

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

²¹Therefore, putting aside^a all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness^b, in humility receive the word^c implanted^d, which is able to save your souls^e. ²²But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers^f who delude themselves^g. ²³For if anyone is a

^a **1:21 Therefore, putting aside.** James uses the word “therefore” because the following words continue to show us that we are in need of a righteousness that we cannot produce in the flesh (e.g., produced by anger). The word translated “putting aside” is the picturesque word for taking off a garment. It is a common picture also used by Luke (Acts 7:58), Paul (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22, 25; Colossians 3:8), the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1) and Peter (1 Peter 2:1; 5:5).

^b **1:21 all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.** The word translated “filthiness” is only used elsewhere in the New Testament in James 2:2. There it is used as an adjective to describe the dirty clothes of a poor man who wanders into the assembly. Here James is obviously talking about moral filth. Rather than “all that remains of wickedness,” the idea is probably better pictured as an abundance of wickedness. The English Standard Version renders this “rampant wickedness.” Some people are much more afraid of stinking in public than they are sinning in public. James says the filthy lifestyle must be shed.

^c **1:21 in humility receive the word.** When one thing is “put off” something new must be “put on.” Just as the old garment is a symbol of our pride, the new one is the picture of humility. Peter says the same thing:

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. 1 Peter 5:5

The word is of course the revelation of God. We would say “The Bible.” God’s word humbles you. When you sit in church or otherwise meditate on Scripture stripped of your filthy pride, God’s word penetrates and he cleanses your soul.

^d **1:21 implanted.** James uses the same type of illustration for the word of God that Jesus used. The message of the gospel is like a seed. God’s word planted in a receptive heart grows and produces salvation and fruit. The word that saves is the word that sanctifies.

^e **1:21 which is able to save your souls.** Readers have been troubled because it appears that James has things backwards. Must sinners clean up their act in order to receive salvation? Is this more evidence that James believed there is human merit in salvation? Consider this. What James is saying here is no different than John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5-12) calling the religious leaders to flee from the coming wrath and display fruit in keeping with repentance. It is also helpful to understand that God’s forever salvation is pictured three ways:

- We have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- We are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18).
- We shall be saved (Matthew 10:22).

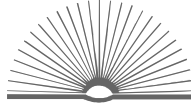
^f **1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers.** We will get more on this later from James. Parroting Sunday School answers does not demonstrate the change that accompanies salvation.

^g **1:22 who delude themselves.** The deception in verse 16 was to think that in some way God is responsible for evil. The deception here is to think that the word of God is merely enjoyable for listening. Some people like to listen to a good sermon and that is about as close as they come to escaping their old life.

James 1.21-24
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.
Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.



The unfolding of your words gives light.

hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks^a at his natural face in a mirror^b; ²⁴for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was^{c,d}

^a 1:23 **he is like a man who looks.** The word used here does not refer to a casual look, but means “to fix the mind on.” It is also used in the very next phrase. The Bible is a mirror and when we get a good look at ourselves we become accountable. Contrast this “look” word with the one used in the next sentence of looking into the “perfect law...”

^b 1:23 **his natural face in a mirror.** Literally “the face of his birth.” There is no deep hidden meaning here, only this: When you are exposed to the word of God you begin to see yourself as you really are—no makeup or masks.

^c 1:24 **once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.** This is human nature. We remember the good things people say about us (and let people know, sometimes in an exaggerated form), but conveniently forget when we learn that something about us has to change.

^d 1:21-24 This text is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount because it leaves the hearer in need of an unattainable righteousness. Just as Jesus said, “I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20), James calls sinners to look into a mirror that reveals sin without correcting it. So how can sinners change? If you ever find yourself despairing that you cannot keep up with the rules, here is hope:

1. Because of the cross, evil can be put aside. Next to God’s righteous standard our evil is so evident that there can be no doubt what has to go.
2. Because of the cross, the law can be written on the heart. In others words, real change happens when people begin thinking God’s thoughts. This is what Jeremiah 31:33 prophesies: “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”
3. Because of the cross, sinners can do what God says. Obedience does not result in salvation, salvation results in obedience.

James 1.21-24
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.
Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.