

Let me begin this morning by posing several questions. What self-deceptions do you tell yourself? Telling yourself you do not need to study for the final test, you will do fine. Have you ever said I can succeed at my job without making the effort needed? Or, I can succeed at sports without paying the price of practice and discipline? Or, I can have a good marriage without putting effort into it, after all we love each other. A parent who says, I can be my children's buddy and not teach and discipline them and they will grow up to be good people. How about, I can have a great relationship with God without reading the Bible or living out what God requires. We all tell ourselves deceptions, small or large. I might say, I will lose 40 pounds by Christmas, but without a plan and the commitment to act upon the plan - do you think losing 40 pounds will become a reality? Of course not! Without a plan and commitment to know God and his Word – it simply will not happen.

Not Hearers Only

James is speaking of this very problem in verses 22 to 24, **“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.”** The consequences of our deceptions can be quite different. If I say I am going to lose 40 pounds and am not committed, have no plan, and then the result is I stay overweight. If I deceive myself by saying I am a Christian and that is all that is required for my salvation then I am bound for hell. Christian obedience to be a doer of the Word is never fully habitual. It requires a daily “putting on Christ” as one is to **“put on the breastplate of faith and love”** as Paul wrote (1 Thessalonians 5:8) in

preparation for daily battle. It is the daily putting on Christ that brings the realization of faith to be true in our hearts and minds and to be observed by others.

James illustrated this teaching with reference to a man who looks intently at his reflection in a mirror. This analogy is a negative one, picturing those who listen but remain inactive and therefore unresponsive. Unlike Paul's use of mirror as a metaphor in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where the reflected image of God is dim, James's reflected image of the man in the mirror is clear. The Word of God has penetrated the world in the form of Scripture and is highly effective in revealing the true nature of the world and men in it. This revelation is most clear for those who are hearers or readers of God's Word, for the men and women God intends to save.

Some believers merely glance into the mirror of truth without letting God's wisdom do its work on them. The "mirror" is key for understanding this section of James. In the ancient world the mirror, a specially shaped piece of polished metal, was used to inspect one's body or enable one to be able to decorate it. The ancient literature is replete with references to the mirror and its use as a metaphor for moral development. There is a double mistake implied here by the believer who does not act upon the Word. First, the Word is being treated like a mere vision, a "theory," in the sense of a detached mental image with no connection to the external world. The Word is like a theory, but it is a practical one that both reflects reality, that is, the natural face, and directs the beholder to act in a certain way, the way of scripture. The second mistake we make regarding the Word is to ignore its message once it is received. The mere glancing at the Word without corrective action is of little use.

In verse 24 it is if looking quickly into the mirror and checking one's face and then leaving is to see if the Word still condemns him. James is conveying how terribly wrong this exercise is. The immediate forgetting of what was seen intensifies the abruptness of the process. A dialogue with such a person might go like this, "What

were you like?” “I forget.” By implication, the failure of this man is that he does not recognize the necessity of remembering, that is, the need to remember and act. There are two mirrors in Scripture, the person of Jesus shows God’s wisdom for his children and the scriptures reflect one’s natural condition and desperate need for Jesus as James is relating here. One must take the scriptures in, remember and act.

How is being a hearer of God’s Word and not being a doer different from those who hear a false word of a god? Is not the destination the same? Many of those who believe in a false god and religion truly believe for they work at obeying its tenants and sharing their believed false beliefs with others. False is false, whether it is because of lack of true belief and only a superficial effort to say I am a Christian or whether one is highly committed to their false belief. Either way Satan sits back and smiles. He tells his demons, look we do not have to concern ourselves with these people for they are condemning themselves and convincing others to follow the road that is broad.

The Word of God has penetrated the human world in the form of Scripture and is highly effective in revealing the true nature of that world. For those who hear and see the Word of God it sheds light into the dark world and shines on the path to the narrow gate that leads to salvation.

Jesus said action follows belief. “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Not only is this the Law of the Prophets but also it is what God did. He did for you what you could not do for yourself. He gave Himself to be crucified for our salvation. However, even though He gave Himself for our salvation there is only one true path to that salvation and it is found only in the Bible. Jesus lived a life of service and he commands his followers to serve others as he served. Jesus continued,¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction,

and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:12-14) The price God requires of true believers is small compared to what He paid so we could be saved. The natural result of true faith is these things; one has a desire to read and know God’s Word for one desires God above all else. The natural result of taking God’s Word into one’s heart and mind is to live out the Word of God or to be doers of the Word. Anything less indicates a problem with the depth of one’s belief for it has no root.

