

Doing

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[0 : 00] So today we continue our study of the book of James. If you'd like to follow along in your Bible, I invite you to turn with me to James chapter 1.

James chapter 1. Briefly, I'll remind you that James, the Lord's brother, is writing primarily to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Gentile world.

He refers to them as the 12 tribes dispersed abroad, or the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. Some Bible translations actually use a more technical term for Jewish people living among the Gentiles, and it will refer to the 12 tribes in the dispersion.

And James is writing to these Christians relatively early in history, probably in the mid-40s A.D. And James has noticed several problems among these Christians.

However, all of these problems appear to be symptoms of one underlying problem. Whether it's how they speak or how they act, everything can be traced back to really a lack of integrity.

[1 : 14] It's an issue James calls double-mindedness. Double-mindedness. Literally, he's referring to a person with two souls. To be a double-minded person is to be a two-souled person.

But of course, we weren't made to have two souls. The implication is that these two souls are moving in opposite directions. They're not in unity with one another.

The Jewish Christians to whom James is writing, they all knew the Shema of Deuteronomy 6 very well, since they would have all memorized it as children.

And it says, Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

In other words, Yahweh is a God of integrity. So His people should be people of integrity. God is undivided in His character and in His purpose.

[2 : 22] So His people should be undivided in their character and in their purpose. We must love this singular, unified God of integrity with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our strength.

We should not have any competing devotions for anything else. According to James, Divided hearts or double minds constitute spiritual adultery.

In chapter 4, he says, You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. So at the heart of this letter, James is addressing this issue of double-mindedness. He sees a lack of integrity among the people. He sees them saying one thing and doing another.

They have one foot in heaven and one foot in the world. And he doesn't want anyone to take this matter lightly. That's a pretty strong indictment in chapter 4. You adulterous people, Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

[3 : 37] You can't be friends with both. But as we'll continue to see throughout this letter, there is a solution to this problem. There's an antidote, if you will.

In his book, *Radically Whole*, David Gibson writes, We've been wrestling with our genuine love for God and the strong pull in totally different directions.

The diagnosis on offer here is very deep because it reaches right into the core of our identities. But there is also a cure on offer that is beautifully simple.

There is a way to behold one person inside and out. So with that said, let me read from James chapter 1 and I'll read verses 19 to the end of the chapter.

My dear brothers, understand this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

[4 : 41] Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not

hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.

But the one who looks intently into the law, the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless and he deceives himself. Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Now chances are your Bible has a division or a paragraph break between verses 18 and 19. In fact, you probably see a subheading between the two.

[5 : 55] My Bible says hearing and doing the word which is descriptive of the passage that follows verse 19 to the end of the chapter. Now as you probably know, James did not have a division here when he originally wrote this letter.

When his original audience received this letter, they read it from start to finish without any obvious breaks at all. So let me back up and read a portion of the last passage starting with verse 16.

James says, Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights who does not change like shifting shadows.

By his own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. My dear brothers, understand this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

Therefore, ridding yourself of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

[7 : 09] Now when you read it that way, it shines a slightly different light on the passage, doesn't it? And this is especially true for verse 19. When we hear James say, be quick to listen and slow to speak, we immediately think of this in the context of interpersonal relationships.

We think about how to communicate with one another. And this verse can certainly have that application. But that may not be James' primary point here.

You'll notice how verse 19 has these bookends, if you will. It comes between James talking about being born again by the word of truth, that's verse 18, and receiving the implanted word in verse 21. And while James may not be the most systematic or linear author of the Bible, I believe verse 19 actually has a more direct connection to this talk about the word of truth than we may notice at first glance.

But we'll come to that. You see, James, he's leading us on the path to wholeness. He's trying to show us how to mend our divided hearts and lead us toward singular devotion to God.

[8 : 29] And where does that start? It starts with the word of God. It starts with the word of truth, as he says here.

Now, I also want you to notice what we might call the parallel lines running through this passage. On the one hand, James is giving us clear instructions, right?

And if I were to summarize his instructions here, he says, here's God's word. Now do it. That's simple enough. Verse 22, be doers of the word.

But notice that James doesn't believe we can be made whole by sheer willpower. He says, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

So he essentially says, look up. This whole thing starts with God. It doesn't start with you. It starts with God.

