

Thinking and Living Biblically

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[0 : 00] Chuck Swindoll tells a modern-day parable about the owner of a company who had to be out of the country for two years. Before he left, he called his leadership team together and gave them these instructions.

He said, while I'm gone, you've got to stay on top of things. Every week, I will send you detailed instructions about what I want to be done.

That will help you to stay on task and keep everything running smoothly. Well, everyone agreed, thought it was a good idea. So for the next two years, he sent detailed instructions every week outlining what the different members of the leadership team needed to be doing.

When he got back from the trip, as he was driving up the driveway to his business, he was shocked at what he saw.

On the outside of the building, it looked like the place had been deserted, abandoned. The grass had not been cut. The flower beds were overgrown with weeds.

[1 : 12] There were even a few windows missing. When he walked into the lobby, the receptionist had her head down on the desk, just asleep. So he just started down the hall.

As he made his way down, he heard loud music coming from several different offices. Well, he went into the accountant's office, but no one was there.

So he just sat down at the computer, pulled up the financial information, and he couldn't believe what he saw. What had been a successful business that had made a profit every year had not made a profit the two years he had been gone.

As he looked more closely at details, he found that he was on the verge of bankruptcy. You can imagine how he felt, what he was going to do.

He immediately called his leadership team together and demanded, What have you been doing? Didn't you get my instructions every week? Well, they replied, Oh, yes, we got them.

[2 : 21] In fact, we got together every Friday morning, and we talked about them. We even printed them out and bound them together in a book. Look, some of us have even memorized a part of your instructions.

Well, the owner was just livid, and he demanded, Well, what did you do with my instructions? And they replied, Do? We didn't do anything, but they sure were nice instructions.

Now, that's an absurd parable, isn't it? But it does illustrate an important point.

In fact, the point I'm going to make today in this message. Sometimes, what I just told you is the way we respond to the instructions that God has already given to us in his word.

And James understood that. And he really made the theme of what we call his New Testament letter, Faith Works.

[3 : 34] Be doers of the word and not hearers only. I want you to turn with me, if you would, to this passage. We're going to look at an extended passage this morning.

There will be a few verses on the screen, but it will be very helpful. If you will pull up on your device, your bound copy, however you want to do it.

But if you would, open your Bible to James chapter 1. And we're going to look together at verses 29, or rather 19 through 27. While you're turning, let me just remind you.

Over the past several weeks, we've been looking at what it means to think biblically about some of today's hot-button issues.

Today, we're going to wrap up that series by emphasizing that as important as it is for us to think biblically, that's not enough.

[4 : 33] We need to put it into practice. We need to live biblically. And that's what James is going to be describing here in the verses that we're going to read.

This is one of the best passages that I know of in all of the Bible to help us to understand how important it is, not to just acquire information or knowledge as we read and study the Bible. We've got to do something with what we read and understand from God's Word. We're going to read verses 19 through 27 now.

That's the context of what James is saying about being doers of the Word, not hearers only. But we're only going to look at a few of the verses in our actual message on this.

Let's read in verse 19. Know this, my beloved brothers, that every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

[5 : 43] Therefore, put away all filthiness and the rampant wickedness, and 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.

For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

I want you to note here, God does not reward our acquiring information. God only rewards our faithfulness to do what he's told us to do.

And that's what James is pointing out here. Verse 26, If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

[6 : 58] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James is very clear in what he says, isn't he? We've got to be both doers as well as hearers of God's word. And that's really just another way of saying we must both think biblically and live biblically.

Let's look at it. We can summarize what James is saying under two statements. The first one, we must be receptive to God's word. We must be receptive to God's word.

And James really has a unique way of telling us here to pay attention to what God's saying in his word. Look first. We must be quick to hear. That's what he says.

Let every person be quick to hear in verse 19. To be quick to hear means to be quick to pay attention. Have you ever, at some point in the past or today, looked at a child in school, a lot of you teachers, or your own children, and say, did you hear me?

[8 : 15] Your question was not, did you hear my voice only? Did you hear what I said? Did it register is what you mean?

Are you paying attention? James is telling us we need to have an eagerness to hear God's word. And when we do, when we are quick to hear, we're paying attention.

We want to hear it. We will let it sink in. We'll think about what we're reading or what we're listening to. Because we want to take it to heart.

It's the word of God. It matters to us as children of God. So we've got to be quick to hear. You know, almost everyone in James' audience would have only heard God's word read to them.

They would not have had their own copy. The leaders of the church, when they received this letter from James, they would have read it. Really in small house group gatherings.

[9 : 23] But most of the people in the New Testament times, they heard the word of God. They didn't have the privilege that we do of having their own copy.

And so when we read this, be talking about being quick to hear, it applies to us who are reading it ourselves. Listen to God as he speaks through his word.

So the first step to thinking biblically is to listen carefully to what God is saying through his word when you hear it read or taught like right now.

Or when you read it for yourself. Next he says we must be slow to speak. Let every person be slow to speak. People throughout history have understood the importance of what James says here.

An ancient philosopher said we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. The rabbis, Jewish rabbis, said it even better.

[10 : 27] Men have two ears but one tongue that they should hear more than they speak. The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction. But the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth to hedge it in and keep it within proper bounds.

Think about that. And then the Proverbs actually says it best. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent. I think Abraham Lincoln must have got his well-known statement from that verse in Proverbs. Lincoln is known for saying better remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.

We need to let these kind of things just sort of sink in. Because in spite of all these warnings, isn't it our natural tendency to do the opposite of what James is saying?

We're all too quick to speak, aren't we? And too slow to listen. And when we do this, two things happen.

[11 : 46] We fail to discover God's way. What God would have us do in a given situation. We fail to discover his truth, his will. And then, because we do that, we speak or act not based on what God tells us is the wise way to go, thing to do.

We speak or act based on our own feelings about the situation. Our personal feelings. Or just our past experiences with certain people or certain situations.

Or we may just think about what everybody else is saying and be influenced by that.

Popular opinions of the secular world. You know, over the past several weeks, we've been looking at, in our series calling Think Biblically or Thinking Biblically, we've been looking at what it means to think biblically about such issues as race.

Law enforcement, law and order. We actually talked about the role of government in our lives, in our country.

[13 : 05] Talked about law enforcement, their responsibility to carry out the law, enforce the law, protect and serve, those kinds of things. We've been looking at, over the past few weeks, socialism.

And we spent two weeks on our personal political involvement. Now I want to ask you, are you doing your best to think biblically about those issues?

Do you, as a Christian, when you watch the news or hear the news and see all that's going on, are you trying to try to get a hold of it, put your mind around it, and think, what does God's word say about this situation?

About what's right and what's wrong? What's good, what's evil? Or, do you form your views, your personal views, based on just how you feel at a given moment?

Do you just react to what you see on the news? Or, do you go by your personal experiences with people of a different race?

[14 : 29] Or your connection to people in law enforcement? Or, do you base your views on what you heard on Fox News?

Or CNN? Or some internet conspiracy theory? You know, it's shocking to think about how many Christians think that whatever they read on the internet is right, is true.

And believe it. Swallow it. Hook, line, and sinker. When a lot of it just defies reality. Don't get sucked into internet conspiracy theories.

The only way we're ever going to learn to really think biblically is to be quick to listen to God. As he speaks through his word.

Through his spirit. And a lot of times, in order to be quick to listen like this, we've just got to not speak. Be more concerned about listening, hearing from him.

[15 : 47] Or doing the study and reading his word than just what we think, what we've experienced, or what somebody is telling us from the outside.

James tells us one more thing to be slow about. We must be slow to anger. Let every person be slow to anger. James knew that when we are not quick to listen and slow to speak, we are more likely to say and do things out of anger.

Isn't that true? Don't you find that when you don't slow down and stop and think, hold your tongue, you just let yourself go.

React. React. Say, first thing comes off, comes out, you know, off the top of your head. Don't you find there's a lot of anger in that? James is probably describing someone who has deep-seated anger issues here.

They're an unteachable person. They are quick to speak and slow to listen because they think they know it all. You know, a lot of people don't have time to sit back and think, or they don't need to.

[17 : 02] Because they think they know it all. You know, generally speaking, this applies the younger you are. When I was a teenager, I had all wisdom than any human being ever needed.

