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As we have seen some have criticized the book of James as leading us back to works based righteousness. In other words, that we have to earn our place with God by what we do. Martin Luther himself said, "James drives us to law and works", he didn't like the book. However, this is not true in the sense that Luther meant it.

We need to separate out the person coming to faith, and a person's life of faith. Both are governed by grace, but it's one thing to say we become right with God by obeying his commands, and quite another to say I obey his commands out of gratitude of his grace as a follower of Jesus. God does not condemn, even if we should fail to live up to his law (which we constantly do), the blood of Christ has present value for all of us no matter how old we are in the faith. Yet, God's perfect law is still our standard; we are being perfected, brought to maturity and completeness.

James is an inward exercise of looking at the heart forcing us to think about what is 'true religion'. And by religion I do not mean, the outward ritualistic trappings of 'Church', but a heart connection to Christ and how that effects behavior in obedience to Gods Grace. It seems dichotomous to say that law brings freedom. Law to us means restriction. But we will see that law does bring freedom. Remember, God is holy, gracious, and unchanging. How are we to live in obedience to him as Lord? We have discussed trials, their use in making us solid, mature, and complete if we react in faith. We have been talking about how sin destroys if we choose escapism when faced with temptation which trial may bring about. James reminds his readers that they can trust in God and respond to life's testing in faith. These verses take us deeper into the practicalities of faith that is not only glorifying to God, but beneficial to us; our relationship to God, personal peace and joy, and our relationship with others.

Proposition: True religion affects the inner person leading to holiness in the outward life.

Question: So, the question is the same Jesus asked his followers, 'Why do you call me Lord but do not do as I say?'

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like

a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

How many of us are sick of church? Why do I still go? What difference does it make? How many of us look at the church as a hostile place where we harp on certain pet sins, but allow other sin to flourish? Where we have vilified outsiders, cut off our own brothers and sisters when fall, but nurture sins like pride, arrogance, mean-spiritedness, anger, selfish ambition, and the like inside our community? How many of us see the church as hypocritical? I think we have all had those moments. In one sense we would be right in that assessment, but we must assess maturely. We are imperfect people, saved by grace, growing in Christ's likeness. Much of the cause of these feelings is a lack of attention to verses like these: ²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

You'll notice we have a variety of portraits up here today (explain). To get to know Muslims in Indonesia I would ask to paint their portrait. Sitting with older men studying their faces. I would talk with them, ask questions, discuss religion, politics, family, etc. We would sit for hours on end, then pack it up and do it again the next day. A captive audience. They felt honored because I showed interest in their lives. They felt cared for and I got to know them at a deeper level in the process. As they revealed their lives, their face and body made sense. The stresses and pressures of life reflected in the lines and creases of their faces. Everything came together, their physical form and story, to form an image of a person in front of me. It took concentration. It took listening, and good questioning. It was a process that took time and attention to detail, but not just physical detail, emotional, and informational detail. This physical person was a whole person, a person with a world view, events that had shaped their thinking and physical stature. A good portrait is not just technically well done, it captures the essence of a person; it knows them, it's alive.

There are two ways to look at Scripture. The first I would challenge someone on, and that is that Scripture is a list of do's and don'ts to be lived as best as possible. This person has dry dead quiet times. They may be

diligent, prone to 'doing the right thing', buckling down to read the Word, although it does nothing more than bring guilt and judgment on them. They read whole passages coming away with a laundry list of rules to live by, of which, they will never live up to. I do not think this person is 'looking intently' into the perfect law that gives freedom.

The second way of looking at Scripture is that you are getting to know Jesus. Studying his face, the lines, asking him questions, listening intently, seeking to understand him. How he looks at life. Broadening your understanding of his world view; what makes him tick, his hurts, pains, joys, what moves his heart. This person attacks Scripture with voracity to paint a portrait of God. Grace leaps off the pages; conviction does not destroy them with guilt but drives them closer to Jesus. Scripture goes beyond a laundry list of rules, and becomes an adventure which brings freedom and life. It becomes a love relationship with Jesus who is gracious, holy, and unchanging; one who loves us even in our trials.

Jesus says in Luke 6:46, 'Why do you call me Lord but do not do what I say'. Good question. There are a number of ways that we can look at Scripture and not do what it says.

1. The first is that we can become relativistic. We can claim that it is the word of God that it is inspired by him, but then adopt views towards it that are culturally relativistic. We can start to match it up with our changing culture saying that those things were true for them, but not for us now since culture has changed. This is a complex issue since there are cultural influences in Scripture, but we need to separate those things from the things that are supra-cultural; the things that transcend beyond culture, which are true for all peoples at all times. One of those issues would be sexuality. God is clear in Scripture about the issue, and its proper place in relationships and society. It is a supra-cultural issue. However there are those of us that say that those things were true only for that time, and that Jesus did not speak to certain issues of sexuality. However we also know that he claimed to fulfill the whole law; that not one mark of it would change. That the law is good and perfect and given for two main reasons:
 - a. To reveal sin and our need for a savior.
 - b. To reveal God's standard for a holy life with him.

