

Be Doers of the Word

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[0:00] I have chosen to deviate from the plan a little bit here, Jonathan.

! I might as well just be honest about it. We've been gone all week. And I'm not ready to get back to Romans, and so there you have it. Your pastor is delinquent. Not lazy, but just...

And so I want to pull a passage out of the book of James. So if you'd open James, and it's all right from time to time to just pull something out of there that I think is familiar, ought to be familiar, but the truth of this particular passage it may reveal more than you knew about it.

And if it doesn't, and it's something you already knew, then maybe you just need to reconsider it again. And the passage that I'm referring to is...

Start with verse 19. Actually, it begins with 22, verse 22, but I'm going to begin in 19 because that's kind of the beginning of the paragraph. And so I'm not going to preach the entire paragraph, but a certain part of it.

[1:28] And so let me go ahead and read. Starting with verse 19, chapter 1. Did you need that information? You did, didn't you? Chapter 1 and verse 19. I'll get back on all cylinders pretty soon.

So then, my beloved brethren. So we know he's speaking to believers, right? Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word. And this is the key passage. And really from here all the way to verse 25 is what we're going to focus on tonight. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

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.

[2:53] 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.

Alright? So there's the passage we're going to focus on. Again, specifically starting with verse 22. Though it's a continuation of a subject.

And the subject, I guess we could say, if we were to define it in a word, would be the word. The word of God.

And how we approach the word of God and what we're to do with that word and so forth. So that's the subject really throughout this chapter in many ways.

Verse 22 is where we want to begin. And what I'm going to do tonight is just kind of take it step by step. Phrase by phrase.

[3:52] And hopefully it will be more than just simply a running commentary. But will be an exposition with some application of this passage and how we ought to relate to the word of God.

He begins there in verse 22. But be doers of the word. That's a very familiar phrase, isn't it?

We've heard this before. Be doers of the word and not hearers only. Be doers of the word. But let's pick that apart just a minute here. I think all the words are, you know, one syllable word.

Well, doers is two. Simple words. Understandable words. But there's some depth to each of these words. And especially when you put them together in the phrase.

The word be is in a certain form in the Greek language. And we'll not get into that. But it literally means to keep on becoming.

[4:55] It's an imperfect verb. And it is present tense. It means to keep on. It's a continuous action. And so it's keep on becoming. That's how we ought to understand what James is saying with the word be.

Keep on becoming what? Doers. Doers. And we don't need a lot of explanation about that word. Obviously, the implication or really it's not implied. It's very clear. We're speaking of some activity. We might say that James point is an active obedience.

To what? The word. So there you have them all together. And the word, of course, is God's word. God's holy word. And this, again, is the theme of the chapter. So let's put all that together as we kind of move forward because we really want to focus in on an analogy that he uses here in just a moment.

But this kind of sets us up. Be. We keep on becoming actively obedient to God's word.

[6:07] God's word. And not hearers only. Now let me ask you something. Is it important to hear God's word? I think so.

Surely so. I hope you're hearing here tonight. That is in the sense of using the physical, you know, the faculty of hearing both ears.

Now some of us, you know, may not hear as well as we once did. And I hope you're hearing me. But it is important to hear. But the word hearers in this text, in this passage, the word that James used, is a rather interesting word.

And it's a Greek word, of course, that is usually used to describe someone who is attending an academic lecture. But is not a student of the professor.

I mean, that's really the origin of this word. Now in our day, it would be likened to auditing a college course.

[7:15] You know. Where you take a class, you pay whatever the price is for the tuition. But you don't get any credit. And so, but the good thing is there are no assignments.

And there are no other class responsibilities. And no, this is the best part, no exams. Have you ever audited a class in college?

Or, you know, I did in seminary years ago. And that's what this word hearer describes. Or describes that kind of person who is auditing the course.

And then when you add to it the word only, then we, you know, it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Hearers only. That is, you're just auditing the course.

You're using your ears to hear, but you're not really participating. Not really going to the extent of applying it to your life and actively working out and doing what it is you're hearing.

