



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Chris Splawn

James 1: 19-27

Fall 2023

"Alive Faith-Doers of the Word"

TRANSCRIPT

Good evening. We are at time, and I feel we'll start on time and as people come in they can catch up as we journey through this wonderful letter of James. We're in our third lesson this evening and we'll be finishing the first chapter. It's been very rich for me to go through it in depth, and I wish we had more time to go through everything with even more depth. But turn with me to James chapter 1, and we'll look at verses 19 through 27. I'll read, and then we'll open in prayer. So James chapter 1, verses 19 through 27,

<sup>19</sup> *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 1: 19-27

This is the Word of God. Let's go to Him in prayer, as we dive into it together this evening.

Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for what a treasure we have to hold Your Word and to study it together this evening. We pray that You will bless Your people tonight as we dig into the treasures of Your Word, which really points us to the effective power of Your Word in the Christian life which enables us to be doers and not merely hearers.

So we pray that You would edify us this evening, encourage our hearts who are in You, who are trusting in the person and work of Your Son alone for salvation, for the forgiveness of our sins; and that we would grow, that we would move from this place this evening to where You have ordained us to be by Your sovereign will: That we would be effective, that we would be, as we just read, effectual "doers" of Your Word in even the most trying of situations, that You would bless Your people and receive the glory for that.

We pray for those who may not be able to be here this evening—be with them who are our brothers and sisters who, perhaps, are under severe trials, we pray that You would encourage their hearts in Christ, and empower them to joy. You are the sustainer of all things, and You are the Father of lights, and all things that come from You to Your people are good and wonderful gifts. Give us wisdom to see that, and give us wisdom to maneuver in this world for Your glory.

Bless Your people this evening, and bless our study. In Jesus name we pray.  
Amen.

(Message) Several years ago I heard a fairly well known preacher who made a bold statement that, "This generation is *monergistic*; sanctification is *synergistic*." Around that same time, within my company, that word, 'synergy', was one of the top corporate buzzwords in the workplace. I 'Googled it', and it came out to be number one, number one in that time, that buzzword, *synergy*. And it seemed like everyone was using that playbook.

But what is the Christian life? Does that define it? I looked up *synergy*, the definition—and its defined as, 'The interaction or cooperation of two or more agents that produce an effect greater than the sum of their separate parts.' So, does that define sanctification? That's the question—is that the Christian life?

When you take that phrase, 'Sanctification is synergistic', to the Scriptures with diligence and care, I think we can consistently see something altogether different. Is that the case that James is writing about here in this letter? That depends upon how you define that word—but in that definition, if you take that phrase too far, it's really, to its own logical conclusion, it can actually be downright dangerous. On one end of the spectrum, one extreme, it can lead to a false sense of sufficiency—and perhaps spiritual arrogance. And on the other extreme, it can lead to utter despondency, and a robber of joy.

The Christian life is not so simply defined as *synergistic*, but rather it is *supernatural*. The Christian life is supernatural from beginning to end—the full completion. It is the work of the Triune God. It is the work that the LORD has started, and it is the work that He will complete, the confidence we have in the work of Christ, and the work of the Triune God. "Salvation is of the LORD.", (Jonah 2:9), —from first to last.

"For I am confident of this very thing...", (you well know), "...that He who began a good work in you will complete it"..., (or will 'perfect it'), "...until the day of Christ Jesus. (Ph 1:6). Who later, there in the same letter, Philippians, "...work out your salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure." (Ph 2:12-13).

I love Louis Berkhof's, *Systematic Theology*. He defines sanctification as:  
"That gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews the whole nature, his whole nature, in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works."

I think that's a good definition of sanctification in the Christian life. The life of saving faith is a supernatural work of God; and now follow that to its logical conclusion and it's apt to fill us with joy and humility with a supernatural confidence, not in ourselves, but in the sovereign work of the Triune God. And it should draw us deeper in our dependence upon Him, upon the LORD. And it should draw us to His Word ever more closely and it should result in a growing life in grace to be lights of life in a dead world and to a helpless people.

We see that in our text tonight that the Christian life, the life of saving and living faith, is a supernatural life, where we are enabled to be "doers" of the Word. As we are reading through the treasures of this first chapter of James, that's the bedrock truth that we landed on last week, where we left off with James in verse 18, "In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

What a contrast to natural man, as James previously put forth as a picture to us, who, "...is carried away and enticed by his own lust". Which in turn, "gives birth to sin", which then, "brings forth death." (Jas 1:14-15). But then, in an exercise of God's sovereign will, He brought us forth, birthed us again, "by the word of truth"—the regenerating word of truth, 'born again', 'born from above', through the living Word of God.

And it's purpose: So that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures, (and it's in a future sense here that we *would be*, and that we *will be*). As 'first fruits', saints are the crown jewels of God's creation, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the very head. And as first fruits, the present saints are a pledge for what the LORD will bring to full completion when the full harvest is revealed at the culmination of time.

And that time has not yet come. We yearn for it, and we can't even imagine the first evidence of God's new creation that is to come. As MacArthur puts it, "We enjoy presently, now, the new life, a foretaste of the future glory to come. The LORD will bring it to completion." That's the glorious purpose for which He has regenerated us into salvation, and into a new life, a supernatural life of faith, from initiation to full completion; from regeneration through sanctification and unto glorification. And that's the catalyst here which enables a living faith to be a doer of His Word.

James continues, and we open in verse 19 this evening, "*This* you know, my beloved brethren." James recognizes that his audience already knows this great truth, the reality of the Christian life, that they have been, "brought forth by the word of truth", (vs18), that they have been regenerated by the power of the Word as revealed by the Holy Spirit—"This we know." (vs19). We have been given eyes of life to see, ears to hear, and a new heart has been planted to believe—unto faith. They are aware of the divine source of their regeneration, (and we already know the regenerating power of the Word of God).

And notice how James references them here. He calls them, "my beloved brethren." (vs19). There is a spiritual affection for the saints that James has for his readers, (and that we ought to have for one another), 'to love his brethren.' They were a kindred people, not merely among the 12 tribes of Israel, though scattered abroad. But James endears himself to them, and he endears them to himself, kindred in faith as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, fellow servants, (which he introduces himself as). The text that follows is not from a harsh, authoritarian position of a sense of superiority, but rather as a fellow brother in Christ. James is living that same Christian life as his fellow brethren, with the same faith, and underneath the same divine call and command.

So everything he's given applies equally to him. "This you know, my beloved brethren...", of the regenerative power "of the word of truth"—the Gospel message of God's truth embodied in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which has caused us to be born again to a glorious future as first fruits of His creation; "This you know."

It is "the word of truth" that is to be held as supreme authority in the life of faith. It is through the Word of God that we, as fellow servants of Christ, are to live.

And how are we to respond to that Word? James points us to that. How we respond to 'the word of truth' is a test of authenticity of a living faith—that we are not mere hearers but 'doers'.

James provides three figures of the nature of the Word in this conclusion of chapter 1. First, in verse 21, the Word is pictured as a *seed*. It's a seed "implanted". In verse 23 it's pictured as a *mirror*. It's a mirror that *reveals*. In verse 25, the Word is "the perfect law, the law of liberty"—the law of freedom.

From verses 19-20, James points us here to how we are to approach the Word of God: As attentive and diligent hearers. In verse 21, the attitude required to receive the Word of God is with humility. And in verses 22-27, how we are to live and apply the Word of God—freely and obediently in a Christ-like, selfless, and humble service within our society in which the Lord has placed us; to the helpless, to the despondent, to the needy—to the same for whom Christ came to save.

Thus, before we can apply these things, we must know these things. We must know the supreme value and power of the Word. "This you know, my beloved brethren" (vs19), "Faith comes through hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." (Rom 10:17).

That same text in Romans before speaks about the Word of Christ, the Word of truth; it must be taught. That's in the preceding verses in Romans 10, verses 14-15, "How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" And, "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" And, "How will they preach unless they are sent?"

And what is the reaction of living faith to the right teaching of the Word? The reaction demanded is that, "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, *and* slow to anger." (19b). That's, really, basic wisdom; practical, most basic, ethical and social manners which is to be expected.

It's common wisdom to be "quick to hear". It's practical to listen attentively to one another as we speak to consider and process what is said, rationally; and to ponder before you speak; to think it through thoroughly. And then, when responding, to remain calm, slow tempered, controlled—not easily overtaken by emotion, not quickly giving an answer 'off the cuff', but to consider it deeply.

