

JAMES: FAITH WORKS / RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OVERALLS #10

“Three Tests of Genuine Faith” (James 1:21-27)

Mission Bible Fellowship (3-8-2020) Pastor Larry Nelson

Introduction:

1. As we come to the Word of God this morning, please open your Bibles to James Chapter 1.

James 1:21-27

- 21 *Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.*
 - 22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*
 - 23 *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*
 - 24 *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*
 - 25 *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*
 - 26 *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.*
 - 27 *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*
2. As we have seen previously, when it comes to living out the Christian life, James is one of the most practical books of the entire New Testament.
 3. In a time of great suffering, the early church had a problem that is still with us today:., Namely, there were many in the fellowship, who called themselves Christians, who were in fact, counterfeits.
 4. Therefore, it should not surprise any of us that the first book of the New Testament to be written, would provide many tests to help sort out genuine believers from the fakes.
 5. **ILL: POTATO or ROCK**

<PROP> So as we come to the last verses of James Chapter 1, we are going to look at three tests of genuine saving faith.

- Genuine Faith Obeys What It Understands** (1:21-26)
- Genuine Faith Ministers to Those in Need** (1:27a)
- Genuine Faith Seeks to Live a Life of Holiness** (1:27b)

- Genuine Faith Obeys What It Understands** (1:21-26)

James 1:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls”

- A. As a Pastor and Biblical Counselor, I am constantly reminding my counselees to practice the **“putting off”** and **“putting on”** process, which is seen throughout Scripture.

Ephesians 4:22-24

- 22 *“... in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside (or **“put off”**, depending on your translation) the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,*

- 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
 24 and **put on** the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Colossians 3:8-10

- 8 But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.
 9 Do not lie to one another, since you **laid aside** (or “**put off**”) the old self with its evil practices,
 10 and have **put on** the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him”

1. And as I have said before, it is not enough want to stop some sinful behavior, or thought process.
2. Self-loving, self-worshiping, sinful thoughts and actions must be replaced with God-worshiping, others loving thoughts and actions.
3. James 1:21 is speaking of this very thing, where:
 - a. He calls us to **put off**, or “*putting aside*” “*filthiness and all that remains of wickedness...*”
 - (1) *Filthiness* <rū - par - e - a>, speaks of moral impurity or defilement.
 - (2) Which is closely related to another term, which speaks of having wax in the ears.
 - (3) In this context, James is warning the Christian, that moral impurity will be a great hindrance to being able to hear, understand, and obey God’s Word.
 - (4) *Wickedness* <ka - ke - a>, is a general term for evil or corruption.
 - (5) It speaks of sin that is deliberate and determined, where possibly, only you and God alone know about it.
 - (6) But whether the sin is out there for everyone to see, or it is a private matter, God is calling us as Christians to commit ourselves to lives of personal purity, as we “**put off**” sinful thoughts and actions, or anything else that reduces our hunger for God and His Word.

:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

- B. Humility <prau - tes>, is a gentle, teachable, receptiveness, and submission to God and His Word.
1. In this context, we are being commanded to “**put off**” pride, and resentment, and self-righteous anger toward God and those who carefully teach His Word.
 2. And we are to “**Put on**” a humble and teachable spirit, that is eager to honor and obey God’s Word.

3. In *Romans 1:16*, Paul declares:

Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ...”

4. Now there are 3 aspects to the saving of the soul.

(1) When we receive Christ as Lord, Master, and Savior, we are saved from the **penalty** of sin.

(2) As we learn to obey His Word, the indwelling Holy Spirit, saves us daily, from the **power** of sin.

(3) And one day in Heaven, we will actually be saved from the very **presence** of sin.

TRANS> So now let’s move on in our text to:

James 1:22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

C. God inspired the half-brother of our Lord, to write the Book of James, with commands that were so clear, no one would have any excuse for not understanding and obeying them.

1. In fact, one must work really hard to miss James’ meaning.

a. Clearly, the problem for us is **not** our understanding, but the doing and obeying.

2. And it is hear that our text reveals 2 problems:

a. First, there is **The Problem of Inattentive Forgetfulness**

James 1:22-25

22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

23 *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*

24 *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*

25 *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

(1) When we come to the study of God’s Word, we must do so with an attitude of humble submission, and a commitment to obey, and to keep on obeying it.

(2) We must come with a heart that says, “Lord, **teach** me, and **change** me.”

(3) I would like to ask all of you a very personal question?, Can you remember the last time when you encountered the Word of God, and it was so profound that it made a lasting change in your life?

