



**Confronting the Gap**  
James 1:22-25

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas  
©Monty Watson – June 11, 2017

---

**CONFRONTING THE GAP**  
**James 1:22-25**

Norman Rockwell is one of the most famous painters in American history, and one of his most famous paintings is of Thanksgiving. From 1923 to 1960, Norman Rockwell's artwork was on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* 322 times. And he loved painting children coming of age. Like this boy getting his first pair of glasses. Or this runaway getting some wise advice from a policeman. Or this uncomfortable boy learning about the facts of life from his dad.

One of Norman Rockwell's most introspective paintings is of a young girl looking in the mirror. Notice the details. Staring in the mirror, she's not quite sure who she is. Her doll cast aside on the floor. Lipstick and brush on the floor by her bare feet. And a picture of a glamorous actress in her lap. The painting captures a young girl on the verge of womanhood, not quite sure what that means and not quite sure she's ready. This young girl is not just looking at her appearance, she's trying to figure out who she is.

This summer, we're going to look in the mirror. Most of the time, you glance in the mirror to make sure you look your best. To make sure your hair is in place and nothing is hanging out of your nose. We want to look our best and avoid any embarrassment. But that's just outer appearance. This summer, we are going to look in the mirror like Norman Rockwell's young girl. Not looking at our appearance, but looking at who we really are.

The word of God is like a mirror. When we look into God's word, it tells the truth about who we really are. A mirror shows us what we look like on the outside, but the word of God shows us what we look like on the inside. So, this summer, we are going to look in the mirror by studying the letter of James.

James was the brother of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> but he did not believe his brother was the Messiah until after the resurrection.<sup>2</sup> But from that moment on, James was convinced and became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James wrote one of the first letters in the New Testament, and the first verse begins with this address. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (James 1:1, ESV). "Dispersion" refers to the scattering of Jewish Christians due to persecution.<sup>3</sup> So, James wrote this letter to encourage them to persevere, to be faithful, and to live in anticipation of the return of Jesus. It was a letter urging them to hang on.

James also wrote about real faith for real life. He was more practical than theological. He described the Christian faith as a way of life that went beyond mere words. James challenged his readers to live what they believed. To "***be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.***" That challenge still stands. That is the challenge for us this summer. To look in the mirror and see the truth about ourselves, and to test the authenticity and reality of our faith.

***"Be doers of the word,*** and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. A hearer of the word and not a doer is like a man who looks intently at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not being a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, ***he will be blessed in what he does.***" (James 1:22-25, MW).

James confronts the gap. There is a gap between what we know and how we live. There is a gap between what we profess and what we practice. And we deceive ourselves thinking that we are spiritually mature and pleasing God by how much we know. It's not how much we know that matters; it's how we obey. I've spent my life studying the Bible and trying to master it, and that's great. But for the sake of my heart and soul, it's not about mastering the Bible; it's about the Bible mastering me. It's not about information, but transformation. It's about an overflow of love for God that results in obedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The proof that we love God, and the proof that we are true believers, is how quickly and cheerfully and fully we obey.

So, we have some questions to think about. *Does the life I live reflect the faith I profess?* Do I really believe what I say I believe? Am I living out what I believe? Because spiritual maturity is narrowing the gap between what we know and how we really live. Does the life I live reflect the faith I profess?

### CONFRONTING THE GAP

James confronts the gap. His words sting a bit. But throughout this letter, he writes as a pastor, as a parent concerned for their children. He writes with contempt for phoniness and with concern for their suffering. He exposes and encourages. And his main concern is 1:22. "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

We hate to admit it, but it's true. We know so much about the Bible, and yet there is a gap. There is a gap between what we know and how we live. A person can read the Bible every day, a person can be in 5 Bible studies every week, a person can study theology and even be an expert in their favorite theological topic, and yet that person can lack brokenness for lost people, lack a healthy marriage, lack healthy relationships with their children, have hidden addiction, lack zeal, lack kindness, and lack humility. Knowledge does not guarantee spiritual maturity.

And often times, this gap is the reason the watching world is not attracted to Christ. They are not impressed with His church, because they are not impressed with us. The indictment of hypocrisy sticks. Jesus described many in His day as "hypocrites ... people honor me with their lips, but whose hearts are far from me" (Mark 7:6, NLT). Paul said the same thing, "(Many) claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him" (Titus 1:16, NIV). I don't want to be one of those people, and neither do you. That's why we're allowing James to confront the gap that exists in our lives. That's why we must wrestle with the question, *Does the life I live reflect the faith I profess?*

"Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (James 1:22).

