

Hearing And Doing

James 1:19-27

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But 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. 26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:19-27 (ESV))

I speak to you often about the special “mystery” that resides within the relationship that we have with God, a mystery that conceals much of the interaction that actually takes place all during the moments of our day, God's sovereign hand reaching into our souls and our circumstances, working continually to bring about the “plan” that He has divinely orchestrated. And then, comes our part of the interaction, our responding to His Will with acts of our own Will, becoming more than “hearers”, but also “doers” of His work.

And though I'm able to clearly see some of that mysterious interaction taking place each day, I do want, so much, to see more and more of it, especially in myself, and even at the very moment that it's actually taking place.

And again, I can hear those mysterious words of Jesus ringing clearly within my mind, that it is the person who has “eyes to see and ears to hear”, who will be able to sense these deeper workings of God, His divine hand reaching into our heart, soul and mind, helping us and “directing our path”.

And so it is today with these words. God is showing Himself to us here in these instructions given through James. Here, in verse 21, we see how God takes the first step by reaching into our being and “implanting” His divine Word into our soul, spirit and mind. And again, as we have been saying in our study of this passage, these are not just ordinary words that we should hear and put away in our memories for later use. No, these “implanted words” are the very “Words and person of the Lord Jesus”, Words

that have dynamic power, power that is beyond our ordinary comprehension, “Words” that engages every thought and behavior and activity that takes place within us, influencing and guiding us toward being and doing things that we would not otherwise be or do of our own accord and will.

Why do I keep repeating these words to us Sunday after Sunday? It is because, in our “natural state of being”, the one that we were born into, we cannot and will not do these next things that God is instructing us to do. Verse 22,

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
(James 1:22 (ESV))

In our “natural state of being”, we really do not even have the desire or purpose to be “doers” of the things of God. As the words of Romans 3 remind us,

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12 (NKJV))

And in these next words, James is reminding us of our natural corrupt condition. Verse 23,

23 For 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. (James 1:23-24 (ESV))

This is exactly what we do in our “natural state of being”. And unfortunately, this is also what many of the people who faithfully attend church every Sunday are doing. And it can be heartbreaking to us preachers when the realization hits us that, by Tuesday or Wednesday, most of the congregation has forgotten the message given on Sunday.

And that is the point that God is making here in this passage, that unless our efforts are combined with the power of the “divinely implanted word of God”, we will indeed read and hear these scriptures over and over again, but each time, walk away immediately forgetting all that we have just seen and heard.

But if and as we humbly surrender our hearts and minds and souls, and meekly receive the “word” that has been “implanted” within us, we will immediately begin to hear and see things that we never knew before; and have wisdom and understanding that will enable us to move on forward, and then to want even more.

This all bears repeating, so may I say it again. . . . At the first moment that we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, God does His part. He “implants” His divine Word within us. But then, as we have just said, you and I, who truly want to be devout Christians, fail to do our part and step on forward immediately to “meekly receive” it, its presence, its power and its benefits.

It is much like a starving person who has delicious bread right in the palm of their hand, but for some reason, they will not eat it and receive all of its nourishing benefits.

Our flesh is hesitant and we find ourselves reverting back to living life much in the same way that we have always lived it, back in the days of our flesh. We do what these words say,

23 For 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. (James 1:23-24 (ESV))

And as we do this, we grieve the Holy Spirit in us and we quench His presence and His power, keeping Him from doing the work that He truly wants to do in us. God forbid we should do such a thing!

The implied command here is for us to immediately move on forward and do as verse 25 instructs, to look into this perfect law, the “law of liberty” and to persevere, becoming a “doer” who “acts”. And when we do that, as these words promise, we will be greatly blessed. Verse 25,

25 But 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. (James 1:25 (ESV))

And folks, these simple words here in verse 25, “the perfect law, the law of liberty” are “filled to the brim” with meaning and promise.