I didn't need to listen. I certainly didn't need to listen to my parents. People were older than me because I knew it all. As I began life as a young adult, Lisa and I got married. I still figured. I pretty well got life figured out. When I first began being a pastor, I just knew that I knew more than everybody else in the church. But you know, the longer I've lived, the dumber I've got. I don't know near as much as I used to know.

I have found that there's a lot of people in this world who can actually help me understand things. God speaks through His Word, through His Spirit, and through a lot of wise people that He's put in our lives if we will listen.

[18:23] Maturity helps us to better understand what James is talking about here. But going back to the angry person. Angry person doesn't think biblically because they just don't seem to understand their need to listen to God.

And as a result, they cannot enjoy a right relationship with God. Look at what he says in verse 20. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God, the right way of life before God. And really before other people. If you've got anger issues, you need to deal with it. You need to acknowledge it. You need to confess it as the sin that it is.

You may need some help trying to identify the source of your anger. How to get a better handle on it. An angry person does not produce the righteousness of God in relationship with God or in relationship with other people.

Now keep in mind, James is writing to Christians. And he's writing to us about the importance of listening to the Word of God. That is a prerequisite to thinking biblically.

[19:38] But it's not enough just to listen. It's not enough to even think biblically. We've got to act according to the truth of God's Word. Let's look at point number two now.

We must be obedient to God's Word. Both listening and obeying is commanded. Note verse 22. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

He is emphasizing hear. Hear. Just don't hear only. Listening to the Word of God is vitally important. We can't obey it if we don't know it.

But just listening or just thinking is not sufficient. I want us all to understand that obeying the Word of God is essential.

James is making a command here in verse 22 that includes a warning. Look at the rest of it. James is telling us that if you think God is pleased with you just because you've acquired knowledge of the Bible, but you don't do what it says, then you are deceiving yourselves.

[20:57] You know, I know in church on Sunday morning, a lot of people, you've grown up reading the Bible. You know a lot about the Bible.

You may have memorized a lot about the Bible. You may read the Bible every day. But what James is talking about, what he is really emphasizing to us this morning is, as important as it is for you to read it, to hear it, to know it, God is most concerned with what you do with what you know.

How you act on it. I want to be real clear here. Don't misunderstand and think I'm downplaying the importance of reading or memorizing the Bible.

I'm not. Reading and hearing the Bible is vital for our spiritual growth. We should be daily Bible readers. That's not out of style.

That's not old-fashioned. That's not what people did when they were young or a generation ago. If we're going to really know God, know how to please Him, be able to live in close fellowship with Him, we've got to read His Word to better understand who He is and how He wants to relate to us.

[22:16] We've got to read His Word to know how to please Him, what does please Him and what does not. We should be regularly hearing the Bible taught, like it is here on Sunday mornings in these worship services.

Next week we're going to start back with Sunday school, another opportunity to gather together, smaller groups, hear the Word of God taught, maybe discuss it, talk about it, apply it to one another's lives.

Being a student of God's Word is essential to learning to think biblically. But James is warning us, don't deceive yourself into thinking that such Bible reading and Bible study are ends in themselves. Your goal should never be to read through the Bible in a year just so you can say to someone, I read through the Bible in a year. Your goal should never be to memorize so many verses a week, even in a one or any other thing.

It's great to read through the Bible in a year. It is a tremendous thing for you to memorize God's Word. But our goal should be putting it into practice, doing what God tells us to do, thinking and acting biblically in every area of our lives.

[23 : 43] You know, God is, God's really not, I don't think He's impressed with us being here this morning. It's easy to be here.

You get up, you come, you sit, you listen, hopefully. What God is most concerned about is what you and I do with what we get here and what we get in our personal Bible reading.

See, God's most concerned with how you're going to act this afternoon with your family. Next week, as a husband, as a wife, as a parent, as a child, as a student, wherever you go to school, as a teacher, as an employee, as an employer, you know, that's where we find out if we just think biblically or if we're living biblically.

It's easy to do what we do here on Sunday. But it's another thing to go back home, especially some homes, or go to certain jobs, be around certain people at school, be around certain friends, and really live like a Christian.

That's where God calls us to be faithful to Him, to look to Him for the strength, the boldness, the wisdom, the love, to actually put into practice what we say we believe.

[25 : 16] I want us to apply what James is saying to what we've been studying for the past several weeks in this series. Are your views on race, on law and order, on socialism, political involvement, all the things we've been looking at, are they based on what the Bible actually teaches about those issues?

I'm going to think that 90, at least 90% of people in this room, you do think about at least some of these issues.

You have opinions. You have beliefs. You may even have convictions. Well, are your views, whatever you call them, are they based upon what God has taught in His Word, what God has revealed in His Word, what we've been looking at over the past several weeks?

I want you to think about it. Just use as an example, if you just deep down are a racist, you just don't like people who don't look like, who don't have the same skin color as you.

I want you to understand you are not right with God. Because we've seen all human beings are created in the image of God.

[26 : 52] That makes all people of the same worth and value and dignity. There is no distinction because we're all created in the image of God. All people have descended from one set of parents, Adam and Eve.

We're all of the same, all human beings are of the same bloodline. We're all of the same one human race. And we can't make distinctions because this person's this color or maybe they're from a different part of the world or a different region of the country.

We can't say that we don't like this person. They're less than us and be right with God. Now we can say it all we want to but we cannot say it and be right with God.

What we need to learn to do some things are easier than others. We need to learn to look at life, all of life through the lens of scripture and let the truth of God's word guide our thinking and our living.

You know if you have sunglasses that are tinted sort of greenish you can there's a sort of a greenish tint to what you look at. Dark, dark blue there's sort of a bluish tint or some other color.

[28 : 13] The lens you look through has an effect on how things look to you. We need to let the Bible be that lens through which we look at all of life and we look at people and life situations based on what God says is true is right and not just what we think or feel what other people say.

That is the only way that any of us can please God if we're Christians our Heavenly Father. As God's people we need to make reading and studying the Bible one of the top priorities of our life.

It is essential to our spiritual health. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian. We've got to continue to spend time with the Lord in prayer in Bible study Bible reading.

That's the only way we're going to grow in our knowledge of Him our closeness to Him the only way we're going to be able to really and truly know how to know and do His will. But the reason we make this a priority is so that we can learn to actually think biblically and then with God's help live biblically.

What James writes here about being a doer of the Word it appears to be based on what Jesus taught when He concluded the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5, 6, and 7.

[29 : 44] I want you to look at this great body of teaching how Jesus concluded in Matthew 7 beginning in verse 24. Jesus said everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock and everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against the house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

What are you building your life upon? The words of Jesus the word of God or the words of men? There's really only those two options.

If Jesus returned to this world today and he asked you what have you done with the instructions that I have given you in your copy of the Bible how would you respond?

Would you have to be honest and say well I've just really not read it. I've just basically ignored it.

I want you to know that is not acceptable and if that's you when you see Jesus either at your death or his second coming you will not be acceptable and so I want to ask you to confess that as the sin that it is repent of it change your mind about what you're doing your life is not so busy that you cannot read the Bible make a commitment that right now I am going to start looking into God's word every day with a prayer Lord teach me help me to think the right way help me to live the right way or would you say to the Lord that you had read his Bible his word you had studied even in detail some things would you tell him that you had memorized some of it well if that's true that's good but don't stop there what the

[32 : 22] Lord is going to be most interested in hearing is your answer to this question what did you do with what you read what did you do with my instructions bottom line it is good for us to think biblically but it is vital that we also live biblically think about it what are you building your life upon what is the foundation and what Jesus said in that passage that we read only a life built on the truth of his word is going to be able to stand be able to stand and weather the storms of life in this world be a hearer studier of God's word but make sure you are a doer of what you hear and what you study let's pray together father father show us now just where we stand lord help us to not be content with knowledge help us to understand that just being able to think biblically is not sufficient help us right now father to just evaluate just how faithfully we are seeking to live according to the truth of your word or help us to so respond to you this morning that we leave here determined with your help the help of the indwelling holy spirit to be doers of what we read what we hear what we know help us not to deceive ourselves by thinking knowledge is enough lord i pray that you will work right now to make it clear to everyone in this room that this message is to christians men and women and young people who have turned from their sin and put their trust in jesus and him alone for their salvation father don't let anyone in this room misunderstand and think that they can earn a right standing with you by what they do but lord help us to understand clearly that if we are saved by your grace through faith in jesus it will be evident by the way that we live by the things that we do let's just all be prayerful and listen to the lord and respond to him as he's speaking to us during this time

I to the