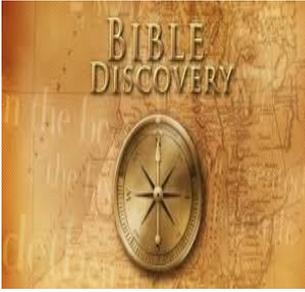


The Joy of an Open Bible

28 Sep 14

James 1:21-24



As we journey into Dangerous Grace, one of the essentials to Discipleship for the Christian is knowledge of God's written Word – it's God's revelation to us - teaching us so much about who God is; and revealing so much of who we are. But the Bible is much more than a lesson on who we are; through God's Word we're invited to come into a *personal* relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Reading these words of God recorded by James, the brother of our Lord, we see a notable theme emerge for teaching the Word, for its influence over our lives. James points to one key act in our training for our attention this morning telling us to just – **“do what it says”!** In other words he's telling us, **“Don't make it complicated, simply read and having read the Word, then follow the Word of God”!** For some unfortunately, reading the Bible's an unpleasant chore because their perception of the Bible's message is *"Do this; don't do that; do this other, but run from that. And then do more of this, more of that and heaven help you do none of that!"* The effect is to build stress & guilt & fear. Praise the Lord that some people do find Scripture to be *the perfect law that gives freedom*; freed from the bondage of pharisaical rules & regulations binding us with guilt & shame & failure. Instead of guilt, by **“internalizing”** Scripture as James describes for us here, we respond in the relationship we enjoy with Jesus, follow Him; we let Him show us the way and keep us safe from harm.

James uses a comparison, a **“but”** if you would. James precedes this morning's reading by securely establishing our very existence as people of faith & followers of Jesus – daring us to be disciples –through the following of the will & outworking of God's Word. Listen to what James 1:18 says - *“Of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures”*. Friends, if you're in Christ this morning, if you've made him Lord of your life, you're a product of God's Word. The seed of God's Word has taken root within you. Remember when Jesus asked Peter, on the occasion when many people stopped following him, *“Will you leave also?”* Peter answers, *“To whom would we go? You alone have the words of life.”* **YES!** God's word, taught & embodied by Christ, is the source, is the seed, of the spiritual life for all who put their faith in Him.

That's why we're to live by the Word. Look again with me at verse 21, *“Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the Implanted Word, which is able to save your souls”*. Instead of the old life, where we heard the Word & ignored it, or heard the word & forgot it, or heard the word & disobeyed it, now, with the Word of God truly implanted within us as our source of life and salvation, we God's Word, in theory, to enacting regular practice. The beauty we now becomes the reflection others see in or bad, whether through joys or temptations & trials, indeed despite or being free and favoured, those to persevere in the Word following but triumphantly doing what God says, and being *“blessed in our doing.”*

In so doing, we've the joy of an open Bible in our lives. Look back with me – James 1:2 says, *“Count it all joy”*. A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance, reminds us, *“We do not always feel joyful, but we are to count it all joy.”* That's our response to a Lord who paid it all for us and invites us to walk with Him! While this sounds wonderful and we must pursue such joy, we



Bible for some...

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don't do
that, do**

**more of this & do none
of that!”**

**“We're to enact
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move beyond merely believing God's Word in our lives through see in the mirror of grace our lives. Whether in good times through sorrows, whether facing finding ourselves with adversity whom the Word gives life Christ always, not just believing

confess we, like many, are often tempted to listen for other, more favorable teachings even as we profess to proclaim to be living by the Word. We've only to look around today to see how the Church has been weakened because we've permitted philosophy & eastern mythology & even human doctrines & cultural norms to rob us of our joy, to lead us from the truth, to settle for worldly advice in place of the priceless, ageless teaching of God. **Am I not right?**

The one fact James emphasizes about "*hearers only*" is that hearing the Word without doing the Word's an act of self-deception. *What is the pattern of such deception?* It is like a person who looks in a mirror and then goes away without thinking further about his or her appearance. It speaks of the ordinariness of what the man is seeing; he doesn't need to give his appearance a further thought. His reflection in the mirror is useless for him in going about his daily business of life. The application is clear: if I hear the word of God but do not do what it says, I'm treating the word as useless. I fail to have a change of nature continuing in sin.

But the practice of sin isn't supposed to be the normal lifestyle of believers. We shouldn't persist in sin—it goes against the new nature we've been given. The Apostle John writes, "*Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them*" [1 John 3:9]. Continuing in a life of sin even robs us of understanding spiritual truth. The Bible says the Holy Spirit helps us understand the will of God. However, if we fail to live by the Word of God, if we fail to live a life directed by the Holy Spirit, if we fail to desire to follow Christ, then our lives cease to have the results we seek in our Christian experience. The Psalmist wrote: "*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law they meditate day and night*" [Psalm 1:1,2]. We're supposed to let God's Word act like a mirror to point out areas in our personal life that need changing. Instead we make excuses, failing to apply Bible teaching to our everyday situations and decisions. We rationalize away our inaction and we're the ones at a lost for that!

