

James 1:22-27, No. 6
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There is certainly a sense in which the verses we are about to read follow naturally upon those we considered last time insofar as James in both sections is addressing our *behavior in reference to the Word of God*. But then the entire book addresses our behavior in that way. It is a book of wisdom, after all. But this next section addresses the Christian life in a different way than in it was addressed vv. 19-21 and introduces a new principle of Christian wisdom.

Text Comment

- v.22 Verse 22 is probably the best known verse in James. [Moo, 89] We've made a point of saying that James, like other wisdom writers, moves from subject to subject with little discernable plan. But in this case there is at least this connection between vv. 21 and 22: in the former we were challenged to "receive with meekness the implanted word" and the latter begins "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Biblical Christianity is never passive; it is always active, a life *to be lived*. [Tasker, 51] If you remember, the Lord pronounced his blessing on those "who hear the word of God and keep it!" [Luke 11:28] And it was Paul, in Romans 2:13 who wrote, "It is not those who hear the law that are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law, or in the language of James *do* the law, who will be declared righteous."

Now it is hardly only Christians who believe that people ought to *do* and not simply to *hear*. Jewish rabbis and pagan moralists said the same thing and say the same thing today. What else does a phrase such as "put your money where your mouth is" or "actions speak louder than words" except being a doer rather than simply a sayer? This is typical of the Bible's wisdom literature as we have already seen. It is commonsensical, so it doesn't surprise us that people who aren't Christians say much the same thing in many cases. But James, of course, is not talking about any *doing*, but doing that is in obedience to the Word of God.

To be deceived in this context is to be mistaken, misled about the true nature of one's religious condition or state.

- v.24 James' analogy is not immediately obvious to the reader, not least because he does not complete the comparison but breaks it off in the middle. So what is the point of comparison: *how or in what way* the man looks is different in each case; *what* he looks at, or *what the result* of his looking is? [Moo, 90] Precisely how is the one who only hears the word and doesn't do the word like a man who looks at his natural face in the mirror and goes away and forgets what he was like? [cf. full discussion in Moo, 90-93]

Commentaries devote pages to this question, so let me summarize. We can see what James is after by noticing how the behavior of the man in the mirror in vv. 23-24 is contrasted with that of the one in v. 25. The first one "observes, goes away, and forgets," the second one "looks into, perseveres, and acts." It is sometimes thought that the

difference that James' is getting at is that the first man just glances at himself while the other man looks intently, or peers into the law of liberty. But, actually, both words convey the sense of careful or concentrated looking. The difference rather is found in what comes after his "looking." In regard to the man looking in the mirror we read that "off he goes." He's seen enough and now devotes himself to other things. But the man who looks carefully into the word of God, takes care to translate what he has read into his daily behavior. [Motyer, 69-70; Moo, 93] *That is, he is a doer of the word.*

- v.25 The picture is of a person who reads or listens to the word of God with the conviction that there is something there of great importance for him or her, something that needs to be translated into action.

We should not think of "the law" here as a reference simply to the commandments of God, the Ten Commandments and the many other commandments that elaborate those ten. James is writing as a Jew steeped in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. *Torah*, the Hebrew word usually translated "law," means "teaching," and includes the entire Bible, not simply the commandments *per se*. It includes rules for living, of course, but also the entire revelation of God, theology and ethics together. In this case, it is the equivalent of "the implanted word" in v. 21 and "word" in vv. 22 and 23 and, indeed, "word of truth" in v. 18, the word that brought us forth to new life.

The law of God is the law of liberty because, as the Bible teaches us in many ways, obedience to it is the path to true human freedom. Everyone wants to be free! It is one of the most powerful of all human motivations, but also one of the least carefully defined or understood. What is freedom? The modern person in the Western World without having given much thought to the question imagines that the law is the enemy of liberty because he or she defines freedom as *thinking whatever one wishes and living however one pleases*. But that is not liberty as the Bible understands liberty and, of course, it is not liberty as a human being craves it. Indeed liberty in that conception, as human experience demonstrates, is more like bondage, because self-indulgence in foolish, willful, and selfish behavior produces human misery and increasing captivity to destructive patterns of thought and life; it never produces a well-ordered, satisfying, and useful life. A husband who says what he pleases and does what he pleases is in the nature of the case a poor husband, and he hardly brings freedom to others in close relationship to him - to his wife, to his children. According to the Bible, the law is God's owner's manual for human life. He is the one who made it, and so he knows how to get the most out of it; how to create a human life that is free to do what human lives ought to do, to create human beings who are free to be and become what human beings were always intended to be and become. Buy a new car and you treat it according to the instruction in the owner's manual, your car will run for years, give you years of trouble-free service. If you hitch it up to a plow, take it into the back forty, and plow your field with it, it won't be long before your car is ruined, a piece of junk, useless to you. Or think of it this way. I wish I were free like Mr. Bechtel at the piano. I can go over and plunk chords, but what I'm not free to do is to play beautiful music on the instrument; and the reason is obvious: I never learned to obey the laws of the piano. Those laws alone give someone the freedom to play beautiful music on the piano.

