

# MIRRORING THE WORD

(James 1:21-27)

## INTRODUCTION:

*One time this person came to church late. He walked in right near the end of the service. He said to an usher, "Is the sermon done yet?" The usher answered wisely. He said, "The sermon has been preached, but it has yet to be done."*

That reply pretty much sums up the message of this part of the book of James. The word of God is not just meant to be preached. It's meant to be practiced. We must not only hear the word. We must do the word.

A. W. Tozer, a perception Christian writer of the last century wrote about the divorce between theory and practice in the Christian life. We are so often exposed to God's truth week after week in our Sunday School classes, in our Bible readings, in our worship service and yet, if we are honest we have to admit how little of it seems to be integrated into our daily lives. When we go home how many of us seek to put into practice what we have heard? How many try to remember what they heard? They may be a divorce between theory and practice.

It is because of this common problem among all Christians that James makes a special point in verses 21-27 to show us how to bridge the gap between being only a hearer of the Word and a doer of the Word. He shows us how to overcome this great divorce between our knowledge of God's Word and our practice of it. We need to learn to marry our theory and our practice in doing the word.

How do we do this from James' writing? The key seems to be a matter of your heart.

## YOU NEED TO HAVE A PREPARED HEART

First, we need to come to God's Word with a prepared heart. James tells us in verse 21 that we need to have prepared hearts to receive God's Word. Verse 21:

**Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**

The image here is that of a farmer who knows that he must first get rid of all the weeds before he plants new plants --- that there must be weeding before there

can be seeding. Before you can rightly receive the Word of God there must be a weeding out from your life those attitudes and actions that choke out the influence of God's Word.

This sounds something like Jesus taught in the parable of the seed and the sower.

**(Mat 13:3-9 NKJV) Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. {4} "And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. {5} "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. {6} "But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. {7} "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. {8} "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. {9} "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"**

The difference in the production of the seed was in the ground's preparation.. The hard ground never had been prepared, nor the stony or thorny ground. It was only the cultivated ground that produced a crop. If we are to be doers of the Word we must first prepare our hearts to truly receive the Word.

God tells us how to prepare ourselves to receive God's Word:

**Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**

We cannot do this in our own strength, but we can choose ask God to weed out our hearts. Sin in your life will plug up your spiritual ears. That's why we must take time for confession of our sins and a willingness to put it aside.

The reason we don't see any fruit in our life from hearing gteh Word of God is that we come with our minds made up that we are not going to change or that we don't need to change. Our hearts aren't prepared to receive the Word.

To integrate God's Word into your life you must prepare your heart to receive it by choosing to lay aside any sin which hinders you.

## **YOU NEED TO HAVE A RECEPTIVE HEART**

The next thing James tells us to do is that we need to have a receptive heart that embraces God's Word with humility. He says, "Receiving **the implanted word with meekness.**"

*The Greek word translated "receive" here is the same word that was used of a woman who would be welcoming her husband back from war. The soldier had been off fighting in a Roman Legion for months. There was very little mail service in those days. She hasn't heard from him in a long time. Now Johnny, or Crispus, finally comes marching home. When she sees him from a distance she can hardly contain herself. She runs toward him and RECEIVES him with open armed enthusiasm. That is how James is saying you ought to RECEIVE the Word of God.*

Or to illustrate it another way -- This word RECEIVE was also used of people who listened to the reading of a Will. What a difference it would make in most churches when the people arrived to hear the message if they would listen that way. Imagine if some very wealthy Church Member died, leaving many wonderful things and large sums of money to the other church members. And if on next Sunday, instead of a sermon the Will was to be read by the Pastor, telling you what was yours. Oh, how carefully and attentively the people would listen!

To receive the Word is to receive it with meekness. Some people are finicky eaters. They are a lot of trouble to a cook. When the girls had friends over and some were finicky eaters, we call them hungry. For if you don't eat what put before you, you don't eat! Some of us come to God's Word like finicky eaters. We only want the blessings, the promises, etc. We don't want to hear the rebuke, the correction, the instruction in righteousness. To truly receive God's Word with meekness we must be willing to accept all of God's Word.

