

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Doers of the Word

by: Kris Brewer

The epistle of James is an amazing letter. James composed the letter with a great amount of practical information crammed into a very small space. Each verse seems to be filled with useful information about how his audience (and therefore us as well) can be better servants before God.

In chapter 1, James relates some crucial thoughts in verses 21 and 22:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:21-22).

We want to consider five brief lessons that we can draw from these two verses.

God expects us to put away sinful practices. There is a common belief in the religious world today that we do not have any obligation to separate our-

selves from sinful practices. Briefly stated, the idea is that God has forgiven our sins, and therefore we do not have to worry about them anymore. We can do whatever we want to do, and God does not see our sinful deeds, but rather sees Jesus in our place. James, however, makes it clear that this is not how God views our sinful practices. He insists that we are to “lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness...” That is not to be a part of who we are if we are the children of God! This idea is closely related to the teachings of the apostle Paul as well:

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that

Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:5–9).

Paul's imagery is that of putting the man of sin to death. We are not to give in to his lusts, but rather live as the new man. We are to lay that sin aside, and instead conform to the "righteousness of God" (James 1:20). We cannot continue in sin and reflect His righteousness at the same time! God expects that, if we are His children, we will put away sinful practices from our lives and live by His righteousness, which is described in His word!

We know what God wants us to do by the word He has given to us. God has not left us wondering about what sin is, and what righteousness is. He has given us His word which defines for us His will. James tells us that it is the "word of Truth" that has "brought us forth" (a term that is related to birth, or birthing). The idea is that it is God's word that reveals to us what God expects. He has revealed His righteousness to us through His word. The only way we can adopt His righteousness is to heed the instructions He has provided to us. He has told us what is right and pleasing to Him. He has also told us what is wrong and sinful. Those latter practices are exactly what God expects us to "lay aside." Paul related the same idea like this:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he pointed out that they used to be involved in these sinful practices, but they laid those things aside when they became Christians. They no longer were involved in the sinful practices because they had chosen to put on the righteousness of God instead. They had been taught what they needed to do (and not do) to be pleasing to the Lord, and they had conformed their lives to His instructions! We can know what God wants from us by reading, studying, and applying His word.

We must have His word implanted in our hearts. James emphasizes the importance of the word of God by declaring that it must be the "implanted word" which must be received with meekness. James was not teaching that this implantation was some miraculous manifestation of God. Rather, he was showing that when the gospel is taught, the hearer must be willing to accept the word, not just intellectu-

ally, but in a way that makes a true impact on the heart. Jesus, in the parable of the sower, related the same concept:

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:18–23).

The response of each person is based upon the choice made as to how to hear and understand the word that was delivered. Only those described as “good soil” received the word in a way to put it into practice. This is what James describes as those who “receive with meekness the implanted word.” Only those who receive the word of God in this manner will attain salvation! They will choose to practice His righteousness and put aside all sinful practices. The word truly grows in their hearts because they receive the word with meekness. They are willing to submit to what they hear, rather than rebel against it. When we refuse to give up those sinful practices in our lives, we show that we have not received the word of God with meekness, and that the word of God is not implanted in our hearts!

We must be doers of the word. There are many who are hearers of the word of God. They may even be able to cite, recite, and quote a great number of passages from their Bibles. However, they are not truly doers of the word of God. There is a need to move beyond an intellectual acceptance of the word of God and put what we find therein into practice.

As we have already seen in this study, there is a need for us to lay aside sinful practices. When we find something defined in the word of God as being against His will, we know that we must do away with that practice from our lives. When we act on what we read in scripture to be obedient to it, we become “doers of the word.” James uses a fantastic example to illustrate this point:

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; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately

forgets what kind of man he was. 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 (James 1:23–25).

We would think that a person who looks in a mirror and sees something that needs fixing, but walks away without adjustment, would be quite foolish. The same is true of those who look into God's revealed will, see something amiss in their own lives, and then walk away without changing. The foolishness that is exposed here though has far more dire circumstances! One who refuses to submit to God's instructions are heading for eternal destruction.

Not only do we have to refrain from the sins that God had shown in His word, we must also adopt His righteousness. He has shown us what righteousness looks like, predominantly through His son. He wants us to grow to be like Him!

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Abiding by the word of God is not just about refraining from the “thou shalt not” type instructions, but rather about becoming more like the Son of God that we read about in His word. If we are not growing to be more like Him, then we cannot be the kind of “doers of the word” that James writes about. Jesus Himself addressed the idea of conforming to the righteousness of God in the Sermon on the Mount:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

The only way to show that we are seeking “first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” is to abide by the instructions that He provided, His revealed word. If we are not adopting His righteousness in our own lives, we are not becoming more like Him. We must be “doers of the word and not hearers only”!

We can be self deluded. James warned that we can deceive ourselves. We can deceive ourselves into believing that what we are doing is good and acceptable to the Lord. We can deceive ourselves into believing that what is written in the word is not all that important. We can deceive ourselves into believing that God can and will accept us, even when we don't listen to what He has told us to do and to be. If we deceive ourselves in these ways, we will never be what God expects!

Perhaps the most dangerous (and frightening) thing about self deception is that we do not know when it has happened. By its very definition, we have become self deluded! We have lied to ourselves, and accepted the lie. Such a state can be difficult to overcome.

How do we escape such self delusion? We must be like the good soil in Jesus' parable, having hearts that are truly willing to listen to the word of God. We must then respond humbly, willing to examine our own actions in comparison to the word that has been revealed for us. Luke praised the Bereans for having this very spirit:

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

If we are not willing to examine our own practices and beliefs against the word of the Lord, then we will stubbornly hold onto ideas that are not in harmony with God's will. As difficult as it may be, we must examine ourselves, and make sure that what we believe and practice is from God's word, not our own desires.

These five lessons from James 1:21-22 can be extremely helpful to us as we strive to be faithful to the Lord. Let us use God's word to learn what He expects of us. When we learn it, let us put it into practice, rather than walking away from its precepts. And let us not delude ourselves in failure!

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

Separation of Church and Hate

by: Kris Brewer

As I was driving home today, I noticed a bumper sticker on the car ahead of me. It read, "Separation of Church and Hate." One might suppose that the bumper sticker was to express that churches should simply not hate. But, judging from the other bumper stickers on this particular car (enough to provide a context) it was evident that this driver believed that churches were the propagators of hate. He clearly believed that the things that churches taught (biblical based condemnations of sinful practices) were hateful.

As I considered this premise, I thought about how intellectually lazy this type of statement is. And yet, that is exactly what has become prominent in our current society. If someone believes something different than what you do, they must be filled with hate! If someone tries to change your way of thinking, they must hate you. Of course, this is only true from one side of the spectrum. It is "hateful," for example, to teach against homosexuality and try to change the mind of one who might practice that sinful behavior (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). But, it is not "hateful" to preach a message forcing not just acceptance of, but approval of the same.

This idea reveals how far too many people think about religion. They see religion as some kind of oppressor, something that spreads hate and fear. While there may be some in the religious world that would in fact spread the idea of hate, that is not the norm. In fact, if one who would have the belief expressed in the bumper sticker cited above would simply sit down to reason with most of these people they have labeled as hateful, they would discover a completely different story. They would discover that those of us who strive to teach people about sin do so out of love, not hate!

The word of God is what defines what is sinful. Many today tend to believe that the definition of what is sinful should change based upon societal norms. That is, if something is generally accepted in society, it should not be classified as "sinful." But, we find that the gospel, as revealed from the mind of God, was intended to be preached for all peoples in all nations and all times. The message of the first century is the exact same message as we are to preach today. What God defined as sin in the first century remains sin today. It is not hateful to relate to those to whom we seek to teach the gospel the message that sinful practices will keep people out of the kingdom of God. In fact, the most loving thing that we can do is strive to show

those who are separated from God their true standing before Him. How can I, if I love my brother, fail to show him what God has revealed in His word concerning sin? Quite frankly, we should love our fellow man too much to allow them to head straight into hell without warning!

As I was looking into the history of this particular bumper sticker, I found a Huffington Post article dating back to May 12, 2014, that confirmed my suspicions. That article cited a photo posted by George Takei, a prominent and outspoken homosexual, taken of a sign at his church. The message was that his church was tolerant of his sinful behavior, and he approved of their message. This is a message that condemns the practice of teaching any kind of repentance, and rejects the word of God as it pertains to sin. While this may be classified as a church, it is certainly not one that belongs to the Lord. How can one which rejects His teachings claim to be under His authority (or belong to Him)?

Let me be clear. I am completely opposed to treating anyone in a hateful manner. There is no excuse for one person to ever mistreat another. But, we also need to be clear about what is "hateful." In our current society, that word has nearly lost its meaning. Voicing a different opinion is labeled as "hateful." Standing up for what one believes in (if it is a biblical belief) is identified as "hateful." Any rhetoric that is contrary to the progressive agenda is called "hateful." Yet, none of these things are hateful. Having discussions about topics we might disagree about at one time was considered beneficial, a valuable intellectual endeavor. Now, such activity is nearly impossible as opposing viewpoints are routinely shut down by simply calling an opponent hateful, or a bigot.

We must, as we strive to teach the gospel message, do so with patience, and with love for those who need to hear it. When we open the Bible and show what the inspired writers have penned, we are not seeking to argue our own opinion, and we are not trying to prove that we are "right." We are sharing the blessing of the word of God. His word calls for "all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). To be able to do that, we must be willing to "search the scriptures" and see what is true. It is our responsibility to look into the word that God has revealed, and learn what His will is (Ephesians 5:17). His word will require us to make changes. It will require us to submit to His will, and leave our own sinful will behind. That is indeed a great challenge. But, let us love one another enough to share the gospel. I will love you enough to try and help you change to please the Lord, and I hope you will love me enough to help me! I will not think you hateful if you show me from God's word something that is amiss in my life, and I must change to please Him!

Daily Bible Reading

May 2019

May 1	Genesis 1-3	May 17	Genesis 29-30
May 2	Genesis 4-5	May 20	Genesis 31
May 3	Genesis 6:1-8:19	May 21	Genesis 32-33
May 6	Genesis 8:20-10:32	May 22	Genesis 34-35
May 7	Genesis 11-13	May 23	Genesis 36-37
May 8	Genesis 14-16	May 24	Genesis 38-40
May 9	Genesis 17-18	May 27	Genesis 41
May 10	Genesis 19:1-21:21	May 28	Genesis 42-43
May 13	Genesis 21:22-23:20	May 29	Genesis 44-45
May 14	Genesis 24	May 30	Genesis 46-47
May 15	Genesis 25-26	May 31	Genesis 48-50
May 16	Genesis 27-28		

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