Remember, the law is an expression of God's own character, perfectly good, loving, and faithful as he is. Therefore, to keep the law is to be God-like and to be God-like is to be good, good for oneself and good for others, and to find in that goodness the fulfillment of one's life. By creating man in his image, God made human life to be lived as a reflection of his character, and when lived in that way the result is *real freedom*, the liberty to be and do what human beings have been made to be and do, to be, as it were, at one with reality.

And so the Christian perseveres in obedience – hard as obedience is with our divided hearts and in a world so full of temptation – because we know that it is in that obedience that everything we hope for in life is to be found. Again, as we have noted before, James seems to have the Lord's teaching always in the back of his mind as he writes. In this case remember what the Lord said to his disciples the night he washed their feet: "If you know these things, *blessed are you* if you do them." That is, *happy will you be if you do them!* [John 13:17]

- v.26 The word group that includes "religious" and "religion" referred to "the external manifestation of [spirituality or relationship with God]" [H. Alford in Motyer, 75] or "the total outward expression of one's theological or spiritual commitment. As we know all too well, both from Holy Scripture and the experience and observation of life, it is possible to be "religious" – by which is meant here the faithful observance of the rituals, the observances of worship, and the performance of what are regarded as religious duties – without living in consistency with the principles that lie behind and beneath those religious observances. This, of course, was repeatedly the problem in the history of Israel: an outward show of loyalty to Yahweh rendered meaningless by indifference to Yahweh's commandments, among others, those commandments that required God's people to care for their neighbors.

In this case James uses the example of an unbridled tongue as the kind of behavior that can nullify the conscientious performance of the rituals and observances of the Christian faith. Unbridled means uncontrolled, as a bridle is the means by which a rider controls the horse he is riding. James might have used anger, or any number of other sins to illustrate his point. But wisdom literature lays great stress on the importance of speech and James is typical of wisdom literature in this way. There are some 60 verses in the book of Proverbs that refer to our speech! [Krabbendam, I, 455] Indeed, he will have a good deal more to say about our speech as his letter continues. This is in large part because the tongue, our speech is in so many ways a window on our inner life, on our true character.

- v.27 Don't suppose that James is providing here a complete definition of true religion, as if *all one had to do* was to visit the needy and keep oneself from the temptations of the world; as if one needn't pray or worship God, needn't receive baptism or participate in the Lord's Supper. He's not saying that any more than Jesus was saying that when in Matthew 25 he taught that he would separate the sheep from the goats on the Day of Judgment according to whether they supplied food to the hungry, welcomed the stranger,

clothed the naked and visited those in prison. In fact James uses the same verb here, translated “to visit,” as Jesus used in Matthew 25:36. Obviously, no one should take Jesus to mean that by not mentioning keeping oneself unstained from the world in Matthew 25, he taught that you could be as sexually promiscuous or as eager for fame and fortune as anyone else, so long as you cared for the poor and visited the prisoners. The point is simply that real faith, hope, and love are demonstrated in practical concern for others, a point the Bible makes repeatedly. Indeed, the care of widows and orphans is a prominent theme in the OT. And here James adds that real faith is also demonstrated by a genuine desire and effort to live a holy life, again a point very often made in the Bible. As Jesus put it, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” [John 14:15] One of Paul’s exhortations to his younger assistant, Timothy, was “keep yourself pure.” [1 Tim. 5:22] Take note once again that the reference to God the Father in v. 27 serves to underscore the relationship between true religion and a life that reflects God’s own. *We are to live like God*, at least as much as mere human beings can imitate his character and his commitments. Or, as Jesus put it, “Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” And, in particular, we are to love as our heavenly Father loves, as he has loved us, the needy and the unworthy, so are we to love others.

