

desire in life, but to be carried along instead by the Spirit of God.

Authentic faith changes how we see others. James says true religion is to look after the fatherless and widows. James includes the two most vulnerable and powerless people of his culture. In a world that overlooks those without clout, without a voice, without power and influences the church, the follower of Jesus looks after them. It is not that they are simply acknowledged, but they are cared for and regarded. Authentic faith means that we do not value what the world values, that is especially true with it comes to the value of people.

I want to close by returning to James illustration of the mirror. James says that authentic faith means being hearers and doers of the Word. He gives us an illustration that the one who is merely a hearer is like the person who looks in the mirror and sees himself, but when he leaves he forgets what he looks like. It is the picture of the person who comes to God's Word and hears it and reads it, but once it is heard and read it is forgotten or at least put to the side.

Yet, the person who is a hearer and doer looks intently. Looks with intention and continuously and becomes obedient. This person we are told is blessed.

James is warning us against this self-deception. When we think that faith is without transformation and change in our lives, then we are self-deceived. James states that is not authentic faith.

I know you all have been to a place with funny mirrors. Maybe even your house or gym has a mirror you like the way you look in it. Mirrors are not perfect reflections of who we are. Sometimes mirrors make us look better than we really do and others make us look worse than we really do. The truth is most of us, whether it is physical or emotional or psychological self, we have a skewed view of who we are. We have a distorted view. God wants us to see ourselves as we really are.

In James' day a mirror was simply highly polished metal. It would have been a poor reflection of the

person at best. The one who is not a doer of the word begins with a poor reflection of self and even forgets that reflection as they go away from the mirror. The person who is the doer of the word does not begin by looking at self, but instead looks intently and continuously into the Word of God and remembers it and does it. This person is blessed.

When we begin with looking at self and self is how we measure our lives we always fail to become what God has intended. It is only when we begin with God's word to us that we truly see our self as we are and have the ability to live lives pleasing to God.

There are two great deceptions that we must guard against. First, we must guard against the deception that God is not good. God is good, giving and always at work leading us to life. We must guard against a self-deception of faith. It is not simply thinking and knowing the right things, instead authentic faith has evidence. It changes our response to circumstances, it changes our ability to control our response, and it changes how we look at others.

Don't be deceived.



The Great Deception

James 1:19-27



There are many experiences that cause us emotional angst. There is disappointment in others and circumstances. There are moments of transition that mean changes and loss. There of course are instances of loss whether it is death, a job change, a relationship ending or a day like this past Monday. (Black Monday on Stock Market) All of these types of experiences cause us great emotional stress. However, there is one experience that we all have experienced, to some degree, that leaves us with many questions in our pain and hurt. That experience is deception.

Just the term deception causes us to have feelings of hurt, or anger and many times we are just at a loss in a moment when we feel we have been deceived.

Deception is how our sin problem began according to Genesis. In the Garden of Eden, God gave man and woman all they needed to not only survive but also thrive and live a joyful life. Yet, the serpent deceives the woman with a lie about God and a lie about God's creation. The woman is deceived, the man is deceived and disobedience and sin enter the world.

Since that moment, deception has been a part of our experience. There are many warnings in scripture about us not being deceived. The term that is used means simply misled. Don't be misled. We are to be on guard as Christians that we not be deceived.

In the first chapter, James warns the new young Christians not to be deceived. He uses the term three times in these few verses. James was writing to the young church and new Christians and he was concerned that they have an authentic faith in Jesus. A faith, that was not only of confession, but one that would be authenticated by their

living. James is writing to Christians who were living in a world where they were the minority. They were being tested by the circumstances of the world and they were being tempted to leave their faith and not persevere through trials of every kind. It is into this setting that James admonishes the young believers to "not be deceive" and "do not deceive your self."

What is James main concern? The first deception that James warns against is not to be deceived or misled about the nature of God. The church was undergoing persecution. They Christian people were facing trials of many kinds. There is much discussion on just what were these trials. What we can surmise is first these trials were the result of the action of others. These trials are not so much temptation as we will discuss later, but rather outward experiences that tested the faith of the follower of Jesus. They could have been trials from others directly connected to living one's faith. There may have been those who were being persecuted by others because they were followers of Jesus. Although it does not appear that these were physical in nature at this point in the history of the church, there was never the less persecution emotionally, economically and socially. The church was a minority living in the midst of a culture that was very different than them. They did not value what the world valued and thus, there was persecution and trials. To be sure the day would come when these emotional and social trials would become physical, but as James wrote he was speaking of those moments of trials that tests ones faith. In general, we should think of these trials of many kinds as external in nature. Those moments in life that cause us to question our faith in God.

James reminds us that these trials are a part of life and especially a part of the life of the follower of Jesus. Just as the world



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did not receive Jesus thus, the world does not receive those who follow Jesus. Just as Jesus faced trials and opposition, so the followers of Jesus will face opposition. However, James reminds us that these moments of opposition and troubles in life are not to destroy us, but to perfect us. God uses them to deepen our faith.

James was concerned about how those who were following Jesus were reacting to the trials, which they were encountering, and in turn how they viewed God's activity in the trial. Here is where their thinking had been skewed. There were those whose line of thinking was this:

1. Life is not suppose to be difficult when you follow Jesus
2. How come this is happening to me when I chose to follow Jesus
3. Will Jesus not keep me from having such difficulty
4. If this is happening God must not be in charge
5. If this is happening God must not love me
6. These trials are leading me to doubt my faith
7. These trials are leading me to turn from my faith in God
8. I am tempted to sin because obviously following Jesus does not work

Have you ever had such thoughts? So the process is very simple. We face trouble and trials, we blame God and thus we are tempted to turn from God and this temptation leads us to sin against God and James outlines the result of this temptation.

