

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Stop Kidding Yourself James 1:19-27 Part Five

The theme of James is Tests of Living Faith! This epistle was written so that we might know whether we are saved or not saved. The first test that we find in this great epistle is the “The Response to Trials test.” This test is found in **James 1:2-18**. We have now begun to consider the second test of living faith and that is the “Response to the Word test.” This test is found in **James 1:19-27**.

The proper response to the Word first of all involves a “proper reception” which is described for us in **VV. 19-21**. But a proper response not only involves a proper reception, but also AN ACTIVE OBEDIENCE.

Let us read **VV. 22-27** “**But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (23) 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; (24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (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, this man shall be blessed in what he does. (26) 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. (27) This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.**” How can we know if in fact we have received the Word in such a way that it has become implanted? We will know when we see ourselves practicing active obedience. It is not enough for us to simply think that we have received the Word properly we must see the fruit of it in our lives.

The bottom line of true spiritual life is not a momentary feeling of compliance or commitment but long-term active obedience . What good is it if somehow you or I are emotionally moved in a particular worship service to think about being obedient but we never follow through on it? Are we somehow more holy for having thought about obedience even though we have not performed what we know to be right? It is not what we feel or think that matters in issues of obedience, it is what we do.

I believe the importance of doing the right thing in our society is becoming less and less important. It seems that more and more the issue is not about what is right but rather what is expedient or what serves the bottom line, whatever that bottom line might be. This should not and cannot be true of the church. We must know what we are about and that is to make sure that we are properly responding to the Word of God. This means that we will be receiving it in such a way that it becomes implanted and the implantation of the Word is confirmed through active obedience. This is more important than any worldly pursuit. This should be more important than having a boyfriend or girlfriend. It should be more important than getting a college degree. It is more important than getting married. It is more important than having children. It is more important than being successful in a particular career. It is more important than having a well-funded retirement.

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I would like to consider Israel for a moment to help us see what this practically might mean for our lives. For much of Israel's history they failed miserably at properly responding to the Word but it was not always that way. There was a particular time in Israel's past that can serve as a model for us.

When the Jews began returning home after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, they found their beloved city of Jerusalem, including the temple, in ruins. Their first desire was to rebuild the temple, and work began and was completed under the direction of Zerubbabel. But the walls of the city also were in serious disrepair, leaving the people vulnerable to attack by an enemy. A Jew named Nehemiah, who had been cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Babylon, secured the king's permission to go to Jerusalem and help his people rebuild the wall. Under his extraordinary leadership and through the guidance and power of the Spirit of God, the people accomplished the formidable rebuilding task in only fifty-two days. All of this is recorded for us in **Neh. 1-6**.

Once these tasks were done, the people acknowledged that God had brought them back to their homeland and to their holy city and had empowered them as they rebuilt the temple and the city wall. This manifestation of God's power had gotten Israel's attention and made it possible for the events in **Neh. 8** to occur as recorded by Nehemiah.

In **Neh. 8:1-3** we read, **“And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. (2) Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. (3) And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.”** Notice that all the people were attentive and this was from early morning to midday. This was not a simple 45 minute Bible reading surrounded with good praise music and it did not just involve sitting in a nice air conditioned auditorium. **Neh. 8:5-6** says, **“And Ezra opened the book in sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.”** Notice that they stood up. I know that sometimes the music group asks you to stand for one or two songs on certain Sundays and I know that this can be a problem for certain individuals and if you are one of those individuals I would hope that you would feel the freedom to remain seated. But for the rest of us, be thankful that I am not asking you to stand for the entire message.

You might think that these extreme commands on the people might lessen the effectiveness of the Word being presented but this does not appear to be the case. It goes to say in **V.6** **“Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”** Now this would be an exciting way to finish a message. Clearly the Word appeared to have a deep impact upon them and this was in spite of less than ideal conditions.

The people showed their spiritual hunger, spontaneously standing up as soon as Ezra began reading the Law and then bowing and worshiping God with their faces to the ground when he had finished.

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This was not done mechanically for **V. 9** says, “..... **For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.**” Though Nehemiah does not specifically state the reason for their weeping, I believe it was a visible expression of godly sorrow which had led them to true repentance.

How do we know this? Look at Nehemiah’s response? In **V. 10** he says, “... **go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.**” Nehemiah was calling the people of Israel to celebrate. Celebrate what? Certainly it was a celebration of forgiveness, that in spite of their sins their genuine contrition was seen by the Lord and honored by the Lord. The depth of their contrition is seen in their continuing effort following this event to remain obedient to the Word. **Neh. 9:1-3** “.... **on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.**” This expression of contrition ultimately expressed itself in a covenant in **Neh. 10:28-29** to walk in God’s law and to observe all the commandments of God, not just in a moment in time but rather as a way of life. The children of Israel in this very special moment in the history of Israel recognized the importance of a proper response to the Word. They were eager to hear the Word, they received it in such a way that it brought conviction, confession and a commitment on their part as a nation to walk in the path of truth. It brought about a spiritual revival.

Revival always begins with the Word. If you are spiritually lethargic and if you are spiritually dead in the water, I would hope that our study of James 1:22-29 would help you to once again experience the power of the spirit-filled life. But this will not happen until we respond to the Word properly, which means that not only will we receive it properly but that we would also strive to manifest an active obedience.

DEMAND FOR ACTIVE OBEDIENCE

We will begin our study by first looking at **James 1:22-27** and examining the DEMAND FOR ACTIVE OBEDIENCE (VV. 22-25)

The demand for active obedience is succinctly stated in **James 1:22** when James exhorts His readers with the following words, “**But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.**”

What does James mean when he says, “**But prove yourselves....**” The word “prove” (GINOMAI) literally means to “be continually” , or to “keep on striving to be” doers of the Word. Some people find themselves becoming very self-satisfied and forsaking the effort to live out the truths of God’s Word but a true believer will not be inwardly satisfied with merely knowing the Word. Rather, he will want to “**prove**” ,or in other words, be “**continually striving to be**” doers of the Word.

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This is not as difficult for those who have recently made professions of faith. In fact, if this desire to be continually striving to be a doer of the Word is not present in a professing new believer, it is a red flag. Typically it is not the new professing believer that has a problem with this; rather often times, it is the church veteran. It is the person who has been going to church a long time and they seem to accept being a nice guy or gal and going to church is all that God requires of them. If this is your conclusion, it is a serious mistake. Let us go on to the very next word. What does it say? **“But prove yourselves doers of the Word.”**

The word “doer” (POIETE) speak of who a person is. It is one thing to get into a fight and quite another thing to be a professional boxer. It is one thing to make periodic repairs around the house; it is another to be a professional repairman. When James is talking about someone who is a “doer”, he wants to make sure that we understand he is not talking about a person who tinkers with obedience, but rather he is talking about someone who is actively practicing obedience and therefore it describes who he is. Therefore he issues the challenge to his readers, **“But prove yourselves doers of the Word.”**

Our lives need not only to be committed to properly receiving the Word but also properly responding to it. We must not only be known as one who is committed to receiving the Word but also as one who is committed to doing it, not just once in a while but as a way of life.

I am very concerned about our church understanding this. It distresses me to see professing believers at our church who are resting on their past laurels rather than on present ongoing active obedience. Why would this be so distressing?

Let us go on in the verse. **“.... not merely hearers who delude themselves.”** If we are not presently able to identify ourselves with those people who James calls **“doers of the Word”** then what could that very well make us? It exposes us to the very real possibility that we are simply, **“hearers.”** The word “hearers” (AKROATES) was used of those who sat passively in an audience and listened to a singer or speaker. Today it could be used of those who audit a college class, of which they are not required to do outside study, write papers, or take any tests. In other words, they are not held accountable for what they hear. Tragically, most churches have many “auditors,” members who willingly expose themselves to the teaching and preaching of the Word but have no desire for that knowledge to alter their day-by-day lives. These people do not give evidence that they are Christians but rather pretenders.

Look at the very next part of the verse. Those that James is refers to as merely hearers he says, **“delude themselves.”** What is the deception that James is talking about? The deception is very simple. It is believing that hearing of the Word is all that is required. Jesus warns explicitly against this error in **Matt. 7:21-23**. There we read **“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ (23) And then I will declare to them, ‘ I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’**

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The character of men is evidenced primarily by their conduct. Over time, conduct is always a reliable test of the inner person, for inevitably the true nature of the person will express itself outwardly. In **Matt 7:16-17** Jesus said, **“You will know them by their fruits, Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”** In **Matt. 12:34-35** Jesus said again, **“..... For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.”**

Conduct is a true measure of true discipleship. Jesus asked in **Luke 6:46-49** **“Why do you call Me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.”** On another occasion He declared unambiguously, **“You are My friends if you do what I command you”** in **John 15:14**.

I am concerned for our church. I am concerned that we would be continually striving not just to hear the Word but be doers of the Word. That the doing of the Word would not just be an occasional experience in our lives but rather a way of life. Too many churches are filled with spiritual sponges who soak up the information, sit , sour, and eventually stink.

CONCLUSION

James is giving to us Tests of a Living Faith. The first test that we have examined is the Response to Trials test. We are now considering the Response to the Word test. A proper response to the Word begins with a proper reception followed by a proper outworking of the Word.

The proper outworking involves an active obedience, which James clearly communicates when he exhorts his readers in **James 1:22** to **“.... prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”** We must be continually and actively be seeking to do what God has called us to do as a true and clear expression of who we are. If this does not happen then we could very easily be deceiving ourselves.

It is not enough to hear the Word; we must do it. Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or Bible study is what makes them grow and get God’s blessing. It is not the hearing but the doing that brings the blessing. Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them! **IF YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE SPIRITUAL BECAUSE YOU HEAR THE WORD, THEN YOU ARE ONLY KIDDING YOURSELF. WHEN IT IS ALL SAID AND DONE IT IS THE DOER OF THE WORD WHO WILL BE SAVED. NOT BECAUSE WORKS WILL SAVE US, BUT RATHER BECAUSE THOSE WHO ARE GENUINELY BORN AGAIN WHO HAVE SAVING, LIVING FAITH WILL WORK.**