By the way, James will take up all three of these ethical concerns – the tongue, concern for the poor and needy, and moral purity – later in his letter.

It is a commonplace of all faithful teaching and preaching of the Bible that salvation requires *both* that we believe *and* that we obey, that we trust the Lord Jesus for our salvation and that we follow the Lord Jesus in our living. Our justification may be by faith alone, but salvation in its entirety requires obedience, that holiness, as we read in Hebrews 12, without which no one will see the Lord. “In his message of the kingdom, Jesus announced the overwhelming, amazing wonder of God’s sovereign grace reaching down to reclaim sinful people for himself. But no one emphasized as strongly as Jesus the need for people touched by God’s grace to respond with a radical, world-renouncing obedience. Both the gracious initiative of God and the grateful response of human beings are necessary aspects of the gospel.” [Moo, 89] Many times, in many ways the Scripture teaches what A.W. Tozer put this way: “Theology of whatever kind is worthless and useless, unless it is obeyed.” [Cited in Krabbendam, 1, 407]

What James says here no serious Christian should dispute, though, to be sure, through the ages some have spoken or written in a way so as to suggest that it was possible to be a Christian, a true believer in Jesus, an inheritor of salvation, without living the Christian life, without obedience to the Lord’s commandments and without what we would call nowadays a Christian lifestyle. But I feel confident in assuming that you know that is not possible. The Bible says that it is impossible too many times and in too many ways. When Jesus said unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of God, he was not talking about your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; he was talking about your obedience. He was not there urging you to trust in him, but to do the will of the Father in heaven. The notion, as it is sometimes described, that a person can have Jesus as his or her Savior but not as his or her Lord – the so-called carnal Christian theory – is never taught in the Bible and contradicts its plainest and most emphatic teaching.

Now James is not talking about the occasional failure of attention, of which we are far too often guilty. My father used to tell a story on himself. He was assisting Dawson Trotman in one of his evangelistic crusades. Dad was a very fine pianist and often helped with the music at such meetings. Dawson Trotman, as you may know, was the founder of the Navigators, and if you know anything about the Navigators – which ministry is every bit an extension of the personality, enthusiasms, and commitments of Dawson Trotman himself – they are very big on daily devotions (often including Scripture memory). This particular morning, Dad came down to the hotel dining room for breakfast, sat down at Trotman’s table, and was immediately asked by the man himself, “Bob, what did the Lord give you in the Word this morning?” Well, my father usually had morning devotions, but that morning he had been late getting up and, well, you get the picture. In great embarrassment he had to admit that he hadn’t read the Word that morning. The sin of sins to Dawson Trotman! He wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice, so he was careful the next morning to read his Bible before going downstairs. Again he sat down to breakfast and again the first thing out of Trotman’s mouth was, “Bob, what did the Lord give you in the Word this morning?” And, though he had read the Word, at that moment he couldn’t for the life of him remember what it was he had read! He was like that man who looks at himself in the mirror and then off he goes, forgetting what it was he had seen or, in this case, what he had read. It was one thing to fail twice at your morning devotions. It was another thing to have to admit that to Dawson Trotman!

We all do that, of course – either fail to read or read with but half a mind – but that sort of forgetfulness is not really James’ point. James knows that we all fall short in many ways, as he will put it in 3:2. He is talking here about the settled convictions of our lives, our real intentions, and, in particular, our eagerness not simply to be known as a Christian but to live like one! Throughout the history of the faith from the very beginning of the story of God’s people in the world up to our own day the presence of *nominalism* in the Christian church has been an immense problem, the church’s ball and chain. By nominalism we mean a commitment that is *in name only*. “Nominalism” comes from the Latin word *nomen*, which means “name.” A nominal Christian is someone who claims to be a Christian, poses as a Christian, may very well be even punctilious in the performance of certain outward Christian rituals and performances, someone who certainly thinks of himself or herself as a Christian, but who lacks any true desire to be Christ’s man or woman in heart, speech, and behavior. *He has the name of a Christian but lacks any real commitment to be a true follower of Jesus Christ* and any aspiration to model his or her own life on the character and the behavior of God himself. The nominal Christian seems to want to love both God and money, to have one foot in Christ’s church while keeping one foot firmly planted in the world, to have the reputation of a Christian – though he would never put it this way to himself – without having to pay for it with the blood, sweat, and tears that real godliness requires. He is the would-be disciple of Jesus who has no intention of taking up his cross to follow the Lord.