[9 : 38] Then he says, by his own choice, by the Father's own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Now we'll talk about this more in a moment, but you see here that God has not merely dropped his word from the sky and said, all right, now you have my word.

Do it. Obey it. Get it done. Now that word is certainly an instrument. And it's an instrument to dramatically and profoundly change us.

But the text doesn't actually say he gave us the word of truth. It says he gave us birth by the word of truth. That's a different thing. Then in verse 21, James says, humbly receive the implanted word.

So on the one hand, we have an exhortation here to do the word. But there's a significant parallel line running through the text that reminds us that God is at work in all of this.

We're not doing this on our own. And while it may seem James is merely telling us to pick ourselves up by the bootstraps and get to work, the truth is God implanted the word in us and we're simply called to humbly receive it.

[10:57] You see the difference? By the way, this is something that you will hear me come back to over and over again. You see, James has the reputation of being a book that is all about doing.

And it is that. But it's more than that. James is suggesting if we rely on ourselves to achieve spiritual wholeness we will get discouraged every time.

We will fail every time. Look closer at what he says. James doesn't believe we'll find the answer in ourselves. It's way too simplistic to say he believes we'll find the answer by merely doing, by getting to work.

He continually throughout this letter, though it is sometimes very subtle, points us back to God. As he says later in the book, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

So yes, there is doing to be done. That much is very clear. James lays out our responsibilities. But this doing of ours is always presented in the context of God's gracious giving.

[12:10] So then the first step is not do this. The first step is to submit to God and simply receive what he gives. We saw that last time, right?

Are we struggling to endure our trials with the right perspective? Well, what does James say? If any of you lacks wisdom, he should change his mind. No, that's not what he says.

If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly. Now, here in the latter half of James 1, the primary instruction is pretty clear.

be doers of the word. But again, that's not where James begins this lesson. He begins by looking back at the gracious work of God.

Verse 18 again. By the Father's own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[13:11] Okay. Why is that significant? Well, before James launches into his practical exhortations here, he wants us to remember that as we strive to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect, we are not striving alone.

In fact, we couldn't even begin the Christian life on our own. Never mind reaching wholeness. We wouldn't even be Christians apart from God's gracious and sovereign work.

In John 3, Jesus said, you must be born again. Why? Ephesians 2, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

We were not sick. We were not merely divided in heart. We were spiritually dead. We had no life in us at all. But, by God's own choice, he gave us birth.

He gave us life. Your translation might say, of his own will, or he chose to give us birth. Ephesians 2 says, God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses.

[14:30] Jesus said, whoever is born of the flesh is flesh and whoever is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.

The wind blows where it pleases and you hear its sound but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the spirit. So you see the Christian life begins with the gracious and sovereign work of God.

Motivated by his love for us, he gives us life. He transforms us from the inside out and this is a radical transformation. We go from being dead in sin to alive in Christ.

We are born a second time. And speaking to first century Christians, James says you were only the first fruits of his creatures. There are many more to come and every one of them will begin the same way.

God will bring them to life through his gracious sovereign work. But you can imagine someone arguing I became a Christian when I believed.

[15:42] Isn't that what Jesus said? God gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life and that's right. God but James wants us to remember here that our faith in him is because of him.

Why? Why is that important? Well first of all apart from him we would have no faith. We have nothing to boast of here. And second we can't possibly combat this problem of double mindedness. We can't possibly achieve wholeness apart from him. We rely on him and his grace daily moment by moment.

You know there were people in the first few centuries of the church who really struggled to accept James as a legitimate part of the biblical canon. They didn't know whether it really belonged in the Bible.

And even in the days of the reformers we see that there were men who struggled with James. And I think one of the primary reasons they struggled is because they missed this subtle emphasis that James places upon the necessity of God's grace.

[16:58] Again they perceived the book to be all about doing rather than trusting in Christ. They saw this apparent tension between Paul's teaching about justification by faith and James' teaching about justification by works.

And they said to themselves I just don't know how to reconcile them. But again I say look closer. Every good and perfect gift is from above.

Coming down from the Father. By his own choice he gave us birth. Humbly receive the implanted word. By no means is James ignorant of God's grace.

It's all throughout this book. Even while he tells us to get to work doing this or that he reminds us in his own subtle way that we rely completely upon God's grace.

