

Place: Lurgan Baptist 30:11:2003

Reading: James 1:18-25

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

10. WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT WHAT WE ARE HEARING ?

According to a news report on one occasion a number of booklets entitled, “ *The Control of the Termites,* ” were stored in the mailing room of a Western University.

Believe it or not the termites gobbled their way through those little booklets and no-one noticed until the damage was done. Those hungry little pests destroyed the information that could have prevented all that from happening. You see, all the facts contained in those booklets did not do a bit of good. Why ? Because knowledge was not applied. That story brings us to the thrust of James message in (1:22) when he says, “ *But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only.* ” There are four kinds of hearers. There are those who are like a Sponge. They soak up good and bad and let both run out immediately. There are those who are like a Sandglass, that let what enters in at one ear pass out the other, hearing without thinking. Then there are those who are like a Strainer. Letting go the good and retaining the bad. There are some who are like a Sieve, letting go the chaff and retaining the good. But even that is not enough, for blessing does not come by simply hearing great Biblical truths. Its not the hearing but the doing that produces the blessing. James says, “ *this man shall be blessed in his deed.* ” (1:25) What man ? The doer of the Word. So the great question that confronts this is “ *what are we doing about what we are hearing ?* ” Its great to go deeper and deeper into the Word, but lets not forget that we are equipped for the work of the ministry. Now this is James’s great concern. He is teaching us that we should Hear God’s Word (1:19-20) receive God’s Word (1:21) and now Obey God’s Word. (1:22) You see, James is still talking about Scripture. He was a great Bible man. A man truly steeped in Holy Scripture. And here is his great concern. What are we doing about what we are hearing ? Now as we seek to open this passage I want you to notice:

(1) AN EXHORTATION

“ *But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only,* ”

(1:22) Now there are several things I want you to notice about this exhortation. Notice for example,

(a) *HOW POWERFUL IT IS:*

“ *But be ye doers of the Word,*” the Greek conveys the idea, “ *make sure that you are.*” “ *Show yourselves to be doers of the Word.*” The tense of the word suggests

“ *continuing action.*” “ *Keep on showing yourselves to be doers of the Word.*” You see, the believer who responds to the demands of the Word only now and then, the Christian who acts by impulse and at intervals is not a real doer of God’s Word. James is saying,

“ *Make sure that you are continually a doer of the Word of God.*” (a)

(b) HOW PRACTICAL IT IS:

James uses this word “ *doer,*” pretty often. Look at

(1:22, 1:23 1:25 4:11) Now what does it mean to be a doer of the Word ? Surely it means to submit to its authority and comply with its demands. It is to be obedient to whatever the Word says. Now James does not condemn a person for reading his Bible, or for being a hearer of the Word, but for being a hearer only. The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *But obey the message, be doers of the Word and not merely listeners to it.*” It is not enough to hear the Word of God we must do it. Many Christians have the mistaken idea that hearing a good message or Bible study is what makes them grow and get God’s blessing. But my it’s the doing that brings the blessing. *Too many believers mark their Bibles but their Bibles never mark them.* James is saying that which is heard in the holy place must be lived out in the market place. Now a knowledge of the Bible is good, but that does not discharge our responsibility. My its not enough to hear the Word, receive the Word, retain the Word, memorise the Word, we must live out the Word of God. You see, its possible to be a brilliant theologian but a poor Christian. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said, “ *Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock.*”

(Matt 7:24) Martin Luther speaking of a pastor by the name of Nicholas Hussman said, “ *What we preach he lives.*” Could that be said of you ? When you hear the Word do you receive it meekly ? Do you obey it wholeheartedly ? Do you live it out joyfully ? Whether at business, home, church, college could it be said of us that we are “ *doers of the Word.*” What an exhortation !

(c) HOW PENETRATING IT IS:

“ *But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only,*”

(1:22) Or as the Amplified puts it, “ *not merely listeners to it.*” Now that word “ *listen,*” (akroatai) literally means “ *audit.*” The word reminds us of a person auditing or pursuing a college course. He attends all the classes, hears all the lectures, but never has to take the tests. When examine time comes he can go and play golf while others study. There is absolutely no pressure. However, when graduation comes and the diplomas are handed out, there is no cap and gown or diploma for the student who has

only attended courses.

My are many of us not just like that ? We just pursue the course. We're just hearers of the Word. We don't visit others in need. We don't keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We're not involved in evangelism and outreach. We don't have any practical input into missionary activity. We don't return a tithe or more to the Lord. Oh, we've heard all the teaching and we believe it, but we just never get the grade. The question is *where will we be on graduation day when we stand before the Lord at the Judgement Seat of Christ ?* So this word "*hearer,*" was used of someone in ancient times who regularly attended the lectures. But the hearers were distinguished from the real disciples and learners ! I wonder which describes us this ? How have you come to worship this ? Have you come up to hear the Word so that you might go away better ? Have you come to judge the Word or have you come to allow the Word to judge you ? Oh, its so easy to sit under the Word as judges of men's gifts and abilities.

