

The End Of Hypocrisy

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[0 : 00] Let me pray for us before we open that passage. Father God, we want to thank you for your word, and we want to ask that right now, as we have heard, that we would be not mere hearers but doers.

We ask that you may enable us to be people who accurately reflect the life that you have purchased for us with the blood of Jesus. Amen.

One of the great struggles for those who call themselves a Christian is that everyone thinks they know how Christians are supposed to live.

I'm sure that you have heard the phrase, I thought you were a Christian, or I thought Christians weren't supposed to smoke, drink, get tattoos, be fun, stay up after 9.30, those sorts of things. Even here in the car park, when we ask cars who are not here for anything to do with us to park elsewhere during the week, there is often abuse along the lines of, I thought you guys were supposed to be Christian.

[1 : 08] I'm not sure what that has to do with parking, but they are sure. And the sad reality is, even though the car park might not be a good example, more often than not, when you hear a comment like that, the critique is correct.

So many people who wear the badge Christian live lives that look nothing like what the Bible says. And that's why so many people refuse to even hear the message of the Gospel.

Hypocrisy is one of the biggest barriers when it comes to telling people about Jesus. I'm yet to meet a non-Christian who doesn't like Jesus. I mean, he's loving, he's forgiving, he's generous, he's compassionate, he's powerful, he's great.

He'd be the perfect person to have in anyone's life. But it's Christians. And it's hypocritical lives that turn people off. And so we need to address the gap between what we say we believe and how we live if we're going to have any credibility in calling other people to follow Jesus.

But in fact, hypocrisy causes an even bigger issue. An issue that strikes closer. Where there is hypocrisy, where there's inconsistency between the words that we speak or the faith that we profess and the life that we live and the actions that we do and the way that we speak, it's not just the world out there that is questioning the validity of what we believe.

[2 : 48] It should make us stop and ask searching questions of ourselves. About just how genuine our faith really is. But the challenge is that nobody sets out to be a hypocrite.

Nobody's goal is to say their one thing and then do the other thing. At the heart of hypocrisy is self-deception.

At the heart of that gap of the way that we live and the way that we speak is a self-deception that's convinced itself that actually we're living exactly how we claim to.

It's a self-deception that has convinced ourselves that we are hitting the mark, that we are ticking the box. But unfortunately, when there is hypocrisy, when there's a gap between belief and action, between faith and life, there is deception.

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

[4 : 07] James is writing to early Christians who have been scattered all throughout the world then in different corners. They have different trials. They have different temptations. They're struggling as a religious minority.

And he wants to put a spotlight on them, particularly those who claim to be Christians, claim to be followers of Jesus, but look nothing like it.

And the struggle is that this self-deception is hard to see because we're deceived. It's self-deception. We're blinded to what we're really like and instead we float along in this sort of false confidence.

See, verse 22 assumes that there's a level of engagement because they're listening to the word. The problem isn't that they're not listening. The problem is that they're just listening. This whole letter of James is written to Christian churches, written to people who would have identified as followers of Jesus, written to people who probably gathered to study the Bible like we are now.

[5 : 14] Maybe had study groups during the week. Maybe did their quiet times. Maybe even memorized verses. And yet, because the churches then and now had a reputation and have a reputation for hypocrisy, James feels the need to warn them, and us, don't be deceived.

And he gives us two measures so that we can check just how genuine we are. So that we can check whether or not there is a gap that we've lost sight of or ignored.

Two safeguards so that we can check and not waste our energy in a life of deluded hypocrisy.

Verse 22. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. First safeguard, listen to the word. Second, do what it says. It's tempting to skip over the first one.

Like that's the easy one of the two. But it's still essential. The verse says, don't merely listen to the word.

[6 : 31] Meaning you have to be at least listening to it. I mean, I know listening to it's not enough, but if you're not listening, then you have no hope of doing it. Because you would not know what it is that is required of you.

