

## How Do We React When We Look Into God's Mirror?—Part II

### 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

[During Special Music, go to office, poorly apply white sunscreen, walk to pulpit at song's end holding hand-held mirror, see myself, say, "Lookin' good," and begin sermon as though all is well]. There are four ways to respond to what we see in a mirror. We can refuse to look knowing we won't like what we see. A coworker in Philadelphia kept up the illusion for years he'd not really let his body go to pot. One day, his shower robe opened accidentally while he stood in front of a full-length mirror. He was so shocked by what he saw he immediately went on an exercise program! A second option: we get a look at ourselves, dislike what we see, and blame the mirror for making us look badly! We may also vent anger toward those God places in our lives to mirror such truth back to us. Thirdly, we can look, see what should be changed, but neglect to make any changes due to apathy. We accept the flaws we see as "okay." This response was demonstrated to you this morning. Or, we can remedy flaws a mirror helps us to see [wipe sunscreen from face]. These four responses to what a physical mirror shows us can be described as avoidance, anger, apathy, and alteration. They also describe our four main responses to what God's mirror, the Bible, shows us.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) showed avoidance, anger, & apathy; but little alteration. His parents, non-practicing Jews, discouraged religious belief. But German public schools grounded him in Christian teachings and a distant relative taught him core beliefs of his Jewish heritage. At age 11, Albert became an observant Jew; composing songs to God's honor he sung enthusiastically walking to school. But at age 51, in his article in 1930 for the *New York Times Magazine*, he claimed to be among the few of "exceptional endowments" able "to rise above" primitive beliefs in a God who judges us and takes a personal interest in the morals we live by! A collection of his private letters, recently made public, reveal his *avoidance* of the Bible's mirror showing him his true self. Trashy remarks about fellow scientists proved him to be jealous and critical. And Einstein's unrestrained lust and adultery throughout his two marriages explain why he became *angry* (in his word, "irritated") when his scientific researches proved God's existence is unavoidable, instead of avoidable, as he'd wished. In 1931, Edwin Hubble (for whom the Space Telescope is named), invited him to California's Mount Wilson Observatory to learn how Hubble's discovery of the increasing expansion of the universe confirmed what Einstein had mathematically discovered: space, matter, and time truly came into being from nothing, as the Bible teaches. From then on, Einstein described himself as "a deeply religious man." He often stated the moral principles promoted by the Old Testament "Prophets" and "Jesus Christ" provide us "with a teaching which is capable of curing all the social ills of humanity." He claimed he thirsted for science to know God's "thoughts." But his enthusiasm for God's Word was limited to *major* alterations the Bible showed him *others* needed and *minor alterations* he thought *he* needed. His *apathy* about his character flaws make him a tragic example of **James 1:23-24**: "[I]f 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." Are Albert Einstein's reactions to the mirror of God's Word temptations to each of us, as well? Yes!

This is the second part of the sermon, How Do We React When We Look into God's Mirror? Last week we explored our need to Hear God's Word. Whether we cry out to God as a child or an adult to save us through **Jesus Christ** from judgment for defying God's moral standards, we begin a lifetime process of being saved from confidence in what our sinful, self-centered heart tells us will give us happiness. We learn to become Christ-centered and to live by the values reflecting our Savior's character, as **James 1:18 & 21** explain: "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 [those redeemed by Christ's sacrifice] among His creatures. <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." Can we know for certain what God calls "filthiness" ("moral impurity") or "wickedness" (ill will toward God or others), if we ignore what He reveals to us in the Bible? No, as **II Timothy 3:16-17** (NLT) makes clear: "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." The Bible's unique authority is why James stressed we "must be quick to hear" it ("must learn to hurry up and listen"). In Bible times, few had access to any Old or New Testament writings to read themselves. They needed to be prepared to listen well in church or in synagogue and to do what they could to remember what they heard.