(4) Genuine Christian living is not about momentary hearing or some passing feeling, it is all about long-term obedience.

John 8:31 “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”

- (a) I fear that many today, even genuine believers, have fallen into complacency.
- (b) Sadly, we can become so accustomed to hearing the Bible, that we become immune to really **hearing** and **obeying** it.

Joshua 1:8 “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

- (c) As I have said before, meditation is not sitting in a lotus position, contemplating the fuzz in your navel.
 - (d) And meditation is much more than just reading, or even memorizing God’s Word.
 - (e) Meditation is the **careful** and **prayerful** thinking about Scripture, with the intent of honoring God through obeying it.
 - (f) Therefore, Meditation must be both **practical** and **personal**.
- (5) When the Jewish exiles returned to Israel from Babylon, they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in a just 52 days.
- (a) Afterwards, there was a great celebration, where the Book of the Law was read, and explained to the people.
 - (b) *Nehemiah 8*, says that from early morning until midday ... all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law ... and when Ezra opened the Book, all the people stood up for its reading ... And then they bowed their faces to the ground when he was done.

Nehemiah 8:9

Nehemiah then said. “*This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.*’ For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.”

- (c) For most of them, this was the first time that they really understood, God’s Word, and ¿why?
 - (d) Because of their parents’ sinning, Israel had been dragged off into a foreign land to be slaves for 70 years, where there was little or no teaching from God’s Word.
 - (e) It was like they were crying out, “*Oh God, let this never happen again ... where our sins require You to punish us!*”
 - (f) Genuine sorrow over sin, led the people to confession, and repentance, and to real change, and to celebration for the forgiveness that God had so freely and eagerly given to them, as they covenanted together to obey the Lord in everything that He called them to do.
- (6) And so again, James exhorts us in 1:22 “*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*”

- (a) “prove yourselves”, <gin - o - mi>, means that we are to keep on striving, continuously, to be “doers of the word.”

TRANS> So let’s read our text again:

James 1:22-25

- 22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*
 23 *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*
 24 *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*
 25 *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abide by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

- (7) Now most of us guys can remember times when, we looked in the mirror, saw that we needed to shave or comb our hair, but then we got distracted or called away, and we totally forgot what we needed to do.

(a) That is the essence of what James is saying here.

- (8) We have all heard sermons, or had Bible study, where the Word of God showed us some area of our life that needed to be changed, and in that moment, we fully intended to do so, but then we forgot.

- (9) So here is your **Nelsonism** for the day: “*Good intentions, without a plan, are just wishful thinking!*” **(REPEAT)**

(a) Here’s an example that we can all relate to:

- i) We have all had times when someone said to us:, “*Hey, we should get together for coffee sometime.*”
 ii) ¿ Now what does that actually mean?
 iii) It usually means: “*I have no intention of actually getting together for coffee with you, but I feel better for having said it.*”
 iv) So whenever anyone says this to me, I immediately get out my date book, and say, “*¿Ok, what day and time works for you?*”
 v) Its amazing how many people respond with something like, “*Oh, I’ll have to get back to you on that.*”

(b) Remember: “**Good intentions, without a plan, are just wishful thinking!**”

- i) Whether you want to meet up with someone for fellowship, or you want to make biblical God-honoring changes in your life, then you have to make a plan, or you will soon forget, and it will never get done.

- ii) And notice how James describes these forgetful hearers, they “*delude themselves*” – which is:
- iii) <para - lo - [/]giz - o - mi> , means to deceive one's self.
- iv) Please consider for a moment these Scripture passages:

Luke 6:46 “Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?”

John 15:14 “You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

1John 2:3-4

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

TRANS> Now let's look again at this morning's text where James draws a strong contrast between the forgetful hearer and the effectual doer.

James 1:25 *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

- (10) James uses the very strong verb, “*looks intently*”, which is much more than just a casual look.
 - (a) This is the same word that Luke and John used, when they described Peter, John, and Mary, as they “**looked**” into Jesus' empty tomb.
 - (b) For the Christian who “*looks*” into God's “*perfect law*”, this is **not** the look of just curiosity, only to turn away and forget what has been learned.
 - (c) God did not give us His Word to satisfy our curiosity ... He gave it to change our lives for His glory!
- (11) So as James focuses on the “*law of liberty*”, he is speaking of the Christians freedom from the bondage of sin, and this “*liberty*” is **not** the freedom to do what we want., It is the power to honor God with Holy Spirit-empowered obedience.

