

The Book Of James: Lesson 4

Being & Doing

Key Bible Verse: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

Illustration/Setting The Stage: This weeks’ lesson reminds me of a story a man who told on himself and his brother, too. He confessed that every now and then when he was a youngster he and his brother would be sent to their room when they had been naughty. But this punishment wasn’t very effective, because the boys figured out a way to escape. There just happened to be a big, old fruit tree right outside their bedroom window and it was their means of escape.

One day they overheard Dad say to Mom, “Mary, the old fruit tree out back hasn’t borne fruit in years. Tomorrow morning I’m going to cut it down.” Needless to say, the boys were undone.

That night, somewhat earlier than usual, they *supposedly* went to bed, only to get up after a short time. They gathered together all the money they had saved, went out the window, down the tree, and into town, where they bought all the apples they could find and some black cotton string. They returned home and tied all the apples onto the old tree.

The next day Father woke up and went outside to chop down the old fruit tree. But he soon came back in, excitedly calling out, “Mary! Mary! It’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever seen! That old tree that hasn’t borne fruit in years is covered with apples! You’ve got to come see this; it’s absolutely covered with big, red apples! I don’t believe it! And it’s a pear tree!”

Of course, apples grow on apple trees and pears grow on pear trees. Trees are

known by the fruit they produce. Christians' are known by the fruit they produce. People will be able to tell whether we're genuine or if we're trying to tie good fruit onto a bad life.

Sunday – Knowing your Enemy

James 1:23, 24; Ezekiel 6:9; Job 42:6

Let's start at the beginning. "We have met the enemy, and he is us." (Pogo) Yes, the devil is man's enemy, but remember that the devil is successful with his temptations only because there is something in humanity that is enticed by the temptation (James 1:14). This is man's carnal nature that strives for recognition and supremacy, and leads us to feeling content with our condition. Pride feels no need.

The prayer of the Pharisee, "God I thank Thee, that I am not as the rest of men," (Luke 18:11) reveals this attitude. The Laodicean church doesn't know that she was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," (Rev. 3:17) and therefore has no need of a Savior.

There are many reasons why we (and more so men) don't go see a doctor: no doctor, no insurance, save money, no time, doctor's don't *do* anything (compared with a barber and dentist), we want to tough it out, we don't want to hear what we might be told (lose weight, exercise, etc.), and we believe there is probably nothing wrong. Some people like to remain in ignorance, because after all what we don't know won't hurt us. But what we don't know will in fact hurt us.

Hanson's Disease teaches us this. The extremities numb leaving no pain signal. So if damage is done to the foot and there's no feeling, then the person is not aware of the large gash to the heel, which if left untreated will become infected. Notice the problem as James puts it. **Read James 1:23, 24** (cp Rom. 7:7, 9; Matt. 13:4).

The sincere Christian learns in order that he might do the will of God, not merely that he might know. It's one thing to look in a mirror just to see what you look like. It's a completely different thing to look to do something about it. We must come face to face with God's Word and accept the challenge, and not just throw on a baseball cap to cover the mess underneath.

Matthew 5:3: "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The place we begin with God is to know our spiritual poverty and come face to face with the fact that everything we've ever done has been tainted with selfishness. This leads us to penitence, genuine sorrow for sin, repentance.

Ezekiel 6:9: "Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations."

Job 42:6: "Therefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes." And we will cast ourselves on the mercy of Christ and trust in His merits alone!

Monday – Being A Doer

James 1:21, 22; Matthew 7:21

In this condition God can now do something in and with us. Notice how Ezekiel puts it in **Ezekiel 36:25-27:** "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*."

James puts it this way: **Read James 1:21, 22.** We throw off our sin (dirty clothes) and receive God's word, Christ's spotless robe of righteousness. Then this Word works a change in you that will lead you to live for Jesus. But we have a choice to make: are we going to hear the word only (merely informed), or are we going to be doers of it (obeying it)? The Spirit of God does nothing without our consent. We have to exercise our wills in order to cooperate with God's work in our life.

"The test of sincerity is not in words but in deeds...Words are of no value unless they are accompanied with appropriate deeds." (Christ Object Lessons, p. 272)

Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that *does* the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Matthew 5:47: Jesus doesn't say to us, "What *say* you more than others," but instead, "What *do* you more than others?"

