

Hear and Do the Word

James 1:19-27

SS Lesson for 02/02/2014

Devotional Scripture: 1 Thess 2:13-14

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson examines how we as Christians we are to **Hear and Do the Word**. The **study's aim** is to see that being a real Christian requires more than mere profession. The **study's application** is to demonstrate that one truly knows the Lord by living a changed life devoted to Christ.

Key Verse: James 1:22

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

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

It is not sufficient, however, to receive the Word; one must respond to it in active obedience. The command is clear, Do not merely listen to the Word.... Do what it says. One must “become,” or “keep on becoming” a doer of the Word and not just a hearer. The growing numbers of sermon-sippers who flit from one doctrinal dessert to another like helpless hummingbirds are deceiving themselves. “Deceiving” is from a verb used in the New Testament only here and in Colossians 2:4. Paralogizomai means “to cheat or deceive by false reasoning.” The deception comes from thinking they have done all that is necessary when actually listening to the Word is only the beginning. A fitting illustration of the “sit, soak, and sour” crowd follows. The one who listens and does nothing is like a man who glances at his face in a mirror and then forgets what he saw. It is interesting that James cited a man in this illustration. A woman would probably not give just a cursory glance, and if she saw a flaw she would probably do what she could to cover it or correct it. Not so this man who sees the “face of his birth” and then forgets about it. To look into the mirror of the Word of God involves an obligation. One must look intently into the perfect Law that gives freedom. The intent and sustained look with a ready response is the key to spiritual strength and continued maturity. The word for “looks intently into” literally means “to stoop down” in order to have a good close look. The “Law that gives freedom” seems like a paradox. Law seems to imply restraint and therefore a lack of freedom. Not so with God’s Law. His perfect Law provides true freedom. “Hold to My teaching,” Christ said, “then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). One who does what God decrees will find full liberty and will be blessed in what he does.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The book of James is concerned with pure and true religion (1:27). The book sets forth practical Christian truth in a most uncompromising way. There is a certain abruptness to what James is saying to us. Our golden text is part of a series of very strong and practical injunctions about living rightly and justly under God. One of the things that must be brought to the forefront if believers are to truly live upright lives under God is the principle of being “doers of the word.” Let us consider this truth both positively and negatively. Positively, being a doer of the word begins with taking in God’s Word. It means being full of God’s Word and full of God. We have to look “into the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). To walk properly under God, we must hear the Word, listen to it, internalize it, and truly know it. Of course, we must go beyond this. We must act on the Word as well. A doer is one who acts, one who continues and goes on to completion. James commands us to be doers. This is an abiding command. There should be a habitual aspect to this in our lives. We become by life and habit those who fulfill and act on the teaching of God’s Word. So being a doer involves taking in the Word of God and habitually putting it into practice. Now let us consider this from the other side, the negative side—failing to be a doer. That makes us hearers only. This state of affairs is derided by James in 1:23-24. It is like a man who peers into a mirror, takes a good look at his face, and then later forgets what he looks like. It is a senseless activity. Likewise, hearing the Word but not doing it is empty and senseless. It has not accomplished anything in our lives. God means for the Word to go deeply into our hearts and to be lived out in our everyday lives. The person who merely hears the Word and does not do it is deceived. He thinks that because he has heard something and may have knowledge of something, he is a possessor of true Christian faith. But by itself this is not

true Christian faith. The true Christian faith is living faith. It means restraining anger (Jas. 1:19-20), laying aside filthiness (vs. 21), controlling the tongue (vs. 26), caring for orphans and widows (vs. 27), and so forth. The Word of God is to become manifestly part of our lives. Let us not be deceived. Without deeds and actions, we are not living the true Christian life. So merely hearing the Word is not enough. It must go further, showing itself in authentic deeds that give evidence we are living justly and righteously under God. Dear friends, we must not treat our Bible reading, Bible study, and sermon listening with carelessness. We must not brush off what we hear and learn. This will destroy the practical outworking of the Christian faith in our lives. As believers, we should never feel comfortable when our lives are coming up short of full obedience to the practical teaching of God's Word. The book of James exposes this tendency and challenges us to engage in active obedience. Let us live the Christian life with energy, responding with firm and certain obedience to whatever God's Word is saying to us.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson came a previous SS Lesson dated 08/03/2008 and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
19	So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath	Hearing the Word
22	But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves	Doing the Word

