

## Bondservant of Christ: Be a Doer of the Word – Part 1

### Key Verses:

*“This you know, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 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; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 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.” James 1:19-25*

*“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ also said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:8-13*

*“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” James 2:14-17*

*“But someone may well say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,’ and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was Rahab the harlot not also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” James 2:18-26*

### Teaching Outlines:

- A. But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (1:22)
  - 1. 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 (1:23)
    - a) For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (1:24)
    - b) But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it (1:25a)
      - 1) Not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer (1:25b)
      - 2) This man will be blessed in what he does (1:25c)

2. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls (1:21)
  - a) This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (1:19)
  - b) For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:20)
- B. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (2:10)
  1. So, speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (2:12)
    - a) For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY' also said, 'DO NOT COMMIT MURDER' (2:11a)
    - b) Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (2:11b)
  2. If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture (2:8a)
    - a) 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF' (2:8b)
    - b) You are doing well (2:8c)
  3. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (2:9)
    - a) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy (2:13a)
    - b) Mercy triumphs over judgment (2:13b)
- C. Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself (2:17)
  1. What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? (2:14a)
    - a) Can that faith save him? (2:14b)
  2. If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food (2:15)
    - a) And one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled (2:16a)
    - b) And yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (2:16b)
- D. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (2:24)
  1. But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (2:18)
    - a) You believe that God is one (2:19a)
    - b) You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (2:19b)
  2. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (2:20)
    - a) Was Abraham our father not justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (2:21)
      - 1) You see that faith was working with his works (2:22a)
      - 2) And as a result of the works, faith was perfected (2:22b)
    - b) And the Scripture was fulfilled which says "And Abraham believed God" (2:23a)
      - 1) it was reckoned to him as righteousness (2:23b)
      - 2) And he was called the friend of God (2:23c)
    - c) In the same way, was Rahab the harlot not also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (2:25)
  3. For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead (2:26)

## Introduction

We have been studying James thematically due to the way he constructed his epistle. Being influenced by wisdom literature, he put his epistle together in a similar format. To avoid jumping from verse to verse through an inductive approach, which is the best way to study a book of the Bible, I chose to study this epistle thematically by categorizing the verses and paragraphs by theme. This format prevents us from having to jump from verse to verse throughout the entire study and, instead, stick to a theme at a time. There are six major themes addressed by James: humility, endurance, wisdom, wealth and poverty, being a doer vs a hearer of the Word, and true religion/controlling the tongue. We are now entering a study of what I consider to be the central theme of epistle – being a doer of the word and not merely a hearer. This is the section where we will consider James' teaching on faith and works which tie in to being a doer of the Word. Throughout his epistle, James dived into what authentic faith looks like, behaves like, speaks like, and lives like. Authentic faith is the central theme around which all the others are connected. As I stated in another section, James wrote much on the difference between the haves and the have nots. One either has humility or they do not. One either has endurance or they do not. And in this section, one either has authentic faith or they do not. We will start by studying his observations on hearing the Word and then being a doer of the Word.

Many of us sit in a gathering place Sunday after Sunday listening to someone teach about Christian living. That teacher may use God's Word to teach, or may base the lesson on some other source, such as philosophy, morality, self-help motivations, therapy, personal opinions, whatever. And if you are fortunate enough to attend a church where the Bible is still being taught, the question for you is what do you do with the teaching you receive each week? If you have a personal devotion each day, what do you do with the input from that devotion? And if you are doing the Word rather than being merely a hearer of the Word, that will transition into the section on faith and works. The paragraphs or sections of the epistle that we will study on faith and works have been subject to controversy, so I want to begin by stating some basics very clearly before we begin.

Salvation is by grace alone! No one can earn God's salvation. It is a gift of mercy and grace offered by God to the lost sinner and does not involve work or merit on part of the sinner. There are Bible verses that make this clear and here are a few:

Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

Titus 3:5-7 *"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

Galatians 2:16 *"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."*

This lost sinner need only confess their need and believe in the resurrected Lord to receive the gift of salvation.