And it's not as easy as it sounds. Listening is actually a lost art for many of us. Not just when it comes to God and the Bible, but with anyone.

Have you noticed that most of our conversations, if we're really honest, are not two people engaging with one another. They're two people taking it in turns, saying what they want to say. We don't sit and carefully listen to one another. We wait for our turn. We're distracted, focusing on what words it is that we will speak next. Just last week, we had Are You Okay Day.

It's a day designed to encourage people to ask one another how we're doing. In the hopes that those struggling with feelings of hopelessness and suicide might be cared for.

[7 : 29] The very fact that we need a day to force us to have those conversations and ask those questions says that we have lost the art of listening. Says that we're much more interested in what we have to say or what we think rather than those around us.

It's not a new thing. James challenges the Christians in the first century as well. Verse 19. My dear brothers, take note of this. Every one of you should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. See, our inability to listen well inhibits us in our relationships with one another. It reflects pride.

It reflects self-absorption that exists in all of us. And that pride draws us away from the life that God desires for us. From the life that God has designed for us.

A life lived self-seeking like that lacks the capacity, lacks the power to produce the kind of life that God has designed.

[8 : 42] And so we need another way. And in verse 21 we find it. Therefore, given that, you know, looking after ourselves, worrying about ourselves, speaking first, listening second, being quick to react, given that that doesn't work, therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

That pride that shapes so much of how we relate to one another is not just a slight deviation from God's design. It's not just a sort of slight challenge to what God has for us.

It's opposition to it. It's moral filth. Just like you can't have a relationship with a friend or spouse if you don't listen, you can't expect to have one with God if you don't listen either.

This passage has really strong echoes of Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 7 where Jesus speaks about the wise and the foolish builder and people come to him who have done miracles, who have preached sermons, who have driven out demons and they are sent away because God says, I never knew you.

The Bible and the story of Jesus is a relational word. It's designed to help us get to know God. And so if we come to it with a pride where our first response is to speak instead of listen, we will be incapable of having the relationship that God wants.

[10 : 34] The Bible is not some opinion column in the paper. It's not the wise musings of some gurus. It's God's word. It's the creator speaking to creatures.

And so we must listen with humility. This word has power.

Did you notice it gets a few different names in these verses? Listen to how it's described. Go back one verse to verse 18. It says, He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.

God's word has the power to give life. Or verse 21 again, Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

God's word can save. Verse 25, The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom. God's word gives life, can save and gives freedom.

[11 : 36] It is the word of truth. It is unchanging. It is reality defining. By it, we understand everything else in existence. We must listen to it.

And not just waiting to respond and say what we think or speak, but hanging on every life-giving word, eager for this to be the thing that defines who we are, what we care about.

And so you need to ask yourself the question, are you putting yourself in situations where you can listen to the word of God? Are you making the most of the opportunities that God is placing in front of you now?

Are you preparing well for church when we gather? Are you making sure you get a good night's sleep? Are you asking God to take away the things in your mind that you know will distract you or make you anxious?

Are you sitting in a good spot here where you know you can concentrate best? Are you eager to take notes? Are you blocking out time to read the Bible for yourself? Or is it just one of many voices that you're just looking for a gap in so that you can let us know what you think or how you see things?

[13 : 03] verse 22 Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Don't be deceived. Listen to the word. Don't merely listen but listen so that you can do what it says. One of the great strengths for our church is that we are Bible people. We love the Bible. Darren's already alluded to the fact that here in Australia and here in Sydney especially there is a saturation of good Bible teachers and good Bible teaching.

People who love God's word and seek to proclaim it faithfully. We love to read the Bible. We love to sing bits of scripture in our songs. We love to declare it in our creeds.

We love to preach from it. We do Bible studies around it. We learn memory verses. But does all of that make any difference to the way that you speak or think or act or feel?

[14 : 16] Imagine a scenario in my house with me and my son Bailey. I've just put him to bed and I've explained that he has to stay in his room and go to sleep.

