

***“Doers of the Word”***

May 13, 2012

Text: James 1:22-25

**A retiring college president was offering some friendly advice  
to his incoming successor at a retirement party.**

He said, “Treat your ‘A students’ well. After they graduate, one  
of them might return to become a great science professor.

“But treat your ‘B students’ even better, because after they  
graduate, they might make a fortune & build you a  
whole new science wing.”

Sometimes “B students” succeed handsomely by taking a little bit  
of knowledge & effectively applying it to real life.

**The subject of today’s text in James 1 is being a doer—  
not just a hearer—of the Word.**

Being a person who doesn’t simply know the truth, but actively  
applies it.

A doer of the Word hears the Gospel and believes;

When he hears what the Bible teaches about sin/repentance,  
he truly/sincerely repents of his sin.

Someone might know that there is a feast being served nearby,  
hold an invitation to the feast in his hand, & still go hungry,  
because he fails to act on that information.

The pilot of an airliner can know there is turbulence  
directly ahead, but unless he acts on that knowledge,  
he’s likely to have some very shaken/upset  
passengers when he lands.

James is going to go even further, telling us that those who don't apply the biblical truth they know, are really deluded/self-deceived.

**James 1:22-25 commands us to be “doers” of the Word, not just “hearers” of it, then it explains exactly what these terms mean...**

**\* The Command: Be Doers, not Mere Hearers**

**[James 1:22]=>** *“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely [only] hearers who delude themselves.”*

**James could have said simply, “Do the Word,” which would have put the focus on our obeying the Bible.**

But instead, he went to the heart of the issue—our character.

He told us what to become=> “doers,” the kind of people who will always faithfully submit to the Word, by doing it.

James reinforces the positive command, by adding a matching negative one=> Don't be people who only hear the Word, w/o doing it.

They hear it either preached/taught, but they deal w/ it like auditors in a class, w/ no sense of accountability.

In fact, “*hearers*” was a common term among the Gks for people who attended a teacher's lectures w/o actually becoming his disciples.

**“*Hearers*” of the Word listen to it being taught (which is good & necessary), but they don't try to live it out.**

For them, hearing Scripture taught is enough—an end in itself,  
not a means to living a more holy/God-glorifying life.

As they sit in church, they're really just trying to decide  
whether/not to agree with what the preacher says, not how  
they should respond to what the Bible says.

They may be familiar w/ certain Scripture texts, and  
consider themselves quite spiritual for that reason.

But when it's all said/done, they don't live out the Word.

They'll walk away at the end of the service w/o giving a  
moment's thought to actually implementing what  
they've heard from the Bible, in their own lives.

They're connoisseurs & taste-testers of religious ideas;  
Not hungry children earnestly seeking the bread of  
life.

Most of the people in any church on any Sunday are “auditors”  
who are willing to listen politely to a sermon.

But they have no intention whatever, of allowing it to alter  
their lives, in any but the most superficial of ways.

**James says that “hearers” like this are deluded &  
self-deceived, because of faulty reasoning.**

They've persuaded themselves that the most God requires of  
them, is to listen attentively to the preacher's sermon.

They may respect the Bible, reverence it, and even read it  
throughout the week, but they give little/no thought

to actually obeying it, because in reality, they don't take God's Word seriously.

It has always been this way among God's people.

James encountered it, Jesus encountered it among the Jews of His own day, preachers for thousands of years have encountered it, & we still encounter it today.

As far as I can see, it is—& always has been—the norm. These folks even include regular church-goers, who would not stay home on Sunday, or miss out on the teaching of the Word, w/o an urgent reason for doing so.

They don't believe that going to church saves anyone, but they'd feel uneasy about not going.

They deceive themselves into thinking that merely hearing the Word (w/o applying it) makes them/their-families better people, as if by osmosis.

**In essence, James is saying to us=> Don't do that!**

Take whatever is said that accurately/faithfully explains the words of Scripture, and choose to act on it obediently.

**There are some wonderful benefits that result from becoming doers of the Word=>**

1) Those who both hear/do the Word are wise people, & they will enjoy the stability/security/blessings of godly wisdom.