But as I said we see parallel lines running through this text. God is certainly gracious. He is certainly giving. Namely he gives us spiritual birth. But he's also not operating in a vacuum.

[18:07] He gave us birth truth by the word of truth. What is the word of truth? I like something Alistair Begg said years ago.

He said it is the gospel. It is the story that Jesus told. It is if you like the great comprehensive wonderful tale of an initiative taking God who is seeking to save men and women when they're not looking for him at all.

Now we could very well say the word of truth encompasses all that God has said, all that he has revealed to us through his word and there's certainly truth to that.

But the gospel message is at the heart of this word of truth. Colossians 1.5 You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

So Paul very specifically defines the word of truth as the gospel. In Ephesians 1, Paul uses the expression again saying, in him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.

[19:30] As Paul says in Romans 10, how can we call on him whom we have not believed in? And how can we believe without hearing him?

And how can we hear without a preacher? The gospel message is God's instrument for bringing about new birth in his people.

We must be born again, right? Well, James says he gave us birth by, we might even say through the word of truth. Here's how the apostle Peter puts it.

He says in 1 Peter 1, you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Then he says, and this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you. Actually, let me go a bit further with what Peter says about it.

[20:31] That's what he said at the end of 1 Peter 1. Then as he moves into chapter 2, he says, therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.

Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow up into your salvation. So, we don't just enter into the Christian life through God's word.

We continue to grow by it. It saves us and then it continually transforms us. We believe in it in the beginning, putting our trust in the Savior it proclaims and then what?

Let's see what James says. Verse 19, my dear brothers, understand this, everyone should be quick to hear, quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls. You know, I'm beginning to think that maybe James and Peter spent a lot of time together.

[21:45] They convey very similar messages here. They both say we must be born again by or through the word of truth. They both insist upon our repentance of evil and wickedness and they both insist we desire the word.

Peter says we'll grow by it into our salvation and James says it can save our broken divided souls if we humbly receive it.

So James is writing to believers here. God has given them new birth through his word. James refers to them as my brothers. He's speaking here to his family in Christ.

But he sees this disturbing lack of integrity and he really wants to lead them to wholeness. And then he says understand this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Pay attention, he says. Take note of this. Don't miss it. listen. You need to listen. You need to hear.

[22 : 56] Hear what exactly? Well, you know this is reminiscent of the Shema. Do you know what Shema means? It means to hear or to listen.

That passage from Deuteronomy 6 gets its name from the first word of it. Listen, Israel. Shema Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Now, James may have in mind here our communication with one another, but I also believe he has a greater point to make.

And it regards the bookends of this passage, you know, the word of God. In verse 21, he says we are to receive this word. Verse 22, we are to do this word.

And of course, receiving and doing will begin with hearing this word. when we get to chapter 3, we'll see that many of these early Christians were a little too anxious to do all the talking.

And what I mean by that is that too many of them wanted to teach, namely. They didn't want to sit back and merely learn from others. They wanted to do the teaching themselves. James says not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we, the teachers, will receive stricter judgment.

[24 : 14] When he talks about them controlling their tongues, when he talks about the dangers of the tongue, that's the context. Evidently, many of them were fighting for teaching positions.

They wanted to do all the talking. And what does James say? Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak. And I believe this actually includes teachers, by the way.

You can imagine a scenario in the church, especially in the early days of the church, when you have all of these well-educated Jewish men, and I mean educated in the scriptures.

They've known them since their youth, and they're all fighting for prominence. They're fighting to show off their knowledge, their vast wisdom. They all think they have something to teach.

They're all a little proud in that regard. Perhaps that's why James tells them to humbly receive the implanted word. And you can imagine the conflicts that would create, and the anger that would be stirred among them as they're all competing with one another, especially if all of these men are competing, and none of them are really submitting to established pastoral leadership.

[25 : 33] It's a free-for-all. So James wants everyone to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and therefore slow to anger.

He says, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. If you want to be made whole, if you want to be made righteous, you're not doing yourselves any favors by always striving to be the one talking.

You need to listen. You need to hear. Specifically, you need to hear what God's word says. And do you know what happens when we listen?

Well, God willing, we learn. And what we learn changes us. Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.

And I can't help but to think back to that great phrase in the King James Bible, the superfluity of naughtiness. That prevalent evil.

