

The Belief That Behaves, Part 2

James 1:22-25

59-10

Take your Bible, if you will, tonight for our study of God's Word and let's look together at the first chapter of James. We've been in this chapter for several months, and rightly so. We certainly don't want to hurry past this tremendous profound section of God's Word. We're looking most particularly now at James chapter 1 verses 19 through 27. And we've entitled these verses "Belief that Behaves...Belief that Behaves."

The character of man basically is to be decided by his conduct. I think we're all pretty much aware of that. The scriptural test of true religion is conduct...behavior, how do you live. It is always an infallible test because the heart of every person governs their behavior. Nothing is more certain, Jesus said, than that a good tree would produce good fruit and a corrupt tree would produce corrupt fruit. Nothing is more certain than that a sweet fountain would bring forth sweet water and a bitter fountain would bring forth bitter water. As Proverbs 4:23 says, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." A good heart produces good things, an evil heart produces evil things. And we are all reminded, aren't we, of Matthew chapter 12 verses 33 to 35 where Jesus affirms that to be so and again that very familiar statement, "That as a man thinks in his heart, so is he."

So, the matter of conduct is really the acid test for genuine faith. Who are the friends of Christ, you might ask? And the answer comes from John 15:14, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." Who are those who really love the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer comes from John 14:23, "He that loveth Me keeps My commandments." Somebody might ask, "How does one know that he possesses the life of God? How does he know that he has a saving knowledge of the Lord?" First John 2:3 answers the question, "Hereby do we know that we know Him if we keep His commandments."

The acid test is always conduct, always behavior, how you live. On the other hand, hostility to Christ in the heart will also be manifest in the conduct. John 14:24 says, "He that loves Me not keeps not My sayings." The two go together. The deceived and the deceivers are identified in 1 John 2:4, "He that says he knows Him and keeps not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him."

You see, the line of demarcation between the saint and the sinner is very clear. First John 3:10 says, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest." Here's the dividing line. "He that does not righteousness is not of God." It's not a question of claiming, it's a question of living. Obedience to the Word of God is the most basic spiritual requirement and the common denominator of all true believers. And we know that. That's founded in the Old Testament where God gives His law and says do this and you give evidence of loving Me, do this and you give evidence of knowing Me, do this and you give evidence of being blessed by Me.

That's how it is in life. Those who obey the Word of God give evidence of the life of God in their

souls. Those who disobey the Word of God give evidence of that absence. So the proper response to the Word of God for a true believer is obedience...obedience. I think we're very much aware of that. And that is the heart and soul of this particular passage, most particularly look at verse 22 and let's just capture the heart of it for a moment. "But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." And we'll stop at that point.

That's very basic. Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." And if you're a hearer only, you are deceiving your ownself. About what? About your salvation, about your genuineness, about your authenticity. For it is a mark of an authentic believer, a true believer, genuine faith, true saving faith that the person has a desire to obey the Word of God being more than a hearer, yes even a doer. The proper response is to be a doer.

Now remember what we said in the very beginning of our study of James. James lays out tests of a living faith. And you can take your life, put it up against the book of James, find out whether you're really saved or not. You don't need to be in the dark about that. You don't need to poke around in some speculative analysis. You don't need to wait for some kind of feelings. You can know whether you're redeemed by putting yourself to the tests that James lays out.

First test came in chapter 1 and that was the test of your response to trials. How do you respond to trials? That's an indicator of whether or not you truly believe God. Secondly, how do you respond to temptation? A trial is simply a situation which God brings into your life to strengthen you, to reveal the level of your faith, to wean you away from the world and so forth as we saw. A temptation is a solicitation to evil. How you handle both the trial and how you handle the temptation are indicators of the kind of faith you have, either saving faith or non-saving faith.

And here comes test number three, and maybe the most salient one of all, are you a hearer only or are you a hearer and then a doer because that's the right response. If you can come and hear and hear and hear and hear and never put into practice, you're a hearer only. If you come and hear and the deepest desire of your heart is to do it, that's the indication of the pulsing of the life of God in the soul of man.