John 5:24 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."*

Acts 16:31 *"They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"*

Romans 10:9-10 *“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”*

1 John 5:13 *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

However! ... there is another side to this. There should be and needs to be evidence of salvation. There is simply no way that the resurrection power of the risen Christ can abide in a human being without there being evidence. Paul summed it up this way, *“I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* (Col. 2:20) Jesus did state that belief in Him is essential to the attainment of eternal life, but He also said this:

Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8 *“Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance”*

Luke 6:43-46 *“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”*

And this is what James is getting at in his epistle. He did not advocate for a works-based salvation. Rather, James argued there should be evidence of faith in the life of the person professing belief in Jesus Christ. Basically, if someone simply states they have faith without any works, or fruit, being generated from the life of the believer, then that type of faith is dead and useless. This is what we will be studying in this section on the theme of being a doer of the Word and not a mere hearer.

We begin by studying 1:19-25 and, for our starting point, we look at the one-liner to sum up this brief speech that James gave his audience. It is verse 22, *“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”* The ESV translates the verse more accurately, *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving themselves.”* James used the verb γινεσθε, which is present tense and imperative mood, indicating a command that is to be conducted now and can more accurately be understood to mean “to come into a particular state or condition.” The “particular state or condition” is to become a “doer” which is translated from the noun ποιητης, a derivative of the verb ποιειω. This will become significant in a moment. The noun only appears in the New Testament six times, four of them in this epistle (1:22, 23, 25; 4:11). One of the uses in Acts 17:28 is in reference to an author or maker of poetry. Simply put, “be doers,” but doers of what?

James instructed his audience to be doers of “the word” and the Greek noun he used was λογου, the genitive singular form of the prominent noun λογος. At the writing and circulation of this epistle there was no New Testament that James would have been able to refer his readers to be doers of. There were only writings preserved from ancient Jewish writers that would now be part of our Old Testament, wisdom, law and prophets. But James did not seem to be referring to those writings or he would have used the Greek noun γραφη. This is the word Paul used in 2 Timothy 3:16, *“All Scripture is inspired by God.”* If he had wanted his readers to be doers of the written law, prophets or wisdom literature, James would have used γραφη. But he didn’t. He told his readers to be doers of the λογος, the word. I believe James was referring to the Sermon on the Mount as taught by Jesus who is the living λογος. (John 1:14) Why do I see this as being the reference? Let me explain further.

Start by asking a question. Why does James instruct his readers to be doers of the word and not merely hearers in the first place? Recall that James is influenced by two main sources: wisdom

literature and the teachings of Jesus, mainly the Sermon on the Mount. This is not a place to get into the details but one could argue that James' epistle is his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, taking the sermon and applying it to real world situations that the scattered believers he wrote to are facing in their lives. There was no New Testament circulating at the time this epistle was written, but someone had to have preserved what Jesus said on the mount that day. It is recorded for us in the gospel of Matthew and, to a lesser extent, in Luke. Perhaps it was Matthew who wrote down the words spoken by Christ that day. Whoever did, copies of Jesus' sermon had probably circulated before the gospels were ever penned, especially after Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. This is the "word" James references. At the end of the sermon, Jesus ended his teaching with the analogy of building your house on the solid rock. In this analogy He made the following two statements, and the ESV translates them more accurately than the NASB.

*"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* (Matthew 7:24)

*"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand."* (Matthew 7:26)

First, Jesus laid out the difference between one who is a doer of the word and one who is merely a hearer of the word. The doers are wise and build their houses, i.e. their faith, on solid rock. The hearers are foolish and build their houses on sand. Second, Jesus used a couple of significant words in these verses that James also used in 1:22 – λογους, the genitive plural of the noun ρος (word), and ποιει, a form of the verb ποιειω (to do). With his penchant for the one-liner, James repeated what Jesus had said at the end of His sermon with his own phrase, *"Be doers of the word and not merely hearers."* James added the phrase "who delude themselves" or "deceiving themselves" with the participle παραλογιζομενοι. This is a compound extending from the root word ρος using the middle deponent verb λογιζομαι, indicating that the subject performs the action, and means "to consider, regard, ponder, think upon" and the preposition παρ, meaning "in sight of" but also "in deviation from" or "inconsistently with." The participle describes someone who hears the word but then thinks upon or considers the instruction inconsistently or in deviation from what is intended. In other words, they believe that hearing is enough. There is no doing. Jesus described this type of listener as one who builds their house on sand which is a foolish thing to do. There is no foundation to the house, and it will wash away. It will be so with the mere hearer of the word who does not become a doer. There is no foundation to their faith, and like the sand that can carry away a house, so can a mere hearer's faith be carried away with self-deceit.