[26 : 36] Humbly receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls. you see, we don't even realize all of the filth and the evil that is around us and in us when we don't take the time to really listen and hear what God's word says.

God's word is our measuring stick, if you will, which we'll talk about in just a second. You know, as I read this, I get the impression that James' original audience doesn't exactly see their hypocrisy.

They're kind of blind to their double mindedness and they're blind to it because they're always talking, they're always teaching, they're always sharing their opinions and ideas. So what does James say they need?

They need to listen. They need to hear God's word and they need to receive it. God said through the prophet Jeremiah, I will put my teaching within them and write it in their hearts.

Deuteronomy says the message is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart so that you may follow it. If you are in Christ, his word is in you.

[27 : 53] So James says receive it, accept it, take it, learn from it, and ultimately submit to it, obey it.

And that's precisely what he says in the next verse, verse 22. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror, for he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.

But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

So James says listen, receive, but also do. Here's what God's word has to say. Listen to it.

[28 : 54] Then accept what it has to say. And finally, obey what it has to say. And anything short of that is double-mindedness. Obviously, we don't know everything going on in these early churches, but a picture is starting to form.

We have lots of people here who evidently are anxious to talk and teach, though they aren't necessarily teaching sound doctrine in all cases.

Later, James says the tongue stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell.

So whatever they were saying wasn't good. It was destructive. So there's lots of teaching going on, and at least some of it wasn't sound. Too many of them are not listening to what God's word actually says.

They're not receiving it humbly. Then there's the problem of not obeying what God's word says. You know, they may have loved to hear it, nodding along and occasionally shouting amen, but they would walk away completely unchanged.

[30 : 08] And that's significant. You know, soon after I was saved and became a Christian, I was really excited about reading and studying the Bible.

I wanted to learn as much as I could from it. So I set out to start a small Bible study group. I wanted to discuss the Bible with others. I wanted to learn from others.

The only problem was I belonged to a very small church and there was no one my age. Kind of like me, everybody my age had gone the way of the prodigal son before and I was the only one who came back at the time.

So I invited some of my non-Christian friends to join me in this Bible study. Let's just say it was interesting. It won't surprise you to learn that most of our conversation centered around very specific ethical issues.

What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol? What does the Bible say about smoking marijuana? What does the Bible say about fornication? Is it fornication to do this or that?

[31 : 14] How far am I allowed to go with my girlfriend or boyfriend? It wasn't a very edifying experience but you know everyone in the group always seemed so receptive.

No one ever argued against the Bible. We would read it, we would discuss it and somewhat surprisingly everyone would agree, okay that's what it says. But it never changed anyone.

Those who drank continued to drink. Those who smoked pot continued to smoke pot. To my horror, one member of the group even committed murder a few years later.

Now that's obviously not the same situation James is continuing with here. He's writing to believers. But you can probably see my point.

We need sound, qualified teachers. We all need to learn from the word of God. We all need to accept it, wholeheartedly, and we all need to obey it.

[32 : 20] We need to actually do it. Now David Gibson has a very helpful way of breaking down this passage and explaining what the word of God is.

He says, the Bible is, number one, an implanted word. It is, number two, a revealing mirror.

And it is, number three, a freeing law. So the Bible is, first of all, an implanted word. Gibson says, implanting things in the body can save it.

The pacemaker to regulate the heart, the plate to fuse the bone, the stent into the artery to allow the blood to flow freely. But did you know that implanting the Bible can save you?

The word of God implanted in your heart, in your bones, in your very being, can save you. A little later, he writes, James is asking us to do an input, output, self-evaluation.

[33 : 30] The verbs required of the believer here are passive, receive, take, accept the word. We depend on the input of God's word to us.

But what do we love doing instead? Output. It's how we roll, by the output of words, anger, and activity, unguided by the necessary input.

Now we've talked about the output of words, and the output of anger. But what does he mean by activity? Well, we won't spend a lot of time on this part today, but look down to the last two verses of this chapter.

If anyone thinks he is religious, without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless, and he deceives himself. Notice he has religion. It's useless, but he has religion.

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

[34 : 33] In other words, these people are religious in their appearance, they're religious in their activities, but to some degree, it's a false religion. It's a vain religion.

There's a lack of integrity, a lack of purity. There's hypocrisy in it. These people are double-minded. So James is confronting us with a test of sorts.

