

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 19, James 1:22-27

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 19, James 1:22-27.

We're ready to pick up now with James 1:22. As I mentioned, this is actually the third subunit here in the second main unit of James 1:2 through 27.

Just remind us that James 1, in my judgment at least, serves as a kind of overture for the rest of the book that he introduces in a general way really virtually all of the major themes of the book, which he then will go ahead in the remainder of the book in chapters 2 through 5 to develop. But he presents these main themes within a framework within chapter 2. In 1:2 through 15, the framework really has to do with the triph of the Christian life over and through trials, through the wisdom that comes from God. Here, in 1:16 through 27, he talks about the triphs of the Christian life over deception through the power of the Word.

So, when we come to verses 22 through 25, which has to do with this business of being doers of the Word and not here's only deceiving yourselves, which has to do really with the Word itself, not in relation to other things. Word is talked about in relation to other elements in verses 16 through 18 and also in verses 19 through 21 and will be again in a sense in verses 26 through 27. Here, he talks about the Word as such, and he presents this passage here, as I say, as a means for avoiding deception and embracing knowledge.

That, of course, is emphasized in the surrounding paragraphs here. But we've dubbed 1:22 through 25 requirements of the Word, and as is the case in many of these subunits or paragraphs in chapter 1, he begins with an exhortation which he then goes ahead to substantiate. We have the same kind of phenomenon here.

The exhortation, of course, is found in verse 22, but be doers of the Word and not here's only deceiving yourselves. Now notice that he engages in a contrast here within this exhortation. He begins with the positive aspect of the exhortation, be doers of the Word, and then by way of contrast, this really a kind of correlative contrast, negatively, not here's only, then that is modified by the participial phrase deceiving yourselves.

Here, the word deceive is paralogizomai. It's a different word from deceive than what we had in verse 16, which is planaō, and he'll use a yet different word for deceive in the next paragraph in verse 26. Then he substantiates this exhortation in

verses 23 through 25, and he begins by talking about the negative, about being a hearer only, and then ends with the positive, being a hearer and doer.

So, he says with regard to the substantiation of those who are hearers only, for if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like, of course here you have a comparison, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror, and then he goes ahead and substantiates that comparison, for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. And then he goes back to substantiate this in terms of the positive, in terms of the person who is a doer of the Word and not simply a hearer, but he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets, but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing. And, of course, you'll note that you have the substantiation here reinforced by the chiasm.

He goes from positive in the exhortation, from positive be doers of the Word to the negative, not hearers only, and then in the substantiation, he reverses the order, begins with a negative, for he who hears only is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror, but he who hears and does, that is to say, looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, being not a hearer who forgets, a hearer of forgetfulness, but a doer of the action, will be blessed in his acting. So, A-B-B-A, this chiasm that we have here, and of course, as we mentioned, chiasm typically emphasizes the first and last elements, and of course, he wants to emphasize a positive here, the exhortation to be doers of the Word, which begins and ends this paragraph. Now again, the notion of deception, in this case, as we mentioned, *paralogizomai*, appears at the beginning of the paragraph.

That was the case also in verse 16, and that will be the case again in verse 26. And also, by the way, its contrast, its negative corollary, *know this*, appears at the beginning of the preceding paragraph in verse 19. Here, the deception involves deceiving oneself as to one's salvation and what is necessary for salvation.

As he will say in verse, as we say this because of verse 21, receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls, but be doers of the Word and not hearers, only deceiving yourselves. Again, in context, the deception seems to be about one's own salvation and what is necessary for salvation. And of course, this anticipates what he will say in 2:14, what does it profit my brethren if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? Now, you have, of course, a contrast here with the end of verse 21, which is, of course, indicated by, in the RSV, the word but.

It's actually *da*, which is a mild connective in the Greek, but the RSV translates this as but, suggesting that what he says here in verse 22 contrasts really what he has been saying in the preceding material. I think that if in fact you do have contrast here, as the RSV takes it, it involves a, it involves a contrast with a possible misreading or

possible misconstrual of verse 21, and also a possible misconstrual of verse 19, where in verse 19 we read, let everyone be, every man be quick to hear. As we mentioned there, quick to hear the Word of God, for one thing.