Jesus stated that *"anyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man."* He had just presented a gathering of people with the teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus covered several topics such as prayer, judging others, anxiety, generosity and lust, several of which James addressed in his epistle. One of the first topics Jesus addressed was anger. *"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment."* (Matthew 5:22a) Just before differentiating between the hearer and the doer, James brought up the topic of anger. *"This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."* (1:19) James had much more to say on how we speak, on the tongue and all the problems that an untamed tongue causes, which is applicable to not holding anger in one's heart. We will look at this further in the next section on the theme of true religion and controlling the tongue. But James added an interesting statement between the verse on anger and the verse on being a doer of the word.

In 1:21 James stated, *“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”* James instructed his audience to *“receive the word implanted.”* First, James used the verb δέχομαι which means “to receive by the hearing” or “to learn or acquire knowledge.” The verb is in the aorist tense which indicates the fact of the action but is silent on when it took place or how long it lasts, and the mood is imperative meaning it is a command. James again uses λογος, “word”, rather than γραφη, “writings.” And I believe, as stated before, that by using the term λογος he is referring to the Sermon on the Mount. But this time the noun is modified with the adjective ἔμφυτος, meaning “implanted, ingrafted,” and is only used here in the New Testament. This is a combination of the preposition εν, meaning “in” or “at” and the verb φυω which describes a sprouting or growing. This is describing something that grows within but does not originate from within. Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount had been circulated. James’ audience would have been familiar with the teaching. They had received it, and they needed to allow it to grow within them by becoming doers what had been received.

James then added *“which is able to save your souls.”* What did he mean by that phrase? Today in “Christian America” we read that phrase, or one like it, and automatically assume that James is referring to eternal salvation. When that occurs, we get all up in arms claiming that James is proclaiming a works or obedience related salvation. But is that what he meant for his audience to understand? First, James stated that the implanted word “is able to save” and used the verb σωζω, which he used five times throughout the epistle. It does mean, and can be translated, “to save.” However, it also has a number of other meanings, such as “to rescue, to deliver, to heal or restore to health, to preserve safe, to cure, to set free.” In our modern American society, we are more safe and secure than many throughout history, and even in the world today, ever knew. We overlook and completely miss that most humans throughout history didn’t know where their next meal was coming from or if they could remain safe from invaders. There are humans in the world today being kept in situations and circumstances that would boggle the minds of most in this comfortable, leisure driven society. During James’ day, for those individuals and families, salvation meant keeping themselves and their children alive or keeping a monarch happy. We toss around terms like “salvation” from a very secure perspective and have no idea what James’ audience faced. They were being hunted down and persecuted for believing in Jesus Christ. One wrong word in anger or a poorly thought-out decision by one person could result in destruction being brought upon their entire family or village. In those circumstances, people were a bit more sensitive to what they say or who they trust. James, in writing his epistle, was not simply offering platitudes or positive thinking advice in how to be happy but attempting to keep the new believing community together and alive. So, when he advised his readers to take seriously the words of Jesus’ sermon it was meant to, as an example, keep one from mouthing off to some authority figure and getting thrown into prison. In other words, being *“quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”* could be actual life-saving advice for those Jewish believers who were being hunted and persecuted, living in new locations without any support system, and struggling to find food and shelter to keep themselves and their families alive.

Regarding anger, James also stated in 1:20, *“for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”* In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made two statements in the section on the Beatitudes regarding righteousness:

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* (Matthew 5:6)

*“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:10)

The righteousness Jesus referred to is not something that is attained within the human heart or being. This righteousness is one that is hungered and thirsted for as one would for a meal that has yet to be consumed. It is one that persecution can be caused for the sake of. It is external of the believer in Christ and so James stated that anger, which can also be translated as wrath, hostility, or strong displeasure, will not achieve the righteousness of God. James used the noun δικαιοσύνη which means “being in agreement with God’s standards or being in proper relationship with God.” Jesus stated that it is blessed to hunger and thirst for righteousness. He stated that it is blessed to be persecuted for righteousness. Not only is anger to be avoided for practical reasons, but it is also good to be left behind for eternal reasons. God’s righteousness has no common ground with anger, wrath and hostility.

