



Be Ye Doers of the Word

Radical & Different

Class One

Jesus' message was unique and James tells us that those who follow him must be prepared to step outside of their comfort zone.

- **SLIDE**

- Introduction

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- James 1:27 KJV
- I love the Book of James, because it is, very much, Radical & Different
- Consider this verse...

27) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

- Now, let's take a look at this verse in the context of who he was writing to:

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- James 1:1 KJV

1) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, **to the twelve tribes** which are scattered abroad, greeting.

- It was Jews who received this letter 2,000 years ago
- It was a people who for over 2,500 years considered “Religion” to be something very different
- Something very much like this:

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- Don't worry... You not supposed to be able to read this one!
- I just want you to compare the simplicity of the James' short little definition of religion, with the complexity and length of what the Law looked like
- Consider the reality of what “*religion*” was to a Jew!
- Exodus 29:15-25 KJV

- 15) Thou shalt also take one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall **put their hands upon the head of the ram.**
- 16) And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt **take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar.**
- 17) And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put *them* unto his pieces, and unto his head.
- 18) And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it *is* a burnt offering unto the LORD: it *is* a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.
- 19) And thou shalt take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram.
- 20) Then shalt thou kill the ram, and **take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.**
- 21) And thou shalt **take of the blood that *is* upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him:** and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him.
- 22) Also thou **shalt take of the ram the fat and the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that *is* upon them, and the right shoulder; for it *is* a ram of consecration:**
- 23) **And one loaf of bread, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer out of the basket of the unleavened bread that *is* before the LORD:**
- 24) **And thou shalt put all in the hands of Aaron, and in the hands of his sons; and shalt wave them for a wave offering before the LORD.**
- 25) And thou shalt receive them of their hands, and burn *them* upon the altar for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour before the LORD: it *is* an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

- James writes this letter to a people whose entire life was full of rules and regulations
- James is writing to a people whose religion was nothing if it wasn't overly complex
- James is writing this letter to a people who took a single verse:

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- Exodus 23:19 KJV

19) The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. **Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.**

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- And produces **LITERALLY 432 KOSHER LAWS!**
- James writes to a people to whom religion looks like this:

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- Repeat Exodus 29
- And he tells them that religion quite simply boils down to this:

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- James 1:27 KJV

27) **Pure religion** and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To **visit the fatherless and widows** in their affliction, *and* to **keep oneself unspotted** from the world.

• ***Radical & Different***

- That's how James would have been received
- No matter how open minded you were, it would have been uncomfortable to hear what he is saying
- James would have been hard for the Jews to hear
- But, James comes about this honestly...
- James learned at the feet of a master
- He learned it from his Brother
- James' brother Jesus was also Radical & Different

- Let's take a minute and think about what Jesus taught

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- Jesus' Teachings were **Revolutionary**
- There is no other way to describe them

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- Let's start out with something as basic as where he was from...
- Jesus was from **Galilee**

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- Galilee was the farthest province from Jerusalem and the most backward culturally
- Religiously, Jerusalem was also the center of the country
- How the leaders of the Jewish religion would have viewed Jesus coming from Galilee would be like how the Pope today would view someone coming from the hills of West Virginia and trying to tell him that he is wrong
- Most Jewish jokes of the time started something like, "*A Galilean was out walking his donkey...*"
- If you were from Galilee at the time of Christ you were the butt of the joke
- Galileans who learned Hebrew generally spoke it so poorly that they were not called on to read the Torah in other Synagogues
- Galileans even spoke Aramaic so poorly that they were clearly noticeable by their accents (As Simon Peter would one day be reminded of...)
- Yet it is from Galilee that Jesus brings his message

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- Jesus clearly wasn't one of the **Religious Elite** in Israel
- He wasn't one of the favored, or one on the inside
- He didn't have connections, or come from good stock
- He didn't come from a good area
- And when he chose his disciples, he didn't surround himself with notable men

- Every one of them except Judas Iscariot were also Galileans
- There were no scholars like Nicodemus, or wealthy patrons like Joseph of Arimathea

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- There doesn't seem to be much natural ability amongst any of them, mainly they were ***“unlearned and ignorant men”***
- His arrival was heralded by a complete maniac
- The one man who had foreseen his coming and tried to spread the word lived out in the wilderness, wore a camel's hair shirt and ate locust and wild honey
- He was revealed to be the Christ, the Son of God by more crazy people
 - Scary, insane, demon-possessed people who would shout out who he was
- And when he began to teach, it wasn't soothing words that came out of his mouth
- He didn't make efforts to make everyone feel more comfortable with what he said
- He didn't try to allay their fears or questions about his integrity or position, by preaching a sound, comfortable, traditional message that everyone would enjoy

