Doers of the Word
James 1:17-27
SS Lesson for 08/03/2008

Devotional Scripture: Eccl 12:13

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Introduction

**Overview and Approach to Lesson**

The outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator. It examines how to be a **Doer of God's Word**. The **study's aim** is to understand and accept the necessity for the believer to be obedient to God's Word. The **study's application** is to not only know what God's Word says but actually live what God's Word teaches.

**Lesson Introduction and Background**

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

James, the author of today's Bible text, wanted to ensure that Bible knowledge was put into practice. His concern was for knowing the Word of God in a way that would enable a Christian to do the will of God. And being a doer goes far beyond pleasant fellowship with other Christians. The epistle of James was written by James, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19; 2:9). James did not believe Jesus to be the Christ until after Jesus' resurrection (John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:7). James was present with those gathered just before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). By the time of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, James had emerged as one of the principal leaders of the church. James was noteworthy enough for the historian Josephus to record his murder, which happened in about AD 62. The epistle of James is his only work in the New Testament. Unlike books from Paul, which often are concerned about the place of Gentiles in the church, James writes primarily to Jewish Christians. They were in a tough situation (James 1:1–3). Some even had fled Jerusalem following the persecution by Herod Agrippa that occurred in the time period of Stephen’s stoning and the execution of James, the son of Zebedee (Acts 11:19–12:2). In the verses preceding those for this lesson (James 1:1–16), James challenges believers to have the kind of mature faith that can stand up to life’s disasters and disappointments. He seems worried about their eternal future. He is concerned that many Christians believe—wrongly—that God is tempting them when the opposite is true (1:13). God wants all believers to succeed! In fact, rather than throwing hazards at us, he continually strews our paths with gifts to encourage us as we go.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

God foreknew and predestinated us to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). To this point, our lessons have portrayed the glorious image of Christ as seen in the book of Hebrews and the Gospels. But we cannot be satisfied with merely admiring Christ's perfections. We must allow Him to reproduce His image in us as well. James saw himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas. 1:1). His readers were early Jewish believers who had been dispersed and were undergoing various kinds of hardship (vs.1-2). They were being persecuted and as a result were in physical and financial distress. Oppressed people are not necessarily good people; these readers could not use their hardships as excuses for sin. James told them that as follower of Christ, they must reflect His image in the details of everyday life. Their trial should be occasions for spiritual growth (Jas. 1:2-12), not temptations to evil (vs. 13-16). This would be possible if they cultivated a proper relationship with God's Word.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Born through the Word (James 1:17-18)**

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.
Born to recognize that God is a giver of only good and perfect things (17)

**God gives good gifts (Matt 7:11)**

11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

**God gives man everything man has (John 3:27)**

27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

**Man cannot boast of having things because all he has was given to him (1 Cor 4:7)**

7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

**Some of God’s greatest gifts are mercy, grace and love (Eph 2:4-6)**

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

**God’s gifts are for our enjoyment (1 Tim 6:17)**

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

**God’s gifts are to serve others (1 Peter 4:10)**

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

**God’s plans are always for our good (Rom 8:28)**

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Born by the Word of truth (18)

**Born through the sanctifying truth of the word (John 17:17)**

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

**Born through the true gospel of salvation (Eph 1:13)**

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

**Born through the living and enduring word (1 Peter 1:23)**

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

**Born through the word that revives our soul (Ps 19:7)**

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The truth of God's word penetrates the soul and spirit (Heb 4:12)
12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Saved through the Word (James 1:19-21)
19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Hearing the Word (19)

Hearing the gospel (Rom 10:14)
14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Hearing about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2)
2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Hearing the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13)
13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Hearing the Holy Spirit (Rev 2:7)
7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

From death to life because of hearing God's word (John 5:24)
24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Joy and praise because of hearing God's word (Acts 13:48)
48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

No condemnation because of hearing God's word and believing it (John 5:24)
24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Righteousness of the Word (20)

God's word produces a harvest of righteousness (Luke 8:15)
15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.
A righteousness that is declared to those who are obedient to God's word (Rom 2:13)
13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Righteousness is the obedience of God's Word (Deut 6:25)
25 And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.

