

Summer 2020



James 1:22

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Reflection

It has been said that James, the brother of Jesus, was more a preacher than a writer, and that the book of the New Testament that bears his name is more like a series of sermon notes than a letter. The book of

James certainly reads like the outline of a sermon. It is filled with memorable illustrations drawn from all walks of life, rhetorical questions, and startling statements meant to jolt the congregation into action. And it contains more imperatives – that is, more commands – per word than any other book in the New Testament. It seems that James shares his brother Jesus' directness and as leader of the church in Jerusalem some measure of his authority. His book is fervent, urgent, immensely practical and quite frankly, often extremely blunt. Like in today's verse, an easy one to remember, but a hard one to do, James 1:22,

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

A preacher might put it this way, as Chuck Swindoll did,

‘Let’s pretend you work for me. In fact, you are my second-in-charge in a company that is growing rapidly. I’m the owner and I’m interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new overseas office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family and move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy organisation at home. I tell you that I will write to you regularly and give you direction and instructions.

I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe

and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist's room and she's doing her nails, and surfing the internet with the radio blaring. I look around and notice that the bins are overflowing, the carpet hasn't been vacuumed in weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I ask about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, 'I think he's down there.' Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our Sales Manager.

I ask you to step into my office (which seems to have been turned into a games room).

‘What in the world is going on?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, look at this place! Didn’t you get any of my letters?’

‘Letters? Oh, yeah – sure, got every one of them. As a matter of fact ... we study them regularly. We’ve even divided into small groups to discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of them are really interesting. You’ll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed some of your sentences to memory! One or two of us have even

managed to memorise an entire letter!
Great stuff in those letters!

‘Okay, okay – you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed and even memorized them. BUT WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?’

‘Do? Uh – we didn’t do anything about them.’¹

Now of course such behaviour at work would be absurd, in fact, it would be professional suicide. You would never behave like this at work. How much graver then is it to hear God’s word and remain unchanged by it?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Improving You Serve* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), 170–71

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Think & Pray

Consider this morning the commands of Jesus Christ, the writings of Paul, the sermons that you've listened to, the conclusions that you've come to when studying the Bible in private and in small groups. Have you changed? Are you continuing to change in your character, in your relationships, in your outlook on life?

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Just like that boss Jesus has left but he

is coming back soon. And in the meantime we've been entrusted to carry on his work. He has entrusted us with very clear and important instructions in the Bible and on his return we will be called to give an account. Are you deceiving yourself in your Christian faith? We are saved by faith alone but faith is never alone. Genuine faith is always followed by works or we are deceiving ourselves. As James says so succinctly,

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Pray over this verse. Pray that you wouldn't just read it, but that you would do it. Thank God for his grace and forgiveness for the times you don't. And pray that this coming

year would be a year of action; a year in which you take great delight in both listening to God's word and doing it.