

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part six

Teaching #1809 - Sunday, June 7th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

FINDING FRUITFULNESS IN YOUR BIBLE STUDY

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 who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

That word, "**But**" at the beginning of **verse 22** links these verses back to **verse 21** - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

That word "**But**" means the mere removal of wickedness doesn't make a person **godly**. It may make a person **moral**. But that isn't the same as Biblical **holiness**. And the reason this matters is James wants everyone to understand that more than morality is needed we hope for the **saving of our souls** (21).

"**Receive with meekness the implanted word....**" Now James wants to tell us what he means by **receiving** the Word. If we are Christians at all, it is because Father God has "**...brought us forth by the word of truth....**" (18). You and I are Christians, if that is what we profess to be, because of the "**Word of truth**" (1:18), and if we have been "**brought forth**" by the Word of truth we will **demonstrate** this is so by the way we **continue** to "**humbly receive**" the same Word of truth.

So the **birth** is measured in terms of the **ongoing reception** of the truth of the word in our lives. In other words, genuine conversion establishes a **relationship** with the truth of God's Word. This, and this alone, proves the genuineness of our transformed hearts. Our faith isn't just talk. Our lives have been **birthed** by the Word, and they are increasingly **shaped** by that same Word. That's the line of reasoning James follows in our text.

So what does it **mean** to receive the implanted Word? James says we only **receive** the Word to the degree we **do** the Word we **hear**. That this is his whole point in our text is made clear by the way he frames **verses 22-25** with commands to **do** the Word at each end:

1:22 - "But be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only...."

1:25 - "...being no hearer who forgets but a **doer** who acts, he will be blessed in his **doing**."

So, if we take last week's teaching and this week's together, we see that we are to be "**quick**" to hear the Word in terms of **readiness** and **alertness** - 19 - "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...."

But hearing the word **quickly** doesn't mean hearing it **superficially** or **carelessly**. To flesh all this out, James writes what is perhaps the classic passage in all the Bible on how to use God's Word fruitfully in our lives:

1) **JAMES OUTLINES THE PARTICULAR DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION THAT COMES TO RELIGIOUS BIBLE READERS**

Verse 22 - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Now James is answering the question, "**When has a person humbly received the implanted Word?**" That's the whole issue that was introduced in **verse 21** - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and **receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**"

Notice the way James ends that verse. It's very important. James wants to make sure we all understand what's at stake. That's why he finishes that verse with the reminder that it is the reception of the implanted Word that makes the saving of the soul possible - "**...which is able to save your souls.**"

Back to **verse 22** - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." The Word is **received** when, and **only** when, the Word is **obeyed**. To **receive** the Word is to **put it into practice**. The Word that **saved** us must also **shape** us. If the Word doesn't continually **shape** us it also doesn't **save** us. This is the uncomfortable logic James simply won't allow us

to miss when verses 21 and 22 are snapped together like pieces of Leggo.

That this is indeed James' intended meaning is made clear by the way he finishes **verse 22** - **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** What kind of deception is this? What is James talking about?

Douglas Moo, in his wonderful commentary on James, comments directly on these words: **"The idea of "deceive" in this context is clear. To be deceived is to be blinded to the reality of one's true religious state. People can think that they are right with God when they really are not. And so it is for those people who "hear" the Word - regular church attenders, seminary students, seminary professors and pastors - but do not "do" it. They are mistaken in thinking they are right with God. For God's Word cannot be divided into parts. If one wants the benefits of its saving power, one must also embrace it as a guide for life. The person who fails to "do" the word, says James, is a person who has not truly "received" God's Word at all."**

Those are strong words. Notice what this verse says. These **"hearers only"** deceive **themselves**. They don't deceive **God**, though, deep inside, this is probably what motivates their ongoing **respect** for the Word they do not actually **obey**. They only deceive **themselves**. Perhaps they've come to actually believe theirs is a genuine faith. After all, it seems as good as most. But, however sincerely held, their faith isn't real.

I'm quite certain we're at a very significant crossroad in the life of the contemporary church. I've never seen anything like it in all my years in ministry. Something is shifting in the church right before our eyes. Personalized definitions of faith and Christianity abound. We're all, so we're told, on our own journey, and heaven forbid anyone should even pretend to have anything absolute to say about where we're going or how we're going to get there.

People, it seems, can find just about any kind of Jesus they want, and follow that Jesus pretty much on their own terms. And if you disagree with them you are told not to judge. The fact that so much of the church seems to buy into this may only show how true James' words are, and how badly we need his warning, though it may be too late to do any good. The thoroughly deceived never know it.

2) **HOW THE WORD OF GOD IS AND IS NOT LIKE A MIRROR**

Verses 23-24 - **"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."**

James isn't just talking about a man who looks into a mirror and doesn't use it. That's **part** of the point, but not the **main** point. The text goes much deeper than that. It has to do with the way all of us use mirrors. Up we get in the morning. We use the mirror for a few moments - wash the face, brush the hair, shave, some put on make-up.