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- Jesus' teachings were **Radical & Different**
- Christ was the King of the Poor and the Dejected
- He championed the cause of the underdog
- He ate with the sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors (virtually a Mafia protection racket)
- What was life like in the time of Jesus?
- What would it have been like to live in Jerusalem when Christ was there?
- Let's consider for a moment, the Israel that Jesus entered 2,000 years ago
- Let's talk about what Jesus faced in Jerusalem so many years ago

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- Let's pretend that we are just simple believers
- We would probably follow our leaders

- Society, and therefore the Jewish Religion was basically broken up into four very distinct groups
- There were four different leadership groups in Israel at the time
- Just like today, when we know that not all Christians are alike, and we've learned that not all Muslims believe the same, the Jews also were divided into sub-groups

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- The smallest of the groups at the time were the **ESSENES**. And understandably so...
- They lived in monkish communities in caves or out in the desert
- The Essenes were convinced that the Roman invasion had come as a punishment for their failure to keep the Law, and they devoted themselves to purity
- Essenes took ritual baths every day, maintained a strict diet, wore no jewelry, took no oaths, and had all material goods in common

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- They hoped that their **Strict Adherence to the Law** would encourage the appearance of the Messiah

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- Another relatively small group were the **ZEALOTS**
- The Zealots were also separationists, but they held a much different strategy

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- The Zealots Advocated Armed Revolt to overthrow the foreigners
- We know that Jesus included Simon the Zealot in his ministry, but we also know that his insistence on his kingdom not being of this world, and his resistance to sending his servants to fight who have infuriated the Zealots

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- At the opposite end of the extreme were the **SADDUCEES**
- The Sadducees were not Separationists like the Essenes and the Zealots, they were Collaborationists!
- They had cooperated with the Greeks years ago, with the Maccabeans, and now with the Romans under Herod

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- The **Greek Thinking had Influenced Their Beliefs**, and they now did not believe in an afterlife or any type of divine intervention on this earth
- Contrary to popular belief, Sadducees were not *Sad, You See...*
- Sure, they didn't believe in the Resurrection...
- But, if you don't believe in any type of future reward or punishment, then you might as well simply enjoy the limited time you have here on earth
- The Sadducees had palatial homes filled with silver and gold, and they filled their lives with parties and fun
- They were a very popular group to be in...

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- But, the most popular group around at the time of Jesus were the **PHARISEES**

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- They were the **Party of the Middle Class...** The party of the people
- They controlled the Synagogues and the Sanhedrin, so they basically controlled all religious life at the time
- They were a lay community
- They also held to high standards of purity, particularly in regards to Sabbath observance, ritual cleanliness and the exact time of feast days
- They struggled between Separatism and Collaboration
- They struggled with being "in the World, but not a part of it..."

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- It's interesting to ask yourself which party **YOU** would have followed if you were alive at the time of Jesus...
- Jesus had to ask himself this same question
- He chose not to follow any of them, and to walk down his own path
- What would I choose if I had come along three years before Christ?
- Extremists like the Essenes and the Zealots would have surely scared me off

- The Essenes were so extreme that they even would force themselves from going to the bathroom at times, for fear that it might defile them
 - I wouldn't want to live that way...
- And I'm not one for fighting against the Roman Soldiers with a few sticks and stones...
- But, I wouldn't have felt comfortable with the materialistic tendencies of the Sadducees, either
- I think that most likely I would have followed the Pharisees
- I think that most likely we all would feel most comfortable being Pharisees
- It was a lay community centered on preserving the Truth handed down by our ancestors
- Yet, why is it that the Gospels record so much conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees?
- Why is it that all through the Gospels the Pharisees arise as the foil of Jesus?
- Why is it that the one group that I would have felt most comfortable with...
 - The one group that had neither gotten too extreme, or had given up on their beliefs altogether and cashed in on the opportunistic wealth that came from the associating with the Romans...
- Why is it that this one group is the one that clashed so often with our Lord, and was intricately involved in his crucifixion?
- Simple...

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- Jesus' teachings were **Radical & Different**
- All of the groups at the time of Jesus had one thing in common:
 - They all were trying to preserve what was distinctly Jewish
- The Jews were, in effect, erecting a fence around their culture in hopes of saving their tiny nation of high ideals from the pagans around them
- It seemed like a good goal...