But it's not enough to Hear the Word of God well. We must also Hold God's Word to Our Hearts. **Jesus** warned us in **Mark 4:1-20**, in His Parable of the Soils, if we continue to allow weedy habits and unChristlike desires to grow rampant in our lives, such "weeds" will "choke" the impact of God's Word upon our hearts and stunt our fruitful value to the Lord. To prevent this, we are to present our hearts to God as a field well prepared to receive a farmer's seed to produce a good harvest, as James urges us to do in **vs. 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." "Receive" is the opposite of "reject." It means "give a favorable reception to" or "embrace." "Wickedness" has the further nuance of referring in the medical sense to "wax in the ear." James may have also been telling us, "Get the wax out of your ears so you won't turn to God a deaf ear when He tells you what you don't want to hear!"

How well do you respond when someone tries to get you correct a fault, especially if it's not something you want to hear? English evangelist George Whitefield (1714-70), mostly forgotten today, may have been the most famous religious figure of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Newspapers called him the "marvel of the age." In his lifetime, he preached at least 18,000 times to perhaps 10 million hearers. His preaching tours up and down the length of the original 13 colonies brought thousands upon thousands into a life-transforming experience of new birth in Christ that sparked what is known as the First Great Awakening; igniting the fire to rid this new land of the moral and spiritual pollutions imposed upon it by Britain. Whitefield's insistence upon preaching to and advocating Christian care for the slave community did more for Christianity to take root among African Americans than anyone else of his time. Yet for all the good he did, George Whitefield was not without his critics. He often received letters of criticism, mockery, or hateful correction. Though at first crushed by such seemingly unfair criticism, he soon learned that the best response to a critic was humility and honesty about himself. After receiving one letter of personal attack, he wrote to its sender stating, "I thank you heartily for your letter. As for what you and my other enemies are saying against me, I know worse things about myself than you will ever say about me. With Love in Christ, George Whitefield."

James urges Christ's followers to Hear God's Word, Hold God's Word to our Hearts, and Heed God's Word. Let's explore The Responsibility of Heeding God's Word and The Rewards of Heeding God's Word.

### **III. HEED GOD'S WORD (James 1:22-25)**

#### **A. The Responsibility of Heeding God's Word**

James points out two options in our response to God's Word. We can "delude" (deceive) ourselves or "be blessed." There are many ways to deceive ourselves. Let's recall Albert Einstein's example:

**1. Avoidance.** We may fool ourselves into believing that neither our Manufacturer nor His Owner's Manual (our Creator and the divinely inspired Bible) exist; or, if they do exist, they have little of value to say to us about how our lives should be run to maximize the great potential built into us by our Designer.

**2. Anger.** We become "irritated," as did Einstein, if confronted with God's truth about ourselves we prefer to avoid. This is the "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" approach to God's Word. We want God's mirror to make us feel good about ourselves just as we are. This "feel-good" popular version of Christianity has much to do with New Age thought that makes gods of human beings. It has little to do with following **Jesus'** teachings of self-sacrifice, humility, service to God and others, discipline of our appetites, forgiveness, and unconditional love. Angry, prideful hostility to God's correction is often the single greatest factor that cheats us from achieving the quality of life our Heavenly Father longs for us to enjoy by aligning ourselves with His wise principles for living. **Vss. 19b-21:** "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." Steve Tran of Westminster, CA, got so angry at cockroaches in his apartment he decided to matters into his own hands. He activated 25 bug bombs (though directions on the label said 2 should do the trick) and closed the door. The fumes reached the pilot light of his stove and created an explosion that sent his screen door across the street, broke all his windows, and caused \$10,000 dollars worth of damage. Steve said, "I really wanted to kill all of them. I thought if I used a lot more, it would last longer." By the way, Steve said he saw cockroaches again within a week. Anger drove him to overreact in ways that did nothing to solve his problem and only made his problems worse. Anger can also fuel such resentment of God's Word that we overreact in ways to make our problems worse.

