

What Does the Mirror Reveal?

James 1: 19-25

As we continue our study in James, we have come to a passage that I am certain each of us can relate to. We discover sound wisdom and practical direction for our daily lives. These verses deal with our daily behavior among the world and our attitude and response to the situations we continually face.

After James addresses our conversation among men, he turns his focus to the Word of God and the obligation we have to it. He uses a familiar object to illustrate the Word: a mirror. We are all familiar with mirrors. We know that they always reveal a true depiction of the object or person within their view. God's Word serves as a mirror to the soul. It reveals what is actually there, not what we wish were there, or even what we perceive is there. The mirror of God's Word will read us as we read it. The key to this mirror is our response to what it reveals. We can accept what we see and seek to improve upon it, or we can deny the true result and seek to hide or cover up what is actually there. Clearly, we will discover, it is in our best interests to respond honestly to the genuine depiction the Word reveals.

Let's take a few moments to consider the [exhortations](#) of the text as we think on the question: [What Does the Mirror Reveal?](#) I trust we will allow the Word to speak to us regarding our spiritual reflection as we move through these verses.

I. A Word Concerning our Conversation (19-20) – James deals with our conversation, our interaction with those around us. As we look at this verse, keep in mind that conversation is a two-way street. It is quite difficult to have a conversation with just ourselves. He speaks of:

A. Our Readiness (19a) – [Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:](#) We are exhorted to be [swift to hear](#). This has the idea of being "[quick, ready, and prompt to hear](#)." Far too often we engage in conversation, but we are not good at listening during the process, particularly in a heated or divisive situation. How many times have you found yourself in the midst of a conversation, and while the other person was still speaking, you were already contemplating a response? That is certainly not being a good listener.

- We must be ready and willing to hear before we speak. Many problems and hurt feelings could be avoided if we were as ready to listen as we are to speak. This is especially true when it comes to biblical instruction. We would be well advised to have a ready ear to hear what the Word has to say to us, even if it confronts or condemns our behavior.

B. Our Restraint (19b-20) – *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: [20] For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* There will be times when our passions get the best of us. During those times we must be *swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath*. When we allow our anger to be revealed, many times it brings much hurt. When we respond in anger, we can be assured that we are not responding in a godly manner, **V.20**. It is easy to lash out in a moment of rage, but the lasting repercussions are not worth the momentary physical gratification. Often the best response is the one left unsaid. **Prov.29:11 – A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.** We have been given two ears and one mouth for a reason. We would do well to listen twice as much as we speak!

- *Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.ⁱ*
- *There is a tradition that Jonathan Edwards, third president of Princeton and one of America's greatest thinkers, had a daughter with an ungovernable temper. But, as is often the case, this infirmity was not known to the outside world. A worthy young man fell in love with her and sought her hand in marriage.*

"You can't have her," was the abrupt answer of Jonathan Edwards.

"But I love her," the young man replied.

"You can't have her," said Edwards.

"But she loves me," continued the young man.

Again Edwards said, "You can't have her."

"Why?" asked the young man.

"Because she is not worthy of you."

"But," he asked, "she is a Christian, is she not?"

"Yes, she is a Christian, but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live."ⁱⁱ

I. A Word Concerning our Conversation (19-20)

II. A Word Concerning our Sanctification (21) – Here James reveals the need for sanctification among the believer. He speaks of two distinct aspects of achieving our goal. We discover:

A. The Need for Removal (21a) – Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.

That is simple enough and would seem rather easy for the believer to achieve, but I am certain that we all battle the desires and hindrances of the flesh. We still live in a sinful body that desires to satisfy its cravings. Good people find themselves indulging the flesh, lashing out in anger, or living contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

- If we are to gain victory over the desires of the flesh, we must **lay apart** these hindrances from our lives. This has the idea of “*putting off or stripping away.*” That is easily discussed, but it is often difficult to achieve. We are in a constant battle with the flesh.
- We are to lay aside all **filthiness**, “*that which defiles and dishonors.*” **Mat.15:18-20 – But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. [19] For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: [20a] These are the things which defile a man.**
- We must also lay aside all **superfluity of naughtiness**. This speaks of the “*overflowing abundance or excess of wickedness, moral defilement, or impurity.*” Hopefully such things do not abound in our lives, but raging rivers begin as small mountain springs that continue to flow and gather as they progress. So it is with our anger or unconfessed sin. If we aren’t careful, we’ll give way to the desires of the flesh and before we know it, we have allowed much sin to enter our lives.

B. The Need for Reception (21b) – and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. James again returns to the focus of the passage: the Word of God. Those who overcome and live victoriously in Christ have **received**, literally *accepted deliberately and readily*, the **Word of God**. Let’s look at bit closer at our reception.

