

Just Do It!

Bringing Faith Down To Earth—Part 5

James 1:22-25

Introduction

Chad Walsh, an American poet and theologian of the early 1900's wrote with prophetic precision these words, "Millions of Christians live in a sentimental haze of vague piety with soft organ music trembling in the light of stained glass windows. Their religion is a pleasant thing, demanding little more than lip service to a few harmless platitudes. It is much safer from Satan's point of view to vaccinate a person with a mild case of Christianity so as to protect him from the real disease."

Part of Satan's strategy is for the believer to come to the conclusion that learning the Bible is the end of the process.

You see, he won't try to get the believer to discard the Bible . . . but to disregard it . . . to learn it . . . but not live it; he's even satisfied if the Christian believes it so long as he does not behave it.

A visitor emailed me some time ago telling me they had visited Colonial several times and had come to the conclusion that I took the Bible way too seriously. What they meant was that they really had no intention of living what they were hearing and so what needed to change, in their opinion, was not the way they lived, but what I preached.

Listen, God never intended the application of biblical truth to become optional instead of mandatory; that living out the Bible is like picking up a hobby . . . it can be nothing more than a Sunday morning event—and maybe even Sunday

evening if you're really into it . . . just don't take it out there throughout the week.

Don't take it so seriously.

Yesterday I was handed a book written by a surgeon who now lives in another part of our state—visited here a few times over the course of his tenure in this medical community and now listens online.

The book is his testimony . . . I read enough of it yesterday to find it really encouraging as this man described his conversion from death to life and how it affected every aspect of his life—his treatment of his wife and children, his language, his purpose in life and on and on. What was especially interesting is how shocked he was as he would tell different people that he had been born again and now had the Spirit of God living within him. People who were regular church attendees that he thought would immediately identify with him . . . instead they became nervous, awkward, defensive . . . some people looked at him as if he'd fallen off the turnip truck and bumped his head. Even a pastor who came to see him, listened to his testimony and then basically said with a smug attitude, "That's nice, but I don't talk about salvation and forgiveness from sin and judgment; we just talk about God's love." They really didn't understand his love for Christ and the gospel and certainly didn't think he should get so carried away about it . . . all that stuff about the Bible—just keep that to yourself!

Listen, God never intended His word to remain indoors. It was designed for the outdoors! It was

made to be communicated to the world—by means of your walk.

In the words of the popular Nike commercial—*Just do it!* In other words, get serious about your sport . . . be willing to sweat; to work it out . . . whatever you want to do—run, jump, ride, shoot, tackle, swim, whatever—don't just talk about it—just *do it!*

After only an opening sentence, James has taken us to the deep issues of life and shown us the evidences of maturing in Christ for those who are willing to just do it—to live it out.

How do you handle trials and trouble? How do you live out your faith? James effectively answers, you grow in your faith and focus beyond asking for immediate deliverance to asking for wisdom so that suffering is not wasted as you choose your responses of faith and trust.

How do you handle temptation? You grow in patience and desire for the truly good gifts from God your Father that provide life rather than jump to embrace the ever-present counterfeit pleasures of the world that bring about death.

How do you handle truth? You grow in your willingness to be schooled by the tutor of truth with your mouth closed and your ears open and your hands clean and your heart teachable and your spirit humble.

And why would God ever expect you to respond to trials and trouble and temptation and truth in that manner? I mean, who does He think we are?

James began with that answer—we are the slaves of Jesus Christ who is the Lord . . . the true and living God.

Slaves can never take the words of their Master too seriously; a slave never considers the will of his Master as an option.

He just does it.

We are His property . . . we belong to Him and He is our Master—and what He says, we just do it!

Jesus Christ once said to his disciples, “*Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you . . . but whoever hears my words and acts on them . . . is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock.*” (Luke 6)

Wisdom is putting God's word into action—in other words, the slave of God builds his life on the words of God.

So here's the question: Just how are we doing as slaves of Jesus Christ? What kind of slaves are we—really!