Righteousness through God's commands (Ps 119:172)
172 May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.

Righteousness because God's Word is trustworthy (Ps 119:138)
138 The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.

Righteousness because God's Word is good (Rom 7:12)
12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

The implanting of God's Word (21)

Implanted so that we do not have to sin (Ps 119:11)
11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Implanted so that we accept God's instructions (Job 22:22)
22 Accept instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart.

Implanted so our feet won't slip (Ps 37:31)
31 The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.

Implanted to lead us to obedience (Ps 40:8)
8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

Implanted so we will accept God's word (Prov 2:1)
2 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,

Implanted for us to recognize what is right (Isa 51:7)
7 "Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.

Implanted to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16)
16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Guided by the Word (James 1:22-27)

22 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 observing his natural face in a mirror;
24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.
25 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.
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.
27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

**Doing Word is more than hearing only (22)**

*It is more than saying Lord, Lord* (Matt 7:21)

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

*It is doing God's Will (Matt 12:50)*

50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

*It is keeping the Word of God (Luke 11:28)*

28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

*It is being a good steward of the Word (Luke 12:47-48)*

47 And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. 48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

*It is being justified by doing God's Word (Rom 2:13)*

13 for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;

**Doing Word is continually observing it and living it (23-25)**

*By not forgetting God's Word (Ps 119:16)*

16 I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

*By ensuring our hearts are in line with our words (Ezek 33:31)*

31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain.

*By abiding in Jesus through the Word (John 15:4-8)*

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

*By being steadfast in living God's Word (2 Tim 3:14-15)*

14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
Doing Word is more than religious words (26)

It is being sanctified, doing good, seeking justice and defending the helpless (Isa 1:15-17)

15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

It is not being a hypocrite, but being near to God in heart and deed (Matt 15:6-9)

7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

It is not letting our mouth cause us to sin (Eccl 5:6)

6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?

It is giving God our hearts and observing His ways (Prov 23:26)

26 My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.

It is manifesting the fruit of God (Jer 12:2)

2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind.

Doing Word is helping the helpless (27)

Helping by undoing bonds and burdens of the oppressed (Isa 58:6-7)

6 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Helping by feeding, clothing, visiting and entertaining the needy (Matt 25:34-40)

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Helping by at every opportunity doing good (Gal 6:10)

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Helping by providing to those in need when we have it (1 John 3:17-18)

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.
Doing Word is keeping oneself unpolluted by the world (27)

By not being conformed to this world (Rom 12:2)

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

By being delivered from this evil age (Gal 1:4)

4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

By not being friends with the world (James 4:4)

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

By not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.16 For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

By overcoming the world (1 John 5:4-5)

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

By being born of God (1 John 5:18)

18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Gifts come in all sizes and shapes—and purposes. Blouses, shirts, and ties are to be worn. Cookies and candy are to be eaten. Books are to be read, CDs listened to. Artwork and photos are to be admired. Many gifts are intended to be used and used and used. Tools like drills and screwdrivers fit this category. So do appliances such as can openers, coffee makers, and microwaves. The gift of salvation is intended to be used too. Its use, however, involves allowing Christ’s principle of loving others to transform every word and deed of our lives into object lessons of God’s love for men and women everywhere.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