Let’s pause for a moment and consider the perspective of James as he wrote these words to the scattered believers. James did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah during his childhood and young adulthood. It was probably not until Jesus had been resurrected that he believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. I Corinthians 15:7 points out that Jesus specifically appeared to James apart from all the apostles. We know nothing more about what the appearance involved but it probably changed James’ life from that point forward. Whatever life path James was on up to that point, he left behind to follow the man who he had known as his half-brother all his life. That man became his Christ, his Lord, and he became His bondservant (James 1:1). He chose not only to follow the one who had been executed by the Roman authorities but the one who had been rejected and turned over to those authorities by the leaders of Judaism. James turned against all of that, what he had known since he was a child. He responded to the call of Jesus and renounced all that he knew of the world. All that Jesus said about the blessed in the Beatitudes applied to James. He chose to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to be merciful and to hunger and thirst for righteousness. This was not a mere matter of intellectual consent for James but was a full life commitment that would eventually get him executed by stoning on orders from the high priest Ananus. James sent his letter to encourage the scattered believers that the one they had chosen to follow required of them a life that was holy, set apart from the world that they lived and moved in. By reminding them that the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God, he was reminding them of everything that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He told them that it was not enough just to have heard the Word, but that they were to be doers of the Word. And if anyone understood the level of commitment involved and needed to be a doer of the Word, it was James.

James went on to describe the hearer of the Word with this analogy. *“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; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”* (1:23-24) James used the noun εσοπτρον, translated “mirror,” which is only used here and in 1 Corinthians 13:12 in the New Testament. Paul stated, *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”* Hearing the word is like a man looking into a mirror as one holds the word up to compare how they look next to the word spoken. They see how they compare to the standard, the word, but then they turn away and forget what they saw.

James didn’t say that the one looking into the mirror forgets what they look like but stated *“he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”* James used a form of the verb ἐπιλανθάνομαι which is a combination of the preposition ἐπι, meaning “on or upon” and the verb λανθάνω, meaning “to escape notice, to keep secret, to be hidden.” The verb in the text has the implied meaning of being covered over or to be concealed. In other words, this is a deliberate act of forgetting. The one looking into the mirror, who had received the word, understood what they saw but then deliberately decided to look away and forget *“what kind of person he was.”* James used the adjective ὁποῖος.

This is related to the interrogative pronoun *ποῖος*, meaning “what?” or “what kind?” conveying the force of a question. This is not a simple wondering about but implies an investigation. The one gazing into the mirror sees what kind of person they are, but instead of asking anything about what they see, decides instead to deliberately forget what they saw. For those who sit in churches listening to homilies and feel-good therapy sessions meant to encourage you and lift you up, you may want to ask if these sermonettes are truly raising the mirror of the Word in front of your face and challenging you to ask, to investigate, what you see. Or are you one who week after week attend one of these services and walk out not having the foggiest notion of what you just heard? And deliberately forgetting what little of the Word you may have received.

### **The perfect law of liberty**

James then offered the juxtaposition to this along with an added word of encouragement. *“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.”* (1:25) Instead of pointing to the one looking into a mirror, James pointed out one *“who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty.”* First, James pointed out a big difference between a hearer and a doer of the Word. The doer of the word is one who “looks intently.” This is the translation of the Greek word *παρακύψας*, which is a combination of the preposition *παρα*, meaning near or nearby, and the verb *κύπτω*, which means “to bow the head” or “stoop low.” This verb is also used in John 20:5 and 11 where Peter and Mary are looking into the tomb where Jesus’ body had been laid to rest. The etymology of the word tells us that the word means more than simply looking into the tomb but that they are looking into the tomb in a way one would investigate something that is problematic, something that averted their full attentions to an occurrence that they never imagined could exist. It describes one taking a close and attentive look with intent to gain an understanding. When James pointed to the *“one who looks intently at the perfect law”* he described a person whose full attention was drawn to a matter that they had not expected, and taking an attentive look. One gets the description of someone driving down the road and suddenly catching something out of the corner of their eye, something unexpected, that takes their attention from the road and onto the side matter causing them to swerve. That is what the “perfect law, the law of liberty” causes. You receive it and it is so distracting that it takes your full attention causing you to swerve or look away from what you had been focused on.