Sometimes, alas, this nominalism is characteristic of whole so-called Christian churches. As I told you last time, I have been reading a new biography of J.I. Packer by Leland Ryken. One feature of Packer’s life story is his life-long struggle to remain faithful to the Anglican Church in defiance of its embrace of heresy and its thorough-going acceptance, if not encouragement, of nominal Christianity. Nominalism is a problem endemic to all churches, but, historically, especially to state churches, as for centuries the English Anglican Church has been. If the

expectation is that everyone in a particular country should belong to the church (to the Lutheran Church in the Scandinavian countries, to the Roman Catholic Church in Italy or Spain, to the Orthodox Church in Greece or Russia, and to the Anglican Church in England), nominalism is virtually guaranteed to be the result since such churches can hardly insist that all their members sincerely and seriously practice the Christian faith as that faith is defined in the Word of God. If to be English and Anglican amount to the same thing, a great many Anglicans are inevitably going to be nominal Christians, indeed, to be a Christian came to mean simply to be an Englishman.

Dr. Packer became an Anglican priest or minister when the Anglican Church in England had long been in steep theological and spiritual decline. Heretical teaching was commonplace, biblical convictions were openly mocked by the ministry, and probably most Anglican parishes were useless for leading anyone to salvation in Jesus Christ. Indeed, when he became a Christian as a university student at Oxford, Packer's first instinct was to be angry with the Anglican church in which he had been raised because though he had diligently attended services with his family and as a boy even went through a confirmation class with his parish priest, he never heard the gospel explained and never was challenged to believe in Christ or to repent of his sins or to become a Christian in anything more than name. Nothing was ever said to him about a personal faith in Jesus Christ or the necessity of repentance from sin. His parish church "represented nominalism in a pure form." [306]

But Packer nevertheless remained an Anglican and eventually became an Anglican minister. His eyes were open, of course. He knew his ministry in the Anglican Church was a ministry largely among nominal Christians, though there were certainly parishes that were outspoken in their commitment to the gospel and to the life of faith. Packer's commitment was always to the reformation of the Anglican Church and for some years in the middle of the 20th century, as under the influence of Packer and others the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church underwent a notable resurgence, it looked as if that reformation were underway. Much of his writing during those years was a direct refutation of the views being propagated by this fellow Anglican ministers and he made no bones about it. His riposte to Bishop J.A.T. Robinson's popular accommodation of the Christian faith to modern culture, entitled *Honest to God*, was itself entitled *Keep Yourself from Idols!* That's one Anglican minister talking about another Anglican minister!

The 16th and 17th century Puritans, if you remember, were virtually all Anglicans and were likewise committed to the theological and spiritual renewal of their largely nominal church. John Bunyan, for example in a way typical of Puritan preachers and writers, scatters his *Pilgrim's Progress* with all sorts of pretend Christians, characters who took themselves for Christians but whom Bunyan reveals to be shams: Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Formalist and Hypocrisy, Talkative, and By-ends. The Puritans had many names for people like this: they called them "Temporaries," "Almost Christians," and "Gospel Hypocrites." Some of the great works of Puritan spirituality dealt extensively with this theme of false assurance, of thinking oneself saved when he was not. Such works include William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest*, Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, Thomas Shepard's *The Ten Virgins*, and Jonathan Edwards's *Charity and its Fruits*. Edwards was a later Puritan, but a man of the same school. And here is

Alexander Whyte, who lived much later, but was sometimes referred to as “the last of the Puritans.”

“It is a common saying...that where despair has slain its thousands, presumption [i.e. thinking you’re a Christian when you’re not] has slain its ten thousands. The agonies of the former are indeed more terrible, but the securities of the latter are far more fatal.”
[*Bunyan Characters*, i, 232]

Again, in those years the Anglican Church was a state church and, accordingly, inevitably largely nominal. Many went to church simply because it was what English people did; you weren’t a true Englishman if you didn’t. What is more, as English citizens they were expected to go to church. In others words there was a culture of church attendance and of identification with Christianity that had nothing to do with any personal, serious loyalty to Jesus Christ. They didn’t go because they loved God or treasured his Word or wanted help to live a faithful Christian life. Most Anglicans in the days of the Puritans, and a high percentage of Anglican ministers, neither knew what the gospel was nor cared, and certainly were not committed to live a life of true loyalty to Jesus Christ. The Puritans wanted to change that. That’s where their name comes from; they wanted *to purify* their church. Dr. Packer, who loved the Puritans, was following in their train. He was involved in a great many committees and projects of his church in which he was sometimes the sole evangelical voice and almost always was outvoted. But still he plugged away. He paid a price for his loyalty to the church of his birth and upbringing. Many Christians couldn’t understand how a champion of historic, biblical Christianity could make common cause with a Church full of heresy and naked disobedience to the Word of God. Over time he lost friends and opportunities for ministry for this reason. But still he continued as an Anglican in the Anglican Church.