But then we leave the mirror and get on with the tasks of the day.

Unless you're an incredibly vain person, those moments in front of the mirror are isolated from the rest of the day. You go your way and forget about the mirror while you work or study, shop or play.

That's what **verse 24** is all about - **"For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."** The mirror was important for that single moment, then you normally forget about it. There are other more important things to do. You put the mirror out of your mind.

And there's nothing **wrong** with using a mirror that way. But there is something **terribly wrong** with looking into God's Word that way. Through all of this, James is pulling out **two lessons**. One comes from a **similarity** with the mirror illustration, and one comes from a **contrast**. **First**, the **similarity**:

- a) ***When you see what needs to be done from looking in the mirror, and when you see what needs to be done in your life from looking at God's Word, you must do it right away.***

After all, that's what a mirror is for. It's not just to **gather information** about yourself. There is something terribly wrong with the person who gets up in the morning, goes to the mirror and says, "Boy, do I look a mess. Yep, that's what I was afraid of!" Then off he goes to the wedding without cleaning himself up. Whatever that person is doing with that mirror, he's not **using** it to any personal advantage at all.

This is the same with looking into God's Word. Anyone who studies the Word of God without **doing what it says** isn't really **receiving** the Word at all. It's not there just to provide information. That's why James likens the Word to a **mirror** instead of a **computer**. Like a mirror, the Word is there to show you what you must do with your life. You really can't **learn** God's Word like you learn French or Algebra.

This is true of everything the Bible teaches. Consider the Lord's prayer, just as an example. **"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** There it is, right there, in the most famous passage in the Bible. Jesus teaches me how I come to know spiritual truth. **"Lord, let me know the reality and power of forgiveness of sin in my life."** **"Fine. If you want to know about My forgiveness, begin by forgiving your worst enemy!"**

Question: **when does a Christian know about forgiveness?** Answer: When he **prays** for forgiveness? No. Wrong answer. When he **reads** about the **importance** of forgiveness? Wrong again.

Answer: The Christian **knows** about forgiveness (from God or anyone else) when he **does** forgiveness from his heart toward his enemy. There is no other way to open your life to the Biblical truth about the subject of forgiveness. Forgiving others is how you **receive** the Word of God about forgiveness. You don't **receive** God's Word about forgiveness by just **memorizing**, or even **claiming promises** about forgiveness.

Now James points out the **contrast** between looking into a mirror and looking into God's Word"

- b) **The limitation of any mirror is you can't keep it in front of you the entire day.** The impact of any physical mirror is lost once you walk away from it. Now James introduces the lesson from **contrast** between a mirror and God's Word. God's Word, while it can't be **read** constantly, twenty-four hours a day, must be **considered** and **received** and **applied** long after the book is put back on the shelf. That leads into James' next point:

3) THE WORD OF GOD IS THE MIRROR YOU NEVER WALK AWAY FROM

Verse 25 - **"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."**

I'd like to develop **three points** from **verse 25**:

- a) **"The one who looks...."(25).** The word literally means **"to stoop and peer into."** You find the very same thought in **Proverbs 2:4**- **"If you look for it (wisdom) as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure."**

Treasure doesn't lie on the surface. You go mining for it. That's James' picture of gleaning truth from God's Word. You get a Bible dictionary, a Bible commentary, a study Bible, a concordance. You look up cross references. You check to see how other texts deal with the same idea.

Yet even that isn't enough. You receive the Word of God as you make the Word a **part** of you. This was hinted at earlier in **verse 21** when James talked about the Word of God becoming the **"implanted Word"**- something that can't be separated from your actual being - a part of who you are, the way your blood type is a part of who you are. He's talking about a process by which, while there are times you **put your Bible down**, you never **leave the Word of Truth** behind.

- b) **"...and perseveres...."25** - **"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres...."** You have to **stay at this to see it begin to produce fruit**. How are we to meditate on God's Word?

The Psalmist tells us - **"...in his law he meditates day and night."** Take away day and night and there's not much time left. That's The Psalmist's point. There are no parts of the day when I allow the Word of Truth no room in my thoughts and actions.

It sounds demanding, and, in a certain sense, it is. But remember, this is no loveless, legalistic, unbeyable command. It would be easy to rather lovelessly dictate that all people should do is stick their heads in their Bible all day and all night.

But I think there's a different thrust to this verse. In the Godly life there should be a constant **dialogue**, a constant **parley** between Word and heart. And it should keep going all day long, in all the different activities of life.

There are many things that don't readily look like they have anything at all to do with the Word of God or my Christian faith. But that's just the way it looks on the surface of things. As I grow in Jesus, as I spend more time looking carefully at my life **through the lens of Biblical truth**, my mind is **trained**, not instantly, but gradually, to see **more eternal significance** in everything to which I set my hand.