Temptation he writes is like a birth process that leads to sin. Temptation is not testing. Temptation comes from within us and begins as desire where we are enticed, dragged away and desire gives birth to sin and sin leads to death.

James makes a point for us to understand that testing is not tempting and tempting is not testing. Testing is what happens to us and tempting is what happens within us. Testing is a part of life and God allows it for the purpose of perfecting us. Temptation however is not from God and if unchecked leads to death.

James wants us to guard our thinking about God. God is not the one who leads us astray. In fact, James tells us that God does just the opposite. God always is leading to life and not death. What God is doing is always good. James reminds us not to be deceived about God and God's activity in our life.

James gives us four descriptions of God. First, God is good. Every good and perfect gift comes from God. It is true God is good all the time. The phrase here in James suggests two characteristics of God. First, all God does in our life is good and for our good. Second, there is no good that God withholds from us. The original deception in the Garden of Eden is "God does not want good for you and God is holding good from you." James says do not be deceived into thinking God is somehow acting in a way that is not good, nor think that God withholds good from us.

Second, God is a giver. Every good gift comes from God who is the Father of lights. God should never be seen as someone who is withholding from us. We do not somehow coax God to be good or to love us. What God gives to us is not the result of our deserving good, or earning good or bartering with God to give good to us. Just the opposite, the God who reveals Himself to us is also the God who gives good to us freely and joyfully.

Third, James reminds us that God is unchangeable. James uses some interesting images to remind us that God is not capricious. God is not good one day and not the next. We can count on the nature of God. James says God is not like shifting shadows. This reference is to the nature of heavenly lights meaning the stars, sun, moon and constellations. The ancients thought of these as unchangeable. You could count on them. However, they knew there were some variations in even the heavenly lights that they counted on for something fixed and certain. God is more certain. God is completely certain. You and I can count on God.

James finishes this warning by reminding us that in contrast to the temptation and sin that leads to death, God is giving us life. We are birthed through the word of truth. We are born again through the gospel. Our new birth is leading to life, the first fruits, the best life that God created.

There is a great deception about God. When we are tested by life we can begin to think that God does not care or that God is powerless. This in turn can lead us to the temptation to turn from God, which leads not to life but to that which will destroy us. James reminds us what we think about God is important. God will use testing to mature us. God is not tempting us, but God is good and holds nothing good from us. We can count on God. It is God's intent to lead us the best of life.

My friends, God is not holding out on us. God gives

us life. Don't be deceived.

Don't be deceived about self. James goes on to remind us that there is evidence in the life of those who follow Jesus. Authentic faith argues James is not simply hearing about Jesus, but it is to believe it and apply it to our lives. Authentic faith according to James has evidence.

James has a progression of a faith process. There is hearing, there is an implanting of the word in our lives and then there is doing. The person who is truly following Jesus not only hears the word, but it is planted into their life and it takes root and then they become obedient. Now, don't be confused. We are not talking about how we are saved from our sins. It is not our work, but by faith and God's grace alone. We cannot earn our salvation, but the person who is in a relationship with Jesus wants to follow Jesus' commands. Thus, James says that faith without works is dead. Faith in Jesus should reveal a transformation in life.

James reminds us that faith in Jesus changes every part of our being. It changes our reactions and emotions. First, James reminds us that we should not live life as angry people. The term there is not so much rage as it is to live in constant frustration. It is really an angry spirit. We are living in a time when people are just angry. They are angry with God, leaders, each other and themselves. Some are just angry at life.

This week, we witnessed the horrible murder of two young people in Roanoke Virginia by an angry and disgruntled man. As we are learning more about this individual, we discover that anger was a way that he was described. Of course that is an extreme example, but just listen and you will hear most people speaking about their frustration and anger throughout the day. James reminds us that anger does not bring about a righteous life. There are some people who believe anger is proof of a righteous life. Some believe that anger toward others, who are unbelievers, is evidence of their righteousness. This is not the example of Jesus. Jesus kept His anger for those who would stand in the way of others hearing the gospel.

SELF-CONTROL IS THE ABILITY NOT TO BE CARRIED BY JUST DESIRE IN LIFE, BUT TO BE CARRIED ALONG INSTEAD BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

We are not to live life in a constant frustration with others and life. Why is that the case? It shows we have been deceived. If we live life frustrated and mad, then we have failed to first of all rejoice in all trials and second, we have failed to believe that God is at work. So an authentic faith transforms our emotions and responses.

It transforms our self-discipline. James reminds us that the person who has an authentic faith not only hears the word, but also does the word. Such a person has self-control. James uses the example of controlling one's language or tongue. James says that religion, that is the living of faith, is worthless when there is no self-control over the body. The tongue or language should be the easiest part of our bodies to control, since we must actually think and act. We know

that James will later lament the destructiveness of what we say to and about others. I think in this case the control of the tongue is representation of how faith that is authentic becomes a controlling aspect not only to our language, but also to our thinking and our acting.

Listen to these passages about self-control:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:27

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law.

Self-control is the ability not to be carried by just