

Living Biblically

Scripture Focus

James 1:19-27

Key Verse

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

Overview

Living biblically includes more than consistently listening, reading or memorizing Scripture. God provides specific commands, directives, prohibitions and warnings in His Word. In order for a believer to live biblically, he must, out of a heart of love for God, do what God commands in His Word. This text presents the believer with a command, an illustration of that command, and an example of living out that command.

Theme

God is worthy of all our life. He has revealed His purposes to man in His Word; therefore, believers are to respond to Him by “Living Biblically.”

Desired Learner Response

The learner will be challenged to examine his life in order to determine if he is truly living out the purposes of God as revealed in the Bible.

Outline

- I. Living Biblically Requires Believers to Receive the Word of God (19-21)
- II. Living Biblically Requires Believers to Obey the Word of God (22-27)

Getting Started

Ask: How many of you remember the last thing someone told you to do? Did you do it?

Emphasize that we have a choice to listen and obey those in authority over us or to ignore and disobey them. In the same way, we have a choice to listen and disobey God’s Word or to listen and obey God’s Word. No neutral ground exists when it comes to hearing the Word of God. James presents two ways to live and commands believers to choose to live biblically. To live biblically is to live according to the specific commands, prohibitions and directives in the Bible. Believers are called by God to hear the Word and then alter their lifestyles in order to conform to the requirements of God as revealed in His Word.

Searching the Scripture

I. Living Biblically Requires Believers to Receive the Word of God (19-21)

Explanation:

v. 19: “swift to hear” – make sure you get the message right; the attitude of a servant taking orders. See: Proverbs 17:28; A person that is swift to hear is one that realizes that in every stage of life, he has much to learn. Living Biblically includes a teachable heart that is eager to receive the Word of God.

“slow to speak” – Don’t think of your words while others speak. A person that is slow to speak is one that thinks through his responses before speaking them. Biblical Living requires believers to examine their words in light of Scripture in order to ensure their words are edifying to others and honoring to Christ.

“slow to wrath” – weighing matters in wisdom, not emotion. Biblical Living calls believers to speak out of the knowledge of Scripture and the love of God. It requires believers to respond to others in a manner that expresses their best spiritual interest.

v. 20: “wrath” – an inner anger not necessarily evident to others. This wrath is an anger that drives the believer to act in his own interest rather than in the interest of others and for the glory of God.

“produce” – The wrath of man is counterproductive to Living Biblically for it causes man to be chiefly concerned with himself. This same word is used in 1:3 and reminds us that God is continuously working in the hearts of His people so that they may be consumed with Him and not with self.

“righteousness” – Wrath in man does not accomplish what is right in God’s eyes. God calls His people to direct their lifestyles by the commands of His Word. A selfish heart that is filled with wrath will result in decisions that come from everything but the Word of God.

v. 21: “lay aside” – continuously lay aside. James is reminding believers that it is the Word alone that should compel a believer to action. Our tendency is to allow our sinful hearts to direct our course of action. God calls believers to continuously lay aside anything that influences our decisions contrary to God’s Word.

“filthiness” – moral defilement. All that seeks to lower man’s pursuit of godly living.

“wickedness” – deliberate acts of sin. All actions that come out of a heart consumed with sin and concerned with self.

“receive” – teachable; continually. Just as we are called to continuously lay aside those things that are contrary to God’s Word, we are also called to continuously take in God’s Word. We are to continuously fill the reservoir of our hearts and minds with the Word of God.

“meekness” – humility; put aside self. A similar idea as “swift to hear” is included in the word meekness. James is reiterating that believers, no matter how educated or how long they have read or taught the Bible, are to continuously take in the Word with humility.

“save souls” – initial salvation from penalty of sin; progressive salvation from power of sin; completed salvation from presences of sin.

Application: Biblical living is the product of practicing obedience from the heart. As we practice heart-felt obedience, areas of life which were not in accord with the ways of Christ are conformed to His image. Instruct your class to take time tomorrow to examine their lives and determine one way in which they are not living according to the ways of Christ described in the Bible. Encourage them to list these in a journal and then during each day of this week to search the Scriptures for specific passages which speak to these areas in need of change. Such examination and Scriptural meditation will lead believers to carefully practice Christ-like living.