Mt 7 (Jesus)=> *“Everyone who **hears** these words of Mine, and **acts upon them**, may be compared to a **wise man**, who built his house upon the rock. / And the rain descended, & the floods came, and the winds blew, & burst against that house; & yet it did not fall,*

*for it had been founded upon the rock. / And everyone who **hears** these words of Mine, & **does not act** upon them, will be like a **foolish** man, who built his house upon the sand. / And the rain descended, & the floods came, & the winds blew, and burst against that house; & it fell, & great was its fall” (Mt 7:24-27).*

Notice that the “*foolish man*” is not the one who has not heard Jesus’ words, but the one who has heard them, but has simply not applied/acted-upon them.

2) There’s also another benefit of both hearing/doing the Word=>

Faithfulness to apply the truth gives a believer confidence in his own salvation.

Rom 2:13=> “*Not the **hearers** of the Law are **just** before God, but the **doers** of the Law will be **justified**.*”

Confidence that we are truly born-again/justified comes not from our knowledge of God’s Word, but from our obeying it.

There are unsaved professors in liberal seminaries all over the world, who prob. know more about the Bible than you/me, but it has little/no effect on how they live their own lives at all.

Satan loves people who profess X but live un-Xn lives, because they delude themselves that they’re saved, when they’re really not.

If they really believed the Word, they’d know the lack of consistency between their lives & God’s Word is strong evidence that they really aren’t born again.

That's why Jesus said few enter the narrow gate to life, but

*“The way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it,”* (the vast majority,

who are “hearers only”).

**Now, having commanded us to be doers of the Word, not merely hearers, James will explain the difference between the two.**

**\* Explanation #1: What It Means to Be a Mere Hearer**

(or better=> How not to be one).

**[Verses 23-24]=>** *“For [here's the explanation] 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; /for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”*

**They actually had mirrors in James' day—hand mirrors made of polished bronze, or occasionally even silver/gold.**

The picture here is of a man looking attentively into a mirror, scrutinizing every detail of his face & outward appearance.

The word “*look at*” in both verses has a prepositional prefix which intensifies its meaning.

So the man is carefully studying the image in the mirror, prob. shifting from side-to-side to compensate for the mirror's distortion due to its imperfections, in order to discern what he really looks like.

**The “mere-hearer” is like this too=> His peering into the Bible (God’s mirror for the soul) isn’t just a quick glance.**

This pres. part. means he looks, and looks, and keeps on looking.

He might adjust his outward appearance, in order to give others a better impression of his Xn life.

This “hearer” may even be profoundly moved by what he discovers about himself in the Word, but his heart isn’t prepared to receive it.

It may even cause him to feel deeply grieved about his sin.

It surprises him by showing him his own heart as only he knows it to be, so that he can say like the adulterous woman at the well, *“Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done”* (Jn 4:29).

But in this case, it’s “Come see a Scripture that told me all...”

**But a “mere-hearer” is what he is, because he then goes away and immediately forgets what kind of person the mirror revealed him to be, so all that careful looking was wasted.**

This person sees his sin & his need for X, then drops the matter.

He doesn’t repent or confess his sins to Jesus, so ultimately there’s no change in his life.

Having heard the sermon, or read the Scripture text, he just goes away and quickly gets involved in other things, forgetting his initial impression/thoughts/feelings.

His conscience may have bothered him while he was looking into the Word, but it soon quiets down too, as he goes back to his old complacent self.

At times you'll teach a "mere-hearer" a biblical truth that you know is exactly what he/she needs to hear/understand. He may say something like, "Wow, that's profound!" You'll go away thinking there's been a significant break-through.

Then soon afterward you'll discover he has completely forgotten it, & there's been no change at all in his life.

May the Lord be gracious to us, if He reveals to us through His Word that something is amiss in our souls, and needs to be confessed & repented-of and corrected.

May He bring our hearts down, bowing humbly before the cross of X, seeking to get things right in our lives.

**A "mere-hearer" deceives himself in several ways=>**

- \* E.g. by busying himself, to systematically crowd out any disturbing feelings that were caused by the Word.
- \* Or by deceiving himself to think that understanding of Scripture & his sin, is all God asks, so no further action is needed.



- \* Or by deceiving himself that the truths of God's Word apply to real sinners, but not to a basically good person like him.
- \* Or by persuading himself that feeling bad about what he heard & saw in the Word is punishment enough to make up for his faults.

He believes he has beaten-up on himself quite enough, and that should be the end of it.

This serves as an unfortunate preventative that keeps him from truly repenting of the sins he has discovered.

The healthiest reaction, would be for him to feel such deep sorrow, that it leads him to true repentance.

In 2 Cor 7:9, Paul wrote to the Corinthians=> *"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of **repentance**; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us."*

**If you hear the Word preached/taught & the HS opens your eyes to your own soul, do something to keep them open.**

Last week's text taught us to prepare our hearts beforehand to receive God's Word through teachability/equanimity/purity/humility.

Now we need to learn how to react properly afterward, so that when the Word does its piercing work on our hearts, we respond the right way—becoming doers, not just hearers. And one of the best things we can do is to take the Word home with us.

On the way home replace idle chitchat w/ a family discussion about today's text and how it spoke to your heart.

Take the text apart when you get home, letting it do its work as deeply as possible within you, by continuing to meditate on it, and seeking the Spirit's help in applying it to yourself.

Get the CD of this sermon and listen to it again.

You'll get things out of it the 2<sup>nd</sup> time that you missed the 1<sup>st</sup> time.

People have told me that on several occasions.

We need to do whatever we can, to resist walking-away, forgetting the truths that have stirred our hearts, and merely getting on with our normal lives, unaffected.

**\* Explanation #2: What It Means to Be a Doer of the Word**

[Verse 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 shall be blessed in what he does."*

**The man in verse 24 was looking carefully into the mirror, but this man in verse 25 is even more intent on doing so.**

The actual wording is that he "looks down at" (lit. "down into") the perfect law of liberty.

It's as if he lays the hand mirror on a table, & peers down into it, as deeply as he can.

This is the analogy James uses of a person who looks into

*“the perfect law, the law of liberty”* w/ an intense & penetrating gaze, to see the condition of his own soul. He is highly motivated to see himself as he really is, to see himself as God sees him—through “the perfect law of liberty”=> the whole Bible, but esp. God commands w/i the Bible.

God has used the circumstances in his life to squeeze out of him any religious game-playing, & he’s now in dead earnest. He is like the Israelites who, having seen God’s power, listened to Moses read them God’s commands, and then answered=> *“All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!”* (Ex 24:7).

He’s like David crying out in prayer=> *“Search me, O God, & know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way”* (Psa 139:23-24).

**As this individual in James 1 peers deeply into the perfect law of God to see himself, the law shows him (w/ surprising accuracy/clarity) who/what he really is.**

It shows him how disturbingly short he falls of God’s standard—God’s own perfection.

He’s like Isaiah standing before God Himself in heaven, crying=>

*“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of*

*hosts*” (and here I stand before the almighty God of angelic armies, with dirty lips the offend Him— Isa 6:5).

He’s hungering/thirsting for righteousness, but the Law shows him nothing but his own unrighteousness. His inclination is to flee, but he can’t—he’s not a “mere-hearer.” If he were, he would.

So he “abides” by the law, keeping his feet to its fire, letting it burn his sinful heart, as the coal taken w/ tongs from heaven’s altar burned Isaiah’s dirty lips. He inches his way past mere regret over his sins, & finally arrives (by God’s grace) at true repentance, fulfilling the very purpose of God’s Law as described in Gal 3: *“The Law has become our tutor to **lead** us to **Christ**, that we may be **justified** [declared righteous] by **faith**”* (Gal 3:24).

**The “perfect law of liberty” is perfect and complete because it drives us to X, forcing us to humble ourselves before Him, in order to ask Him by faith for grace/forgiveness, to save our souls.**

It’s complete because it brings us all the way from arrogant rebellion against God, to humble, trying submission. Originally, we might have tried to prove ourselves to Him by meeting the Law’s moral demands on our own, but we couldn’t do it.

Its perfection was so unattainable that we finally gave up,  
and appealed to Jesus for cleansing from our guilt/sin  
by His grace, which we knew good/well we didn't  
deserve.

It felt like an admission of failure at the time, & from man's  
perspective, it was.

But it proved to be a very fortunate failure, because it  
introduced us to the concept of salvation by God's  
grace alone.