TRANS> So much for The Problem of Inattentive Forgetfulness, now lets consider:

b. The Problem of Religious Worthlessness (:26)

James 1:26 *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.*

- (1) As Christians, we **should** be involved in the outward activities of regular church attendance, winning the lost, Bible reading, and fellowship with one another.

- (2) But like the Pharisees, many today are self-deceived, because all of these religious activities have no value in themselves, if they are not driven by a saving faith that desires to truly glorify God and to love others.
- (3) Unbelievers and even professing Christians can attempt to do all these things in the power of the flesh, but there is one thing that will inevitably expose them as phony counterfeits, and that is their inability to consistently control their tongues.
- (4) A godless self-deceived heart will eventually be exposed by corrupt, unkind, and prideful speech.
- (5) Please notice how as Paul listed off some of the “*deeds of the flesh*” in *Galatians 5:21-22*, he not only spoke of: *immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and jealousy*; but he also included sins of the tongue: *enmities, strife, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions*, with the warning, “... *that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*”
- (6) In other words, no matter what anyone may claim about his own faith in Christ, the counterfeit’s words will eventually betray his self-deceived, lost and sinful heart.
- (7) And James agrees, saying that “... *this man's religion is **worthless***” (*James 1:26*).
- (8) The point here is that genuine Christian faith, will transform both our hearts, and our words.
- (9) James will later spend the entirety of Chapter 3 developing what he summarized in verse 26 of Chapter 1.

TRANS> So far, I have spent the bulk of our time this morning showing how, **Genuine Faith Obeys What It Understands**, but now I want to quickly move on to the next point in my sermon outline, which is:

II. **Genuine Faith Ministers to Those in Need** (1:27a)

James 1:27a “*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress ...*”

- A. What God sees as being clean and uncontaminated religion, the genuine, real deal of the Christian life, will be evidenced by unselfishly serving others, who cannot pay you back.
- B. Now lest anyone misunderstand, please be assured that James is **not** preaching that salvation is earned by doing Good Works.
 1. Nothing could be further from the truth.
 2. As we see from *Ephesians 2:8-10*, genuine salvation is received by faith, and is accomplished by God’s grace **alone**, with nothing added.

Ephesians 2:8-10

- 8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*
 9 *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
 10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

3. God's grace is the **root**, and good works are the **fruit**.
4. And so James provides two examples of what to expect from someone who is a genuine Christian.

C. In the 1st Century, Christians were being slaughtered by the 1000s, which had left many widows and orphans, with no one to care for them.

1. There were no life insurance or welfare programs.
2. So when James exhorts Christians to "*visit orphans and widows*", it means far more than just dropping by to say "*Hello.*"
3. This word is often used in the N.T. to speak of visiting people in order to provide whatever practical help, food, clothing, and encouragement that was needed.
4. And because these destitute souls are still with us today, Paul exhorts us in:

Galatians 6:10 *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

5. But so often churches treat the less fortunate among God's family, as though they are invisible.
6. Again, the point of this verse is that we are to be generous with those in the family of God, who cannot pay us back.
7. Genuine Christians give of our time **and** our treasure, so that no one falls through the cracks of neglect.
8. For many widows, even those whose husbands made arrangements to provide for them financially, they still need kind and gentle words of comfort, along with the only hug that they may have received all week.
 - a. At our house, we call this, "*Love with skin on it!*"
 - b. What I mean is:, if the early church was called to greet one another with a "**holy kiss**", then we should certainly be able to give the "widows" and "children" among us a "**holy hug**", along with encouraging words, and generous help, according to their need.

TRANS> Which brings us to the final point in this morning's sermon:

III. **Genuine Faith Seeks to Live a Life of Holiness** (1:27b)

James 1:27 "*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, **and** to keep oneself unstained by the world.*"

A. Christians are called to live in continuous moral and spiritual purity.

1 John 2:15-17

- 15 *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.*
- 16 *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*
- 17 *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

B. Even as Jesus was known as the friend of tax collectors and sinners, so too, we are in the world, but we must not become immorally contaminated by the world.

