

James 1 (22) – Are you Doing or Deceiving?

Intro: self-deception is and has always been a great problem. Attesting to this are multitudes of psychological studies, and we have many literary examples, like *Don Quixote*, and *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Of course, I might dare say that most of us, in our own personal lives, have found out at some point that we had been self-deceived.

In many places, the Bible addresses this problem of self-deception with regards to salvation. How do you know if someone is really saved? How do you examine your own life? The book of James deals with the nature of saving faith, what it looks like in practice. It teaches us the differences between a saving faith and a non-saving faith (like the demons have – cf. James 2:19). Believing in Jesus means trusting Him, and loyalty to Him, it is not merely mental assent.

The demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 3:11), and they know that Jesus was raised from the dead. They know He IS Lord, but they don't seek to love, serve, honor, or obey Jesus AS Lord. James teaches us the truth that a saving faith leads to a living faith – your life tells the story about the kind of faith that you have. This book gives evidences of saving faith, the marks of a real, true, genuine faith in Christ.

In vs.2-12, James talks about reacting to trials. Hard times will harden lost people, but hardships don't destroy genuine, saving faith, they develop it. They bring people closer to Jesus; they don't drive people away from Him. Christians learn endurance, and become mature through trials. Then in vs.13-17, James talks about resisting temptation. The person who isn't actually saved wants to justify and stay in their sin. They want to play the blame game. But Christians learn to submit to God rather than succumbing to temptation.

Now, in vs.18-27, James talks about responding to truth, that is to say, our proper response to the Word of God. Vs.18 teaches us that we are born again through the Word of God; it is how we become part of the kingdom of God. And the Word of God is also what equips us to grow and to mature through the trials we face in life. Then, in vs.19-21, we are admonished about receiving the Word of God instead of rejecting it. Vs.19-20 are dealing with having the right mindset (hungry, teachable, submissive), and vs.21 deals with creating the right environment, so that we can truly receive God's Word, to give Him glory, and to benefit from it.

Now we come to vs.22, and the central message of the entire book (vs.23, 25). James has talked about having the right mindset, and creating the right environment, and now we see that simple yet pivotal word...*but*. Now we learn that having the right mindset and creating the right environment is not enough. We must also take the right action. We have to live out the message or we are deceiving ourselves as to our own belief in it. We're not who we think we are.

But – There is a contrast presented in this verse, between someone who actually has a biblical faith, and someone who only has some knowledge of the biblical faith. Someone who hears and does is living out the message. Someone who is just a hearer, but not a doer, thinks that they have a biblical faith, in other words, a saving faith, but they are deceived. The saved person is the one who not only receives, but responds. The deceived person takes it in, but doesn't act it out.

This text is crystal clear. Some people believe that they believe the Word of God, but are in fact manifesting unbelief, and are deceived. The problem with deception is that you don't know it. People can say that they believe all day long, but affirmation is not action, and acceptance without action is rejection. They know the truth but they won't live for it. It is the same faith that the demons have. It's not a living faith, and so it is not a saving faith. We can't just listen, and learn, we must live. We can believe that we are ready to receive the Word and allow it to flourish, but we can be deceived, and so fail to produce the righteousness of God in our lives.

Now this has to do with our salvation but also our sanctification. We know this because James has been addressing people who are true Christians, but who are going through the testing and trials, the process God has designed to give us maturity and wisdom and a godly quality of life (vs.4-5, 12, 17-18, etc.). The Word is what gives us our new nature, but it is also something we must nurture. There can't just be attitude and atmosphere, there must be application.

Now if you are always having a problem succumbing to temptations instead of maturing in your trials, if you are never growing in godliness, if you are consistently becoming angry and resisting God's Word, then that is a sign that you are not even saved yet. However, even Christians can stop growing mature and start growing calloused. This is what your problem is; you are not applying the Word, just adding more words to your head.

This contrast calls for a comparison. Which one are we; the one who just hears, or the one who hears and also does? We aren't supposed to just study the Bible; we are supposed to submit to it. Too many will cheerlead for the Bible and say the right answers at the right time but they are not applying the Bible, they are just affirming propositions. They are selective instead of truly submissive. They might obey if they think it's okay. But it's not all right just to listen. We have to honestly compare our life to what God is teaching. Not comparing ourselves to someone else, but to the Word itself. Is your life being changed by what you hear? That's doing the Word.