It created the awareness w/i us, that X saves only failures,  
no one else—weak/weary/spiritually-defeated losers,  
who are “*poor in spirit*,” just as He came to heal the  
sick, not those who were already well;

Those w/i whom the H.S. has created a meek/gentle spirit  
humble themselves before Him to receive God's  
undeserved gift of grace.

We did, & suddenly we were free to rest—from hopeless efforts  
to prove ourselves spiritually, from our old slavery to sin,  
free from the Law's condemnation, & free at last to love  
our Lord and stop resisting Him.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has set us free  
from the law of sin and of death (Rom 8:2).

We have come to know the personification of truth—Jesus  
X—& He, being that truth, has made us free

(Jn 8:32);

Or as Jesus said it—“*free indeed*” (Jn 8:36).

The Law itself brought us to this freedom from its own condemnation, by bringing us to Jesus, our gracious Savior/Emancipator.

We have discovered what David knew=> “*The law of the LORD is **perfect, restoring the soul***” (Psa 19:7).

It has restored our souls by bringing us to Jesus, where we received God’s forgiveness, life, and grace.

Having trusted Jesus for our salvation, we were really/finally free.

**When the Spirit regenerated our souls, we stopped being “forgetful hearers” & became “effectual doers” (lit. “doers of work”).**

Doers of what work? The Law!

We were freed from its condemnation, but not from our obligation to obey it.

How could we be?

The Law is God’s standard—a moral silhouette of Himself (His nature/character).

It reflects His holy will for all human conduct, and that could never change.

It explains to man how to live a holy life (like God’s holy life), that will fulfill/satisfy every holy longing of a

heart that has been created in God's own image, and  
re-created in the image of our Savior, Jesus X.

This doesn't mean that believers live perfectly, according to the  
Law, but we'd like to, & we can truthfully say we "**joyfully  
concur** w/ the law of God in [our] inner man" (Rom 7:22).

God has made us doers of the Word, not hearers-only.

And Jesus has told us=> "*If you know these things, you are  
**blessed** [makarios—fortunate, well off, happy]  
if you do them*" (Jn 13:17).

That's the same word James uses at the end of verse 25=>

*"this man [the doer of the Word] shall be **blessed**  
[makarios] in what he does."*

**"Doers of the Word" are not theoreticians, but active doers of  
the Word.**

God has called us to be people who actively obey Him.

That's why Jesus said (Mk 16:16)=> "*He who has believed  
and has been **baptized** shall be saved; but he who has  
disbelieved shall be condemned.*"

Baptism doesn't save us, but anyone who has truly believed  
will get baptized, in active obedience to his newfound  
Lord.

We aren't saved by what we do, but the minute we're saved,  
we'll want to do something, just as Isaiah did when the  
angel told

him=> "*Behold, this [hot coal] has touched your lips;  
& your iniquity is taken away, & your sin is forgiven.*"

In the very next verse he heard the Lord saying=> "*Whom*

*shall I send, and who will go for Us?”*

W/o a moment's hesitation he answered=> *“Here am I.  
Send me!”* (Isa 6:8).

I.e., I'm here, so please just give me something to do,  
for You, Lord.

Eph 2:8-9 makes it clear that we are not saved by works;

But Eph 2:10 makes it equally clear that we are saved for  
the purpose of actively doing good works=>

*“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ  
Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared  
beforehand, that we should walk [actively] in them.”*

**But James also wants us to understand that we'll be “blessed”  
in the good works we do.**

He doesn't say that we'll be blessed because of them, but  
rather “*in*” them.

Everything we hear from God's Word, we do; & the very doing  
of it, becomes a blessing to us.

When the Word mentions that we are to pray, we pray and  
we're blessed.

When it tells us we are to repent, we repent.

Because it tells us to live morally-pure lives, we do, and it's  
a blessing to us.

When the passage we're considering reminds us to do good  
to orphans/widows, we do it, and we find greater  
blessing in it than they do.



When we read that we are to love/serve one another, we  
look for some way in which to love/serve other Xns,  
the whole church is blessed, and we get in on it.  
We assume God is directing His Word at our own ears, and so  
hearing it, we obey it, as if it were His own voice.  
We don't say to ourselves, "That was interesting and it  
stirred up certain feelings w/i me, so I'm going to  
think carefully about acting on those feelings.  
We don't wait for a repeat of that message from God, not  
wanting to act hastily before a clear pattern emerges,  
so we'll know His will for sure.