Let me take you back to an Old Testament illustration just to set the general picture in your mind. Look to the book of Nehemiah and the eighth chapter. Nehemiah chapter 8, and while you're trying to find Nehemiah for just a moment, I'll give you a little bit of background. The Jews had begun to return from Babylon. You remember that they had been taken into Babylon, into captivity around 600 B.C. There were three deportations. They'd been there over a period of seventy years and then some of them had started to come back. When they had come back from Babylon, back to their city which was in rubble, the first thing they wanted to do was to build the temple. And so they resurrected the temple under the direction of a man named Zerubbabel. The temple was up but the walls of the city were still in disrepair, nothing but rubble and the city was therefore vulnerable to the attack of enemies on the outside.

A man who was a very high up man in the kingdom in the area of Medo-Persia was a man named Nehemiah. He in fact was a cup bearer to the king but he was a Jew and he was burdened about his homeland. And what he wanted to do was go back and help his people build their wall so they could finish off their city. God allowed that man, Nehemiah, to go back, to lead his people in the project. And by his wonderful instruction and his leadership and through the power of the Spirit of God they rebuilt the whole wall of the city of Jerusalem in 52 days and secured their city.

And once this was done, the stage was set because they had seen the hand of God in restoring their people to the land and rebuilding their temple and their city, the stage was set for a spiritual revival. And that spiritual revival begins to take place in chapter 8 of Nehemiah. And it says in verse 1, "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law." This is where revival always begins, it always begins with the same thing, bring the book, the Word of God.

"And Ezra the priest," verse 2 says, "brought the law before the congregation both of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the street that was before the water gate, from the morning until midday, before the men and the women and those who could understand and the ears of all the people." And the implication here is were tuned closely to the book of the law for hours and hours and hours he read the Word of God. And not just read it, but as we see later in the text, he explained it very carefully to them. He did an exposition. This is the first sort of expository sermon you see anywhere in Scripture.

"Ezra the scribe stood on a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose and beside him stood..." and you have a whole list of names that will be on the quiz but will not read them at this time. Verse 5 says, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people. And when he opened it, the all the people stood up." They not only listened all day, they listened standing up. That's why it's my custom, as you know, on the Lord's day morning when we read the Word of God to stand. "And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands," they were slightly charismatic, "and they bowed their heads and they worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." They were also humbled as they heard the Word of God.

And then you will notice they had people assisting in verse 7, who...and the end of verse 7 says, "Caused the people to understand the law." It is not enough to read it, there is the reading and then the explanation of it...the exposition of it which these men assisted Ezra in fulfilling. So, they read in the book in the law of God distinctly and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading. And so the Word was read and the Word was explicated in order that they might understand. And, of course, we see that the response, verse 9, "The day is holy to the Lord your God, mourn not nor weep." And that introduces us to the fact that when they heard the Word of God read, it convicted them of...what?...of sin. And so they began to mourn and they began to weep when they heard the words of the law. And confession has a place because later on if you'll notice chapter 9, "And the twenty and fourth day of this month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, sack cloth and dirt on them and the seat of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers and they stood up in their place and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God in one fourth part of the day and another fourth part they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God."

Listen, confession is part of revival. The preaching of the Word of God, the exposition of the Word of God penetrates the sins of the heart and elicits confession of sin. And that's very important. So the first response to the Word of God was confession.

The second one was celebration. Go back with me for a moment to verse 10 of chapter 8. There it says, "He said to them, Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy unto our Lord, neither be ye grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength. And the Levites then stilled all the people saying, Hold your peace, the day is holy,

neither be you grieved. And all the people went their way to eat and drink and send portions and make mirth because they had understood the words that were declared to them." There was not only a message in the Word of God about sin, but there was a message in the Word of God about forgiveness. And so there was that mixture of sorrow over sin and celebration because of forgiveness.

We find in chapter 9 a third important element, a very important element. Not only the element of confession and the element of celebration, but may I suggest to you that upon hearing the Word of God...one, we should confess our sin; two, we should celebrate the provision for that sin; three, let's use the word covenant. There is a confession, there is a celebration and there is a covenant, as well. Chapter 9 and verse 38, "And because of all this, we make a sure promise—or covenant is implied—a true and sure promise to God and we write it, and our princes and Levites and priests all seal it." And it even lists in chapter 10 the names of everybody who affirmed that the people had made a covenant.

