



Highlight (Scripture references and Introduction.)

James 1:22-25

INTRO: The Bible is at the same time a great *treasure* and a great *trust*. It's a treasure that *changes* our hearts and a test that *reveals* our hearts. Every believer deals with the tendency to only *own* a copy of the word without tending to *obey* the content of the word. A great test of the sincerity of our faith and devotion is in whether or not we obey God and apply the Bible. Scripture warns us about this in many instances:

See if you can find a common theme in these passages: *Having a form of godliness but deny the power thereof* (2 Tim. 3:5). *These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me* (Matt. 15:8). *Do not be merely hearers of the word, but be doers of the word* (James 1:22-25). *Thy word I have hid in my heart that I may not sin against God* (Psalm 119:11). *To obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Sam. 15:22). All of these passages give emphasis to the importance of applying scripture and obeying God.

Isn't it true that: Unless you un-wrap the package and eat, you can starve to death in a grocery store. Unless he actually eats the food, being surrounded by tons of food does a starving man no good. The same is true when it comes to Christians and the Bible – ultimately and in the end, if we don't apply scripture and obey, the other disciplines related to the Bible are of no good.

Until we are applying the Bible to our lives, we are denying the power of godliness
Until we are applying the Bible to our lives, we are just talking the right talk – and talk is cheap!
Until we are applying the Bible to our lives, we are just tickling our ears with hearing. Until we are applying the Bible to our lives, memorizing Scripture is selfish and self-seeking. Until we are applying the Bible to our lives, all of our religious "sacrifices" are from impure hearts.

Let us, then, value the treasure and honor the trust!

TANSITION: In this lesson we will be talking about the importance of applying the Bible to our lives. This lesson will ask and answer three simple questions about applying the Bible.

Explain (Context and Commentary for the Scriptures.)

Point 1. What is the problem with NOT applying the Bible to our lives?

- a. We seem to be delighting in our devotions more than in God Himself. ***"These people honor Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me."*** (Matt. 15:8). The disciplines are not the end. They are the means to a greater end – godliness that glorifies Him.

- b. We are living with deception. James speak of people who do not apply the Bible to their lives as being like people who wake up in the morning, look in to the mirror, see a messy bed head, and then turn and walk away forgetting the need for a shower and grooming. (James 1:22-25)
- c. We are posturing ourselves for discouragement due to the lack of God's power and peace in our lives. God has not, is not, and will not ever bless a life of spiritual stagnation and disobedience. On the other hand, though the cost of obedience and applying God's word to our lives is high, He will bless obedience with His power and peace; without which the believer will experience great discouragement. (2 Tim. 3:5)
- d. Simply put? Dis-obedience. The scripture is clear when it asserts that, **"...he that knows to do right and does not do it, it is sin to him."** (James 4:17). Not applying what scripture teaches us is to live in disobedience.
- e. We are cultivating a diminished discernment – the way to sharpen and train our conscience and to develop a sensitive discernment of the voice God is by the application of His word – the Bible. (Rom. 12:2; Titus 1: 10-16 –esp. v 15).

DISCUSSION

- ☐ What does it look like to delight in devotions and disciplines more than in God Himself?
- ☐ What are some of the reflections God's word makes of us when we look into it? And, why do we ignore them?
- ☐ If someone misused a financial gift you gave them, would you continue to give to them?
- ☐ Name some practical sounds and sights we become deaf and blind to – and what's the correlation to obeying God's word?

Point 2. What Are the Pre-requisites for Applying the Bible?

a. It begins with Initiation. (Ezra 7: 10)

In previous lessons we have discussed the importance of *reading* the Bible and *studying* the Bible. Those are the results of taking the initiative to spend time communing with God through His word. The Bible tells us that Ezra made this a priority – **"For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel"**. And, likewise, the *application* of the Bible will never be possible until we discipline ourselves to continue to take the initiative and seek God through His word. As we do that, He teaches us more about Himself, His will, and His kingdom. **Here is the subtle key:** application assumes information which, in part, is the result of

initiation. This is, in part, why the Psalmist requested of the Lord, “**Open my eyes that I might behold beautiful things from your law**” (Psalm 119:18). It’s through initiating communion with God through reading and studying the Bible that He teaches us Who He is, what to do (application), and how to do it (application).

b. The second pre-requisite is Illumination. (1 Cor. 2:14)

It is humbling and exciting to know that God wants to reveal Himself to us. Primarily, God uses creation (Ps. 19) and the Bible (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12) to do this. *Illumination* is the theological term given for God’s gracious enablement of the hearer to understand the meaning of His word – the Bible. The *work* of God and the *word* of God are His primary means of revelation. Illumination functions in relation to the word of God (the Bible). Since we can only apply and obey what we understand, we need help in understanding God’s word.

