

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 1:19-27 (September 27, 2026)
From Hearers to Doers: Letting God's Word Transform Our Lives

The Theme: James calls us to authentic, practical Christianity. Real faith is not merely something we profess or understand intellectually; it's seen in how we actually live day-by-day, and real faith is seen by its fruit.

Central Truth: the effective hearing of God's Word transforms us into followers of Jesus Christ who live out an authentic faith.

Key Passage (22): "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Opening Question: Have you ever looked in a mirror, noticed something that really needed to be corrected, and then walked away without doing anything about it? What would be the point of looking in the mirror if you weren't going to do something about what you saw?

Background: James is addressing believers who are facing the realities and challenges of life. In the first part of chapter 1, he has encouraged them to face trials with joyful confidence, knowing that God is working through those trials. Beginning in verse 19, He turns from the trials believers experience to the way believers respond to God's Word. His concern is not merely whether Christians hear the Word, but whether they respond to it in loving obedience.

Lesson Objectives:

Primary Objective: For students to move from simply hearing God's Word to doing what He calls them to do, allowing Scripture to transform their daily lives by examining their hearts, exposing what needs to change, and producing obedient, Christlike living through God's grace.

- 1) Explain the difference between merely hearing God's Word and actively doing it.
- 2) Recognize the importance of being "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger," especially when God's Word confronts attitudes or behaviors in our lives.
- 3) Identify sinful attitudes and behaviors that must be put away so that we can receive God's Word with humility and allow it to take root in our lives.
- 4) Understand James's "mirror" illustration and recognize how God's Word reveals areas of sin, weakness, and spiritual need that require a response.
- 5) Describe what James means by the "perfect law, the law of liberty," and understand how continuing in God's Word leads to a life of freedom and obedience.
- 6) Identify practical evidence of authentic faith in three areas James highlights: our speech, our compassion toward others, and our personal holiness.
- 7) Personally apply the lesson by answering the question, "What will I do with what God has shown me through His Word?" and identifying at least one specific area in which God is calling you to respond in obedience.

I. Be Quick to Hear, Slow to Speak, and Slow to Anger (19-20)

- A. There is a standard of "the righteousness that God requires." The believer's life is to be measured not by the standards of the surrounding culture but by God's holy character.
- B. Be quick to hear: The immediate context concerns hearing the "word of truth."
 1. God uses His Word to expose sin, reveal our need for forgiveness, and show us how to live in a way pleasing to Him.
 2. Being "quick to hear" means responding readily when God's Word speaks to us and allowing the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and correction.
- C. Be slow to speak: James connects spiritual maturity with an openness to receiving God's Word into our hearts without responding with rejection.

C. Be slow to anger: James is particularly concerned about anger in response to God's truth. When Scripture exposes something in us that we don't want to acknowledge, our response should not be resentment, defensiveness, or rebellion.

Discussion Questions

Why do you think James places “quick to hear” before “slow to speak”?

What makes it difficult for us to hear something that exposes an area of weakness in our lives?

What are some ways people respond when God's Word confronts something they don't want to change?

Why doesn't human anger produce the righteousness God requires?

Questions for Personal Reflection

When God's Word challenges me, am I genuinely listening, or preparing my defense?

Is there a time in my life when I responded to conviction of sin with irritation or resentment?

What would being “quick to hear” look like in my life this week?

II. Put Away Sin and Humbly Receive God's Word (21)

A. James moves from listening to repentance and reception. The command to “put away” carries the sense of deliberately getting rid of or casting off those things that dishonor God.

1. Filthiness: Any evil or immoral conduct

2. Rampant wickedness: Evil that's intended to harm others

B. The positive response: “receive with meekness the implanted word.”

Key Principle: We cannot genuinely receive God's Word while deliberately clinging to the attitudes and behaviors that God's Word tells us to abandon.

Discussion Questions

In practical terms, what does it mean to “put away” sin?

Why does James use such strong language concerning “all” filthiness and wickedness?

What is the relationship between humility and our ability to receive God's Word?

How can anger, pride, bitterness, or self-reliance interfere with our ability to receive God's truth?

