

James

Knowing and Doing

August 28, 2011

I. Introduction

A. **James 1:16-27** . . . Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [17] Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. [18] In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. [19] This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. [22] But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; [24] for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. [25] But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. [26] If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. [27] Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

B. Prayer

II. Knowing is not enough. We must live up to what we know.

A. **James 1:21-22** . . . Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive the word implanted**, which is able to save your souls. [22] **But prove yourselves doers of the word**, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

1. **in humility (gentleness) receive the word implanted** –

a. To receive the word of God in a way that is able to save your soul, is to:

(1) Get it inside of you through reading, memorization, contemplation, and listening to teachers who both understand it and who live up to what they understand.

- (2) And it is to apply the truths you know from God's word, in the most practical ways, to every area of your life.
 - b. This does not mean that theology and doctrine are not important. They are, and it is for this reason that we are wise to look deeply and regularly into the Word of God in order:
 - (1) To know who God is, what He is like, why He does what He does, and how He deals with us.
 - (2) To know what our place is in relation to God so that we can properly relate to Him in every situation of life. This takes in such things as fear, awe, love, worship, humble submission, holiness, and cheerful service.
 - (3) To know who saves us, what we are saved from, and what we are saved to.
 - c. Yet James does not point to theology and doctrine as the truth of God's word that is able to save your soul. Instead, James points to the practical side of God's word – that is, the **how to** in relation to living the Christian life in the day-to-day circumstances of life.
 - (1) And why do I say this? Because he follows up his exhortation to take in the Word of God with a statement that in essence says, you have to apply what you take in for it to do you any good. Listen to what James says: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (**James 1:22**).
 - (2) And from the Old Testament, David speaks about the necessity to apply God's word in the most practical ways to how we live day in and day out when he said: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. [10] With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. [11] Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." (**Psalms 119:9-11**).
2. **But prove yourselves (become) doers of the word –**
- a. As I have already implied, taking in the word of God is vital to living a Christ-like life. However it is only half of what is necessary. Doing what we know, or as I have often said, living up to what we know is the other half.
 - (1) The reality is, we are Christians, not based on what we know, but how we live. Consider the word "Christian," which we use as an identifying label. It means "Christ-like." And though it was first used by unbelievers in Antioch as a derogatory

label for believers, they chose this label because the believers were living lives that made it easy for the unbelievers to identify them as followers of Christ. In other words, because they lived up to the truth they knew, they were labeled as Christ-like.

- (2) Added to this example is James own affirmation of the truth that both knowing and doing what we know are required of us as Christians when he says in chapter four: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (**James 4:17**). In other words, knowing without doing what we know leads to doing other than we know, and that is sin or lawlessness or rebellion against God.
 - (3) And again in chapter two, James says “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. [20] But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?” (**James 2:19-20**).
 - (4) The point here is simple. Knowing the truth is only half of what it takes to become a Christian and to live the Christ-like life. Putting the truth we know into practice – from the first moment of repentance to the last breath we take – is the other half. If we avoid or ignore or short-change this second half, we are no wiser than the demons who know the truth yet continue in the way of sin.
- b. Beyond these two portions in James, there are other scriptures which speak to the necessity of living up to what we know. I have selected some of them for our consideration today. As we read each one, consider the importance God places on keeping knowing and doing together.
- (1) **Matthew 7:21** . . . Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.
 - (2) **Luke 6:46-49** . . . Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? [47] Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: [48] he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. [49] But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst

against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.

(3) **Romans 2:12-13** . . . For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; [13] for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

(4) **Matthew 15:7-9** . . . You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: [8] 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. [9] 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