The relativistic person will pick and choose what suits them. They may be strong on some things but then say, "Well, that does not matter today. Well, poverty doesn't matter does it, it is all relative". They have certain books and passages in Scripture that they will die for, but others they are indifferent to. They make themselves god over the word and their own lives. To them Jesus would point to the 1st commandment, you shall have no other gods before me.

2. The second way we can not do what the Word says is to become superstitious. In 1 Samuel it tells the story of Israel being defeated by the Philistines. The elders decided to bring the ark of the Lord up from Shiloh saying, 'so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies' (1 Samuel 4:3). Yet, when they entered battle again, they were defeated another time, and the ark was captured. Their issue was that they viewed the ark as magical, disregarding God; they were not seeking him. They viewed the ark as if it could save them instead of God. They had to learn the lesson that they could not expect salvation from a holy God while still persisting in wickedness. Many of us today view the Bible in much the same way. If it sits in our home, if we carry it with us, if we just read it like good Christians, we will be okay. If we go to church singing worship songs, we'll be fine. But all the while there is darkness in us that goes unresolved, the Word has no effect. We still live in gossip, slander, hatred, bitterness, pride, emotional abuse of another, or other 'acceptable' sins. The cultural Christian life is not a magic wand to get you into heaven. God's Word must be lived internally leading to outward life change; the principles of Scripture have to be wrestled over and internalized making changes in our hearts and eventually our behavior towards others.

- a. Jesus says to us a very sobering thing in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

The superstitious Christian makes idols of their surroundings. They worship the Christian Culture, don't internalize the message, and

have nothing to do with the outside world. They fill themselves up on Christian sub-culture thinking they are getting close to Jesus, while neighbors go unloved, the poor never enter their mind. To them Jesus would point out the 2nd commandment, you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above, the earth below, or the waters underneath.

3. The third way is we make our Christian life and the Word of God a strictly emotional issue. I am sure we all know those that have a life that is an absolute mess, but seem to walk around with this starry eyed talk of what they read in some obscure passage that day. The Scriptures to this person are almost like a drug insulating them from dealing with real life. They gloss over the convicting parts honing in on those flowery Psalms they have read over and over again that make them feel good, but they are unwilling to face their own demons allowing God to change them. These people will usually hide behind a bible, or in church, instead of going to an uncomfortable family gathering saying they do not want to be like the world. They are afraid to engage. They avoid relationships that go too deep because to be confronted with their own fear and false pride would be too much for them to handle. Their relationships are only church people or at best, someone they are witnessing to. That poor soul being witnessed to is beaten up with verses like, 'I am the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the father except through me,' and they never come around again. The emotional Christian says, 'Well, they just didn't want to accept Jesus!' never admitting that it had more to do with their lack of ability to engage a relationship and apply Scripture in heart matters. They drive people farther away from God using the very Word of God. Everything is on their terms, and if it is not, then, in their opinion, it's from the devil. To them Jesus may say, 'Get behind me Satan for you know not what you are doing.'
4. And, the last way we can not 'do' the Word of God is to make it theoretical. A problem exacerbated by the Modern World View. The Modern World View says that everything can be proved, and knowledge and provability become god and all important to this person. The Church has been mastered by this world view for many centuries and it has done its damage. We jokingly use the terms

cemetery and seminary interchangeably. It communicates what we all too often see, seminary gobbles up a person making them profoundly knowledgeable in the Scriptures, but the inner person goes unchanged. Again, pride is overlooked; sins of the heart go unchecked. Intellectual arrogance is applauded.

Many current Christian writers are saying that with the shift from Modern to Post-modern world views, the model of pastor as CEO, this all knowing man of power in the church that can do no wrong, is quickly dying out. Post-moderns/Millennials want vulnerability, heart change, transparency, we want to know our leaders' struggle; which gets us back to the question, what is biblical leadership, what is the biblical church?

The theoretical Christian is more concerned with another's doctrine, and theology aligning with theirs than they are of loving people. They pontificate, but would never wash a foot. They elaborate on points in Scripture and answer questions as if there are no ambiguities, no grey areas, and make others feel idiotic in their 'simplistic' faith of loving their neighbors. Their importance is boosted when talking about 5 point Calvinism, or Proper Reformed Theology, but their relationships are cold and dry. They have not changed in a decade, and you would never hear them say they are sorry. In their minds, they are always right. When social issues come up, they roll their eyes and prattle off some obscure verse which highlights how they feel everyone is in their situation due to personal sin, and if the world just served God, everything would be right.