- We are to receive the **engrafted word**. That is an interesting concept. It speaks of that which has been “*implanted, germinated, sprung up, and grown.*” I thought of the results of a seed being planted in fertile ground. It germinated and grew to maturity in order to produce fruit. That is how God’s Word works in our lives. There are times when we immediately receive that which is intended, and at other times, we must allow the instruction to dwell within us for a season, nurturing the seed, and in God’s time it will spring up in our lives!
- Also we need to consider the attitude necessary for germination and fruit to produce. We must receive God’s Word with **meekness**; that is we “*accept God’s dealing with us and His direction without dispute or resistance.*” We all know that God’s Word is beneficial, and hopefully all know it is infallible, and yet many times we dispute or resist the clear teaching of Scripture. God’s Word brought conviction which lead to our salvation. Surely if we can trust it with our eternal souls, we ought to look to it for daily direction and nourishment!

I. A Word Concerning our Conversation (19-20)

II. A Word Concerning our Sanctification (21)

III. A Word Concerning our Reflection (22-25) – Keep in mind that God's Word serves as a mirror, revealing the condition of our lives. James addresses our response to that which is revealed to us through the mirror of the Word. Notice:

A. The Admonition (22) – *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* This is very simple and needs little explanation. We are to respond to the mandates of the Word, not just hear it and pass it by. I have heard many say that they have difficulty understanding the Word, but I am convinced our problem isn't as much comprehension as it is obedience. I have more concern with what I do understand than those portions of Scripture I can't fully understand.

- We will never gain more wisdom and knowledge in the deep things of God if we are unwilling to be submissive to that which we clearly understand. We just need to live our lives according to the Word of God. That would save a lot of heartache and confusion, while glorifying our Savior and Lord in the process.

B. The Illustration (23-24) – *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: [24] For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.* Here James speaks of the futility of casually looking in the mirror without any care or observation, only to walk away and forget the image one saw. He didn't take time to notice the details or the needs, and quickly forgot his own reflection.

- So it is with our spiritual lives and the mirror of God's Word. A casual, unconcerned glance will not have lasting effects. If we are unwilling to gaze into the mirror with a desire for it to reveal who we truly are, we will not benefit from it. If we don't allow the Word to speak to us and change us, we will walk away from it and quickly forget the image it revealed. We will soon forget the urgent needs in our lives and the direction we received to address those needs.

C. The Expectation (25) – *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* James now reveals the expectation of believers which is opposite of those who casually glance at the Word and fail to be moved by it. This expectation is three-fold. Notice it involves:

1. Consideration (25a) – **But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty...** This has the idea of “*stooping down near something in order to get a closer look.*” Rather than a quick glance soon forgotten, this speaks of an earnest desire to not only see the Word, but grasp it and apply it to one’s life. We will never respond to the Word as we should until we take the time to genuinely consider it.

▪ There must be a certain aspect of humility in our consideration. As we stoop or bow to consider God’s Word, we humble ourselves before Him. *There was an Irish peddler who went from door to door selling his wares. He was met by a Christian who knew him and, after the regular greeting, the Christian remarked to the Irish peddler, "It's a grand thing to be saved." "Eh?" said the peddler. "It is, but I know something better than that." "Better than being saved?" the Christian friend asked in astonishment. "What can you possibly know better than that?" "The companionship of the Man who saved me," was the unexpected reply.* ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Continuation – **But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein...** Once we have taken the time to consider the Word, we must allow it to abide within our hearts, continuing in the Word. This speaks of “*remaining nearby, to abide.*” Clearly a casual or occasional reading of the Word will not satisfy this expectation, nor will it benefit the reader. James emphasizes the need for us to continue in the Word of God, consistently. **1 Tim.4:16 – Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.** **1 John 2:24 – Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.**

3. Compensation (25) – **But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.** Our commitment to the Lord and His Word are not without benefit. Granted we do not serve the Lord just for the blessings He gives, but we have comfort knowing that He will reward those who genuinely seek Him. If we are faithful to hear the Word and respond to its direction in our lives, we will be blessed of the Lord in our endeavors.

▪ We need to notice however, James is not simply referring to busy work or simply doing what others expect. This speaks of being compensated for our *difficult, hard labor*. Many are willing to assume the easy tasks of the kingdom, but few are willing to surrender themselves to the leisure of the Master. *A refined girl was converted. After a little while, in a testimony meeting, there were those who were expressing thanks for what God had done for them, saving them from drink, or gambling, or worldly pleasures. Presently this sweet girl got up and said, "Christ gave me a bigger salvation than any of you. He has saved me from an easy armchair."* ^{iv} Often it is easier to motivate one saved from excess than those saved from ease.

As we conclude our study this evening, I trust you have considered the question posed in the introduction: What does the Mirror Reveal? Are we guilty of a passing glance at Scripture being only a hearer, but not an earnest doer? Has the mirror of God's Word revealed a need in your life? If so, are you willing to take action concerning what you've experienced? We are blessed to have the Word to guide us, but often it is left unopened. A Bible that is not read and followed will lead to a life that is weary and wayward.

James spoke to the brethren in this passage, those who had placed their faith and trust in Christ for salvation. Have you done the same? Do you know for certain that you are born again in Christ? I am convinced many have a hard time discerning Scripture because they have never met the Author. If you have never been saved, please seek Christ in salvation today!

ⁱ AMBROSE BIERCE, *The Devil's Dictionary*

ⁱⁱ Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid