

James began his letter telling us to count it all joy when we face trials, which means afflictions or temptations. One temptation is to speak what should not be spoken. In the previous passage we were commanded to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because man's anger does not bring about the righteousness of God. He tells us to receive the implanted Word which is able to save our souls. He continues in our passage for today by telling us how to receive that Word and what it should do in us. Of course, that Word is the Word of God. He became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14ⁱ). While James emphasis is on doing, we know that without Christ, who is the living Word, we can do nothing (John 15:5ⁱⁱ). So, as we go through this passage, keep in mind that doing is joyfully yielding to the implanted Word, instead of yielding to temptation. It is His life in us that enables us to be doers of the Word.

²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* James 1:22 In Hebrew, the command to hear implies not only hearing but acting on what you hear. The Shema from Deuteronomy reads, ⁴ *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Deuteronomy 6:4,5 We are to hear the truth that there is only one God and that we should love Him with our all. Do you see the link between hearing and obeying. Hear and do! But when we read the Bible, we often hear and do not obey. Even this greatest of commands we usually fall short of obeying. In that case, according to this verse in James, we are deceiving ourselves. We think we are a good Christians doing our duty to God, but we do not have faith in what we heard, for if we did, by the grace of God we would do it. We pat ourselves on the back for reading the Bible or going to church before we do anything about what we have heard. It does not mean a thing unless we do something about what we heard (Matthew 7:21ⁱⁱⁱ). The Bible is not just an information book. It is God's invitation to a relationship with Him.

Jesus taught the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount. He told the crowd that whoever **hears His sayings and puts them into practice** is like a man who builds his house on a rock. But those who hear the sayings and do not do them is like a man whose house is built on sand, which will not withstand the storms of life (Matthew 7:24-27^{iv}). The next verses give us an illustration of what it is like.

²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* James 1:23,24 When we read God's Word or hear it preached and do not act on what we heard, James tells us we are like someone who gets up in the morning and intently looks at his face in a mirror. He says, "Ahhhh! My hair is a mess; there is crust in the corners of my eyes; it looks like I drooled in my sleep; and I have a day of beard stubble on my face." Then he turns around and walks out the door and gets in his car and goes to work. While at work he cannot understand why everyone is staring at him. He forgot what he saw in the mirror and failed to do anything about it.

We read in the beginning of the chapter to count it all joy when you face various kinds of trials (James 1:2^v), but when a trial comes, we whine and complain. We read to ask God for wisdom (1:5^{vi}), and we find ourselves not knowing what to do and run to man instead of to God for wisdom. We doubt God will answer our prayer and forget that the doubting person does not receive anything from the Lord (1:6-8^{vii}). We heard, but we

did not let our heart and mind be changed by the Word so that our actions follow. That is being self-deceived. It is like the people who heard Ezekiel. ^{30b} *'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.'* ³¹ *And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain.* ³² *And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.* Ezekiel 33:30-32

The Scriptures give us a mirror to see our flaws. When we study God's Word, we can easily see where we are falling short. I was just looking at Paul telling the Thessalonians that they knew how he lived among them, and they became imitators of him. He saw their *work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Thessalonians 1:3 I thought to myself, "Do I want people to imitate me?" In Philippians Paul tells the church to keep their eyes on those who follow his example (Philippians 3:17^{viii}). Would my example cause others to have works of faith, labors of love, steadfast hope in the Lord? I would hope so. But I see where I fall short. I looked in the mirror of God's Word and I do not want to forget what I saw, where I need to change. I pray for the zeal of the Lord to consume me, that by doing what I hear I might be pleasing the Lord whom I love.

Home Depot says its stores are how doers get more done. James tells us it is looking into the mirror of God's Word that shows us how to be doers which results in a blessed life. ²⁵ *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* James 1:25 "BUT" - thank God for this conjunction. If we just stop at the point where we fail to do what we hear from the Word, we would be hopeless. But we look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, our spiritual mirror, and by God's grace we act on it.

