

# LETTING THE WORD WORK

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Text: James 1:22-27

■ A. W. Tozer writes in his book, *THE ROOT OF THE RIGHTEOUS*, "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun...It is the glaring disparity between theology and practice among professing Christians.

So wide is the gulf that separates theory from practice in the church that an inquiring stranger who chances upon both would scarcely dream that there was any relation between them. An intelligent observer of our human scene who heard that Sunday morning sermon and later watched the Sunday afternoon conduct of those who had heard it would conclude that he had been examining two distinct and contrary religions...not willing to endure the inconveniences of being right. So the divorce between theory and practice becomes permanent in fact, though in word the union is declared to be eternal. Truth sits forsaken and grieves till her professed followers come home for a brief visit, but she sees them depart again when the bills become due." (Swindoll, 49)

Previously in verses 19-21, we saw that James was trying to clear the way for God's Word to be received into our hearts. He did so by calling for a restraint on un-Christlike actions, an emphasis on repentance, and an openness to the Word of God.

In our text today, James continues to discuss putting the Word to work in our lives. His desire is to do away with superficial Christianity that is of no value to the "hearer of the Word" and is hypocrisy to those around us who are watching our lives.

James offers the solution to this problem beginning in v. 22.

## I. JAMES INSTRUCTS US TO PUT THE WORD INTO PRACTICE (v.22).

■ James says, "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

A. God wants us to be obedient to the Word.

■ The call to "do what it says" lies at the center of all that James teaches. It sums up the message of the whole book: Put into practice what you profess to believe. (Burdick, 75)

B. James warns us against deceiving ourselves.

■ Another translation reads, "Do what God's word says. Don't merely listen to it, or you will fool yourselves." (God's Word Series)

■ Charles Swindoll writes, "The Greek term for HEARERS is an interesting one. It refers to someone who audits a course at a university—someone who listens carefully and takes notes, but has no assignments, tests or responsibilities. In short, someone who merely takes in information.

James plainly states that those who simply audit the faith are deceiving themselves about their Christianity, and that sincere believers will prove their authenticity by applying what they hear." (52-53)

C. God wants people who will LISTEN and ACT according to His Word.

In other words, prove what you know and what you have with God by the way you live!

## II. JAMES GIVES US THE REASON FOR PRACTICING THE WORD (v.23-25).

■ James compares the Word of God to a mirror when he states, "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..."

In this illustration, James wants us to see the difference between *forgetting* the Word and *continuing* in the Word.

A. The forgetful hearer is like a man who studies his face in the mirror and then goes away and forgets what he looks like. Sound ridiculous?

This is no more ridiculous than someone studying the Word of God intently and then forgetting or neglecting to put it into practice. Failing to practice what you know does you no good.

B. The doer of the Word will be blessed because he listens and puts the Word into practice.

**The reasons are found in v. 25:**

1. He looks intently into the perfect law of liberty.
2. He continues to do it.
3. He doesn't forget what he has heard.
4. He puts into practice what he has learned.

■ The doer of the Word is the fulfillment of Psalm 1:1-3,  
"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper." (NKJV)

### **III. JAMES GIVES US THE CRITERIA FOR APPLYING THE WORD (v.26-27).**

A. The Word will affect our speech.

■ "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue..."

When a person fails to control the speech, even if he appears to be religious, he is deceiving himself and living a worthless religion.

B. The Word will determine how we treat others.

■ "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble."

James is not defining "religion," he is simply stating that one's religion is going to be evident in his/her concern for others.

C. The Word will keep us pure in this world.

■ “To keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

The term "world" is speaking of the system of the world of which satan is the author. To be unspotted, uncorrupted, unstained or unpolluted by the world is to live by a higher standard than the world -- God's standard.

## CONCLUSION

■ Phillips Brooks wrote, "Obedience must be the struggle and desire of our life. Obedience, not hard and forced, but ready, loving and spontaneous; the doing of duty, not merely that duty may be done, but that the soul in doing it may become capable of receiving uttering God."

Most often those who are "hearers" only and not "doers" of the word are those who have only a head knowledge of God; that is, they are only superficial in their experience—their hearts have simply not been affected. In fact, their hearts will not be affected as long as they fail to let the word work in their lives.

### References

Brooks, Phillips.

Burdick, Donald. *Expositor's Bible commentary Series*. (1995). Grand Rapids, MI: World Publishing.

Swindoll, Charles R. (1991). *James: Practical and authentic living*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing.