

DOERS OF THE WORD

James 1:21-27

If Christians would have their lives saved from the pitfalls of the world, and live worthwhile lives for God, they must do two things--lay aside their filthiness and receive the Word of God into their hearts. Before the Word can be received and rooted there must be a cleansing of the heart, somewhat like a garden is cleansed by the removal of all noxious weeds. We must not forget that the human heart, by nature, is a filthy place. God's Word says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9.

In order to get a good crop the farmer clears his field of all harmful and noxious weeds. Even so, if we are to live fruitful Christian lives for our Lord, we must have good clean soil in which to plant the Word.

A noxious weed that must be gotten out of the way is "wickedness," which here may have the narrower sense of malice. The precise figure is an "effervescence" of malice. Surely one far too often sees this picture in actual life. Malice bubbles up and runs over into word and deed. "The evil man out of the evil treasure in his heart bringeth forth that which is evil." Luke 6:45. Surely evil runs riot unless it is checked and taken out root and branch.

We are begotten by the Word. The Word of God is living because it begets life. That which is dead cannot impart life. The egg that produces the chick must be a fertile egg. The seed of corn which produces first the shoot, then the ear, and finally the full corn must be a living seed. While other books may inspire life, the Bible begets life. The Word of God never becomes old, never disintegrates, dies nor decays. Its power never fails. It produces life. Of all the saved, none have ever come to know the Lord apart from the Word of God. Philosophy may instruct, but the Bible begets. "Being born again by the Word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever."

The same Word that begets also nourishes, builds up, strengthens and invigorates. When we neglect the Living Word we are in danger of being swept away by the cunning craftiness of men and by their evil doctrines whereby they try to deceive.

To receive the Word of God is more than just to hear it. Many hear it, but never let it take hold of them. God's Word is a message to man's heart, so we must let it become a part of us. As we receive it into our innermost beings, it will become an active working force in our lives. If we will receive this Word with deep humility and genuine submissiveness, letting it correct, teach and lead us, we shall become more Spirit-filled and Christ-like. Those Christians who neglect the Word suffer much spiritually. They remain spiritual babes all their lives. Consequently, they often get strange and false notions, and sometimes they are swept away into false cults by the cunning craftiness of men.

With verse twenty-two we come to the main theme of this epistle. Already in the early church there were some who professed to be Christians whose lives gave very little evidence of the reality. Seemingly there were some who thought there was virtue in just hearing the Word, and that it did not matter a lot whether or not one obeyed it. Such, James says, were just deceiving themselves. He proved the futility of mere listening without any effort to put into practice what one hears. He knew quite well the empty ceremonialism of the Jews who said and did not. The "hearers only" did nothing except listen. They were shirkers instead of workers.

In verse twenty-two we are exhorted to be "doers of the Word." Doing the Word does not produce salvation, but it is a characteristic of a saved person. A mark of childhood is obedience. One who does not obey is either not a child or else he is a very poor one.

Every Sabbath the Jews had the Old Testament read to them in the synagogue. They placed great emphasis on the importance of attending these services and the value of listening

to these readings. Many seemed to think that this was their whole religious duty. They remind us of many today who think that because they attend church services once a week other things do not matter much. To attend and to hear are of little value unless the Word is permitted to work in the heart and life. It is like scattering seed on hard ground where it cannot take root and grow.

Many listen to the Word of God preached for years, but are not even saved. They go to church, but their minds are on the clock or something else more than on the sermon. When the meeting is over all they think about is getting home. Some of them may say "that was a nice sermon," but immediately they forget it. Even Christians listen attentively to the Word and still do not obey it. The purpose of the Word is to bring life to the sinner through the Saviour, which will result in a godly life for the Lord.

To deceive others has been a common practice since Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. But this verse of scripture speaks of self-deception, which is worse than deceiving others. Many believe they are bound for heaven, yet all the while they are on the road to hell. If any Christian thinks that God is pleased with his merely hearing the Word, he is sadly deceived and terribly mistaken.

To be a "doer of the Word" is of the utmost importance, and should be a constant habit of the child of God. Christians are obligated to make the doing of the Word of God the main business of their lives, affecting, penetrating and pervading all other matters. He who hears the Word and does it not will soon forget what he hears. No matter how wonderful or how precious truth may be, it must be lived out to become effective. He who hears the Word and does it not may imagine that he is all right, but such is not the case. Here God warns His children against being hearers and nothing more.

Being hearers of the Word without acting on it is like pouring water into a sieve. It goes in one ear and out the other. People easily acquire itching ears that delight to be tickled with some sensation. The Word does not take root in the hearts of such people. They deceive themselves, but nobody else. These spiritual gad-about, who go from one revival meeting to another, are impulsive, and lack depth of purpose and seriousness in life.

The "doers of the Word" are those who read, hear, understand, believe, submit to the authority of and are ruled by the Bible. Their tempers and lives are regulated by its precepts. Instead of walking in their own ways, they obey its holy commandments. The term "doers" is expressive of continuance.

In connection with this exhortation, we have a splendid illustration. A mere hearer is compared to a person who, after looking at himself in a mirror, takes his departure, and soon forgets the appearance he presented. Such a man looks at himself in a mirror, is not flattered by what he sees, so he turns away and tries to forget. Likewise, many hear the Word of God, see their condition, but try to forget what they have seen or try to make themselves believe they are not as bad as pictured.

A photograph often flatters a person, but a mirror gives an accurate reflection. On that account, Socrates advised young men to carry a mirror. If they were good looking, they should remind themselves that an ugly life was out of keeping with good looks. If their appearance was not so good, they were told to remember that handsome actions offset ugly looks. Besides showing us every wrinkle in our faces and every streak in our hair, the mirror tells us whether we are clean or dirty.

God's Word is like a mirror. In it we can see ourselves as we are morally and spiritually. Many do not like the Bible for this reason. Their moral visage is not so good, so they do not like the mirror that reveals this to them. To a person who dares to behold himself in it, it will show him all his weaknesses, failures and sins. It will show how filthy he is and how badly he needs cleansing. Men may flatter us, but this mirror, without an apology, will show exactly what we are in God's sight. Therefore, let us use this wonderful

mirror with conscientious and loving diligence. Let us observe ourselves carefully in this mirror, see wherein we come short, straightway proceed to correct the matter, and continue to walk in the right way.

It is a marvelous thing for Christians to look into the law of liberty, to enter it and to continue therein. It is not only a matter of looking, but of continuing; of seeing, but of living; of knowing, but of doing. The Holy Spirit quickly passes from the expression "doers of the Word" to "doers of the work" in verse twenty-five. Doing the Word and doing the work are linked indissolubly. He who is a doer of the Word is of necessity a doer of the work. Any doer of the work, who is not also a doer of the Word, will certainly make a terrible mess of the work. Any doing of the work that is not based on obedience to the Word is sure to fail. The practice of the Word of God, rather than a mere glancing at the mirror and chattering about what was seen, is what really counts.

This expression, "If any man among you seem to be religious," as recorded in verse twenty-six, is very suggestive. According to it, there is a religion that is counterfeit. It is not counterfeit to the extent that all men cast it off as such. It has appearances of being genuine. But, a seeming religion is a vain one.

A religion which does not curb and govern the tongue is worthless. The tongue is here regarded as an unruly horse that needs to be controlled with bit and bridle. By nature its course is wild and destructive, like that of a spirited horse without a bridle. Bridling the tongue is an excellent test of real Christianity. He who has sufficient grace to accomplish this difficult task is to be commended and appreciated. The Lord will not hold us guiltless for speaking words which should be left unsaid.

In verse twenty-seven James gives us two very practical tests of genuine religion. One is mercy toward the suffering or active love to the needy. True religion must express itself in action. The other test is to keep oneself unspotted from the stain of the world. This world is corrupt and defiling. While we are in it, we are to keep ourselves aloof from its pollutions.