And so it continued when he moved to Canada in 1979 to teach at Regent College in Vancouver, BC. He became a part of the Anglican Church of Canada, a church in much the same spiritual situation as was the church back home in England, and worked toward reformation without any real success. But recently, as you may know, he finally left the Anglican Church of Canada and allied himself with the Anglican Church of North America, the new grouping of Anglicans who had finally had enough of English and Canadian Anglicanism’s toleration and promotion of theological error and utter indifference to the law of God. The bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada diocese in Vancouver B.C. in which Packer was licensed to preach made the moral approval of homosexuality a requirement for ministers within the diocese. Packer, of course, in loyalty to the Bible refused, and his license to preach was withdrawn. And so it was he left the Church of his birth and of his upbringing and for the years of his ministry for the new, biblically loyal Anglican Church of North America. When a minister can no longer be faithful to the Word of God, when he can no longer keep himself unstained from the world, he has no choice but to follow God rather than man.

Now I tell that story, which is the story of many ministers’ lives, for two reasons. One, of course, is to remind us that churches as a whole, both denominations and individual congregations must also follow James’ counsel here, *must look into the perfect law of liberty and persevere as doers of the Word*. Indeed, it is doubtful that many individual Christians will escape the temptation of nominalism if their churches do not. When churches refuse to be *doers* of the Word, when they

continue to read the Bible in their worship services so that their people remain *hearers of the Word*, when the church continues to do lip-service to the Word, continues to sing Christian hymns about the grace of God and the obligation of men and women both to trust and to obey, continues to collect money for the poor, but then prove themselves indifferent or openly hostile to the will of God as it is revealed in the Word of God, when they openly dispense with the law of God when it conflicts with their modern sensibilities, it is virtually guaranteed that most of their people, in due time will become hearers but not doers of the Word.

And pretty soon – as we are seeing everywhere to be true of such churches – their numbers decline so steeply that very soon they no longer have even hearers of the Word left in their pews. Their people have so completely lost interest in doing that they no longer bother coming to church to hear. Indeed, the interaction between ecclesiastical and personal or individual nominalism is clearly one of cause and effect. The more nominal the church the more its members will be or become nominal themselves. That is why it is so important for Christians to be in churches that help them to keep the edge on their Christian life, that are always challenging them to live their faith, always reminding them of how many reasons they have to love and serve the God who has loved them and served them at such terrible sacrifice to himself.

But the second reason why it is instructive to look at the problem James is exposing here – a perennial problem in Christian history – is that it is easier to see the real nature of nominalism and its effect when they are portrayed on a larger scale. Many things have to be enlarged to be seen clearly: a living cell, for example, or a highly populated area on a map.

James reminds us in v. 22 that the individual nominal Christian – the hearer but not doer of the Word – is easily deceived about his own state. He has no idea that what he does is actually worthless. He thinks he is a Christian, she thinks she is – in a group this size I have an almost moral certainty that there is someone among us this evening who thinks he or she is a Christian and who is in fact not a Christian, not truly, not genuinely – because he goes to church, because she participates in Sunday worship, because they give some money to the church or participate in one of its good causes. He or she easily imagines that someone who does such things must be a Christian. Everyone else considers him or her a Christian, including the minister, why shouldn't he or she. And so they go on with their lives confident that they are among the people of God. Indeed, in some of the most horrifying words in the Bible, the Lord describes such people – many such people he says – finding out only on the Day of Judgment that, while they always thought themselves to be God's people, God himself never considered them to be so.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity.’” [Matt. 7:21-23]

There too the Lord is plainly contrasting what a so-called Christian *says* with what he or she *does*. The Lord here has them saying that they prophesied, and drove out demons, and did mighty works, further to solemnize us. Who of us imagines that we have done things as great as that? If *that* wasn't enough, what about our paltry observances and performances? Remember,

Judas performed miracles and drove out demons with the rest of the Twelve Disciples when Jesus sent them out in his name on a preaching tour! These people did everything except the Lord's will. What the Lord is saying in this provocative and memorable way is that we must be Christians indeed not simply Christians in name; followers of the real Jesus not simply polite admirers of a Jesus of our own imagining.