The context here, though, is much deeper than the casual, social ethic or appropriate formal business manners. The setting here is in the presence of the LORD—of God. How are we to respond?

If James is one of the earliest writings of the New Testament, (and I think it is), then it's written at a time when the Gospel is being spread verbally. There's no other written New Testament books of the Bible yet being distributed; certainly not the full cannon. And the early church meeting was a dynamic meeting, (kind of like our Lord's Supper), a dynamic and active meeting with men standing and speaking freely, as the LORD leads. Christians were dependent upon their local teachers to verbally communicate the Word of God, (or, 'the truths'); the Person and work of Christ; the salvation and New Covenant that comes through Christ. They were dependent upon the early church missionaries as they traveled from synagogue to synagogue for their knowledge of the Gospel and 'the word of truth'.

The faithful reaction of hearing the Word is to be 'quick to listen'. The 'quickness to listen and slowness to speak' reveals something of the heart. It reveals the heart of faith that is eager to grow, hungry to hear and learn "of the word of truth"; to deeply reflect and digest the Word of God and 'the word of truth'; and so examine it with discernment and then to ponder.

And we should be approaching with that same lesson any time someone stands here before you to speak. Please, hold my feet to the fire, and 'be a Berean' and diligently examine what is taught in the Scriptures, and in light of the Scriptures. That's the reaction of the wise, the faithful.

But the reaction of the fool is altogether different. James enters in with that comparison—comparing and contrasting a worldly reaction. A worldly reaction is to be, ‘quick to speak, quick to give a rebuttal, and quick to argue’ —a rash response which can lead to anger very quickly. This is characteristic of the natural man, (and it's not to be characteristic of the one with living faith), the natural man who is at enmity with God and His Word. It's not to be characterized by those who are in Christ.

I like how D. Edmond Hiebert applied this. He says, "Let them remember that freedom of expression involves grave responsibility." That's very true. We are fully responsible to our approach to God's Word—and to our response to God's Word. A closed ear to the Word of truth will shut off future truths to be revealed for the saint. There's a danger there; rejecting something that is in God's Word can shut off additional blessings to come.

And on the flip side, when you come to a text, humble yourself before you dig through the truth deeply. If you're diligent with the Word of God, additional blessings are provided; more truth is revealed through the Word of God.

So there's a danger here for saints when you come to a text that you don't agree with, or perhaps you don't understand, be careful—be careful there. Be careful; the problem is not the text; the problem is not the Scripture. I've seen and heard of these reactions over topics such as ‘common grace.’ It's also very common with, ‘election’, a sense of ‘the atonement’, ‘inability’. Be quick to hear the Word of God, dig deep in the Word—that's a vertical application here to the Word.

And yet there's horizontal application, too; classically amongst one another—brothers and sisters in Christ. Whereas when we share the Word of God with an unbeliever, there is wisdom in engaging them gently, patiently. “A gentle answer turns away wrath.” (Pro 15:1). So, “Let your gentle spirit be known among men”, (Phi 4:5), for, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,



gentleness, self-control..." (Gal 5:22). That's the idea here among the horizontal applications.

And the reason to be "slow to anger" James gives in verse 20. "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." In other words, man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires within a believer, within one who is of living faith—and it does not promote the righteousness of God.

And in another section, in your anger; 'Be angry, but do not sin'. You "do not let the sun go down on your anger", (Eph 4:26) and you don't let it percolate within your heart. Human wrath does not further spiritual need. That's an important truth to learn and to apply, but it's difficult, self-control is difficult. Even when it's packaged as zealous piety, it's no excuse for doing wrath—particularly in our witness.

Moses is a tragic example of this, (I think for us), in the Old Testament. You remember in Numbers chapter 20, the LORD commanded Moses to speak to His people, to the rock, and from it water would flow. [He had already struck the rock once. I think the rock is a wonderful type of Christ here—Christ was stricken once on the cross. That's sufficient; there's no need to strike the Rock again.] Moses was commanded to *speak*—but Moses responded to the people with anger, and rather than *speaking* to the rock, he strikes it with his staff. And he calls the people, "You rebels." (Num 20:10). He was angry. And because of that one act of disobedience, even after a long life of humbly serving the LORD and faithfully serving Him, (he was characterized as a humble, a most humble man), and yet with that one act of disobedience came a severe consequence, where he could not enter into the promised land—he could not lead the people into the promised land.

