

# Being *and* Doing



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *James 1:23, 24; Matt. 19:16–22; Luke 6:27–38; Rom. 8:2–4; 12:9–18; 2 Pet. 1:4.*

**Memory Text:** “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (*James 1:22*).

Jean Francois Gravelet, better known as “The Great Blondin,” became famous for walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. In September of 1860, the Prince of Wales had witnessed 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. Although the prince had heard of the man’s skills, and had even just seen them in action, he was still not ready to place his life in Blondin’s hands.

The point is, of course, that hearing and seeing are not enough when it comes to a relationship with God. We may be intellectually convinced about the existence of God, the truth of the gospel, and the Second Coming. We may have even seen for ourselves the reality of God’s love and care. Yet, even with all that, we may not really be ready to commit ourselves fully into His hands, an action that would be revealed by our works. This is precisely why James emphasizes the importance of being doers, not just hearers, of the Word.

This week we’ll look at what being a doer of the Word means for those saved by grace.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.

## Knowing Your Enemy

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 imagine ourselves to be.

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

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While there is nothing wrong with looking our best, many people spend a great deal of time and money to improve their appearance. But we need to make sure that we don’t deceive ourselves. James says we need to get a better view of ourselves, no matter how much we might not like what we see.

**Read** Matthew 19:16–22 and 26:33–35, 69–75. How does the self-image of each of these two men compare with the reality? What do their two different reactions to Jesus’ words say about them?

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The rich young man thought he had been keeping the commandments. Suddenly he was challenged to adhere to a different kind of obedience, one that he had never anticipated, one that went much deeper than mere outward compliance to rules and regulations. (*See Rom. 7:7.*)

Peter, like this young man, also had a distorted picture of himself. Self-confidently, he predicted that even if everyone else should stumble and fall away, he would remain faithful—even if it cost him his life. But neither realized how tightly sin held him in its grasp. Both were self-deceived about their true spiritual state. Peter, however, eventually was converted. As far as we know, the rich young ruler wasn’t.

**It’s always so easy to see the faults in others but not in ourselves, right? Deep down, though, we probably are more aware of our faults than we want to admit. Look deep into your own soul. What does this view tell you about why you must have a Savior?**

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## Being a Doer

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

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James combines *being* and *doing*. He does not separate them, nor does he make one more important than the other. They are like two sides of the same coin, inseparable. We are to *be* doers. Furthermore, the tense of the Greek word for *be* here refers to an ongoing lifestyle of obedience, one that is expected of us now rather than at some indefinite time in the future.

The point is, 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. This is something quite different from merely following rules (which 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?

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“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, doesn’t it? And it is, on our own. Love like this does not come naturally to sinful human beings. That is why Jesus goes on to talk about two different kinds of trees and the fruit each produces (Luke 6:43–45).

Similarly, in Galatians 5 Paul contrasts the *works* of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21) with the *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). It is almost as if the more we focus on *doing*, the worse we become; whereas, when we are *being led by the Spirit*, it yields a totally different outcome—the fruit of love and obedience.

**Think about a time you did something simply because it was required of you or because it was a rule you had to obey. Contrast that to the time you did something similar because it was something you wanted to do, something that flowed naturally out of you because of Christ living in you. How does this contrast help us to understand the point of today’s study?**

## The Law of Freedom

**Read** James 1:25. What does he say about the role of the law?

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James echoes the Psalms in calling God's law "perfect" (*Ps. 19:7*) and a way of freedom (*Ps. 119:45*). But notice that the law in James cannot save us and certainly cannot cleanse us. It shows us God's ideal, but it cannot make us follow that ideal any more than seeing a world-class athlete perform amazing feats could enable us to do the same. To follow that ideal, 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 an instrument of death or as something that shows the way to freedom and life?

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Even Paul affirms that "not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (*Rom. 2:13, NKJV*). As he 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.

Thus, the problem is not with the law but with us. We forget who we really are: sinners in constant need of a Savior. Outside of Christ, we hear only the law's condemnation. But in Christ, we become new men and women (*2 Cor. 5:17*) who are set free in Jesus (*John 8:36*). We hear Him speaking the law to us, that we should " 'love one another, as I have loved you' " (*John 15:12, NKJV*). Through Christ, we experience the freedom of God's sons and daughters who are saved by grace and who will not want to slip back into the condemnation and bondage we had as transgressors. In Christ, not only are we forgiven our sins, we now have a new life, one in which we are able to render obedience to the law. We do so, however, not in order to be saved but out of the freedom that comes from knowing that we already are saved and, therefore, no longer stand condemned by the law.

**Think about what it would be like, having the natures we do, to try to keep the law well enough to be saved by it. How would this make the law a means of bondage? How has Jesus freed us from that bondage while, at the same time, commanding us to keep the law?**

## Useful or Useless?

**Read** James 1:26, 27 and compare it to Matthew 25:35, 36, 40 and Romans 12:9–18. In light of these passages, how would you define true Christianity?

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If Jesus, James, and Paul emphasize anything, it is the importance of being a useful Christian. By loving “the least of these” (*Matt. 25:40*), by taking the time to visit those most easily overlooked, by showing hospitality—in all these practical ways and more—we reveal Jesus’ love and become the channel by which Jesus loves through us.

“The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. Of course, as she goes on to explain, “to live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. It does not come naturally or automatically. If our religion consists only in affirmations of belief and listening to sermons, it is largely useless.

James describes “religion” or “religious” in verses 26, 27 with a word that suggests being *unusually devout*. Such an attitude has immediate, visible consequences, and people will notice the difference.

One obvious change will be our choice of words. Instead of using uninhibited remarks and harsh tones and gestures, we will become more sensitive to the effect our communication exerts on others. We will “bridle” our tongue so that it does not dash off ahead of us with all the violence and energy of an untamed horse.

James also singles out orphans and widows as those most needing our love and care. From a worldly standpoint, it does not make sense to focus our resources on those who can give nothing back to society. But from God’s viewpoint, it is precisely how we treat those who have been cast off and rejected by the world that reveals which of us are Christ’s true followers: either by lending money to those who cannot pay us back; inviting to dinner those who cannot reciprocate; or blessing and praying for those who mistreat us (*Luke 6:35, 14:12–14, Matt. 5:44*). As Paul points out, we are re-created in Christ Jesus for good works (*Eph. 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?**

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## Unlike the World

**What** does it mean to keep oneself “unspotted from the world”? *James 1:27, NKJV*. How could that even be possible? See also *1 John 2:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:4*.

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Some people seem to think that if only they could move far enough away from the world, they could avoid most of its temptations. Though there's some truth to that, and we should try to avoid temptation as much as possible (especially those temptations we find hardest to resist), our problems and weaknesses do tend to follow us wherever we go. The problem with sin isn't so much what is *out there*, though that certainly plays a role, as much as it is what's *in us*, and in our hearts. That's where the true battle is, and we will have to fight that battle no matter where we live.

It is also an interesting phenomenon that solving some problems makes those that remain seem more obvious. For example, cleaning one area of a room makes any dirt nearby stand out even more. So also with the spiritual life: “the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

Let's not have Ellen G. White say here what she isn't saying. She isn't saying that the closer we get to Jesus the faultier we actually become. She continues: “The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 65.

Real religion leads a person to “hunger and thirst” for a deeper experience (*Matt. 5:6*). Jesus spent adequate time alone with His heavenly Father in order to know His will. Yet, He never shut Himself off from people. He went to where the people were. His “food” was reaching out to the needy, breaking down barriers of prejudice, and sharing the good news of eternal life (*John 4:28–35*).

Despite the fact that Jesus and the earliest Christians had a diet and lifestyle quite different from the Gentile world around them, these practices never kept them from sharing their faith. They went everywhere, and the gospel spread throughout the empire and became firmly planted, even in such centers of corruption and wickedness as Rome.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Test of Discipleship,” pp. 59–63, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law is God’s great moral looking glass. Man is to compare his words, his spirit, his actions with the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 935.

“Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.

“As Jesus was in human nature, so God means His followers to be. In His strength we are to live the life of purity and nobility which the Saviour lived.”—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 69.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we have been told it would be to our advantage to move away (if possible) from worldly places, why is that not the ultimate answer to the problems of sin and temptation? How far would we have to go in order to be away from any kind of temptation at all? What is the only answer for sin and temptation, regardless of where we live?
- 2 Police were trying to place electronic eavesdropping devices in an office where they suspected criminals were working. The only problem: vicious Dobermans surrounded the compound. 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 not only eating the burgers out of the officers’ hands, but they were licking the officers’ hands when done. Thus, with the guard dogs tamed, the police were able to infiltrate and plant the devices. What lesson can we take from this story about how we, if we are not careful, can let our own guards down?
- 3 Think more about this idea of being a doer of the Word as opposed to just believing the Word. What is, in the end, the real difference between the two?
- 4 What do you say to those who claim that because of the grace of Christ, they are free from the law? What do they often really mean by that, and how would you answer them?

## Angels on Main Street: Part 1

ISMAEL SERRANO

Medellín is a large city in the heart of Colombia. While the city has a reputation as the drug capital of the world, it is also known for its beauty, and its citizens are known for their hard work and love of learning.

Colombia Adventist University (Corporacion Universitaria Adventista, UNAC) is located in Medellín. Founded in 1937 as Industrial College Coloveno, it became Colombo-Venezuelan Institute in 1950 and Colombia Adventist University in 1981. UNAC offers undergraduate through doctoral level degrees.

For many years UNAC students have worked in the neighborhoods of Medellín searching for people who want to learn about God. One neighborhood, known for its violence and poverty, was an especially difficult area, but after knocking on many doors, the young people found several residents who wanted to study the Bible. They arranged to hold meetings in the home of a church member who lived in the area.

Each Sabbath the students met with the people and studied the Bible together. Within a few months several people in the Bible study group requested baptism. What joy the young people felt as they saw the fruits of their labors.

Often, after attending the evening meetings, the students had to walk several blocks to catch a bus back to school. If it was late, the students had to walk all the way back to school. The streets, which seemed safe during daylight hours, were full of dangers at night.

One night Mery and Rocio came to the evening worship service. After the meeting they found that they did not have a ride back to the school. They would have to walk several blocks through the dangerous, poorly lit streets. Some people from the church offered to walk with them partway, and the girls gratefully accepted their offer.

As the group walked along, they passed open doors of dimly lit taverns. In the smoky light that filtered out, they could see unshaven men drinking and playing tavern games. Their coarse language and crude laughter sent chills down Rocio's spine. She shivered as she recalled reports of girls her age who had been attacked or murdered in dark alleys such as those she and her friends were passing.

The little group walked faster, hoping to escape the sounds and smells of this part of town, hardly speaking as they walked quickly through the dim light. They passed men and women standing in the shadows of tall buildings. Sometimes the only hint that a person was there was the smell of a cigarette or alcohol.

Soon they reached the street where their companions lived. Rocio and Mery thanked them for walking with them. The girls tried to smile, hoping that their fear would not show. Then they turned and quickly continued their journey.

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