John 13:17: "If you know these things, happy are you if you *do* them." We can only do what we become (a tree is known by the fruit it bears). "Every tree is known by its own fruits. Our words, our actions, are the fruit we bear." (1T, p. 416) This even includes the Biblical admonition about loving our enemies, something that is easy to say but hard to do.

Question: "How can we love someone that has ruined our family? We may be able to forgive with God's help but to forget and love? Is it enough not to hate in God's eyes?" Love – "agape" – denotes the love of respect verses "philein" which describes the love of emotion, such as exist between family members. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to "philein" our enemies. To "agapen" our enemies is to treat them with respect and courtesy and to regard them as God regards them.

Tuesday – Law Of Freedom

James 1:25; Psalm 19:7; Romans 8:3, 4

Read James 1:25. What is the role of the law (cp Rom. 3:20)? It points out sin and our need of a savior, but it cannot save us. Only Jesus can do that (see Ps. 19:7; Rom. 8:3, 4).

Not only is there disregard for societal laws, but Christian's seem to have little regard for the holy law of God too. Why is that? Does the devil appreciate or like God's law? No. Why not? Because it tells men their need and points them to a Savior. If the devil can eliminate God's law, or make it obscure, or inconsequential, then he removes the basis for spiritual revival.

Romans 7:9: "I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." The commandment brings death to self, which is the beginning of spiritual life. He removes the need of Jesus.

Is the law of God a burden, a device to keep people unhappy? How is it possible that the law can be referred to the "law of liberty"? Are guardrails on winding roads put there to make motorists lives miserable? No! They're there to preserve lives. Stay on this side of them then they free from you from a car accident, even death. When God's law is brought into the life and obeyed out of love, then we experience true freedom – freedom from false worship which produces unhappiness, freedom from overwork which promotes sickness and broken homes, etc. But always remember that true obedience, which comes from the heart, is impossible without genuine conversion.

Wednesday – Useful Or Useless?

James 1:26, 27

How do we define true Christianity? There's a lot of versions of what is termed Christianity today. You're a Christian is you vote for a particular candidate. You're a

Christian if you merely attend church. You're a Christian if you say you are. But what does true Christianity look like? **Read James 1:26, 27** (cp. Matt. 25:25, 26, 40; Rom. 12:9-18).

Evidence of genuine Christianity: 1. Bridled tongue (discretion in speech – what comes out of the mouth reveals what's in the heart); 2. Providing support for the less fortunate (not a description of whole religion, but just two pertinent examples).

In essence true Christianity is useful and in essence leads a practical life to benefit those who often get overlooked in society. "No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian. To live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline. It is because they do not understand this that many are so easily discouraged in the Christian life." Ministry of Healing, p. 470)

Question: "If the evidence of genuine Christianity is seen in good works, why in Matthew 7:22, 23 does Jesus declare certain ones who've done a host of good things even for the church, to be lost? What's going on here?" This is not a contradiction of what Jesus taught in Matt. 25 regarding the helping of the less fortunate. This is all a matter of the heart. Remember the rich young ruler who said he kept God's law but when asked to give up his riches couldn't, thus revealing that he had not allowed God to have heart entirely. Evidently, these people in Matt. 7 while doing good things are not obeying God from the heart (1 John 2:4; Ezek. 33:31, 32)

Thursday – Unlike The World

James 1:27; Romans 12:2

Another evidence of genuine Christianity is living a life "without moral blemish," "aspilon," "unspotted" (**James 1:27**). This doesn't mean that you can't be spotted because you're hiding somewhere away from civilization. That type of religion is

useless. A person might not do anything wrong, but they certainly aren't doing that which is right. A person might avoid corrupting influences, but they need to remember that they take themselves wherever they go.

1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The world in this verse is synonymous with evil principles and practices that are contrary to the will of God.

Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world [squeezed into its mold], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." To be truly converted means to avoid any thought or deed that allows the filth of the world to stain him. It means looking to Jesus and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of glory and grace.

True religion leads a person to "hunger and thirst" for a deeper experience with Jesus that leads to ministering to others. Jesus said it was His "food" to bless and benefit the needy.

Appeal: Those saved by grace will be doers of God's word, not hearers only. Let us spend more time in God's word gaining inspiration and strength, looking to Jesus so that we might be changed, consenting to the work God wants to do in our hearts.