

Let's read James 1:21-25:



James 1:21-25 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness *the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.*

<sup>22</sup> But *be doers of the Word*, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

<sup>24</sup> for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

<sup>25</sup> But he who looks *into the perfect law of liberty (namely the Gospel)* and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a *doer of the work*, this one *will be blessed* in what he does.

Most Christians read this passage and interpret the mirror as being the moral Law of God, in which you have to look continually to see your flaws and sins. In other words, you see what you need to change and then go try changing it, without forgetting the moral flaws that you saw in the mirror, until those issues are removed out of your life. Only THEN will you be blessed in what you do.

There are multiple problems with this interpretation. First, the mirror is the perfect law of liberty, and not the moral Law or the Ten Commandments. What is the perfect law of liberty? The perfect law of liberty is the Gospel or the Word of His grace. *The perfect law of liberty is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:2). That law stipulates that we are dead to sin (Romans 6:11) and no longer under sin's dominion (Romans 6:14), that God loves us (John 16:27), that we are joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), that all possible blessings are already established and granted to us in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), that even when we sin we are not condemned anymore (Romans 8:1), that we have power to live in holiness (1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 4:13), that we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24), that we are a success (Psalm 1:3), that we are prosperous (2 Corinthians 8:9), victorious (Romans 8:37), above failure, and protected. This is the Gospel and the perfect law of liberty that we need to be doers of, meaning believing these things and walking in them.

In the New Testament, the act of doing the Word is believing the Word about you and acting accordingly. The act of doing the Word is not obeying a set of moral rules like in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, you will not be blessed BECAUSE you obey the moral Law. *Obedience is no longer a condition for God to bless you, like in the Old Testament.* You are blessed regardless of your level of obedience.

The more you believe the Word of grace about the perfect being that you have become in your spirit, the more grace is released in your life, and the more blessings manifest themselves from the inside out into the material world. When you come to realize how blessed you are, then the blessing begins to flow in everything you do. You are blessed even before you believe it, once you have come in Christ. But when you believe that you have been blessed, that blessing starts manifesting in your life physically and emotionally.

Notice that verse 21 says that the Word is already implanted in you and able to save your soul. What does that mean? It means that your new spirit is the Word itself, because it has been born of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23), and consequently, you have become the Word of God in your spirit. That Word is just locked inside of you and blocked by your mind. When you look in the mirror of the Word, you see yourself, the Word. When your mind receives the revelation of who you really are inside, and accepts it by believing it, that's when you begin putting "flesh" to the Word inside, the same way Jesus was the incarnated Word. That is the moment when you bring the Word out and manifest it to make your soul immune to the works of darkness on this earth. The works of darkness are: sickness, depression, confusion, lack of peace and joy, failure, anger, lack of wisdom, etc. This is how your soul is saved by the implanted Word of God in you. The salvation of your soul in this context does not refer to the salvation from hell in the future life, but to the salvation of your whole being here in earth from sin and from all its effects that entered the world together with it.

*Renewal of the mind is not refreshing your mind with the moral Law of God, or the Ten Commandments.* The moral Law of God has already been written into your conscience since you were born on this earth. We know good and evil because of the Fall. We don't need to refresh that knowledge because it's already in us and in all people. That's why you have moral people that have never been born again, and neither heard or tried to keep the Ten Commandments, yet behave at the highest moral standards and sometimes better than some born-again believers. That is why you have Greek Orthodox and Catholic people, that are mostly not born again, going regularly to confess their sins to the priests. The conscience is always working in everyone, either we like it or not, and it doesn't need our help. Renewal of the mind means to renew your thinking about your new identity and nature, to focus and meditate on that, and be aware of that. The new identity is not something obvious to the eyes, but something that you need to behold with the eyes of the Spirit, and refresh your mind with it constantly. Your new nature is what you should not forget about and be a doer of. Then your soul (mind, will, conscience, and emotions) and body will be transformed into, and align to, the same image of Christ, in which your spirit has already been reborn.

