

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

JAMES 1:19-27 ¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ 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. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. ²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 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.

THERE IS A VERY OLD STORY ABOUT A PREACHER AND A SOAP MAKER WHO WALKED TOGETHER THROUGH THEIR CITY.

THEY TALKED ABOUT THE MANY PROBLEMS THEY SAW, AS WELL AS OTHERS THEY KNEW ABOUT.

FINALLY, THE SOAP MAKER SAID TO THE PREACHER: “THAT BIBLE OF YOURS MUST NOT BE TOO GOOD, LOOK AT ALL OF THIS!”

HIS COMPANION WAS SILENT FOR A MOMENT, BUT AS THEY TURNED THE CORNER THEY OBSERVED A NUMBER OF DIRTY CHILDREN PLAYING IN THE STREET.

THEN THE PREACHER REMARKED, “LOOKS LIKE THAT SOAP OF YOURS ISN’T VERY GOOD EITHER.”

BUT THE SOAP MAKER PROTESTED SAYING, “SOAP DOESN’T WORK IF YOU DO NOT USE IT.”

THE PREACHER SMILED AND SAID, “NEITHER DOES THE BIBLE WORK UNLESS YOU APPLY IT TO YOUR LIFE.”

FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS THROUGH THE BOOK OF REVELATION THE WORD OF GOD CALLS FOR FAITH TO BE DEMONSTRATED BY BOTH BELIEF AND ACTION.

TOGETHER THEY HELP TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD OUR CREATOR.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE FROM DEUTERONOMY SIX, PROVIDES THE GROUNDWORK FOR COVENANTAL HEARING AND DOING:

“HEAR O ISRAEL, THE LORD YOUR GOD IS ONE. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, AND MIGHT.”

SIMILARLY, JAMES SOUGHT TO TELL THE CHURCH OF HIS TIME, TO CONSIDER THE SERIOUS NATURE OF FAITH THAT NOT ONLY CONFESSES BELIEF IN CHRIST, BUT ACTS ON THAT CONFESSION.

TRULY, LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE REQUIRES MORE THAN A CASUAL EFFORT, LIKE A QUICK GLANCE IN THE MIRROR.

IT CALLS FOR A HEARTFELT DESIRE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO WHAT WE DISCERN IS GOD'S MESSAGE.

THE BIBLE CALLS US TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOD WHO LOVES US SO MUCH- HE SENT JESUS TO DIE FOR OUR SINS IN ORDER TO SAVE US.

IN THIS SENSE THE BIBLE COULD BE COMPARED TO A TREASURE MAP THAT TAKES US ON A JOURNEY, WHICH WILL CONCLUDE BY US FINDING THE GREATEST TREASURE OF ALL- A PLACE IN THE ARMS OF GOD.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES IS ACTUALLY MORE LIKE A SERMON ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, THAN IT IS A TRUE LETTER.

IT'S AUTHOR DRAWS ON THE WISDOM TEACHINGS FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, AND APPLIES THEM TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

SPECIFICALLY, HE FOCUSES ON HOW CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND ACTION MUST BE UNIFIED IF ONE IS TO HAVE A LIFE OF CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY.

NATURALLY, JAMES DOES NOT EXPECT CHRISTIANS TO AUTOMATICALLY DEMONSTRATE MATURITY OF FAITH.

HE REALIZES THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN BOTH BELIEF, AND IN THE KIND OF DEEDS THAT MIRROR BELIEF IN CHRIST.

YET HE INSISTS ON CHRISTIANS MAKING STEADY PROGRESS TOWARDS THE GOAL OF ACTIONS OR WORKS, WHICH REFLECT THE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THEY CONFESS.

JAMES, THROUGH THESE WORDS OFFERS HIS DEFINITION OF THE CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE. THE GREEK WORD TRANSLATED AS "RID" SPECIFICALLY REFERS TO CLOTHING.

HE WROTE: "RID YOURSELVES OF SORDIDNESS AND RANK GROWTH OF WICKEDNESS...."

