

Sermon or Lesson: James 1:22-24 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Treating God's Word As If It Were Useless

INTRO: For those of us who are parents of children or teenagers, what is it like when you give your child or teen an instruction to do their regular assigned chore and they look at you, nod their head, and then continue on with what they were doing, thereupon totally disregarding what you just instructed them to do? What do you think about this? Is this kind of behavior good for them and for their relationship with you?

Let's examine a passage in God's Word that addresses this topic of ignoring what we are told to do.

READ: James 1:22-24

v.22 - READ

[Lesson Question: How is "merely listening to the word" deceiving oneself?]

SECTION POINT: "Merely listening to the word" is deceiving oneself.

(AMP) - "betraying yourselves [into deception by reasoning contrary to the Truth]"

- - God places responsibility on each of us to do what we hear in His Word, but those who "merely listen" may erroneously think that God's commands are not commands but instead are really recommendations or nice advice; i.e. they do not acknowledge God's right to exert authority in their own life.
 - - "Merely listening" does not bring about change or righteous living, behaviors, and thinking; it is not practical Christian living (the theme of the Book of James). But those who "merely listen" may erroneously think it does accomplish God's purpose in their life because they feel better after hearing it.
 - - "Merely listening" does not please God nor make us righteous in His sight nor fixes any problems God has with us, even though we may erroneously think it does.
 - - For those who "merely listen", their relationship with God is seriously flawed even though they may think it is fine - there are deceived.
 - - For those who "merely listen", they deceive themselves about what their proper response should be. They assume it is sufficient and good enough to just listen - put in their time and they are good for another week.
 - - For those who "merely listen", they think they are fooling others around them about how spiritual and good they are but they really do not fool others for long. They develop and maintain both a false front and a false sense of spirituality.
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[Lesson Question: Why is it hard, difficult, un-compelling to do what the Word says?]

SECTION POINT: It is hard, difficult, un-compelling to do what the Word says.

- - "Doing what the Word says" involves extensive change and overhaul of our beliefs, behaviors, and thinking. (v.21)
 - - "Doing what the Word says" inevitably involves giving up cherished sin. (v.21)
 - - "Doing what the Word says" involves understanding, wisdom, remembering, commitment (vv.23-25) - i.e. deliberate sustained intellectual effort.
 - - We think what is being asked of us seems restrictive, unpleasant, detrimental to our enjoying life. (see vv.21; 4:4,8)
 - - Also, we do not always recognize the answer(s) to our problems when they are told to us from God's Word. (see vv.3:13-17)
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vv.23-24 - READ

[Lesson Question: What are the main points of the analogy here in verses 23-24?]

SECTION POINT: The example of the mirror is used here to portray that there are absurdities in listening to the Word but not doing what it says.

The main points of the analogy here in verses 23-24 are:

- - It is absurd to immediately forget what your face looks like after looking at it in the mirror.
- - Likewise, it is absurd to immediately forget and not internalize something as important as the Word, which is direct instruction communicated from God.
- - The absurdity of immediately failing to remember what you look like is equal to the absurdity of failing to respond to the hearing of God's Word, and therefore it becomes insulting and disrespectful to Him.
- - God intends for and designed His Word to be acted on, implanted, obeyed and not just superficially heard and then ignored; merely hearing is completely inadequate to God.
- - The Word has no impact on our life if we do not obey it, which is contrary to God's intention for and design of His Word to have a great transformative impact.
- - Essentially, there is no personal commitment to the heard content, even though the Word has great worthiness to be committed to.

[Note: Another more comprehensive analogy similar to this is in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23, the 'Parable Of The Sower', which elaborates on variations of how people respond to hearing the Word.]

[Lesson Question: Is it a sin to "merely listen to the word but not do it" (v.23)?]

SECTION POINT: It is a sin to "merely listen to the word but not do it". (v.23)

- - According to the person's demeanor, "merely listening to the word but not doing it" is either a sin of 'omission' - failing to do what is right (v.4:17), or a sin of 'commission' - refusing to do what is right, what we are instructed to do here in verse 22.
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BIG IDEA: We should not only hear the Word but also necessarily do what it says, and not doing what the Word says essentially rejects it and judges it useless to you.

APPLICATIONS:

- - Has the illustration in verses 23-24 been effective in helping you get God's point?
 - - For those of you who are not believers, if the Bible really is direct instruction communicated from God and if you, along with everyone else, will indeed stand before Him in judgment one day, then do you think it is wise to categorically dismiss what you hear from the Bible? Will your rationales for dismissing it be credible before God on Judgment Day?
 - - For those of you who are believers, are there ways in which you and/or others in your ministry and/or your church essentially treat God's Word as if it were useless? Irrelevant? Non-applicable? Insufficient? Obsolete? Marginal? If so, what are you going to do about these ways of essentially mistreating the Word that you have just thought about? Shrug your shoulders, dismiss them, and go on with life - like it depicts in our passage of immediately forgetting what you look like in the mirror?
 - - Do you personally merely listen to God's Word and then ignore or forget to do it as you go on with your life? How often? When you are in trials, is it common for you to both hear the Word and dismiss it? Do you now appreciate the ramifications when you dismiss the Word?
 - - Maybe it is time for you to start or more thoroughly make God's Word useful in your life, your ministry, your church instead of useless.
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