And also, at the end there of that paragraph, verse 21, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. It would be possible for the reader coming off of verses 19 through 21 to draw the conclusion that what is, what is, what is necessary, perhaps the only thing that is necessary, is to, is to, is to hear the Word, be quick to hear and to understand the business of receiving the Word as simply hearing the Word without any reference to acting upon it or doing it. So, it's that possible misconstrual from verses 19 through 21 that he seems to correct here by way of, by way of contrast.

Now this hearing only involves more than simply listening to the Word. It involves accepting the Word as a Word of truth, verses 18 and 21, giving, one might say, superficial, creedal assent to it. This anticipates verse 19 of chapter 2, you believe that God is one, you do well, even the demons believe and shudder.

As we're going to see when we get to that point, that has to do with creedal affirmation, believing that God is one, making the creedal and affirming the creedal statement that God is one, and really accepting it up to a point, accepting it up to a point, accepting the Word as a Word of truth, giving creedal assent to the Word, being the Word of truth, accepting it as a Word of truth up to a point. That seems to be what he has in mind when he says when he talks about being hearers only of the Word but refusing to allow its truth to change our basic outlook or to affect our behavior, especially amidst the challenges of life. Now he's going to come back to this point really in 2:14 through 17.

What is a profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but not works, can his faith save him? And by the way, this word here that is translated, being a doer of the Word, is, poietes, but is, at least in terms of concept, related to the notion of working, doing or working. What is a prophet, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works, can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. That's why I say I think that he has in mind here the notion of refusing to allow the truth of the Word to change our basic outlook or to affect our behavior.

The structure of this passage, especially the relationship of verse 21 to verse 22 and following, and especially verse 25, but he who looks into the, , into the perfect law, the law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets, but a doer that acts, shall be blessed in his doing. The structure of this passage then implies that salvation, by which he means present deliverance, points toward final, eschatological, or end-

time deliverance. I say present deliverance because he talks about this business of doing the Word as, as, as, , as relating to the, to, to, to the Word as a law of liberty, the law that frees now, that delivers now, that grants freedom now. But also, when he says at the end here, that person shall be blessed in his doing, he typically, James, typically uses blessed language to refer to end-time or eschatological salvation, as he has already in 1:12.

Blessed is a man who, blessed is a man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. And again, in 5:11, the same kind of thing, , where he says, , behold, we, , we, we call those blessed who were steadfast, you have heard the steadfastness of Job, Job, and have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful, pointing to the fact that Job was better off at the end than he was at the beginning. So, James uses blessed language here consistently to refer to the blessedness of future eschatological end-time salvation.

He indicates then that being the doer of the Word involves present salvation, that is to say, experiencing in the present life freedom, liberty, and deliverance from bondage to evil, but then also blessedness at the end of life towards a life that is coming. That, that, that, that, , that, , salvation, he says here then, both present and future is mediated through action. You have really the sacramental character of behavior here is mediated through action by being not a hearer of the Word, but a doer of the Word.

That one experiences salvation in the very process of doing. If one is not a doer, that person does not have salvation. Now, this is substantiated by the illustration regarding the mirror in verses 23 through 25.

There is an issue in the interpretation of this passage as to whether this is a parable or an allegory, but actually, I think that that distinction or that that difference is, really overplayed here on the part of many scholars because, as we mentioned earlier in this video presentation, a parable, parables as used in the New Testament, and by the way, you find this also parables in the Old Testament. I refer you to perhaps the most famous parable in the Old Testament at all, the parable of the rich man and the poor man and his, and his lamb, that Nathan spoke to David there in the 12th chapter of 2 Samuel, that a parable has one main point, which does not exclude the possibility that the details have, have their own spiritual counterparts. But in the Bible, parables have one main point, and the details quite often typically have spiritual counterparts that support or enhance that one main point.

And that really is what you have here. So, I do think you have a parable that has really expected allegorical aspects to it, expected, in terms of what we are familiar with in terms of the parables in the Bible, both Old Testament and New. So I think it

is, preferable to view this, as this illustration as a parable that has certain allegorical elements.

That is to say, certain details here are meant to point toward certain realities in our life or in the life of this person who looks into the mirror and either goes away, forgets, or goes away and acts appears into it and acts. Now, according to, , this understanding then of the illustration that we have, the point is this: it makes no sense to look at your natural face in a mirror, see dirt or other imperfections that could be corrected, only to go away without doing anything about it. If that is what one does, why look into the mirror in the first place? It makes no sense because it makes no difference.

