**Do What The Word Says**

James 1:19-27 (Key Verse: 1:22)

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Last week we learned about a sacrificial shepherd heart for God’s sheep. This was one of our prayer topics at the beginning of the year for our ministry. We had also prayed to be spiritual warriors in our generation. And one best way is to do what the word of God teaches us. Because the bible tells us that God’s word is like a sword. We are in a ministry that focus on teaching the bible. We even have big prayer item when we deliver Sunday message, that all listeners may receive one clear word of God. We have weekly bible studies, where we hear and discuss the word of God. Our ministry’s name has the word bible in the middle. So this message today is so relevant to us. Question is, are we only hearer’s of the word or are we also doers of the word? Is it enough to study the bible and be hears of the word?

In today’s passage, James teaches about hearing and doing the word. He teaches a fundamental truth for our Christian life. Why did God give his word? Was it just for our hearing and enjoyment? We may be proud of reading, studying, and teaching the Bible. But James says, “Do not deceive yourselves.” What really matters is doing what the word says, not just listening to it. This is quite challenging to anyone who hears the word, especially to those of us who diligently study and teach the Bible. But God’s heart is that his children may be truly blessed through his word. God wants us to see his vision of full redemption so that we can experience new life every day. Amen!

In this passage there is a number of imperatives, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow in anger (19), get rid of moral filth (21a), be doers of the word and not hears only (22). It may sound like Christian life is about obeying a list of instructions to live a moralistic life. However, this is not the case. Verse 18 says, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.” Through the blood of Jesus on the cross we have been given new birth, and this is all God’s grace and God’s unconditional love for us, so that we might become the first of God’s chosen people pure and righteous for His glory. These imperatives are then the fruits we produce because of God’s grace upon us. Because God chose us and gave us a new birth through Jesus. We do not do things to become morally upright, but rather because of what Jesus did for us, we have become God’s people who produce fruits of righteousness (the imperatives). This message is broken to two parts, part I, be quick to listen and humbly accept the word and part II, be doers of the word, and practice true religion. May the lord indeed bless us by granting each one of us hearing of one word so we may obey. Amen!

**Part I: Be quick to listen and humbly accept the word (19-21)**

Look at verse 19, My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,” In general it is much much easier to speak than to listen. To be quick to listen and slow to speak, requires some level of humility and surrender. It is not by mistake that we have two ears and one mouth. I read somewhere that it symbolizes that we need to listen twice as much as we speak. Proverbs 10:19 says, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.” Sin is not ended by having many words.

Also we need to be slow to anger. Because anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires [20]. When we are angry, we usually feel justified as though it is for a rightful reason. However our anger is a result of having a high level regard of ourselves, it is actually a result of pride. We think of ourselves too much. It is as a result of being too self conscious or too self focused rather than being self-less. Proverbs 14:29 says, “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.” This is a person who is able to look things from the other persons perspective and then understand. Which is possible by not becoming the centre of attention.

We all coming from all kinds of family backgrounds, we may have our own traumas growing up. Such that certain things said to us now triggers us to be angry quickly. The common one is no one wants to be told they are bad. We immediately become defensive and angry. Either because we have been trying to live morally upright, or we already have own self doubts of being good. And now when someone comes with judgmental tone or words, we are triggered to anger. And so how can we be slow to anger when we are so focused on ourselves? The answer is through Jesus, who was and is completely and perfectly others centered. The bible does not come with methods such as three steps to overcome anger.

Look at verse 21, “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” All our good works, works to try and save our lives by living morally upright lives are but filthy rags. The bible calls it moral filth. We also need to get rid of every expression of evil and humbly accept the word of God. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ that was planted in us. Because it is only God’s word that can save our souls. Verse 21b says, humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls. This word planted in us is the power source for our spiritual life, renewal, and growth. Through what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, we die to self and are enabled by Jesus to live for God. We can now become less self focused and more people focused. We can grow to become like Jesus who did not come to receive but to give.

Our attitude towards the word of God is critical. We should humbly accept God’s word that was planted in our hearts. When we are challenged by the word of God to repent and obey, we want to debate or resist the word of God. But meekness is the way of Jesus our Savior, who is gentle and humble. Spurgeon wrote, “It is the door through which God’s grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving.” So, we should let the Lord speak to us through his word. We should let his word take root in our hearts and lives. Through receiving God’s word again and again, our faith grows. The word of God has power to save us; it has the power to change us inside out. May we be quick to listen and humbly accept God’s word. Amen!

**Part II: Be doers of the word and practice true religion (22-27)**

How do we humbly accept God’s word? How can we have God’s word remain in our hearts? We do so by doing what the word says. Let us all read verse 22, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” We need to listen to things again and again because we keep falling short to do what the word teaches. Today, we live in a culture where we are constantly bombarded with information. We get tons of information every day through online media platforms such as YouTube, social media, podcasts, etc.. And, after listening or watching, we usually evaluate what we see by clicking like or dislike. All these things also influence how we process information and what we are hearing. How are we engaging with what we are learning from our bible studies? Clearly, we are not called to just listen and then forget.

