we ought to visit orphans and widows when there's need, especially in our own families. I mean, this is a true issue. This is not, he's not trying to say that this is, this all takes, all right?

This is all, and if you're doing this, then you're in. It's just one example, and really it's just representative of a kind of a category, and we'll mention those here in a minute.

And, but he mentions the second thing, really this is the third thing, because we have to go back to the previous verse to pick up the first thing that really is implied here about a true relationship with God.

[43 : 29] The second thing here in this passage says to keep oneself unspotted from the world. All right, so there really are, again, borrowing from the previous verse, a true relationship to God and his word is demonstrated by a controlled tongue.

So these are kind of categories. Is it important, I mean, and if we get on into James, we're going to certainly understand this, but how important is the tongue as a barometer of your spiritual condition?

Extremely important. That's why, that's a category, this is here. And the second one, the thing about orphans and widows, compassion for the needy.

All right, so while visiting orphans and widows, that's a very specific example. For example, he says, in a sense, is part of a larger category that ought to be true, ought to be true of those who claim a true relationship with Christ, and that's we're compassionate toward people who are in need, not just for their physical needs, but as well spiritual needs.

And then the third one is a moral purity and integrity. And we can easily see how that applies. But all three of these apply. So this is an example.

[45 : 09] You say, here is an application of what I've been teaching you about the Word of God, about being hearers and doers of the Word of God.

Here's an example. because a doer of the Word is one who's part of the true relationship with Christ. And here is how that is evidenced, is demonstrated in your life.

The tongue, the compassionate heart, morality, purity, holiness, integrity, those kinds of things.