

A Call to Obey the Word We Hear

by Mack Tomlinson

This sermon focuses on the importance of being doers of the Word, not just hearers, emphasizing the need for obedience and application of the Scriptures in our daily lives. James chapter 1, verses 21-25, highlight the call to receive the implanted Word with meekness, be doers of the Word, and not deceive ourselves by being hearers only. The sermon challenges believers to examine whether they are forgetful hearers or doers who act upon the Word, emphasizing the blessings that come from obedience and transformation through the Word of God.

Scripture: James 1:22, Romans 12:2, John 13:17, 1 John 2:17, Romans 6:17, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 7:24, Romans 12:9

Topics: "Obedience to the Word", "Transformation through Action"

Description

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Transcript

James chapter 1, two of the lines in that hymn, one stated renew our minds and another said teach us full obedience. And that is the focus of our message this morning. From James chapter 1, we will read verses 21 through 25.

James 1, 21, therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word. Which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves.

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, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 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. Let's pray together.

Father, as we come again to this time to hear your word, we come to hear not a man but a Savior. We want this morning, we ask this morning, Lord Jesus, that we would hear the voice of our shepherd, living words that are life, that are transformational, that you would speak to your people. So Lord, renew our

minds and teach us full obedience for your glory and for our good.

In the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, we pray, amen. As most of you know already, James is one of the most practical books in the New Testament. And it addresses real human issues, issues of the heart, and even right down to needs in society, how people treat one another, all kinds of issues.

My New Testament professor at Southwestern Seminary, Curtis Fawn, once said, few things would do more to revitalize present-day Christianity than a determined effort by Christians to take James seriously and put his teaching into practice. Well, that's what James expects when he says, don't be hearers only, but be doers of the Word. And we know for centuries, as you've read James and perhaps studied it, many have set Paul and James against one another, but John Blanchard, dear John Blanchard, who preached here in Denton in the mid-eighties, some of us heard him, he set the record straight wonderfully by saying this, Paul's great theme is that no man can produce justification by good works, and James' great theme is no man can evidence justification without good works.

That's a great way to say it. So as a reader of James, if you're a Bible reader, what comes to your mind that you like most in James? It's a good thought. Well, our text is uniquely a call to obey God, particularly to obey the Word, particularly to obey the Word we hear.

And as verse 21 says, to have this attitude, spiritual attitude, in heart, in spirit, to receive the engrafted Word, that it might save our souls. Now isn't this a unique language, because he's speaking to Christians. Today we can be saved more within, delivered more within, transformed more within, changed more within, delivered by receiving the engrafted Word, which is able to deliver us, to save us, to sanctify us.

So this is a unique call to obey the Word, to go for it today and every day, for this to go into our minds, but not to stop there, right? To engage our hearts, but not to stop there. To engage our affections, to grip our affections, our motives, our will, our choices, then our eyes and our tongues and our motives and our feet and our hands, where the Word of God is dwelling in us richly, that it transforms us. Like it was said of John Bunyan, you could stick him with a needle and he would bleed the Bible.

When the Bible sticks us and comes in, what comes out ought to be a renewed life and a transformed way of living, obeying the truth we hear. I've often felt in my own life, many times, with sadness, that my obedience to the Bible needed to catch up with my knowledge of the Bible. Do you ever feel that way? Brethren, we know a lot by God's grace, but increasingly our obedience to the Word needs to catch up with our knowledge of it.

Always. And this is a call here. Am I ever more a hearer than I am a doer? And James here, to quote someone, he pulls no punches.

He hits hard and doesn't hold back. In our text, because this is a direct punch about listening to truth without becoming a doer of that truth that you've heard recently. Which is more important, knowing or obeying? We know.

We know. Knowing has got to be there, but knowing has to become obeying. We have here, James shows us two men.

The first one is in verses 23 and 24. One who hears. And the second one is in verse 25.

The one who hears and listens, but doesn't just hear, he does what he's heard. He's a doer of the Word. And you know, I thought this weekend, I've never made this connection, but I thought this weekend, isn't that what Jesus did in the end of the Sermon on the Mount? Two men.

One builds his house, how? On the sand. The other builds his house on the rock. What was the difference between the two? Both of these parallel with each other.

One man builds his house on hearing and doing. One man builds his house on the rock of obedience to the Word. The other man, James, is a hearer only.

The other man in Matthew 7 builds his house on the sand of having the truth set before him, but he doesn't obey it. That's the real parallel. So let's think about these two men this morning and let's examine ourselves.

