

#3 James Chapter 1c-2a

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Martin Luther rejected the Epistle of James. He believed it contradicted Paul's teaching that salvation, our justification, is only by God's Grace according to faith in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luther thought James was denying justification by faith alone because he wrote about the importance of our outward works, the things that others see. What Luther failed to recognize was that James was teaching the same thing Paul did, but Paul was teaching about the faith of the inner man, faith of the heart which God alone sees, whereas James was teaching it is also important what is evident from the outer man, the walk of faith that others witness because it is according to what we do that God is glorified by others when they see our works which correspond to a life of faith. If what we do does not reflect what we claim to believe then others see us as hypocrites and turn away from the God in Whom we say we believe.

Verse 22: 'But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.'

Here is our next test of true, saving faith. Do you read the Bible and do what it says? When you read God's Word, when it shows you areas of your life where you fall short of 'walking in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called' Eph 4:1, do you admit your failure and sin to God and to yourself and then make the changes necessary, or do you deceive yourself into thinking you're just fine the way you are; do you deceive yourself into thinking, if no one knows about those secret areas of your life then everything is just fine? God's Word should cause us to always closely examine our own lives, our own hearts.

After Church, a lady came up to the Pastor and said, 'That was a wonderful sermon, Pastor, simply wonderful! Everything you said applies to my husband.'

Verse 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; ²⁴for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.'

The idea here is the same as the difference between how different people look at themselves in the mirror. Typically women, and some men, look very intently at themselves in the mirror. They pay attention to every hair and whisker, every millimeter of skin, they examine both eyes and both ears, they look at their neck and their hair from every angle, front, back and both sides, noticing every wrinkle, every pimple, every mole and every age spot, carefully covering each one with the greatest of care and attention. Then there are people like me who just glance in the mirror, and think, 'Just fine... my face is still attached, who could ask for more? I know what I look like, I'm sure I haven't changed since yesterday. I have things to do. I don't look intently. Remember, like with the Letter to the Hebrews, James is writing to those who only have the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets.

Do you remember what we said was the purpose of the Law?

It was meant first, to show the Righteousness of God and the complete unrighteousness of all men, to divide between righteousness and sin... to show the reality of our sin.

'...for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.' Rom 3:20

What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made Gal 3:19

It cuts deep inside us to reveal who we really are.

'For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.' Heb 4:12

The Law acted as a fence, a barrier, a teacher for the spiritual man who seeks to draw near to God. Then, when Christ came, He brought the New Covenant whereby God's Law was then written on our hearts. The Law taught right from wrong; now, with His Law written on our hearts, the Holy Spirit teaches us. The spiritual man seeks to draw near to God as God draws him near.

'But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.' Gal 3:23

Conversely, the natural man runs from God wanting to hide from Him, like Adam and Eve did +after they sinned. The natural man is offended by the Law and he seeks to rebel against it, to attack it, to sin all the more. The Law was added so that the natural man would rebel against it and sin all the more, fully showing himself to be guilty and deserving of death.

'Moreover the law entered that the ***offense might abound.***' rom 5:20

James isn't talking about poor memory, that we forget what the Word says, he is talking about the one whose priorities are wrong. Other things are more important.

He looks into God's Word and sees who he really is, and rather than making the necessary changes to conform to God's Word and will, he allows the things of the World to draw him away from God's will. They are more important to him than God's will.

The Old Testament, which is all these Hebrew Christians had at this time and about which they were very familiar, having memorized it from early childhood, was filled with instances of Israel's having forgotten God and His blessings. Moses said, ' then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' Deut 6:12

The Psalmist warns, 'forget none of His benefits.' Ps. 103:2

God warned through Malachi, ' Remember the law of Moses My servant.' Mal 4:4

God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We were made in God's image and are also trinity, physical body, spiritual body and soul. We are like an old fashioned balance scale; on one side of the scale is our fleshly body which is corrupted by sin. Our flesh always seeks its own way, it always wants to rebel and sin. On the other side of the scale is our spiritual body which God created the moment of our salvation. Our spirit is one with God's Holy Spirit and it always seeks to do according to what the Holy Spirit tells us. In the middle of the scale is our soul, our will and emotions, our mind and decision making processes. Our soul must constantly decide whether to follow our flesh into sin or follow our spirit into God's will and blessing. To constantly help us in those constantly present decisions, the Bible tells us that we have the mind of Christ: ' For The spiritual man judges all things, but he himself is not subject to anyone's judgment. **16**"For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ..' Cor 2:15 He calls our minds and hearts to Himself, He strengthens and encourages our minds, He always reminds us of His Word but He will never force our decision. He may go to great lengths to help us make the right decision, but He won't force us... our own minds, our own souls must make the decisions.

