

Be Doers Of The Word, And Not Hearers Only.

Text: James 1:22-27

Suggested Hymns:
416, 426, 265, 294, 267

- 1) What This Admonition Teaches Us
- 2) Why We Should Be Doers Of The Word,
And Not Hearers Only

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is James 1:22–27, ***22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.***

26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” As to hearing and doing the Word of God, there are two types of people. There are those who claim to be doers but will not hear the Word, and those who claim to be hearers but will not do according to the Word.

The first type are those who claim to be doers of the divine Word but refuse to hear. They do not go to church. They never attend Divine Services. However, if you approach them on the subject of church-going, and tell them that they are doing wrong because they neglect the Divine Service, they will fly up and say, *What? doing wrong? Am I not as good as you church-going people? Am I not better than those hypocrites who go to church every Sunday and do all kinds of wicked things during the week?*

I do not need go to church and be told what I must do to please God. I do according to the Word of God. I lead an honest life. I do that which is right, and I challenge any one to show me where I am doing wrong.

When I was a child, I had to go to church and to Sunday-school, and learn religion, and it did me no harm. Let children learn all they can, but when a man knows what he is about and what God requires of him, why should he go to church and hear the Word of God? Most of those who do not go to church speak in this way.

Others say, It is true, I do not go to church, but I pray at home, and is not that as good as if I went to church?

All these people are wrong when they claim that they are doing according to God's Word. How can they say that they do according to the Lord's Word which says, in Luke 11:28, "***blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!***"

And in Hebrews 10:23-25, *let us ...²⁵ not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The second type are those who claim to be hearers, but will not do according to the Word. They go to church. They come to the Lord's Supper. But how do they treat the Word of God which is proclaimed to them? They disregard it altogether.

They neither let the Word of God bring them to a true living faith nor do they heed those admonitions by which they are exhorted to abstain from sin and to lead a holy life.

In spite of all the sermons which they hear, they stick to their old sins, and do not make the slightest effort to be doers of the Word which they hear. To these latter people the admonition of our text is addressed.

Let us consider the admonition, ***be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*** May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What This Admonition Teaches Us

The Apostle says, ***But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*** What does this admonition teach us? The common explanation is, that, when we hear the Word of God, it tells us what to do to please God.

For example, when we go to church and hear the Law of God proclaimed to us, when in the sermon certain sins are denounced, or certain good works are advised, we should not have these things said to us in vain, but heed the words and put into practice what we have heard.

The common explanation is, that we should hear and do what God says to us in His holy Law.

But this explanation is not quite correct as we shall readily see. This admonition implies also that we should do according to the precepts of the Law, but the context shows that the first and the next thing which the Apostle has in his mind when he says, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only* is not that we should do the works of the Law.

What does the Apostle mean by the Word of God which we should not only hear, but do also? The Word of God, we know, is twofold. It is Law, and it is Gospel. Does the Apostle mean the Law? It cannot be. For by the little word “*But*” he connects with the former, and in the words immediately preceding our text he speaks of the *“implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

Now, is the Law able to save our souls? Can the Law bring us to heaven? No; only the Gospel can do that. By the Law is the knowledge of sin, and the Law condemns us. It will never help us into eternal life.

Furthermore, in the latter part of our Epistle, the Apostle refers to the Word of God which we should do as *“the perfect law of liberty.”*¹ Now can that which we call the Law of God, the commandments of God, lead us to the liberty of God’s children? No; only the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ Jesus can do that.

Jesus says in John 8:36, *“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”* You see, my friends, that by the “**Word**” in this connection the Apostle cannot mean the Law of our own works and deeds. By the Word which we should do he means the Gospel of God’s works and deeds for us, that in His dear Son He has loved us from eternity, has forgiven us all our sins in Christ, and has given us eternal life through His name.

But how can we do this Word of the Gospel? How can we do that which is proclaimed to us of the Saviour Jesus? Christ answers this question when He

says in John 6:40, ⁴⁰ *And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life.*

And when at a certain time the Jews asked Jesus, *What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?* Jesus answered and said to them, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”*²

When the keeper of the prison at Philippi asked Paul and Silas, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*³ they answered him, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* See, then, faith it is, believing in Christ, whereby we do the Word of God which in the Gospel He has proclaimed to us.

The Apostle’s admonition, *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only,”* means to say as much as this: When the Gospel is proclaimed to you who want to be Christians, when the glorious message is preached to you, that God does not want to have you eternally lost in your sins, that from eternity He has had mercy on you, that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for your sins on the cross, to atone for your transgressions, and to obtain for you eternal life, — when this precious Gospel is proclaimed to you, it will not suffice that you merely sit in your pew in church and hear and hear and hear with bodily ears.

What are you profited if you be ever so regular an attendant at the house of God, and if your Christianity consists in nothing more than to hear? What are you profited if the Word of God moves and touches you only for the moment while you hear, if for a minute or two your soul is impressed with the wonderful love of God in His dear Son, if the sermon moves you to tears, and all this is but a transient feeling, a passing emotion without any further consequences?