Creation is referred to as *general* revelation and is used by God to point man to Him and cause man to ponder the path of his own life – those two things can happen through man’s simple *observation* of all God has made – His work. On the other hand, the Bible, unlike the *general* revelation of creation, is referred to as *special* revelation. While there is much about the Bible that makes it special, for this lesson one reason will be given; the Bible is *special* revelation because it requires special aid or *illumination* for one to understand it – “**But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned**” (1 Cor. 2:14). Without the aid of Holy Spirit, no one can understand the meaning of God’s word – the Bible. Again, *illumination* is God’s gracious enablement of the hearer to understand His word.

Think of illumination and revelation as a painting that is in a dark room. The painting (*revelation*) is obscured and hidden because of the darkness in the room. But, once the small accent light (*Holy Spirit*) is turned on above it, the beauty of the revelation (painting) is made known and enjoyed (*illumination*). Holy Spirit helps us to see the truth!

Observation of creation can lead man to ask the right **questions**, but only the gracious *illumination* of the written revelation (Bible) by Holy Spirit provides man with the right **answers**. **Here’s the subtle key:** One can only apply what they know, and one can only know what God has revealed by Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14).

c. The third pre-requisite is Memorization and Meditation. (Psalm 119:11; 1:2)

After Holy Spirit has illumined our hearts and minds to the meaning of God’s word we are then responsible to respond to the truth and apply His word. For consistent application to be possible, believers must practice the disciplines of memorization and meditation. In prior weeks we have studied those two disciplines. Now, again, we see their importance!

For the application of the Bible the writer *groups* these disciplines because they are *inseparable* - one points to the other. The writer *refers* to these disciplines because they are *indispensable* for godliness – application of the Bible will never happen without them. The space of this lesson won’t

allow for sufficient explanation, but, it is very clear that God designed our minds and emotions to influence how we live. The Bible says, “As a man thinks in his heart so is he” (Prov. 23:7). “...to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). “He is kept at perfect peace whose mind is fixed on You” (Is. 26:3). Whatever is in our heart and on our mind greatly influences how we live.

So, the Psalmist wrote, “**Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.**” (Ps. 119:11). This is an obvious lesson in the importance of memorizing and hiding/ “**treasuring**” God’s word in the deepest recesses of our being. *Treasuring* God’s word refers to placing such a value on it that we hide it away for safe keeping. On another occasion, in reference to the godly person meditating on God’s word, the Psalmist wrote that he/she “**meditates day and night**”. This is an obvious lesson in the importance of keeping God’s word in the forefront of our minds. The original Hebrew word for “*meditate*” refers to a cow chewing on their cud; they chew it and chew it and chew it and chew it and . . . Whitney’s words are very vivid when he writes:

Most information, even biblical information, passes through our minds like water through a sieve. There’s usually so much information coming in every day that we retain very little. But when we meditate, the truth remains and percolates. We can smell the aroma more fully and taste it better. As it brews in our brain, the insights come. The heart is warmed by meditation and cold truth is melted into passionate action.” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, p. 74)

Any believer who is serious about obeying and honoring God will discipline themselves to memorize and meditate on God’s word. **Here’s the Subtle Key:** We won’t always have a bible in our hand; so, we must have it in our hearts (Memorization) and on our minds (Meditation). All of our actions are a reflection of what we value and the expression of what’s on our minds and our thinking. Application of the Bible is no different – we must value it enough to memorize it so that we can set our minds on it enough to practice it.

DISCUSSION

- ☐ What hinders some people from initiating a life of seeking God through His word?
- ☐ Create or think of a metaphor that illustrates the principle of illumination.
- ☐ What are some barriers to scriptural meditation?

Point 3. How Do We Apply the Bible and Obey God? (John 13:17)

It is crucial that we understand that though there are benefits to *static* memorization and conversation about the Bible, the greatest blessings of God are graciously given to those who obey the word. Concerning the scriptures, Jesus said, “...**blessed are you if you do them.**” Knowing what the Bible says is good; but our knowledge is not worship. Talking about and explaining God’s word is good; but our conversation itself is not worship. Instead, what God desires is *dynamic* application and obedience. Application that flows out of love and sincerity is true worship.

So How Do we Practice Dynamic Obedience?

a. We Should Obey God Pointedly.

The term '*pointedly*': Though it is sometimes used in a negative sense, it means to make one's response obvious and with intentionality. The writer employs this term to capture the idea of immediacy. That is, to apply the Bible and obey God immediately.