A single moment of unrestraint in our words can tarnish our witness severely and damage our testimony—and dishonor the LORD. Even in the final moment, even in the fourth quarter of your life, it can be severe. So there's a warning there. We are to be self-controlled. And not only when it comes to anger, but with all things that are characteristic of the fallen world, and of the old nature. We are to be self-controlled.

Verse 21, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

In receiving 'the word of truth', there is a *negative* action of which to turn *against*, and a *positive* action of which we are to turn *towards*. First, we are to, 'put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.' 'To put aside', in other words 'to cast off', or 'to get rid of, to strip off.' The picture here is of a garment. There is a definitive break with the things: 'We're to cast them off' —change in conduct and lifestyle. We are to 'put off the old, and we are to put on the new' —for that is what we have been supernaturally born to.

You can see this in the imputation of our sin to Christ. He bore it upon Himself. He 'put it on' Himself; and that imputation of Christ's righteousness to the *regenerate people of God* means we are clothed in His righteousness. That's who we are in Christ, and that's how we are to live in the Christian life—a life of living faith:

Romans 13, verse 12, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regards to *its* lusts." (Rom 13: 12-14).

As John Owens put it, "Be killing sin, lest sin be killing you." This is a mortification of sin; this is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our life which we are enabled to do. It is wholly inconsistent within the Christian life, within the life of living faith, to be characterized as living as one who is characterized by "all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness." (vs21).

But we do live in a fallen world that is characterized by such things. The nature of the wickedness of the world is *troubling*; that's the idea James is saying here. 'All that remains of wickedness' is prevalent and it's overflowing. That's the description: 'It's abounding'—an abounding, vast quantity of wickedness that must be removed and stripped off.

It has already been done so by the implanted Word of God. We're to, 'be in the world, but not of the world', for we have died to the world in Christ and you're alive now in Him. That's who we are; that's our identity in Christ. Mark down 1 John chapter 2,

verses 15-17. I won't read that, but you can go back to it. It's very applicable to what is to characterize the Christian life: "Love of God and the love for the fallen world are incompatible, not merely in rivalry with one another...", as one put it, "but it's at a state of enmity against one another within the Christian life."

Thomas Chalmers observed that, 'They are so irreconcilable that they cannot dwell together in the same bosom.' That's true. That's Romans 8:7, "For the mind set on flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on flesh is hostile toward God..." And this is where the supernatural life of the saints is lived—as servants of Christ and is lived here.

"The sin that so easily entangles us", as Paul puts it. It creeps up, 'Does it not?' Every day it 'creeps up' in my own heart, in my own mind. "The innate evils of our old nature...", as one put it, "...a dead corpse that we still drag around, it seems—and it still leaves a stench."

But that is not who we are in Christ; it's not characteristic of a living faith that is alive. The characteristic of a living faith is one that struggles with these things, that struggles against the old. We struggle, in God's grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The new affections we have in Christ expel those affections of the old dead nature. That's where the supernatural battle is fought—and that's where it's won, by the grace of God using His Word.

And we have been given and equipped with everything we need to wage war against all filthiness, and the evil which is so prevalent. "...in humility...", James writes, "...receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." (vs23b). The Word of God, "the word of truth"—the Word is both our offense, and it's our defense as well. If you look at the whole armor of God, it's our sword; the Word is our sword. It's the belt of truth, which holds all the spiritual armor of God together. It's the Gospel of peace that makes our feet swift in the spiritual battle of obedience. The Word here is 'a seed'. The Word is "implanted"; it has already been implanted in those who are of Christ and are living the faith.

And we receive it with *humility*. That's how we are to approach God's Word, with humility and eagerness, submitting ourself to His Holy Word. And there's a sense of urgency here in that imperative to "receive", or to 'accept'. There's an urgency that we are to "receive" and accept the Word, 'humbly', which has been implanted already within the regenerative people of God.

And as such, that seed does not lie dormant or dead in the soil of a believer's heart. It's to produce roots and grow deep within—buried deep within the heart and sprouting to every corner within; the new nature, the new heart. It sprouts out of that soil of the regenerative heart, and it expands. It's dynamic in its character, the Word is—and it does not remain stagnant. That *seed* doesn't remain stagnant.