THUS HE ENVISIONS CHRISTIANS REMOVING CERTAIN BEHAVIORS THAT OPPOSE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, MUCH LIKE ONE WOULD REMOVE FILTHY CLOTHING.

AND IN PLACE OF THOSE SOILED GARMENTS CHRISTIANS SHOULD PUT ON THE CLEANER CHARACTERISTICS OF LISTENING FOR GOD'S WILL AND FOLLOWING IT.

THIS IS DONE BY CHRISTIANS WELCOMING GOD'S WORD IMPLANTED IN OUR LIVES IN A WAY THAT INSPIRES AND BUILDS UPON OUR SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST.

HE EXPLAINS THIS IN ANOTHER WAY BY SAYING: "BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DECEIVE THEMSELVES".

THEN HE OFFERS WHAT COULD BE CALLED: "THE PARABLE OF THE MIRROR", BECAUSE IT COMPARES THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR WITH THAT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

THINK ABOUT WHAT THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR IS. IT GIVES US THE ABILITY TO LOOK AT OUR OUTWARD APPEARANCE AND CORRECT ANYTHING WE SEE THAT IS OUT OF PLACE.

WE ALSO MAY LOOK IN A MIRROR TO DETECT ANY DIRT OR SMUDGE ON OUR FACE, OR TO STRAIGHTEN OUR CLOTHING.

HOWEVER, IF WE LOOK IN A MIRROR, SEE SOMETHING OUT OF PLACE AND THEN MOVE AWAY WITHOUT CORRECTING THE PROBLEM, THE MIRROR HAS DONE US LITTLE GOOD.

JAMES SAYS THAT SCRIPTURE IS LIKE A MIRROR, IT IS IN FACT GOD'S MIRROR INTO OUR SOULS-MEANING OUR LIVES.

IN THE MIRROR OF GOD WE CAN SEE BOTH OUR CHARACTER FLAWS AND OUR VIRTUES.

YES, THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD HELPS US TO SEE WHAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED OR CHANGED, AS WELL AS TO SEE WHAT IS ALRIGHT.

THEREFORE, A CHRISTIAN WHO HEARS GOD'S WORD, BUT DOES NOT THEN SEEK TO UNDERSTAND AND DO IT; DOES NOT BENEFIT FROM SCRIPTURE.

SUCH PEOPLE HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD BUT THEN GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, LEAVING GOD BEHIND. THE APOSTLE COUNSELS AGAINST SUCH A CHOICE.

JAMES GOES ON TO SUGGEST THAT FAITH PUT INTO ACTION REFLECTS THE LAW OF LIBERTY, WHICH PROVIDES GREAT BLESSINGS TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW IT, SAYING:

"BUT THOSE WHO LOOK INTO THE PERFECT LAW, THE LAW OF LIBERTY, AND PERSEVERE, BEING NOT HEARERS WHO FORGET, BUT DOERS WHO ACT-THEY WILL BE BLESSED IN THEIR DOING."

WE ARE BLESSED BY THE CONSTRAINTS OF GOD'S LAW BECAUSE IT SHOWS US HIS WILL AND HELPS US MEASURE OUR RESPONSE.

OF COURSE WE OFTEN THINK OF THE LAW AS LIMITING OUR FREEDOM RATHER THAN ENHANCING IT.

BUT FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST THIS IS NOT THE CASE. THE LAW OF GOD, RATHER THAN INFRINGING ON OUR RIGHTS, HELPS TO BOTH DEFINE AND ENHANCE THEM.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY DRAWS US CLOSER TO GOD AS WE BECOME MORE FAITHFULLY ACTIVE IN FOLLOWING JESUS.

THUS THE LAW IS LIBERATING BECAUSE ITS PURPOSE IS TO GIVE OUR LIFE DIRECTION RATHER THAN LIMITATIONS.

IN OUR WORLD PLAGUED BY SIN, LIFE WITHOUT ANY RULES WOULD RESULT IN STRESS, CONFUSION, AND PROBABLY ANARCHY.

PEOPLE NEED SOME DIRECTION IF FREEDOM IS TO TRULY BE EXPERIENCED IN THEIR LIVES.