When Jesus called His first disciples and said, "***Follow me...***" the Bible records their response as, "***Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.***" (Mark 1:17-18). The disciples left everything to follow Jesus! They also did so immediately. There was no wondering where their love and loyalties lay. **Here's the principle:** Delayed or partial obedience is immediate and total disobedience. When God speaks we should obey *pointedly*!

b. We Should Obey God Prayerfully.

As was explained above, we aren't praying about whether or not we *will* obey? For those in love with Jesus that is a settled issue! Rather, we are praying about what that obedience looks like – the *How*? Illumination has told us *what* to do and now we need wisdom to know *how* to do it. When God speaks the believer should cry out to Him expressing their desire to obey, confessing the weakness of their flesh, and the need for wisdom. The Psalmist revealed his understanding of this when he wrote, "***Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path***" (Psalm 119:105) and so did Solomon when he encouraged his son, "***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding.***"⁶ ***In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.***" (Prov. 3:5-6). The psalmist and Solomon both knew that they needed God's wisdom and guidance for obeying Him. **Here's the principle:** As followers of Jesus we not only want to do the right *thing*, we also want to do it the right *way*. It is incredibly encouraging to note the sufficiency of God's word in showing us *what* to do and *how* to do it. In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 Paul says that the Bible gives us **information** - "*doctrine*", **confrontation** - "*reproof*", **correction** - "*correction*", and **application** - "*training in righteousness*". When we pray, we can be confident that God will take us from information to application.

c. We Should Obey God Powerfully

Just as our flesh could not give us insight to understand God's word, neither can it give ability to obey God's word. Our flesh is dead and lifeless – it is totally contrary to God's nature and God's will (Rom. 8:10). How, then, can we obey?

We obey God in the power of Holy Spirit. Time and time again we are told to be filled with Holy Spirit; as compared to living in the weakness of our flesh. "***And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit***" (Eph. 5:18) "***But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.***" (Gal. 5:16). Just as we make a decision to seek God in His word, we must also make the decision to yield to His Spirit. That is, we must seek to live the wonderful Spirit-filled life – that is a life of abundance and power.

Being filled with God's Spirit is not something that is reserved for the spiritually elite. Being filled with His Spirit is something that is promised to those who are pure and faithful. Even at the risk of

it sounding formulaic, the writer will mention three simple steps that lead to being filled: Seek to be clean and pure before the Lord, confessing all known sin; Surrender to His known will – express your desire to honor Him; Finally, ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. Jesus’ words are penetrating when He said, ***“So if you, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*** (Luke 11:13)

Here’s the principle: Obedience is only possible when done in the power of Holy Spirit.

d. We Should Obey God Purposefully

Knowing that the costs and demands of vision fulfillment are often overwhelming and discouraging, financial expert Dave Ramsey says that our **why** must be bigger than our **what**. The *what* is the goal/vision, but the *why* is the motive.

As believers seeking to obey God, the goal really isn’t obedience. Instead, the goal is worship; that is, to worship God through obedience. This is often referred to as giving God glory. Because glorifying God is the supreme purpose for our existence, there can be no greater motivation for our obedience. It was **for the glory of God** that young David was willing to face the demands and dangers of fighting the giant (1 Sam. 17:46-47). Second, we are motivated **for our own good**. While our own good should never be first, it is not a bad or inappropriate motivator. God has promised blessing, favor, and success to those who live for Him and by Him. The Psalmist describes the blessed life of those who obey God for the glory of God. ***“That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”*** (Psalm 1:3) WOW! What a privilege to give Him glory and receive His good! **Here’s the principle:** Even if our good doesn’t come on this side of eternity let us be sold out for the glory of God!

DISCUSSION:

- ☐ What are reasons for which believers delay in obeying God?
- ☐ Name several risks in trying to obey God in one’s own strength.
- ☐ Give 3-5 inadequate reasons for which believers may obey God’s word.
- ☐ How might being rightly motivated change one’s willingness to obey?

Application (What does God want me to do?) **Respond** (What specific commitment will I make?)

When we apply the Bible we are being sanctified and begin to look more and more like Jesus, and become better postured and positioned for His service. Looking more *like* Him and living *for* Him brings Him glory and will also lead to our good – Wow! What an amazing way to live!

Over the last several weeks we have talked much about the Bible. But, here’s the question: What are you going to do with all that has been written, studied, and discussed? Make the decision that you will seek God through His word and, that as He speaks, you will obey. This call to Bible intake has really not been about commitment to the Word of God; rather, it’s about communing with the God of the Word.

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