To help us answer that question, James will take us into a classroom and then into a dressing room to show us the difference between Christianity as a hobby and Christianity as a matter of the heart.

1. The Classroom

First, the classroom . . . Look at *James chapter 1 and verse 22: But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

The original word for hearers—from akroates (ακροατης)—is the same word the Greeks used for a student in the university who was auditor. It actually refers to an attentive listener.

Spiros Zodhiates, *The Work of Faith*, (AMG Publishers, 1985), p. 111

An auditor is someone who sits down in class with the other students, has the same advantages of learning and can benefit from what he hears in class.

The difference between an audit student and a credit student—in the first century and the 21st century is that the audit student has some of the same advantages, but doesn't have the same responsibilities.

Ibid, p. 111

He doesn't have to take the mid-term exam or any of the pop quizzes. He doesn't have to turn in homework or stay up late doing the reading assignments; he doesn't have to turn in any term papers for the teacher to examine his thinking.

The problem is though, at the end of an education, the auditor cannot become a practicing lawyer, or engineer, or nurse or teacher, or mechanic.

They are not licensed to practice because they never did the assignments. They want the benefits without the responsibilities. They wanted to get credit for being in class, but that's where they wanted it to stay . . . they didn't want any homework.

This is the person who attends the church but never joins the church. They want the benefits of the church without any responsibilities . . . it's just a lot easier to date the church—in fact, more than one at a time—sure, they found some attractive ones to date but they couldn't find a perfect one; so they'd never consider settling down and certainly not spend time or money paying on the mortgage or fixing up the place or serving the needs of people who come over.

This is the person who knows Christ but has not publicly testified to that relationship through believer's baptism. That would be uncomfortable for me; that would require I get up in front of somebody . . . that would mean I have to act and not just believe.

Now you're catching on.

James would say, "Just do it . . . move from spectating to participating."

Now there are those who would say that James isn't talking about Christians as auditors here—surely a genuine Christian would never be an auditor?! They argue that the auditor here—the attentive listener—is an unbeliever.

That might sound reasonable—certainly there are plenty of texts to challenge insincere faith—but that view, frankly, lets the church off the hook. It misses the very challenge James was delivering to his Jewish, Christian audience. And it misses the context here of maturing faith.

The Reformer, Martin Luther didn't think the Book of James should be approved as scripture because he viewed James and Paul in contradiction. I believe he missed the context of James which brought Luther to believe there was a contradiction.

The Apostle Paul is interested and inspired to reveal the definition of saving faith—it is without works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Apostle James is not dealing with the definition of faith—he is interested in the demonstration of faith—you cannot demonstrate faith without works—faith without works is dead—it's useless (James 2:17).

Paul was interested in defining justification in the sight of God; James is interested in defining justification before mankind!

With that context in mind, James is not contrasting a believer with an unbeliever—he's contrasting a maturing active believer with an immature inactive believer whose testimony before a watching world is effectively dead.

In fact, the verb tense for "prove yourselves doers of the word" is present tense—several different translations pick up on this as they translate this verse—continue to be doers of the word . . . keep on obeying this message . . . show yourself more and more a doer . . . do what it says . . . don't stop.

D. Edmond Hiebert, *James* (BMH Books, 1992), p. 118

The immature believer wants whatever he learns in church to stay at church . . . whatever he sees in the Bible to stay in the Bible . . . don't give me any homework—don't give me any late-night assignments . . . I just want to listen . . . I will audit my way through trials, temptations and trouble.

James is saying, if you want to be able to practice your faith—like a practicing doctor or a practicing nurse—you can't audit God's word . . . you can't take it or leave it.

In fact, James goes on to say at the end of *verse 22*, if you're going to think like that you've actually begun *deluding yourselves*. Literally, you've gotten off track in your thinking.

R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, Augsburg Publishing, 1966), p. 555

The word for delude—*paralogizomai* (παρολογίζομαι)—carries with it the idea of cheating or defrauding yourself.

Dan G. McCartney, *James: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, (Baker Academic, 2009), p. 120

In other words, whenever you hear the word taught or you read the word for yourself and you decide that you will not put it into practice you end up cheating yourself out of growth in maturity and all that a deeper faith and closer walk with Christ can mean.