And what was the covenant? Verse 28 chapter 10 and thereafter all those names it says, "And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims and all they who had separated themselves from the people of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, everyone having knowledge and having understanding, they did cleave to their brethren, their nobles. They entered into a curse. They entered into an oath to walk in God's law which was given by Moses, the servant of God and to observe and to do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and His ordinances and His statutes." That's covenant.

The Word of God elicited confession. It elicited celebration. And most significantly and most importantly of all, it elicited a covenant of obedience. And they made a vow which involved a curse should they disobey, a promise to God to do what the Word told them to do. Now that's a proper response to the Word of God. Confession, that's part of it; celebration, that's part of it; covenant, that's the fulfillment of it.

Now turn over to the New Testament for a moment to Luke 6, one more passage before we look specifically at James 1. Jesus affirms this very same necessity in Luke 6:46, and Jesus puts it as point blank as it possible could be put. He says in verse 46, "And why do you call Me Lord, Lord and...what?...do not the things which I say?" Why would you do that? Why would you affirm that I am your Lord and not make a covenant of obedience? "Whosoever comes to Me and hears My sayings and does them, I'll show you to whom he is like. He's like a man who built a house and dug deep and laid the foundation on a rock. And when a flood arose, a stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that hears and does not is like a man that without a foundation built a house on the earth against which the stream did beat vehemently and immediately it fell and the ruin of that house was great."

You try to construct a religious house on anything else but obedience to the Word of God and the effort is folly. That's the bottom line, people. Boy, you know, I remember growing up in a church and I remember hearing so many formulas about the Christian life. And I frankly admit to you that I tried a lot of those things. I remember going to a camp as a kid and figuring if I could throw a pine cone in the fire that would be the turning point of my spiritual life. And some speaker would get up and, man, he would really lay it on me and he would be good and he would be funny and he would be moving in his communication, he would make me feel bad about my sin and "wouldn't you like to commit your life to Christ...if you really want to turn your life around and start all over and live for God, throw

this stick in the fire." I threw a lot of sticks in a lot of fires and that was never the issue, never.

And I remember somebody would come along and they'd give me a little book, and said, "This little book will tell you how to be totally committed to God." And I'd get that little book and I'd read that little formula and I'd pray that little prayer and I didn't see any major change. It took me a long time admittedly to find out that the bottom line in the spiritual life is not some momentary commitment, the bottom line in the spiritual life is some long-term obedience. That's it. There needs to be a covenant point where I covenant to be obedient to the Word of God. And as I do my very best in the energy of the Spirit to live out that covenant, I therefore manifest my genuine salvation. If you don't sense that in your heart, you may have been convicted of your sin, you may have even wanted to reach out and grab the forgiveness God provides, but if the deepest and truest longing of your heart is not to covenant to obey the living God, then the thing you think is saving faith is something less and you are deceived.

Now let's go back to James 1. A hearer who is not a doer is deceived...he is deceived. Scripture becomes the focal point in this whole section, by the way, in James. Back in verse 18 we were begotten with the Word of truth. We were begotten with that. We know that, verse 19 says, this you know...you know the Word of God gave you new life and the Word of God then becomes the focal point of that new life and you continue to do the Word of God. How you respond to the Word of God, how I respond to the Word of God then is indicative of our spiritual state.

Now, keep in mind James makes two major points here. We looked at the last one last Lord's day and we'll look at the...the first one last Lord's day, we'll look at the second this evening. First of all, James says, true saving faith is demonstrated by a proper...watch this word...reception of the Word...reception. In other words, you receive it with the right attitude and that has three elements. You remember from last time? You remember verse 19? "My beloved brothers, let every man be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to wrath." And we pointed out that that's not talking about general spiritual attitudes, that's in relation to the Word of God. We are to be quick for the listening, the Greek says, quick for the listening to the Word, slow for the speaking of the Word, eager to learn and not so eager to teach, be careful about rushing into teaching, that's a great responsibility. And slow to be angry in resisting the Word. All of that is wrapped around the Word of God.

We said then the first point James makes is a proper reception of the Word means you're willing to receive the Word with submission...with submission. Quick to listen, slow to speak it and not angry when it confronts your sin.

A fellow came by the line this morning after church and greeted me and said, "I have to confess that you were describing me last Sunday night. I've been angry with you and God and the Word many times when you've confronted my sin." That's not an uncommon kind of anger. So the righteousness of God, he says, verse 20, is not produced by rebelling against what the Word says but by submitting to what it says. A life that quickly listens to the Word, slowly and almost reluctantly speaks the Word, not wanting to rush into things that are sacred and does not rebel, that's a submissive attitude.

The second part of this proper reception of the Word is to receive the Word not only with submission but with purity, verse 21, putting away all filthiness and the abundance of wickedness. If you're to be a proper soil in which the seed can flourish, the mass of filthy sin and evil motive and intent has to be put off.

Thirdly we noted that a proper reception of the Word involves willingness to receive the Word with humility. Again verse 21, we are to receive with meekness, teachableness is probably the best translation of *prautes*, the implanted Word because of its power to save your souls.

So, proper reception, and we went into that in detail last time. Now let's go to the second point from verses 22 to 27, this is so wonderful. Not only...now mark this...are we to have a proper reception of the Word but a proper reaction to the Word...a proper reaction. It is to set us into motion. And this is introduced by the very famous line in verse 22 which we just read, "But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." The word "but" is important, very important. It's wonderful to hear, it's wonderful to hear with submission, it's wonderful to hear with purity, it's wonderful to hear with humility, but it is not enough to hear. You have to go one step further and that is to do. It must be obeyed in life. So he commands here "be ye doers." Literally in the present imperative sense the verb would indicate "be ye continually doers, keep on striving to be doers of the Word."

This isn't anything new to the Jewish readers to whom James writes, the twelve tribes as he says in chapter 1 verse 1, scattered abroad. They knew this. The rabbis even said, and I'm quoting from some of their own rabbis, "You ought not only to read the laws of Moses but rather to practice what they command you." They also said, "Not the expounding of the law is the chief thing, but the doing of it."

This is obvious, isn't it? I mean, I'm probably taking ice to Eskimos. You have more of this than you need, you know that. But it's something that has to be emphasized. And I guess from a standpoint of a pastor in a church like this, the greatest fear I have is that you who hear so much would do so little...almost substituting the hearing for the doing. Sometimes when there's a famine of hearing, when you hear something profound and rich and true, you grasp on to that one single thing you've heard and try your best to put it into life that you might know the blessing of God, but where you're literally drowning in profundity, as it were, and drowning in the richness of the Word of God you tend to treat it as if it was nothing more than sand instead of the gold that it really is. And maybe because you have so many opportunities to hear and apply, the application part slips by time after time after time.

You say, "Do true believers put the Word into practice?" Yes. "Do true believers always put the Word into practice?" No or a pastor's task would be relatively simple. But even when they don't, it's the desire of their heart that they would and they should and they recognize their failure. Be doers.

As I said, the Jews were not unfamiliar with this. Many of the Jews were like many Christians today, they attended the reading of the Word, they...and the idea of the reading of the Word embraces the whole of the exposition of it...they attended the reading and exposition of the Word and they did absolutely nothing about it. No more classic illustration than that could be found than the Jews of the time of our Lord Jesus. But he says it's not enough. It is not enough. And I don't know how to get the message across any other way than just to say this is what God says, this isn't me. You're to be a doer of it. How many times can you hear and never apply what you hear?

Now the word "doers" is very interesting. Why does he do that? Why does he use a substantive instead of saying "do the Word"? Why does he say "be ye doers"? Because the word "doer" carries

with it a characterization of a whole personality. It's one thing to fight in a war, it's something else to be soldier. It's one thing to build a house, it's something else to be a builder. You understand that. It's one thing to teach somebody, it's something else to be a teacher. That's a whole life characterization. And we are to be characteristically doers...oh, he's a doer of the Word by life habit.

By the way, it's a favorite word of James. He uses it three times in this section and once over in chapter 4, I think it's around verse 11. Yes, a doer of the law. Robert Johnston says, "This is a person whose life is characterized by holy energy...holy energy." A doer...a doer and not just a hearer. As we saw in verses 19 to 21, hearing is important.

I want you to notice the word "hearer" here in verse 22..."not hearers only." That Greek word is the ancient term for auditors. Have you ever gone to school and audited a class? That means you listen but you don't do any of the work. Boy, we have an awful lot of spiritual auditors. I want to audit church. I certainly don't want to get involved, I just want to audit. And I guess one of the great fears that I have is that we have folks who do that at Grace. Oh, they come all smiles, you know. They try to maintain their sanctification while parking their car and getting from the lot to the building...a very difficult task here on Sunday morning. Maybe they make it. They come in, they audit the sermon...very interesting, we liked it, it's nice, we feel religious. Gone. No change in life. They sit. They listen. They have the privilege to hear. They want no commitment to do the work.

There are people who come, they hear the Word of God, they hear the exposition of the Word of God, nothing changes. May I suggest to you that hearing is not an end in itself, it's a means to an end and the end is obedience? And if you just come and hear and nothing changes in your life and you think yourself to be religious and you think yourself to trust in God and to have saving faith, you are...what?...deceived. The test of living saving faith is willingness to receive the Word and apply it in life. And just as there were three elements to hearing it, submission, purity being the first two and then the element of teachableness or meekness or humility, there are also three elements here in doing it.

The first one, we are to apply the Word without deception...without deception. He says, "If you are doers of the Word, you're on target. If you are hearers only, you are self-deceived." The old Scottish phrase spoke of "sermon tasters who never tasted the grace of God." They only tasted sermons, not that the Lord is gracious. Any response to the Word of truth other than obedience is merely a deception. Sentimental admiration of the preacher, enjoyment of the mental stimulation, good feelings about the emotional exhilaration of discovering truth are all merely deceptions...if nothing happens in your life. And Satan would love to make you content with that so you think yourself to be religious.

The word "deceiving" here, deceiving your ownself, *paralogizomai* is a kind of an interesting word. It means to reason beside, or alongside. We might even say it means to be beside yourself. But the mathematical use of this word when it appears in mathematical terminology outside Scripture means to miscalculate...to reckon wrongly. Listen, if you think just hearing is enough and not applying it, you have made a gross miscalculation. You are self-deceived through fallacious reasoning. You're beside yourself. You've misconstrued true godliness. Robert Johnstone, a commentator of another century writes a very interesting and insightful paragraph. He says, "Knowing that the study of divine truth through reading the Bible, giving attendance on the public ordinances of grace and otherwise is a most important duty is indeed the road leading toward the gate of everlasting life. Some allow themselves through man's natural aversion to genuine spirituality to be persuaded by the wicked one

that this is the sum of all Christian duty and is itself the gate of life so that in mere hearing they enter in and all is well with them. To rest satisfied," he says, "with the means of grace without yielding up our hearts to their power so as to receive the grace and exhibit its working in our lives is manifestly folly of the same class as that of a workman who should content himself with possessing tools without using them, madness of the same class as that of a man perishing with hunger who should exalt in having bread in his hands without eating it. But folly and madness as immeasurably greater than these as the work of God transcends an importance the work of an earthly craftsman and life with Christ in God the perishable bread of earth."

We would say a person was stupid to die of hunger with bread in his hands. A person was stupid to have tools and do no work. And just so foolish as one who hears and does not do. It is a deception.

Now in order to explain this deception, James develops a very graphic analogy...just a marvelous analogy. I want you to follow this analogy, verse 23. Here's his analogy to identify for us in a work picture what he means. "For," he says and that could better be translated because...here's his point...doers of the Word, fine...hearers only are self-deceived, "Because..." and he launches into his analogy. "If anyone...and that's a generic reference, it's generally true, it's true across the board...if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer," in other words, he takes the deceitful route, the self-deceiving route, "he is like," and he launches right into his analogy. He identifies the subject of his analogy, who is it? It's the hearer who is not a doer. This is his subject. He's going to give us a word picture, an analogy, a graphic illustration of someone who hears and doesn't do. He is like a man beholding.

By the way, that word "beholding" is a forceful word. It means to look carefully, to observe carefully. It doesn't mean to take a casual glance. Some commentators have suggested that. That is not what the word means. *Katanoeo* means to look carefully, cautiously, observantly. He looks very carefully at...what?...well, he's like a man looking into a mirror and seeing his natural face. This is his picture. It's interesting terminology. His natural face literally in the Greek is the face of his birth...the face of his genesis, his natural face. And he looks in a mirror and sees his face. This is very, very primitive in terms of mirrors and they were usually made of polished bronze beaten flat, polished to a high gloss. And if you looked long enough and moved it around a little bit so that the little bubbles and things were shifted away from what you were trying to see, you'd get a pretty good image of yourself. Copper/tin mixture used to make that polished bronze, sometimes the mirrors were made out of silver and sometimes, for very wealthy folks, they were even made out of gold. But they would take this metal mirror, it was admittedly an imperfect reflection, much as is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 13:12 when the same picture is used there. But if you looked long enough and cautiously and accurately, you could get a pretty good idea of what you saw.

So, he says the person who hears and doesn't do is like a person who looks in a mirror and sees the face of his birth, just his natural face. Verse 24, he sees himself, again he uses the same verb here exactly, and then he goes away, or literally in the Greek text this is a perfect tense between two what we call gnomic aorist, for you Greek students, the perfect tense, he has gone away. He looks and he leaves. And with a mirror no longer in front of him, immediately he...what?...he forgets what kind of man he was. He forgets what he saw.

Have you ever had that happen? I've showed up at work here at the church sometimes and I've been sitting at my desk and scratched my lip and thought..."What is...I didn't shave." So I go in the bathroom and realized I just didn't shave here or I didn't shave here. And what happened was I was

doing it all but the phone rang. Ever had that experience? Or maybe you've showed up at work with shaving cream behind your ear because your wife called you for breakfast before you could get your whole act together. And there are some other worse scenarios that we won't go into that are possible when you get interrupted and you're not quite where you ought to be and you go away and you forget. Or maybe there's something you really wanted to correct, ladies, when you're getting all that stuff on to make people think you're other than who you really are, and somehow along the way...and I'm not saying that you don't need it...I don't want to get into this, but anyway....you get off in your world of busyness and the kids distract you and pretty soon you're out of the house and you meet somebody face to face and they keep looking at you strangely and you realize that something went vertical that was intended to go horizontal, or whatever. But we look for a moment, we go away and we forget what we saw, it passes.

The point is this, if you don't do something on the spot when you see what needs to be done, you'll get busy in life and you'll forget that anything needs to be done at all. You see, that's the point. You've got to do it while you see it. Can you feel where this analogy's going? And I'm telling you something, every preacher in the world knows this. You...Sunday's sermon is gone, folks, Monday. I hate to say that, it's very painful. Maybe it lasts a little bit into the week but it doesn't take long and you're gone from the mirror. And if you didn't fix it while you saw it, you may never fix it. You forget. You might show up in a very important place with your hair uncombed...something goofed up somewhere. You just didn't stay around the mirror long enough and you didn't adjust it when you were looking at it.

Verse 25 clarifies the analogy by contrasting the other person. The hearer only is the guy who comes to the mirror, or the Word of God, it shows him his sin, it shows him his ugliness, it shows him his blemishes, it shows him what's wrong in his life and it demands because he sees it and recognizes it that he do something about it but he gets distracted, he's gone, he's back into the world, he forgets what he saw and it never gets adjusted. That's the hearer only.

Contrast with that verse 25, "Whosoever looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it...not being a forgetful hearer, but a what?...a what?...a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Here's the contrast. Here's one who has looked, and this is a different word for looked, not "kataneo," this is a word "parakupto," it literally means to stoop over, to bend down to examine something with care and precision. Here is a person who really gets into it and really searches it out, the stooping implies even a humbling of oneself, looking intently with great desire and effort at the mirror, wanting to discern what is revealed.

