



Doing Something About It

Vance Havner:

"They hear thy words but they will not do them." — EZEKIEL 33:31.

"But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." — JAMES 1:22.

The prophet Ezekiel ministered in an evil time. It was his lot to prophesy to a generation that listened after a fashion, likened him unto one having a pleasant voice, told others about his preaching, but did nothing about his message. They heard his words but did them not.

Ezekiel was not the only man of God whose sermons fell on unresponsive ears. Earlier, God had advised Isaiah well in advance that his message would blink eyes and shut ears and harden hearts lest the hearers convert and be healed. And those words show up later in each of the four Gospels and still later in Acts and Romans to explain the poor response of Israel to the ministry of our Lord and of Paul. Israel heard but did nothing.

James warns against the same evil. Invariably we do not quote the entire verse. We say, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only," and there we stop. But there is a most solemn further word, "deceiving yourselves." That is the worst thing about it: hearing and not doing, we delude ourselves.

Our Lord constantly warned against doing nothing about it. "Everyone that hears these sayings of mine and does not do them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand." "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." "You are my friends if you do what I command you." "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and don't do the things I say?" In the Great Commission, we are told to go "teaching them TO OBSERVE" the things commanded.

Chief among the besetting sins of the saints is hearing without doing. And it is a grievous sin, for "to him that knows the good he ought to do and fails to do it, it is sin." In Ezekiel's day they heard the preacher, complimented him, told others about him, but did nothing about the message. The centuries have passed, and today we listen to preachers, invite others to hear them, congratulate them with that very doubtful compliment, "I enjoyed your sermon." But we do nothing about it.

Let it never be forgotten that, although we may do nothing about the Word we hear, the Word will do something to us. The same sun melts ice and hardens clay, and the Word of God humbles or hardens the human heart. Truth heard and not acted upon is a dangerous thing. Spiritual impulses which are not translated into action have a disastrous reaction.

It is well known that many movie-goers who are continually being excited and stirred in the world of make-believe become emotional drunkards. But there are also religious drunkards and Bible-conference drunkards and church drunkards, who go from meeting to meeting, constantly being stirred but doing nothing about it, until their souls become fed-up, their moral muscles deteriorate and they lose their capacity for being aroused. Presently they suffer from a moral let-down, a religious hangover. They delude themselves. They have heard the best preachers, they have read the best books, they have had their ears tickled and their emotions thrilled, but as with a stimulant the doses have to be increased and after awhile there is no effect, no matter what they read or hear. An alarm clock that fairly blasts us out of bed on the first morning may eventually fail to arouse us. Something like that happens to those who hear and take no action upon it.

It is a serious thing to trifle with any emotion and not carry it through to its proper and legitimate conclusion. And it is most dangerous to play with the holy stirrings of God's Spirit through His Word. I had rather take chances with forked lightning any time. For the Word of God is dynamite, it is a hammer, a fire, a sword; messengers of the Word are a savour of life unto life and of death unto death. The man who habitually hears the Word of God and does nothing about it is the greatest of fools, for he fools himself.

Americans are a generation of spectators. They sit, thousands strong, in a football stadium and watch twenty-two men strive for the mastery down below. Then they go to the movies and thrill to the sham of

Hollywood. On Sunday some of them go to church, and once again they are spectators before whom the minister is expected to perform. Many of them have no more intention of doing anything about the sermon than they intend to act out what they experienced at the movies. They are spectators, not participants.

Modern Christians find it easy to hear the Word and do nothing about it. Preaching may be had on every hand, at church, at the turn of a radio dial. Sermons have become so commonplace that we take the truth for granted. But where much has been given, much shall be required. God forbid that we should go out of our churches merely comparing one minister with another; like the listeners of Ezekiel's day, complimenting the messenger without conforming to the message, passing it up as just another sermon, "enjoying" it when God meant that our consciences would be pricked by it. The task of the preacher is "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" and we are comfortable enough. God help us if we let the fowls of the air snatch up the seed which should produce thirty-, sixty-, an hundredfold; if we behold ourselves in the mirror of the Word and straightway forget what manner of persons we are!

The great and holy themes of Scripture are always joined with a call to do something about it. The first part of Ephesians shows us our exalted position in Christ, but right out of those heavenly glories we move from doctrine to duty, to the believer's vocation, which too often is regarded as a vacation. There are those who enjoy a dissertation on "The Lord knows those who are his" but who resent an application of the rest of the verse, "And let every one who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." It is possible to revel in prophetic lectures, "seeing that all these things shall be dissolved," without going on to do something about what manner of persons we ought to be. The coming of our Lord is a certainty, a coming certainty, a comforting certainty, and a challenging certainty, and if we hold properly this hope we shall do something about it, we shall purify ourselves even as He is pure. Alas, it is too often the case that the same brother who shouts "amen" — and well he may! — through the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the resurrection chapter, shuts his mouth as tightly as his pocketbook on the sixteenth chapter, the collection chapter!

From start to finish, the Word of God joins creed with deed, and if "cursed be he that handles the word of God deceitfully," let us remember that one way we can do that is by hearing it and not doing it. "Sin will keep us from the Book and the Book will keep us from sin," and it is not the Word hidden in the head but in the heart that keeps us from sin. You can have a head full of Scripture and heart full of sin! You can backslide with a Bible under your arm!

It is possible to mistake a familiarity with Bible terms for a knowledge of Bible truth. We are not suffering from a lack of sermons. Maybe we have too many sermons. There is enough of the Word of God stored in the heads of Christians, if it were obeyed, to set America on fire and set off enough Divine power to put atomic bombs to shame in comparison.

But something has to be done about the Word. It is true, gloriously true, that God's Word will not return unto Him void. Ezekiel was assured that although the people would not heed his message, they would know that a prophet had been among them. Many a preacher, in an unresponsive day, has encouraged himself with that blessed truth. But that God's Word will not return void is no lollipop to roll under our tongues while we evade personal responsibility. The preacher has a responsibility to preach the Word, but his hearers have a responsibility to heed it. There is another verse about the Word not profiting Israel long ago, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." There must be a volitional response, "faith taking hold of the word."

We may have faith, but is it OBEYENT faith? "By faith Abraham OBEYED." Are you obedient to the truth you know? Let me confine myself to the book of James and ask you a few pointed questions from that brief letter whence came our text about being doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves. And don't put these verses in a dispensational cubbyhole, they are for us all!

"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." This is to Christians. Have you done anything about that lately?

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Have your prayers been unanswered because of sin?

"Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." Have you done anything about your tongue and temper lately?

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." Have you been proud? We want to have a revival and still save our faces, but the first thing we lose in a revival is our face!

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"Speak not evil one of another, brethren . . . Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed." Are you critical? Is there someone to whom you owe an apology?

These are only a few verses, chosen almost at random. Think what would happen if the Church did something about one little book, the book of James!

God help us to do something about it, lest we hear God's words and do them not, deceiving ourselves. "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).