

RED OAK CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE GUIDELINE*Psalms 31:3***HEARERS AND DOERS OF THE WORD**

When we are talking about Hearers and Doers of God's word, we are talking about those who have been converted to Christianity. The context brings out this fact, *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures* (James 1:16–18). The American Standard 1901 says “brought us forth” with the word of truth. Peter says, *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever* (1 Peter 1:23). Paul says, *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (Titus 3:5)* The phrase “washing of” shows that the washing is prompted by the regeneration. Jesus said to Nicodemus, ... *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (John 3:3–5). What do we learn? We are regenerated (or re-begotten) when we hear the word and believe it. We are born again when we are baptized into Christ in water. James then is talking to Christians in this context. After James reminds the brethren of their spiritual begetting and rebirth, he begins to instruct them on how to be not only hearers of the word but doers also. To be a hearer and doer of the word, James says there must be certain criteria in place in one's life to make that possible. What would those be? **1.** One must be “quick to hear” (prompt or ready). It would be such a grand thing to have brethren eager to hear what God has to say to them! **2.** One must be “slow to speak.” Have you ever noticed that someone who talks all the time will not be ready or even able to listen? Of course, this rule is great in all points of life, but in particular, in this context, it is dealing with the word of truth and how we receive it. We should always weigh our words carefully and, at times, simply be quiet and listen. **3.** One must be “slow to wrath”. Again this would be a character trait that is needed in all of life, but here it is dealing with receiving the word. If it is the case that a person has trained himself to be a ready and eager listener and has overcome his tongue to keep quiet, but becomes angry when the word comes to his ears and causes trouble and division, all he has accomplished is help for the devil. James says, *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (vs20) Solomon also spoke concerning this, Proverbs 14:29 *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: But he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.* **4.** One must have a “pure heart”. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls* (James 1:21). If we develop a quick ear, a cautious tongue, and a calm temper, along with the purifying of the heart, we prepare ourselves as good soil for the “implanted word” (Luke 8:15) *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.* Next James tell us in verse 21 that the hearer is a “receiver” of the word and proceeds to emphasize the fact that the word will save ones soul. James then draws a contrast; *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves* (James 1:22). “Receiving” represents the foundation of the Christian life, and “doing” indicates our fruit. It is worth noting that the receiving of the word is an imperative in the Greek language therefore we understand it to be a command that we receive the word, and with that receiving comes the doing.

A lot of hearers of the truth are not really on their guard against the danger of being “hearers only.” For example, what do we do when the service is over? “Well, I'm done with that, now I'm going fishing.” Some will comment about the lesson or sermon at their exit and then dismiss the subject matter from their minds until they are reminded of it again in another lesson. Some will talk about how they enjoyed the sermon, which is great, but why does one enjoy a sermon or lesson? Is it because they have in place all the criteria we mentioned earlier and thus they are good, fertile ground to receive it? Hopefully, that is the case! Or is it the case that the enjoyment came from being entertained with some milquetoast, feel-good preaching that failed to address sin? This begs the question, what is the purpose of preaching? It is not that the people may be happy or get some sort of enjoyment from it (although that would be an added benefit to

those who properly receive it). Preaching is done so that people may be profited, edified, and inspired to live an upright, good, godly life. The highest praise that can be bestowed upon a preacher is not to tell him how much his preaching is enjoyed on Sunday, but to let him see how well it is being translated into life on the other days of the week and how it helped you overcome some problem in your life. The purpose of the pulpit is to be practical and concise in proclaiming God's word. It is a means for man building. Its work is to promote the doing of the Word of God in our everyday lives. People who are satisfied with the self deception of "hearing only" as the sum of Christian duty are persons who have no idea about the nature of true religion. Their profession is no more than an empty house. The "hearer only" is on the road to final spiritual ruin.

Next, James uses a simile to help enforce the imperative. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was* (James 1:22-24). The simile here is that of two men looking at their faces in a mirror. "The word of truth" is the spiritual glass in which we may see the reflection of our souls. The hearer only, after he has momentarily recognized himself in it, goes on his way and forgets his moral uncomeliness. It is often convenient not to remember that what he saw was the features of "the old man, which waxes corrupt after the lusts of deceit. In contrast, the hearer and doer of the word looks into the mirror that he may learn the law of his renewed life. The gospel law is not a terror to him. He is willing to be obedient. It is to him "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (ver. 25), which the Holy Spirit is writing within his heart.

Finally, James demonstrates three elements of contrast between the conduct of the two men as it relates to the gospel mirror. First, The one-man "beholdeth;" the other "looketh." In the case of the hearer only or foolish hearer, it is only a passing, cursory, careless glance of the eye—a look at the mirror, and himself in it. But, in the case of the wise hearer, it is the serious, eager, anxious look at the soul: this man stoops down to takes a close look "into" the law of liberty. Second, the one man "goeth away;" the other "continueth" to look. The foolish hearer glances briefly because he is not interested. He says to himself the sermons are always dull and is ready to dismiss the subject of Christianity as soon as the church service is over, but the wise hearer goes on looking. His examination is persistent and unabated. He looks so long that what he sees becomes indelibly impressed upon his heart. Finally, the one man "straightway forgetteth;" the other is "a doer that worketh." The "hearer only" soon dismisses the thought of the spots and blemishes which he saw upon his spiritual features when he glanced at them in the gospel mirror, but the wise hearer looks carefully and continuously because he wants to know himself, and because it is his purpose to be always a "doer." He has learned that it is the goal of his life to obey the perfect law of liberty. By doing this work, he will gain both knowledge and self-control, and in doing it he will be "blessed." Which person do you want to be?†

James A. Cossey

We are now meeting in the conference room at the Microtel Inn each Sunday morning!

Bible Study: 9am

Worship service: 10am

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