"Well, boy, Pastor Don, I don't think I'm a terribly **ungodly** person. I certainly don't want to be. But I just don't think of all that as I go through the day. How can I learn to bring all of my life under the umbrella of God's Word?"

- i) **First, spend more time in the Word.** This is so basic and simple, yet everything James is describing depends on it. There are really only two questions every Christian must answer. **First, how much** of God's Word do you think it would be good to have hidden in your heart? Answer that one honestly. Then comes the **second** question. **How do you think the Word will get in there - deep into your heart?**
- ii) **Second, constantly bring your thoughts, especially your moral judgments - your conscience - under the scrutiny of the Word .**

Hebrews 4:12 - "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**"

Here the writer describes an internal process with the Word that only more mature Christians have sorted out. The Word of God, as he pictures it, isn't the print on some ancient parchment. He sees God's Word as it probes and darts around your mind - specifically, your **conscience**. That's what the writer means by the Word piercing and opening up the **"thoughts and intentions of the heart."**

The mind of the Christian isn't **passive** or **asleep** in this process. Wise and careful Spirit-led Christians have learned they need to **use their thoughts in slow motion**. They know a **self-protecting conscience**, with all its **intentions**, can mow down good Bible knowledge in a hurry if it isn't **slowed down - governed - made to heel - at the command of the ingrafted Word**.

Wise Christians know their lives don't do well spiritually when governed by **impulse**. Don't trust your actions to the standards of others - not even in the church. Don't measure your life by your own desires and attractions and feelings. All through the Bible great people of God took the time to question and examine themselves in the presence of God's Word.

Let me offer one additional help here. The first promptings of the Spirit are usually the most reliable, **before** you've colored them by your own excuses, rationalizations and evasions.

- iii) **Third, pray unceasingly for the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in daily activities.**

John 14:26 - "But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

It's humbling to have God show you just how much of life you live leaning on your own understanding and acquired experience. I need to pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal very specifically the Word-centered way of responding to life's situations **today**, because I have never been exactly where I am today ever before.

Finally, look at the **third point** from **verse 25**:

- c) **"....being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (25b).** This very literal translation of the verse doesn't read as nicely as does the NIV, but its awkward structure makes an important point - **"....being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."** This terribly bumpy

English makes very plain James' idea. **Hearers forget. Doers are blessed.**

Let's wrap up by looking at both sides quickly:

Hearers forget. But **what** do they forget? It's right at this point that this text opened up fresh truth to my heart. It is always one of the most exciting times of my whole week. Hearers forget **what?** They **don't** forget what the Bible **says.** That's not James' point at all.

They may very well have **memorized** what the passage of the day said. They don't forget the **reference.** They may very well know where hundreds of important verses are found. And that's a very good thing to know. They don't even forget how **important** the passage they memorized is. They may very well believe with all their heart that God's Word is the most inspired, inerrant, and important text in all the world.

But, for all of that, James says if they just hear the Word, however methodically and intelligently, they are **forgetful** hearers. And what they forget is the most important thing of all. They forget they **haven't done what the Word said.** They forget that part. They forget that nobody follows Jesus just because they **agree** with Him.

And because they've forgotten the whole point of what they read, James says they are totally **"deceived"** about their relationship with God - **James 1:22** - **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."**

Hearers forget. They forget that the light of the Word is **task-lighting** - **Psalm 119:105** - **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."**

This is light for steering the feet and lighting the pathway. You will walk in the dark, however brilliant you are, without doing God's Word. You will miss the truth, however educated you are, without doing God's Word. You will make eternally wrong decisions, however careful you are, without doing God's Word.

James is pressing as he wraps up this text. You and I live in a world that thinks the Bible is a nice book. It pays lip-service to the Word, especially the parts that talk about loving each other and the Golden Rule. But when it comes to governing most of the situations of life, this world doesn't care beans about God's Word. But God does. He always honors His Word. One day He will judge the world by His Word.

Hearers forget. But that's only one side of James' point in this last verse of our text. The second is **doers are blessed** - **"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (25b).**

Learn now that God's law brings **"liberty."** That doesn't mean it requires no effort. It means it **frees your life from its greatest blunders** and **illuminates your darkest blind spots.**

Notice James says the doer will be blessed **"in his doing."** That's all the description of the blessing we get because it's all we need. It's all inclusive. **Whatever** the doer does, he will be blessed. It's not magic. The doer is **blessed** in whatever he does because he **lives the Word** in whatever he does.

Does it take effort to bring the truth of the Word to bear on all of life? Yes, you bet. Is it a popular way to live life in this world? Not a chance. Will God honor it? That's actually the question to ask **first**, because it's the only one that matters. James promises, the doer will be blessed in all his doing.