What does God mean by this expression, “the law of liberty”? In these words, God is speaking to us about being “liberated”, freed from all the many different forms of “bondage” that have charmed our souls and held us captive for all the many years of our lives; our gaining “freedom” from our “bondage” to the desires and passions and habits of our mind, heart, spirit and flesh that are continually at work to corrupt us. As we’re warned in Romans 6,

16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey. (Romans 6:16 (NKJV))

But God forbid this should continue! In Christ, when the “son has set you free, you shall be free indeed”. In Christ, we are absolutely released and set free from the power and the control of sin, and we are free indeed! Romans 8, verse 1,

1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:1-2 (NASB))

So then, because we have been truly set free from our bondage to the desires and the habits of our flesh, how should we then go about beginning to apprehend the “freedom” and the blessings that are ours in the “law of liberty”? Romans 12, tells us how to begin.

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV))

Our flesh, with all of its desires and habits are first put into check as we allow the indwelling Spirit of Christ to “renew our minds”. As we “meekly receive” the presence and the power of the indwelling Christ (who is one in the same with the “implanted word”) He will begin to “transform” and “renew” our minds, changing us and changing the way that we think, from a condition that once was fully corrupt and unholy, into a person that is able to comprehend and to begin to actually “do” the “will of God” in all the many ordinary circumstances of daily life. What a joy, the “renewing of our minds”!

May I give us one more thought regarding the “renewing of our minds”? One of the truisms that I have learned in recent years is that whatever our “worldview” is on a matter, so goes our behavior and actions. If our “worldview” is corrupt then so will be our behavior. And the only means of changing our “worldview” for the better is through meekly receiving the “implanted word” of God.

A second “freedom” that the “law of liberty” will bring to our souls is the “freedom” that will take place within our conscience as we repent and as we turn away from our old ingrained habits and behaviors. A lifetime of sinful behaviors can often bring a burden of “guilt” to our conscience that will rob our souls of its liberty. A warning though, sometimes, and perhaps too often, even though we repent, our conscience will remain stubborn and not want to give up its guilty feelings.

And to add to the problem, the world, the flesh and the devil are ever vigilant to do their part to stifle our recovery, bringing back to mind all the mess we have made of our lives,

and the lives of others. And sometimes, the continued guilt can be utterly paralyzing to our recovery, all the while, grieving and quenching the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

But thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit is more vigilant than our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and defender. And all we have to do is keep meekly turning our hearts and crying out to Him, and He will eventually get us on past the guilt and the shame and the self-reproach that has paralyzed us. And the glorious comfort of “freedom” will eventually fill our souls. And then we can finally move on.

A third “freedom” that the “Law of Liberty” provides is freedom from the “control of our will”. And herein is one of my most pressing difficulties.

A person's will, by nature, is not free. It is a slave to any number of masters. Our passions are often evil, and our pursuits misguided, on many occasions controlled by insatiable desires within us to have more and better and different things. And our will seem always to rise to the occasion with a willingness to do whatever it takes to have those things that our heart desires.

And such is a state of bondage. Yes, we are able to see the evil for what it is and know that it is our duty to turn from it, but yet, we are drawn to yield to it.

And again, this is as true for the faithful church goers, as for the less faithful. We may know well what is right and Godly, but yet be without the strength to do it. How will our “liberty” from such a condition be found?

As I have studied the scriptures and especially some of the bible commentators regarding “freedom from the control of our will”, a commentator that I most agree with, made the simple statement, “while faith makes all things possible, it is “love” that makes all things easier.” He contends that obedience that comes solely from a sense of duty, or even from the fear of the law of God, can only gain us so much. But if we desire to find real “freedom” from the tyranny of our own will, it must be through obedience that comes much more from an earnest desire to “love”, to “love both the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and then also to love other people as Christ loves them”. And as we begin to truly “love”, our efforts will be joined by the Holy Spirit within us to then bring our errant “will” under control.

Through “love” we are far more apt to “bridle our tongue” and be “quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”. And also, that is when we are far more apt to “become a

“doer” of God’s Word and not merely hearers who listens for a while and then forget what we heard.

May I close with the special thought that is being expressed here, that we must dedicate ourselves to being “doers” and not mere “hearers” of God’s truths, that if you simply listen to the things that I have shared from these scriptures, and store them away in your memory, but then do nothing more with them, then we all may as well have stayed home.

I plead with each of us! Be “doers” of God word and not mere “hearers”. And as we “do”, we will bless the Lord, and we will bless others, and we ourselves will be blessed. Praise the Lord!

22 . . . be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But 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. (James 1:22-25 (ESV))