Nor do we wait to talk it over w/ others, before we act.

Sure as anything, if we do, Satan will send along a  
mere-hearer who will try to talk us out of it.

**Serving our Lord by doing His will makes us blessed/happy,  
because we're serving a gracious God we've come to  
love/trust and whose commands are for our own good.**

James uses the word "*Blessed*," which speaks of transcendent joy  
& spiritual happiness, such as that of people already in  
heaven.

It's the kind of joy that follows acts of courageous faith,  
after God has blessed them in some spectacular way.

E.g. David must have felt that kind of joy when he  
responded by faith to Goliath's arrogant challenge,  
asking, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he*

*should taunt the armies of the living God?” then*

acted promptly to cut the bully down (1 Sam 17:27).

In Psa 19, David wrote=> *“The precepts of the LORD are right, **rejoicing** the heart”* (19:8).

**Would it not be well for you/me/each-one-of-us to ask**

**ourselves, Am I a mere-hearer, or a doer-of-the-Word?**

Various ones in our congregation have asked us to pray for 4 young women named Julie/Becky/Tori/shannon, each of whom has a life-threatening disease.

These ladies weigh on me, as I think/pray about them, because they remind me of how quickly/unexpectedly life can be snatched away.

One of them makes no profession of even being a Xn.

We may think to ourselves, “I’ll become a doer of the Word someday, but not just yet.”

We don’t know how many “somedays” we have left.

The Bible says, *“Now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor 6:2).

An old poem by C.T. Studd says it effectively=>

We’ve only one life,  
‘Twill soon be past.  
Only what’s done for Christ  
Will last.

## ***“Doers of the Word”***

May 13, 2012

Text: James 1:22-25

1. The subject of today’s text in James 1 is being a doer—not just a hearer—of the [10 Word].

**James 1:22-25 commands us to be “doers” not just “hearers,” then it explains exactly what these terms mean...**

### **\* The Command: Be Doers not Mere Hearers** **[James 1:22]**

2. “*Hearers*” of the Word listen to it being taught (which is good and necessary), but they don’t try to [10 live] it out.
3. In essence, James is saying to us, “Take whatever is said that accurately and faithfully explains the words of Scripture and choose to [8 act] on it obediently.”

Mt 7:24-27; Rom 2:13

4. Satan loves people who profess Christ but live un-Christian lives because they [14 delude] themselves that they are saved.

### **\* Explanation #1: How to Be a Mere Hearer** **[Verses 23-24]**

Jn 4:29

5. A “mere hearer” sees his sin and his need for Christ, then drops the matter; he does not repent or [16 confess] his sins to Jesus.
6. A “mere hearer” deceives himself to think that understanding of Scripture and his sin is all God asks, so no further [14 action] is needed.

II Cor 7:9

### **\* Explanation #2: How to Be a Doer of the Word** **[Verse 25]**

7. The man in verse 24 was looking carefully into the mirror, but this man in verse 25 is even [10 more] intent on doing so.

Ex 24:7; Psa 139:23-24; Isa 6:5; Gal 3:24

8. The “*perfect law of liberty*” is perfect and complete because it drives us to Christ forcing us to humble ourselves before Him in order to ask Him by [12 faith] for grace and forgiveness.

Rom 8:2; Jn 8:32, 36; Psa 19:7

9. When the Spirit regenerated our souls, we stopped being “forgetful hearers” and became “effectual doers of work.” What work? The [8 Law].

Rom 7:22; Jn 13:17

10. God has called us to be people who actively [10 obey] Him.

Mk 16:16; Isa 6:7, 8; Eph 2:8-9, 10

11. James also wants us to understand that we will be [16 blessed] in the good works we do.

12. Serving our Lord by doing His will makes us happy because we are serving a gracious God we have come to [10 love] and trust.

I Sam 17:27; Psa 19:8

13. We may think to ourselves, “I’ll become a doer of the Word someday, but not just yet”; the Bible says, “[8 Now] is the day of salvation.”

(2 Cor 6:2).