(4:11) To come to the Word to taste and enjoy it, to say,
"*Preacher I enjoyed that message.*"

But the question is, what are you doing about what you are hearing ? Do you leave the building saying how much you enjoyed the message but go on living as if you had never heard it ? My the purpose of preaching is not that might be pleased, but that they might profited, edified and inspired to live godly and holy lives. My *don't praise the man if you are not prepared to practise the matter.* (1)

(2) AN ILLUSTRATION

An illustration of someone who is just a "*hearer only.*"

Did you notice (1:23) ? Now the word "*glass,*" simply means "*a mirror.*" But the phrase "*natural face,*" is interesting. It means "the face he was born with." You can't help your face, can you ? Well, some of the ladies try. Some of the ladies put enough paint on their faces to paint a ship and enough powder to blow it up. Did you see the lady on the news who went to L. A. to get her nose smaller and her face changed ? It cost her around £50,000-00 but there is a better way to improve the face, from the inside. The light of the Saviour's presence in the heart shining out in the very face.

(Ps 34:5) Do you recall Moses when he came down from the Mount, having fellowshiped with God ? "*the skin of his face shone.*" (Exod 34:30) The effects of his fellowship with God were observable for all to see.

But do you see the other word in (1:24) "*he beholdeth himself,*" that indicates a casual, superficial look. What we might call "*a look and a promise.*" Now here is James's simple illustration. A man gets up in the morning, dashes to the mirror, swishes the razor and face cloth over his face, throws the comb through his hair, gulps his breakfast and dashes for the train or car, by which time he has completely forgotten the details of what his face looked like a few minutes earlier. You see, in the previous verses

James has compared the Word of God to *Seed* (1:18) but now he is comparing God's Word to a *Mirror*. The Christian he has in mind comes to his Bible, hurriedly dashes through a passage, skims over some else's notes, bows his head for a moment of prayer, and then is off into the mad whirl of business with as little understanding of what he has read as the other man had knowledge of the precise details of his face. Now is that you ? Does this find you out ? Is this your personal approach to the Bible ? Is it one of casual observance ? Well, if it is then its wrong. Indeed James tells us that there is something wrong about this:

(a) MAN'S REASONING:

He deceives himself. (1:22) The word means “ *to be deceived by false reasoning.* ” In the context it suggests that because one thing has happened, something else automatically follows. Some Christian says, “ *Well, I've read my Bible, said my prayers, had my time with the Lord, so everything is fine, I have gone through the process so I can assume the progress.* ” My that is false reasoning. You see, its so easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that progress has been made when we've learned a new truth, heard a fine message, taught on a certain subject. Have you never come away from a service, a Bible convention, a Bible class saying “ *Well I have learned something tonight,* ” but could you have added, “ *from that moment, that part of God's Word entered into my spiritual bloodstream and changed my life for God and for good.* ” You see, there's a difference between reading a menu and eating a meal, there's a difference between reading a prescription and taking the medicine and there is a difference between reading the Word and growing in grace. (a)

(b) MAN'S READING:

He says, “ *for he beholdeth himself,* ” (1:24) That just means “ *a casual glance.* ” I wonder have you ever had the experience of having looked at your watch but what you saw made little impression on your mind. Then someone asked for the time, and you had to look at your watch again before you could answer him. You see, your first look had been so casual a glance that it made little impression on your mind. My is this not how we often look into the Mirror of God's Word ? Just a casual glance. *Are you reading the Word only as a religious exercise but you are failing to profit from it personally ?*

With some of us our conscience would prick us, if we did not have our daily reading, but does our conscience bother us when we read the Word of God carelessly ? God says in Isaiah “ *to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word.* ” (Is 66:2) Telling the story of his vision Daniel cries, “ *And when He had spoken this Word unto me I stood trembling.* ” (Dan 10:11) When did we last do that ? Tremble before the Word ! You see, for the man who hears the Word but does not practice it, James says there is something wrong about (a) (b)

(c) MAN'S RESPONSE:

Look at (1:24) “ *And goeth his way,*” or as a paraphrase has it, “ *he goes on with what he was doing.*” Was the rich young ruler not just like that ?

