

Introduction:

- A. The story is told of a big, 2000 member church that was filled to overflowing one Sunday morning.
 - 1. The preacher was ready to start the sermon when two men, dressed in long black coats and black hats entered thru the rear of the church.
 - 2. One of the two men walked to the middle of the church while the other stayed at the back of the church. They both then reached under their coats and withdrew automatic weapons.
 - 3. The man in the middle announced, “Everyone willing to take a bullet for Jesus stay in your seats!”
 - 4. As you might expect, the pews quickly emptied, followed by the choir, the choir director and the assistant minister.
 - 5. After the dust settled, there were about twenty people left sitting in the church and the preacher was holding steady in the pulpit.
 - 6. The two men put their weapons away and said, gently, to the preacher, “All right, preacher, now that the hypocrites are gone, you may begin your sermon.”

- B. If we are honest with ourselves, there are times when hypocrisy is a challenge for all of us.
 - 1. None of us are perfect. There are times when all of us should be trying to be better than we really are.
 - 2. Hypocrisy, though, hits full stride when we are no longer really trying to be who we should be, but are just pretending to be something that we are not.

- C. I like the story told of the man who came out of the Louisiana backcountry, swamp land - He was all dressed up and was carrying his Bible.
 - 1. A friend saw him and asked, “Elias, where are you going all dressed up like that?”
 - 2. Elias said, “I’ve been hearing about New Orleans. I hear that there is a lot of free-runnin’ liquor and a lot of gamblin’ and a lot of real good naughty shows.”
 - 3. The friend looked him over and said, “But Elias, if that’s where you’re goin’ why are you carrying your Bible under your arm?”
 - 4. And Elias replied, “Well, if it’s as good as they say it is, I might stay over until Sunday and go to church.”

- D. Robert Redford was walking one day through a hotel lobby. A woman saw him and followed him to the elevator.
 - 1. “Are you the real Robert Redford?” she asked him with great excitement.
 - 2. As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, “Only when I am alone!”
 - 3. Who are you really? Who are you when no one is watching? Who are you when you are alone with just your family?
 - 4. Truth is – there should really only be one of us! Should we not be the same person with whomever we are with and even if we are alone?

- E. John Stott wrote, “Hypocrisy is hideous. What cancer is to the body, hypocrisy is to the church. It is a killing agent. Unfortunately, hypocrisy is also addictive. And even though Jesus reserved his most severe words of condemnation for the hypocrite, we still seem to prefer that lifestyle to truth and authenticity.” (John Stott, *Sermon on the Mount*)

- F. We are in a sermon series called “A Healthy Church.”

1. So far, we have been learning that we should be striving to be a healthy church because that's the kind of church that pleases God and that's the kind of church that grows, both spiritually and numerically.
2. In last week's sermon we talked about growing deeper through discipleship.
3. We looked at some of Jesus' most challenging teachings about discipleship – I certainly was challenged, and I hope you were too!
4. We were reminded that Jesus said that discipleship is costly. He said, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Lk 14:27)
5. Following Jesus is serious business and requires our greatest efforts and commitments.
6. We must be willing to put Jesus before anyone or anything, or we cannot be one of His disciples.

G. A lot of people, perhaps us included, say that they believe in and love Jesus, and yet they refuse to obey His commandments.

1. Jesus once challenged people like that by asking, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)
2. Jesus was saying, in effect, that their actions contradicted their testimony.
3. He was accusing them of hypocrisy.

H. It is hypocritical for us to say "Lord, Lord" and then not obey Jesus.

1. It is hypocritical for us to attend church services on Sunday, sing enthusiastically and then go home and live very worldly, unspiritual lives the rest of the week.
2. The book of James makes it unmistakably clear that true religion and true discipleship make a distinctive difference in one's life.
3. True discipleship makes a distinctive difference in one's thinking, disposition, language, habits, and choices.
4. To be a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of inflated claims to spirituality or even regular church attendance, rather God calls us to turn total control of our lives over to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I. Today, I want us to spend a few minutes examining some verses from James Chapter 1

1. These verses from James 1 are by no means an exhaustive treatment of discipleship, but they are an excellent presentation of the implications of discipleship.
2. James addresses four areas of our lives that must be affected by our relationship with God.
3. If these areas are not being affected by our relationship with God, then something is not right in our walk with God.
4. To claim to be dedicated to Christ but then not grow in these areas is not right.
5. We could call it disobedience or hypocrisy or we could call it sinfulness, but we must not shrug our shoulders and call it acceptable.
6. True discipleship requires sincerity, seriousness, and effort.
7. So let's take a look at how James reminds us about what discipleship should look like.

