

James 1 - An Exegesis

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I. A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

In the first three centuries of Christian history, the place of James in the canon was somewhat uncertain. Though alluded to in non-biblical writings as early as 130 AD (in *The Shepherd of Hermas*) the first writer known to have quoted it explicitly as Scripture was Origen (about 425 AD). James was not included in the Muratorian Fragment, a list of canonical writings drawn up in Rome about 170 AD. Nor was James included in the Old Latin version of the Bible. Eusebius (325 AD) listed it as one of the disputed books, though he himself seems to have accepted it as canonical. It appears to have been generally received in the East from very early times, but it was not until the fourth century that James' canonical status was finally settled in the West. From that time until the time of the Reformation, no question was raised about the book.

At the time of the Reformation Erasmus and others revived the doubts about James. Luther, because he thought it contradicted Paul, called James' letter "*ein recht strohern Epistel*." Much has been made about that comment of Luther. Read in the context in which he said it, Luther's point can almost be understood as he was comparing the Epistle of James with John's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles. When one compares the preaching of Christ in them and then looks at James' letter, you can see what Luther was talking about. It is the quote which follows that about the "right strawy Epistle" which would bother us even more. Luther continues: "But this James does no more than drive to the law and its works, and in a disorderly way throws one thing into another, so that I imagine it was some good pious man or other who took up a few statements from the disciples of the apostles and so threw them on paper, or perhaps out of his sermon the thing was composed by another."

Luther relegated James to the appendix of his translation of the Bible, along with Jude, Hebrews and Revelation. They were assigned no numbers in his table of contents. In the first complete German Bible issued in 1534, "a right strawy epistle" is omitted from the introduction to James. Since 1603, the disputed books have been numbered in the table of contents.

Since 1600 the questioning has all but ceased. As far as the church is concerned, the Epistle of James and its canonicity are assured. We are not even disturbed by Luther's opinions and statements against the book.

The relation of James to the rest of the New Testament has been compared by some as the relation of salt and food. A dish of salt makes for an ill-balanced meal, but a meal without salt is sadly lacking in flavor. James, though not suited to constitute one's entire diet, nonetheless gives special flavor to the total message of the New Testament. If more Christians today took James seriously and put his teachings into practice, the world would be a better place to live. The Epistle has a special relevance for those who are long on theory but short on practice.

We cannot be certain as to the date and place of composition of this Epistle. Most claim it to be the oldest of the New Testament books, especially because of its Jewish tone and its lack of reference to the Apostolic Conference at Jerusalem. That would put the time of composition somewhere between Stephen's martyrdom (35 AD) and the Jerusalem Conference (52 AD). The Epistle was most probably written at Jerusalem.

The purpose of the Epistle seems to be mainly to admonish people to live a truly Christian life. Because of the similarity to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, some have called this Epistle a commentary to the Sermon on the Mount. The book is intended to give comfort, rebuke, and counsel to Christians passing through a period of severe trial—comfort for their sorrows, rebuke for their worldliness and counsel for redirecting their lives.

James, in its tone, is probably one of the most authoritative of all the New Testament Epistles. In the 108 verses of the letter there are 54 imperative verbs. James is never on the defensive, never apologetic, never uncertain that his word is the Word of the Lord.

II. OUTLINE OF CHAPTER ONE

The Epistolary Greeting. (vs. 1)

- I. OUTWARD TRIALS (1: 2-12)
 - A. The proper attitude toward trials (2-4)
 - B. The spiritual resources for meeting trials (5-8)
 - C. Specific examples of trials (9-11)
 - D. The reward for enduring trials (12)
- II. INWARD TEMPTATIONS (1:13-18)
 - A. God is not responsible for, evil (13-16)
 - B. God is the source of all good (17, 18)
- III. THE ROLE OF GOD'S WORD (1:19-27)
 - A. The Word of God demands attention (19, 20)
 - B. The Word of God demands reception (21)
 - C. The Word of God demands practice (22-27)

III. EXEGESIS OF JAMES 1

The format to be used in this paper will be to reproduce a literal, translation in the left hand column, with the NIV translation in the right hand column for comparison.