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- The Pharisees were simply **Preserving the Law**

- They were the ones that had instituted the concept of Rabbi's to teach the people and continue the traditions of their elders
- And, they were doing a **GREAT** job of it!

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- But, in the process of trying to keep the Law **PURE**, they had **INVALIDATED** it's intent
- In their desire to keep things the way they were, and not be changed by the Romans, they actually destroyed the way things were supposed to be
- God had goals and desires for their spiritual development, but they were so infatuated with preserving their place in God's plan, that they lost sight of God's goals
- How have we done as a lay community intent on keeping ourselves separate (for that is what Pharisee means) and being "in the world but not part of it"?

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- In the history of our religion we have also done an **EXCELLENT** job of **Preserving The Truth**
- A comparison of our basic doctrines from 1850 to 2000 reveals virtually no major changes over the past 150 years
- Brother Thomas began his search for Bible Truth with Alexander Campbell, but eventually separated from the Campbellites over important, but a relatively few number of issues
- Fast Forward 150 years, and the Campbellites, now known as the Church of Christ, have adopted **EVERY** traditional, Trinitarian doctrine common to Christendom, and yet Christadelphians hold very closely to the original doctrines taught by Brother Thomas
- We have done a great job of teaching our children the same precious and important doctrines handed down to us by our ancestors...
- But, in the process have we sometimes, like the Pharisees before us, lost sight of the **INTENT** of the **Lord's Gospel**?

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- That, quite simply, is the question before us this in these classes...
- Jesus' teachings were **Radical & Different**
- There were two main issues that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for

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- The Pharisees had become **LEGALISTIC**
- They were focused on the Rules & Regulations and forgot the purpose of the Law
- They had kept the form of their Religion, but had totally lost the function of it

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- The Pharisees had become **EXCLUSIONARY**
- They weren't making any attempts to bring converts into Judaism
- They weren't even making any effort to include other Jews in the group
- They would lay heavy burdens on people's shoulders and provide no help or assistance at all about how to carry them

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- On the contrary, Jesus' teachings were full of **GRACE**
- Jesus understood that man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man
- The purpose and the function of our religion is more important than preserving it's form
- It's okay to do good on the Sabbath
- Jesus focused on forgiving people rather than regulating them

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- And that brought in the multitudes
- By their very nature, Jesus' teachings were **INCLUSIVE**
- Jesus reached out to people and included them in his gospel of grace
- We seem to have a natural tendency to lean towards Legalism and Exclusion

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- It's like two sides of Teeter Totter

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- When the Purity side is up, the Acceptance side is down

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- We strive for doctrinal purity (no matter how weakly and ineffective we are)
- And in the process we usually exclude more and more people around us
- Until eventually we could end up like the man in the story who finally finds a church that he's comfortable fellowshiping in, but looks around to see that he's all alone

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- But, reversing it really doesn't help either...

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- Filling the church up just by accepting all kinds of people and throwing any hopes of correct doctrine is not the way to go either
- And it's not like we want to somehow balance it in the middle either
- Being lukewarm isn't the solution

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- By introducing **GRACE** into the picture, Jesus almost miraculously solves the problem

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- Jesus shows us that we can maintain the highest standards and still accept those who are unable to live up to those standards
- Jesus shows us that we should encourage people to reach for ideals, while still living with them in the reality of our sinful, morally compromised lives
- Jesus tried to push religion away from the infatuation with Rules and towards Grace
- Jesus lived a life of Grace and this simple concept of Grace was **Revolutionary**
- No other religion had ever brought forth the concept of Grace
- Other religions dealt mainly with appeasing the Gods, making them happy so that they would bless your crops or help you to have healthy children
- The Gods didn't demand much of us in the way of obedience, and none of them offered any type of forgiveness to us, if we displeased them
- The God of the Jews was different, but the Jews had lost sight of this
- The Jews had lowered God's Grace down to almost mathematical principles

- If you committed this sin, you simply offered this sacrifice, and you were forgiven
- Jesus' teachings were **Radical & Different**
- Jesus tenderly and lovingly offered to us absolute Grace
- Jesus forgave an adulteress caught in her sin
- Jesus forgave a thief caught and hung on a cross
- Jesus forgave a disciple who had denied (three times!) having ever known him
- And, ultimately, Jesus forgave the bloody crowds that screamed out for his death

• **Crucify Him!**

• **Crucify Him!**

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- When we read the Book of James we get that same sense of reading something that is **Radical & Different**
- James does an excellent job of bringing us back to the Spirit and the Intent of our Lord's teaching

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- James does an excellent job of bringing us back to **GRACE**

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- A **Radical & Different** way of looking at Religion
- Not a Religion of Rules and Regulations
- Not a Religion of Sins and Consequences
- Not a Religion of Sacrifices and Offerings
- James does an excellent job of reminding us that...
- Pure religion, true religion, the type of religion that really pleases God...
- Is not filling your life with an over-insistence on rules, and the consequences that occur if you fall short of the law
- It does involve paying attention to your own personal righteousness, and we'll talk more about that later...

