

Series: "Practicing Our Faith"
"What To Do With God's Word"

Let's think for a few moments about God. We'll start with the basics.

Is there a God? If not, end of discussion. End of sermon!

If there is a Supreme Being, does this Supreme Being want to relate to us, to communicate with us? Is this God just some sort of cosmic force, some distant divine entity, isolated in its glory? Or does this God have human qualities that make it possible to actually speak to us?

If this God desires to speak to us, what do you think He, or She, or It would say?

Do you realize that the Christian faith has an answer to every one of these questions! It affirms – yes, there is a God! And yes, this God wants to relate to us and communicate with us! Our faith tells us that God not only *wants* to communicate with us, but it tells us what God *has said and is saying* to us earthlings! And Christians claim that what God has said to us is contained in this book, the Bible – and most especially in the words of Jesus of Nazareth (God's Son).

All of this is an introduction to this second message in a series of sermons from the Book of James. Let's begin reading in James 1:17-18. "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave birth to us by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures." I like the Common English Bible rendering of these verses: "Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all. He chose to give us birth by his true word."

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from a heavenly Father who is changeless and pure. *And one of the greatest gifts from above, from God, is His Word!* "In fulfillment of his own purpose, he gave us birth by the word of truth" (James 1:18a).

He gave us birth by the word of truth. This isn't talking about our *physical* birth, it's talking about a *spiritual* birth. We are born again, we come alive spiritually, through this word of truth that God has spoken to us. The first letter of Peter in the New Testament says the same thing: "You have been born anew through the living and enduring word of God...that word is the good news that was announced to you" (1 Peter 1:23-24). We are born again (or born anew) through what God has spoken to us. And this word is the gospel, or good news, about Jesus!

Hold these thoughts for a moment, and let's read on: "You must understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, for human anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls" (James 1:19-21). Be quick to listen, slow to speak. Be quick to listen! Jump at the chance to hear what God has to say to us! But be slow to be focused on what *we* have to say. (*We'll come back to these verses and this theme in one of our upcoming sermons*).

Notice the words in verse 21: “Welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.” There is a God who wants to communicate with us. And this God has spoken to us through the words recorded in the Bible, words which have the power to give us a new spiritual birth, and to save our souls! Wouldn’t you say that getting acquainted with this Book, and letting it shape the way we live, is a pretty big deal!

Jesus thought it was! Remember the account of Jesus in the wilderness, when He’s tempted by Satan? When Jesus is enticed by Satan to turn stones into bread, Jesus responds with these words: “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4). You can’t live by physical bread alone. You need the words from God. Then Satan quotes from Scripture. He tempts Jesus to jump off a high pinnacle by the temple, for it says in Scripture (the Old Testament) that God will protect you. Jesus’ reply? Again, quoting God’s words found in the Old Testament, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus valued and cherished the words God had spoken to humanity!

With all of this in mind, let’s continue with what James says: “But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like” (James 1:22-24).

We have all kinds of opportunities to be *hearers* of the Word of God. When we read the Bible ourselves – maybe as part of a devotional, or perhaps we’re reading through a book of the Bible. In Sunday School, or Catacombs, or a Bible study group. Perhaps by listening to a TV or radio preacher, or watching a video. Here in worship, by listening to sermons.

There’s something good about people who take the Bible seriously, and read it, or listen to it being explained, or expounded on! Yea for that! But James takes it a step further! Don’t just be a *hearer* of the word, but be a *doer*. Do what God says we should do!

He uses an illustration of a mirror. Look at these words again: “For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like” (verses 23-24).

Mirrors are interesting things. Unless you’ve got one of these trick mirrors that show you all out of proportion and looking silly (or creepy), a mirror will tell the truth. The job of a mirror isn’t to show us what we’d like to see. The mirror doesn’t hide things, or change things, just to make us feel better. If I’m wearing a shirt that’s a little too tight, and my belly sticks out, the mirror isn’t going to correct that! Ladies, if you just don’t look right in that dress or top, the mirror isn’t going to change your wardrobe so you look like some hot chick on the cover of a fashion magazine. If I have grey hair or a bald spot, a mirror isn’t going to make my hair brown and cover the bald spot, to make me look 30 years younger.

God’s Word, the words God has spoken to us humans, is like a mirror! It shows us the truth about ourselves. And because God’s Word is like a mirror, sometimes it makes us feel

uncomfortable, sometimes it stings, sometimes we don't like what it shows us about ourselves

But *hearing* the word, and not *doing or practicing* it, is like walking up to a mirror, seeing what we need to change, or correct, or improve, and then walking away and doing nothing about it. "This outfit looks horrible, but so what." "I've got nose hairs sticking out, but I don't care." "Some of my makeup smudged on my face, but it's too much bother to wipe it off."

There's a story of a missionary who gave a New Testament to a man who admitted, "If I take this, I'll probably tear out the pages to roll my cigarettes." The missionary said, "Then at least promise to read each page before you smoke it." Years later, he met that same man at a church conference. The man smiled and said, "I smoked my way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke—but by the time I got to John 3:16, the Word burned me instead."

Imagine if there were no mirrors at all in life, where you could see yourself as you really are! Maybe sometimes you're visiting in someone's home, and there's no mirror in the bedroom, or you're traveling, and using a rest room, and there's no mirror. It can be annoying, frustrating. Imagine, if we didn't have a Bible, no words from God, to show us the truth about ourselves, about God, about life's meaning and purpose.

Now it's great to be a hearer of the Word, but it's when we put it into practice that it makes a difference, and accomplishes its purpose. Jesus said the same thing in one of His little stories. "Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" (Matthew 7:24-27). Remember this story? Maybe you're even humming in your mind that children's song, "The wise man built his house upon the rock." Note: Everyone who hears these words of mine, *and acts on them*... will be like the wise man who build his house on solid ground.

We've been doing an Andy Stanley study in the adult Sunday School class. *Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith*". He talks about the importance of encountering the Bible, the message God has given to us humans. He says in their churches they emphasize apply it: apply, apply, apply. It's not *Bible knowledge* that's the goal, but it's *Bible practice*!

What are some of the hardest words in the Bible for you to practice? How about some of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: love your enemies...pray for those who persecute you...turn the other cheek...looking at a woman with lust is like committing adultery...forgive people their trespasses against you. Those are tough! How about do not worry...do not judge...trust your heavenly Father...do not fear. But this is what the Lord wants from us! Not just knowledge of what He says (though that's the first step), but practicing what He has said to us!

So, it's a pretty simple theme for this sermon. "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers"

(James 1:22). So, we hear a sermon. The preacher has driven home a point from the Scriptures. It moves us to want to change. We're inspired. We leave church, and the sermon is forgotten. We're in a small group study, or Sunday School, or Bible study. We've learned more about a particular book of the Bible, or a Scripture passage. There's been a lively discussion. A particular verse or section has touched us. Two days later, one week later, we're no different than before that Bible study. We're reading a devotional (*The Upper Room, Daily Bread*, or a devotional book). A particular passage of Scripture has moved us, to trust the Lord. Not to worry. But we soon slip back into our fretting and worrisome frame of mind.

With God's help, let's break that pattern! Put God's word into practice!

James goes on to give a promise to those who are not only hearers, but doers of the Word: "They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do" (James 1:25 Common English Bible).

It's like Jesus said, hearing His words and putting them into practice is being wise, and building our house on solid rock! When we actually *do what the Bible says*, some amazing and wonderful things can happen!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
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