Before we even think about doing, Gibson calls it output, we need to pause long enough to reflect on input. Are we humbly receiving from God what we need?

Are we humbly receiving from His Word what we need? Second, Gibson says the Bible is a revealing mirror.

As I said before, the Bible acts as a measuring stick for us. It teaches us something about ourselves. James says, if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like someone who looks at his own face in the mirror, for he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.

[35 : 50] Gibson writes, imagine looking in the mirror in the morning and seeing what you're like, seeing what needs fixing, the stubble to be shaved off, the makeup to be applied, or the hair to be combed.

Imagine going away and ignoring what the mirror reveals. Who does that? Who listens to the Bible, hears it, understands what God is saying, and goes away and doesn't do what he says.

Well, the answer is a double-minded person. Gibson continues, to be spiritually whole, we must listen to God, and to be spiritually whole, we must not only listen, we must do.

I can't remember who I heard this story from, but he was talking about carrying some flowers and getting some of that yellow pollen on his face. He must have touched his face.

He gets in the car, he's going to visit somebody, and he looks in the mirror and he sees, I've got yellow pollen on my face, I need to get that off before I get out of the car. Then he forgets about it. And so, of course, he approaches somebody with yellow pollen all over his face.

[36 : 57] That's what James is talking about here. It doesn't make any sense to look into that Bible, to see something about ourselves and then walk away as though we saw nothing at all. I'm fine.

I can continue just as I was. Well, third, the Bible is a freeing law. Here's what James says. The one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

And here's what Gibson says. When you look in the Bible and listen to it, you're not just seeing who you are as in a mirror, but you're seeing who God is, coming face to face with his character, his loves, his standards, his law.

That is what law does. It reveals the nature of the one who gives it. Now, you may not have ever thought about it that way, but James here, he says God's law is a perfect law.

Do you remember that word from last time? That's a word that means completeness. It's a word that means wholeness. God is whole. His law is whole. And his law leads us to wholeness.

[38 : 16] Think of it this way. Let's say I make a rule for my children. Let's say I tell them, you can play in the yard, but stay in the yard. Do not go out onto the street.

Now, who knows? My kids may think that's a completely arbitrary and unnecessary rule, but that's not really the case, is it? The rule says something about me, and it says something about my relationship with my children.

It says I love my children, and I don't want them to get hit by a car. I want them to be whole. I want them to be healthy. Now, when they grow up to be teenagers, they might just push back a little bit, and they might accuse me of infringing upon their liberty with all of my rules, right?

After all, rules restrict us. They limit our freedom, don't they? Yet, James says God's law is not only perfect, but a perfect law of freedom.

Isn't that a contradiction, kind of like the place called liberty tax? How can a law ever be a law of freedom? Well, imagine what might happen to my children if I don't enforce a rule that says no playing in the street.

[39 : 38] They might want the so-called freedom to play wherever they want, but I know their version of freedom, absolute, unhindered, unqualified freedom, could get them hurt, if not killed.

And what freedom would they have then? No, true freedom actually requires rules to keep us healthy and to keep us well. And let's keep in mind these rules come from a perfect lawgiver who knows far more than we do.

Here's what Gibson says, and I'll end with this. We have the Bible, we love his word, we look in the mirror, and we ignore it.

There are few greater tragedies in life than this. For acting on God's word by doing what it says is the only route to living in the power and blessing for which we have been created.

But a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. Doing the word makes you flourish, it will make you content, whole, righteous. The posture of the believer is to delight in the law of the Lord, both day and night.

[40 : 52] So the Bible is like a seed, implanted inside you which can grow and give life. It is like a mirror that can tell you the truth about yourself and show you what you need to do.

The Bible can set you free and give you the kind of life that is blessed by God. And to that I say, Amen. Let's pray.

Gracious Father, your word is truth that saves and makes us whole. Convict us when we are hearers only and not doers of your word.

Plant your word deeply within us. Make us quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Help us humbly receive and obey your implanted word.

May we look intently into your perfect law of freedom and live it out to embrace it, to love it. Help us to have undivided hearts for you.

[41 : 52] Keep us from being stained by the world. Make our entire lives evidence of pure and undefiled religion. And we ask this in the name of Christ, the living word made flesh, our only source of wholeness and life everlasting.

Amen.