Take your little children to the Lincoln Memorial and they'll want to run up and down the stairs and they'll think that's just grand—but the mature person will read the inscriptions and revel in the character of this man and all he accomplished for our nation.

James is saying that if we run around like little children, we basically end up cheating ourselves out of so much more to appreciate about our Lord. We miss out on so much depth and growth in Him.

There's one more thought here I want to show you before we leave this classroom illustration.

James is talking about a “doer” as he begins *verse 22*. The word he used is *poietes* (ποιητης) which gives us our transliterated word for poet. He's talking about creatively serving the Lord.
Zodhiates, p. 109

He's not talking about obeying with a bad attitude or doing things at a bare minimum—he's talking about the maturing believer who gives God his creative best—his passionate service—a desire to serve God with excellence.

Immaturity says, “I'll get the job done with the least amount of energy and thought—I'll do what I'm supposed to do but not one thing more.” Maturity says, “What can I do next . . . how can I do it better?”

You see, James is not only saying, “Just do it” . . . he's saying, “Just do it with excellence and creativity.”

He's talking about servants of God who don't just put in time—they give everything they have to please their Lord and they attempt to reflect the excellence of God's character in the excellence of their work.

Speaking of a reflection, James now takes us out of the classroom and opens another door of illustration—this time it's a dressing room.

2. The Dressing Room

Look at *verse 23*. ***For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror: 24. For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*** James is suggesting, if anyone listens to the word but doesn't take action, he is like a man looking in a mirror at his natural face—literally, at the face he was born with . . .

Hiebert, p. 121

. . . but then walks away without doing anything about it.

James is basically saying, with a sense of humor, why would anyone do that?

Looking into the mirror usually leads you to take some kind of remedial action.

Ralph P. Martin, James: Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 50

It's most often an emergency.

None of us showed up here today looking like we did when we first saw our reflection in the mirror . . . there's been a tremendous amount of repair.

I love James' choice of words—by the inspiring influence of the Holy Spirit, even his use of the word for “man” is intended. Look again at *verse 23*. ***If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror.***

The word for “man” is not generic here, but specific.

Why? Because a man is a perfect illustration for James' point simply because of the way a man looks in the mirror.

A man glances into a mirror . . . a woman gazes into a mirror.

Tony Evans, The Perfect Christian (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 42

And a man looks in a mirror and says, “Yeah, that’s me”; a woman looks in the mirror and says, “Oh my!”

A man looks and says, “Not too bad.” A woman says, “I can’t believe it’s *that* bad!”

And a heroic effort of reconstruction begins. Just count the pieces of machinery it takes to get a woman ready vs. a man. And there’s not a man alive who will complain.

One of the first things Marsha bought me when we were dating in college was a comb. It just showed up in my student mailbox. I didn’t comb my hair. And I used to have some—so use your imagination. Why bother combing it.

I used to wonder how my mother did it with four sons and only one bathroom . . . now I know . . . we just didn’t care. Four girls would have been a different story.

You see, James isn’t pulling words at random.

This is the inspired clarity of James’ illustration: a woman is not going to step in front of a mirror and do nothing—a man just might.

ibid

And now that he has our attention with the illustration, he’s going to take us deeper with the application. Notice *verse 25*. ***But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.***

He’s talking now about looking intently into the perfect law—the law of grace which has captured us. We are now slaves to the Master of liberty and grace.

And James says, “We’re abiding by it.” The word ‘abiding’ means to stay close to the Word.

James writes, we’re not going to be forgetful hearers. The original word translated forgetful doesn’t mean to fail to remember, it means to disregard—to neglect.

McCarney, p. 121

One author said of this text, “We are gripped by the word and it holds us.”

Lenski, p. 557

The idea behind looking intently also carries the idea of bending over with humility to look . . . to stoop down to see.

Pride fogs up the mirror. Pride looks at its reflection and is only interested in saving face. The maturing believer humbly looks at their reflection and desires to conform ever more to the image of Christ.