Can I tell you something? Your attitude when you come to the hearing of the Word of God may be the key to everything. That's right. Do you prepare your heart when you come to the Lord's Word by saying, "God, I want to look in the mirror and I want to see exactly what my...my natural face looks like, I want to see all the blemishes and the blotches and all the places that need repair and, Lord God, I come with a heart that says show me where the problem is so I can see it changed," is that your attitude? Or, is your attitude, "I hope John's interesting again, he sure talks a long time and if he's not interesting it's a long time not to be interesting?" What's your attitude? Do you humble yourself and stoop over and look closely into the Word of God and you're not so concerned with the homiletics, you're not so concerned with the stories, you're not so concerned with the histrionics and the theatrics of what's going on around you but what you are concerned about is that God's Holy Spirit would use the Word of God as a mirror to show you where you failed so that you on the spot while you're still looking can cry out to God and covenant in your own heart to make it right? That's

the right spirit because when you get away from it, what's going to happen? You become captive to all the distractions of life, the mirror's gone, you forget what you look like and you go on in the same way. Now if that's the typical pattern of your life, there's good reason to believe you're not saved.

But on the other hand, those of us who are Christians sometimes are like that in our response to God's Word, aren't we? So suddenly James gives us the imperative key to the analogy and he says the one who bends over, stoops down, looks closely into, and I love this phrase, the perfect law of liberty...what's that? What's the only perfect law ever given? The Word of God. What is the source of all of our liberty? The Word of God that frees us from every bondage. And when you look in it...and here's the key...and you continue in it...it's called the law because it's the authoritative instruction from God. God's Word is called the law in the Old Testament, God's Word is called the law in the New Testament. It is the law of the Lord, a binding behavioral code that is obligatory. May I hasten to say to you because there is grace for sin does not mean that there is no law? Because there is forgiveness when we break it doesn't mean there is no law. There is a moral law that God wants us to obey. Jesus came to fulfill that law, not to set it aside, He says in Matthew 5:17 to 20. It is a perfect law. It's complete. It's sufficient. It's comprehensive. It utterly represents the revelation of the mind of God. It utterly represents the revelation of His will for mankind. It is everything we need. It is consummate, it is flawless, it is without error, it will meet every need, touch every part of life, fulfill every desire of every true heart. It is the law of God. And as we look into that law, it liberates us, I love that. The law of liberty. What a conundrum, what a paradox, how can a law be liberty? But it is the Word of God that liberates us. Law we think of as bondage, but law is not bondage. It is the law of freedom. It is the law of liberty. Why? Because it frees us from sin's bondage and sin's slavery.

And when you look into the Word of God, he says, and continue...oh, I love that. What is the implication? He keeps looking, a persevering learner. He doesn't forget his state. He looks intimately at the revelation of his sinful ugliness. He sees all that is wrong in his life and all that is unpleasing to God and he wants to throw it off and get rid of it. That's the kind of...that's the kind of character that marks a true believer.

You know, a serious obstacle, I guess, to salvation is man's natural aversion to serious spiritual thought. People just don't want to get serious about it. They don't want to look at themselves. They don't want to be honest in their self-examination...fear, pride, foolishness causes people to be detracted from that. But for the one who really knows the Lord there ought to be a longing to see himself as he is. I don't know how you feel about it but I want to keep moving along to be more like Christ, don't you? And whatever blemishes the Word of God reveals in my life, you know, I...there's almost a legitimate...don't misunderstand me...there's almost a legitimate spiritual sadism that we have to have. In other words, I rush to the Word of God and say, "God, beat me up, show me how ugly I am, show me where my failures are, show me where the ugliness of sin is so having seen it I can...I can come to You for the cure."

So, this one looks and he bends over and he stoops down and he sees it as a liberating law, not a bondage. And so he continues there and he is not a forgetful hearer. Maybe he goes home and he takes the passage that's been taught and before he goes to sleep he reads it again, or every day he goes over it again and he keeps crying out, "God, change my life...God, change.." Can you imagine what would happen if people began to live like that? Boy, we think we've done our spiritual duty if we've listened. Not hardly.