The Apostle Paul began his letter to the Colossians with a prayer. "We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects" (Colossians 1:9-10, NAS). Paul's prayer was about narrowing the gap. "Be filled with the knowledge of His will ... so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects."<sup>4</sup>

The Greek word for “worthy” means consistent with or equivalent to.<sup>5</sup> The word comes from the market where a merchant used a set of scales. It’s balancing what we say with how we live. Is your lifestyle consistent with your faith in Jesus? Is your lifestyle consistent with His character? Does your lifestyle please Him, honor Him, and glorify Him?

Paul used this phrase in many of his letters. He talked about “living in a manner worthy of the Lord ... worthy of the Gospel ... worthy of the calling.”<sup>6</sup> He’s talking about living in a manner worthy of Jesus’ sacrifice, worthy of His blood, and worthy of the cross. Living in a manner worthy of His love, worthy of His mercy, and worthy of His grace. Living in a manner worthy of His Lordship, worthy of His holiness, and worthy of being a child of God.

“Be filled with the knowledge of His will ... so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects.”

And James makes the same plea. “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” He actually echoes the point Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus said, “A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit ... Just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! ... But I will reply, ‘I never knew you’” (Matthew 7:17-18, 20-23, NLT).

And then Jesus said this. “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46, NAS).

To say you believe in Jesus, to sing songs of praise to Jesus, to call yourself a Christian, to be proud of being a student of the Bible, and not obey Him is absurd!

And this is how James illustrates that absurdity. “A hearer of the word and not a doer is like a man who looks intently at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (James 1:23-24). One commentator said, “James is not describing a man with a poor memory, but rather a man with poor priorities.”<sup>7</sup> To this person, the Bible is interesting, but not important. It is unthinkable to read the words of God and walk away unmoved and unchanged!

A mirror shows us what we look like on the outside and the word of God shows us what we look like on the inside. How can a person walk away from a mirror and forget what they look like? How can a person walk away from the Bible and forget to obey? We look into the word to see God, to understand His will, to see His standards, and to see if we are living up to those standards. Therefore, when we look into God’s word, we also see ourselves. The mirror does not lie and God’s word does not lie. It tells us the truth about ourselves.

Here’s an example. Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” When you read that verse, you immediately have to ask yourself if that verse describes you. That’s how the Bible works. We read God’s word to compare ourselves to His standard. The proof that we love God, and the proof that

we are true believers, is how quickly and cheerfully and fully we obey. That's what it means to look into God's word like a mirror.

Again, it is absurd for a professing Christian to look into God's word and walk away unmoved and unchanged! *Does the life you live reflect the faith you profess?*

James moved from the negative to the positive. "But the one who looks intently into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not being a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be *blessed* in what he does" (James 1:25).<sup>8</sup> The phrase "looks intently" means to stoop down to inspect. That's the difference between "hearers" and "doers." Those who ultimately obey God's word not only hear it, they linger over it, they absorb it, and it becomes a part of who they are.

Think about how much time you spend in front of a mirror. Shaving, combing your hair, putting on makeup. We spend a lot of time looking at ourselves in the mirror. But how much more time should we spend looking intently into God's word? If we spend so much time making sure the outside is right, shouldn't we spend even more time making sure the inside is right?

James confronts the gap and his words sting a bit. "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (James 1:22). It is absurd for a professing Christian to look into God's word and walk away unmoved and unchanged! *Does the life you live reflect the faith you profess?*

#### OBEDIENCE IN THE BIBLE

Obedience is a constant theme throughout the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

When Joshua became the leader of the Hebrews, the Lord told him that a great leader must "meditate on (the word) day and night" and "be careful to do everything that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8).

Years later, the prophet Samuel knew something was missing in the heart of God's people, and he confronted them. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22, NIV).

At the end of his life, King Solomon came to a great conclusion. Paraphrasing from his book Ecclesiastes, "After all I have experienced, after all I have observed in life, after all the wealth and wisdom I have acquired ... the conclusion is this: fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

I love the heart of the person who wrote Psalm 119. I love his desire to obey God. "Oh, that my actions would consistently reflect your decrees! Then I will not be ashamed when I compare my life with your commands. As I learn your righteous regulations, I will thank you by living as I should! ... I have devoted myself to your commandments ... I will spend my life obeying your commandments ... I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands" (Psalm 119:5-7, 45, 56, 60, NLT). I want a heart like that. Don't you?

The proof that we love God, and the proof that we are true believers, is how quickly and cheerfully and fully we obey.

### SO WHY DON'T WE OBEY?

So, *why don't we obey?* Because there are so many things pulling us from God.

The enticement of our culture is *comfort*. Affluence makes it easy to put our security in our money and not in God. That's why we must remember Jesus' words. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). If money is your security, if success is your ambition, if comfort is your idol, there will be a wide gap between what you profess as a Christian and how you are really living. If you want to narrow the gap, you've got overcome the idol of comfort.