Let us examine why James is comparing the law of liberty to a mirror. What did Christ set us free from? It was the bondage of the 613 laws of the Old Covenant and the judgment we deserved for breaking those commands. That law teaches us that Christ took the punishment for all our sins (1 John 2:2^{ix}; 1 Peter 3:18^x). We are also freed from the enslavement of sin (Galatians 5:1^{xi}). We see in that law that Someone has paid the debt we owed (Romans 6:23^{xii}; Isaiah 53:5^{xiii}). The love that could do such a gracious thing for me causes me want to be righteous in return. Paul wrote ¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* Galatians 5:13 We are freed from all the dos and do nots of the law, but the moral laws still describe a life that pleases God. Murder is still wrong because God is the giver of life. Theft is wrong because God gave that item to someone else. Adultery is wrong because God is faithful. A life of wisdom is going to be expressed in righteousness in everyday living, but not under compulsion, rather out of sheer joy and a desire to express our love for God in all that we do (Romans 14:17-19^{xiv}). This is where law and liberty meet in joyful expressions of service (Psalm 100:2^{xv}).

If one *looks into this perfect law of liberty and perseveres...* Again, let us pause and think about what that is saying. When we look into that mirror of the moral law and persevere, we see where we fall short, and then we surrender those strongholds of the old nature to God. We persevere in this battle of flesh versus spirit (Galatians 5:17^{xvi}). We remember what we have heard from the Lord, the corrections we saw in His Word, and see that our actions start falling in line. That is not because we must, but because we are

free to, and that is the desire of our new nature, to live in a way that is pleasing to God (Romans 6:13,14^{xvii}).

This is when we find our lives are blessed, not necessarily with prosperity as in the case of the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:4,5^{xviii}), but spiritually. We find the fruits of the Spirit are increasingly manifest in our lives (Galatians 5:22,23^{xix}). The love, joy, and peace that we always longed for are ours in Jesus and overflow from our lives to others (John 4:13,14^{xx}).

James wrote that we must persevere. That means it does not come instantly. The battle is a lifelong one, but each victory matures us and prepares us for the next battle. We find our satisfaction in Jesus and lean on His strength. Our faith is refined and is a shield to take the enemy's fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16^{xxi}). We do not want to be like the seed that fell on the shallow soil that sprang up and looked so good, but because its roots were shallow it died when the sun beat upon it (Matthew 13:5,6^{xxii}). If we want to get to that place of blessing, we must persevere, learn our lessons, draw near to God, and let the life of Jesus in us be manifest in our daily lives (1 Peter 5:9^{xxiii}; Hebrews 10:22,23^{xxiv}; 2 Corinthians 4:10^{xxv}). That is a blessed doer who acts on the Word he or she hears!

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. James 1:26 How do we know if we have looked intently into the law of liberty and are now a blessed doer who acts? James gave us some litmus tests. Is our tongue bridled? We put a bridle on a horse to steer its head so that it goes where we want it to go. Is our born-again spirit applying the Word of truth to bridle our tongue? Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34^{xxvi}). If our tongue is quick to justify our actions and condemn others or to gossip and slander or to complain and murmur against what God has allowed, we have deceived our heart (Psalm 15:1-3^{xxvii}). We thought we were religious and spiritually mature, but the words coming from our mouths are a sign that is not so.

When I introduced this series of sermons in James, I told you we will be challenged to see if our faith is genuine. We will see where our actions fall short. James has hit on several already in this first chapter: complaining about trials, doubting God, the sin of partiality, thinking that God is tempting us, and now he is addressing how we allow the old nature to shoot out a comment that defends our ego or wounds others. That is not being as James said in verse 19^{xxviii}, *quick to listen and slow to speak, and slow to anger*. We are not applying what we hear so that we act on the Word that saves us from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4^{xxix}).