Whether James has the Sermon on the Mount in mind, I don't know. But he's certainly saying the same thing as Jesus did in Matthew 7. What's the vital truth for us this morning in this passage? What's the one thing that's a true takeaway? It's this. The truth we hear must be applied and obeyed and not just heard.

Are we in that mode of thinking that way? Or do we come to hear and we listen and we go away and we forget? Am I a hearer only? Am I one who does the truth? So verse 23, let's examine this man and then we'll see the second one. Verse 23, for if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like someone, he's like a man who looks intently in a mirror and sees himself. He looks at himself, but he goes away and at once he forgets what he was like.

So here's a man, the picture is a man is observing himself as in a mirror. Hears the Word, he reads it, he listens to it, he observes truth about himself, but then he goes away and he forgets what's lacking. He goes away and he forgets.

He's a good listener, listens all the time, but he goes away and he immediately, because he doesn't do what the Word says, because he doesn't enter into with serious minded obedience and application, he forgets what he's heard, what he's listened to. The hearer only. He observes his face, he observes himself, he goes away and he forgets what he saw in the mirror.

Observing forgetful. The text uses the word observes twice. Observing forgetful.

Observes forgetful. So is the one who hears, but doesn't regularly do what he hears. Now the word hearer here means listening.

He listens. We listen all the time. You hear sermons, you read blogs, and you're hearing, you're listening.

You go to Bible studies. We hear things and we are always listening. But here, the ESV calls the man, he's a listener who forgets.

Only a listener. Are we ever that way? When God speaks to us truly from His Word, what do we do? Do we pause? Do we recognize the voice of God in this? Do we bring our hearts and we say, Lord, what do you want from me in this? How can I apply this? What am I to do? What am I to not do? What's my point of obedience here? That's doing the Word. That's a strange phrase, isn't it? Doer of the Word.

That's not used really. We don't call somebody, you know, he's a real doer of the Word. How would we say it? How would we view it? He's an obedient man.

He obeys the Scripture. She believes and obeys the Word of God in her life. So, a hearer only.

Why would a person be a hearer only? What do you think? Here's the bottom line. A person is a hearer only when his heart is not serious about obedience to the Word. That's it right there.

Out of the heart flow all issues of life. So it's a wrong heart. It's a casual heart.

It's a divided heart. It's a distracted heart. It's a carnal heart.

It's a heart who's not walking in the light. When he comes and he listens and he hears and he goes away and he forgets what God said to him because his heart isn't engaged for real, minute obedience. Such a person can actually hear regularly and settle for that only.

And the more they hear only, the more they become what verse 22 warns about, deceiving themselves. A hearer only is a self-deceived person, James says. They've deceived themselves into thinking they can hear the truth and somehow not take it serious enough to obey it.

They think that knowledge equals growth. That knowledge equals maturity. That hearing and listening and gaining knowledge equals godliness increasing.

Self-deception at the heart of that. A hearer only is deceiving himself. Now this is real.

This is serious. And the Bible would say it's even dangerous. A great danger and problem among many professing believers in evangelical churches is that there are often more listeners than there are doers.

To hear only and just listen. Years ago, a 23-year-old prison inmate, part of his assignment by someone over him in the prison, was to write out the 121st Psalm 100 times. I like that prison staff person, whoever that is.

Write out Psalm 121 100 times. He did it and afterward he said, it had no real effect on me. To which the person said, do you realize, if you had believed and obeyed those words, it would have changed your life.

A hearer only. How much do we ever hear that doesn't get applied? We don't get down before God and say, Lord, I'm not doing this that I just read. Help me to do it.

So that's the hearer only. But notice the second man, verse 25. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and continues or perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

This man is called a doer who acts. Here he's heard, he listens, but he's a doer who acts. That makes all the difference.

And that man, there's a blessed promise connected to that. James says, be doers of the Word. That means in all things, as we're exposed to the Word of God, all our life, all our journey, we are continually to have a heart of conforming ourselves to what's in this book.

No excuses, no exceptions, but conformity to the Word of God. That's the one, the doer who acts. He or she views the Bible as if it's truly binding, not only on my theology, but on my practical living at every level.

How I conduct myself. How I work. How I obey my employer.

How I obey my parents. How I treat others. How I pay my bills.

What kind of behavior do I have in the community where others are watching me? The doer of the Word applies it all. They desire to do their Master's will. Their heart says, I want to obey my Savior's words to follow and conform.