The truth is that those of us that have committed our lives to Jesus, by God's grace, have shifted allegiance. If we align ourselves with Jesus, we become his obedient servant. Last week we saw how the sin life, gratifying its desires, brings death. The promises of sin never materialize, they are untrue; even those acceptable sins of pride or emotional escapism through good things. These four categories; relativism, superstition, emotionalism, and intellectualism/Theoretical faith, are all living under a sin life that merely has become acceptable in the church. But, as we move under the law of grace, aligning ourselves with the standards God has established, we become free; free from licentious sin, and free from the sin of 'being

good' or 'being right'. But it seems dichotomous to say law brings freedom. Let's remember Galatians 5, 'it is for freedom you have been set free, therefore don't allow yourselves again to be burdened with a yoke of slavery' (licentiousness/circumcision). Galatians says, 'Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the sinful nature.' Not the other way around which would read, avoid the sinful nature and you will live by the Spirit. We have to remember that we are under the law of grace, we have an ever present help in the Spirit. So, to be free from the bondage of sin you must simply pursue first God's kingdom and his righteousness and everything will fall into place; live by the Spirit.

Think about it this way, if we are staring at our temptation and sin we are focused on that and we will lose the battle. But if we shift our gaze to Jesus, studying his face, sin and temptation are either behind us out of view or at best in our peripheral vision and have much less power to destroy us. We need to stare in the mirror of the word and let Jesus reflect himself back to us in this battle.

We have to remember that God's standards, the law, brings freedom because we live in community; community with God first, and secondly with others. If we were alone in the world we would not need God's law. If there were no god, no people, and you would not die, you could do whatever you wanted and it would not make one difference; but we don't. When we live as if we are a law unto ourselves within community, doing whatever we want, we get our hand slapped. The sin life brings death and incarceration, either literally or metaphorically, because we are communal beings in a world where we have to interact with others, and with our god. We live in a world where God has implanted his word in us which convicts of sin and wrongdoing. It is for freedom that we have been set free, knowing him brings that freedom.

Jesus also said in Luke 6:46-49 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.

The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." James says the same here, his writing is replete with references to the teachings of Christ, he says, the man looking intently into God's perfect law and doing it, 'he will be blessed in what he does.' Again the Word of God, intently studied, understanding Jesus, rounding out that portrait of him in your heart, brings solidity to your life, blessings – not that circumstances will change, but you will find peace, joy, maturity, and completeness even in trials.

Let's wrestle with some good questions... Is your faith relativistic? Are you allowing God to speak with authority into your life? Are you taking his words as his words? Is he Lord? Is your faith superstitious? Are you relying on the outward trappings of churchianity to save you? Do you just come to church, do the Christian thing, thinking that will save you? Is your Christianity emotional? Do you use the Word of God as a drug to avoid the pain and hurt of this life that could make you better? Is your Christianity an avoidance tactic in relationships so that you do not have to deal with your crooked heart? Is your faith theoretical? Would everyone say you have strong theology, know doctrine, but don't want to be around you? Are you more concerned that someone's doctrine is correct than in loving them closer to Christ?

Faith in life is never simple; true religion is a love relationship with Jesus affecting the inner person and working itself out in healthy choices in outward life. There are ambiguities and things to struggle through; I urge you to look intently into the perfect law of God painting a portrait of Jesus in your heart, thereby withstanding the storm of trials and testing. Get to know him, hide his word in your heart, not because it is the Christian thing to do, but because you are in a love relationship with him. His commands bring freedom in life, relationships, and blessings you will not imagine. Do not merely listen to the word and deceive yourselves. A practical challenge for anyone is to memorize Scripture. Start in Galatians, or the one another verses. Memorize the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 and I guarantee your life will change! Scripture cuts to the heart, and blesses us in all ways. Do what it says. Again Jesus asks, 'Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?'

Let's end today with a reading from the Velveteen Rabbit which I read at Mike & Lindley's service last Saturday - all the while thinking about how Jesus and others love us through a difficult life:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?" "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but Really loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt." "Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get all loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Jesus loves you through the trials of life making you real. Real life does not happen to us if we break easily, if we have sharp edges, or have to be carefully kept - if we are relativistic, superstitious, emotional, or theoretical. We become real in living by the Spirit allowing Jesus to address our hearts. We need real followers of Jesus, but the relativistic, superstitious, emotional or theoretical Christian is just a stuffed facsimiles thereof. If we call him Lord then he must be allowed to reign over everything in our lives allowing him to transform us by Word & Spirit.