I spoke earlier of how this robs us of our joy. The Bible says God wants our joy to be full: the Apostle John writes, "*These things we write to you that your joy may be full*" [1 John 1:4]. Joy's that deep satisfaction which comes from knowing there's a direct line open between us and the Lord. When we're following God's Word, we're where He wants us to be. We're in the place He approves. It's an inner happiness not dependent upon outside circumstances. Don't let sin rob us of that joy!

There's urgency here in James' message. He's heartedly warning us not to be self-deceived. First, James emphasizes sin leads to death [1:15]. We can't claim freedom from death if we're carelessly persisting in sin which leads to death. If we choose to hold to sin running our own lives instead of submitting to God's Word, we can't ask Christ to save us; it's contradictory. Secondly, having been saved, I surrender myself to the doing of God's Word. It's not that I try to save myself through my

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works; rather, because I'm saved, I willingly respond to Christ's saving grace, setting my heart on doing God's Will because He's my Saviour. James's analogy places emphasis on the usefulness of God's Word for our daily living. Unlike our useless reflection in a mirror, the Word of God is brought into our daily decisions and actions. *First, for a moment, let's consider the alternative and ask, how does one live as only a hearer of the word today?*

- *Relativism* - increasing skepticism regarding the possibility of absolute truth. Relativism as a worldview pervades contemporary thought and even pressures many Christians. A common assumption is Christianity's an alternative that has had its day. This is so persuasive because modern culture has the notion everything changes, whether fashions or automobiles or religion or, ultimately, truth itself. Nothing is forever, everything is possible, all things are relative.



Church weakened because we've permitted philosophy, eastern mythology, human doctrines & cultural norms to rob us of our joy!

- *Compromise* – failure to remain anchored in the truth of God’s Word causes us to drift into the many waves of thought that flow around us. The saying is, “*stand for something or fall for anything.*” Today’s wavering faith within God’s Church is demonstrative of this fear.
- *Superstition* - In 1 Samuel it’s recorded the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines. The elders of Israel decided to bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh "so that **it** may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies" [1 Samuel 4:3]. When they next went to battle, this time with the ark of the Lord present, Israel was again defeated, & the ark was captured. What went wrong? They treated the Ark of the Covenant as if **it** were magical, as if **it** could save them. Instead, they should have sought the Lord. Had they done so, they’d have realized they could not expect help from a holy God while persisting in wickedness. They’d have known to do what James says to do: act on God's Word! This is not far off from the way some treat Scripture today. The Bible’s revered as an object, like some weegie board which brings blessings or curses on one's life. We worship its bound pages and forget the author. We fail to look to the Lord for help and direction.

That’s why we’re called to “*not merely listen to the word. . . . Do what it says...*” The pattern by which we’re blessed is stated in four successive terms in verse 25 – a sort of heaven sent recipe for spiritual success if we would follow God’s Word. Let’s break it down together.

- “**Looks intently**”. Looking into the Word of God itself, which is worthy of an intent look because it is *the perfect law that gives freedom*, is how we begin to find the blessings of God finding the message of Jesus, discovering the route to eternal life.
- “**Continue to do this**”. Not only should we look intently but also persist in looking making it a habit, making it a daily routine, making it the foundation of our lives.
- “**Not forgetting what he has heard**”. It’s a call for us to internalize and make God’s direction our own, forsaking our own path to follow Him. With Peter we ask, “Where else would we go?” When you’ve tasted what is good and sweet and excellent, how can you go back to the bitter?
- “**But doing it**”. The full message is clearly laid out for us, in essence: "*being not a hearer of forgetfulness but a doer of action.*" We must do more than have familiarity with God’s Word; we must embrace the Word and let it direct our lives.

James shows, in contrast to that of the hearer who’s deceived, that the doer of God’s Word is blessed. He’s, literally, blessed through *the perfect law of freedom*. The teachings of Jesus are *the perfect law* to which James refers. By living according to this Word we’ve true freedom in spite of oppression; we’ve freedom to walk with the Son of God, we’ve freedom to enter the kingdom of heaven and to live righteous lives.

How then are we to be doers of the Word today?

It begins by recognizing that what we believe about the nature of Scripture affects how we use Scripture. Rather than believing Scripture to be a list of performance demands, let us look to Scripture for its truly biblical standards of how God wants us to live. Rather than pursuing relativistic belief allowing compromise and superstition to bind us, using Scripture selectively; accepting only what feels comfortable, let us instead accept the entirety of God’s Word, finding the joy of an open Bible in our lives, as “*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*” [2 Timothy 3:16]

We’d love to hear from you. Contact us at 519-317-8659 or via email at office.mbbc@explornet.ca.

**God bless,
Pastor Dave**

James 1:25...



Blessed through *the perfect law of freedom*

