

How to Be a James 1:22 Bible Reader
James 1:17-27

Dr. Steve Horn

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Introduction to Text: Last week I challenged you to read the Bible through in 2008. I hope that you are six days in to that challenge. I closed that message with a brief warning that the greatest worry that we ought to have is that we would be only readers or hearers of the Word of God and not doers of the Word of God. James gives us that most familiar phrase that we are to be both hearers and doers of the Word. We consider that phrase today as James gave it to us. You will notice that the verse comes in a larger context on the subject of doing. James begins with a section loosely connected to the idea of various trials. Next, comes this charge to let our relationship with God be defined by what we do not what we say.

Text: ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. ¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of 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 observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Introduction: Mark Twain reportedly said, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." When we come to the book of James, I think we find parts we can understand. The problem with disobeying the Word of God cannot be blamed on our lack of understanding, but rather on our unwillingness to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. However, the call of God on our lives is not to read the Bible for information purposes, but for transformation purposes. We must be doers of the Word, not merely hearers. So, how can we become a James 1:22 Bible reader—one who will not just read the Word, but do the Word?

Receive the Word of God Properly

If we are going to do the Word of God, we must receive the Word of God properly. We identify that proper way in the James text.

- With Conviction (17-18)—Last week we observed that “All Scripture is God-breathed.” Is that your conviction? If your conviction is *here is the Word of God* that really ought to end all question as to whether we are going to obey that Word. In addition, if we have the conviction that *here is the Word of God*, we ought to have a certain eagerness about approaching that Word of God.
- With Commitment to obedience (21a)—Again, this whole section in James outlines a commitment to action. Verse 21 uses the imagery of a Christian removing what ought not to be part of his/her life just as a person removes filthy clothing. Last week, I invited you to read through the Bible. Oddly enough, this morning, I want to un-invite some of you. If you are a Christian already, but have no desire to do everything this book, rightly interpreted, says for us to do, you probably would be better off not reading the Bible.
- With a Controlled Spirit (21b)—As a Christian, we should receive the Word of God with humility. We are pretty good at thinking that our interpretations of the Bible are absolutely correct. I’ve discovered that I must come to the Word of God with a fair amount of humility if I am going to receive correctly the Word of God.

Billy Graham said “Early in my ministry some intellectual theologians challenged me because they felt I was naive when it came to understanding the Scriptures. As I listened to them, I began to question what I believed. One moonlit night I walked into the woods and spread my Bible over the stump of a tree. ‘Lord,’ I said, ‘I don’t understand everything in this book. But I accept it by faith as your divine Word.’ From that moment on, I’ve not had a doubt that the Bible is God’s inspired Word. The Scriptures have remained my constant guide.”

We must come ourselves to that point when we will say, “This is the Word of God. I do not understand yet all that it says to do, but as God gives me understanding, I will obey, because this is God’s Word.”

Respond to the Word of God Immediately and Fully

If we do not respond to the Word of God immediately and fully, two consequences are possible.

- You will deceive yourself.

You will deceive yourself on the basis that you read the Bible. You will deceive yourself on the basis that at least you did something. You can deceive yourself on the basis of knowledge. You can deceive yourself on the basis that you are obedient to some of what the Bible says. It matters not how you deceive yourself if you are deceived.

- You will forget.

You wouldn't think you would forget, but you do. The analogy of looking into the mirror and turning away is a good one. I hate to admit this, but this happened to me. I was in college, living in the dormitory at the time. I was wearing a cast and using crutches on this particular morning. I struggled to get myself ready for the day with my new friends (cast and crutches). Walking to the school cafeteria, I noticed how everybody was staring at me. A few even pointed. I thought to myself how they must have been at the game on Saturday and been eyewitness to my body going one way and my ankle the other. But that wasn't it at all. After sitting at the table with some friends, one friend immediately said, "Hey, Steve, you know you've got a piece of toilet paper on your face." Yes, I had done what every shaving male has done at least once in life—stuck a piece of toilet paper to a fresh shaving cut. But, no, I didn't know it was there. I once knew it was there. I had looked in the mirror and had seen that it was there. But, I turned away thinking I would leave it on my face just a little longer while I continued to get ready. I didn't really mean to leave the room with the paper stuck to my face, but having turned away from the mirror, I forgot "what kind of man {I} was."

As we read the Word, the Word becomes a mirror to our soul. Looking into the mirror of the Word of God, we see ourselves as God sees us. Unless there is immediate and full response, we will turn away and forget what we have just seen.

Recognize the Benefits of Obeying the Word of God

Verse 25 says of the one who obeys the Word of God, "he will be blessed he does." That's the same message God gave to Joshua when Joshua assumed leadership of Israel after Moses. God said, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8) I don't know about you, but I have no intention of missing out on the blessing of God.

Perhaps no other story communicates the truth of the benefits of obeying the Word of God better than this one.

The Bible can change not only a life but an entire lifestyle. Most of us have heard the story of the Mutiny on the Bounty, but few of us have heard how the Bible played a very vital part in that historical event. The Bounty was a British ship which set sail from England in 1787, bound for the South Seas. The idea was that those on board would spend some time among the islands, transplanting fruit-bearing and food-bearing trees, and doing other things to make some of the islands more habitable. After ten months of voyage, the Bounty arrived safely at its destination, and for six months the officers and the crew gave themselves to the duties placed upon them by their government. When the

special task was completed, however, and the order came to embark again, the sailors rebelled. They had formed strong attachments for the native girls, and the climate and the ease of the South Sea island life was much to their liking. The result was mutiny on the Bounty, and the sailors placed Captain Bligh and a few loyal men adrift in an open boat. Captain Bligh, in an almost miraculous fashion, survived the ordeal, was rescued, and eventually arrived home in London to tell his story. An expedition was launched to punish the mutineers, and in due time fourteen of them were captured and paid the penalty under British law. But nine of the men had gone to another distant island. There they formed a colony. Perhaps there has never been a more degraded and debauched social life than that of that colony. They learned to distill whiskey from a native plant, and the whiskey, as usual, along with other habits, led to their ruin. Disease and murder took the lives of all the native men and all but one of the white men named Alexander Smith. He found himself the only man on an island, surrounded by a crowd of women and half-breed children. Alexander Smith found a Bible among the possessions of a dead sailor. The Book was new to him. He had never read it before. He sat down and read it through. He believed it and he began to appropriate it. He wanted others to share in the benefits of this book, so he taught classes to the women and the children, as he read to them and taught them the Scriptures. It was twenty years before a ship ever found that island, and when it did, a miniature Utopia was discovered. The people were living in decency, prosperity, harmony, and peace. There was nothing of crime, disease, immorality, insanity, or illiteracy. How was it accomplished? By the reading, the believing, and the appropriating of the truth of God! (The Tale Of The Tardy Oxcart Charles R. Swindoll, Word, pp. 50-51.)

Conclusion: A Quick Test (vv. 26-27)

So, how do we know if we are just hearers of the Word of God and not doers? We have a quick test in verses 26-27. There are other tests, to be sure, but here is the test that James provides. What about these things.

1. Control of Tongue?
2. Compassion for the Less Fortunate?
3. Conformity to the World?

The answers to these questions help us to determine whether we are doers of the Word of God or hearers just fooling ourselves.