**3. Apathy.** We look deeply enough into God's Word to learn what needs to be changed to please God and to bless ourselves, but we neglect to make any serious changes. Helen Keller (1880-1968) became so deaf and blind at 19 months due to an unknown illness that she withdrew into a world of defiance and despair until a remarkable teacher led her to believe in and fight for the God-given potential for a satisfying life she still retained. In her book, *My Religion*, Helen Keller commented, "Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all—the apathy of human beings."

**4. Alteration.** To the extent we have opportunity to be "a hearer of [God's] Word," God holds us accountable to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." If we choose to deceive ourselves to evade making the Alterations in our attitudes and actions the mirror of God's Word reveals to us should be made, we are still responsible to cooperate with God to make these changes. **Vss. 22-24** insist: "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."

## **B. The Rewards of Heeding God's Word**

Instead of deceiving ourselves about what God's Word shows us about ourselves and how we should respond, we can use what we learn from God's Word to bless ourselves with liberty and love, as promised in **vs. 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. Liberty.** Why is it appropriate to describe God's Word as "the law of liberty"? Because God's Law safeguards, describes, and enables the life of true freedom into which **Jesus** liberated us! In **John 8:31-32, 36**, "Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. . . . So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'" We need to get past the notion God's laws limit our freedom. Most of

us define freedom as doing whatever we *want* to do. The great Bible teacher Augustine (A.D. 354-430) explained, "freedom" is not "doing what we *want* to do" as much as it is a matter of "doing what we *ought* to do." Anyone who has ever tried to break a bad habit knows what Augustine meant. Years ago when the western U.S. was being settled, roads were often just ruts left by passing wagons. Some of these roads were like good habits that took you someplace you wanted to be. Some ruts were traps that led followers to dead ends or took them where they didn't want to go. A sign on one of these old trails read: "Avoid this rut or you'll be in it for the next 25 miles!"

**2. Love.** In His commandments, the Lord God has taken what is true about Himself (what He is like and what He likes) and expressed this truth as a rule for us to obey. This means if we reject God's laws we are really rejecting whom? God. **Jesus** gave His disciples these parting instructions: "If you love Me, you will keep My commands" (**John 14:15**). **Jesus** strengthened His association of "love" with "law" in **John 14:21**: "The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him." In other words, those who best keep God's laws experience the best wonders of His love. *We do Christianity a great disservice when we present it as a religion of lifeless laws instead of as a relationship of living love!*

## CONCLUSION

Most of us have been blessed by the spectacular images captured by the Hubble Telescope of some of God's most breathtaking creations across the far reaches of the universe [first photo of Telescope]. But when the Hubble Space Telescope first went into orbit 353 miles above the earth, on April 24, 1990, something was obviously wrong. Though the pictures were clearer than those of ground-based telescopes, they were still blurry [photo #2]. It was a terrible disappointment. For a time, a joke made the rounds saying the only thing NASA learned from the Hubble Telescope was to never name a project that rhymed with "trouble." But the problem was identified. Hubble's primary mirror, polished carefully and lovingly over the course of a full year, had a tiny flaw in its shape about 1/50th the thickness of a sheet of paper. This caused the light reflected from the mirror's center to be distorted. Astronauts and NASA staff spent 11 months training for one of the most complex space missions ever attempted [photo #3]. In 1993, a space shuttle mission lasting almost 11 days and requiring five spacewalks (an all-time record) was able to correct this flaw. This transformed Hubble into the telescope that had been originally promised, whose breathtaking, dazzlingly clear images have awed us ever since! [photo #4]. [You Tube video of best Hubble Telescope images e<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzBhB1h9B8I>]

God designed each of us with far more loving care than the Hubble Telescope's primary mirror. Our sinful flaws causes us to be self-centered. This distorts how we perceive the truth and reality of everything around us. God's Word provides us with a mirror that will allow us to see God, our world, and ourselves more truly than the sin-warped mirror of our hearts. To the extent we cooperate with our Lord's complex mission to correct our sinful flaws, by becoming "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves," we are transformed into people through whom others can see breathtaking, even dazzlingly clear images of our Lord and Savior, **Jesus Christ!**