THE EPISTOLARY GREETING: (vs. 1)

James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes who are in the dispersion, greetings:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

James follows the standard pattern in the opening of this Epistle, namely, identifying the writer, the reader and then the greeting.

All that is told us about the writer is that his name is James and that he was a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. James was a common name in New Testament times. Three are especially prominent in the New Testament. James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John. He can be ruled out as the author as he died at a very early age (ca. 42 AD). There was James, the son of Alphaeus (also called the Less, or the Apostle). Finally, James, the Lord's brother (also called James, the Just). It is the latter who is usually identified with this Epistle. Convincing arguments can be made in an attempt to show that James the Less and James the brother of the Lord are the same person, however, I have no intention of going into that point now. James the brother of the Lord was influential among the Jewish believers. (Acts 12: 17, 15:13 ff.; 21:15) He was head of the Jerusalem congregation from about 45-62 AD and Paul considered him to be one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9).

James addressed the Epistle to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. Again, this is a point which we could discuss in great detail. Does he mean physical descendants or is he speaking spiritually?

Suffice it to say that the over-all tone and general content of the letter rule out that it was written to unconverted people, even though there is one section (4:13-5:6) which seems to have them in mind. I feel it best to take James literally and understand that he is writing to Jewish Christians residing outside of Palestine.

Χαίρειν is the imperatival infinitive, common in letters. The form is part of the evidence for an early date of this epistle. Later, when Paul writes his letters, he expands the greetings and this form disappears.

I. OUTWARD TRIALS (1: 2-12)

A. The proper attitude toward trials (2-4)

Consider (it) all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various kinds of temptations, since you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; but let endurance bring about a finished work in order that you may be complete and whole, lacking nothing.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Verb forms and vocabulary:

2.	ἡγήσασθε	Aorist, Inv., 2 nd pl.	ἡγέομαι	to think, consider
	περιπέσητε	Aorist, subj., 2 nd pl.,	περιπίπτω	to fall into
3.	γινώσκοντες	Pres., Act., Ptc., nom. pl.	γινώσκω	to know
	κατεργάζεται	Pres., ind., 3 rd sg.	κατεργάζω	to work out
4.	ἔχέτω	Pres., inv., 3 rd sg.	εἶχω	to have, bring about
	ἦτε	Pres., subj., 2 nd pl.	εἰμί	to be
	λειπόμενοι	Pres., pass., part., nom. pl.	λείπω	to want, lack

The key word in verses 2-12 is temptation. The passage opens with it and ends with it. James is trying to show that the Christian can triumph in trials. He says that these trials, diverse as they may be, are to be a cause or ground for joy. Don't misunderstand James. He isn't saying that we should go out and seek trials. Knowing our own weaknesses, we pray that God would exempt us from them. Nor is James trying to deny that these trials often bring heartache and tragedy with them. He doesn't say that trial *is* all joy, but he urges his readers to *count* it all joy. In other words, look at them from the bright side, realizing that God is able to make all things turn into our highest good.

James goes on to explain why the Christian can consider trials as good. He says the Christian knows, (or ought to know) that his trials are a spiritual discipline essential to the maturing of his Christian life. They are designed to purify faith, produce patience, and perfect Christian character. Rightly met, they lead to true blessedness and enduring reward.

In verse four James encourages the reader to let patience have her perfect work. In other words, patience must be permitted to run its course and have its full effect on our lives. The words here imply that patience is sometimes hindered from exercising its influence and achieving its triumphs in our lives. This happens when we grow weary of trial and resort to questionable ways of freeing ourselves. If patience is permitted to run its full course it will do two things. It will make man perfect, not in the sense of sinless, but rather mature, fully developed. Second, it will make him entire. He will be lacking in nothing. Certainly this condition will never be met as long as we are in this sinful life, but trials borne patiently will bring us well along the way of maturity.

B. The spiritual resources for meeting trials (5-8)

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all, generously and not as one who reproaches and it will be given to him. Let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts resembles a wave of the sea, moved by the wind and tossed to and fro. Let that man not think that he

will receive anything from the Lord, (he is) a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts

is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That, man should not think he will receive

anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all he does.

5.	αἰτέῖτω	Pres., Inv., 3 sg.	αἰτέω	to ask
	ὀνειδίζοντος	Pres., Part., Gen. Ms.	ὀνειδίζω	to reproach
	δοθήσεται	Fut., Pass., Ind., 3 sg.	δίδωμι	to give
6.	ἔοικεν	Perf. (pres.), Ind., 3 sg.	ἔοικα	to resemble

In verses 5-8 three things are mentioned as necessary for successfully meeting the trials of life. They are wisdom (5a), prayer (5b), and faith (6-8). The emphasis is not simply on the need of these things but also the fact that they are available through the gracious provision of God.

The Christian needs wisdom so that he might see his trials in a true light and make proper use of them. If this wisdom is lacking, he is encouraged to ask of God and He will supply what is lacking. As James points out, it is God's disposition to give. The Greek is difficult to render in the English but conveys the thought that He is the "giving-God." He gives to all men liberally. He gives unconditionally, without bargaining, without any of the imperfections that mar human giving. He is most generous to all men, as the Psalmist also declares in Ps. 145:15, 16: "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." God's gifts are marked by liberality. They are not restricted to certain nations, to favored classes or to particular individuals, but are available to all mankind. No sincere seeker is sent away empty handed.

James mentions another quality of the "giving-God," namely, that he does not grant one's request and then reproach him with it afterwards. When we come to Him, God might say: "What use have you made of the last gift I gave you?" Or He might remind us of our unworthiness to appear before Him. But He does not. He gives and does not upbraid.

James adds one further encouragement to prayer in the words: "it will be given to him." Here James seems to echo the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7 when He says: Ask and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." There is not the least bit of uncertainty in these words. That is strong encouragement for us to come boldly to the throne of grace!

Such prayer, however, is effective only when asked in faith, that is, with trust in God that one's request will be granted according to God's will. We must pray, confident that God will hear us and is willing and able to grant our requests. We must not doubt. We must not oscillate between faith and unbelief, trust and distrust, pleading with boldness, but all the time thinking that it is useless to ask. That man who prays in that manner is like a wave of the sea which is driven and tossed about. Such a person is trying to serve two masters and isn't willing to break with either. He ought not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. The wavering petitioner insults God by doubting the truth of His Word and treating Him as a mere fellow man who does not deserve his confidence. James warns that such a person is unstable in all his ways, not only in his prayers. He is unstable and that instability is reflected throughout all of his actions.

C. Specific Examples of Trials (9-11)

Let the poor brother boast in his high position but (let) the rich (boast) in his humiliation, because like the flower of a plant he will pass away, for the sun with its blazing heat rises and dries up the plant and its flower falls off and the beauty of its countenance is destroyed. Likewise the rich man will fade away in his journeys.

The brother in humble circumstances, ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

9.	καυχάσθω	Pres., Imv., 3 sg.	καυχάομαι	to boast
10.	παρελεύσεται	Fut., Ind., 3 sg.	παρέρχομαι	to pass away
11.	ἀνέτειλεν	Aor., Act., 3 sg.	ἀνατέλλω	to rise
	ἐξήρανεν	Aor., Act., 3 sg.	ἐξηραίνω	to dry up
	ἐξέπεσεν	Aor., Act., 3 sg.	ἐκπίπτω	to fall off
	ἀπώλετο	Aor., Md., Ind., 3 sg.	ἀπόλλυμι	to destroy

Having discussed the testings of faith and the resources needed for meeting them, James now introduces two concrete examples: the test of poverty (9) and the test of prosperity (10, 11). The passages teach that both rich and poor have reason to rejoice. The gospel brings both together and places them on the same level of spiritual privilege. The poor man is not to be depressed in his poverty but is to exult in his high spiritual position. The rich man is not to find his delight in the abundance of worldly goods but is to exult in the humbling of soul which divine grace produces. He must realize that his worldly goods are perishable and must rather seek those things which are eternal.