1 Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."*

2 Corinthians 6:14 *Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

1. In the early weeks after my conversion to Christ, I was still living in a college fraternity house, where beer parties were common.
 - a. But it didn't take me long to realize the hypocrisy of witnessing for Christ with a Bible in one hand and a beer in the other!
2. And as I take a moment to go from preaching to meddling, may I say that there is no such thing as evangelistic dating in the Bible!
 - a. This is a recipe for disaster!
 - b. If you don't date unbelievers, then you will never need to be worry about falling in love and marrying one.
 - c. And when it comes to evangelism, because of the deceitfulness of our own hearts , unless there are others who are present, men should witness to men, and women should witness to other women.
3. It is one thing to reach out to the lost with the saving Gospel of Christ, but it is something else to participate in their sin, in order to witness to them.
4. Remember, we are in the world, but we are not to be of it.
 - a. So James calls us to keep ourselves, "... *unstained by the world.*"
 - b. And there are few things that will "*stain*" a Christian faster or more deeply than having close relationships with unbelievers.
 - c. We would all do well to remember Paul's command in:

2 Corinthians 6:14-15

- 14 *Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*
- 15 *Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*

CONCLUSION:

1. So this morning we have studied **“3 Tests of Genuine Faith”**

Genuine Faith Obeys What It Understands (1:21-26)

Genuine Faith Ministers to Those in Need (1:27a)

Genuine Faith Seeks to Live a Life of Holiness (1:27b)

2. Please be assured that the purpose for these tests are not to cause genuine Christians to doubt our faith.
3. The purpose is to hold up a mirror to self-righteous, counterfeits, who may be deceived into believing that they are saved, and on their way to Heaven, when they are not.
4. The Apostle John said in:

1 John 5:13 *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.*

5. But, Paul balances this truth with this exhortation in:

2 Corinthians 13:5 *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?”*

6. I did not have the privilege of growing up in a Christian home.
 - a. There were churches on every corner, but the Nelson family didn't go to any of them, ever.
 - b. At the age of 16, I couldn't have told you that Jesus was anything more than a swear word.
 - c. It wasn't until my first year in college that I came to understand who Jesus is, and how He died on the cross, to take the punishment for my sins upon Himself, and how He rose from the dead to prove that sinners like me could be forgiven and made right with God.
 - d. When I came home for Christmas break that year, and I told my parents the wonderful news about why and how I had committed my life to Jesus Christ, they responded with, *“We wish you were addicted to drugs. , If you were a drug addict we would know what to do with you, but what do we do with a Jesus freak!”*
7. As the years went by, and I later became a pastor, I discovered that there were lots of folks just like me, who didn't know anything about the Bible, or what Jesus did, to make a way for sinners to go to heaven.
 - a. So I wrote this little Bible study.
 - b. Back then it was called, *“How to Get to Heaven From Hope, Idaho”* because that was where I was pastoring at the time.
 - c. But today I have printed them for places all over North America.
 - d. I even have one that says, *“How to Get to Heaven From Mission.”*

- e. Now I know that some of the people from Abbotsford are not even sure that this is possible, but it is.
- f. This Bible study booklet focuses on 4 words, **BELIEVE, CONFESS, REPENT, and RECEIVE.**
- i. *John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*
 - ii. *1 John 1:9 says, "If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness."*
 - iii. Jesus said in *Luke 13:3* says, "... unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish.
 - (1) Have you ever turned the wrong way, down a One-Way street?
 - (2) Did you then jump out of your car, and shake your fist at 4 lanes of oncoming traffic, and try to convince them that they were wrong and you were right?
 - (3) Of course not!, You turned around and went the right way.
 - (4) Well that is what it means to repent.
 - (5) Every sin that I ever did came as the result of me trying to be boss of my own life.
 - (6) I was living a life of sin, going down the road of life, doing what I wanted to do, whenever I wanted to do it.
 - (7) But then God opened my eyes, and enabled me to **repent**.
 - (8) I did a U-Turn, from being the boss of my own life, and committed myself to a new Lord and Master, where Jesus has the right to tell me how to life.
 - iv. And then I **received** Christ, and God forgave me of all my sins, and the Holy Spirit came to forever live in my soul, making me a child of God.
 - v. *John 1:12 says, "But as many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe** in His name."*

8. **BELIEVE, CONFESS, REPENT, RECEIVE**

9. God does not want us to think so, hope so, maybe so, about our salvation., He wants us to **know** so.
10. And if you don't "**know so**", Paul said in *2 Corinthians 6:2* says, "*Behold, **now** is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, **now** is "THE DAY OF SALVATION."*
11. If you have not received Christ in repentant faith, then I urge you to talk with someone here this morning, who will help you to understand how to become a Christian, so you can **finally** and **forever** be right with God.
12. And I would be delighted to give you my "*How to Get to Heaven from Mission*" Bible Study, along with this Bible that will show you how to get there.

13. Our James text this morning urges all of us to be a **doers** of God's Word, not just **forgetful hearers**.
14. So if we can help you today, please come and ask.

Let's pray together.