God’s Word is the guideline for the lives of His people. It is the light that illuminates our path. The psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). For a deterrent against sin we read, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (vs. 11). The Word of God does not lack when it comes to giving help and direction to His children. As far as the stability of Holy Scripture, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). In writing about the importance of the Word of God in relation to believers, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). God's Word must be the master of our lives. Our very existence must be under the control of His Word. If we as God's
children want His full blessings upon us, His Word must dwell in us richly. The spiritual wisdom referred to in the writing of the Apostle Paul is not the wisdom that is found among scholars and academics but rather that which will make us be spiritual believers who reveal Christ. God's will for His children is that they be a help and a blessing to each other. We are to admonish each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. I recall that when I was a teen, our youth group sang a song whose words reflected the meaning of Colossians 3:16. The song was a prayer asking the Lord to make our lives a sweet melody that would sing His praises. The words asked God to tune our lives with love and to make the harmony complete, for He is the master Musician. The apostle, after penning the blessed truth in Colossians 3:16, went on to say, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (vs. 17). The sad truth about these wonderful admonitions from God's Word is that they are often ignored by His children. It is easy to listen to the preaching of God's Word or to sit and read it, but it is another thing to live out what is heard or read. One must hear before he can do. If God's people are to comfort one another with the Word, if they are to be nourished by the Word, and if they are to be led by the Word, they must be both hearers and doers of the Word. The Christian is to be a doer of God's Word.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. We should thank God for all the good we experience because it all comes from Him (Jas. 1:17-18)
2. We could save ourselves much grief if we would listen more and speak less (vs. 19)
3. Human anger usually is the exact opposite of God's holy anger (vs. 20-21)
4. We deceive ourselves if we think merely going to church and learning the truth will make us pleasing to God (vs. 22-25)
5. Unrestrained speech reveals a wicked heart (vs. 26)
6. The Christian's work is helping the helpless, not merely speaking holy words (vs. 27)

**Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

Jesus told the rich young ruler, "There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). He is our example of all that is good. The more conformed we are to the image of Christ, the more people will see good in us, especially as we become doers of the Word.

**Good gifts (Jas. 1:17-18)**

Think about all the good gifts you have received from people in your lifetime. Maybe this would include the shiny new bike your father bought for you when you were six or that special dress your husband knew you had your eye on. These good gifts, you might be surprised to learn, were from God. Every good gift comes from Him. Such material gifts cannot compare to the good spiritual gifts our Lord gives us. Just as we are not the cause of our physical birth, so we do not have anything to do with our spiritual birth. Because of His gracious, loving heart and in accordance with His perfect will, the Lord gave us spiritual life. Is it possible to receive anything better than the gift of life?

**Good advice (Jas. 1:19-20)**

Because we have received this precious gift of spiritual life, let us not waste it. James encouraged his fellow believers to put into action wise principles that lead to effective ministry and true joy. Those who continually spout their own opinions and wisdom find it difficult to hear God's voice. And those who are always ready to give someone a piece of their mind should recognize that even if they are logically correct, their anger does not accomplish the righteousness God desires. Gentle kindness is a more fitting tool for doing the work of Christ.

**Good doers (Jas. 1:21-25)**

It is human nature to excuse our vices and the corruption that so easily flows from our sinful flesh. We should instead nurture the word of truth that God has planted within us. As it grows and fills our heart, it gives meaning and purpose to life. More than that, it makes us fit for heaven. Too often, though, we learn
God's truth and agree with it but then, for some reason, act as if that is the same as doing it. A wise man will not fall into this trap of hypocritical thinking. When he hears the truth, he will give every effort to putting it into practice in his life. James knew that not all of his readers would be both good hearers and good doers. He recognized a basic trait of sinful humanity: we are very willing to deceive ourselves when the truth does not suit us. So he spelled out how a good doer progresses spiritually. He does not just listen once to the uncomfortable truths that show him his faults; he is willing to keep focused on these realities until good habits have displaced the bad ones he was guilty of. Those who have their character flaws exposed by God's truth but then are distracted by other things end up losing all the benefits of the Spirit's work. Therefore, it is essential to spiritual success that we continually look into God's Word and ignore the many distractions of this world.

**Good religion (Jas. 1:26-27)**

The world sees many people as being religious who really have no understanding of what James called "pure religion." Those who are truly religious focus their efforts on two main objectives: caring for the needy and avoiding the many vices of this world. Without any exaggeration, we could spend our whole lives trying to do these two things and never reach these goals. But let us still be relentless in our pursuit of them.