Another thing that keeps us from living out what we say we believe is *conformity*. The Bible says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him ... and the world is passing away" (1 John 2:15-17, NAS). Most people are living for things that won't last, that are "passing away." We call Jesus Lord, but is there any real distinction in how we live as compared to everyone else around us? Romans 12:2 reminds us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NAS). Choose to do God's will. Choose to be different and to be distinctly Christian.

Another reason we don't obey is because we want to be in *control*. We don't want to take orders, even from God. It's a Lordship issue. We want to do what we want to do. We want to do things our way. We want to pursue our agenda. It's simply a refusal to submit to Jesus as the Lord of our life.

Another reason we don't obey all that God has commanded is *distraction*. The way we have designed our lives competes with God. There are so many choices in life. The world is filled with so many fun and exciting things to experience, and we don't want to miss out. And, the lifestyle we have designed is crazy busy. Most of us are too busy to stop and take a long look at our lives and to see if we are obeying God or not.

James is right, and we know he's right. A lot of the time we are "hearers of the word" and not "doers of the world," and we deceive ourselves by thinking that's okay. It's not okay, and we know it.

Years after His resurrection and ascension, Jesus spoke from heaven to the church in Ephesus. He commended the church for their theology. But He also confronted them, and said, "I have this against you, you have *left your first love*" (Revelation 2:4). The church known for its theology had lost their first love. They still believed all the right things, they just didn't love Jesus like they used to.

Let me go deeper. *How do you feel when you know you're not obeying God?* Do you feel regret or do you rationalize? Do you feel conviction or do you just ignore it? How do you feel when you know you're not obeying God?

The most perilous place you can be, as a Christian, is where you no longer feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit when you sin. Your standards slip and you don't even notice. Desensitized by the culture, you accept as normal what the culture accepts as normal. You don't even feel bad when you know you are not obeying God.

If you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in you.<sup>10</sup> The Holy Spirit stirs your conscience. He warns us when something is wrong, like warning lights on the dashboard of a car.

What is the Holy Spirit warning you about? What is He bringing to your mind right now? What area of your life are you not submitting to the Lordship of Jesus? What are you doing that you know you should not be doing? What are you not doing that you know you ought to be doing? James also said, "It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it" (James 4:17, NLT). What part of God's word are you ignoring?

If you truly desire to follow Jesus, you will bow before Him and ask Him to point out anything in your life that's not right. You will ask Him to expose your sin and to reveal any lack of obedience. That's what King David did, and that's why he was called a man after God's own heart.<sup>11</sup> David was willing to pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me ... Point out anything in me that offends you" (Psalm 139:23-24, NLT).

Are you willing to pray that prayer? I hope you are, and I hope I am.

### **MOTIVATION FOR OBEDIENCE**

What is the ultimate motivation for obedience? The cross. When we think about what Jesus did for us. When we think about how He suffered, and bled, and died. For us. In our place. Jesus did not take our sin and nail it to the cross. Jesus absorbed our sin and nailed Himself to the cross. So that you and I might be forgiven of everything we've ever done wrong. Oh, the grace of God. "How great a love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called the children of God, and that is who we are!" (1 John 3:1).

Gratitude for grace is the ultimate motivation for obedience. Loving the one who loved us so. As Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

As an expression of our love, and in remembrance of His love for us, let's prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper.

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Matthew 13:55, Jesus had four brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, and verse 13:56 also mentions sisters.

<sup>2</sup> See John 7:5, also 1 Corinthians 15:7.

<sup>3</sup> Peter also wrote to those “scattered” throughout the Mediterranean world (1 Peter 1:1).

<sup>4</sup> See these verses also. “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27, NAS). “I implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (Ephesians 4:1, NAS). “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NAS).

<sup>5</sup> The Greek word for “worthy” is *axios*.

<sup>6</sup> See Colossians 1:10, Philippians 1:27, Ephesians 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> Steven Cole, “Doers of the Word, James 1:22-27,” Bible.org.

<sup>8</sup> James referred to God’s word as the “law of liberty.” The new covenant of Jesus liberated Jews from the bondage of religion tradition and ritual. The Gospel frees us from sin and allows us to live as God always intended for us to live. Again, James echoes his brother Jesus when he used the word “abides.” Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (John 15:10, NAS). He said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14, NAS). “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28, NIV).

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NAS).<sup>9</sup> He also said, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28, NIV). John echoed Jesus’ words thirty years later, “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3, NIV).

<sup>10</sup> See Romans 8:9.

<sup>11</sup> See Acts 13:22.