But easy as it is to deceive ourselves, it is harder to fail to see the problem when it is displayed on a much larger screen. The nominal churches – and this is a point so obvious and so important that every Christian in the United States of America ought to be reckoning with this question and this issue and this fact frequently – the great churches of our land, the historic churches of our land are disappearing before our eyes. Christian churches though they claim to be, they stand for nothing distinctly Christian, they do not require that their people keep themselves unstained from the world, even most of their ministry to the poor has about it the air of progressive politics rather than real Christian love and charity. They are hemorrhaging members so rapidly that the date of their death can now be precisely predicted and it does not lie very far in the future. The Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Lutherans – the once great Churches of our land; at least the large old denominations of that type – are all in their death-throes. Few will make it much past the middle of the century in any meaningful institutional existence.

It is harder for an individual to see that he is not being blessed by the Lord because he is only a hearer and not a doer of the Word. Especially this is so in a country like ours where so many live comfortable lives, at least outwardly. But when whole churches are collapsing and soon to disappear, who can avoid facing facts. Such churches are a warning to us as individual believers: how easy to be a hearer and not a doer, how easily one can deceive oneself, how impressive the outward appearance can remain while within there is very little to demonstrate a true loyalty to Jesus or his Word. Why should the Lord bless those churches when their entire life is defined by the fact that they are hearers but not doers of God's word, when they do not look carefully at the perfect law of liberty to find their marching orders, and when they are unwilling to imitate the character of God in their own lives? But, then, why should God bless *me*, if I am in my own life what those entire churches are in theirs?

John Bunyan reminds us that the reason God has given us his Word is *precisely so that we would live by it*. Or as he put it: “the soul of religion is the practical part.”

We have so far looked at the issue in the terms James uses here: the biblical summons to be doers and not just hearers. But, as we conclude, let us remember that this is what the Bible so clearly teaches to be God's purpose in salvation, to produce *doers*! It is his purpose not just to save our necks but to transform our lives, to make us, as Paul puts it in Titus 2:14, a people for his very own, “zealous for good works.” He might just as well have written “zealous to *do* the Word of God.” It cannot be otherwise. God, being perfectly good and just as he is, could never forgive our sins so that we could continue to sin. As the beautiful hymn has it:

“[Jesus] died that we might be forgiv'n, he died to make us good...”

To be a doer of God's word is to honor the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made for us! And what is the best antidote to the nominalism that James condemns here and warns against? It is actually

quite simple. The way to keep from being a nominal Christian, a hearer but not a doer, is always to remember how important it is not to be one and how many there are in the church and have always been who gladly hear but never do.

We have said that James is throughout his letter simply putting the teaching of Jesus in other words. He is certainly doing that here, reproducing especially the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon we learn that, whatever else, the Lord expects that his people will live differently than unbelievers and that they will live better. They will be more humble, more pure, more honest, more faithful, more sincere, more merciful, more loving, more committed to his cause. And he admits in the final paragraphs of that sermon that there will be among his followers people who hear but do not *do*. He is not there as James is not here distinguishing between people who claim to be Christians and people who do not; between people who are known as Christians and people who are not. He is not distinguishing between people who go to Christian churches and people who do not. In both cases these are people who *hear the Lord's words*. Both groups belong to the Christian community, both hear sermons in church, both are acquainted with the Bible. But one group of people *only* hear, the other group *hears and does!* Now, to be sure, as we learned the last time from vv. 21-23, we cannot always tell for sure who belongs to which class of Christian: the spurious or the genuine. Many of the hearers-only do not know themselves to be so. The foundations of their life are hidden from their view, and they don't care to investigate and make sure. Sometimes they are only exposed by the storms of life. Sometimes the true nature of a person's commitment to Christ is not exposed until the judgment day.

It is not easy to do the will of God, to hear and to do the Word of God. The Bible is honest about that. But, facing the hard work it may require, recall James' words: "he will be blessed in his doing!" God knows that you are doing as well as hearing, and he will reward you! And what possibly can compare with that!