That's Sola Scriptura. That's the doctrine of 'Scripture alone'; the implanted Word of God, which is able to save your souls. It's through God's inerrant Word and the authority of the Word of God where the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is first revealed. That's where we see who Christ is: His nature, His glory, and what He has accomplished for us. It's through the regenerative power of the Word of the Holy Spirit that we are regenerated unto grace through saving faith—trusting and leaning on Christ alone as revealed in His Word. We *are* saved: We *have been* saved; we *are being* saved; and we *will be* saved.

And everything we need in the Christian life is found here—in God's living and supernatural Word. There's no book like it. It's supernatural. It's living to those who are alive in Christ, to those who the Holy Spirit enables.

And now James goes back to the 'comparison and contrast' again, and he pits the "doer" to the "mere hearer" of the saving Word of God. Verse 22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not mere hearers who delude themselves."

And there's the danger. Those who receive the Word of God, that 'word of truth' with saving faith, will be revealed as genuine through their humble obedience to the

Word. Wholehearted acceptance of the Word must result in active obedience to the Word. That's the very nature of saving faith, or living faith.

And there's a demand here for 'active obedience'. James repeats the word, "doer", four times in this letter. It's referenced a total of six times in the New Testament, so the majority of that word "doer" is found here in James. That's the emphasis. Living faith does not remain *alone*—but it '*does*', it '*acts*'.

That points to the characteristic of the true believer, the bent of one's life. Not that they are without the struggle of sin—we do, we do struggle. We ought to struggle, but that very struggle, in itself, is an evidence of the new life within us—that life of faith. We struggle within and of our own flesh when we are equipped in the Word.

For the unregenerate, they don't struggle with sin. They might seek to escape of the consequences of sin, (perhaps of an addiction). An unregenerate can seek refuge from the effects of sin, but it's not a true, spiritual, inner struggle with sin in and of itself. There's no mortification of sin on a daily basis—or on any basis for the unbeliever. There's no inner, supernatural struggle; but that's characteristic of the saints, those who are in Christ.

The merely, 'Coming to church as a "hearer", Sunday after Sunday', but refusing the power of God's Word on one's life, is delusional. It's completely delusional because the Word of God is the power of the living God.

However this is not to dismiss hearing the Word of God. Hearing the Word of God is critical for the Christian life; 'Faith comes through hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.' (Rom 10:17). But, 'a hearer of God's Word' in that sense is not "a mere hearer." (vs22b). A 'mere hearer' is one that produces no action, no life. There's no hunger; there's no affection to obey. There's no gratitude for the Word; no gratitude to the LORD; they're just an 'empty hearer.'

What a dangerous place to be. A very dangerous place to be! If you're growing up in a Christian home, and you're a hearer of God's Word, there comes much to be expected of that "To those whom much has been given, much will be required".

(Luke 12:48). And what a privileged position you're in, to be in the presence of God's Word where it's faithfully taught.

Our sovereign Creator has implanted His Word in us. And the reality is proven in our enabled obedience. The reality of that implanted Word is proven in our enabled obedience. There's no proof, here in this text, that is required by God for Himself. He doesn't need to see our outward proof for the inward work that He initiated. He's already accomplished it.

Our outward work is not 'in a performance before God', as proof for Him. The proof is designed, I think, first and foremost for ourselves; for the Christian life, for our own joy; for the assurance that Christ provides that He is working out His good in and through you. And that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

The proof is designed for our own joy in Christ and our own praise to a Savior—for He is the one that has performed it. And as a benefit, it is proof for the saints among one another to see the genuine nature of that supernatural life of living faith. And it's for the benefit of the dead world: Is it not, for the unbeliever, to observe the mystery of the Christian life and the enabled obedience of the regenerated follower of Christ—is it not to confound 'the dead world'?

If you really think about it, the regenerate power of the Holy Spirit lived out in the Christian life should confound those who are without that hope. We've seen that in Scripture as the apostles are tried: Peter and James; their accusers are dumbfounded by the wisdom flowing out of them in their answers—and they recognized that they were with Christ. And so too, it should be for us who are in Him.