Likewise, persons who look into the law see themselves, not their natural face, of course, but their spiritual face, both who they are in their inadequacy and who God made them to be and expects them to be in their potential. If they do more than simply look, katano'o, which in this context has to do with the quick glance, if they do more than simply look into the law but peer into it, the word here is parakupto, which really means to bend down and to, to bend down and to look intently and constantly and in an enduring sort of way, if they peer into it, allowing it by putting it into practice to shape the very essence of their character, and more than that, allow what they have seen actually to determine the whole of their behavior, they will be blessed. That is, they will experience salvation in the process of their doing or on the basis of their doing.

Now, we note that the law here is described as a perfect law of liberty. It is perfect, knowing, again, how James uses teleos or perfect throughout the book, it is perfect in that it is complete. It contains all that is necessary for salvation.

James may actually be echoing, perhaps even alluding here, to Psalm 19, verse 7. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, again, tying into this notion of wisdom that is so prominent in James. And by the way, of course, this business of saving the soul is, from Psalm 19, is picked up in verse 21, which is able to save your souls.

In other words, the law is perfect in that it can perfectly save. One needs nothing; one can perfectly save; one needs nothing more than it. This salvation, of course, we're going to get back to in what sense is the case. This salvation involves, among other things, liberty or freedom, the perfect law of liberty.

Now, later in chapter 2, verse 12, James will once again refer to the law as perfect. He says here in 2:12, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the, excuse me, talks of the law as, as a law of liberty in verse 12, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. He says there, and this, of course, goes back to verse 8 also, if you really fulfill the royal law, according to the

scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well, which indicates that, that when he talks about the law as being the law of liberty, he's indicating that the law liberates, the law frees, the law grants freedom, but what does it grant freedom from? Well, according to 2:12 and 13, of course, it grants freedom from judgment, but beyond that, it grants freedom from self-obsession because the law of liberty in 2.12 has to do with what he says, what he calls the royal law in 2.8, according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, freedom from self-obsession so that one can truly love the neighbor and fulfill the whole of the law.

Now, also, by the way, if we interpret this passage here, verses 1:22 through 25, in light of what he goes ahead to say in 2:8 through 13, with regard to the royal law and the law of liberty and the like there, we find that really what he's talking about in terms of the law being a law of liberty, the law that frees and the law that saves, that the law can free, the law can save, if in fact, you're talking about the law as interpreted by and fulfilled in the gospel. That's why in 2:8, he talks about fulfilling the royal law, as we'll see when we get to that point, the law of the King, the law as King Jesus has reinterpreted it and has proclaimed it, with the love command at the center, whose possibility of fulfillment comes through accepting the gospel in faith, as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory to one. In that sense, the law is the word of truth that produces new birth and that blocks or prevents one from truly, and actually frees one from all that would block or prevent one from truly loving the neighbor as oneself and thereby fulfilling the law.

So, the law not only commands, it also provides the ability to obey. But once again, it's a law as taken up by Christ, as interpreted by Christ, as proclaimed by Christ, and as brought to fulfillment by Christ, which becomes operational or realizable in us as we exercise faith in Christ, as we hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ to one. It provides the ability to obey by freeing from bondage to self-interest that keeps persons from obeying the law.

Now, he goes ahead and rounds this out in 126 through 27, talking about the religion of the word. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

So, here, of course, you have basically this passage structured according to the contrast between true versus vain religion. And he talks about false religion in terms of, once again, in terms of deception or deceiving his heart. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, here again, is the third Greek word for deception, *apatao*, here.

This man's, this person's religion is vain. That is to say, it's worthless, it's empty, and it's worthless, as they say if he does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart.

Here, by the way, of course, he introduces the notion, well, he really has introduced it already in verses 19 through 21, but he reintroduces in a very brief way the notion of the use of the tongue, and verse 26 itself will especially be particularized in 3:1 through 12, where he actually uses, again, this whole business of bit and bridle and the like, speaking of the tongue.