[8:18] That's the idea here. Although it is important that we hear. And we've already been exhorted. If you remember when I read starting with verse 19, and this is why I started with verse 19 primarily, we've already been reminded or exhorted by James to hear.

He said to be swift to hear. We're to be quick to hear. Now, the theme is the word of God, so that's the application there as well. We're to be swift, quick to hear.

And so we are to hear it, the word of God, verse 19. We are to receive it. That also is a reference to hearing, but a step further.

We're to receive it and to receive it humbly. He said in verse 21. And then in verse 22, we're to be doers of it. Doers and not hearers only. And so the point is not hearing, it is doing.

And yes, we are to hear the word, swift to hear. And yes, we are to receive the word, humbly receive it. But we are to do it.

[9:21] Because if we just hear it and receive it, and that is the end of the process, then you've missed it. You've missed what God is requiring and what he wants you to do and what would be beneficial to you.

You've missed it. And this, of course, I think is a huge problem in the church today. It always has been. It's a problem with every believer. And we all struggle with this. And so now, then, that as kind of the introduction, well, not really the introduction, is the substance of the text.

But what I want us to key in on is the analogy that James uses. I don't think anybody ought to come and listen to a preacher and only remember his illustrations.

Although that tends to be the thing we remember the most. But when it comes to an illustration provided in the word of God, then if you just remember the illustration, you're okay. Because it's inspired.

Okay? And so, this is going to be an illustration or more technically, it's an analogy. Starting there in verse 23. And look at it again. For, or because, if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, then he is like.

[10:37] Now, that word clues you in that this is an analogy. He is like a man observing or looking.

You might have in your translation. Looking at his natural face. That's how the King James, or well, the New King James, I know, translates it that way. Others might have it. Looks at his own face. And that's the idea. Looks at his own face or observes his natural face in a mirror.

There's the analogy that James gives us. And the analogy involves a very common everyday activity that every one of us are involved in at some point of the day.

For most of us men, it's in the morning and that's the last time we look at a mirror. If we do it then. For the women, it's other, more often maybe throughout the day. And I'm not trying to be, well, forget it.

[11:38] But it is a common activity, isn't it? Looking into a mirror. Right? It is. And so this is the analogy that James is using. But certainly there is a reality.

In fact, there are a couple of realities that he's wanting to teach us through this analogy. They're very important. Spiritual realities. And one of them is that God's Word is like a mirror.

That's the other side of the analogy. Every analogy has two sides. It has the reality and then the illustration of it. And they're like one another in a sense. Though the Word of God is certainly much grander and much more glorious than any mirror.

But it is like a mirror in certain respects. And so this is the spiritual reality that he's teaching through the analogy that God's Word is like a mirror. In that it reveals the truth about us.

Or it reveals the truth about the one who looks into it. Looks into it. The Word of God. But there's a second reality.

[12:45] And if we miss this, then we're going to miss what James is trying to teach us. And that is that what God's Word reveals, we must act upon. We must act upon deliberately.

Definitely. Methodically. Obediently. And so God's Word is like a mirror and it reveals the truth to the one who's looking into it just like a mirror does.

But more than that, what it reveals, we must act upon. So that we're not just simply hearers, but we're also doers of the Word. So let's then consider this analogy and make a few connections that James is making here.

So think about this analogy. We can imagine a man. We'll just use man here. That's what James said. Though it applies to women.

But imagine a man or a woman observing or looking at his natural face. Own face in a mirror.

[13:57] Now what is he doing? He's looking. See, every word that James uses here in the text carries great weight. When you put it all together, it conveys tremendous meaning.

So we need to consider each word looking. Looking. And the word that he chose there is a very common word for looking. And not just a casual look, but actually a giving attention.

Taking note. And so here's a man looking into a mirror and he's giving attention to what? His own face.

His own face. And that means the face he was born with. And where does he see his face? In a mirror.

All right. There we just have unpacked the phrase. And it's pretty simple, isn't it? I mean, there isn't anything, you know, complicated about this. Here's a man. Here's the analogy. A man looking into a mirror.

