

## How Do We React When We Look Into God's Mirror?-Part I James 1:18-25

(NASB) "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. <sup>19</sup> This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> 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; <sup>24</sup> for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> 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."

### INTRODUCTION

One dark, moonless night in his Scottish homeland, a young man decided to take a shortcut across a stretch of damp wasteland known as the moors. He'd been visiting friends, had stayed later than planned, and wanted to save time to get enough sleep before working early the next day. He realized a deep, deserted limestone quarry in the area posed him some danger, but he was confident he could avoid it. Suddenly, as he walked briskly along, he heard a man's voice call his name with urgency: "Peter!" He stopped, turned quickly around, and replied, "Yes, who is it? What do you want?" No one answered. He seemed to be totally alone; surrounded by nothing but silence. Confused at first, he became frustrated over being delayed and took a few more steps. He then heard his name called out even more urgently, "Peter!" Something then struck his shins with such force that he fell to his knees. As he thrust out his arms to catch himself, he felt nothing but air! He found himself dangling over the edge of the abandoned stone quarry. One more stride and he would have almost certainly plunged to his death in this deep, abandoned pit.

Peter broke out in a cold sweat. He'd given his heart to **Christ** as Lord and Savior. But as he reflected on this miraculous intervention, he realized he'd been closing his ears to God's call on his life as a minister. There seemed to be too many obstacles. Peter determined he'd never close his ears to God again, regardless of the difficulties in obeying what God called him to do. In 1927, he emigrated to the U. S. with just a few dollars to his name, because this is where God called him to train and to serve. A mere 10 years later, Peter became pastor of one of America's most influential churches, the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. In 1946, he became Chaplain of the United States Senate. Before his sudden death of a heart attack in 1949, Peter Marshall inspired thousands of average citizens and our nation's foremost leaders to embrace **Jesus** as Master and Savior without reservations or compromise, as he had. But God mainly spoke to Peter Marshall through the Bible, not by an angel, making him a good example to us today.

We start out in life doing things our way; coping as best we can with what life throws at us. By the time we're adults, we're fairly confident in our ability to make decisions for our happiness. But after we cry out to God, either as an adult or as a child, to save us through **Jesus Christ**, we begin a lifetime process of being saved from confidence in what our selfish desires say will make us happy. We begin to live by the values that reflect the character of our Savior. Country music legend Wanda Jackson, known as the Queen of Rockabilly, briefly dated 20-year-old Elvis Presley while touring with him in 1955 when she was 18. At age 33, she'd just completed the most financially successful year of her career. But she realized she was becoming like the self-centered, self-serving people she'd always despised. She discovered knowing God's Bible truths in her head was not enough. She cried out to **Jesus** for a new, pure heart and God-centered life based upon the Bible. Today, at age 80, she's still eager to listen to God's words to her through the Bible!

Our three outline points are Hear God's Word, Hold God's Word to Our Hearts, and Heed God's Word.

## I. HEAR GOD'S WORD (James 1:18-20)

We cannot gain God's lasting forgiveness and a secure place in Heaven by taking a poll of what *others* believe we should do. All that counts is what *God* has told us to do. We have no way to know for certain what God calls "sin" or what He's told us to do to escape sin's penalty or power except by the record of what He's revealed to us in the Bible. **II Timothy 3:16-17** (NLT) assures us: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do." Are these words true about the value of Scripture? Then, is there anything more important for any of us to do than to do whatever it takes to hear and to apply God's Word?

An explosion in Kansas City severely injured a new Christian. His face was badly disfigured. He lost his eyesight and both of his hands. One of his greatest sorrows was that he could no longer read the Bible. Then he heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in Braille. Much to his dismay, however, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion. Then, one day, as he brought one of the Braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters. He could feel them. Like a flash he thought, "I can read the Bible using my tongue." By the time evangelist Robert Sumner reported this story in 1969, in his book, *The Wonders of the Word of God*, this man had "read" the entire Bible four times!

James, our Lord's half-brother, wrote this letter to believers who'd been under his spiritual care as their lead pastor in Jerusalem. When persecution scattered these believers across the Roman Empire in search of communities where they could live and work without immediate threat of death or prison, James wrote what is probably the earliest document of the New Testament; about 15 years after Christ's resurrection. He sought to equip these early Christians, many of whom were new believers, with the basic understanding of how God's Spirit is at work in our lives to save us from sin and temptation—past, present, and future. This is why James emphasized the crucial role of God's Word in every step of our salvation from sin's penalty and power. God "brought us forth by the word of truth" (**vs. 18**), meaning we were "born again" by God's "Spirit" (**John 3:3-7**) after convicting us of our need to repent and to call upon **Jesus** in faith to be saved from sin's penalty. **Vs. 21** explains we are saved from sin's power to the extent we "in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." The necessary role of God's "word" in teaching us to live honorably as followers of Christ is cited again in **vss. 22, 23, and 25**.