How much of the Word of God do you continue and continue and continue to look into until it tells

you who you are and where you are, until it opens up all the sore spots of life and then you call on God to make those things right? But the one who does that is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work...a doer of the Word in verse 23 is the idea and a doer of the work in verse 25. The Christian sees things as they really are and his will is brought into union with God's will so he loves to do what the Bible commands to be done.

And verse 25 ends with this great statement, "This man shall be blessed in his deed." You know what that means? The blessing is not in the hearing, the blessing is in the...what?...the doing. The deed and the doing are the same. The blessing is in the doing. Do you remember Joshua said this, chapter 1 verse 8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success." You want a prosperous way, a blessed way, a successful way, you stick with the Word, you stick with the Word, you hear it, you look in it, you meditate on it day and night and then it begins to change your life as it shows you yourself. And you want to know something wonderful? The hearer and the doer finds that the obligation of the law of God is a yoke, as Jesus said, that is easy and a burden that is light.

Can I draw this together with these words? Listen. The hearer and the doer...listen carefully...they're similar in several ways. They look at the law of God, they listen, they are intent in their observation to some degree, they're both there. They're hearing. They're looking. They're seeing the problems in their life. The difference is, one on the spot, covenant with God to be obedient...the other leaves with no such covenant. In fact, maybe felt a feeling a little bit like he was violated or intruded on, a little rebellious.

I remember as a kid I had a great lesson. There was a little evangelist from Scotland by the name of Billy Straken and I invited him to come and speak at a college group that I was ministering to. And he spoke and he had some things to say that kind of touched my own heart. And afterwards I went up to him and I wasn't trying to be just offering him platitudes, I wasn't trying to be just gracious, but I said to him, "I want you to know that what you said ministered to me and I'm very appreciative." I'll never forget what he said...very abruptly looked at me in the eye and said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" and walked away.

Well, for many years I didn't like him. I thought to myself..."Give me a little common courtesy, will ya? I mean, I'm just trying to be nice." But it stuck in my mind. I don't remember a lot of conversations, I remember that one. "What are you going to do about it?" Could I be so bold as to suggest to you that I have every right to say to you when I teach the Word of God, "What are you going to do about it?" Not for my sake, for your sake and for His sake who gave you His Word. The doer puts it into practice...puts it into living. You see growth, you see progress, that's true faith at work. It safeguards. It expresses. It empowers the life. It's more than a momentary experience...the application of truth that changes an entire life. So, he says when you receive the Word, receive it without deception, receive it without deception put into action.

There are two other elements, but we're going to have to save those for next time...equally as important. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the instruction that we have gained through Your Word in this wonderful passage. And, Father, we thank You for wholly obedience that has respect for all Your commands, not just some of them, that embraces all Your precepts out of love for You and desire to honor You

and be blessed. Thank You for that wholly obedience that is habitual, that longs with the depth of the heart to do what is right. Make us doers, Lord, who have heard so much. O how much we have heard...how rich we are. Lord, save us from the disastrous sin of disregarding divine truth. For some, Lord, who have been content to hear and never apply, never obey, who thinking themselves religious are deceived and damned to eternal hell. For others of us as Christians who have begun to cultivate habits of ignoring Your word, looking in the mirror and just like a self-deceived unbeliever walking away as if nothing was required, God, teach us to apply Your Word that we may be blessed. Help us to know, Lord, that You do not withhold from us any good thing but we take ourselves out of the place of blessing when we refuse to apply the Word. Help us, Lord, with eagerness, with swift feet to run to put Your Word into action rather than deceiving ourselves that we are secure in what we know even though it never shows up in how we live.

While your heads are bowed as we close tonight the message portion of our service, would you just spend a moment in prayer before the Lord? Offer Him your own heart and covenant as those Jews of old that you will obey His Word. They stood all day and listened to it being read. They confessed their sin, they celebrated forgiveness but most of all they entered into an oath to walk in God's law and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and His ordinances and His statutes. Would you do that in your heart? Make that covenant to apply what you hear when you hear it before you leave the mirror of the Word and forget what you see.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).