And he finds hope and energy and encouragement as he stays close—as he grips—the word of grace.

F.B. Meyer, the British pastor and commentator, born in 1847, wrote, “I used to think that God’s blessings were on shelves one above the other; and that the taller we grew in character the easier we could reach them. I now find that God’s gifts are on the shelves one beneath the other; and it is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower; and that we have to go down, always down [as we mature] to get His best gifts.”

Zodhiates, p. 124

James ends the paragraph by promising, verse 25b, ***this man***—shifting now to a generic reference to any Christian who does act upon what he learns—***this kind of believer will be blessed in what he does.***

David the Psalmist wrote, ***I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts (Psalm 119:45).***

He also invited the word to do its work on his reflection when he wrote, ***Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:23-24).***

That’s the way to respond to the truth of the Word; stooping down to listen and learn and then live it out.

A contemporary of F. B. Meyer was a British pastor named Robert Chapman. Charles Spurgeon called him the saintliest man he ever knew. I’ve read two biographies of Chapman and in one of them he was

giving advice to a missionary that was heading for the field of ministry. His advice was simply this: keep low, look up and press forward.

Robert L. Peterson & Alexander Strauch, Lessons in Spiritual Leadership From the Life of R.C. Chapman (Lewis and Roth, 1991), p. 701

In other words, keep low—stay humble; look up—stay focused on Christ; and press forward—live what you learn.

Which is another way of saying, “Just do it.”

That’s exactly what James is saying . . . don’t be content with just listening; you need to really learn it; and don’t stop after learning it; you need to live it! Do the homework; practice it . . . just do it!

In his book Improving Your Serve, Chuck Swindoll repeated a parable you may have heard before—let me read you his version.

Let’s pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I’m the owner and I’m interested in expanding overseas.

To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay overseas until a new branch office can be established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months. As my assistant I leave you in charge of all the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you direction and instructions.

I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. In them, I spell out my expectations.

Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows facing the street are broken.

I walk into the receptionist’s room and she’s doing her nails, listening to her

favorite radio station. I look around and notice the waste baskets are overflowing, the carpet hasn’t been vacuumed for weeks and nobody seems concerned that the owner has even returned.

I ask about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells over the radio, “I think he’s down there.”

Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a checker game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office—only to discover it has been temporarily converted into a television room for watching the afternoon soap operas.

“What in the world is going on?”

“What do ya’ mean?”

“Well, look at this place! Didn’t you get any of my letters?”

“Letters? Oh, yeah—sure, we got every one of them. As a matter of fact, we’ve had letter studies every Friday night since you’ve been away. We even divided all the personnel into small groups for discussing the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You’ll be pleased to know that a few of us actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two employees even memorized an entire letter and more! Great stuff in those letters!”

“Okay, okay, you got my letters, you studied them and discussed them and even memorized them. But what did you do about them?”

“Do? Um, we didn’t do anything about your letters.”

Charles R. Swindoll, quoted in R. Kent Hughes, James: Faith that Works (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 71

This problem, stretches all the way back to the times of James the Apostle, the Christians of the

first century who would read the letters with ink barely dry.

James is challenging the church then and now. The danger is to read a letter, hear a sermon, read a devotional, memorize a passage of scripture; and say, there that takes care of my spiritual growth for the day, the week, the month, the year.

James is effectively warning us all, “You’re not really learning unless you desire to live it out . . . with creativity and excellence so that Christ is glorified and we are truly changed into a little bit more of the reflection of Christ we see in the Word of God. For to look into the mirror of God’s word is to both see the complexion of our soul and the character of our Savior—which is entirely

reassuring, encouraging and hopeful. He has redeemed us from what we’ve done and who we are, and through His servant James exhorts us to step up to the mirror and continue making changes that reflect His glory.

But it won’t happen unless as we read . . . and learn . . . and listen . . . we’re willing to say, “Yes, Lord—your servant is not only listening, but willing to live it. I am willing to just do it.”

© Copyright 2010 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved