

Being *and* Doing



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?

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?

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?

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”?

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?

“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?

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?

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?

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.”—Page 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?

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*.

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *James 1:25*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: (1) Recognize that the root of temptation comes from his or her own lusts and desires. (2) Discern that God’s ways are better than his or her own natural ways. (3) Admit that, of ourselves, it is impossible to resist temptation, but with God, all things are possible.

Feel: Experience the power in overcoming temptation that God makes available through His Holy Spirit and His Word, the Bible.

Do: Choose to abandon “the old man of sin” and become a new person in Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Recognizing the Real Problem

A Are you tempted by things that have no real attraction for you? Why, or why not?

B How can we be certain that it is better to follow God’s revealed way than our own natural desires?

II. Feel: Responding to Sin’s Control

A Do you find it easier to fall into temptation when you are alone or when you are with someone else? Why?

B Describe your feelings after you are able, with God’s help, to resist a temptation that in the past had entrapped you.

III. Do: Cast Off the Old, Put On the New

A Have you (or has someone you know) experienced a positive change in your spiritual life? How could you tell that a change had taken place? What was different?

B How can we “cast off” our old ways and become new men and women in Christ? What can we do to ensure a lasting life change?

► **Summary:** Those who are saved by grace will be doers of God’s Word because they have placed their faith fully in Him. The root of temptation comes from our own lusts and desires, but God’s Word is an effective weapon against sin. Satan attempts to make sin appear attractive, but when we are fully surrendered to God we will accept that His ways are best, and we will become new people in Him.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 1:25*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Those who are saved by grace will be doers of God’s Word, because they have placed their faith fully in Him.

Just for Teachers: This week we will explore how God’s ways are always best and how being a “doer” of God’s Word brings many blessings. Important points to emphasize: (1) recognizing that temptation springs from our lusts and desires and (2) admitting that it is impossible on our own to resist temptation, but with God all things are possible.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Sunday, July 22, 2012, was the big day, and Alicia Trott was ready. For months and years, the 28-year-old nursing professor at the University of Southern Maine had been training for the famous Ironman Lake Placid athletic event.

During the grueling race, athletes from across the United States test their speed and endurance through a 2.4-mile swim in the chilly waters of Mirror Lake, followed by a demanding 112-mile bike ride over the Adirondack Mountain High Peaks, ending with a 26.2-mile run through the mountains and around the lake.

Shortly before 7:00 A.M., Alicia stepped into Mirror Lake. She, along with all the other participants, hoped to qualify for one of the 50 coveted spots for the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii.

“May this be the best day of your life!” shouted the announcer. The starting pistol fired, and more than three thousand athletes churned up the waters of Mirror Lake.

Eleven hours, forty-seven minutes, and twenty-eight seconds later, Alicia crossed the finish line. Placing third in her age category, she qualified for the world championship in Kona!

Family and friends surrounded Alicia, ecstatic at her victory and qualification for the world championship. “So, when is the Ironman in Kona?” someone asked.

“October 13,” came the answer.

October 13? Alicia’s strong heart skipped a beat. She knew that October 13, 2012, was a Saturday—the Sabbath. Although she kept silent, Alicia knew what she was going to do. She would not be going to Kona.

Consider This: Given that we are saved by grace, was there really an issue if Alicia participated in the Ironman on Sabbath? Why, or why not? What is the relationship, in this situation, of faith and grace to being a “doer” of the Word?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The prophet Ezekiel was apparently well-known for his eloquence—so much so that word about him spread throughout the city. People told their friends and relatives, “Please come and hear the word of the Lord.” But there was a problem. Not with Ezekiel—he was a faithful watchman who warned Israel of imminent disaster if they did not change their ways (*Ezek. 33:1–11*). The problem was with the people. God described it to Ezekiel this way: “Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them” (*vs. 32, NKJV*). Despite the prophet’s warnings, Jerusalem fell (*vs. 21*). The people heard the warning but failed to act on it. Their experience underscores the importance of not just hearing the word of the Lord but actually choosing to do it. Jesus frequently warns against hearing but not doing (*Matt. 7:21–27, Luke 8:21, John 13:17*), as does the rest of the New Testament (*see 1 John 3:18*).

Bible Commentary

I. Seeing and Doing (*Review James 1:22 with your class.*)

James 1:21 describes how the Word of God, implanted in our hearts, is able to save us. We do not save ourselves; it is God’s work in us through His creative Word. Paul agrees (*Rom. 10:17, 2 Cor. 4:6*). In fact, the contrast in James 1:22 between hearing and doing is also made by Paul in Romans 2:13: “for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (*NKJV*). Justification is now freely given, based on faith (*Rom. 3:26, 5:1*), but it is ratified in the investigative judgment, and the final reward of eternal life and immortality is bestowed based on works corresponding to our faith (*Matt. 16:27, 1 Pet. 1:17, Rev. 20:12, 22:12*).

So, the Word is “able” to save us as long as we allow it to do its work in our hearts and lives. As James will make clear in chapter 2, faith, in the sense of mere believing, is useless to save. It must be an active faith, made manifest by good works. This manifestation of faith by works is essential not in order to save us but to reveal that God’s work of salvation is effective in us. It renders us “safe to save” in the sense of our final glorification when Jesus comes. “It is not

possible for us to drift into heaven. . . . Those who refuse to co-operate with God on earth would not co-operate with Him in heaven. It would not be safe to take them to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 280.

Consider This: Salvation in all its aspects is God’s work from start to finish, as we permit Him to have His way with us. In what sense, then, is character development both His work and our work?

II. The Law of Freedom (*Review James 1:23–25 with your class.*)

Seventh-day Adventists have sometimes been characterized as hopeless legalists in bondage to the law. Nowadays some Seventh-day Adventists go to the opposite extreme and seem afraid even to mention the law for fear of being misunderstood. After all, can God’s law really have anything to do with freedom?

Because “all have sinned” (*Rom. 3:23*), the law identifies us as transgressors and condemns us to death (*vs. 19, James 2:9*). If it didn’t, it wouldn’t be doing its job. We are like prisoners on death row with the law standing guard over us, at least according to Paul (*Gal. 3:23*). How, then, can James call the law a “law of freedom” (*James 2:12, HCSB*)? Because the law shows us our need of a Savior. Then, after we come to faith in Christ, we are justified and no longer under the law’s condemnation (*Gal. 3:24*). We are prisoners only as long as we continue in sin. But Jesus sets us free from the fear of condemnation and “the law of sin and death” (*Rom. 8:1, 2; Heb. 2:14, 15*).

Questions for Discussion:

❶ Which seems to be the greater danger in your church, legalism or a lax attitude toward obedience? Why is it so hard to get the balance right?

❷ It has been said that some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. Is it also possible, even for Christians, to be so earthly minded that God cannot use us?

❸ Active faith includes working for the salvation of others, charitable giving, community service, and other loving acts of generosity, based on what we have received from Christ. In light of this, discuss with the class how involved your

church is in the needs of your community. What more for your community could you be doing now and for eternity?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: How can we become the people that God longs for us to be—not only hearers but doers of His Word? How does placing our faith fully in Jesus enable us to do what He asks us to do? The answer, of course, involves dying to self and becoming new creatures in Christ—to be born again. In this important application section, guide your class into understanding this vital concept.

Object Lesson: In Romans 6:6, Paul states, “our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

Every New Year in the country of Nicaragua, the people celebrate a tradition that illustrates Paul’s point very well. A few days before New Year’s Eve, stuffed “old men” appear around shops and homes, waiting for the big night. These effigies represent the old year. They wear men’s shirts and trousers stuffed with newspaper, straw, and other flammable material. Nestled inside are dozens of firecrackers, rockets, and other pyrotechnic wonders. As midnight approaches, these “old men” light up the Nicaraguan sky as they explode, celebrating the New Year.

Thought Questions:

What does the “old man” in Romans 6:6 represent, and how is it “crucified with Christ”? What insights about Paul’s point does the object lesson furnish? How can we become free from serving sin?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is designed to help reiterate the important concept of this week’s lesson—surrendering our old, sinful selves to God so that He can enable us to be not only hearers but doers of His Word.

Activity: Make a list, either mentally or written out on paper, of the sins that you struggle with and would like to remove from your life. Then—if working with a paper list—cut it into paper strips and read each one aloud, asking God to remove these besetting sins from your life. (Alternately, if doing this activity without a paper list, confess each sin before God.) Tell Him that you want to be not only a hearer but a doer of His Word. Rip the strips into shreds and toss them away.