[15:01] Looking attentively into a mirror. And he sees his own natural face there. And it appears before him in the mirror. It's a reflection. That's the analogy. Very simple.

Common everyday activity for most people, male and female. Now, depending upon what you see in a mirror.

You might react in one of three ways. And here's the application of the analogy. You can react one of three ways. I don't know that there might be a fourth.

But these three will get the idea across. Number one. You could smash the mirror. Right?

I mean, you look into the mirror and you don't like what you see. Ever happen to you? You don't, you know, not any of you reacted to that.

[16:01] Like, I don't know what. You're talking about. I like what I see in the mirror. Is that right? Every one of you? Sometimes, though, we do. At least I do. I look into the mirror and I don't like what I see.

And so, what could I do? I could go out to the garage and grab the hammer. At least if I can find it. And I could go in and just take that hammer and smash that mirror into a quadzillion pieces or

slivers of glass.

And have done with it. And then, you know, I would put an end to the unpleasant reality that's being reflected on that mirror. I could do that, couldn't I?

That would be one option. But remember, this is an analogy here in God's Word.

And so, the mirror of which James refers, to which James refers, is not an actual mirror. It's the Word of God.

[17 : 02] It's the Holy Word of God. And so, the mirror is God's Word and it reveals the truth to those who look into it.

That's what this analogy is about. And when I look into it, I may see some things I don't want to see. Right?

And sometimes that happens. That is in regard to the truth about me. And if I don't like it, I might just simply destroy the mirror. There are many who have tried to do that over the centuries since it was written.

In some countries today, still, the Bible is banned or burned. Certainly, it is illegal to have a copy of it in some countries in our world today.

They are trying to get rid of the mirror. Because that mirror shows a contrary truth to their truth.

[18 : 06] Whomever it might be. There are other ways to try to destroy the Word of God. And there are many today. Theologians, liberal scholars who are trying to destroy it by explaining it away as fable or superstition.

Or to cast it in a certain light that may cause people to doubt its accuracy. And so, if we can chip away at the truth and its accuracy, then eventually we don't have to worry about what it says about us.

And that's the same thing as taking a hammer to the mirror and pulverizing it because you don't like what it reflects. Or, number two, you could just simply ignore what you see in the mirror.

Couldn't you? We can do that in a physical sense. You know, I mean, you might look in the mirror and see a bit of ketchup on my chin.

You know, because I had a hot dog for lunch. And I say, hmm, ketchup on my chin. Oh, well, who cares? And so, I just go on, walk away from the mirror and I ignore it and forget all about it.

[19 : 34] And I don't see it anymore, so in my mind it doesn't exist. I know this is an oversimplification. It's ridiculous. But we'd be surprised, I think, all of us, if we'd be honest, how many things we see in the mirror that we might be able to do something about what we've just disregarded.

So, that's one option. I never will forget several years ago, and I may have told this story. I don't know. I've had other occasions to tell this story.

It's kind of humbling. It's kind of embarrassing. But several years ago, when, at some point in my life, when hair started to grow in other places, you know, like ears and inside the ear and nose.

You know, the older you get, hair begins to grow those places. And I was shaving one morning, and I looked there, and there was hair on my ear. There's some right now.

Don't come afterward and look, okay? And so I looked at that, and there's hair on there, so I got out my razor, and I got up real close to the mirror, and it was starting to kind of trim that hair off of my ear and inside my ear.

[20 : 51] And I looked, I said, what? What is that? And right in the middle of my forehead was a single hair sticking straight out of my forehead.

It was an inch long. I thought, what is that, and where did that come from, and who saw that? So I plucked that booger out of it.

You know, get rid of it. I have to be honest with you, as I was kind of going over my message for tonight, I decided to go into the bathroom and check and see if there was a hair there again, you know.

Just in case, you know, afterward you came up to me and said, Brother Dodd, you've got a hair right there in the forehead. And from now on, as long as you know me, you're going to be looking at my forehead to see if there's a hair there.

You know what I found? There was a hair there. And I had to pluck it out before the service tonight. Anyway. You know, so the mirror revealed something that was very unsightly and embarrassing to me and certainly unflattering, if that's a word.

[21:59] It was not flattering to me. And so I got rid of it. Now, I could have just disregarded it. I could have done that several years ago when I first saw it and not telling what it would look like today.

I could just say, well, it's there, but forget it. You know, I just, and I go away from the mirror and just forget about it, that it existed in the first place.

That would be an option. Now, remember, we're not talking about mirrors in the physical sense. The analogy is about the Word of God.

The mirror is the Word of God. Or the Word of God is like a mirror. It reveals the truth about us. And like a mirror, the Bible sometimes, oftentimes, reveals some pretty, pretty unflattering things about us.

It does. And more than that, more than just revealing unflattering things, more than that because the Bible reveals deeper things than just hair in unsightly places.

[23:17] Deeper things on the inside, more than any mirror could ever reveal. This is what we need to understand about the analogy and really more specifically about the Word of God and the power of the Word of God.

It reveals the ugly things. You know, as they say, beauty is skin deep. It's only skin deep. Ugly goes all the way to the bone.

And the Bible reveals all of the ugliness. But also, unlike a common mirror, and this is the good news, the Bible tells us how to deal with these flaws that we find, that it reveals.

How they can be dealt with and, in many cases, be permanently fixed. And what we must do in order for that to happen. Or we could ignore all of that.

That is what the Bible reveals. We could do that. And many do. And kind of like the man in our analogy. What does it say about him in verse 24?

[24:25] For he observes himself, or looks at himself, and then goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

What does that mean? It means, because we know the analogy of the mirror, the other side of the analogy is the Word of God. What it means is, he goes away, or he looks into the mirror, and the Word of God, and he looks into the Word of God, and reveals the truth about him, and then he goes away from it, and forgets that truth.

Immediately, just forgets the truth that was revealed there. Now, James is writing to Christian readers, as I noted at the beginning tonight.

And Christians are often self-deceived in their spirituality, aren't they? We all are. And we can attend a Sunday night Bible study like this, here tonight, or Sunday morning, and we can attend Sunday school, and listen to a teacher who's teaching God's Word.

And we can be involved in that, maybe some other kinds of Bible studies, or maybe our own personal Bible study. And here's the weird thing about us.

[25:53] We can mistake, or maybe I should put it this way, we can equate the pleasures of hearing the Word of God expounded.

We can equate that with biblical Christianity. We say that's the same thing. That our attending a service like this, and enjoying the Word of God being taught, or Sunday school class in that small group, and just the mere activity of hearing the Word of God, we can equate that with biblical Christianity.

And that falls way short of the reality. Sherry used to sing a song years ago.

I wish she'd find an accompaniment for it, or some music for it. It was entitled Stirred, but not changed. And that's what happens to us if we're just hearers only.

And we think that's all that's required, that we give audience to the Word of God, and yet it doesn't change us. There is no doing of what we hear.

[27:13] Now, getting back to the analogy, if you don't like what you see in the mirror, you could smash the mirror. Number two, you could ignore what you see there.

Or number three, you could do what is needed to change your image. To do what the Bible prescribes to change that image.

And here's where the analogy turns into reality. Verse 25, But the one who looks diligently. That's the New American Standard version. And I include that because the New American Standard, and the ESV may do the same. It really brings out the full meaning of the Word.

King James uses the word looks. New King James looks. But really it looks intently. And the word is strange.

[28:13] It describes a kind of a stooping. Like a bending down or crouching down to really examine something. I did that this morning. When we got back from our trip, we found some spiders decided to, while we were away, to come out.

I'm talking about the bad kind, the brown recluses. And this morning, I didn't have my glasses on, and I walked into the bathroom, and there was something down on the floor, but I couldn't see what it was.

So I had to get way down there and squint my eyes to see what it was. To look very closely and intently, to examine it. And that's the word that is used here.

And so he says, but the one who stoops down and looks closely into, into what? Not a mirror. We're done with the analogy. But looks into the perfect law of liberty or freedom. The perfect law. That's the word of God.