This is contrasted here with the true religion, and here, of course, he implies a true religion involves not being deceived but being pure and unspotted, which is expressed in terms of visiting the fatherless in their affliction and visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unstained from the world. Now, once again, we have the emphasis on self-deception. We're not surprised by that.

This is what unifies verses 16, one of the things that unifies verses 16 through 27. He moves now from deception regarding God's motives, verse 16, that's the first manifestation of deception, deception regarding God's motives, verse 16, to deception regarding God's methods, God's method for salvation, verse 22, to deception regarding God's approval, now in verse 26. Here, we are deceived in terms of what is acceptable to God and what God expects.

Here, James really, when he introduces the word religious here, and it's actually *threskos*, here, by introducing the notion of religion, James is appealing to the universal religious nature, the religious sense in all humans, and the religious nature, the religious sense that is present in some way or another, in some extent or another, in all human societies, and for that matter, in all humans, and by the way, one might actually view even secularism as having religious aspects to it so that even secularism and secularists cannot get away from the religious impulse and religious character of humanity, but at the center of the religious nature and the religious sense in all humans is a desire to please God, that is basically what is involved in religion. It is the impulse to please God, especially in terms of the performance of religious acts, and that really is a significance of this word *threskos*, the performance of religious acts. Now, since the goal of this kind of religion is to please God, to be acceptable to God, it is of utmost importance that this religion be acceptable to God and that it make a difference to Him.

It would be absolutely devastating to find that one's religion is empty or vain, *mataios*, that is to say, useless as far as God is concerned. That's the meaning of vain here. This man's religion is vain in that it makes no difference to God; it is not acceptable to God, it is not pleasing to God, it makes no difference to God, and it is useless as far as God is concerned.

Now, although James emphasizes in his language cultic acts and makes use of cultic sort of language, *threskes*, religious, *threskeia*, religion, *katharos*, pure, that's actually a kind of cultic language, that is to say, involves being purification or pure in the sense of being acceptable to God, having access to God in worship, and *amiantos*,

pure and undefiled. Remember how ubiquitous that language of undefiled is in the Old Testament cultic system about the necessity of sacrifices being undefiled before God and the like. So, all of this really is cultic language.

He really uses cultic language here in order to, but he uses it in such a way as to suggest that religion is not to be understood cultically, that is to say, informal, informal, informal acts of ritual, and the like. But having said that, it is the case too, and by the way, this may be involved in James using this kind of language here, that he may be, that this may suggest something that, as I say, manifestly true anyway, that James is not speaking here against ritual as such. He's not really engaging in a polemic against ritual, even though, as I say, these words often emphasize ritual acts, and he uses them, as he employs them, he gives a, he gives, he talks about them in behavioral, verse, it gives them behavioral versus liturgical sort of content.

He is not speaking against ritual as such; there's no reason to think that he is, but he is indicating that the essence of true religion is not found in ritual or in religious or pious activities but in behavior, and especially behavior understood in terms of acts of mercy, a kind of bridling of the tongue that resists the filthiness of improper relationship and hateful relationship and angry relationship with other persons that come to, that comes to expression in improper speech, and that's negative, and then positively in terms of acts of mercy. The worship of God is not confined to the assembly where the word is heard. This, in a sense, continues really what he said in verse 22, be doers of the word and not hearers only.

It's not enough to be in the assembly to be part of a worshipping community and hear the word. The worship of God is not confined to the assembly where the word is heard, but even there, not necessarily put into practice. I say that because at the, in the very next passage at the beginning of chapter two, he's going to, he's going to give a scenario of a Christian assembly, of Christian worship, where right there in the midst of worship, you have a defaming and a shaming of the poor, which, of course, contradicts the very worship that was being pursued there.

The assembly where the word is heard but is not put into practice. The worship of God is not confined to the assembly and certainly is not, it is not found in the assembly where the word is only heard but not put into practice but takes place in the crucible of life where it is done. The worship of God is not confined to the assembly but takes place in the crucible of life where it is done.

Now, true religion here, according to this passage, involves four things. It involves, first of all, as he says, a bridled tongue. We'll say more about this when we get to chapters three and four, but he'll pick this, he'll pick this up in chapters, in chapter three, where he, where he relates there, he relates there this business of controlling the tongue to bits in horse's mouth, in horse's mouths, which involve the bridling of the whole body of the horse.