Oh, but that deception thing. You see, sin is lying to you. Some people think that their life is being changed, but it is not in the way the Bible means for it to change. They may listen intently, but with a mind toward the addition of facts or feelings, instead of a mind which is set on acting in faith. In other words, we believe we got something out of the sermon if we get...

- Information (made me think)
- Inspiration (made me feel good)
- Identification (made me convicted)

Now information, inspiration, and identification are all good and necessary. But receiving the Word of God is not just about feeding. We are fed so that we might grow stronger and stay or get healthy. Getting fed is not about growing complacent. You can feel convicted and never do anything about it except go talk to the pastor afterwards. And that is no good by itself. A breakthrough is good, but follow-through is the key. Conviction does not guarantee conversion. Seeing the need to change does not guarantee a change in our character.

The questions to ask are not, "have I heard this before", or "is there something new here", or "does this make me feel better", or even "does this show me where I have been wrong"? The

questions to ask are, “am I living this”, or “am I willing to get right”, and “am I being intentional about changing”? We can and should be good listeners and good learners. We can and should be convicted in our hearts. But we can and we must act on what we have heard. We have to be both willing and intentional. So we have a contrast that calls for a comparison, an honest evaluation, not of our listening, and not of our learning, but of our living.

be doers of the word – for clarity, some versions phrase it, “But prove yourselves doers” This is a present middle imperative. It is an all the time, personal command. You do this right now and you continue to do it. It is a lifetime pursuit. James calls professing believers to be doers, not just to do, meaning that it is a lifestyle pursuit. Yes, Christians will fail to do this at times, but it is not about perfection, it is about pattern and practice. You never get to the point where you don’t have to be a doer, where you retire to being just a listener. Christlikeness isn’t something we just strove for in the past, and it isn’t a part time job.

Romans 12:2 – *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* We are to be transformed by renewing of our minds, and this doesn’t mean just in our thoughts, but in our actions, as the rest of the verse so clearly spells out (“testing” in the KJV = prove, or live out the truth of God’s will).

The pattern of the life of a saved person is a progression in obedience to the Bible. 1 John 2:3-4 – *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him –* “keep” means we keep an eye upon it to do it. Show me someone who isn’t concerned about obedience and I’ll show you someone who isn’t saved.

1 John 3:8-10 – *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.* Show me someone whose pattern of life is the same as it ever was, and someone who doesn’t want to fellowship and worship with believers, and I’ll show you someone who isn’t a believer. This isn’t about perfection, but about pattern, practice, and preference. We want to honor God by our lives. We won’t be sinless, but we can sin less, and we will want to if we are truly born again.

For the Christian, being a doer is a principle. It is an indicative that we will follow as an imperative. Be a doer is an imperative but it is an imperative that true Christians will do; it is indicative of them, unlike those for whom it is not, and are not true Christians but deceived.

The fruit reveals the root. You hear people say that Christianity isn’t about rules it is about relationship. And yes, Christianity is about relationship, but it is a relationship where we follow the rules. Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ which produces a Christlike lifestyle. People say Christianity isn’t a religion it is a relationship. Yes, but it is a relationship with the one who started the only true religion. You can’t do it your way you have to obey.

and not hearers only – It’s a commitment; “doer” and “hearer” describe someone’s character. It is about the predominant pattern in your life. You can be described as a doer or merely a hearer. This word for “hearer” was used in Greek literature for those who attended lectures but never joined the groups. It is like someone who audits a class. An auditor doesn’t have to do the assignments. They get to listen, and aren’t held accountable. But it isn’t so in the kingdom of God. Hearing the truth is not enough; believers must act on it. Believers *will* act on it.

So many are deceived. They come and hear and enjoy and go home. There is no involvement in ministry, in or out of the church, no accountability to fellow believers or elders, and no real engagement with God’s Word, no real commitment to change. They are just hearing, and James says, in other words, God says, it is not enough, it is deception. Of course some who claim to be Christians don’t even bother to take time to hear, so what can we say about them?

So many people think that because they know more about the Bible that they have arrived. They compare themselves to themselves, and in terms of knowledge, not action. They might even evangelize, but they are not living out the faith, and they are deceived. It’s not just how much of the Word you know, but how much of the Word you do.

By the way, James is not talking about doing the charismatic gifts; he’s talking about living the character of Christ. He is not talking about that point you want the pastor to emphasize. Doing the Word doesn’t mean riding your hobby horse; it means continually giving God your heart.

Doing the Word is not automatic, it requires action. Hearers are selective instead of submissive; they pick and choose the things they are willing to submit to. But doers humbly put the Word into practice.

Some will say, “It just doesn’t intersect with my life”. That’s because you are placing yourself at the center. That very statement shows your idolatry. Our lives are supposed to revolve around Christ, not the other way around. Self-centered is self-deceived. A profession of faith rooted in self-fulfillment is no true faith at all. The thought of someone being strongly persuaded to follow Jesus without actually being broken over sin, repenting, believing, and pursuing holiness is anathema to biblical teaching. Glorifying God by obeying His Word and being conformed to the character of Christ is always relevant.

How many people have you known who were very knowledgeable about some doctrine or teaching or point in the Bible, and yet were so inconsistent about Scripture that it was obvious to everyone else that they weren’t really serving God? They are angry, and ready to fight for their position, but they only act on what they want. They are hearers only, and their inconsistency is a mark of their self-deception. They think everyone else just doesn’t get it, but the satanic joke is on them. They may love to study, but it is to be approved by men, not God.

How is it that someone can seem to be very interested in learning about the Bible, but remain in outright rebellion against some obvious command of Scripture? This text is telling us, it is because they are just a hearer who is self-deceived. Now it is true that a doer, in other words, a real, true, genuine Christian, may have a hard time obeying in some areas at certain times. But they will want to live the truth, and be willing to repent. Their sin grieves them, and they are

continually asking God to help them, not simply resisting the Word of God where it doesn't meet their convenience or desired lifestyle, like a hearer does. A doer is not defiantly rebellious.

deceiving yourselves – James says don't fool yourself. Those who listen and learn but fail to live out the message are only cheating themselves out of the blessings that God has designed. They never receive the maturity, endurance, wisdom, and godly quality of life the Word is meant to produce. And yes, some miss out on eternal life, because they were never more than a hearer. This deception is a spiritual miscalculation; people think that they can get away with it, but they have been deluded. To do the Word is to be changed in your character.

Here in this verse, God is commanding us to act on His Word, to live as if it is true, and that it matters, and that we are accountable. You are supposed to hide the Word in your heart not put it on the shelf. You don't really appreciate it if you don't really apply it. Apathy and indifference toward the Word of God is sin, and sin is lying to you. You can't get away with apathy, carelessness, resistance, rebellion, rejection. It will cost you. The Bible describes it as the deceitfulness of sin. You are either a doer or a deceiver, and the person you are deceiving is yourself. You will fool yourself right into hell.

Even if you really are saved, those who don't keep putting the Word into practice, but just keep putting it into their pockets, they become angry souls and they are deceiving themselves, and they will miss out on maturity. Maturity is worth it, because He is worthy. Obedience doesn't earn the love of God, but for a Christian, obedience allows the experience of God's love to be revealed in our lives (cf. John 14:21, 23). Obedience, holiness, repentance, these things keep the fires of personal revival kindled in our hearts.

A true disciple is both a learner and a liver. A disciple is a model, a person whose whole life is evidence of God's grace. It is a worshipful witness, living for Christ, winning others to Christ, and edifying our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is what it means to walk by faith, and to walk in the Spirit, in accordance with the Word. As you walk in the Spirit, you have more intimate fellowship with God, and the life of Christ is free to express itself in you. In this way you become a partaker of something that does not originate in you, but in Christ; the love of God. Sin turns us away and tells us to look at something else, and our souls grow cold.

This is so vital; we must be doers of the Word and not hearers only, thereby deceiving ourselves. There are so many that are involved in the process of deception right now. The process of deception begins when you put it in your pocket instead of put it into practice. We think it isn't happening, but again, the thing about deception is that you don't know it. Remember; when you don't believe that you can be deceived, that's when you already are.

You have heard the Word; now the question is, are you a doer, or a deceiver?