THUS GOD GAVE INSTRUCTIONS TO GO WITH THE GIFT OF FREE WILL. FOR TRUE FREEDOM IS A MATTER OF ABIDING BY CERTAIN LIMITATIONS AS WELL AS MAKING CHOICES.

IN OTHER WORDS, CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS NOT FOUND BY ADHERING TO THE CONDITIONS OF A "DOG-EAT-DOG" WORLD.

BUT RATHER IT CONSISTS IN LIVING BY CHRIST'S COMMANDMENT TO LOVE.

THUS FAITH WORKS THROUGH LOVE-THE LOVE OF GOD, SELF, AND NEIGHBOR. THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE AS GOD'S MIRROR.

FIRST, A REMINDER ABOUT MIRRORS MAY BE HELPFUL: THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR IS TO LOOK AT OURSELVES AND NOT TO LOOK AT OTHERS.

IF A PERSON WENT AROUND SHOVING AN ACTUAL MIRROR IN PEOPLE'S FACES SAYING, "DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE? COMB YOUR HAIR OR WASH YOUR FACE." HE OR SHE WOULD LOOK FOOLISH.

SIMILARLY SHOVING THE BIBLE IN OTHER PEOPLE'S FACES AND TELLING THEM TO GET THEIR LIVES IN ORDER WILL ALSO MAKE US LOOK FOOLISH TO MOST PEOPLE.

HOWEVER LIVING OUT THE FAITH WE CONFESS IN VISIBLE WAYS MAY INSPIRE OTHERS TO LOOK AT THEIR OWN LIVES THROUGH GOD'S MIRROR-THE BIBLE.

ANOTHER RELEVANT POINT IS THAT LIKE AN ACTUAL MIRROR, WE NEED TO LOOK INTO SCRIPTURE AND REFLECT ON WHAT WE HEAR THERE MORE THAN ONCE.

THE GREAT PREACHER CHARLES SPURGEON TOLD A STORY ABOUT HIMSELF ONE EVENING WHILE AT DINNER IN A RESTAURANT HE BECAME DISTURBED BY SEEING A MAN SCOWLING AT HIM FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM.

HE TRIED TO IGNORE IT, BUT FINALLY DECIDED TO GO OVER TO HIM AND FIND OUT WHY THE MAN KEPT STARING AT HIM IN THAT WAY.

WHEN REV. SPURGEON STOOD UP, HE REALIZED HE HAD BEEN LOOKING AT HIS OWN FACE IN A MIRROR ON THE WALL.

HE NEVER REALIZED HE MADE SUCH FACES IN PUBLIC AND SEEING THIS CAUSED HIM TO STRIVE TO BE MORE CONSCIOUS OF HOW HE PRESENTED HIMSELF.

SOMETHING SIMILAR CAN BE SAID ABOUT LOOKING INTO SCRIPTURE. FIRST, WE SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED WHEN FIND WE ARE DOING PRETTY WELL IN SOME ASPECTS OF OUR FAITH WALK.

BUT WE SHOULD ALSO BE MOTIVATED TO REPENT AND SEEK THE SPIRIT'S HELP TO CHANGE WHEN WE SEE HOW WE ARE FALLING SHORT OF LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

AND, HOW WE REACT WHEN WE DISCOVER SOMETHING WE DO NOT LIKE, IS KEY.

FOR EXAMPLE: THINK ABOUT THE STORY OF SNOW WHITE. THE WICKED QUEEN WOULD LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND ASK WHO IS THE FAIREST IN THE LAND.

THE MIRROR WAS ALWAYS TRUTHFUL-IT SAID SHE WAS THE FAIREST. BUT THEN ONE DAY THE TRUTHFUL ANSWER CHANGED-SNOW WHITE WAS FAIRER.

THIS WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE QUEEN-SHE COULD CHOOSE TO ACCEPT THIS CHANGE, SHE COULD TRY TO IMPROVE HER OWN LOOKS, SHE COULD SMASHED THE MIRROR. OR SHE COULD TRY TO REMOVE SNOW WHITE.

IN THE STORY, SHE CHOSE THE LATTER BUT IT DID NOT WORK OUT WELL FOR HER IN THE END.

LOOKING INTO THE TRUTHFUL MIRROR OF SCRIPTURE WE HAVE SIMILAR CHOICES-PASSIVELY ACCEPT OUR SINS, WORK TO CONFORM MORE FULLY TO GOD'S WORD, TOSS THE BIBLE ASIDE, OR FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON OTHER PEOPLE. A WOMAN NAMED EVIE TORNQUIST RECORDED A SONG THAT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY INSPIRED BY THE STORY OF SNOW WHITE AND SCRIPTURE AS GOD'S MIRROR.

LISTEN TO SOME OF THE LYRICS AS YOU IMAGINE YOURSELF LOOKING INTO A MIRROR AND HEARING THESE WORDS:

“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WHAT IS YOUR LIFE COMING TO?”

YOU'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR JESUS, LOOKING TO FIND HOPE FOR TOMORROW, AND SOME PEACE OF MIND.

YOU CAN FIND HIM IN THE BIBLE AND MANY CHURCHES THAT I KNOW BUT 'TIL YOU FIND HIM IN THE MIRROR YOU'VE GOT A LONG WAY TO GO.

SO MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, I KNOW WHO IS LORD OF ALL. JUST LET ME SEE HIM EVERYDAY. FOR ME THAT IS THE ONLY WAY.”

GOD'S WORD CALLS US TO BE LIKE JESUS, BUT IN TRUTH, WE WILL NEVER SEE JESUS CLEARLY WHEN WE LOOK INTO THE MIRROR. HOWEVER, WE CAN CATCH GLIMPSES OF HIM.

WE CAN SEE HIM AT TIMES IN OUR OWN WORDS AND ACTIONS AND CHOICES.

THE GOAL IS TO NOT GIVE UP, EITHER BY DECIDING WE ARE CLOSE ENOUGH TO REFLECTING JESUS WE DO NOT NEED TRY ANYMORE; OR BY DECIDING WE ARE NEVER GOING TO SEE HIM WELL ENOUGH IT IS WORTH THE EFFORT TO CHANGE.

LET US PRAY: HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR YOUR REMINDER TO KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS AND OUR HEARTS FOCUSED ON THE TRUTH OF YOUR WORD. THANK YOU FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS THE BIBLE CONTAINS. HELP US TO BE QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO ANGER, NOT ONLY WITH OTHER PEOPLE, BUT ALSO AS IT RELATES TO YOU AND YOUR WORD, ESPECIALLY ON THOSE OCCASIONS WHEN WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT, OR STRUGGLE WITH HOW YOU WANT US TO LIVE AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. IN HIS NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: DEUT. 6:1-9 AND JAMES 1:17-27

FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS THROUGH THE BOOK OF REVELATION THE WORD OF GOD CALLS FOR FAITH TO BE DEMONSTRATED BY BOTH BELIEF AND ACTION. TOGETHER THEY HELP TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD OUR CREATOR.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE FROM DEUTERONOMY SIX, PROVIDES THE GROUNDWORK FOR COVENANTAL HEARING AND DOING: “HEAR O ISRAEL, THE LORD YOUR GOD IS ONE. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, AND MIGHT. “SIMILARLY, JAMES SOUGHT TO TELL THE CHURCH OF HIS TIME, TO CONSIDER THE SERIOUS NATURE OF FAITH THAT NOT ONLY CONFESSES BELIEF IN CHRIST, BUT ACTS ON THAT CONFESSION.

TRULY, LISTENING FOR GOD’S VOICE REQUIRES MORE THAN A CASUAL EFFORT, LIKE A QUICK GLANCE IN THE MIRROR. IT CALLS FOR A HEARTFELT DESIRE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO WHAT WE DISCERN IS GOD’S MESSAGE. THE BIBLE CALLS US TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOD WHO LOVES US SO MUCH- HE SENT JESUS TO DIE FOR OUR SINS IN ORDER TO SAVE US.

IN THIS SENSE THE BIBLE COULD BE COMPARED TO A TREASURE MAP THAT TAKES US ON A JOURNEY, WHICH WILL CONCLUDE BY US FINDING THE GREATEST TREASURE OF ALL- A PLACE IN THE ARMS OF GOD.

SO JAMES INSTRUCTS US: “BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DECEIVE THEMSELVES”. THEN HE OFFERS WHAT COULD BE CALLED: “THE PARABLE OF THE MIRROR”, BECAUSE IT COMPARES THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR WITH THAT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

THINK ABOUT WHAT THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR IS. IT GIVES US THE ABILITY TO LOOK AT OUR OUTWARD APPEARANCE AND CORRECT ANYTHING WE SEE THAT IS OUT OF PLACE. BUT IF WE LOOK IN A MIRROR, SEE SOMETHING OUT OF PLACE AND THEN MOVE AWAY WITHOUT FIXING THE PROBLEM, THE MIRROR HAS DONE US LITTLE GOOD. JAMES SAYS THAT SCRIPTURE IS LIKE A MIRROR, IT IS IN FACT GOD’S MIRROR INTO OUR SOULS-MEANING OUR LIVES.

IN THE MIRROR OF GOD WE CAN SEE BOTH OUR CHARACTER FLAWS AND OUR VIRTUES. YES, THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD HELPS US TO SEE WHAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED OR CHANGED, AS WELL AS TO SEE WHAT IS ALRIGHT. THEREFORE, A CHRISTIAN WHO HEARS GOD’S WORD, BUT DOES NOT THEN SEEK TO UNDERSTAND AND DO IT; DOES NOT BENEFIT FROM SCRIPTURE. SUCH PEOPLE HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD BUT THEN GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, LEAVING GOD BEHIND. JAMES COUNSELS AGAINST THAT CHOICE.

A REMINDER ABOUT MIRRORS MAY BE HELPFUL: THE PURPOSE OF A MIRROR IS TO LOOK AT OURSELVES AND NOT TO LOOK AT OTHERS. IF A PERSON WENT AROUND SHOVING AN ACTUAL MIRROR IN PEOPLE FACES SAYING, “DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE? COMB YOUR HAIR OR WASH YOUR FACE.” HE OR SHE WOULD LOOK FOOLISH.

SIMILARLY SHOVING THE BIBLE IN OTHER PEOPLE’S FACES AND TELLING THEM TO GET THEIR LIVES IN ORDER WILL ALSO MAKE US LOOK FOOLISH TO MOST PEOPLE. HOWEVER LIVING OUT THE FAITH WE CONFESS IN VISIBLE WAYS MAY INSPIRE OTHERS TO LOOK AT THEIR OWN LIVES THROUGH GOD’S MIRROR-THE BIBLE.

ANOTHER RELEVANT POINT IS THAT LIKE AN ACTUAL MIRROR, WE NEED TO LOOK INTO SCRIPTURE AND REFLECT ON WHAT WE HEAR THERE MORE THAN ONCE. FIRST, WE SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED WHEN FIND WE ARE DOING PRETTY WELL IN SOME ASPECTS OF OUR FAITH WALK. BUT WE SHOULD ALSO BE MOTIVATED TO REPENT AND SEEK THE SPIRIT’S HELP TO CHANGE- WHEN WE SEE HOW WE ARE FALLING SHORT OF LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL.

GOD’S WORD CALLS US TO BE LIKE JESUS, BUT IN TRUTH, WE WILL NEVER SEE JESUS CLEARLY WHEN WE LOOK INTO THE MIRROR. HOWEVER, WE CAN CATCH GLIMPSES OF HIM. WE CAN SEE HIM AT TIMES IN OUR OWN WORDS AND ACTIONS AND CHOICES.

THE GOAL IS TO NOT GIVE UP, EITHER BY DECIDING WE ARE CLOSE ENOUGH TO REFLECTING JESUS WE DO NOT NEED TRY ANYMORE; OR BY DECIDING WE ARE NEVER GOING TO SEE HIM WELL ENOUGH THAT IT IS WORTH THE EFFORT TO CHANGE.