To integrate God's word into your life you must have a prepared heart and a receptive heart.

## **YOU NEED TO HAVE AN OBEDIENT HEART**

And thirdly, James says that you must have an obedient heart to get God's Word into your life. This perhaps is the most important of the three principles. Our relationship to the Word of God doesn't end with it being received into our hearts; we must follow through and have an obedient heart.

In verses 22-27 James gives us a command, an illustration, and three brief applications to help us know if we have a prepared, receptive, and obedient heart.

First the command. Verse 22:

**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

The words “not hearers only” referred in the 1st century to what we might call an Academic Auditor. Have you ever "audited" a course in college? I'm sure if you have ever been an auditor or have had an auditor in the class you know that he is the most relaxed one there. Why? Because all he is doing is filling his notebooks with notes. He takes no assignments. Does no homework. And takes no tests. He just takes in information.

I'm afraid some of us come to church and Sunday school as only auditors – hearers! The command is to be doers of the word let a person be deceived.

James now gives us a two-part illustration on the folly of being self-deceived. In verses 23-24 he writes:

**For if anyone is 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.**

This is the picture of a man who looks into the Scriptures, and after having been exposed to the truth, closes it and goes his way, quickly forgetting what God has said.

In verse 25 James illustrates the doer:

**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.**

I can tell by looking over this congregation that you have all looked at one thing before you came to this service. You all looked at a mirror. And I can tell you even more. You did something about what you saw in that mirror. And I thank you for that.

When you look into a mirror it doesn't hide what you are really like. What you see is what you are. Like it or not. When you fight that early morning battle of mind over mattress, stumble into that bathroom, go over to the mirror and take a look. That's you!! Men, those stubs sticking out of your chin, that's you, every last stub. Women, those hair rollers that make you look like your trying to get a message from outer space--that's you!!

What kind of person would get up in the morning, turn the bathroom light on, go over to the mirror and say, "I look terrible. I need to do something about

that and then turns off the light and leave for church? That's absurd. But we do that spiritually don't we? We open the Word. We say "What a magnificent truth. How profound. How powerful and moving. How true! Boy, I really need to be like that or do that...." And then it makes no difference.

James is saying here that the Bible is like a mirror. It shows you who and what you really are. And when you look in that mirror and are unhappy with what you see you have just a few options. You can smash the mirror. Many today who attack the Bible are doing just that. Or you can just ignore the mirror or James as suggests you can use it to make some very needed correction. Notice God's promise at the end of verse 25 to those who choose this last option. He writes, such a man will be blessed in what he does.

James concludes this chapter will three brief applications on how to know if you are a practicing hearer of the Word.

Being a doer of the Word will show in how we talk. Verse 26

**If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.**

Our words and speech will be the most obvious application of being a doer of the word. If we do not allow God to "bridle" our tongue, then we have truly got God's Word down deep in our hearts..

The next application will be acts of kindness to "widows and orphans."

The phrase "Orphans and widows" is almost a technical term in the Old Testament for those who are destitute. And the phrase "to look after" or "to visit" doesn't just mean to drop by to get personally involved. James says if we are doers of the word we see evidence not only in the way we talk but in acts of kindness we do. And the thing that marks our acts of kindness is that we are kind to those who cannot pay us back: people like orphans and widows.

The third application will be on how we keep ourselves from being polluted morally by the world. As a Christian you are to be a marked person. You are to be marked not by the World but by the Word.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Do you want to integrate what you hear from the Word to how you live the Word? Then you have to prepare your heart to receive it You have to humbly embraces it. You need a heart that is eager to obey it..

The message of James is: Don't just listen to the Word of God. Do what it says. Receive it. Read it. Review it. Remember it. And respond to it as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Then God will help you bridge that gap between theory and practice.

Amen? Amen!