

Being Who You Are and Doing What Is Right



SABBATH—OCTOBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: James 1:23, 24; Matthew 19:16–22; Luke 6:27–38; Romans 8:2–4; Romans 12:9–18; 2 Peter 1:4.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [do not] just listen to the word. You fool yourselves if you do that. You must do what it says” (James 1:22, NlrV).

JEAN FRANCOIS GRAVELOT WAS BETTER KNOWN AS “THE GREAT BLONDIN” because of his golden hair. He became famous for walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. In September of 1860, the Prince of Wales watched Blondin’s crossing of the falls with an assistant on his back. After the walk, Blondin turned to the British prince and offered to carry him across the falls too. The prince had heard of Blondin’s skills and had even just *seen* them in action. But the prince was not ready to risk his life by being carried across the falls.

The point is that hearing and seeing are not enough when it comes to a relationship with God. We may knowingly believe in God, the truth of the gospel, and the Second Coming. We may have even seen for ourselves that God’s love and care are real. But, even with all that, we may not really be ready to dedicate ourselves fully to Him. This is an action that would be shown by our works. This is why James says that being *doers*, not just hearers of the Word, is important.

This week we will look at what being a doer of the Word means for those who are saved by grace.¹

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

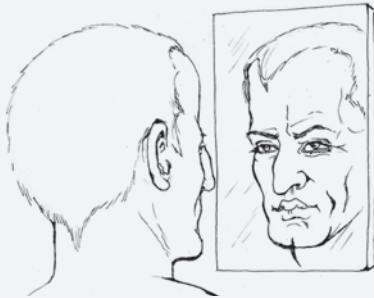
KNOWING YOUR ENEMY (James 1:23, 24)

Someone once said this about his enemy: “I see him every day—when I’m shaving.” This is exactly what James wants us to recognize: our greatest enemy is ourselves. Salvation begins by seeing who we really are, not who we think we are.

Read James 1:23, 24. Who is described here? What is the basic problem?

There is nothing wrong with looking our best. But many people spend much time and money to improve their appearance. We need to make sure that we do not deceive (fool) ourselves. James says we need to get a better picture of ourselves, even if we might not like what we see.

Read Matthew 19:16–22 and Matthew 26:33–35, 69–75. How does the self-image (picture) of each of these two men compare (equal) with who they really are? What do their two different actions toward Jesus’ words say about them?



Our greatest enemy is ourselves.

The rich young man *thought* he had been keeping the commandments. Suddenly, he was challenged to have a different kind of obedience. It is a kind of obedience that he had never expected. It went much deeper than just the appearance of obedience to rules. (Read Romans 7:7.)

Peter, like this young man, also had a false picture of himself. He boasted that even if everyone else should stumble and fall away, he would remain faithful—even if it cost him his life. But neither man understood how tightly sin held him in its grasp. Both fooled themselves about their true spiritual condition. But Peter was converted later. As far as we know, the rich young ruler was not.

It is always so easy to see the faults in others but not in ourselves, right? Deep down we probably know more about our faults than we care to admit. Look deep into your own soul. What does this tell you about why you must have a Savior?

BEING A DOER² (James 1:22)

Read James 1:22 again. The Greek says “to be” does of the Word (the law). How might the message have been different if James had simply said, “Do the Word”?

James joins *being* and *doing*. He does not separate them. He does not make one more important than the other. They are like two sides of the same coin; you cannot separate them. We are *to be* doers. The Greek word suggests a continuing lifestyle of obedience. This lifestyle should be expected of us now rather than at some time in the future.

We are to become new people in the Lord. And as a result of what *we become*, *we do* the things that God commands us to do. This is something different from just following rules. (This seems to have been the problem with the rich young ruler, as we saw in yesterday’s daily study.)

Read Luke 6:27–38. What are some of the actions that we should be taking?

“ ‘Love your enemies.’ ” “ ‘Give to everyone who asks of you.’ ” “ ‘Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful’ ” (Luke 6:27, 30, 36, NKJV). Sounds impossible? Yes, it is, if we try to do these things on our own. Love like this does not come naturally to sinful humans. That is why Jesus goes on talking about two different kinds of trees and the fruit each tree gives (Luke 6:43–45).

In Galatians 5, Paul shows the difference between the *works* of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–21) and the *fruit* of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). It is almost as if the more we try doing things in our own strength, the worse we become. But when we are *being led by the Spirit*, this leads to a different result. This result is the fruit of love and obedience.

Think about a time you did something only because you were required to do it. Or maybe it was because it was a rule you had to obey. Now compare³ this to the time you did something because you wanted to do it. Remember how easily and naturally it flowed out of you because of Christ living in you. How does this difference help us understand the point of today’s daily study?



Being and doing are like two sides of the same coin: inseparable.

DEFINITIONS

2. doer—a person who puts his or her beliefs into action.
3. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

THE LAW OF FREEDOM (James 1:25)

Read James 1:25. What does he say about what the law does?

James repeats the Psalms in calling God's law "perfect" (Psalm 19:7) and a way of freedom (Psalm 119:45). But notice James also writes that the law cannot save us. And it certainly cannot cleanse (make pure) us. It shows us God's idea of an unselfish life of love. But it cannot make us perfect, just as watching a world-class athlete swim cannot turn us into a world-class swimmer by simply watching. In order to live Christ's idea of a life of loving service, we need the power of Christ in our lives.

Read Romans 8:2, 4 and 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18. What makes the difference between the law as a tool of death and as something that shows the way to freedom and life?

Even Paul supports the idea that "hearing [knowing]" the law does not make a person right with God. People are considered right with God only when they obey the law (Romans 2:13, NIV). As Paul says, we can become doers only through the work of the Spirit writing the law on our hearts. Only when we obey it from the heart can the law be a law of freedom.

So, the problem is not with the law but with us. We forget who we really are. We are always in need of a Savior. Outside of Christ we hear only the law's judgment. But in Christ we become new men and women (2 Corinthians 5:17) who are freed in Jesus (John 8:36). We hear *Jesus* speaking the law to us, that we should "love one another, *as I have loved you*" (John 15:12; emphasis added). Through Christ, we experience the freedom of God's sons and daughters.

Think about what it would be like, as a sinner, to try to keep the law well enough to be saved by it. How would this make the law feel like slavery to us? How has Jesus freed us from that slavery while, at the same time, commanding us to keep the law?



We become doers only through the Spirit writing the law on our hearts.

USEFUL OR USELESS? (James 1:26, 27)

Read James 1:26, 27 and compare it to Matthew 25:35, 36, 40 and Romans 12:9–18. From these verses, how would you explain true Christianity?

If Jesus, James, or Paul wishes to draw attention to just one thing, it would be the importance of being a *useful* Christian. We can become useful by loving “the least [lowest] of these my brethren” (Matthew 25:40) by taking the time to visit them and by showing hospitality to them. By doing these things, we show Jesus’ love for them.

“The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 470. Of course, as she goes on to explain, “if a person lives such a life and gives such an influence, it requires hard work, self-sacrifice, and discipline.”—Adapted, page 470. It does not come naturally or automatically. If our religion requires only beliefs and listening to sermons, it is mostly useless.

James describes “religion” or “religious” in verses 26, 27 with a word that suggests being unusually devout (very faithful). Such faithful Christians have attitudes (thoughts and feelings) that show positive results in their lives. People will notice the difference.

One clear change will be our choice of words. Instead of swearing or using rough words, we will become more sensitive to how we speak to others. We will control our words so that they do not hurt people. We will not use words that run wild as an untamed horse.

James also points to orphans and widows as those most needing our love and care. According to a worldly person, it does not make sense for us to pay attention to those who can give nothing back to society. But according to God, how we treat those who have been cast off and rejected by the world shows we are Christ’s true followers. Are we lending money to those who cannot pay us back? Are we inviting to dinner those who cannot do the same? Are we blessing and praying for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:35; Luke 14:12–14; Matthew 5:44)? As Paul points out, we are re-created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

How much of your own time and energy do you spend helping those in need? What does your answer say to you about how “useful” your faith really is?



The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving Christian.

UNLIKE THE WORLD (James 1:27)

What does it mean to keep oneself “unspotted [pure] from the world”? (James 1:27, NKJV). How could that even be possible? Read also 1 John 2:15, 16; 2 Peter 1:4.

Some people seem to think that if only they could move far enough away from the world, they could avoid most of its temptations. There may be some truth to that. We should try to avoid temptation as much as possible (especially those temptations we find hardest to resist). But our problems and weaknesses do follow us wherever we go. The problem with sin is not always what is *out there*. True, that does play a part. But the real problem is what is *in us*, and in our hearts. That is where the true battle is.

It is also an interesting thought that solving some problems makes other problems seem more noticeable. For example, cleaning one area of a room makes any dirt more noticeable in another area. This is true with the spiritual life. “The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty or dirty you will appear in your own eyes. This is because your vision will be clearer. And your faults will be seen more clearly in comparison to His perfect nature.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 64.

We should not make Ellen G. White say here what she *is not* really saying. She is not saying that the closer we get to Jesus the more faulty we really become. She continues: “The more we realize our need of Him and the word of God, the higher our thoughts will be of His character [who He is]. Then we shall show more fully His character.”—Adapted from *Steps to Christ*, page 65.

Real religion leads a person to “hunger and thirst” for a deeper experience with Jesus (Matthew 5:6). Jesus spent plenty of time alone with His heavenly Father. He did this so that He could get to know His will (plan). But He never shut Himself off from people. He went to where the people were. His “food” was reaching out to the needy. He broke down prejudice.⁴ He also shared the good news of eternal life (John 4:28–35).

Jesus and the earliest Christians had a diet and lifestyle quite different from the Gentile (non-Jewish) world around them. But these practices never kept them from sharing their faith. They went everywhere. And the gospel spread throughout the empire and became strong even in centers of wickedness such as Rome.

DEFINITIONS

4. prejudice—an unfair feeling of dislike for a person or group because of race, sex, religion, and so on.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “The Test of Discipleship [The Choice to Follow Christ],” pages 59–63, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law is God’s great mirror. Man is to compare his words, his spirit, his actions with the Word of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 935.

“Instead of freeing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of [ones who share] the grace of Christ. This helps us to obey God.

“As Jesus was in human nature, so God expects His followers to be. In His strength we are to live pure and noble lives as the Savior lived.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, page 69.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① We have been told it would be to our advantage to move away (if possible) from worldly places. But why is that not the real answer to the problems of sin and temptation? How far would we have to go in order to be away from all temptations? What is the only answer for sin and temptation, no matter where we live?

② Police were trying to put electronic eavesdropping devices (bugs, microphones) in an office where they suspected that criminals were working. The only problem: cruel Dobermans were around the place. So, the police, each night, would feed the dogs hamburgers. At first they would toss about five or six between the bars. Before long, the dogs were eating the burgers out of the officers’ hands. They also were licking the officers’ hands when done. So, with the guard dogs tamed, the police were able to enter the place and plant the listening bugs. What lesson can we take from this story about how we can let our own guards down if we are not careful?

③ Think more about this idea of being a doer of the Word instead of just believing the Word. What is the real difference between the two in the end?

④ What do you say to those who claim that they are free from the law because of the grace of Christ? What do they often really mean by that? And how would you answer them?