In the mirror, you don't see your old self, the sinner, or your sinful deeds. Instead, you see Christ, Who is glory, Who is the Word of God incarnated, and that's who you are as well in Him. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 is also a passage about the mirror that goes along here and it says:

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

<sup>18</sup> But we all, with unveiled face, *beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*, are being transformed into *the same image* from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The way to be transformed into the image of the Lord is to behold the glory of the Lord, that is, to focus on who Christ is in you and who you are in Christ. You do this by reading and meditating on the Word of God and by listening to sermons and biblical teachings. This is how you look into the perfect law of liberty and see who you are and who you have become – the very glory of the Lord. The new creation is no longer fallen short of the glory of God as Romans 3:23 says. That is the state of unbelievers. *The new creation in Christ is the fullness of the glory of God here on earth* (John 1:16; John 17:22).

Most of the times, believers read the Bible with an Old Testament perspective, instead of reading it with a New Testament mindset. They read the New Testament in the light and through the lens of the Old Testament, rather than reading the Old Testament in the light and through the lens of the New Testament. The grace and the glory that came after Jesus' death and resurrection are the culmination of the entire Bible. Everything else is included in that grace as an intermediate stage to the unfolding final plan of grace: the election of one man,

Abraham, the election of one nation, Israel, the giving of the Law, and the period of the prophets. Those were shadows of the real to come. God had to announce the birth of Jesus and what He was going to accomplish at the cross through the mouth of His prophets, so that He would have man's authority to bring Jesus on earth. That is probably why it took hundreds and thousands of years until the promises about the seed of Christ given to Eve and to Abraham came into being. In the same time, God had to be very cryptic in those announcements, so that the devil and the princes of this world would not understand His secret plan of salvation. Otherwise, they would have never crucified the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8). Can you imagine that? The devil would have never crucified Jesus if he knew that by one man's death, more sons of God like Him would come into being. God had to work in the Old Testament in stages to reveal His plan progressively and carefully, but grace is what unifies and makes sense of all those phases together. That is why some truths that were a present reality in the Old Testament cannot become principles of interpretation over the entire Bible, and especially of the New Testament. It's rather the other way around: the New Testament has to interpret the Old Testament. There are present truths that pertain to the new creation in Christ and past truths that don't apply to believers today, although they paved the way to Christ and applied to the people that lived in those times and contexts. That is why the Bible contains an OLD testament and a NEW testament. Many things in the Old Testament prepared people through symbols and analogies, so that they would understand what was going to happen at the cross.

Let's look at a few examples of reading the New Testament with Old Testament assumptions. In Deuteronomy 11:26-28 we read:

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (NKJV)

<sup>26</sup> "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse:

<sup>27</sup> *the blessing, if you obey* the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today;

<sup>28</sup> *and the curse, if you do not obey* the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.

Then when we read James 1:21-25, we assume that the passage is talking about the same thing like in Deuteronomy:

James 1:21-25 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> *But be doers of the Word*, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

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<sup>25</sup> But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but *a doer of the work*, *this one will be blessed in what he does*.

The general past truth revealed in the Deuteronomy passage we've just read, as well as in many other places in the Old Testament, is this: if you obey God's commandments (namely the Law), God will bless you; if you don't obey His commandments, God will curse you or punish you. The general present truth revealed in the James passage we've just read, as well as in many other places in the New Testament, is this: God has already blessed you and made you holy by faith in the spirit realm, independent of your obedience and deeds; now go and do the things pertaining to your new nature, and you (not God) will convert the spiritual blessings into earthly ones.

Another example: in the Old Testament, the power of God and the Holy Spirit came down to help God's people from time to time and would remain with them for a while, as long as the people obeyed the Law or humbled themselves with fasting and praying. They had to implore

God to come help them in their battles, through their obedience and fasting. And that was true for them because Christ had not died yet and they were not yet part of God's family. They were servants, not sons and daughters. They didn't have any legal right to God's power. They relied only on God's mercy that would overlook their sins until Christ would come. However, believers in the New Testament apply the same principles to the gift of the Holy Spirit, thinking that they need to cleanse themselves first, then humble themselves through prayer and fasting, and then tarry for an indefinite time in a state of begging God to send His promised Holy Spirit, until they feel something spectacular physically or emotionally. That's how they know they received the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, they conclude that they were not holy enough, or they didn't pray and fast enough, or simply God didn't want yet to give His Holy Spirit to them. So, they try harder to sanctify themselves. They apply the same principle if they need a healing in their body, or if they want God to move with power in their lives and with signs and wonders, especially when they read, for example, 2 Timothy 2:21, where Paul tells Timothy to cleanse himself so that he would be a vessel of honor. However, that passage covers a different context of qualifications for public ministry in front of people, and not a condition for receiving the Holy Spirit. Most believers made out of the Holy Spirit, of the power of God, and of healing, a reward for their good behavior. Or they made out of those things something that can be experienced only when they get to a certain spiritual height. "Why do we need the Holy Spirit then, since we have to be perfect before He can come? How can He help us?" The Holy Spirit came exactly for this purpose: to help us, to sanctify us, to teach us how to be spiritual, and to move in us with power, so that we would be a blessing for people. Many Christians even believe that, depending on their obedience, the Holy Spirit comes and goes as He did in the Old Testament, based on what King David said in Psalm 51:11: "Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."

The first truth that is a past reality in this example is that, in the Old Testament, God would do everything for His people as a response to their obedience to the Law and to prayer and fasting. The present truth is that God has already given His people everything they need freely by faith (His Son, His Word, His Holy Spirit and His fullness of power) and now His people must use what they have and have been given. Neither God nor Jesus are moved or respond in any way because of believers' level of sanctification or because of their fasting. Fasting doesn't move God; fasting changes us. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after He finished His work (Hebrews 10:12) and He now waits for believers to bring all the enemies of sickness, poverty, and addictions under His feet, in their own lives and the lives of other people.

Another past reality is that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would come only partially and temporarily over some people to accomplish certain tasks, based on their obedience. The present truth is that the Holy Spirit is received in its fullness and without measure (John 3:34; John 20:21) by any born-again person through a simple prayer of faith, exactly like salvation. The Holy Spirit is the gift that God wanted to give freely to His people all along, ever since Abraham. The Holy Spirit is the blessing of Abraham (Galatians 3:14) and that is why Jesus had to die first, so that the new creations would have the right to receive the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in John 14:16, Jesus said that once the Holy Spirit came, He would be with the believers forever, without specifying any conditions. The Holy Spirit doesn't come and go anymore when we feel we are not holy enough in our eyes.

Finally, we see God in the Old Testament sending sometimes sickness, curse, or calamity over His people because of their transgressions, as He promised in Deuteronomy 28. Then, believers come to Hebrews 12, where they read about the so-called discipline of the Lord and conclude that God still punishes His children sometimes with sickness or curse or He allows it, so that He would discipline them, teach them something, or force them to come back from their wicked ways. However, the present truth in the New Testament is that God can never send or allow sickness and curse on His children as a consequence of their wrong ways. Believers are the ones allowing them in their lives through unbelief. According to Galatians 3:13, Christ became a curse for all humanity's wrong doings and took all curse and sickness on Him (1 Peter 2:24). Does God allow some people not to be saved and go to hell? Of course not, but they allow it themselves through their unbelief. Moreover, it is His Holy Spirit who teaches believers all things and guides them into all truth (John 14:26, John 16:13, 1 John 2:27), rather than the devil's tools. Furthermore, the Scripture is inspired by God to teach, reproof, correct, and train in righteousness those who are in Christ (2 Timothy 3:16) and not calamity and curse.

Now let's look at a few examples of how to read the Old Testament with a new creation mindset. Proverbs 8:18 says:

Proverbs 8:18 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> *Riches and honor* are with me (wisdom), *enduring riches* and righteousness.

We know from king Solomon's life how wisdom brought him riches and honor. However, in the New Testament, we see that Christ has become wisdom from God for the new creation (1 Corinthians 1:30), that the new creation has the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), and that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). With that perspective in mind, now we can understand that if we are in Christ, we are way more advantaged than king Solomon, we have access to all the wisdom and knowledge, and consequently, we can experience enduring riches and honor in our lives. It is a sure promise.

Proverbs 18:21 says:

Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> Death and life are *in the power of the tongue*, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

With the New Testament knowledge, we know that we can alter the course of our life for the better, through words that we say by faith, which are aligned to the Word of grace. Likewise, we can change the course of our lives when we also allow the rivers of living water to flow freely through our mouth by speaking and praying in tongues (John 7:38, James 3:2-7). With the New Testament mindset, now we know that it matters what we believe and what we speak with our mouth and that death and life are indeed in the power of the tongue.

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