James declares that person's religion to be worthless. Why? Because it has not changed his or her heart. It is a set of beliefs that leave us as the same fallen people we were before. Religion may make us feel good about ourselves, or give us an emotional high, but we are still the same person to the rest of the world, speaking the same rude or vulgar things that we think will impress others. We are not hearing God's Word or asking for wisdom for what to say and how to say it.

We should recognize that for some people this looks like an instant transformation, but for most of us it is a lifelong journey of perseverance. We learn from each failure, and we are grieved each time. That is a sign that the Spirit of God is working in us. Little by little we find His grace helping us to change. If there is no effort or desire to change, that is a sign that we may be deceiving ourselves.

Jesus said, ⁴⁹ *For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.* John 12:49 NIV translates that as “what to say and how to say it.” I fall far short of that incredible example. But that is our goal. Keep the reins of our tongues held tightly back until we hear what God would have us say and how He would have us say it. I probably have a few dozen thoughts or more every day that I want to express, but after a second or two of asking if it is edifying, I realize I should not utter the words (Proverbs 30:32^{xxx}). We will have a lot more on this topic in chapter 3.

The final verses of chapter one outline what James will address in the rest of his letter. ²⁷ *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* James 1:27 If I see from my actions and words that my religion is worthless, what then is true religion. That is what James defines next. *Religion that is pure and undefiled...* That means there are religions that are impure and defiled. Whatever promotes selfishness and ego, a false sense of being spiritual without the new birth of the Spirit and hearing and acting on the Word is an impure and defiled religion. Every religion that depends on works for salvation is impure. Works cannot save us, but works are evidence we have become a new creation.

What is pure and undefiled before God the Father is to do what is on His heart: to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction (Isaiah 1:17^{xxxi}; Psalm 68:5^{xxxii}). The word visit has the same Greek roots that we also use for the word we translate as overseer. In other words, we do not just drop in and say hello. We see what we can do to relieve their condition. It will cost us, and that is an offering to God.

Throughout the Levitical law God made mention of caring for the poor and the sojourner (Leviticus 23:22^{xxxiii}). Widows and orphans were the needy of the first century. The orphans have no one to care for them. They would beg or steal or labor for their daily bread. The culture of the day saw them as worthless, but God made them in His image. He cares for the throwaways of this world. In our culture it is the homeless drug abusers. Many are in that condition because of their horrific home lives. The foundation of our society is the family, and the family unit in our culture is collapsing. That does not excuse their bad choices or justify their behavior, but they are still precious souls in the eyes of God. They need the love of God displayed so they can begin to hope in Him.

Widows had almost no means of support. Their affliction refers to the loss of their spouse and the poverty that results from it. If they did not have a male child, they were desperate. They were also made in the image of God. While Jews thought to be born a woman was somewhat of a curse, God made both male and female in His image (Genesis 1:27^{xxxiv}). We still have the problem today of men dying and leaving behind a widow. Even if they have a male heir, they are often left to fend for themselves. It is a lot easier in our society, but in much of the world this has not changed. That is why we support ministries that teach women in impoverished nations skills to support themselves and give them the tools to do so.

Having a heart for the needy is true religion. We do not want to encourage laziness and must discern who is truly in need. The Scriptures are clear that we should work so that we can help those in need (Ephesians 4:28^{xxxv}). If our religion is worth something, we will give to Christian relief organizations or missions that help the orphan and widow and those in crisis due to natural disasters. That is why we give to two local missions.

God may direct us to give to an individual that is in a tight spot through no fault of their own. We have a benevolent fund for those needs as well. There is also our food pantry which provides for the homeless.

Christians in the first century that would not work tried to live off the generosity of the church. Paul wrote that if they will not work then they will not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10^{xxxvi}). We work to be responsible for our own families and to be able to give.

The next action of pure and undefiled religion is to keep ourselves unstained from the world. That means to be set apart from worldliness, the love of money, coveting things, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17^{xxxvii}). **Just as God called Israel out of Egypt, He calls Christians out of this world system.** We enter the kingdom of God with new priorities and a different reason for living. Our selfishness is nailed to the cross of Jesus and we yield our decisions to our Savior. When we will at times find ourselves yielding to our old nature, we repent and turn to the life of Christ to reign in us (1 John 1:9^{xxxviii}). This is a process of sanctification, and we will be at it until we pass from this life. Thankfully, Jesus will finish the work when we see Him (1 John 3:2^{xxxix}).

