



Helping people encounter God in His Word



For use on Sunday, September 28, 2003

Introduction

Reality Check: When Life Requires a Balance *Trading Faces – When You Deceive Yourself*

“What a hypocrite!” steamed Marcus, “He has some nerve telling me that I should not be living with my girlfriend!”

“Who are you talking about?” asked Dave, Marcus’ college friend who was visiting.

“My Dad!” huffed Marcus, “He thinks he has some moral superiority. What a joke! Look at this letter he sent me!”

Marcus handed Dave the letter. As Dave read it he gave a low whistle and said, “Man, if I had a dad that said this, I’d tell him where to go!”

“You don’t even know the half of it!” fumed Marcus. “The thing is he had an affair with his secretary when I was eight. Now he thinks he can tell me what to do because he is a Christian. How lame is that?”

“What do you mean?” asked Dave.

Marcus replied, “After my dad had his affair, my mom took us kids away from him for awhile. We visited him every weekend while my folks were separated and went to counseling to save their marriage. During the counseling my dad accepted Christ, and turned completely around. It was about 9 months later that my parents moved back in together, still married. My mom somehow was able to forgive my dad, but not me. I saw what she went through and what he did to her. And now here he is telling me not to make the same mistakes he made. What a jerk!”

“Whoa! You never told me that before,” said Dave astonished. “I guess I understand the letter more now. But after you told me what you just did, Marcus, I think you’re lucky.”

“What?” said Marcus startled.

“Yeah, I think you’re lucky,” said Dave, “I didn’t even know my dad. My folks split up right when I was born and my mom raised me. It was tough. Mom tried to do everything, but she couldn’t. I respected her and everything, but I did what I wanted to. I had no one telling me not to do something because it would be a mistake. I have gotten into a lot of trouble and have learned the hard way, but you still have a mom and a dad. And even better is they worked out their marriage to still be together. If that is what becoming a Christian is about, that’s awesome! I think it is cool that your dad is trying to tell you that he made mistakes that he doesn’t want you to follow. I wish I had a dad who would have given me his perspective when he thought I was about to make a big mistake.”

Marcus stood there in stunned silence then said, “Dave, if I took my dad’s advice I’d be moving out on Beth! You think that wouldn’t be a mistake too? She’d break it off immediately!”

“Dude, I’m not saying that is what I would do,” exclaimed Dave, “but since your dad has made a similar mistake and changed, why not consider what he says. I mean he wrote in his letter that had he known the disastrous outcome of his actions before becoming a Christian, he wouldn’t have had the affair. You go to church, not me. You have to decide what you’ll do, and if what your dad says about sex and marriage in the Bible is true.”

Observation

What do you see?

James 1:19-27 *Listening and Doing*

¹⁹My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹Therefore, 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. 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. ²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion 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.

Record your first impressions from what you read.

Interact with the passages

- Put a circle around the words “quick” and “slow.” Draw arrows to the actions a person is to do.
- Underline the word “anger” and draw arrows to the outcomes of anger.
- Highlight the word, “therefore,” “get rid,” and “humbly accept.”
- Put a square around all references of “the word.” Draw arrows of the effects of the word on the person’s life.
- Highlight these phrases: “looks intently,” “continues,” “not forgetting,” “doing it.” Draw an arrow to the outcome of doing what is required.
- Circle all references to “religion.” Draw arrows in black ink to phrases that describe “worthless” religion. Draw arrows in blue ink to phrases that describe “acceptable” religion.

Interpretation

What does it mean?

When one allows biblical truth to honestly and humbly penetrate one’s life and acts upon that truth, behaviors and attitudes that are contrary to following God and loving others are changed, transforming the believer to being more like Christ.

Insights

- In v. 20 the “does not bring” is a present verb meaning anger continually does not bring about right thoughts or actions.
- “Filth” can mean filthy clothes and is coupled with “get rid” which in Greek means “to strip off.” This is a metaphor for taking off suspect morals like discarding dirty clothing.

- In Greek a literal translation is “abundant evil” in v. 21 and it indicates that wickedness is not a normal part of our character, but abnormal.
- “Looks intently” means to examine closely and look for minute clues and markers for later recognition.
- “But doing it” is “becoming a doer who does the work.”
- The term “religious” denotes the scrupulous observance of religious exercise, in either words or actions that is sincerely or hypocritically performed in the guise of devout religion.
- “Tight rein” is a picture of a bridle that a man would put in his own mouth.
- “Religion that God accepts” is literally “religion—clean and undefiled.”

Answering Questions of Interpretation

1. How is speaking in anger coupled with moral filth and evil? The therefore in v. 21 reflects back to the previous sentence. Does this tie from v. 21 to v. 19 also tie to “keeping one’s tongue” in v. 26? Are James’ readers having arguments about religious rites and activities?
2. How does one come to understand “do what it says”? Why is humbleness listed here so closely to this phrase? Does doing and humility have a close tie? What would humble doing look like in today’s society?
3. How does one keep from being “religious” or in this sense a hypocrite? What today are things that make people “religious”? Is true religion really visiting orphans, helping distressed widows, and keeping oneself from worldly values or something more? Explain.

Application

What do I do?

How well do I really listen? Do I find that I am someone who waits for someone to finish speaking so I can say what I want to say? What does my listening accomplish that speaking may not? Am I being too proud about my own ideas to really listen to someone else? How can improving my humility increase my listening skills?

Do I do what the Bible asks me to do? What and when was the last impression the Word made on me? Have I been living my life as I want to, or have I been applying the truth from the Bible daily in my life? If so, how? What has been the evidence? Am I certain that I am not pursuing ‘religiosity’ but ‘relationship’ with God and others? How can I tell? Write your impressions.

Correlation

How do we work this into our Home Group, Family, youth group, ministry, class, small group?

Core Competency: Authority of the Bible

Creed: I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Commentary: ‘Truth is what you make of it’ is what contemporary culture tells us. “Whatever is true for you is good for you, but don’t judge me. The axiom of “personal truth” makes all discussion of what is right and wrong and good and evil, subjective, changeable, and relative. It makes each person the sole owner of ‘their truth’ and the implication of a person living this way is isolation and anarchy, a less than ideal scenario when dealing with other people.

Fortunately, there is truth that is greater than each person’s personal preferences and originates from someone greater than Humankind and society. That truth originated with God and has been communicated to us by Him. We find God’s truth in the Bible, which was recorded by men who were in close fellowship with God. What they wrote did not reflect their personal truth preferences, but God’s truth.

Because God’s truth is communicated through the Bible, the reader finds non-contradictory unchanging commands, actions, and values that God desires and honors. Also, God’s truth revealed in the Bible is timeless, being relevant and effective not only to the original hearers but also to readers today. Followers of Christ can say with confidence that the Bible has the right to deliver God’s truth-- to command their beliefs and actions.

Question: Tell of a time that the truth of the Bible challenged a personal belief or action. What was the belief or action that was challenged? How did you respond in that situation to the biblical truth once it was revealed to you? Did you do what the Bible said or did you do what you wanted? Why do you think you responded that way?

Kid’s Corner – I Never Forget a Face

Say: All the kids need to go look at themselves closely in a mirror and when you get back you’ll answer some questions about what you saw.

Ask: (*When kids return from looking.*) I know each of you looked in the mirror. I will ask each of you questions of what you saw and you need to answer them.

• What color hair do you have? • Was your hair combed or messy? • What color eyes do you have? • What color eyebrows do you have? • Are your teeth white, yellow, or brown? • Do you have food stuck in your teeth?

Say: Okay, I believe you remember what you look like. The Bible says that if a person reads the Bible and does not do what it tells them to do, they are like a person who forgets what they look like. What would happen if you or your parents forgot what you looked like? (*Get lost, be scared, not find home*)

So when we read the Bible we need to do what it says. When we do what the Bible says we will not be lost or scared and can always find our way home to God because we recognize God and He recognizes us. When we follow or do what God tells us to do He says he will bless us.

Memorize: James 1:25 “When I continue to study the Bible, not forgetting what I heard, but doing it; God will bless me in what I do.”



Grace Community Church

1200 East Southern Avenue, Tempe, AZ 85282 • 480.894.2201 • www.gccaz.org