To experience and enjoy the full benefits of being saved from our sinful self, James taught we "must be quick to hear" ("must learn to hurry up and listen"). A well-known evangelist once declared, "I have spent some of the happiest moments of my life in the arms of another man's wife." He was testing how closely people were listening as he preached from God's Word to prompt their attention and recall of his teaching. After a long pause, the evangelist added, "That woman was my mother." A few weeks later, a young pastor who'd heard this evangelist decided to test the hearing of a civic group he'd been invited to address. He exclaimed in a loud voice, "I have spent some of the happiest days of my life in the arms of another man's wife." After a long pause, this pastor admitted with embarrassment, "But for the life of me I can't remember who she was." In Biblical times, few owned or had access to any Old or New Testament writings to read God's Word themselves. Their best opportunity for God to speak to them through His revealed, written Word was to hear a synagogue or church leader read and explain Bible portions to them. This trained them to listen well and do their best to remember what they heard in such treasured opportunities!

## II. HOLD GOD'S WORD TO OUR HEARTS (James 1:21)

It's not enough to be thoroughly familiar with God's Word. It's not enough to believe **Jesus** is God in the flesh who died in our place to rescue us from God's judgment. God inspired the Bible to lead us to commit ourselves to His Son as "our only Master and Lord" (**Jude 4**). We show evidence of our commitment by a lifestyle that mirrors our Savior's. While a young lady sunbathed on the beach, a small boy in

swimming trunks came up and asked, "Do you believe in God?" Though surprised by the question, she replied, "Why, yes, I do." He asked, "Do you go to church every Sunday?" She answered "Yes" again. He then asked: "Do you read your Bible and pray every day to please the Lord?" With highly around curiosity she said "Yes!" The boy sighed with relief and asked, "Will you hold my money while I go swimming?"

James urges us in **vs. 21**, "in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (meaning, "continue the process begun at your new birth of being saved from sin's consequences and control by humbly receiving God's Word into your hearts"). "Receive" is the opposite of "reject." The Greek word can mean "give a favorable reception to." James may have had in mind **Jesus'** Parable of the Soils (**Mark 4:1-20**, NASB). In **Mark 4:20**, **Jesus** describes the "good soil" where the "seed" of God's Word produces a fruitful harvest as "those" who "hear the word and accept it and bear fruit." "Accept" is an intensive form of the verb translated "receive" in **vs. 21**. In the context of the Parable of the Soils, we can better "receive" the "seed" of God's Word into "good soil" when we cooperate with God's Spirit to rid our hearts of thorny weeds of sinful desires and bad attitudes that "choke" God's Word from reproducing our Savior's godly character traits within us. "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." "Wickedness" has the further nuance of referring in the medical sense to "wax in the ear." James may have been telling us, "Don't turn a deaf ear to God when He tells us what we don't want to hear." This reveals the crucial role of "humility" ("a teachable, submissive spirit"). Our *hearts* cannot be transformed to mirror **Jesus'** likeness if we stop our ears to what God's Spirit tells us to do, no matter how much we know God's Word in our *heads*.

Many years ago in a Moscow theater, matinee idol Alexander Rostovzev played the role of **Jesus** in a sacrilegious play entitled *Christ in a Tuxedo*. To show contempt for God's values and to exalt the values of worldly pleasure and success, Alexander was to read two verses from the Sermon on the Mount, remove his gown, and mockingly say, "Give me my tuxedo and top hat!" As he read **Matthew 5:3-4** (KJV), "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," he began to tremble. Instead of following the script, he kept reading from **Matthew 5**; ignoring the coughs, calls, and foot-stamping of other actors. Finally, recalling a verse he'd learned in childhood in a Russian Orthodox church, he cried out, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!" (**Luke 23:42**, KJV). Before the curtain could be lowered, Rostovzev unstopped his ears from hearing God speaking through His Word and committed his life to **Jesus Christ** as his personal Lord and Savior!

We will wait until next week to explore more thoroughly what it means not only to Hear God's Word and to Hold God's Word to Our Heart's, but to Heed God's Word in obedience.

## CONCLUSION

The Good News of **Jesus Christ**, and what we must do to experience life's fullest joys as forgiven sinners and beloved children of our Heavenly Father, is not a bizarre mystery that only a few can grasp. Most of what we truly need to know is found in the song, "Happiness Is the Lord" (by Ira Stanphill):

Happiness is to know the Savior, Living a life within His favor, Having a change in my behavior,  
Happiness is the Lord. Happiness is a new creation, "Jesus and me" in close relation, Having a part in  
His salvation, Happiness is the Lord.

Real joy is mine, no matter if teardrops start. I've found the secret; It's Jesus in my heart. Happiness is to be forgiven, Living a life that's worth the livin', Taking a trip that leads to heaven, Happiness is the Lord. Happiness is the Lord. Happiness is the Lord. Let's now sing this song as our hymn of commitment to our Lord!