The illustration which James uses to emphasize the brevity and uncertainty of life reminds us of that which Isaiah used in chapter 40:6 ff. In Isaiah the words are not directed to the rich, but are a general statement of the brevity of life. James applies the passage to the rich, perhaps because money tends to produce a false sense of security and the rich need to be reminded of the uncertainty of life. This picture used by James and Isaiah (also Peter in I Peter 1:24) would have special meaning for the residents of Palestine who saw it take place often. The valleys and pastures of Palestine can be green and filled with beautiful flowers one day and a day later the same beauty has turned to dried up grass and withered flowers. The culprit is the sirocco or scorching south-east wind which comes blowing from the desert. Just like those beautiful flowers the rich man in all his impressive appearance will fade away in the midst of his plans and undertakings (journeys).

D. The Reward for Enduring Trials (12)

Blessed is the man who endures temptation because when he is approved, he will receive the crown of life which He promised to those who love Him.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the victor's crown, the life God has promised to those who love Him.

λήμψεται	Fut., Ind., Act., 3 sg.	λαμβάνω	to receive, take
ἐπηγγείλατο	Aor., Mid., Ind., 3 sg.	ἐπαγγέλλω	to promise

In verse 12 James offers consolation to suffering and tried Christians by reminding them that God rewards those who remain steadfast under trial. First, they are blessed. What is meant here is the inner quality of happiness with God, a happiness that is not affected by outward circumstances. The blessing lies not in the mere experience of trials, because some people come out of their difficulties hardened rather than softened. The blessing lies in the courageous endurance of trial.

The reason for the blessedness is stated in the last half of the verse. When the man has been approved, when he succeeds in passing the test, the prize which God has promised to those who love Him, the crown of life will be given. The word *δόκιμος* is that which is used of coins and metals which were tested and found true. To the victor, belongs the crown of life.

Verses 2-12 served as encouragement in the face of afflictions and trials of life. Encouragement to patient endurance, encouragement to believe that trials can be turned to our good, encouragement to prayer,

encouragement to joyful acceptance of one's lot in life, encouragement to look hopefully to the future. The thought of James in this section can be well summed up by the poetry of William Cowper who wrote:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are hid with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

II. INWARD TEMPTATIONS (1:13-18)

In verses 2-12 James was thinking of temptations in the sense of outward trials. In verses 13-18 he discusses temptation as inward enticement to evil. There is a close connection between the two. Outward testings are often the occasion for inward temptations to evil. When one fails to stand successfully in the face of outward temptations, the result is often a stirring up of evil desires and the committing of open transgression against God.

The first point James discusses in this section is who is responsible for evil. Is God in any way implicated? We cannot deny that God sends trials, but is He responsible for the evil effect which trials sometimes produce? James answers, the question clearly and unequivocally. Two things must be insisted upon. First, God is in no way responsible for the evil that we do (13-16); second, God is the source of all that is good (17,18).

A. God is not responsible for evil (13-16)

When tempted let nobody say, "I am tempted by God," for God is not tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. But each is tempted when he is dragged away and lured by his own desire; then after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my dear brothers.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

14.	ἐξεκκλόμενος	Pres., Pass., Part., Nom., Sg.	ἐξέλκω	to drag out, draw
	δელεάζομενος	Pres., Pass., Part., Nom., Sg.	δελεάζω	to lure
15.	συλλαβοῦσα	Aor., Act., Part., Nom., Sg., f.	συλλαμβάνω	to conceive
	ἀποτελεσθεῖσα	Aor., Pass., Part., N., Sg., f.	ἀποτελέω	to finish, perform