How does God's grace change the way we respond when His Word exposes our sin?

Questions for Personal Reflection

What is God currently showing me that I need to “put away”?

Am I trying to defend an attitude or habit that God's Word is asking me to get rid of?

Do I approach God's Word with humility, willing to let it examine every area of my life?

Am I trying harder—or am I drawing nearer to Christ and depending upon His grace?

III. Be Doers of the Word, Not Hearers Only (22-24)

A. Merely hearing God's Word can create a dangerous form of self-deception.

1. Attending church, participating in Bible study, hearing sermons, underlining verses, and knowing biblical answers are not substitutes for obedience.
2. James compares the hearer who does not obey to someone who looks carefully into a mirror and then walks away and forgets what he saw.

3. The mirror doesn't create the problem--it reveals it. God's Word also reveals our temptations, our weaknesses, our sins, our failures, our attitudes, our motives, and, ultimately, our need for God's grace.
- B. The critical question is not "What did I learn?" but "How will I allow God to transform my life to bring it into alignment with His word and His will?"

Discussion Questions

- Why does James describe hearing without doing as "self-deception?"
- What is the difference between knowing biblical truth and living biblical truth?
- How can church attendance or Bible study become substitutes for genuine obedience?
- What does the mirror illustration teach us about the purpose of Scripture?
- When God's Word reveals something unpleasant about us, what are some ways we might avoid responding to it?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- What has God shown me recently through His Word that I have not yet acted upon?
- Am I obtaining biblical knowledge without experiencing the transformation it calls for?
- Is there something I know God wants me to do that I continue to postpone?
- If someone observed my life rather than listening to my words, what evidence would they see of my faith?

IV. Looking Into and Persevering in the Perfect Law of Liberty (25)

- A. Look intently: Far more than a casual glance.
 1. "An earnest, humble, and investigative attention to God's works and words. The physical gesture [of stooping down] underscores an inner

disposition--reverence mixed with expectancy--that is essential for receiving revelation.”

2. Not just an occasional glance at it while the pastor’s reading the scripture; it’s a continuous immersion into the Word of God, allowing it--not merely to inform--but to transform you so “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
- B. Continuing in it: It’s only through this persistent study and continuous application of the law of Christ that we become real doers of the word.
- C. Understand the “law of liberty”: freedom through obedience. Obedience to Christ doesn’t destroy freedom; it’s the pathway into the freedom Christ gives.
- D. The blessing comes “in” obedience. Obedience itself brings the joy of deeper fellowship with God and greater understanding of His will.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to “look into” God's Word rather than merely read it?

Why is perseverance necessary for becoming a doer of the Word?

What does Christian freedom mean according to this lesson?

How can obedience actually produce greater freedom?

Why do you think James connects obedience with blessing?

What spiritual habits help us continue in God's Word?

Questions for Personal Reflection

Am I consistently looking into God's Word, or only occasionally glancing at it?

What helps me remember and apply what I learn from Scripture?

In what ways have I experienced the joy or freedom that comes from obeying God?

V. Authentic Faith Is Demonstrated by Words, Compassion, and Holiness (26-27)

- A. Authentic faith controls the tongue. Your speech is an important indicator of the condition of your heart.
- B. Authentic faith cares for those in need. The care that we are to give to widows and orphans is one example of people who should receive every believer's compassion and care.
- C. Authentic faith remains unstained by the world. Keeping oneself “unstained from the world” does not mean withdrawing from society. It means refusing to allow the world's values and practices to interfere with our relationship with Christ and our witness to others.

Discussion Questions

- Why does James use the tongue as one test of genuine faith?
- What do our words reveal about the condition of our hearts?
- Why do you think James specifically mentions widows and orphans?
- What does it mean to remain “unstained from the world” while still living in the world?
- How do speech, compassion, and holiness provide visible evidence of an inwardly transformed life?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- What do my words reveal about the condition of my heart?
- Is there someone experiencing difficulty whom God may be calling me to serve?
- Are there influences (people, wealth, comfort, power, prestige) in my life that are gradually pulling me away from Christ?
- Would people who know me see evidence of both compassion toward others and holiness before God?

Final Reflection Question

When God's Word shows me something that needs to change, will I walk away and forget what I saw—or will I bring it to Christ and allow Him to transform me?

Summary: A genuine believer:

Is quick to hear God's Word.

Is slow to speak and slow to anger, especially when confronted by truth.

Puts away sin rather than making excuses for it.

Receives God's Word with humility, allowing it to transform his or her heart.

Becomes a doer of the Word, rather than merely a hearer.

Looks intently into God's Word and perseveres in it.

Lives in the freedom Christ provides through obedience.

Controls the tongue, recognizing that speech reveals the heart.

Cares for people in affliction.

Keeps himself or herself unstained by the world.

Bringing It All Together: God's Word is the mirror. Christ is the Savior. The Holy Spirit is the One who transforms us. And authentic faith responds to what God reveals by faithfully following Jesus, living out that faith before the world.

Sunday School Lesson for September 27, 2026
James 1:18-27

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this last Sunday in September, we've started a new series of lessons, this time turning our attention to the letter of James, the brother of our Lord. Throughout our study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In this brief letter, James shows us exactly how authentic believers follow Jesus.

In our second lesson from James' letter today, we turn to the second part of the first chapter. In last week's lesson, we introduced his message where he called us to engage with the challenges we face in life with joyful confidence, knowing that God is working out His purpose in our lives for our good and His glory. Today, in our study from verses nineteen through 27, James calls us to consider several behaviors in our lives that we may not recognize or choose not to acknowledge--behaviors that question whether we are simply hearers of God's Word or actual doers of His Word, responding in loving obedience to His plan for our lives.

So, picture a typical day in your life. The day begins in a rush to get out the door. The kids are still in their pajamas and they'll be late for school if you don't hurry up. You've got an early morning meeting, you're still not dressed, and you haven't had your coffee yet. You stop to look in the mirror. Your hair's a mess or you missed a couple of spots or cut yourself shaving. Worst of all, there's a piece of spinach from your Costco breakfast quiche hanging right there in your front teeth. You look directly at it in the mirror. You really intend to do something about it, but you get distracted by other things, and the thought of that piece of spinach hanging there completely passes out of your mind.

Instead of doing something about it, you finish getting yourself and the kids ready, rush out to the car, and head to school or work. During the course of an otherwise normal day, you run into all sorts of people--meetings at the office, conversations at the job site, lunchtime Bible study, a visit to the grocery store, pick up the kids from school. And everyone you come into contact with can see exactly what you forgot about in the mirror.

That's the picture James gives us here.

God's Word is like that. It shows us what's there. If we're looking honestly, then we ought to clearly see our impatience, our harsh words, our bitterness, our selfishness, and our pride. Right?

How many times have we heard the sermon, nodded along, underlined the verse, and then walked straight into a Monday morning never having allowed that otherwise compelling message to alter the trajectory of our lives ?

James is warning us. This kind of behavior is self-deception. It's like truly believing, "My teeth are clean," while that piece of spinach is hanging there for everyone in the world to see.

God's Word reveals what needs our attention--whether we acknowledge it or not. It calls us toward genuine change--not in our own strength, but through the grace that God freely supplies to us.

Before giving us his illustration of the mirror, James offers us several pictures of how an authentic believer in Jesus Christ shows that he or she is truly following Jesus. As we said in our first lesson, "James writes to those who are willing to be transformed by God's Word." "James is not exposing your sin to leave you in guilt. He is exposing your need for Christ. Every place [where] this study uncovers impatience, pride, inconsistency, self-reliance, or self-deception is another reminder of your need for the Savior. James is not calling you to try harder; he is calling you to draw nearer to the One who gives wisdom, grace, and life. So don't rush to defend yourself. Don't settle for surface-level answers. Don't aim to protect your image. And

don't [pretend] you are doing well in the very areas James is bringing into the light." Don't ignore that piece of spinach that God sees and that a whole lot of people see as well.

James begins in verse nineteen with, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires."

First, starting at the end of verse twenty, notice that James identifies the standard for authentic Christianity: "the righteousness that God requires." Regardless of what the world may say, there is an absolute standard of that which is right and acceptable in the sight of God, a standard that is grounded in His own nature of holiness.