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Though the author does not draw attention to the fact, he was the James who was a brother of Jesus (compare Matthew 13:55). Jesus' brothers were skeptical of him during his ministry (John 7:5). But after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7), and the reality of the resurrection brought him and his brothers to faith. James became one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 2:9). Reliable sources outside the Bible tell us that James was highly respected in Jerusalem, even among many who were not Christians. Even so, he was murdered in AD 62 by opponents of Christianity. There are other men by the name of James in the New Testament, and we take care to distinguish between them (Matthew 4:21; 10:3; etc.). The letter of James is written in a fluent, literate style that reveals a mind that is at home in the Greek culture that dominated the eastern Mediterranean region of the first century AD. Even so, the letter offers us the Jewish outlook of Old Testament wisdom literature, such as the book of Proverbs. The letter's perspective is distinctly Christian as it reflects the emphases of Jesus' teaching, especially that of the Sermon on the Mount. We see the Jewishness of the letter in its address to "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1). These are not simply Jews, but believers in Jesus, the people of God in Christ. They are scattered partly because of persecution (Acts 8:1) and partly because missionaries planted the seed of the gospel outside Palestine, efforts that led still more people to faith in Christ. But after coming to faith, what's next? Today's lesson addresses just this question.

Major Theme Analysis

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

Hearing 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.

Results of 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 about 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.

Doing 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 Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: The Tests of True Religion: A Study of the Book of James

God sends adversity our way to perfect us, as James indicated in verses 2-4. Adversity reveals our deficiencies, and God graciously provides for our needs in times of trial, producing maturity and wholeness (without deficiency). While God uses adversity to perfect His saints, adversity often brings out the worst in men. Not only are we more prone to anger and harsh words, we may strike out in anger. No wonder James has already warned us about blaming God for tempting us (verses 13-18). James has already assured us that when we lack wisdom and ask for it in faith, God will give it to us (verses 5-7). That wisdom will often come from the Word of God, but it may also come from those who can give godly counsel from the Word, often from those who have endured such affliction themselves (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). We should therefore be quick to hear and to heed godly counsel. Conversely, we should be slow to speak and slow to anger. How easy it is to “blow up” in times of adversity, saying and doing things that are foolish and hurtful. Some people have learned that anger is a way of manipulating others. How many children today get their way by throwing a fit? Anger actually does work, in that it intimidates others, or makes them feel guilty, so that they give in to us in an unhealthy way. Human anger may produce sinful results, but James tells us that it will never achieve God’s righteousness. The flesh never produces righteousness, and human anger is a manifestation of the flesh:

16 But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh; for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, **outbursts of anger**, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, 21 envyings, murders, drunkenness, carousings, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God! 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 **gentleness, and self-control**. Against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, being jealous of one another (Galatians 5:16-26).

We have two choices as Christians. Either we may surrender to the passions of the flesh, which lead to death, or we may surrender to the implanted Word of God, which **“is able to save our souls”** (verse 21). James has just told us that it is the Word of God that was the instrument of our conversion; now he tells us that the Word of God is the instrument of our sanctification. As you can see, I understand the expression **“able to save your souls”** as a reference to the present aspect of our salvation. There is a past dimension (our initial conversion), a present dimension (our sanctification), and a future dimension -- our ultimate perfection (when we go to be with Him; see 1 John 3:2) – to our salvation. Merely hearing God’s Word is not enough. Even studying and comprehending great portions of the Bible is inadequate. The Bible is a book to be read, and practiced, just as our Lord taught (Matthew 7:21, 24-27; John 13:17). Jesus used very strong words when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees. Perhaps the most common term He used to describe them was **“hypocrites!”** They said one thing and did another. They believed certain things to be true, but they did not act accordingly (Matthew 23:1-3). James does not wish this to be true of the saints, and so he urges them to hear the Word of God and to heed it, by putting it into practice. He then articulates two primary areas of application, which I believe are very instructive. The first area of application is personal. He characterizes a saint as looking carefully into the Word, and when he or she does so, the Word reveals them for what they are, as we see also in Hebrews (Hebrews 4:12-13).