James now shifts the word analogy from being, 'a living seed', to now, 'a revealing mirror.' In verse 23, (and again there's a negative and a positive comparison in the contrast here), Verse 23, "For if *someone* is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

(vs23-24). That's 'the mere hearer' of God's Word—who walks away and is not a doer. He looks at the Word of God like a mirror; and it's a mirror revealing who we are.

The Word of God reveals a right 'anthrology' we could say, 'A right study of man' that identifies who we are apart from Christ in our own nature: We are fallen; we are dead; we are sinful. "All have sinned", and fallen short of the Word of God. (Rom3:23).

But it also reveals the glories of Christ and the nature and character of God the Father: It reveals the wrath due unto sin—apart from the provision of His Son. And it reveals the great truths of who we are in Christ through faith. But the 'mere hearer' looks at the Word, looks at his natural face in the mirror, and he walks away forgetting what kind of person he is.

That word 'his natural face', is a revelation of his heart. That word, "natural face", is, 'The face that he is born with', you could say. 'Know thyself'; how critical it is to know yourself—and to know yourself rightly in the arc-light of the Word of God. That's the first negative picture and it's a warning of self-deception: Of spiritual blindness or of spiritual indifference altogether. That's the one who looks upon the Word, sees his face, (sees who he is), and then walks away immediately forgetting what kind of person he is.

I really like what Bruce Waltke once said, (and I can't remember where, but I know I heard him say it), he talked about the importance of remembering: "Remembering in the Christian life is critical for our sanctification, remembering according to the Scriptures." He said, "The opposite of *remembering* is not, *forgetting*. But the opposite of remembering is to *dismember*—to dismember as to *sever a limb*."

And that's the picture here, I think, of one who looks upon the Word of God, walks away, and there's no application within his life. He is *not* a "doer"—what a shame it is. Spiritual blindness, it's utter self-deception and ultimately will lead to spiritual decapitation when standing before the judgment throne of God.

But not so for the saints, not so for one with living faith. That's 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..." (I love that, "an effectual doer")  
"...this man will be blessed in what he does."

This is the man who looks intently. The picture here is that he leans over, diligently, with eagerness, to see what it revealed—the truths that are found within. What a crucial distinction from the previous man—completely opposite. "The word", here in verse 21 and verse 22, is "the word", in verse 18. It's, "the perfect law", and, "the law of liberty", (literally 'the law of freedom') of verse 25. It is the "implanted", (vs21), Word of God that abides in the believer, and it leads to Christian freedom. It's not one who becomes a forgetful hearer, (who severs off the things that they see), but an effectual doer—an effectual doer that leans intently and diligently into the Word of God.

They didn't have mirrors like we have today. A mirror here would be a bronze that is polished, and you'd lean over to look and see yourself. And that's what the Word is intended to be used for; to look intently at "the perfect law", "the law of liberty", "the law of freedom." And those who abide by it as effectual doers, (and not as forgetful hearers), are doing what is effectual for the means of which God has ordained: This man will be blessed, this believer will be blessed in what he does.

There's much need for wisdom in the Christian life. Prayer is needed: To pray unceasingly and to look to the Word intently with eagerness to grow in the Word. We often hear the phrase, 'The truth will set you free' and that is what we see here in the Word of God. This is the Word of God through faith; it is the law of freedom. And it frees faith to act, and to live, and to do—to be the "doer". It gives freedom.

The Christian is not free from the obligation to do God's will as revealed in the Word; but rather the Christian's affections, (and the affections within the saints), are so turned that the spiritual hunger and desire is to do the will of the Father. So, we are obligated to obey, but the motive in our obedience is to be driven by a hunger and a willful desire to please the Father, and to do His will.

The Christian is truly free when he or she wants to do what they ought to do according to the Word. Psalm 37:4, (I love this), it says, "Delight yourself in the LORD; and



He will give you the desire of your heart." Not desires to go off and do worldly things, but He will give you the right desires, according to His Word. He will give you righteous desires that are of God's nature and character.

And that man, that believer, will be blessed in what he does. He will be blessed because the LORD will honor those who honor the LORD both in word and deed. The LORD honors those who honor Him—through faithful obedience we will be honored and blessed. We'll be blessed and be joyful; the joyful Christian life will flow from a joyful obedience to the Word.

Verse 26, "If anyone thinks to himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless." Here again, the negative: The one who "thinks to himself to be religious"—there's an arrogance here, a pious outward religion.