Obedience to God's Word results in God's blessing in our lives: 'All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God.' Deut. 28:2

Disobedience always brings God's loving chastisement which in itself is meant to remind us of God's love and care for us: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; **6** *For whom the Lord loves He chastens*, And scourges every son whom He receives.' ⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.'

God chose each one of us who are born again and He alone created our spirits perfect and complete. It was His choice and His work alone. He created our spirits perfect and sinless.

Our souls, making right decisions and God conforming them more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is God's work also but we are involved in it by submitting to God and making right choices.

Our physical bodies are still sinful and always will be until the Lord Jesus Christ returns for us and we are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the Rapture. Our physical bodies being submitted to the will of God is all our work but God is involved by strengthening and encouraging us by His Holy Spirit.

All day, every day, we must choose whether to follow our flesh which always wants to sin or to follow our spirits which always want to do God's will.

When we study God's Word, our true selves are revealed and we can either pay attention and be doers of the Word and not hearers only or we can go away and quickly forget what God's Word showed us about ourselves and be hearers of the Word and not doers, deceiving ourselves.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1

David, in the Psalms, over and over reminds us of the proper response to God's Word. All of Psalm 119 is written of his love for God's Word:

'Oh, how I love Your law!

It *is* my meditation all the day.

⁹⁸ You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;

For they *are* ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers,

For Your testimonies *are* my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients,

Because I keep Your precepts.

¹⁰¹ I have restrained my feet from every evil way,

That I may keep Your word.' Ps 119:97

God made His Word simple and understandable. Even the unregenerate man, someone lost, can still understand much of it unless he simply chooses to disregard it as foolishness.

Samuel Clemmons, Mark Twain was not a Christian by any means but he said, 'It isn't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand!'

Verse 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.'

Psalms 1 says, 'Blessed *is* the man...(whose) ***delight is in the law of the LORD***, (the Word of God) and *in His law he meditates* day and night... and ***whatever he does shall prosper***.'

The Greek word for 'looking into' God's Word... it means to stoop down and carefully examine. It is the same word when Mary looked into the tomb to see if Jesus was there, and also the same word used of angels desiring to look into the things revealed to us in the Gospel. It means carefully studying and learning God's Word and then acting upon it. Doing the work(s) which corresponds to what God's Word says.

Here, instead of saying a doer of the **Word**... it says, the 'doer of the **work**' will be blessed in what he does. What work will bring God's blessing? Obedience... obedience to God's Word. If we obey God's Word, especially the law which He has written on our hearts, we will be blessed in all we do. We will still have trials and tribulations because that is how God refines and polishes us but we won't need to be disciplined by God. Discipline and chastisement are reserved for God's disobedient children. Blessing along with trials are reserved for God's obedient children and judgment and eternal condemnation are reserved for everyone else.

What are the laws which God has written on our hearts? ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself***... these two are what make up the perfect Law of Liberty. As we study God's Word, as we see our reflection in it, we will be able to see whether or not our actions correspond to God's perfect Law of Liberty. Those actions are what constitute ***doing the work***.

Verse 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.'

To control the tongue is so difficult. The Word says, 'The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the

heart that the mouth speaks.' Luke 6:45 Later in James he says, 'For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body... Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things... See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.'

We can look so spiritual and so religious but if we are speaking lies or gossiping or causing division or cursing or so many other things that the tongue is very good at... those are 'works' that do not correspond to a born again heart. Those works are what correspond to someone who is deceiving themselves and trying to deceive everyone else.

This is someone who is a hearer of the Word but not a doer of the Word or the work that exemplifies the Word. This person thinks he is religious, he is proud of how he thinks he looks to others; he goes through all the rituals of religion but the heart is deceived and deceiving. He prays and tithes and fasts and wears appropriate clothing but it is all worthless if he cannot control his own tongue.

To be a doer of the word, to understand God's Word so that it can be properly applied to our lives we must look intently at it. First, before we begin reading and studying we must ask God for wisdom to understand and apply it to ourselves. He promised us, earlier in the chapter that if we ask God for wisdom, He will always give it to us generously.

Remember, he is writing to Hebrew Christians who had been steeped in religion all their lives; they took great pride in walking according to all the laws and statutes of Moses. They memorized Scripture, they fasted and prayed, they gave their alms, their hair was just right, their robes were just right, they were like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, all these things I have done since my youth and Jesus said, go, sell all you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven,' and he went away sad because he was very rich. Outwardly, he was very religious but in his heart, he was selfish, prideful and covetous; his religion was worthless because it wasn't of the heart. So what should our 'religion' look like?

Verse 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.

He means to have a heart of compassion for the least within your congregation. Know who the widows and orphans are, and by 'visit' he means to really get into their lives in a helpful, loving way, giving of real time and money, making sure their needs are fully met.

The word that James uses for 'visit' is the same word used of God coming to the aid of His people, both Jews and Gentiles alike, coming with His Salvation and all that it entails.

It's the same word that Jesus used when he said, 'You did or did not **visit** Me when I was sick or naked or in prison' and to those who didn't, He will say, 'I never knew you.'

It's the same word that James used in Acts 14: 'Simon has declared how God at the first **visited** the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. The word actually conveys everything of God's Salvation. That's what he means by **visiting** widows and orphans in their distress.

It's also important to see that what he is describing is an area of ministry that offers no recognition, no glory and no payback. This is ministry to those who could never repay in any way.

It's always easy to get people to volunteer for jobs that produce recognition and glory. It's much harder to find people to do small menial tasks.

I went to the pastor and said, 'Do you need me to preach?' He said, 'No.' 'Do you need me to direct the choir? No. Do you need me to lead the worship team? No. Do you need me to teach others? No. He said, what we really need is someone to clean the toilets. I went away downcast, but I did it anyway. The next Sunday, there were bright, shining plaques on both sides of every bathroom door saying,

All bathrooms kept sparkling clean by TOM TILLMAN, HUMBLE MAN OF GOD.

And at the bottom, in small letters, they said, '*All glory to God.*'

Chapter 2: 'My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?'

'Our Daily Bread of Feb. 1979 reported this story: *'When he was a student, the famous Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, considered becoming a Christian. He read the Gospels and was moved by them. It seemed to him that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that plagued the people of India.*

One Sunday, he went to a local church. He had decided to see the pastor and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the church, which consisted of white people, the ushers refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu" I wonder what kind of impact for the Gospel Gandhi might have had in India if God had chosen him for salvation.

The sins of showing favoritism to the rich and the beautiful or whatever other quality the World favors and of despising the poor and the ugly or whatever other quality the World hates has always been a problem for the Church and in every Church. We almost can't help ourselves, we all do it. Pretty girls can always live by a different set of rules. Rich men too. We favor them and too often wish to be them but it is so ugly to God when we think like that.

Here is another test of true faith in God. The rich, the poor, the beautiful and the ugly are all, meant by God, to be tests for each of us. How do we respond to each of them? Do we have the heart of God within us or do we have the heart of the World within us? Do we prefer the rich and the beautiful people? Do we shun and look the other way when approached by poor or ugly people? Are we proud to be seen with the rich and the beautiful? Are we ashamed to be seen with the poor and the ugly? Do we not invite the poor and ugly to our parties for fear the rich and beautiful won't come?

Of course, **we** would **never** do this, but the people we know of, who do,... they aren't the only ones. Even Peter himself was guilty of the same thing. In Galatians 2, Paul writes, ' Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men **came from James**, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.' See that? They came from Jerusalem, from James, the same one who is now writing this letter to other Hebrews. He must have learned something when his emissaries returned from Antioch.

In the first line of this chapter he says, 'do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Lord of glory**, with partiality.' When we are partial toward anyone, when we exalt anyone, whether they are rich or beautiful or talented, we glorify them, robbing the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, of glory that is rightfully His.

When we do that, we are judging according to outward appearances, what the World does, and not according to the heart, as God does. That is exactly James' point here. The rich and beautiful are not inherently bad; some are very good. The poor and ugly are not inherently good; some are very bad. How do we tell the difference? That's the point of this entire letter: these many tests of true faith. A person's heart will be heard from his mouth and seen in his works. A rich, poor, beautiful or ugly person who is a child of God will be kind, loving and generous; he will show forth a heart that is toward God and His desires. One who is not a child of God, whatever his station, will exhibit a heart that is toward the World and its preferences.

It's important to God that each of us cultivate a heart that judges according to what is important to God. Paul writes to the Corinthians: 'For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the

flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.' 1 Cor 1:28

As I said, there is nothing inherently good or bad in wealth or poverty, in beauty or ugliness, in being talented or untalented but the problem for a rich or beautiful or talented person is that they can learn to trust in their wealth, talent and beauty and so fail to readily see their need for Jesus Christ and His Salvation. For them, life can seem very good, very satisfying; they may never want it to end, whereas the poor, ugly and untalented soon recognize that this life is truly unsatisfying; they can be much more open to the hope of eternal life in Heaven.

When God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son she said, '... He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent away the rich empty-handed.' Luke 1

God is always in complete control. He has made each of us a certain way for His purposes and He brings different people into our lives for His purposes. How we respond to each one shows the true condition of our hearts before Him.