Also, that religion is pure and undefiled. Now, this points, of course, to a recurring concern in James for unity and wholeness, for lack of admixture or alloy, pure and undefiled. It suggests the ultimate purpose of cultic purity and of flawlessness in the cult, points ahead, really, to a pure and undefiled life.

This is necessary, this business of being pure and undefiled, this is necessary because God is one and perfect. He also is characterized by unity and wholeness, by being pure and undefiled, and therefore the worshiper, if the worshiper is going to be a true worshiper of God, must share the character of God as being one and perfect. As being, as being pure and undefiled, as being characterized by unity and wholeness.

Thus, anything short of pure and undefiled religion is unacceptable to God. Now, this points especially to the cleavage between hearing and doing. Pure and undefiled has to do with, again, stands in contrast to being impure, that is, say, being hearer of the word but not a doer.

Ironically, cultic language is employed to indicate that cult or religious activity is not sufficient. That which makes a person unclean is not ceremonial inadequacies but a concern for ceremonial correctness that ignores general behavior. Now, this leads, of course, really to the third component of true religion here, not only bridal tongue and pure and undefiled but also visiting widows and orphans.

Now, of course, the word visit here is used in its Old Testament sense of visit in the sense of being present to help, helping, and caring for them. Even as God in the Old Testament visits his people in their need to rescue or save them, which, of course, involves really the covenant action of Yahweh towards his people, points really then to the covenant obligation of Christians towards one another. By the way, this once again carries on the idea that to worship God properly means to embrace a character or to nurture a character, to express a character, to demonstrate a character that is like the character of God.

The widows and orphans, of course, represent the poor and oppressed. This is a way of talking about poor and oppressed in general, not only widows and orphans, of course, it would include them. This is an implication really from God's status as God and Father.

Verse 27, religion that is pure and undefiled before God and Father. That's to say, He is a God who has created all, including the poor and the needy, and is thus the Father of all, including the poor and the needy, and as a Father has a commitment to the well-being of those whom He has created. You cannot worship God as God, as Creator God, and not attend to the needs of His human creation, which is the highest order of creation according to the Scripture.

You cannot worship; you cannot really be a worshiper of God, who is Father, in terms of loving care for all of His human creatures if, in fact, you do not share His active, loving care for all of His creatures. And then, finally, this business of true religion here, as James develops it, involves keeping oneself unstained from the world, unstained from the world. Now, note again we have the Coptic language being used here, being unstained from the world.

Aspilos is what's used. And we also note the element of irony here. Keeping oneself unstained from the world does not mean withdrawing from society.

He just talked about visiting orphans and widows in their affliction. It does not mean manifest does not mean withdrawal from society. It does not involve asceticism or escapism but rather involvement in society.

This passage certainly stands against the statement, the famous statement from Alfred North Whitehead, to the effect that religion is what a man does in his solitariness. The world here is used in James in the sense of his disposition towards evil and against God. World involves the inclination to find security in attaching oneself to or possessing the things of this present world.

A security in this, a finding security or establishing security in this present world. This way means keeping oneself unstained by the world so that there is not even a hint. Once again, this business of being unstained is not a matter; it's not a matter of being entirely worldly.

Throughout, James is not primarily concerned with people who are entirely worldly, but people who attempt to be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time. He does not have within his crosshairs people who embrace entirely evil, but those who want to, who embrace both evil and good at the same time, who are divided in that way. And here he's talking about people like that who are stained.

They're not entirely devoid of religion, but they want to combine religion, that is to say, behavior that is acceptable with God, with commitments that stand against that, that stand over against that commitment to God. They try to find security both in pleasing God, following God, and obeying God, but also in faith in and confidence in the world. So, the content really of true religion then is this, it involves a framework of moral responsibility that involves God, self, others, and the world.

In fact, religion has primarily to do with one's relationship to God, but one's relationship to God is determined by one's relationship to others, to self, and especially to the world, and especially the needy in the world. It's an urging here to adopt the perspective of the kingdom versus the present age. Okay, well, that actually brings us to the conclusion then of chapter one, this overture in the book of James, and leads us really to go ahead and to move into chapter two.

We've gone really a little more than 40 minutes here in terms of rounding out chapter one. This is a good place to pause, to break, so that we can begin fresh at the beginning of the next segment with the second chapter of James.

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