Man is naturally inclined. to shift the blame from himself to God. One need only recall the words of Adam after he fell into sin: "And the woman *thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). In every age since man has tried to pass the buck from himself to God. To such, James offers these words of rebuke. God is incapable of being tempted by evil. Neither does He ever tempt anyone. His perfect holiness makes Him untemptable and also makes it impossible for Him to tempt anyone. There is no contradiction here with such passages as Genesis 22:1, where it is said that "God did tempt Abraham." The intent of the temptation there in Genesis was to prove Abraham's faith. Here James is speaking of a different

type of temptation, namely, one which draws men to sin. In that way God never tempts any one. When God does send trials our way, they are intended to build our Christian character and not to lead us to sin (cf. v. 2).

In verse 14 James tells us what it is that lures and ensnares man. He says it is man's own lust. There is no way that we can shift the blame from ourselves to God. Man's lust entices and seduces him. When man surrenders his will to lust, conception takes place and lust gives birth to sin. Then sin, when it has run its course, itself gives birth to death. Lust, sin, death—that is the order.

(v. 14 - the participles contain metaphors from hunting and fishing—that of luring the game forth and then enticing it with bait.)

“The mere fact of being tempted does not involve in itself anything sinful. It is when the desire of man goes out to meet and embrace the forbidden thing and an unholy marriage takes place between these two, that sin is born” (NIC, p. 34).

Verse 16 expresses the warning that we not be deceived regarding this. One could debate whether verse 16 refers back to verses 13-15 or goes with 17,18. I prefer to think it refers back to what was just said. “Don't be deceived. You can't blame God!” But then, I suppose an equally convincing argument could be made for taking it with verse 17-18. “Don't be deceived, (not temptation) but every good gift and every perfect present comes from God.”

B. God is the source of all good. (17,18)

Every good gift and every perfect present is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is not change or a shadow cast by variation. Because He wanted to He gave birth to us through the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all His created things.

Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

17. ἐνι	contracted from of	ἐνεστί	to be
18. βουληθείς	Aor., Pass., Part., N. M. Sg.	βούλομαι	to wish, desire
ἀπεκύησεν	Aor., Act., Ind., 3 sg.	ἀποκυέω	to give birth to

Having affirmed that God is in no way the source of evil or man's sin, James proceeds to declare that rather God is the source of all that is good. Two different words for “gift” are used, but actually they are synonyms. There can be no doubt that all kinds and all degrees of good are from God. There may be secondary causes, but He is the originator of all that good which comes to us. James uses the present tense in *καταβαῖνον* probably to show that these gifts flow to us in a continuing and constant stream. Speaking of God as “the Father of lights,” he is referring to God as the Creator of the stars and other heavenly bodies. With God there is no change or variation as we see in the world around us. James most likely is referring here to astronomical phenomena: the variation and brilliance of the stars and planets, the waxing and waning of the moon, the eclipses and so on. In contrast to these, God is unchangeable.

In verse 18 James proceeds to speak of the supreme gift which God has given to His people. He points out first of all that it is of God's own will. While we were chained by sin and eternally lost, God resolved not to let us perish in sin but to save us through the Word of truth, the gospel of salvation. The purpose or result is that we are the firstfruits of His creation. “Of all created things we reborn children of God are His peculiar possession, sacred to Him, not only created by Him but also brought forth in a spiritual birth, by means of the Word. Will He tempt us again to fall away? Nay, He will continue to shower perfect gifts upon us” (Lenski, p. 548).

III. THE ROLE OF GOD'S WORD (1:19-27)

Having mentioned the Word of truth as the instrument by which this new birth is effected, James here shows that it must be a dominant factor in maintaining, disciplining and maturing the life which it originates. In the section three figures are used in describing the Word of God. It is like a seed planted in the heart (21), a mirror into which one looks (24), and a law by which one's life is guided (25). There are three imperatives used in this section and they speak of God's demands (the demands of God's Word), upon the believer's life. They are: hearing the Word (19,20), receiving the Word (21) and doing the Word (22-27).

