

DOER OF THE WORD OR DECEIVING YOUR OWN SELF JAMES 1:22-25

Text: James 1:22

James 1:22

²² But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Introduction:

In a 2005 issue of Our Daily Bread, Richard Dehaan tells the story of a man in New York City who died at the age of 63, without ever working a single job.

The man spent the entirety of his adult life in college. He acquired multiple degrees, but never put any of them into practice.

Rather than a thirst for knowledge, it turns out that the man's lifetime in the classroom was the result of a trust fund that had been left to him by a wealthy relative who passed away when the man was just a child.

The trust fund stipulated that the man was to be given enough money to support him, so long as he was in school. The man turned that fund into a lifetime of income by simply staying in school.

Unfortunately, there are far too many people who spend their whole lives listening to the teaching of the Word of God, but spend very little time living it out.

They hear all the “thou shalt,” they just don’t heed them. They can recite the fruit of the Spirit; they just don’t reproduce them in their lives.

James speaks out against this disconnect between listening and living. He says in James 1:22, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...”

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked,

Luke 6:46

⁴⁶ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

At the heart of being a follower of Christ is not just hearing, but doing what His Word commands.

Note:

1. THE FOOLISHNESS OF JUST HEARING THE WORD

James 1:22

²² But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Notice the phrase, “deceiving your own selves.”

The word “deceiving” literally means “beside reason”.

It describes that which is counter to reason.

Notice what James says about only hearing the Word.

A. The Application of the Word the Lord Commanded

James opens this section with a command about how we are to apply the Word of God to our lives.

He says that we are to be “doers”.

The word doer describes someone who takes something that they are given and then creatively does something with it.

Whenever you hear the Word of God, it is not just information for your head; it is inspiration for your life!

You are to take the Word and apply it to your life.

While this is the application of the Word that James commands, he follows the positive command of “Be ye doers of the word...,” with a negative one.

Notice not only the application of the Word that James commands, but notice also:

B. The Approach to the Word the Lord Condemns

The text indicates that it is possible to hear the Word and deceive you own self.

This foolish self-deception comes from being a “hearer only”. James says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...”

The Lord said in John 13:17:

John 13:17

¹⁷ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

Notice also:

2. THE FORGETFULNESS THAT OFTEN HINDERS THE WORD

James illustrates what it looks like for a person to listen but not live out what they hear from the Word.

James 1:23-24

²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: ²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

Let’s look at this illustration James gives us, and see what he teaches us about how forgetfulness will hinder

us from carrying out what God has commanded. Notice first of all:

A. What We Find When We Look in the Word

James 1:23

²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

The word “glass” refers to the ancient mirrors that were used in James’ day. James says that a man looks into the mirror, and he sees his face. The mirror reveals who he really is.

Is that not what happens when we look into the Word of God. The Bible serves as mirror to reflect back to us the truth of who we are.

Romans 7:7

⁷ What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

When we look into the Word of God, it tells us who we really are. It tells us we are sinful. It tells us we need a Savior. It tells us that in Christ we are loved, accepted, and forgiven.

James not only reminds us in verse 23 of what we find when we look in the Word, but in verse 24, he reminds us of:

B. Why We Forget When We Leave the Word

Look again at James' illustration. He said a man who only hears the Word, but is not a doer, is like a man who looks at himself in the mirror.

James 1:24

²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

The mirror informs the man of who he is, but he walks away and forgets completely what he learned from the mirror.

Is that not how so many of us read the Bible? We take one look at it, and then we are off, never to consider again what God had to say.

There are two reasons I think we forget the Word of God after we have heard it or read it. One, we don't meditate on it, and two, we don't memorize it.

Psalms 1:1-2

¹ Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Psalms 119:11

¹¹ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

James reminds us with this illustration that when we rush away from the Word, and never meditate on it, or memorize it, we are bound to become the kind of person who is only a hearer, but not a doer of the Word.

3. THE FAITHFULNESS THAT OBEDIENTLY HANDLES THE WORD

James 1:25

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

That phrase “perfect law of liberty” is referring to the Word of Christ.

Notice a couple of truths we are given to help us practice what we are taught in the Word of God.

First we find here:

A. How We Should Read the Bible

Note the phrase “looketh into”. It literally means to turn you head sideways in order to look into something.

It is a picture of someone stooping down to look carefully at something. It is the same word that is used

in John 20:5, where it describes what John did when came to the empty tomb.

John 20:5

⁵ And he stooping down, *and looking in*, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

That is the same effort and strain that James says a doer of the Word uses when they “look into” the Scriptures.

James is teaching us that a quick skim over a Bible chapter is not sufficient to translate listening into living.

If we want the Word to become a part of our actions, we must look deeply into the Scriptures, and as James says in verse 25, we must “continue therein.”

God is not so much worried with quickness of your reading, as He is with the quality of it. We must read the Word carefully; looking deeply into what God has to say.

Notice also:

B. How We Should Respond to the Bible

James 1:25

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Here is the original point where James began in verse 22, being not just a hearer of the Word, but a “doer of the work.”

You may fill your head with Bible principles until you sound like a certified theologian. However, if none of those principles become practice in your life, they are useless.

Quote:

If Biblical information never becomes personal motivation, then you have mishandled the Word of God.

Illustration:

For instance, if you read that you are to love your neighbor as yourself, but you are so busy with yourself that you never tell your neighbor about Jesus, then you have not truly responded to the Word.

If you read that those who have been forgiven are supposed to in turn forgive, and yet you carry around some dusty grudge against someone, then you have not faithfully and obediently responded to the Word of God!

There was a man who once bragged to Mark Twain that he was planning on visiting the Holy Land, climbing

Mount Sinai, and shouting out the Ten Commandments to the top of his voice.

Twain told the man that it would be better if he just stayed at home and lived them.

It is not enough to simply hear and know what the Bible says. James reminds us that a faithful handling of the Word of God involves hearing and obeying what God has said.

Close:

James concludes verse 25 with a beatitude. He says that if a man carefully studies the Word, and then puts into practice what he has learned, "...this man shall be blessed in his deed."

There is a blessing – a happiness – in life that can only come from obeying the Word of God.

Hearing the Word of God is important, but hearing alone is not what God intends for us to do with His Word.

According to James, you are only fooling yourself if you fail to connect your listening to your living.

In reality hearing only is sinful – for God tells us:

James 4:17

¹⁷ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.