[29:18] To look intently into the word of God. And it's described here, he uses the designation, the perfect law.

The perfect law. It's perfect. Perfect in a number of ways. It's perfect in the sense that it's complete. And that it is the full truth of God.

You don't need any more. There's no more given. It's all here and it's finished and it's complete. And it's the full truth.

It's all we need. It's right here. And so it's perfect in that sense, but it's also perfect because it's just what we need. That's another way we would use the word perfect. That's perfect. That means that's just what I need.

And that's the word of God. And so we're to look intently into it. Not only to know the sad truth about us.

[30:18] We need not be afraid of that and avoid that as we might avoid the mirror. We're not to be afraid of that.

We're to look so that we know the truth about us. And God's word reveals that. But we're to do that so that we can know God's remedy for what it reveals in us.

God's remedy for those flaws. And it is the perfect law of liberty. Liberty. And this is the amazing thing about the Bible.

You know, the one, and he's talking about the one who continues, continues looking into the mirror of God's word. God's word. That person will see things that are wonderful along with the things that are tragic about us, albeit truthful about us.

And so we see both those things. We see the bondage of sin, but we see the freedom of sin through Christ. We see sin. We see salvation. We see bad news. We see good news.

[31:23] We see judgment in God's wrath, but we see grace and His love. And we see death and we see life. We see all those things. But it is not enough, again, just to see and to know these things in God's word.

Because you see, this is the flow of thought in James. James chapter 1. Quick to hear the word of God. Verse 19. Humbly receive the word of God.

Verse 21. And then he says here, to continue in it. That's what he says here. Do you see that?

Some of you might have the word persevere.

To persevere in it. To continue in it. So that it affects change in your life.

Someone has said that faith alone saves. But faith that saves is not alone. We have the word of God.

[32:30] Jesus used the same word in John 8:31. He says, If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

And so, the one who continues or perseveres in God's word is, and here's the ESV version of it, is not a forgetful hearer.

Or not forgetting what he has heard. So, you see, if you just glance at God's word, it won't stick.

Verse 24 tells us that.

But the one who continues in the word of God and is not a hearer who forgets, but is a doer who acts.

Or doer of the work. So, let's again put this together. Hearing the word, verse 19, receiving the word, verse 21, doing the word, verse 25, doing it, doing it.

[33 : 36] The great evangelist, D.L. Moody, was asked on one occasion to attend a conference in Indianapolis, a conference whose theme was mass evangelism.

Of course, D.L. Moody was very much involved in that. And so, he was invited to come to this conference on mass evangelism, and it was scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. And Moody asked his song leader, Ira Sankey, as the story goes, to meet him, not at 7, but at 6.

And to meet him at a certain street corner. And when Ira Sankey got there, Moody was there, and he had a box, and he said, he told Sankey to stand on the box and start singing, leading music. And as soon as he did, people started to gather. And pretty soon, quite a number had gathered around. And so then, Moody got up there and made a brief comment and then invited them all to go with him to the conference center.

And they did. And so, when they got there, the place began to fill up. In fact, it filled to capacity. And they were hungry to hear the Word of God. And so, Moody began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this mass of people who had gathered in the conference center.

[34 : 55] Well, around 7 o'clock, when 7 o'clock rolled around, and the attendees for the conference on mass evangelism began to filter in, Moody said, it's time to close now.

And because the brethren of the convention wished to come in and discuss the topic of how to reach the masses. Perfect.

See, there's a difference between talking and doing. And doing it.

And the one who does the Word, he says, as he closes this in verse 25, and then he'll go on to add a few things, but we'll finish here.

He says in verse 21, the one who does the Word, this person, he says, will be blessed. Blessed in what he does.

[35 : 59] And so it comes with a promise, doesn't it? So that when you look in, intently look into the Word, the perfect Word of liberty, God's Word, it reveals not only things about you, but what you should do about it.

As well as some other things that God wants us to do. And if we will then be that kind of person, we can be assured that all that we do will be blessed by Him.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.