I. Discipleship calls for the control of Temper and Tongue

A. Look again at what James says in verses 19 and 20, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."

1. Hardly any test of one's religion could be more practical and revealing than this one.
 - a. Are you able to listen to others?
 - b. Do you know when to hold your tongue?
 - c. Can you control your temper?

- d. Being known for a sharp tongue and fiery temper will not make anyone an effective influence for Christ and His church.
- 2. When Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus about the character traits that we must look for in elders, we notice that many of them have to do with temper and tongue.
 - a. Timothy's list includes: temperate, self-controlled, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.
 - b. Titus' list includes: not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not violent, self-controlled.
 - c. These traits are important targets for all disciples, not just elders.
- B. Ultimately, our goal as disciples must be to live like Jesus.
 - 1. We all know that Jesus went into the temple and cleared the place, on two occasions.
 - 2. We all know that Jesus was very direct with some of his communication to the Pharisees, and at times with his apostles.
 - 3. But on those occasions Jesus knew what he was doing. He was controlled and righteous in all his words and actions.
 - 4. In his anger, he did not sin.
- C. Jesus was characterized by self-control, gentleness and love.
 - 1. Jesus certainly was quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.
 - a. Jesus did not let his anger or tongue get out of control.
 - b. Those of us who claim to be his disciples must follow his example.
 - c. "Blowing your top" and "letting off steam" may be the natural and easy thing for us to do, but it is not the godly thing to do.
 - 2. We must keep a tight rein on our anger and our tongue.
 - a. James says if we do not, then our religion is worthless.
 - b. That is a very serious declaration.
 - c. Anger that is out of control, and a tongue on the loose can cancel and destroy every other good thing that our religion is doing in our lives.
 - 3. So, first of all, discipleship requires the control of temper and tongue.

II. Discipleship calls for moral purity.

- A. Look at verses 21 and 27, "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...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."
- B. When the gospel is preached, there are varied responses to it.
 - 1. For example, when Paul first preached the gospel message in Athens "some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.'" (Acts 17:32)
 - 2. Even among those who have received the gospel and have become disciples, there are evident differences in the amounts of change produced in their lives and in the degree of devotion to Christ which has been created.
 - 3. We are forced to wonder why there is such a difference in effect where the gospel is faithfully preached and received.
 - 4. The difference does not lie within the gospel itself, but rather is dependent on the individual hearers.
 - 5. This is what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Soils (Lk 8:4-15). The effectiveness and productivity of the gospel depended on what kind of soil the seed fell upon.
- C. James 1:21 is saying the same thing. God's word is able to "save you," but only if you allow it to become "planted" (deeply rooted) in your heart.
 - 1. So, how does one go about creating a heart that will welcome the power of the gospel?

2. First, James says, they must “get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.”
 - a. Some people fail to live the Christian life, because they have never accepted the implications of genuine repentance.
 - b. They have given up most of their sins, but not all of them.
 - c. The gospel cannot produce all that it can until we, with God’s help, eliminate the pollution that does not belong.
 - d. Our challenge is to live in the world, but not allow the world to live in us.
 - e. So, how do we do that?
3. Second, James says, we must receive the rebuke and counsel of the Word of God in “humility.”
 - a. Because of a lack of humility, some of us react to the Word of God, or the rebuke of a spiritual leader, with anger and resentment.
 - b. Rather than repent, we get mad when the Bible rebukes some sin that we enjoy, and we reject the teacher who brings the matter to our attention.
4. Whether a person receives the implanted Word and receives the desired effect from it depends entirely on him or her.
 - a. A hypocrite will be content to go through the motions of Christianity without undergoing a transformation – they call themselves Christian, but they continue to talk and act like the world.
 - b. But one who is a true disciple of Jesus will yield to the will of God, being transformed from the inside out – they will become less worldly and more pure and holy.
5. So, the second thing we learn is that true discipleship demands a rejection of sin and a ridding of the evil so prevalent in the world.

III. Discipleship calls for obedience to the Word of God.

- A. Look at verse 22, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”
 1. Discipleship means a willingness to submit to and obey the Word of God.
 2. The truths of the gospel and God’s Word must be translated into concrete actions.
 3. Attending worship services, listening to sermons and classes are of no value if a person doesn’t put it into practice.
 4. Hearing the Word and thinking about the Word is not the end goal – the end goal is putting the truth into action.
 5. After reading the Word, or hearing the lesson the critical question we must wrestle with is: “What am I going to do about it?”
- B. James declares that those Christians who are content with a “hearing-but-not-doing” religion are deceiving themselves.
 1. He compares them to the man who sees a reflection of his dirty face and uncombed hair in the mirror but does nothing about it.
 - a. When a person looks into the mirror of God’s Word, he sees himself both as he really is and as he ought to be.
 - b. But the careless and indifferent hearer makes no effort to bridge the gap between the two.
 - c. The blessed and happy person is the one who hears the truth and then acts on what he has heard.
 2. Verse 25 speaks of the man who “looks intently into the perfect law.”
 - a. This expression literally refers to one who stoops down to take a close look.
 - b. True disciples are committed to looking intently into the law of God. They continue to do this. They are consistent in doing this.
 - c. And as they look intently and continually, they put it into practice.
 3. The hypocrite listens, nods approvingly, and affirms his agreement with the truth. He then goes on his way to behave precisely as he pleases – even if it defies the truth he has just heard.
 4. Third, we learn that discipleship demands regular study and application of the Word.

IV. Discipleship calls for a concern for others.

- A. I don't want to spend too much time on this point this morning, because it is a principle that I want to develop more when we look at fellowship and ministry in some later lessons.
 - 1. Nevertheless, we cannot help but notice the connection in this text between true discipleship and a concern for others, especially those in need.
 - 2. Look at verse 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."
 - 3. God has always had a special place in his heart for the helpless and hurting.
 - a. Psalm 68:5 states that God is "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows."
 - b. With God's concern for these people being so great, don't you think that we had better have the same concern.
 - 4. James is telling us that if we shut our hearts to the plight of distressed people around us, then our religion is impure and full of fault.
 - a. Who are the vulnerable ones around us that God wants us to care for?
 - b. Are they the elderly? Are they widowed? Are they poor or sick?
 - c. Are they orphaned? I'm so thankful for our new involvement in the orphanage in Haiti!
 - 5. Therefore, discipleship calls for a concern for all people, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Conclusion: What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

- A. Discipleship certainly involves correct doctrine and correct form of church practices, which is what we learned in our sermon series last Fall, but it must include so much more.
 - 1. Discipleship means that the way we follow Jesus makes a difference in every aspect of our lives, including our attitudes and words, and our morals and actions.
 - 2. Discipleship requires humility, honesty, real effort in repentance and spiritual exercise.
- B. Most of all, discipleship is a commitment to following Christ and practicing our Christianity for a lifetime.
 - 1. Growing in discipleship takes a long time and a lot of practice.
 - 2. Comedian Yakov Smirnoff said when he first came to the United States from Russia; he wasn't prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in American grocery stores.
 - a. He says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk - you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice - you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, 'what a country!'"
 - 3. Don't you wish there was instant discipleship powder? Just add water and drink it and we would instantly be more like Jesus!
- C. Church slogans are big business in the world of competitive church growth.
 - 1. We seek positive, upbeat slogans that are filled with promise.
 - 2. You don't find many churches proclaiming, "This Christian thing is a lot of work!"
 - 3. I did hear about one impressive church that had a very honest and true name and slogan.
 - a. They call themselves "Oaks Fellowship" and their slogan is "Deeply Rooted Maturity Takes Time."
 - b. No easy, instant promises there! Deeply rooted maturity takes time.
 - 4. And that's the call of discipleship – spiritual strength and maturity takes not only time, but a whole lot of effort.
- D. So, in the end, we will be a more healthy church as we have stronger and more mature disciples.
 - 1. Growing deeper in discipleship starts with renewing the commitment of our whole selves to God, and then continues as we strive to become more like Jesus in our everyday lives.

2. Including:
 - a. A control of our temper and tongues.
 - b. A practice of moral purity.
 - c. A practice of studying and obeying God's Word.
 - d. A practical care and concern for others – especially the most vulnerable ones.
3. That's the kind of discipleship that pleases God and leads to a healthy, growing church.
4. Since we want to be doers of the Word and not just hearers, let's take a look at that list of four areas of discipleship and ask ourselves: "Which of these things do I need to work on the most? And what will I do today to begin to work on it?"