(Mk 10:17) He came to the right Person, with the right question, got the right answer, but went the wrong way his own way. Do you do that ? Do you look into the Mirror of God’s Word and see what is wrong in your life and what must be done to put it right but you do absolutely nothing. We hear the Saviour’s command,

“ *this do in remembrance of Me,*” (Lk 22:19) and we say, “ *Lord, there’s the dinner, the family, I can’t sacrifice 30 minutes for You.*” We hear the Lord say,

“ *He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved,*” and we respond, “ *Lord its just a meaningless ordinance.*”

(Mk 16:16) We hear the Lord say, “ *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,*” Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him,” (Mal 3:10 1 Cor 16:2) and we respond, “ *Lord what about the mortgage, we can’t afford it.*”

We hear the Lord say, “ *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is,*” and we respond, “ *Lord, my recreation nights are more important than your Word and Prayer, Lord I don’t want to be committed to a local church, I want to flight about, take all the privileges and bear no responsibilities.*” We hear the Lord say, “ *Be filled with the Spirit,*” and we respond, “ *Lord I can’t give up my pet sin to know this fullness.*” “ *And goeth his way,*” Christian is that what you’ll do this again ? Just go your way, no matter what God says. Are you a “ *hearer only,*” ? (1) (2)

(3) AN OBSERVATION

Look at the observation, the statement that James makes concerning the doer of the Word. (1:25) Do you see that word “ *but,*” ? Its introducing us to a person vastly different in his approach. The man typified in the first section is a hearer and not a doer, but this man is “ *not a forget hearer but a doer of the work,*” (1:25) You see, here is a believer who:

(a) LOOKS AT GOD’S WORD:

The word “ *looketh,*” here means “ *a careful earnest gaze.*” A similar word is used in (Jn 20:5) and describes how Peter and John looked into the empty tomb. My that was no casual glance for John intended to miss nothing that tomb might reveal to him about Christ. We read “ *And he stooping down and looking in.*” Not a glance but a gaze, a thorough careful scrutiny of every nook and cranny. Is this how you approach the Word of God ? Do you seek with the Holy Spirit’s help to pierce beneath the surface of Holy Scripture in order to discover and discern deeper truths ?

I am told that in the Johannesburg area of South Africa there are at least 55 gold mines, some of them nearly 12,000 feet deep. I remember going down one of them a few years ago and being intrigued with everything down there in the bowels of the earth. When I got back up the shaft to day light I was allowed to hold in my hands a bar of gold worth half a million dollars. Isn't it amazing that men are not only prepared to go to that tremendous depth in the earth, but to bring up to the surface four tons of ore in order to produce one ounce of gold ? Do you recall what David said about God's Word ? "*The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.*" (Ps 19:9-10) Is that how you feel about your Bible ? Do you desire it ? Do you look at God's Word ? (a)

(b) LINGER'S IN GOD'S WORD:

"*And continueth therein,*" (1:25) The Amplified Bible puts it, "*is faithful to it and perseveres in looking into it.*" When Paul visited Athens do you recall how he was described ? "*this babblers.*" (Acts 17:18) Now that translates a Greek word (spermlogos) that describes a little grain eating bird, that flitted here and there, picking up minute trifles and titbits, but never staying anywhere long enough to get its beak into something solid. That certainly did not describe Paul, but does it describe you ? Are you satisfied with a few verses here and there, a thought for the day ? Is your Bible study a matter of fits and starts ? Or is it marked by the determined disciple that God promises to reward ? George Duncan once said, "*God does not reveal the deep things of the Spirit to the casual Christian who drops in for a chat.*" I'm not suggesting that you spend hours before breakfast each morning in meditation. But has your Bible reading any structure to it ? Do you linger in the Word ? (a) (b) and:

(c) LIVES OUT GOD'S WORD:

"*He being not a heedless listener who forgets, but an active doer who obeys, he shall be blessed in his doing, in his life of obedience.*" (Amplified) Now notice very carefully that it is "*in his deed,*" or "*doing,*" that this man is "*blessed.*" He is not said to be blessed because of the amount of Biblical knowledge he accumulates, the blessing comes with his obedience to the revealed will of God. Is this not a truth that the Bible so often mentions ? "*the judgements of the Lord are right and in keeping of them there is great reward.*"

(Ps 19:9) "*Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and do it.*" (Lk 11:28 Jn 13:17) The world renowned physician Dr. Howard A. Kelly of John Hopkins Hospital U.S.A. was once visited by a woman in which the cares of life threatened her physical strength and even her reasoning. One she described her symptoms, she was surprised at the prescription he gave her. "*Madam,*" he said "*what you need is to read the Bible more.*" He told her to go home and read her Bible an hour each day and then come back to him in a month. At first the lady was inclined to become angry with him, but she did what he told her. She was a Christian and had neglected the things of God. When she came back a month later he said to her, "*I see you have been an obedient patient. Do you feel as if you need any other medicine now ?*" She said, "*No, Doctor, I am a different person. But how*

did you know what I needed ?” He reached over and picked up his well-worn and well-marked Bible and said, “ If I omit my daily reading of God’s Word, I not lose my joy, but I lose my greatest source of strength and skill. Your case called not for medicine but for a source of peace and strength outside your self. My prescription, when tried works wonders.”

James was a man of the Book. In this whole section he pleads with us to Hear the Word (1:19) Receive the Word (1:21) Obey the Word (1:22) A man once came from a church service much earlier than expected. “ *You are early,*” said his wife. “ *Is the sermon done already ?*” “ *No,*” he replied, “ *its preached. Its going to be done now.*” My what are you doing about what you are hearing ?