A. The Word of God demands attention. (19,20)

Know this, my dear brothers. Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

ἴστε

Perf. (pres.), Act., Impv.

οἶδα

to know

The KJV translation begins with the word "Therefore" to show the connection between this section and the preceding. However, the "wherefore" is not found in the most ancient manuscripts. The variant occurs when the word ἴστε is changed to ὤστε.

James says that we ought to be swift to hear, eager and ready to listen to God's Word. Slow to speak and slow to wrath both indicate an attitude of reverent attention. There are far too many outspoken people both in the world and in the church. If we would listen more and talk less, we would learn more and be the more blessed. Those who talk endlessly often are the fiercest arguers also. James continues in verse 4 with the very thought of man's wrath. He says that it does not produce God's righteousness. There is much proof of this fact in church history. Wrath, kindled by the flames of controversy, divides the people of God and thereby does great harm to the work of spreading the kingdom of God and the message of salvation.

B. The Word of God demands reception. (21)

Therefore, put away every moral uncleanness, and all the evil prevailing and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls.

ἀποθέμενοι

Aor., M., Part., N. M. Pl.

ἀποτίθημι

to put away

δέξασθε

Aor., Impv., 2 pl.

δέχομαι

to receive

σωσαι

Aor., Inf.

σώζω

to save

Having urged his readers to have an attentive spirit or attitude regarding the Word, James now tells them to receive it; make it their own. When we hear the Word it is our responsibility also to accept it, making it part of ourselves. (This is the same word used of the Bereans, who "received the Word ... and searched the Scriptures daily," and the Thessalonians, who "received it not as the word of men, but as ... the word of God" (Acts 17:11, 1 Thess. 2:13). The readers are Christians, the word has been implanted in them. Perhaps he has in mind here the Parable of the Sower, and that seed which was planted in the good soil and produced a hundred fold.

In order to receive that Word and bring forth fruit, we must lay aside all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. The dearly loved phrase of the KJV, "superfluity of naughtiness" is doomed to fall by the wayside.

None of the modern translations pick it up. It might be an attractive phrase to us, as it flows so smoothly off the tongue, but it is at best a poor rendering in this context. The word is used four times in the New Testament: here, Romans 5:17, II Cor. 8:2, 10:15. In all the places outside of James the “idea of “superfluity” or “overflow” is present. However, in this context, such a rendering would seem to say that a certain amount of wickedness or malice in the Christian may be tolerated, and only the excess need be put away. James is not saying that, but rather that we must put away all of it. Luther is right when he translated: *alle Bosheit*.

With meekness, lowliness, humility, let us accept that Word of God, not doubting, questioning or disputing it. That precious Word is able to save your souls. The Word of God, welcomed and rooted in the Christian’s heart, is the power of God unto salvation.

C. The Word of God demands practice. (22-27)

Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who considers the face of his birth in a mirror, for he considers himself and leaves immediately, forgetting of what sort he was. But he who bends to look into the perfect law which is of freedom and keeps on serving, not being a hearer of forgetfulness but a doer of work, that one will be blessed in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious, not holding his tongue in check but deceiving his heart, this one’s religion is worthless. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction and to guard himself spotless from the world.

Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

24.	ἀπελήλυθεν	Perf., Act., Ind., 3 sg.	ἀπέρχομαι	to go away
25.	παρακύψας	Aor., Part., N. M. Sg.	παρακύπτω	to bend to look in
	παραμείνας	Aor., Part., N. M. Sg.	παραμένω	to keep serving
	γενόμενος	Aor., Part., N. M. Sg.	γίνομαι	to be
26.	χαλιναγωγῶν	Pres., Part., N. M. Sg.	χαλιναγωγέω	to hold in check
	ἀπατῶν	Pres., Act., Part., N. M. Sg.	ἀπατάω	to deceive
27.	ἐπισκέπτεσθαι	Pres., Inf.	ἐπισκέπτομαι	to visit
	τηρεῖν	Pres., Inf.	τηρέω	guard

Hearing the Word is not enough. James says we are to be doers of the Word. The present tense of the verb form is used here expressing continuous action. “Keep on showing yourself to be.” The man who responds to the Word only now and then is not a real doer of the Word.