The Word of God exposes all of our sins, all of our weaknesses, all of our needs. If we are to be doers of the Word and not just hearers, then we must do something about those sins that our study of the Word reveals. To study the Word of God without applying it is useless and foolish. When we study God’s Word and heed it, then we are blessed in what we do. If we do not apply the Word in our deeds, we miss much of God’s blessing. James leaves us with just one specific area of personal application at this point (though he will take up the subject of the tongue later on – see chapter 3): keeping reign on our tongue (verse 26). We appear to be going back to verse 19 and to James’ instruction to be **“slow to speak.”**

If there is one thing I like about James, it is that his writing is incredibly simple and straightforward. There are always those, like the lawyer in Luke 10, who want to quibble over details (10:29), but the Bible speaks so plainly that this is really hard to do. Why is it that so many seem to think that spirituality is measured by the quantity of our speech, while the Scriptures frequently instruct us to be quiet (see also 1 Corinthians 14:26-38; 1 Peter 2:18—3:7)? If the first area of application is directed toward one’s self, the second area of application is directed toward ones’ neighbors, and in particular, those who are in need (James 1:27). How often we wish to use our Bible knowledge in other ways. We prefer to teach our neighbors, even when they don’t wish to be taught. We prefer to correct our fellow-believers, because their understanding of the Word is not identical with ours. We may prefer to point out the sins of others. There certainly is a proper time for teaching and preaching and even rebuking, but here James tells us that the proper application of the Word is to come to the aid of widows and orphans. (You will recall that when Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for being hypocrites in Matthew 23, He specifically mentioned that they pray long prayers, but steal widows’ houses (23:14)). The real test of religion is how one who is strong deals with those who are weak. The biblical model is that the strong use their strengths to minister to the needs of the weak.

James begins with the personal application of the Word – taking heed to its mirror message; he then moves to the public application of the Word – caring for the widows and the orphans in their affliction. But James then

moves back, once again, to the personal application of God's Word: we are to keep ourselves unstained from the world (verse 27). As I read the Book of Hebrews, I see the author being greatly concerned about his readers, who are Jewish Christians. Their identification with Christ has brought them considerable persecution, and for some time they have endured. But as time has passed, there are some who appear to have begun toying with the idea of falling back by keeping step with the world. The writer urges them to persevere and to endure:

*32 But remember the former days when you endured a harsh conflict of suffering after you were enlightened. 33 At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and afflictions, and at other times you came to share with others who were treated in that way. 34 For in fact you shared the sufferings of those in prison, and you accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you certainly had a better and lasting possession. 35 So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward. 36 For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised. 37 For "**just a little longer**" and "**he who is coming will arrive and not delay.**" 38 "**But my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I take no pleasure in him.**" 39 But we are not among those who shrink back and thus perish, but are among those who have faith and preserve their souls (Hebrews 10:32-39, underscoring mine).*

James seems to be saying the same thing the writer to the Hebrews says. They are to endure adversity with a stability that is grounded in faith. They are not to waver between loving and serving God and loving this present world. They are to deal with the sins that the Word reveals, and they are to avoid the sins that the world urges us to enjoy.

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Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Christians in the earliest years of the faith struggled to bring their actions into conformity with the faith that they confessed. In that respect, they were not much different from us today. What do you see about yourself in the true picture of you that emerges from God's Word? Perhaps it reveals the real weakness that lies behind the picture of strength that you try to project. Perhaps it reveals the parts of your life that still reflect the world's outlook instead of the character of the true God. Perhaps it reveals a "motor mouth" with a sensitive accelerator, always speaking before listening. Perhaps it reveals a sense of entitlement that strangles generosity. In one respect or another, God's Word reveals in all of us our stubborn tendency to run our lives on our terms. If we have confessed that God's way is the only way, our only hope, then it is once again time to assess ourselves in light of God's Word. We do so in order that we may put what we believe into action with the consistency that truly honors the God who has saved us.

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 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.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Being a good listener is the work of a wise person (Jas. 1:19)
2. Only God is capable of truly fair judgments (vs. 20)
3. Let the Word of God reform your attitude and demeanor (vs. 21)
4. Hearing God's Word but not acting on it is harmful to our spiritual well-being (vs. 22)
5. Blemishes on our spiritual lives often stand out to those around us like an unkempt physical appearance (vss. 23-24)
6. A hearer and doer of God's Word finds fulfillment in ministering to those in need while keeping his life pure before God (vss. 25-27)