No; you must be a doer of the Word which you hear. The Gospel, which is proclaimed to you in its truth and purity, you must receive into a good and honest heart, you must receive it in the faith and remain steadfast in the faith.

When you are told that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, you must apply this glorious news to your own person and learn to say: *‘O what a merciful God! He has saved me also. When you are told that Jesus receives sinners, you must see the Saviour coming to you, extending His hand to receive you, and joyfully you must say: Jesus, You are mine forever.’*

When you are told that Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and that on the cross He died for all, you must appreciate Christ's great work for the whole fallen world and appropriate it to your own person, and triumphantly say: *'Glory to God! I am saved, my transgression is forgiven, my sin is covered, I have been reconciled to God in Christ, my Mediator and Redeemer, — heaven is mine!'*

You see, my friends, the person who in this way believes the Word of the Gospel and relies upon the Word of the Gospel, is a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only, and this is what the admonition of our text teaches us.

2. Why We Should Be Doers Of The Word, And Not Hearers Only.

And now, in the second place, let us see why we should be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.

The first reason is, because we deceive ourselves if we are hearers only and not doers. The Apostle distinctly says that by hearing only, and not doing, you are *"deceiving yourselves,"* and then he adds, ²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.*

The Apostle is saying to us: If you look into a mirror, your own picture is before you, you see yourself; but when you go away from the mirror, the picture is wiped away, and you forget how you look.

Now this is the very state of the person who is a hearer and not a doer of the Word. As long as he looks into the mirror of the Word, as long as he hears the Word, he sees himself as he should be in the form of a true Christian, in the form in which the Word pictures the true Christian, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He may also form all kinds of good resolves for the moment. But when the sounds of the Word have died away, when from the church he passes out into the world, he forgets his good resolves, and the true Christian's picture which he saw passes out of his mind.

In spite of his church-going he is and remains an unbeliever. He belongs to those of whom Jesus says in the parable of the sower, *"Those by the wayside are*

the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

Does not the Apostle speak the truth when of such hearers he claims that they deceive themselves because they refuse to do the Word of the Gospel, and do not come to the faith ?

The second reason why we should be doers and not hearers only is, because in no other way can we be profited by the Word than if we do according to it. The Apostle says, ²⁵ *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

The perfect law of liberty, as we have heard before, is the Gospel. The Apostle therefore is saying to us that the person is only truly profited by the Word which he hears who does not forget, but ponders in his heart what he has heard, who is induced by the preaching of the Word to believe in Christ, and endures in the faith to the end.

And what is the profit which he receives? He is “*blessed in what he does*” says the Apostle, that is, because his deed, as we have heard before, is his faith; he is blessed in his faith; for by his faith he has forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

The third reason why we should be doers, and not hearers only, is, because only the doers have the true religion, or, because only the believers can do good works and lead a God-pleasing life. *What pleases God, that pleases me*⁴ the hymnist wrote.

We have heard before that the first and next thing which the Apostle is teaching us when he admonishes us to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, is, that we should believe the Gospel of Christ, but that implies, at the same time, that we should do according to the precepts of the Law.

For how can a true believer ignore the Law of God, and refuse to do the will of God? A true believer remains a sinner as long as he lives, this is true. But he is not a reckless sinner. He does not sin because he finds pleasure in sinning, but because his flesh is weak, and he cannot help it.

His desire is to be without sin, and his delight is in the Law of the Lord. He is a doer, not of the Gospel only by faith, but also of the Law, and he endeavours to please God in his daily life.

At the end of our Epistle the Apostle therefore speaks of the religion of those who are doers, and not hearers only. He says, ²⁶ *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.* ²⁷ *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

How, then, do we show and manifest that our religion is true? What are the marks by which it is shown that our religion is not a self-deception and a work of hypocrisy? These marks are the deeds which from a true faith we perform to show that we love the neighbour.

This is not true religion, to be an outward church member, and to count yourself with the Christians, and to be a regular attendant at the divine services, and to talk Christianity, and then to do as you please in the world, to conform yourself to the world, and to sin with the children of this world, not to try to follow God's precepts in His Word, and to walk your own way without love and sympathy for the neighbour.

If we do not want to deceive our own hearts and make our religion vain, we must bridle our tongue, we must be careful that we do not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame the neighbour, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

And we must do good to others wherever an opportunity is presented, visit the fatherless and the widows who are so greatly in need of comfort and help, visit them to console them, and to help them in their want and distress, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world, abstaining from the world's evil lusts, and walking as the children of God. Then our religion will not be vain.

May the Lord grant us His grace that both as to the Law and as to the Gospel we be doers of the Word and not hearers only. May we in true faith receive the Word of the Gospel to the salvation of our souls, and that in our daily life we do God's will to prove before the world that our religion is not vain. ***"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ James 1:25

² John 6:29

³ Acts 16:30

⁴ Salomo Franck