- But, Real Religion is not complex and ritualistic

- Real Religion is not strenuous or hard to follow

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- Real Religion is all about Living a **Simple, Loving, Christian Life**

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- Pure Religion

Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: **Reach out to the homeless** and **loveless** in their plight, and **guard against corruption** from the godless world.

- It's a simple life, but it's not a life that's simple
- We can't live life aimlessly or without consideration if we are going to guard against corruption from the godless world
- It's a simple life, but it's not an easy life
- None of us feel naturally comfortable reaching out to help the homeless
- That is something very outside of our Comfort Zone
- It is a calling that is really **Radical & Different**

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- Few people understood this **Radical & Different** message better than James
- But, like Jesus' message before him, James message is not easy for us to hear
- For like the Pharisees before us, we also lean towards Legalism and we also find it uncomfortable to be pushed out of a life of Rules and into a life of Grace

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- James is all about **REVERSING** your **Natural Tendencies**
- And that is quite simply why it is Uncomfortable

- Because it is **"Unnatural"**

- It's very natural, very normal for us to be in the position that we are in today...
- But, it's not necessarily, the healthiest position that we can be in

- We tend to settle, don't we?
- We tend to allow ourselves, and our Ecclesias, to fall to the "*Lowest Common Denominator*" of life
- Left to our own inclinations, we won't be driven to be better
- We won't strive for something greater
- We won't rise above
- Left to our own inclinations, we will quietly and simply accept the slow, creeping malaise of society around us, and allow it to have its negative effects upon us
- And **THAT** is the purpose of James
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- James' Goal is to **WAKE US UP**
- **SLIDE**
- To help us to remember **WHY** we really are here, and **WHAT** we should be doing
- **SLIDE**
- To help us see what is **IMPORTANT** and what is merely for **SHOW**
- James does an excellent job reminding us both personally and Ecclesially of our calling
- It is particularly interesting how James deals with our Ecclesial Life
- Because, in a very real sense, it was "*Organized Religion*" that Christ was rebelling against in the first place
- And yet, he then went on to organize an entirely new religion that would grow to be the largest in the world...
- But, it's important that we look at our Ecclesias also in the light of Grace...
- When Christians gather together in churches, everything that can go wrong sooner or later does
- Tempers flare, cliques form, personalities arise, and sooner or later, there is unrest and upset
- Outsiders, on observing this, usually conclude that, therefore, the **Religion is a Lie**

- We are all Hypocrites, and the message must not be true because the messengers are not perfect
- As Believers we see it differently...
- Just as a hospital collects the sick under one roof and labels them as such, the Ecclesia collects sinners
- Many of the people outside the hospital are every bit as sick as the ones inside, but their illnesses are either undiagnosed, disguised or ignored

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- It's similar with sinners outside the Ecclesia

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- Ecclesias are **NOT**, as a rule, **Model Communities of Good Behavior**
- To think that they are, or even that they should be, is immature
- Ecclesias are, rather, places where human misbehavior is brought out in the open, and dealt with

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- Ecclesias are places where we **PRACTICE FORGIVENESS**

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- Ecclesias are places of **Grace**...
- Ecclesias are not places that we go to avoid sin, but rather places where we go to face sin
- The letter of James shows one of the Ecclesia's early leaders skillfully going about his work of confronting, diagnosing, and dealing with areas of misbelief and misbehavior that had turned up in congregations committed to his care

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- Deep wisdom is on display here in James, wisdom both rare and essential
- Wisdom is not primarily knowing the Truth, although it certainly includes that...