This intentional look was to be given to *“the perfect law, the law of liberty.”* James described the law with the adjective *τέλειος* which can mean “perfect, mature, finished.” Jesus used the same word in the Sermon on the Mount. *“Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48) He made this statement within the context of His discussion of personal relationships: murder, forgiveness, adultery, divorce, making vows and loving your enemies. Jesus described one who is complete in character and will not fall short of the standard expected by God. The point He was making was that His listeners needed to demonstrate maturity, completeness, just as the heavenly Father is complete. The expectation was that the follower of Christ would demonstrate a wholeness in their relationships with others, that they would relate to others in the same manner that God relates to people. The adjective appears in other New Testament passages with the same understanding in reference to maturity or completeness:

*“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature”* (1 Corinthians 2:16)

*“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.”* (1 Corinthians 14:20)

*“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”* (Colossians 1:28)



*“But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:14)*

James used this adjective to describe the Greek noun νομος meaning “law.” This noun is used with a variety of contextual meanings throughout the New Testament. It can mean a law (Romans 4:15); the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17); an Old Testament reference (John 10:34); a legal restriction (Romans 7:2,3); a standard (Romans 3:27); a rule of life or conduct (Galatians 6:2). This last meaning is the one James referenced in 1:25. Jesus also used it in this way in Matthew 7:12, *“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* When we read the word “law” in the New Testament it is easy to assume the meaning of a formal, government issued law, and certainly there are contexts where νομος does refer to this.

James used the noun in this way in 2:11. But there is more to νομος than a strictly legal meaning. There is a contextual meaning that includes how we interact with and treat other people such as we find in Romans 3:27 and Galatians 6:2. Jesus stated that He “did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” the law (Matthew 5:17) He introduced a new way of interacting with others that was not based solely on obligations imposed by law. Jesus introduced this in the familiar passage of Matthew 22:36-40.

*“‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’”*

We live in a society that consists of and depends upon self-determining individuals. Our laws extend from the freedoms we enjoy and are meant to preserve that freedom. Our laws govern society as a whole and the individual within society. We may not always agree but do understand the parallels between our individual freedoms and our laws that govern. They exist together to support and strengthen one another. Within the societal context of the New Testament and when James wrote his epistle, the Jews understood law. What they struggled with was understanding the freedom that Jesus introduced based on a relationship with God the Father through the forgiveness of sin, which abrogated the Mosaic Law. And it wasn’t that the Mosaic Law had been obliterated, but that it had been fulfilled and was no longer the standard by which one’s relationship with God was determined. A person could have access to God through the person of Jesus Christ because of His death and resurrection. The Law was no longer a burden and had been replaced with a freedom to live in the new life provided by Christ. The new life was no longer about fulfilling the Law but about living in a relationship with God the Father, through Christ and the power of His Spirit, and in relationship to others. This “law” that James pointed to was a new rule of life and conduct, and it was a complete and mature rule that was to be given one’s full attention with intent to investigate, to take in and to understand, not one to be heard and then immediately dismissed and forgotten.

To further support the assertion that James was not referring to the Mosaic Law, or a rule of law, when he used the phrase “the perfect law,” he next explained that it is a *“law of liberty.”* He used this same Greek noun in 2:12, *“So speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”* That noun is ἐλευθερία and means “freedom, liberty, to not be enslaved.” This is essential to be understood correctly because it supports the assertion that James did not promote a works salvation. Someone who is a slave can understand freedom in the sense that it is the opposite of who they are and freedom is separate from, apart from, who they are as a slave. However, someone who is free understands freedom as a way of life. The noun ἐλευθερία describes freedom as an essential quality of being free. In a sense, to the one who is free, freedom is the governing law of their existence. The perfect law James referred to is this law, the governing law of being free for the one who has freedom. This freedom is totally separate from any type of slavery. His reference to “works” were

always meant to determine whether one's faith was being lived out under this governing law of freedom in Christ. Here are other uses of the noun ἐλευθερία in the New Testament:

*"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."* (Galatians 5:1)