II. Biblical Living Requires Believers to Obey the Word of God (22-27)

Explanation:

v. 22: “doers” – prove yourself; what we are? A doer is not just a person that does the Word. A doer is one whose heart has been transformed by Christ and out of a changed heart is continuously obeying the Word of God.

“hearers” – one who sits in the audience to listen to a singer or performer. Notice the word “only.” It is necessary for believers to sit in humility as a student and listen to the teaching and preaching of the Word. It is also necessary for a believer to take on himself the responsibility of putting the commands of Scripture into action.

“deceiving” – Mature believers cannot be satisfied with hearing and not doing the Word. Those who hear without doing make a serious miscalculation as to their maturity. To believe maturity is occurring apart from the consistent doing of the Word is self deception. True growth in Christlikeness is evidenced by obedience to the Word out of a heart in love with Jesus.

v. 23: “mirror” – made of polished brass or gold; had to be positioned just right for a person to clearly see themselves.

v. 24: “forgets” – sees his sin and God’s grace, but walks away unchanged. This image is of a person that hears the Word of God, but makes no life changes as a result of what he has heard.

v. 25: “perfect” – not distorted; inerrant; sufficient. The Bible is completely true and totally sufficient for every life and every part of every life. The Bible tells the believer what to believe and what not to believe. The Bible instructs the believer in how to behave and how not to behave. It is perfect and is a perfect guide for all of life.

“law” – requires obedience. It is a reminder that godly living is more than hearing the Word, but also includes accountability before God to obey the Word.

“liberty” – freedom to obey provided by grace. Believers are enabled by grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit to obey the Word of God. We were enslaved in our sin before Christ, which is to say, we had no freedom in sin to obey Christ. Christ set us free from sin; therefore, we are now free in Christ to obey His Word.

“continues” – application to life: The same idea as verse 21. We are to continuously take in the Word of God and continuously live out the Word of God.

“blessed” – genuinely happy; profound inner joy. Living joyfully free in Jesus is accomplished by the believer who saturates his mind with the Word and allows the Word to dictate his every word, deed and desire.

v. 26: “religious” – The idea is presented of a person that believes he is obedient to the Word.

“tongue” – the mouth exposes the true condition of the heart. External religion is powerless to control the tongue. Only a mind and heart saturated with the Word and a lifestyle that is continuously being transformed by the Word will consistently speak words that honor Christ. Ungodly speech reveals a sinful heart.

“useless” – no value to man or God. The man that is convinced of his own spiritual maturity, yet continuously speaks words that are destructive to the body of Christ and inconsistent with the Bible deceives himself and does not benefit the Kingdom of God.

v. 27: “pure and undefiled” – freedom from the contamination of forgetful hearers and faithless talkers. Notice that the One who determines the purity of one’s faith is God.

“visit” – caring for others; selflessness characterizes maturity. James provides one example of selfless living that characterizes those that hear the Word and conform their lives to the pattern of Christ.

“orphans and widows” – two of the neediest groups in the early church. To serve these two groups was to invest your life in people that could do nothing for you in return. This act of service was evidence that a person was more concerned with others than with self.

“keep” – regular; continuous action. The same idea of continual Biblical Living is presented in verses 21 and 25.

“unspotted” – morally and spiritually pure. An unspotted life is one that is lived by the clear mandates of Scripture. He does not walk in places where temptation will come; but when it does, he makes his decisions from the directives in the Bible.

“from the world” – A definable, obvious, evident difference. The use of the word world is one that reminds the believer that he has been set free from sin and as a doer of the Word is to live radically different from those still in the bondage of sin. That difference is not a general moral living, but rather a life that is modeled by the Word of God.

Make It Personal

While the book of James is often referred to as the epistle of practice, this does not mean that it is all about behavior. In fact, throughout the book James consistently aims at the heart of his readers. As a result, it is important to help your students understand that God is not ultimately after a people who act differently. He is after much more than that. Instead, God is cultivating a people for Himself who, because they are fundamentally transformed on the inside, display His character on the outside. With this in mind, it is essential that Christians diligently examine their own hearts in light of God’s Word, praying for the Holy Spirit to continue the process of change (sanctification). It is only then that we will truly be Christ-like doers of the Word and not merely hearers.

Memorize

Encourage your students to memorize James 1:23-25