I've wandered out to watch TV for my moment of solitude in the day and a few minutes later he reappears working his cheeky grin. He always comes out and asks a question like he doesn't know. Oh, what are you doing? And leans around and starts watching TV. Oh, it's the TV. What's on TV? And then sort of works his way to sit on the lounge. So I say, Bailey, go back to your room, get into bed and stay there.

He continues to watch TV so thinking that he wasn't listening I say, Bailey, go back to your room, get in bed and stay there.

He looks at me. Here's the seriousness of my tone. He says, okay, and wanders off, stamping as loud as he can to wake Hudson up. Now, a little while later, imagine I wander down the hallway to get something out of my room and I find Bailey sitting in the hallway reading books.

[15 : 32] I'd be like, Bailey, didn't you listen to me? Imagine if he was to look up to me and say, yeah, dad, I listened and I've been thinking about what you said, really studying it and I think that you were talking about me staying in my bed and going to sleep.

In fact, I think I've memorised what you said. I think you said, Bailey, go back to your room, get in bed and stay there. You can imagine how the rest of the conversation might go from my side.

That kind of listening isn't okay in any sphere of our life. That kind of listening won't cut it with your boss when they give you instructions.

In fact, it completely defeats the purpose for me speaking those words. My goal wasn't that Bailey knew what I said. my goal was that Bailey did what I said.

And yet, often that's the way we listen to God's word. We think about it, we study it, we have study groups for it.

[16:59] We write in our journals, maybe we even memorise it. But does it make any difference? I've sat in Bible studies with people who when confronted with parts of the Bible that were uncomfortable or challenging, maybe bits that demanded some change or some sacrifice, and so those bits were completely pushed aside and rejected.

And the issue wasn't that they thought the Bible was saying something else, it's that they just didn't care. We're happy to read it and understand it, but the gap is in our obedience.

In effect, they were saying, I've listened, I know what you said, but I disagree. Maybe it's more subtle than that for some of us.

We read what the Bible says, we agree with what it says, but we either wrongly think it doesn't apply to us, you know the classic, I really hope that person's listening today because this is a message for them.

If they want to be as godly and humble as me, they've got some things they need to adjust. Or, maybe we feel that little twinge of guilt, we hear that little challenge or rebuke, but then we walk away and do nothing.

[18:22] verse 23 says, anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Now, I don't know many people who enjoy looking at themselves in the mirror. Actually, that's not entirely true. Just about everyone at the gym I go to enjoys checking themselves at the mirror. But there are a lot of people for whom a mirror can be very uncomfortable.

Because a mirror shows all the bits that you probably spend time trying to hide or disguise or trick yourself into thinking aren't there. And so, if you don't like what you see when you look in the mirror, it makes sense that you probably won't look that often and even if you do, you probably won't work too hard to remember what you saw.

It's much more pleasant to delude yourself into thinking you look how you want to look. So forget about the rough edges. But pleasant or not, it's not reality.

Looking in the mirror of God's word will at times make you uncomfortable. It will challenge you. It will demand things from you.

[19:44] It will show you parts of your life and parts of your character that are deeply offensive to God. But pretending that's not how it is, isn't going to help you.

The point of a mirror is to see what's there so that you can make adjustments. If I get up in the morning and I'm looking in the mirror and I'm styling my hair, bit of product in it, little twist here, little pat there, if when I look in the mirror I'm not happy with what I see, I make adjustments.

I deal with the little alfalfa that's going on at the back. I put it where I was trying to put it so it looks how I want it to look. I'm not walking out the door looking ridiculous.

The solution isn't to avoid the mirror because it makes me uncomfortable, it's to deal with what the mirror shows me. And yet again, when it comes to our character, when the Bible shows us the gap between how we're living and what we claim to believe, often our first reaction is to pretend we didn't see it.

To trick ourselves into thinking that we're actually better than we are. We shrug our shoulders and we live in self-delusion rather than fixing the issue.

[21:06] To not do what Scripture calls you to do, to not obey what you hear, is to waste the opportunity given to you by God. The opportunity to be changed, to grow, to be better and even to be blessed.

Did you catch that in verse 25? Look there with me now. In contrast to the deluded, forgetful man, religion that, sorry, verse 25, 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.

The opposite of looking and forgetting is continuing, not forgetting, doing, grabbing hold of the opportunity presented by the chance to see the bits that need work.

I mean, did you notice what the mirror became there? This is an opposing analogy. These verses are connected but in one half, a man looks into a mirror. But in verse 25, a man looks into the perfect law that gives freedom.

The word of God is so much more than rules. It does so much more than show us the standard that God has set that we are not making. It shows us Jesus. It shows us a saviour.

[22 : 34] It is only perfect and it only brings freedom because of Jesus. Jesus. Jesus himself says, I came to fulfil the law. When Jesus comes to earth, he's perfect, perfectly obedient in every way, in every opportunity.

He obeys his heavenly father, even to the point of dying. And then when he dies, he dies as a substitute for every person who's failed to do that in their lives. He dies to offer forgiveness. He dies to pay debt. He offers to take shame and guilt. He offers to take away that moral filth and that evil that we need to get rid of.

This is why it's the word that saves. Because it's the word about Jesus. It's the word about the one who forgives sinful people, who loves those who don't deserve it, who exchanges his life for our life so that we can be acceptable to God.

Jesus satisfies the law. He perfects it. He transforms it. And then he redeploys it in our lives.

[23 : 56] Now the mirror has become a map. Before it was uncomfortable, but now it shows us where we are. It shows us the destination that God has prepared for his people.

Last week James showed us in James 1 and verse 4 about the goal of being mature and complete and not lacking anything. The mirror is now a map that shows us our inadequacies and failures, shows us the finish line, but also shows us in Jesus how we might get to that finish line.

And shows us how we might have as much blessing as possible every step of the way and every day between now and then. It's not something to be scared of or intimidated by.

It's God's guide on how you might be most blessed in the life that he's given you. It's not about guilt anymore because Jesus has dealt with that by dying for guilty people.

God's word is about pouring as much blessing as can possibly be squashed into your life. Will we still get corrected and rebuked and challenged?

[25 : 13] Will there still be huge sacrifices and changes that are demanded of us? Will we still feel guilty sometimes when we read it or listen to sermons? Yes.

But what's different now because of Jesus is what we do with that guilt. I remember my first job quite distinctly.

I worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken. It was my dream job after working in a video store because I didn't think you had to do anything in a video store. But working at KFC was also a dream job because I figured you could eat as much chicken as you wanted.

That was a half-truth. But it was still a fun job. But I remember working in there I actually had a lot to learn. I was 15 and so I'd never had any other job before trying to figure out that I had to wear my uniform correctly because I hadn't learnt that in the first however many years of school.

So I had to wear my uniform correctly. I had to be there on time. I had to stay until the right time. I had to keep myself busy. I had to always be doing whatever they asked me. And so there was kind of this fear that drives you in your job.

[26 : 22] I need to tick the boxes required of me otherwise my boss is going to turn around and say you're cut. You're fired. You're sacked. I can get a different 15 year old who can do your job. And so when you're at work there is this motivation for you to do what is required of you.

And that is if you don't do it you're gone. You're fired. That's it. Game over. However growing up living in my family there was a different motivation to do what was required of me.

It wasn't that if I didn't do it I was cut. That's not how families work. What do they say? You can choose your friends but you can't choose your family. You're stuck together.

And so I obeyed secure that obey or not obey I'm still going to be my parents' son but also confident that ultimately they loved me even if I disagreed with what they thought was best for me.

I obeyed from a place of security not hoping to meet a standard not hoping to get something back from them as a result.

[27 : 30] Doing the word obeying God's word isn't about being perfect. It's not about achieving a level so that God might think you're great or might love you more.

It's about being honest. Obeying the word about Jesus means seeing in the map and recognizing that you're not good enough. It means trusting him to fix the issue.

Trusting that his forgiveness is sufficient. Trusting that no failure is too big for his love to cover it. And then secure in his love chasing with every bit of energy the blessing that he has designed in obeying him.

In making the hard choices. In sacrificing. In changing. True hypocrisy comes when we delude ourselves into thinking that we've made it.

When we start convincing ourselves that there are no faults or adjustments required and instead are very quick to point out the adjustments required in others. It's a delusion that we have invented because we want to be secure.

[28 : 56] But the security that God's word offers is far better. At the beginning we talked briefly about how the world around us is quick to let us know when there's a gap between what we claim to believe and the way that we live.

The issue isn't that we're not perfect. That's not the expectation in God's word. It's not even the expectation in the world.

The issue is that we claim to be perfect. Whereas God's word tells us over and over we are far from it. The issue is that we put a standard here and then live here.

When in actual fact this is all God's word requires from us. That we would be distinct. That we would be different. That we would stand out. But not that we would be perfect.

That's a work that God is doing in us. That's a job that won't be finished until Jesus comes back or we get called home. And so what it means to have integrity.

[30 : 06] To be genuine. To be authentic. Is to actually say what the Bible says. I'm not there yet. I'm still sinful.

What it means is to have the humility talked about in verse 21 where our starting point when we open the Bible is I know there's something that needs to change even if I'm not sure what it is yet. To be so secure in God's love that it's okay. In fact it's even exciting to admit mistake. Because that's the step towards the growth that God wants to bring.

That's the step towards the blessing that God has designed for us. Authentic faith is so secure in what Jesus has done and in the unconditional love of God that it is honest and real about failure. And it delights to confess sin. Even publicly. Because that just shows how amazing Jesus is. But none of this lets us off the hook.

[31 : 17] The end point is not sweet. All I've got to do is admit that I'm not good enough and I can relax a bit. The word still does demand change. It does demand that we are distinct from the world.

It does show us what God wants. It does expect us to be on a journey towards that perfection that God is working in us. And if anything the freedom that we have because of Jesus, the security we have in his love should increase our urgency.

Should grow our desire to obey because it's not something we're not being chased with a naughty stick anymore. God has laid out in front of us the promise of blessing and motivated us to pursue obedience because of his goodness.

Verse 26 gives us a scary warning. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. There is still the warning here from James having pointed us to Jesus that if we claim one thing and live differently, we run the risk of having a worthless religion.

But 27, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

[32 : 37] Three quick opportunities to put into practice what James has challenged us on. Our conversations, our compassion and our character. It's not an exhaustive list.

This is not everything that it is to be a Christian but I'm sure it's a sufficient amount to make us feel uncomfortable. Do your words reflect God's design for them?

Are you encouraging? Are your words life-giving? Or is your mouth full of gossip and slander and coarseness?

Second one, are you actively engaged in caring for those who are less fortunate, those in need?

How do you respond to pictures of a three-year-old Syrian boy washed up on a beach?

And third, can your friends and family and colleagues and neighbours see something different in you compared to those around you?

[33 : 51] Or have you been diluted with the world that you live in? Are you just like everyone else? Now we're going to unpack those three things more as we go through this series.

But if just those couple of verses, just those three examples have made you uncomfortable or made you see something that you know needs to change, don't just listen.

Do what it says. Confess your failure.

Admit your inadequacy. And trust Jesus to forgive you. Trust him to be the one who will work in you to change you.

And secure in his perfect love, work with everything you've got to try and live in the blessing of obedience to his word.

[34 : 56] Hear this, verse 22 again. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 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.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. . . .

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