Jesus addressed this very problem in his parable of the seed. Jesus was intently serious saying, ³ “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.” My beloved, are we followers of Jesus? If yes, we must be sowers of His gospel! ⁴ “And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.” The world, and the prince of this world will try everything to devour the Word of God, but this is not our worry, for this is in God’s control, we are to be obedient and trust. We are to sow God’s Word everywhere we can. Jesus continues, ⁵ “Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.” These are those who call themselves Christian but do not believe unto salvation and live the Word of God. These are those who looked into the mirror and quickly forgot what they saw. They accept God’s Word with joy when they first hear it, but there is no depth to their faith and they fall away. Or, these are those who take the Word of God and distort it because they do not know God’s Word with spiritual wisdom. Therefore they build false religions that are but a dim and cloudy reflection of the truth of God. They are different, yet share the same destiny, one is shallow and the other is false, but they are both lost. Then Jesus says, ⁷ “Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.” Some initially look at Christ but they cannot leave the

world. They may want to keep one foot in the world and one in Christianity. However, this does not work. As Jesus said as recorded in Matthew and Luke, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24) Here Jesus was speaking of money, but this principle applies to every aspect of one faith and the living out of that faith. One must choose Christ or the world and fully commit to one or the other. Jesus ends his parable with, “ ‘And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.’ ”⁹ And he said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’ ” (Mark 4:3-9) The Word falls into the heart and mind of those who take it in with joy and because of their love for Christ they both live the gospel and bear fruit by sharing the gospel of good news – they are the doers and they increase the kingdom of God 30 or 60 or even a 100 times. They are the doers of the Word that James is speaking about.

A Doer Who Acts

As Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, “For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.”¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” (Romans 2:12-13) It is this thought that is in James’ mind as he shifts from the need for one to seek God, study and know His Word and then be doers of that Word to relating doing with the love of God’s Word or law and the blessing this brings into one’s life. James writes in verse 25 of chapter 1, “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.” What does it mean for one to look “into the perfect law, the law of liberty” and “be blessed in his doing?”

Here are four images to describe the purpose of the law and I hope they will help us understand James' meaning of verse 25. First, the law is like a dentist's little mirror, which he sticks into the patient's mouth. With the mirror he can detect cavities. But he doesn't drill with the little mirror or use it to pull teeth. It can show him the decayed area or other abnormality, but it cannot provide the solution. Another analogy is the law is also like a flashlight. If suddenly at night the lights go out, you use the flashlight to guide you down the darkened basement stairs to the electrical breaker box. When you point the flashlight towards the fuse breakers it helps you see the one that has tripped. But it is not the flashlight that restores the circuit; it only showed you the problem breaker. You reset the breaker to restore the electricity. The third image relates the law to a plumbline. When a builder wants to check his work, he uses a weighted string to see if it's true to the vertical. But if he finds that he has made a mistake, he doesn't use the plumbline to correct it. He gets out his hammer and saw. The law points out the problem of sin; it doesn't provide a solution. The Law is like the mirror and when one's looks into the mirror they see the pimple in the middle of their forehead. One sees the blemish that mars the face just like the law shows the blemishes in our lives that mar our ability to reflect the life God has called us to. The law reflects the problem and our need for a solution. When one understands that the only way to removed the blemish is for us to replace our image in the mirror with the person of Christ and then have the faith to live His law, to act, to be doers and live God's Word and Law is when God's blessings come.

As one intently looks at God's Word they not only see their need to change, but that it is the Word that begins to change one and continues to change one throughout life. The Word teaches right from wrong, light from darkness and what it looks like to live within the boundaries God has defined for Christians. Many see God's Law as restrictive and burdensome. However the truth is the Law is freeing. It is the Law

of God that enables Christians to live free from the world and enables them to serve, love others, know the peace of God and both receive and share God's blessings with others.

Paul wrote of this freedom found in being slaves to the law of God. You may wish to follow along as I read from Romans chapter 6 beginning in verse 15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:15-23) My beloved through faith in Christ we are "set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." This certainly seems to be a contradiction. How can one be free and be a slave? In truth this is the balance one finds in living by faith in Christ. Free from the fallen world and sin and peace from living in obedience to the scriptures.

Paul brought it down to this simple concept in his second letter to the believers in Corinth, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17) Letting the Spirit of the Lord live within you, to submit to the Spirit, to let the Spirit guide your life is not restrictive, but true freedom. It allows one to live as a doer and receive the blessing that come with doing and serving. Paul in his letter to the Galatians in which he defines this freedom found through Christ throughout the letter and here is a small part of Paul’s freedom definition - “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” (Galatians 5:13-14) This is a life of doing and here in Paul’s reflection, in part, is the heart verse of Canyon Bible Church, the very words of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus, who said, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

The Bible is full of apparent paradoxes from a worldly viewpoint; Jesus’ death brings forgiveness and life, obedience frees, sacrifice brings the abundance of blessings, in giving one receives, and being slaves of God brings ever increasing freedom from sin and freedom from sin leads to our lives being ever more sanctified and our sanctification leads to eternal life with God through the saving power of Christ Jesus! These are things the world simply cannot understand.

This is James’ point - take in God’s Word and be doers of the Word and you will live the law of liberty and the law of liberty will preserve you and bless you until you are with Christ for eternity. So, my beloved what possible reason can we have for not being doers of God’s Word? To not live God’s Word, serve others and consider others more worthy than us, is sin? Therefore, go from here and go back

into the world living in the freedom of being slaves of God and serving others in the name of Christ. Fulfill the great life and adventure God himself has called us to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)