This distinction between hearing and doing is emphasized in the Parable of the Sower. James warns that to stop short at hearing and fail to go on in doing leads to self-deception, a deception of the worst kind. And yet, we see so much of this today. While one cannot loop into the hearts of those attending worship services, you wonder how many of them are merely hearing the Word and not bothering to carry it home with them and put it to use in their lives. If our people come to church only because their pastor is an excellent orator, or only to have an hour of peace and quiet away from the fast pace of our world, then they are perhaps mere hearers of the

word and not doers. If the Word which is read and preached in the service (or in the privacy of the home) does not move the hearer to do something that needs to be done in his life, then there is a definite problem. In the following verses, James illustrates that fact.

The first illustration deals with the man who looks carelessly at himself in the mirror, walks away and forgets what he saw. The mere hearer of the Word does something similar. He hears the Word, but it is soon forgotten and has no lasting effect upon him. Such hearing is of little or no value. The mirror of God's Word does show man what he looks like. It shows him what a miserable sinner he is, and how many spots and blemishes he has. But the mirror of God's Word does more than that. It also reveals what man can become by the grace of God.

The doer of the Word is illustrated in verse 25. He is one who considers what he hears, being mindful of what the Word means for his life. The word *παρακύψας* has the sense of looking very closely or seriously into a thing actually stooping down to see more clearly. The same word used in John 20:5 of the disciple stooping to look into the empty tomb.

This man realizes how far short he has fallen from God's standard and he sees his sin. That moves him to take action, to repent, be cleansed and forgiven, and then he becomes, not a hearer that forgets, but a doer of the work. He seeks to bring his life more into accord with the law of God. The more he sees Christ in the Word, the more motivation he has for trying to live his life for Him who loved him and gave himself for him. As James says, this man is blessed.

The last two verses of the chapter give us three examples of the practice, of the Word. First, the bridling of the tongue. James treats it very briefly here but will devote more time to it later in the book.

James was thinking of the man who supposes himself to be a diligent observer of religious duties. While the words might, bring to mind the hypocrite, I don't think James has the hypocrite in mind. He is speaking of the self-deceived man, not one who is trying to deceive others.

The man who thinks he is religious while not bridling his tongue is deceiving himself. His religion lets his tongue go like an unbridled horse. It lacks control. Such a person is forever voicing his opinions, damaging people right and left. James says his religion is worthless futile and fruitless.

Two additional examples of practicing the Word are given in the final verse. At first the verse appears to be an all-inclusive definition of religion. Some have used it as such. "Do works of charity and lead a clean moral life. That is all that's important. But such was not James intention here. It isn't fair to take this single sentence out of the epistle, and ignore the context. James is singly emphasizing that the externals of religious worship are unacceptable unto God unless accompanied by loving service and a holy life. Actions do speak louder than words. To use the words of Scripture "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20).

The first example has to do with compassion for the needy, specifically the widows and fatherless. Both are mentioned in the Bible as objects of God's special care and compassion. He is "father of the fatherless, and a judge (protector) of the widows" (Psalm 68:5). James perhaps has in mind here the Pharisees who are described in Luke 20:47 as those who "devour widow's houses and for a show make long prayers": James urges that Christians, in contrast to such Pharisees, take a personal interest in and express love and concern for the orphans and widows.

The second expression of genuine worship is personal. The Christian is to "keep himself unspotted from (uncontaminated by) the world. The world is filled with filth and dirt. To guard oneself unspotted would mean that none of this worldly uncleanness should soil our heart or our souls. It would also imply that we attend to constant cleansing. While we must be in the world, we are not to be of it.

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