James even uses an analogy of a mirror in verses 23 and 24 to illustrate what it is like to only listen and not do what the word teaches. Look at verse 23-24, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” If our bible studies is all about listening, discussing and not intentional to do what the word teaches, then we are deceiving ourselves. We are in a false religion, we are make up artist, make believe, claiming to be Christians.

One sociologist C. Smith once said, the religion of this generation can be portrayed as “moralistic therapeutic deism,” It is “moralistic” because it is about making a morally good person. It is “therapeutic” because it makes people feel good about themselves. It is “deism” because God is not needed unless we have a problem to fix. If God’s word challenges us to repent and we allow our egos to refuse to humbly accept God’s word, we are then living in an illusion. Are we under the hearing of the word of God to forget it? If our answer is NO! then the only way not to forget, the only way to keep God’s word in our hearts is to do wat the word says.

Look at verse 25, “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” The expression “to look intently into” , talks about a sincere attitude toward God’s word, studying it with great scrutiny and devotion. Its seems contradictory that the law could give us freedom. However, God’s law offers us a true reflection of our sinful condition and gives us the opportunity to ask for God’s forgiveness. In other words the Bible is a law book, through the Bible we get to know who we are and who God is. As believers we are saved by God’s grace. For example the Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death, this is God’s law, like the law of gravity, impossible to escape it. Sin will lead to death.

However, instead of us facing God’s judgement of death due to sin, Jesus Christ, the son of God took all our sin upon himself and died on the cross. So that whosever believes in him may not die but live. This is as a result of God’s perfect law. We have been given freedom and we shall continue in it as long as we do what the word of God teaches. This is how we can be blessed in what we do, when we do what the word of God teaches. Whether you are a student, work at some company or have your business, if we are living in obedience to the word of God, then we will be blessed in what we do. The blessing is not the vocation we do, but rather doing what God’s teaches in that vocation. We are truly free when we live as those who are created according to the image of God, and right here is the truest and purest form of God’s blessing. As we obey what the bible teaches, the law of Christ, we will be like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season. The word of God is the source of life; the word of God nourishes us, it transforms us into the image of Christ. His word enables us to overcome hardships and challenges. May we enjoy this blessed life by putting God’s word into practice!

Look at verse 26-27, “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” Here James gives us some important examples of putting the word of God into practice such as being able to control our tongues, to show concern for the helpless in need, and to live a life of purity. The word religion means a practice or method of worshiping God. Let us look more into verse 26-27 on what true religion is.

**Firstly, controlling our tongue.** If we cannot control our tongues we deceive ourselves and our religion is worthless. Do get angry quickly and start talking without listening to the other? Do we criticize each other with our tongues? Do we gossip about others, spreading bitterness, and condemning others? How about on social media? Unless the word of God is transmitted in our speech and lives, we are deceiving ourselves regarding our walk with God. If our tongue and speech is not sanctified and we cannot control our tongue, our religion is worthless or even idolatrous.

**Secondly, looking after the helpless in need (widows and orphans).** In the Bible, orphans and widows stand for the most vulnerable in society. God is the defender of the fatherless, widows and foreigners because they are without any protection in society. We as believers should look after them in their difficult situation. Historically, the church has engaged in caring for the weak in society. May God give us a generous heart to care for the needy and vulnerable. Amen!

**Thirdly, keeping oneself from being polluted by the world.** As we learned sometime this year, because God is holy, we should also live holy lives. The pollution of the world spreads through music, movies and now more than ever social media. We should take care what we are consuming and allowing. The world teaches us to devote our lives to things and people, rather than our lord Jesus Christ. These examples are not the only marks of true religion, but some of the important examples where we can obey the word of God practically.

Let us examine our lives before God. Is my religion acceptable to God? Or is it worthless, having a form of godliness, but denying its power? The word of God says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” True religion is not merely listening to the Word. How much we hear or read or how much we know does not matter to God. You may memorize Bible verses which is great. But more importantly is to trust, love and obey Jesus. What counts before God is acting on what we hear and what we learn. This passage really challenges me. Because I read, study, and preach God’s word. I should repent and start practicing what I know so help me God. Amen!

**In conclusion,** we are not encouraged to obey the Word with our own will power. The goal of our Christian life is not to keep many rules or change ourselves into “good” people who live by many rules. We are not changed by rules, but by grace. We are not in a competition or performance based religion. Our goal is to live in a right relationship with God. He wants our sanctification, which is possible and motivated only by his grace in Jesus. So, I pray that we humbly accept and obey the word of the gospel every day. God has blessed our ministry to love his word through Bible studies and meditation. God wants to bless each of us with his life-giving word all the more. May we grow in the love and holiness of God by putting his word into practice! Amen.