That adjective, "religious," occurs only here in the entire New Testament as an adjective. And the word, *religion*, as a noun, occurs only four times in the New Testament. And every time it's used, it's in a rather negative connotation, (except here in verse 27). In Colossians 2:18 it's used negatively for the worshiping of angels. It's the same word. In Acts chapter 26, verse five, Paul uses the term for the strict ceremonial practices that he observed as a Pharisee; and the idea here is of 'a mere outward performance—going through the motions in the public sphere.' And yet if he is not restrained and in control of his tongue, all that outward exercise of his high piety is meaningless. It's worthless—an unbridled tongue, with no restraint, no self-control.

The principle here is also true in the real world; careers had been ruined by one errant word, one unrestrained word—and can cause great harm to our witness and our testimony.

Verse 27, "But pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world." That is 'pure and undefiled worship': It is to be selfless; it is to be Christ-like —

serving one another. That is what is honored in the sight of God, service to the helpless. It's a picture of Christ serving—what He came to do. It's one that elevates others who cannot reimburse; the vulnerable, the widow and the orphan—the most vulnerable in that society, who can never pay back the kindness shown upon them. The Christian life is to be characterized by that.

And that's reflecting the character and mission of God, the mission of Christ for which He came. He came to save the helpless. He came to save the worthless. He came to save those who could never repay that debt which He paid for us. His caring for the most needy—that's the gracious kindness of our God.

If, as we've gone through this text, you find yourself inadequate or unqualified to live this out perfectly, I think that's the right attitude to have in one sense. But we don't stay there, do we? No, because we have been made adequate, and equipped, and qualified. He has qualified the unqualified in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you have that sense, we storm the gates of heaven, and go to heaven in prayer for the wisdom in your King.

I love how Mark Newman put it in Sunday School here, this past Sunday in a teaching on prayer. He said, "We pray relentlessly". He used that word, "*Relentlessly* we go to Him." As James wrote that, 'all who go to Him, the LORD will not refuse. He will not chide those who come to Him for wisdom, and He will lavish it upon them.' (See James 1:5).

And so that is the Christian life, supernatural. As Augustine said, "Command what You will, but will what You command." And the Lord does that in His teaching as we grow in Him and grow in our walk. It's descriptive of the ministry, the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, through us. The Christian life is a supernatural life. And I've seen it in many of you; you're testimonies to that Christian life to one another.

How do you explain the one who's been diagnosed with a severe sickness, with an upcoming treatment that would be agonizing—and the response of that one is,

of glory and gratitude. We count it as a gift from the LORD—to request, not prayer for his own health, but that he would only be a faithful steward of that gift.

Or the woman who is undergoing the same trial, an agonizing ordeal. And then after coming to the other side of it, states joyfully, 'If I had to do it all over again I would choose that path, for the LORD revealed Himself in a precious way and grew us together in our love for Him, and our love for one another.'

Recently I met a believer, newly born in Christ, and immediately he breaks a hip, and comes down with COVID. And his response is to say, "God's miracle used mysterious moments to allow me to become His child. And I have lived in a joyous time of peace and commitment since." That's a supernatural power, is it not?

Or the man on his deathbed, as we witnessed here at Believer's Chapel, a long time member, who upon his final moments, praises God for the affliction. —Because through it, he had a platform to share of his love and joy for Christ, and the confident hope that we have in Him: 'To live is Christ, to die is gain.'

What a blessed assurance that is, to enable us to be doers of His Word. Let's go to the LORD in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this hour together to dive into these precious truths: Your nature, Your character, Your commands for the Christian life. For Your commands are not idle, they are enabled in the Christian heart—and we welcome Your commands for Your Word has been “implanted” in each one of our hearts who are in Christ.

And yet for those who are apart from Christ, that is their only hope. Their only hope for a true, joyful life in Christ, with salvation and forgiveness of sins, is found here in the Word, in the precious Word of truth—the Word of God that reveals who we are before You in Your majesty, Your splendor, and Your greatness; and the love with which You have loved the world, that You would send Your own Son, so that we would be made the children of God through faith by Your grace. It's all a work from You, from beginning

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to end. So bless Your work among Your people this evening, as we go out from here. In  
Jesus name, Amen.

*(End of Audio)*