You might ask why we would strive to be pure and undefiled now if we will not be complete until that day. We do so because we are recipients of the greatest love ever displayed (John 15:13^{xl}). Our new nature wants to enjoy the freedom of being unselfish and ability to do the will of God. We delight in being God's instrument in the earth. The more we experience of Jesus, the more we want to experience the liberated life. Far from being boring, it is a joyful adventure.

To be holy conjures up images of a monastic monk locked away on his knees all day in prayer. But following Christ is far more. While we do want to spend more time in communion with Jesus in prayer, our daily lives are exciting because we know Jesus has a plan for every day of our lives. We watch with anticipation to see what He will teach us or how He will work through us. We wonder at the grace that would draw us to Himself and cause to be sons and daughters of God. (See Isaiah 1:11-17^{xli}, 1 John 3:17,18^{xlii}.)

In this passage James has outlined three topics that he will address in the rest of the letter: controlling the tongue (3:1-12), caring for those in need (2:1-26), and living a sanctified life (3:13-5:6). May the grace of God help us hear and do out of love for our Savior. If you heard the Lord speak to your heart through this message, be a blessed doer of what the Spirit helped your ears to hear!

Questions:

- 1 How does this section connect with the previous passage?
- 2 How is verse 22 expressed in the Shema?
- 3 How do we know we are deceiving ourselves?
- 4 Explain the analogy in verses 23,24.
- 5 Would you be comfortable asking someone to imitate your life?
- 6 What is the mirror? Why must we persevere? 7 How do we persevere?
- 8 What gives us a clue that we are deceiving ourselves?
- 9 What was Jesus' example in that matter?
- 10 What is pure and undefiled religion?

Benediction: ⁹ *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,* ¹⁰ *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,* ¹¹ *filled with the fruit of righteousness*

that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11 (NIV)

ⁱ **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

ⁱⁱ **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 7:21 (ESV)**

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

^{iv} **Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)**

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

^v **James 1:2 (ESV)**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

^{vi} **James 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

^{vii} **James 1:6-8 (ESV)**

⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

^{viii} **Philippians 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

^{ix} **1 John 2:2 (ESV)**

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

^x **1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

^{xi} **Galatians 5:1 (ESV)**

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

^{xii} **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^{xiii} **Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)**

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

^{xiv} **Romans 14:17-19 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

^{xv} **Psalms 100:2 (ESV)**

² Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

^{xvi} **Galatians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

^{xvii} **Romans 6:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

^{xviii} **Romans 6:13-14 (ESV)**

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^{xix} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xx} **John 4:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

^{xxi} **Ephesians 6:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

^{xxii} **Matthew 13:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

^{xxiii} **1 Peter 5:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

^{xxiv} **Hebrews 10:22-23 (ESV)**

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

^{xxv} **2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

^{xxvi} **Matthew 12:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

^{xxvii} **Psalms 15:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

^{xxviii} **James 1:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

^{xxix} **Galatians 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

^{xxx} **Proverbs 30:32 (ESV)**

³² If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.

^{xxxi} **Isaiah 1:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

^{xxxii} **Psalms 68:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

^{xxxiii} **Leviticus 23:22 (ESV)**

²² "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."

^{xxxiv} **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

^{xxxv} **Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

^{xxxvi} **2 Thessalonians 3:10 (KJV)**

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

^{xxxvii} **1 John 2:15-17 (KJV)**

¹⁵ Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

xxxviii **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

xxxix **1 John 3:2 (KJV)**

² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

xi **John 15:13 (KJV)**

¹³ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

xlii **Isaiah 1:11-17 (ESV)**

¹¹ “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹² “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

xliii **1 John 3:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.