And all my ways being conformed into His image has revealed in His Word. That's the second man in the text, the doer who acts. Now it says he looks into, notice the language, he looks into the perfect law of liberty.

What's that talking about? It's really a word picture for the entire whole counsel of God. In the New Testament it could be the reality of the grace of God and the gospel that has brought grace, the grace of Jesus Christ and redemption in all these days of grace. The gospel, the truth of God, the whole counsel of God.

James has that in mind. The man looks into and hears and sees the perfect law of the liberty that is there within the Word of God. And he acts on it.

He applies it. So here is gaining of knowledge, looking into, that's hearing and listening, but that's only half of it. The first man did that, looking into.

But here is the one who continues, perseveres in the truth. There's the obedience. Being a hearer or a doer.

Being a person with knowledge or being an obedient believer who walks in the precepts and commandments of the Lord. Remember what Jesus said in John 13? If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. James agrees with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not enough to know these things, blessed is the one, happy is the one who's a doer and an obeyer of the things that the Word of God tells us. So how much today are you a forgetful hearer or a doer? To what degree does the first one reside in your life? Which one am I? Which one are you? Last month, Lynn and I, on part of our road trip, we were driving through some desert, and we said, well, let's just memorize some. So I said, what are you going to memorize? Well, Romans 12, right? So we turned to the second half of it, really the last two-thirds of it, from about verse 9 to 21.

And if you remember that, there's all these rapid-fire little commands. There's like 27 of them. Like, let love be not without hypocrisy, but be genuine.

Give to others. Don't think much about yourself. These kind of rapid-fire commands.

We began to memorize them. And then we just started talking about how easy is it to read these statements in our daily reading, in our family worship, to read them and not stop and say, am I practicing that? I mean, we read and memorized, don't let your love be hypocritical. And then we stopped and thought, is mine? Am I genuine in my love? Hate what's evil.

Am I always hating what's evil? Cling to what is good. Am I doing that, clinging only to what is good, or am I clinging to what is evil? Prefer others before yourself. How often I've failed.

Don't be arrogant or haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight, Romans 12 says. Give thought to do what's honorable.

As much as it depends on you, live in peace with all men. You get what I'm saying. We can read over it, but not apply it.

I had a friend call me yesterday from another town, and he entered into a breakfast time and a discussion that became a debate, that became an argument, and he didn't obey the Scripture, though he knows that Scripture. He let it happen. This means to apply and receive.

All of Scripture says, godly wisdom cries out to us. Apply and receive in your heart. Receive the engrafted Word in your heart.

As much as you listen to the Word, apply it equally as much. Is this part of our spiritual discipline? We go to the Scriptures with a heart to learn and listen and hear. Do we bring to it just as much a heart that says I've got to apply this and walk in it and live it? We've got to engage our hearts.

Always to apply as much as we hear the truth. As Paul said to Timothy, meditate on these things. Give yourself entirely to them.

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them. I think we often forget that one little word in Moses' words and in Jesus' quoting it.

Man shall not what? Live by bread alone, but shall live by living by it. Living by it. Walking in it.

In the 20th century, there was a man in Britain named Rees Howells. Anybody ever read his life? Rees Howells. It's worth a read.

A Jewish man who knew him in South Wales, well, a Jewish man who had been talked to by different Christians, said the day I see any Christian truly living the Sermon on the Mount, then I'll believe. That man met Rees Howells and he said, that man lives the Sermon on the Mount. This is what I'm talking about.

Does my walk and my conduct and my motives and my actions and how I relate to people, how I treat people, does it live the Sermon on the Mount? Where people see us exemplifying it. Being living epistles that are seen and read of all men. Why be doers of the Word? Let me just give you a couple of practical thoughts.

Why should every Christian here be a doer of the Word? Because, number one, the Gospel has changed us and we have a heart now to obey the Word. We obey because the Gospel has changed us. How radically have you been changed? You know.

People could stand up all over this room and say, this is what God's done for me. The Gospel has changed our hearts. We're changed from the inside out and therefore, we want to obey.

Because the change has happened. Paul reminds the Romans. Remember in Romans 6? He says, but thanks be unto God that you were slaves of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you.

Obedience from the heart. God the Holy Spirit gives a Christian a new heart in regeneration. And then the law of God's within your heart and suddenly, as Paul Washer says, what you once hated, you now love and you want to obey from your heart.

You feel that way if you're a Christian. That's a longing from within. You have obeyed from the heart that truth.

And Peter, whose obedience was imperfect, remember? He said it this way. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth by the Spirit, therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully on the grace that's coming as obedient children. As obedient children.

Ask yourself this morning, am my life characterized by being an obedient child of God? The reason we're to be doers of the Word is because as Christians, we have a heart of obedience. We're called to walk in obedience. We cannot willfully refuse to obey Christ in an area that's revealed here.

It just doesn't fit with the Christian. True Christians have obeyed the Gospel. And now we obey from the heart.

Yes, imperfectly, but progressively, consistently, out of Gospel love for Him who died for me. Second reason why I'm to be a doer of the Word. Because obedience is a supreme responsibility.

A supreme responsibility in the Christian life. Hearing and listening is not obedience. Knowing, having a great Bible reading plan.

I listen to men usually three or four times a week. A brief edited message. But hearing and listening is not obedience.

It doesn't produce the fruit of the Spirit in us. In competition with the Bible, now, see, things can compete with our Bible in our life. Books, blogs, internet resources, others leading us in Bible studies.

We use these things, and when we do, we're always learning and gaining knowledge. We're always increasing. But as some, as Paul observed, they were always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Meaning, to truly be obeying and living out the truth. Always learning. Never able to come to an experiential knowledge of the truth.

What Augustine said once is striking about a casual attitude about the Bible. Quote, If you believe only what you like or agree with in Scripture, and you reject what you dislike, it's not the Bible you believe, but yourself. These New Covenant statements, the body of this New Testament, the New Covenant we're under, these aren't statements that are just good ideas and nice opinions or suggestions.

If we're not taking to heart as we read, as we hear the truth, as we listen, if we're not taking to heart, we may be proving ourselves to be a hearer only. What are you? What are you? Christ calls us to live as He lived. He was a man who lived upon every word of God that the Father gave Him in His journey.

We're called to live as He lived. To love as He loved. To walk as He walked.

To obey as He obeyed the Father. We're called to live that way. And as someone said, we need every word that God speaks.

Every word that God speaks. Every time you go to a men's or women's study. Every time you come to the Bible study hour.

Every time the Word of God is open. God has a specific application, a specific Word for you to transform you and change you, to set you free, to encourage you, to strengthen you, to exhort you. We need every word that God speaks.

Is that our heart? Someone said, let us so adhere to the Word of God that no novelty captivates us and leads us astray. You and I can be led astray from walking in this truth. Many have been turned away from the truth.

Beloved, when James says, let us not be hearers only, let us be doers of the Word, he wants us to search our hearts. He wrote this to believers and he wanted it to be a punch, a wake-up call to say, search your hearts. Receive the grafted Word which is able to save your souls.

But, be not hearers only. Be doers. We need this.

In what way? For fresh obedience. For fresh, updated obedience. For heart-changing grace.

We don't always feel motivated to obey and apply. We need grace to take the truth and have it planted deeply within us and do it and live it. For God to move us out of... for any of us, if we're in a hearing-only mode, into an obedience mode.

You know, John reminds us in 1 John. Remember this amazing thought from John. For all that is in the world, the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the pride of life is passing away, but, he who does the will of God abides forever.

Not who knows the will of God, but he who does the will of God. Christ says this morning to us, if you know these things, happy are you if you do them. Brethren, may God make all of us more and more, as we walk in the Spirit and live in the Spirit and feed on His Word and let it dwell in us richly, more and more, may we be transformed out of any listening only into being a doer of the Word.

Do you want your life to be marked with that? Do you want others to be able to say about you, not for your praise, but to see your good works in doing and living the Word? People say, he is a man like Reese Howes. He lives it. And therefore, it's real.

May God help us. Let's pray. Let's search our hearts right now.

And just bow before the Lord on this. What is your response before the Lord? Go to Him. Tell Him.

Tell Him your heart. Tell Him what you want in light of His Word. Father, we thank You that this text in James is for us as much as it was for those first century believers.

We pray that in accordance with Romans 12, 1 and 2, that we would be not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind to know and do fully the will of God. Lord, give us grace. Make us like the doer of the Word.

And that blessed promise, He will be blessed in all of life. He will be blessed in His walk, in His living, in His relationship with God. Lord, we want the blessing to be on us of being a doer of Your Word.

Make us living epistles. Make us more obedient children. And change us into the image of our Savior.

We pray in His name, Amen.

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