3. **and not merely (*only*) hearers who delude themselves –**

- a. Notice – when we focus on hearing or reading or in some other way learning the truths that God has for us, while failing or falling short in the doing of what we learn and hence know, we are not just failing or falling short, we are also deluding ourselves.
- b. To **delude** yourself (1) is to lead yourself from truth into error; (2) it is to willfully mislead your mind by hiding certain truths from yourself; (3) it is to knowingly and therefore deliberately treat a lie as if it were the truth.
- c. In other words, we involve ourselves in self-delusion or self-deception when we choose to believe our own false reasoning, or a particular lie, instead of choosing to believe what we know is the truth. Then, from the position of believing our own false reasoning, we convince ourselves that what is wrong is right. This in turn leads us to conclude that we are justified in what we are doing, or at the very least, that there is nothing wrong with what we are doing.
- d. One reason self-delusion is so hard to overcome is that it comes from within. In other words, it comes from the one we trust the most – ourselves. And once we have convinced ourselves that what we believe is true and what we are doing is right, we close off our mind to anyone telling us otherwise. This is why it is so hard to speak truth into the life of anyone who is self-deceived.
- e. But we do more than close ourselves off from hearing truth from those around us when we take the path of self-delusion.
 - (1) We also make it clear to God that we treasure and love something more than we love Him.
 - (2) We harden our heart against the truth of God and the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit so that we are less receptive

to God's truth and less sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

- (3) We dull or desensitize our conscience so that it no longer serves as a warning mechanism against wrong-doing in the way God intends it to serve us.
 - (4) We reinforce the false belief that knowing the Word of God is equal to being and doing what the Word of God says.
 - (5) We set ourselves against God, and we put God in the position of having to set Himself against us.
 - (6) We hinder our prayers.
- f. My point here is that self-delusion comes at a great cost to our own spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. Whatever we think we are gaining from self-delusion, the truth is, we are losing far more!

B. **James 1:23-24** . . . For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; [24] for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

1. The word of God is like a mirror held up before us. In it we read or hear read to us God's mind, His ways, His laws, and His expectations of us – which in turn exposes our own short-comings and defects while setting before us God's standards for the Christian life and the goal toward which we ought to be zealously heading.
2. Now the point God is making here is that while looking into God's word:
 - a. we may feel convicted or brought to our senses on a particular matter,
 - b. or we may feel encouraged to make a new or a greater effort in putting off the old nature and putting on Christ,
 - c. or we may gain new insight into what we ought to do in a specific situation
 - d. or we may feel a greater sense of zeal in pursuing God and godliness.
3. But when we finish looking into God's word and turn our attention elsewhere, we quickly forget the lessons learned or the conviction felt, and our good intentions fade into the background so that whatever we intended to do with what we gained from the Word goes undone.

4. Now let me remind all of us that forgetting what we have read is not the fault of our age or the busyness of our life or the failure of our good intentions. It is the direct result of being a hearer of the word and not a doer.
 - a. To change from being one who hears but doesn't do to one who hears and does may require saying no to certain activities that rob us of time to meditate and contemplate and figure out how to apply God's word to how we live day by day.
 - b. It will probably require daily preparation and vigilance.
 - c. It will for sure require talking with God and gaining His wisdom for applying accurately what you know.
5. But more than all these, to change from being one who hears but doesn't do to one who hears and does requires a change of mind! Where you do not want to live like Christ, you have change your thinking and values so that you can come to the place where that is what you want! For it isn't until you want to apply what you know that you will feel driven to do so. Again, better motives are very helpful here, but repentance and choosing in keeping with your repentance is vital.

C. **James 1:25** . . . But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

1. "**Looks intently**" implies continuation or perseverance or prolonged looking as opposed to a quicker, shorter time of looking. To gain the understanding of how to apply what you know,
 - a. you need to pray for wisdom, and insight
 - b. you need honesty with yourself about yourself, or you need to ask a true friend to tell you the truth about yourself
 - c. you need to ponder what specific scriptures are saying so as to drill down to their deeper meanings and applications,
 - d. you need to meditate so as to see what God is saying in ever growing and larger, more extensive ways
 - e. and you need to get out in the real world and do your best to live up to what you know – even though it will require some trial and error at first in many situations.
2. Blessed in what he does – reminds us that righteousness brings reward:
 - a. **Psalms 19:7-11** . . . The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

[8] The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. [9] The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. [10] They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

- b. **John 14:21** . . . He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.
- c. **II Corinthians 3:18** . . . But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.
- d. **II Timothy 3:16-17** . . . All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; [17] so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

III. Conclusion

- A. Knowing is not enough. We must live up to what we know to be in good standing with God, to have personal integrity, and to live the Christian life as we have been saved to live it.