*"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* (Galatians 5:13)

*"Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil but use it as bondslaves of God."* (1 Peter 2:16)

When James differentiated between the hearer and the doer of the word with the description of "one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty," he was pointing to the freedom given in Christ. The literal translation of 1:25 would read like this; *"But the one having looked intently into the perfect law, that of lawful freedom."* The noun ἐλευθερία was meant to clarify what "the perfect law" was. His audience was to give full attention to and take a close look at, to investigate, the freedom given in Christ. This is not a matter to be simply heard and then forgotten. James told his readers that a doer of the word is one who takes seriously what this perfect law of freedom is, what it offers, and to give serious and deliberate attention to it. Don't be one who is a forgetful hearer. Become an effectual doer, because this is one who *"will be blessed in what he does."*

James gave his readers a couple of more things to consider for those who may have questioned what it meant to "look intently at the perfect law" and to be one "blessed in what he does." First, James used the participle παραμεινας which is a combination of the preposition παρα, meaning "near, nearby" and the verb μενω, meaning "to stay," and other uses in the New Testament express a sense of staying in the same place. In the gospel of John, it expresses the meaning of abiding within a teaching. The verb παραμένω, from which our participle derives, means to remain constantly with, to stand with or to abide, to stay by someone's side. So, when one looks intently at the perfect law of liberty given in Christ, they are to remain with it constantly, to abide with it, to keep it by one's side. This perfect law of liberty is to become a constant companion, a way of life, for the one who believes in Christ. This goes even a step further than being a doer of the word, but almost as if you are taking up residence with it so that it becomes a way of life. Second, James described the doer with the phrase ποιητής έργου, "a doer of the work."

In 1:22 James pointed to the necessity of being a doer of the "word". Now there is the added description of being a doer of the "work." What is this work? Once again, we look to the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus stated, *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* He made the statement in the paragraph describing the disciples as salt and light, and He did not say that men will see God, but that they will see the good works. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." He did not say that they were to be the light but that they already were the light. It was the disciples themselves who were the light, not a thing that they did. This makes more sense when put into its proper context. This paragraph on salt, light and good works is just after the Beatitudes which give us a larger context to understand what good works are. The good works are poverty, mourning, gentleness, mercifulness, peacemaking, being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and being insulted and rejected. Quite a list! This is not the way we think of good work, even in the context of serving others. We want our good works to be good deeds, not a manner of living, such as being poor, persecuted and insulted. But good deeds bring attention to the doer and that is not what Jesus described. Jesus stated that the good works would glorify the Father. If the good works were human virtues and actions, then the glory would be toward the doer. And this is, quite frankly, what most

prefer in our society. Yes, even Christians want to be recognized for doing good. We crave attention. And outside the Church community our society is rife with celebrities, politicians and athletes who crave attention for the good works they perform for the less fortunate in our world.

This is an important change in perspective for the believer in Christ. It is not about what you do! It is about who you are! And this is the point that James hammers on over and over in his epistle. Is your faith authentic? Are you a doer of the word? Do you hear the word, receive it, and then give your full attention to it so you can gain an understanding of it, making it your constant companion? Do you take it so seriously that you also become a doer of the good works described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? Or are you more focused on performing good deeds that draw glory to yourself and make you feel good about what you've done for someone? Being poor is not the same as giving to the poor. Being meek is not humbly but aggressively pursuing your dreams and overcoming the odds in the attainment of personal success. Being merciful has nothing to do with releasing criminals from wrongdoing or allowing someone who is clearly involved in unrepentant, blatant sin to sit in church with you as you sing worship songs in a darkened theater. There is a clear difference between mercy and tolerance. Are you being persecuted for the sake of righteousness? Do people insult you and falsely say all kinds of things against you? Understand there is a clear and distinguishable difference between being and doing, and the follower of Christ must wrestle with this. You must! And if you aren't, then you simply don't get it. There is a doing in following Christ, but that doing comes out of your being in Christ. You cannot perform deeds and work so that you follow Christ. You follow Christ and then the power of Christ produces the life of a disciple inside you reveals you as the salt and light that glorifies God. The good works that glorify God are produced by one who has heard the call of Christ through His Word and is a follower of Christ.

**The theme of being a doer of the Word will be continued in part two.**