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- Wisdom is **Skill in Living the Truth**

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- For, what good is having the Truth if we don't know how to live it?
- What benefit has this wonderful blessing brought us if it hasn't changed the way that we live our lives

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- That is one of James most famous messages, and the theme of our classes
 - **BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD**

- Let's look at that verse, Chapter 1, Verse 22 in the NIV:

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- James 1:22 NIV

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

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- When we come to James, we see that he counsels us to **DO the Readings**, not just "*do the readings*" – Actually DO what they say!
- We said that James is all about **REVERSING** your **Natural Tendencies**

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- James is concerned with that important part of our development that God calls **TRANSFORMATION**
- The changing of our heart to accept God's Word and to become more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

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- James clarifies the difference between **TRANSFORMATION** and **INFORMATION**
- There's a big difference between coming to the word of God to be changed into a child of God, versus simply gathering more academic knowledge
- There are dangers involved when a person receives Information and not Transformation
- One of them is...

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- If it's simply an accumulation of information that you are after, then the person with the most information ends up feeling proud of what they have accomplished, and not humbled by the message of salvation

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- **Spiritual Arrogance** accompanies **Information without Transformation**

- Because you know a lot about a very important subject, does not mean that you are a very important person

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- Academics without discipline avoids humility
- To receive the **ACADEMIC** Benefits of time spent around the Word, without receiving the **DISCIPLINE** of the Word avoids the **HUMBLING** aspect of the message
- Another danger involved when a person receives Information and not Transformation is:

- **SLIDE**

- **SELF-DECEPTION**

- When we are informed but not transformed we can actually deceive ourselves and think that we are something when we really aren't

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- We can develop the **Appearance of Spirituality**
- Take any person you know whose knowledge of the Bible is, say, ten times greater than that of the average unbeliever
- Then ask yourself if this person is ten times more loving, ten times more patient, and ten times more joyful than the average unbeliever
- Are we allowing God's Word to have it intended effect upon us?
- Or are we just attending class after class, bible school after bible school, so that we appear to be spiritual people?

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- Are we **READING**, but not really **HEARING**?
- We have to make sure that our Hearts are ready to receive
- We have to make sure that the soil of our heart is receptive to the things that God is trying to say to us
- We have to spend time with God in His Word
 - But, it's not just time for time's sake
- Our job is to create opportunities in our life for God to speak
- To be quiet, and to focus on what we are reading, and give God the opportunity to really speak to us
- Are we allowing God's Word to have it's intended effect upon us, or are we simply reading it, and walking away
- That is what James saw all too often in his Ecclesia

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- James 1:23-25 KJV

- 23) For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
- 24) For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
- 25) But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

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- When a man **"beholdeth himself"**, the problem is not necessarily the length of his look, or the amount of time he spent staring into the mirror
- The problem isn't that the person didn't spend enough time around the Word of God...
- The problem is stated in the next two phrases:

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- **"And goeth his way"**

- While this person was listening their mind was elsewhere
- They come, they hear, but they are not really interested in God's word affecting a change in their lives
- In fact they soon go their way, believing they have done their duty by coming to hear
- The result of this is the final phrase:

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- **"forgetteth what manner of man he was"**

- The word forgetteth means "to lose out of mind or neglect"
- The hearer only will soon be out of the assembly and on his way
- And forget what he has heard
- The Word of God will not germinate in his heart
- It will not take root and affect a change
- In fact, like a preoccupied man looking in a mirror soon forgets what he saw, so it is with the hearer only
 - He will soon forget what he has heard
- Sadly, he has deceived himself into believing that he has pleased God because he has simply listened
- The Doer of the Word looks just like the Hearer that he is sitting next to on Sunday Morning
- But the **INTENTIONS** of this person are different
- This individual comes not to just hear but to actually receive God's word
- He his not distracted by other things
- His intentions are to do what he hears
- He has prepared his mind, and he is ready to receive

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- This person not only looks into it with the aim to do it, but **"continueth therein"**

- This person understands that the further he gets from Christ the more likely he is to leave Christ
- So, he continues reading and looking into the Word
- He continues receiving the Word into his heart
- He continues in this process of **TRANSFORMATION**
- That is what James wanted for the members of his Ecclesia
- And it is what he wants for us
- James wants us to be Transformed
- James doesn't want us to follow the same old plan that got us where we are today

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- That's why James Message is **Radical & Different**
- Over the next few classes, we will look at a few of these messages that James has for us
- In our next class, we will tackle what many consider to be the Heart of James' Book

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- **Faith & Works**

- We'll see how James and Paul complement each other to complete our understanding of this important concept
- Then in our third class we'll look at the topic of Prayer

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- **Effectual & Fervent**

- And we will learn from a man who truly understood how to pray
- Our Sunday School class is called:

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- **Bitter & Sweet**

- And will focus on James' instructions to us about how to Tame the Tongue