



“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

Faith Obeys the Word

Central Truth: Faith produces an obedient response to God’s Word.

L369. Date: June 1980. **Text:** James 1:19-27. **Topic:** Faith: Of Believers; Obedience: To God/ Scripture.

Many people do not understand what faith is. They think of it as wistful thoughts, daydreaming, foolishness, or even self-deception. It is none of those. Faith is confident trust in the sovereign person we call God.

Faith is not hoping for “pie in the sky bye and bye.” It is practical. It lives in the real world and affects the affairs of daily life.

You exercise faith day by day without realizing it. You may take your car to have the brakes repaired. You may not know personally the person who does the work. But when he tells you the brakes are repaired, you get in the car and drive out into traffic. That is faith in the natural realm. You act on his word because you trust him to be faithful. Just so, God speaks to us through the Bible. Faith accepts His word and acts upon it because we trust Him to be faithful. To doubt His word and refuse to act is sin. Thus this study is entitled, “Faith Obeys the Word.”

Faith Receives the Word (James 1:19-21)

Jesus gave a parable about how people receive the Word of God (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23). Some hear without response — as seed falling on the pathway to be devoured by birds. Some hear with enthusiasm but without commitment — as seed sprouting in the shallow soil covering a rock. Some hear but secular concerns turn their attention away from God — as seed growing among thorns. But some hear, grow heartily, and bear fruit.

James 1:19-21 tells you how to be productive upon hearing the Word of God.

Receive the Word of God unhesitatingly. *“Be swift to hear.”* (verse 19). Have an open mind and receptive spirit so that the truth taught does not fall upon unreceptive ears. Be like the Bereans who listened eagerly to the public teaching of the Word of God and followed that with private study (Acts 17:11). Receive the Word of God *“not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* (I Thessalonians 2:13). Do not be open to just any doctrine of any teacher. Be sure the person who instructs you in the Word is committed to its truth. But when that truth is taught, receive it like a thirsting man receives a drink of water.

Receive the Word of God humbly. *“Be slow to speak”* (verse 19). Uninstructed comments will hinder you from learning the truth. To “bridle” the tongue is a sign that you are truly religious (James 1:26). God's Word, not your opinion, is of greatest importance. So listen to Bible teaching with a humble spirit that receives and applies its instruction.

Receive the Word of God calmly. Be *“slow to wrath”* (verse 19) (See also verse 20.) Sometimes the truth of Holy Scripture will prick, and the application of its truths will cut. What is your response when the preacher's sermon cuts across some failure in your life? Do you get upset at the messenger, or do you respond humbly to the message? To get angry at the truth of the Word is a sign of spiritual immaturity and rebellion. It is sin. Thank God that He loves you so much He will not leave you alone as you are. His Word disciplines you and makes you more like Jesus.

Receive the Word of God penitently. *“Lay apart all filthiness and the superfluity of naughtiness”* (verse 21). When you are convicted by the truth of the Word, strip off everything that soils you and whatever wickedness clings to you. The only person who enjoys personal fellowship with God is one who is clean in conduct and pure in character (Psalm 15). The Holy Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make you more like the Son of God.

Receive the Word of God profitably. It is *“able to save your souls”* (verse 21). God saved you from the penalty of sin at your conversion. He saves you from the power of sin in daily life. He will save you from the presence of sin at the return of the Lord Jesus. But always His saving work is according to principles set forth in His Word, the Holy Bible. Obeying the Bible never harms you; it always helps you. Be open to whatever God says to you in public teaching and in private study.

Faith Responds to the Word (James 1:22-25)

The great burden of the preacher or teacher is helping those people who hear but refuse to submit to the principles of Holy Scripture. Not all people respond correctly to God's Word.

You can hear but not respond. You can be a “*hearer of the Word, and not a doer*” (verse 23). Some tragic consequences follow that course.

(1) To hear and not obey is to deceive yourself (verse 22). There is some satisfaction in knowing what God says in the Bible (Ezekiel 33:30-33). But that is never enough. It is like going to a physician with an illness, receiving medication to restore your health, and then failing to take the medicine. God pronounces a curse upon the person who follows such a course (Jeremiah 48:10).

(2) To hear and not obey is to catch only a glimpse of divine truth (verses 23, 24). It is like looking into a mirror to check your appearance, then having to go back and look again because you are not sure all is in order. There is no contentment of spirit to one who hears but does not obey.

You can hear and obey (verse 25). Three blessings follow that course.

(1) You find liberty in the application of God's law to your life. His Word is “*the perfect law of liberty.*” It does not enslave you for life, but it frees you to live (Galatians 5:1). It helps you to grow stronger and stronger (Job 17:9).

(2) You will find direction and meaning to life as you hear and obey. The Word of God becomes a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:105). It will say, “*This is the way, walk ye in it*” at every decision you face (Isaiah 30:21).

(3) You will find the blessings of God upon your life as you hear and obey. His command for you to keep the Word of God in your heart and follow its principles in conduct is accompanied with a promise: “*Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*” (Joshua 1:8). That course makes it well with you and with your children forever (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Faith Practices the Word (James 1:26, 27)

There are three areas which are influenced by the Word of God in your life. Consider them.

The Word controls what you say, making you bridle your tongue (verse 26). The Bible speaks often of the need to control speech, the blessings of good speech, and the curse of evil words. (See Titus 3:2; James 3:6; 4:11; Psalm 34:13; and I Peter 3:10, for example.) The mouth speaks

what is in the heart, and the Word of God purifies the heart.

The Word controls what you do, making you “*visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction*” (verse 27). It sets out God's command for you to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). If the Bible does not influence your conduct, it is because the Word is not truly in your heart.

The Word controls who you are, keeping you “*unspotted from the world*” (verse 27). The fruit of Bible truth applied to life is “*charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*” (I Timothy 1:5). It keeps you from fellowship with the things of sin and keeps you spotless and blameless before your God (II Peter 3:14).

No wonder our Lord commands, “*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only*” (James 1:22). To know and not do is to sin most seriously against God. Why would anyone want to know the Bible if there was no resolve to follow its teachings? “*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17).

Discipline your mind to learn, then discipline your life to obey. Read our Lord's warning about hearing and doing His Word (Matthew 7:24-27); and respond in humble obedience.