God's righteousness is what God rightly requires from every person since we are part of His creation, but genuine believers have an even greater reason to live by God's standard--we are, as Paul writes in Romans, chapter six, verse seventeen: "slaves of righteousness."

So, with this standard of God's righteousness in mind--something, by the way, that James' Jewish readers would have been acutely aware of--he reminds us of three precepts of God's righteousness in verse nineteen.

This first exhortation to "be quick to hear, slow to speak" is great advice that everyone should take to heart, particularly those who are genuinely trying to follow Jesus. While the instruction has often been broadened to refer to our conversations in general--and it certainly applies to that--, the context is that of listening to the Word of truth.

In the verse just before this--verse eighteen--James told us that "Of [God's], own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation." This "Word of Truth" we said was the gospel--the fact that everyone has failed to live up to God's standard of holiness, and the only way to be reconciled to God and forgiven for rejecting Him is to place your trust in the One He sent to take upon Himself the

punishment for our sin. This word of truth reveals our sin, uncovers our need for forgiveness, and shows us the way to live a life that's pleasing to God.

So, we are, first, to be quick to hear. The word translated "quick" is the word from which we get our word, tachometer, and a tachometer is an instrument that measures how fast a piece of equipment is operating. As believers, we're to respond quickly to the hearing of the word of truth, allowing the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment in our own lives so that, as we heard last week, we would take one step closer to becoming "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

We're to be quick to hear, and slow to speak. To his primarily Jewish audience, he's not telling them something they didn't already know. In Proverbs, chapter ten, verse nineteen, we hear, "When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise." In chapter fifteen, verse two, Solomon writes, "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge attractive, but the mouth of fools blurts out foolishness."

This foolishness that's blurted out by those who disregard James' cautionary words often spiring from anger, so James directs his appeal to the source of our slow hearing and quick speaking. Once again, he may have been drawing on Proverbs familiar to his audience. For example, Proverbs, chapter sixteen, verse 32: "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

The particular point James is making is not that we should be careful not to respond in anger without thinking--as true as that is--but that we should not respond to the truth in anger. When we're confronted by the truth of God's Word and it uncovers sin in our lives, we should never respond with anger, whether that comes in the form of outright rebellion or a smoldering resentment.

Although Paul focuses on one particular type of sin as he nears the closing of his first letter to the followers of Christ in Thessalonica, his general

summary includes every behavior and attitude that disregards the holiness of God which we are to imitate. In chapter four, verse seven, he writes, “God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”

In our study of John, we saw many instances of those who angrily rejected the words of the Lord because it didn’t fit their theology, challenged their traditions, or just made them uncomfortable. Sometimes, God’s Word does that, and it’s a good thing. So, when you come across a passage of scripture that confronts something in your life, when you hear a sermon that steps on your toes, when another believer opens the Word of God to challenge you, or at any other time when the Holy Spirit brings conviction to your heart, don’t get angry. Be quick to listen and slow to respond, lest you act out of sinful irritation or resentment. Hebrews, chapter twelve, verse eleven: “For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Let the word of truth bear rich fruit in your life, as we’ll hear more from James later in chapter three.

James’ objective in exhorting us to “be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” is because “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.” Not only does anger not produce the righteousness that God requires, James addresses two other classes of sin that don’t produce the righteousness that God requires--verse 21: “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” In light of the fact that God has given us a new birth to be slaves of righteousness and the firstfruits of His new creation in Christ, it follows that we should purge ourselves of everything that’s dishonoring to the Lord and inappropriate for someone who’s been given the new birth through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The filthiness James speaks of refers to any evil or immoral conduct. To those who have been brought forth by the word of truth, such behavior should

be persistently averted and avoided. The word James uses appears only here in our New Testaments and is equivalent to the word we find in Ezekiel, chapter 44, verse six, where the Lord says, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘O house of Israel, enough of all your **abominations**,’” and proceeds to name a few of those things that the Lord hates.

Although several translations render the verb as “put away,” the sense is much stronger. “Get rid of” or “cast off” more accurately describes the force and intentionality of purging ourselves from such things.

“Put away ALL filthiness.” So, what does that include? A partial list could include such things as foul speech; offensive jokes and innuendoes; pictures and videos and movies that are degrading to women, men, and children; music that’s dishonoring to God and to others; selfish thoughts, actions, attitudes, and pride; anything and everything that sets itself against the holiness of God in your life, including the anger that he talked about in the previous verse--get rid of it. Clean house. Clear out both the spider webs and kill the spider--for those of you who are familiar with the old sermon illustration. “Take every thought captive to obey Christ”--Second Corinthians, chapter ten, verse five--to defend yourself against any desire to return to those unholy habits, actions, and attitudes.

Second, “put away all ... rampant wickedness,” “all that remains of wickedness,” or “overflowing of haughtiness,” depending on your translation. This word doesn’t refer to evil in general so much as it speaks of evil that’s intended to harm others. In both of these words, James uses strong and emphatic language to speak of the abhorrence we should have toward these things. He’s just spoken of sin in one aspect as filthy, loathsome, and detestable. He now speaks even more emphatically, not simply as that which is evil, but evil abounding, overflowing; evil in the highest degree.

The word refers to sins that have their root in wrath and anger, so, Paul urges the followers of Christ in Ephesus, chapter four, verse 31, to “Let all

bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice;" and we find similar appeals in Colossians, chapter three, verse eight, and the first verse of First Peter, chapter two.

The problem, of course, with displaying any of these habits or harboring any of these attitudes is that you're not able to receive the word of truth; and, if you can't receive the word of truth, this conclusion casts doubt on the authenticity of your faith. Ridding oneself of all filthiness and rampant wickedness is a prerequisite of receiving "with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." A mind that's full of sensuality and wickedness doesn't have the capacity or the desire to appreciate the value, understand the worth or usefulness of, or the ability to apply the word of truth.

So, James says, "receive with meekness the implanted word." James sets the attitude that we are to receive the word "with meekness" or "in humility" in stark contrast to the rejection of the word due to wrath and malice. This "implanted word"--the Amplified Version adds "actually rooted in your heart"--that we are to receive is the seed that finds good soil and bears rich fruit, that fruit being the salvation of our souls.

How, then, should we respond to the hearing of the word of truth--the full message of the gospel about why we need forgiveness, how we're saved, and how our lives should be transformed by this word of truth? We humbly receive God's Word, allow it to examine every aspect of our lives, revealing anything that's a hindrance to God's righteousness working in and through us, obey His word, and allowing it to transform your life. It's not settling for merely hearing the truth; James calls us to receive it with humility and put it into practice.

With the words of verses nineteen through 21, James has set the stage for the central theme of his letter: God's Word gives new life and transforms those who humbly receive it. Hearing God's Word is never the destination. It's an invitation to receive His Word, trust it, and live by it. It's not simply information to collect; it's God's means of exposing our hearts, transforming

those who place their trust in Him, and giving us new life. Those who are “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;” understand that “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.” They’ve “put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness in order to keep receiving with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [their] souls.”

We find his application of these truths to real life in verse 22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” Don’t just listen to the gospel--obey it--the message of James in a nutshell.

This was the message of the Lord Jesus as He concluded His Sermon on the Mount. After warning His hearers about false prophets who can be identified by their bad fruit, He says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who **does** the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

And this warning is followed by the familiar comparison in verse 24: “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

The essential, distinguishing characteristic of real, genuine, authentic faith is how we live day-by-day, moment-by-moment. Anything else, however virtuous or upright it may seem--whether avoiding evil or doing good--is useless if it doesn’t produce the evidence of attitudes and behavior consistent with the gospel. Paul tells us in the opening chapters of his letter to the followers of Christ in Rome, chapter two, verse thirteen: “It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be

justified.” True Christianity’s not about believing or knowing the right things; it’s about living a life of righteousness and holiness.

What’s going on in the minds of those who reject James’ wise counsel and exhortation? They’re deceiving themselves. If you’re not a doer, but only a hearer, you’re deluding yourself “by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth” as the Amplified Version reads. If you think that hearing is enough; if you think that showing up for a church service or sitting in a Sunday School class is good enough; that, somehow, you’ll get enough religion through osmosis to get you into heaven; you’re only deceiving yourself.

Some translations read, “**Become** doers of the word,” which is a better rendering. Authentic Christianity is a process--a process that begins at the moment one places his or her faith in Jesus Christ--a process that continues throughout the believer’s life. Those who are becoming doers of the Word consistently pursue a greater understanding of the Word in order to live by it more closely, seek greater fellowship and intimacy with their heavenly Father, long for a clearer vision of His plan for their lives, and take advantage of every opportunity to express their love for the Lord.

One commentator notes that “The Jews have a saying that the man who hears without practicing is like a [farmer] who ploughs and sows, but never reaps.” But James’ illustration is much more descriptive--verse 23: “If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like,” just as in the illustration that began our study today.

This man--or woman--for the word allows for both--I’ll use “his” to speak of both men and women--this person looks attentively at his face in the mirror. The mirror of that day would have been a piece of polished metal. Although the person’s able to recognize himself in the mirror, he goes away, immediately forgetting what he actually looked like.

So how does this apply to becoming doers and not simply hearers of the Word? When we hear the gospel proclaimed in a sermon or when we study the Word of God for ourselves, we find the reflection of ourselves in it--our temptations and weaknesses, our sins and failures, the influences of the Holy Spirit upon us, and the working of His grace.

The question we each need to ask is, "What will I do with what I see about my life reflected in this mirror of the Word of God that pulls back the cover of my self-righteousness, my self-sufficiency, my efforts to make myself righteous in the eyes of God, and my rejection of His plan for my life?" Will that reflection lead to confession of sin, turning away from and ridding myself of a particular habit or attitude or activity, a reordering of the priorities of my life, a return to seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, or some other aspect of becoming in every way a doer of the Word rather than just a hearer? Does our hearing lead us to act or is it just another exercise in appearing to be religious, and the insight that's just been granted to us is just one more wasted experience?"

In the opening verses of chapter twelve of Paul's message to the followers of Christ in Rome, he tells us that authentic believers are to be continuously transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing our minds. It's not enough to walk away from hearing the word of God with a concluding thought. Whenever we encounter the Word of God, His intention is for us to experience a compelling transformation--be it small or great--that more closely conforms us into the image of Christ--not simply hearing the Word but responding by doing what God calls us to do.

So, completely unlike the one who looks into the mirror and forgets what he looks like--verse 25--"The one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." Blessing for the doer, self-deception for the one who only hears.

Now, you may be wondering what “law” James is talking about here. It’s different from how Paul sees the Law. Paul would say that the Law was a yoke of bondage, but he’s speaking about the Law of Moses. James has another law in mind: the law of liberty.

James, a servant, a slave “of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” recognizes that the gospel is the authoritative standard and rule for human conduct as in the command of Jesus in John, chapter fourteen, verse fifteen, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” And this law is perfect in the sense that it completed what the Law of Moses could never accomplish.

This perfection is found in two aspects--freedom “from” and freedom “to.” In Christ, we’re freed **from** the power of sin--we have a freedom we never had before to choose not to sin. We’ve been freed from the penalty of sin, and one day we’ll be free from the very presence of sin. We’ve been freed from our selfish nature. We’ve been freed from fear because--First John chapter four, verse eighteen--“Perfect love casts out all fear.”

We’ve been freed **from** many things and freed **for** many things as well. Galatians, chapter five opens with Paul declaring, “For freedom Christ has set us free.” We’re now free to fulfill the purpose for which we were created, just as Jesus spoke of in His parable of the seed in John, chapter twelve: “Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.” “But,” Jesus went on to say, “if that seed fulfills its created purpose by being buried in the ground, it produces many seeds. The one who loves his own life will lose it, while the one who takes the opposite attitude towards his life, the one who gives away his life, in this life will keep it for eternal life.” In giving yourself away in a growing, deepening relationship with Jesus Christ, you find true freedom. He told the crowds in John, chapter six, verse 36, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Now we walk in that freedom, submitting ourselves to this perfect law of liberty for the freedom it gives. Alexander MacLaren writes, we “are free in

obedience; free from the tyranny of [our] own lusts, passions, inclinations; free from the domination of men and opinion and common customs and personal habits. All those bonds are burnt in the fiery furnace of love into which they pass; and where [we] walk transfigured and at liberty, because [we] keep that law. Freedom comes from the reception into the heart of the life whose motions coincide with the commandments of the gospel. Then the burden that I carry / carries me, and the limits within which I am confined are the merciful fences put up on the edge of the cliff to keep the traveller from falling over and being dashed to pieces [below].”

This law is so perfect, so abundant in the freedom it provides that Augustine said in a sermon on First John, chapter four, “Love, and do what you will ... let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.” The simplified version of that is, “Love God, and live as you please / because the way you are pleased to live is the way that is pleasing to the Lord.”

Here in verse 25, James calls us to two specific activities when it comes to this perfect law of liberty: looking and continuing. The word translated “looking,” is the same word John used to describe the activity of Peter and later, Mary, who stooped down to look into the empty tomb out of a sense of intense interest--John, chapter twenty, verses five and eleven. One word study notes, “In Scripture this action becomes a metaphor for an earnest, humble, and investigative attention to God’s works and words. The physical gesture [of stooping down] underscores an inner disposition--reverence mixed with expectancy--that is essential for receiving revelation.” Looking into this perfect law of liberty isn’t just an occasional glance at it while the pastor’s reading the scripture; it’s a continuous study into the Word of God, allowing it--not merely to inform--but to transform you so “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The one who’s not a forgetful hearer but is a doer of what this law of liberty requires also continues in it. Continuing, abiding, persistent, immersion

and reflective meditation in this law of liberty that we find in the gospel and the words of Jesus negatively guards against forgetting, carelessness, and backsliding and positively develops healthy habits that result in a life marked by both freedom and effective action. It's only through this persistent study and continuous application of the law of Christ that we become real doers of the word.

James then concludes verse 25 by saying it's not the one who hears and forgets who is blessed, but the doer who acts "will be blessed in his doing." Such a person is not blessed "for" what he or she does but "in" what he or she does, just as David wrote in Psalm 19, verse eleven: "By [the Law of the Lord] is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

MacLaren writes, "The rewards of this law are not arbitrarily bestowed, separately from the act of obedience, by the will of the Judge, but the deeds of obedience automatically bring the blessedness. ... There is no delight so deep and true as the delight of doing the will of Him whom we love. There is no blessedness like that of an increasing communion with God, and of the clearer perception of His will and mind which follow obedience as surely as the shadow does the sunshine. There is no blessedness like the glow of approving conscience, the reflection of the smile on Christ's face."

The danger that James warns us about is far more pressing now than it was when he first penned these words. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the Bible is the best-selling book of all time. Translators around the world are even now working to make it available to people groups who have never read the Word of God in their own language. Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, word studies, and workbooks abound. Tragically, however, many study the life of Christ, but far too few follow the life of Christ. One commentator writes, "We pay Him the empty homage of an intellectual interest in His words and works, but we do not [do] the things which He says. We throng and press Him in our curiosity, but we obtain no blessing, because

in all our hearing and learning there is no true wisdom, no fear of the Lord, and no doing of His Word.”

Finally, in the last two verses of this first chapter, James gives us a pop quiz to see if God’s Word has truly taken root in our hearts to the extent that we’re a doer and not a hearer only: “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.”

The person who considers himself to be religious without evidence of carrying out the will of the Lord is the one who practices the external forms of worship. We might say that person comes to church, sings the songs, maybe even reads his Bible or serves on a church committee. Such a person has been exposed to the truth of the gospel and its demand to live by the perfect law of liberty. But it’s all for show. There’s no real substance--no looking into the perfect law of liberty and persevering, being only a hearer who quickly forgets. “This person’s religion,” James bluntly says, “is worthless” because--and this is one example of many that we’ll find later--he doesn’t bridle his tongue.

Our words are often the first place where the condition of our hearts becomes visible. In Matthew, chapter twelve, verse 34, Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” James isn’t calling us to just speak more carefully; he’s exposing the source from which our words flow. A transformed heart produces transformed speech. When our words reveal impatience, gossip, harshness, or anger, the perfect law of liberty is being disregarded, and there’s good reason to question the authenticity of your faith. More on this in chapter three.

The second place where the condition of our hearts becomes visible is how we treat others and how we live lives of holiness in the midst of an unholy world--our duties to others and our duties to ourselves. James will have much more to say about these things later in this letter, but, for now, he tells us in verse 27, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is

this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

The plight of widows and orphans was seen as the most extreme affliction throughout the history of Israel, and we hear the prophets denounce those who fail to care for them as they should. It’s only natural that they find a prominent place in every authentic believer’s circle of compassion and care, but this is only a single example of our Christian duties to others. More on this in the next chapter.

“Keeping oneself unstained from the world” doesn’t mean keeping yourself out of the world, but refusing to allow the things of this world to interfere with your relationship with Jesus Christ and the evidence that you are a child of God, bought with the precious blood of Christ and redeemed to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” --Matthew, chapter five, verse sixteen.

These characteristics, briefly, are the things James says demonstrate “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father.” But--again--much more on that later.

Before we leave, let’s go back to that piece of spinach in your teeth. Once the mirror has shown it to you, you have a choice. You can deal with it, or you can walk away forgetting or pretending you never saw it.

We face a similar choice when we open God’s Word. It shows us what we couldn’t, or maybe didn’t, want to see on our own. It exposes attitudes we’ve overlooked, words we wish we could take back, and motives that aren’t nearly as pure as we imagined.

So, what do we do with what we see? We could close our Bibles and move on. We could hide in shame, defend ourselves, or promise to try harder next time. But none of those responses can bring about the genuine change / James longs for his readers to experience. We need more than an honest reflection. We need Christ.

Jesus is the only one who ever responded perfectly to everything God said. His words were always true, His responses were righteous, and His obedience flowed from perfect love. Yet He willingly took upon himself the judgment our careless words, divided hearts, and empty religion deserved. Through His death and resurrection, He secured our forgiveness and new life, and He gives us a righteousness we could never earn for ourselves.

Because of Christ, we can respond honestly when God's Word exposes our sin. We can agree with what God says, confess what we see, and turn from it without hiding or defending ourselves.

And the Lord Jesus doesn't stop with forgiveness. He gives us His Holy Spirit, who patiently works within us to reshape our hearts and train us to walk in obedience. We don't simply notice what's wrong and then walk away unchanged. By God's grace, we respond to what His Word has shown us and allow Him to shape us more perfectly into the image of Jesus.

God doesn't expose our sin because He wants to push us away. He's graciously showing us what we could not see on our own and drawing us closer to Christ.

A mirror doesn't create the problem--it reveals what's already there. Sometimes we immediately recognize what God is showing us. Other times, we need to slow down and ask better questions. James tells us that God's Word has the power to save and transform. So why do we so often remain unchanged? Because it's possible to hear God's Word without allowing it to reshape the way we live. We listen to sermons. We go to Bible studies. We underline verses. We memorize the right answers. We say the right things. Yet our words, our attitudes, our priorities, and our relationships often remain unchanged.

James confronts that self-deception head-on throughout this letter. He exposes the very real danger of confusing spiritual activity with spiritual vitality and shows us how to align our speech, our thoughts, and our actions

with the law of liberty we find in Christ, in our verses for today and continuing on in the first thirteen verses of chapter two that will be the focus of our lesson next week.

Thank you for walking with me through this challenging message from the brother of our Lord / where we find, not a list of commands with the expectation for us to make it happen on our own. Instead, his words show us how deeply we need the Savior who endured suffering for us, secured our promised life, and now gives us the grace we need to truly follow Him every moment of every day.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Greek Testament - Nicoll, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Exposition of the Entire Bible by John Gill (1746-63), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; ICC New Testament commentary on selected books, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (John Peter Lange) text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Expositions Of Holy Scripture, Alexander MacLaren, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; and The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database, copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc.