

The Perfect Law of Freedom

Hearing and Doing Part 4
James 1:23-25 1-25-2015

Summary: Verse 25 gives five principles for receiving God’s Word in a way that we will remember it enough to do it. The last one is to become motivated by the promise of blessing. Next, look intently into the law. Then, understand the nature of the law (it is the perfect law that frees you from sin).

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James 1:22 But he doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but one who does good works-- this person will be blessed in what he does.

Introduction

I came across a website this week that had photos of people shopping at Walmart. And these people – some of them may have forgotten to glance in the mirror before leaving their house to go out in public. It is amazing how ridiculous some people look when they show up at Walmart. When I saw those pictures, I thought, “These are the people James is talking about in verses 23-24”.

23 if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Every morning we get up, and we look in the mirror to assess the damage from the night before. You all probably did that this morning. You looked in the mirror and thought, “Ok, I’ve got some work to do here.” This is a very common human experience – they were doing it 2000 years ago and we are still doing it today. James starts with an analogy of a mirror, but right at the end there he slips out of the analogy and gives you an idea of what he is talking about. Instead of saying **he goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like**, he says **he goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he is**. James is making the transition from a literal mirror to the mirror of God’s Word. A physical

mirror shows you what kind of face you have; God's Word is a mirror that shows you what kind of person you are. A mirror shows the flaws in your body; the Bible shows the flaws in your heart.

Remember!

The natural response of the Christian heart when you see those character flaws in the mirror of God's Word, is to change and conform yourself to God's will in those areas. That is our normal response, but very often we fail at that, mainly because we just simply forget. The principal we saw in the Word has not sunk deeply enough into our souls so that it pops into mind at the moment we need it, so in this section James is teaching us how to learn in such a way as to remember enough that we actually put it into practice.

This is not a small matter. Being a doer of the Word is the evidence of whether or not you are truly saved.

Romans 2:13 For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be declared righteous.¹

He is saying, "James is right – you have got to be a doer of the Word. And if you aren't, if all you do is listen and learn all the time, then you are not on your way to heaven."

So if you are a Christian, you are striving to be a doer of God's Word. But that effort is hindered by forgetting, so James is going to help us with that. He is going to show us how to approach God's Word in a way that will make the right principles come to mind at the right time.

Luke 8:18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen.

When you walk away from the sermon, God's question for you is not, "Did you listen?" The question is, "*How* did you listen?" Did you listen in such a way that you will end up remembering it and putting it into practice?

James is going to give us five principles that will help us do that. I want to jump down to number five and begin with that, because that one is the motivation.

How to Remember

1) Be Motivated by Blessing

Take a look at the end of verse 25. James says the doer of God's Word will be blessed. That is our motivation. You will have the blessing of God on your life if you are a doer of His Word. Here is a literal translation of James 1:25 –

25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work -- he will be blessed in his doing.

The thing that God will bless is your effort to do the work. All of your activities that spring from an effort to put God's Word into practice will have the blessing of God on them.

Joshua 1:8 meditate on [the Book of the law] day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Prosperity and success are not in your power to obtain. You can work hard and do what you can, but God determines whether your efforts succeed or fail. God decides whether people will like you - or trust

¹ Some people have tried to pit James against Paul as if they were teaching different things when it comes to faith and works. That could not be farther from the truth. Both Apostles call for the exact same thing – believing that results in doing. And Paul essentially quotes James here – using James' unique phrases "doer of the law" and "hearer of the law"

you. Do you have any areas of your life that are not being blessed right now? The more you are able to remember God's Word enough to put it into practice, the more blessing you will find on every area of life.

And step 1 to being able to remember and do God's Word is to get motivated by focusing your attention on the promise of blessing. For the next principle, let's go back to the beginning of the verse.

2) Look Intently

Who gets this blessing?

25 the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom

If you want to be able to remember God's Word so you can put it into practice, it starts with intensive looking. That word translated **looks intently** means *to stoop down, bending back and neck*. It refers to a close, thorough examination. Looking at details. Studying beyond what is on the surface.

Observation

One of the most difficult and most important and most neglected steps in Bible study is thorough observation. My first year in college I took a class on how to study the Bible and one of the first assignments was for us to write out 50 observations of the verse we were studying. I remember I got to about 30 and was stumped. I had to think and think and struggle and struggle just to come up with one more ... and then one more. I spent hours working on it that night until I finally came up with 50. I came back the next day all excited to hand in my work, and the professor didn't even collect it. He just said, "Your assignment for tonight is to make another 50 observations on that same verse." That assignment was incredibly difficult, but it was one of the most valuable things I ever learned. It taught me that after you think you have seen absolutely everything there is to see, there is still a whole lot that you haven't seen yet.

God did not design His Word to be understood at a glance. It is not a bumper sticker. Each passage of Scripture is like a nut inside a shell. You cannot get to the nourishment until you penetrate the shell. And that takes a lot of thought. There is no shortcut. Think of a lollipop with a tootsie roll center and there is no way to bite through it. You just have to take the time to roll it around in your mouth until you finally get through to the treat inside.

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Think about that. Greek was his first language. He understood the historical context of the New Testament better than anyone alive today because he lived in it. He knew Paul personally. And yet even Timothy, in order to gain the insight needed to understand what Paul was saying, had to spend some time to **reflect** on what Paul had written. The New Testament letters were not intended to be read like you read a letter you get from a friend. God took massive amounts of truth and folded them down with an amazing economy of words so that millions of preachers and teachers and scholars studying this book for 2000 years have not exhausted it. But that folded up message takes some time to unfold.

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light

God compressed huge amounts of truth into a small space – like a zip file on the computer. And unzipping requires careful reflection. Most people read the Bible way too fast. If you want to train your heart to be bored with the Bible, just read something you don't understand, and then the next day move on to something else you don't understand. Do that every day and you will train your heart to hate Bible reading. Nothing is more boring and useless than looking at words that you don't understand.

Sometimes people ask me after a sermon, "Where did you get that insight?" I can tell you; those insights never come the first few hours. They usually don't come in the first few *days*. But they always

come eventually – that is the exciting thing. Paul tells Timothy that gaining insight will take some hard work and reflection. But did you catch the promise?

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Do you believe that promise? Do you believe that God will give you insight if you persist long enough? I think a lot of people give up on a passage too soon because they don't really believe that. They don't believe there actually is a tootsie roll at the center of every passage of Scripture. They suck on a verse for a little while and then decide, "There's nothing here beyond the obvious. I'll move on."

Think deeply

God wants us to think deeply about His Word. That is what that word **reflect** means – to think deeply. Explore the passage like a little kid who just moved into a big mansion, and you are all excited to go exploring every room.

It honors God when we do that. That may be one reason why God included difficult passages in Scripture.² Difficult passages force us to think deeply. John Dewey said, "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem." If there is no problem, we typically just don't think very hard. John Piper: "Nothing sends us deeper into the counsels of God than seeing apparent theological discrepancies in the Bible and pondering them day and night until they grow into an emerging vision of unified truth."

God makes some things hard so that we will think hard, and also to test our level of desire. How badly do you want insight? Do you want it enough to search for it like hidden treasure? Or is your desire for the Word so small that you are content to call it quits if you don't see any great insight lying right out there on the surface? God exposes the level of our desire by putting hard passages in the Bible. In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable that no one understood, and the disciples asked, "Jesus, why do you do that?" And He said, "Because this truth is only for certain people to know and not for others." Who are these special people who get this exclusive insight? It was the group of people who were interested enough to come to Jesus afterward and ask, "What did that parable mean, Jesus?" The people who were content to shrug their shoulders and walk away – those people don't get to have the truth.

"I want to think deeply, but how do I do it you ask."

Let me give you some questions to ask when you are looking into a passage of Scripture:

"What is the Original Intent?"

When this was first written, what was the writer trying to communicate to the people he was writing to? Whatever idea he was trying to convey – that is the meaning of the passage. That is the only meaning the passage will ever have. Don't be one of those people who takes words and phrases from all over the Bible and pieces them together like a jigsaw puzzle. I heard someone the other day say that in Revelation 8:1 there was silence in heaven for a half an hour. And in 2 Peter 3:8, a day is like 1000 years. If you do the math you find out there was silence in heaven for a little over 20 years. You can save yourself from a whole lot of foolishness just by asking, "Is it really likely that's what the original writer was trying to communicate to the original readers?"

"Why is this word/phrase/sentence here?"

Think about when you are in a conversation and the other person throws in a comment and you don't know why they said it. You say to your friend, "Hey, are we still on for lunch today at noon?"

"Yes. I'm planning on it. And I'll be on time."

And you walk away thinking, "Why did he throw in the part about he will be on time? What was he getting at with that remark?" That is the question you need to ask every time there is a word or a phrase in the Bible and it is not immediately obvious why it is included.

² It's not just you – some parts of the Bible really are hard to understand. **2 Peter 3:16 [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters ... His letters contain some things that are hard to understand.** The Bible itself says that the Bible is hard to understand in places.

Sometimes it is helpful to take the word out and see how the verse reads without that word. For example, back in verse 21 James said **humbly receive the implanted word which can save your soul**. And we asked the question, “Why does he throw in the word **implanted**”? Why not just say, “Humbly accept the word which can save your soul”? If I can’t answer that question, then I am not understanding what James is saying.

“How does it fit with what came before?”

What is the flow of thought? Again, if you are in a conversation with a friend, and they say something that makes perfect sense by itself, but you don’t understand the connection between that and what they were just talking about, you assume you must have missed something.

“Man, that was a great movie we saw last night, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, sure was. I’ll tell you – I absolutely hate it when people aren’t honest with their friends.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Why would you be confused at that point? The sentence itself is clear enough – “I hate it when people lie to their friends.”

No big words or anything – very straightforward sentence. The reason you say you don’t understand is because you don’t get the connection between that and the conversation about the movie.

We naturally do that in conversation. But many people fail to do that when they read the Bible. They read about persevering through trials in the first paragraph of James, and they say, “That’s really some great stuff.” Then they read about praying for wisdom in the next paragraph and they think, “Yeah, I’ve really got to pray for wisdom.” But they don’t do what they would do in a normal conversation and say, “Wait a second, why did you suddenly go from perseverance and trials to praying for wisdom? What is the connection between those two comments?”

So always ask, “Why is he saying this here right after he said that?” And if you can’t answer that question, you are not understanding the passage.

“What is the main thing being commanded or asserted?”

It can help to go through and underline the commands or the statements of fact. Then most of the rest of the phrases will just be giving you the how or the why or the when of those commands or statements. For example, in James 1:2, the command is **Consider it pure joy**, so you underline that. Then above **my brothers** you write, “who” – that is who this command is for. Above **whenever you face trials of many kinds**, you write, “when.” Above **because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance**, you write, “why.”

Now you have the message of the text at a glance – The command is to consider it pure joy, and it is for a certain group of people, at a certain time, for a certain reason.

“What are the implications for my life?”

All Scripture is useful for training in righteousness. So how is this particular passage useful for training in righteousness in my life right now? What does God want me to do in response to what I have just learned? Every morning after your devotions write it down: “Today I will...”

“What does this imply about the nature of God?”

Nothing is more valuable than learning more about what God is like. Almost every passage in the Bible at least implies some things about what God is like. And if you don’t consciously watch for those implications, you can really miss out on a lot of wonderful truth.

“Why is it important to God that I know this?”

Of all the billions and billions of things God could have revealed to us and said to us, He narrowed it down to this one book so every single word in here is absolutely crucial. So if you cannot see the importance of it, that means you need to study all the more. If I know that something is important but I can't see why it's important, then I am missing something.

Hermeneutics

Few things in life, if any, will pay more dividends than learning the science of how to correctly interpret the Bible. The fancy word for that is hermeneutics. That just refers to the basic principles of how to figure out what a passage means.

Think about it - What is God's Word? Paper and ink? No, God's Word is His thoughts, His will, His desires, the revelation of what He is like, His law and commandments, His encouragement to us – all of that is His Word. And right now all of that is encoded by a bunch of English letters and punctuation marks sitting in the pages of your Bible. So what does it look like to decode it and get that life-giving truth from those pages inside your heart? It is the process of interpretation - hermeneutics. We have a hermeneutics class available on video on foodforyoursoul.net. It is such an important class, because what good is the Bible if you misinterpret it? If God said one thing, and you interpret it to mean something else, then it is worthless. That video series might not be a bad way to kick off your Fellowship Family group.

Tools

“What if I ask all those questions and do all that thinking and reflecting and I still don't know what the passage means?”

This is the best piece of advice I can give you for Bible study: If you don't know what a passage means – find out! Use some of the amazing resources we have at our disposal. Get a good study Bible. I have hundreds of commentaries in my library but very often the first place I check is my old 1984 NIV Study Bible. Those commentary notes are absolutely outstanding. The ESV Study Bible notes are also very good. And the HCSB study Bible notes are not bad either.

If you want to look up Greek and Hebrew words – I would be more than happy to show you how to use the Greek Hebrew Keyword Study Bible, or E-sword Bible software (which is free).

Teachers

What happens if you study a passage the best you can and you still can't figure it out? Then what? Have you ever noticed, reading through the New Testament, how many times teachers and preachers are mentioned? The fact that God gave teachers to the church is a major emphasis in Scripture. Why did God give us teachers? I have a theory about that. I am going to go way out on a limb and say I think the reason God gave us teachers was so that they would teach us. If everybody could easily understand the Bible at first glance, there would be no point in having teachers. But God gave us teachers because He knew we would need them. God knew that some of you would have to work a job all day in order to make a living. And some of you would have children to take care of all day. He knew that your time for studying the Bible would be very limited so He called certain men to give their full time to the study of His Word so they could teach it to the rest of us.

So if you run into a passage in the Bible that you cannot figure out, ask a teacher or preacher. I know that some of you are hesitant to ask me Bible questions because you think I'm too busy. What do you think I am busy doing? Teaching the Bible is my job! So don't hesitate to ask me or Bob or Sam or Andrew or one of the other teachers in the church. That's what we are here for – God called us to help you look intently into His Word.

The third principle has to do with the way you think about God's law.

3) Understand What The Law Is (Law of Freedom)

25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work - this person will be blessed in his doing.

James refers to the Scriptures as the **word** four times just in that little section from verses 18 to 23. But in verse 25 he shifts to calling it **law**, and that is what he is going to call it from now on.³ One reason for that might be that James is really focusing in this book on doing – obeying –so he uses a term that brings to mind specifically the parts of God's Word that are commands.

So he is drawing our attention to the law of God, but instead of just saying "law," James calls it **the perfect law of freedom**. He calls it that because thinking of it that way will help you be more successful in your efforts to obey it. When you open up the Bible and read a command from God, and you want to obey that command, one key to success will be in thinking of God's commands as **the perfect law of freedom**.

Law of Freedom

James calls it that here and again in 2:12. I think James is trying to correct a problem that existed in his time and that still exists in our day. There are some Christians who seem to think the Law is a bad thing. They think it is this oppressive system that used to exist back in Old Testament times, and it was a failure, and now we have been set free from the tyranny of that bad system. Many times you hear people pit law against grace. People tell me, "You preach too much law – you need more grace," as if law and grace were opposites.

And that creates a lot of confusion, because if you define law as anything God commands, then those people are, in essence, saying we shouldn't put forth effort to obey God. And the whole doctrine ends up being self-contradictory, because they say, "Instead of striving to obey God's commands, we should just rely on the Holy Spirit." And that is a contradiction because God commands us to rely on the Holy Spirit. So when they tell you to rely on the Holy Spirit, they are telling you to obey one of God's commands!

So all that to say there are a lot of people who are very confused about the role of God's law in the Christian life. And that same problem existed in the time of James. Some Christians were evidently thinking of the law of God as a burdensome restriction on their Christian freedom. So James is going to set them straight by calling it the **law of freedom**.

Freedom from What?

That is definitely an attention-getting phrase, because normally we think of a law as restricting freedom - by definition. The speed limit restricts your freedom to drive faster. Laws against stealing restrict your freedom to take other people's stuff. Laws restrict freedom. But James is letting us know that the law of God is different. Rather than restricting freedom, it gives us freedom.

Freedom to do what? Freedom to disobey God? No. Glance through the rest of the book of James and you can tell he is not a fan of disobedience.

James 2:12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

One of the commands in God's law is that we must love our neighbor and be merciful. And in the same sentence where he calls it the law of freedom he warns us not to break it or we will be judged without mercy. So it is not freedom to disobey.⁴

³ This is the last time in the book that James will refer to the Scriptures as the Word, and the first of 10 times in the book when he calls it the Law (2:8-12, 4:11).

⁴ There are some passages where Paul speaks of being free from the Law. For an explanation of those texts, see the Appendix.

So what kind of freedom does the law give us? What did Jesus say about freedom in relationship to His Word?⁵

John 8:30 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

So there Jesus talked about the freedom that comes from remaining in His Word. Freedom from what?

34 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

What does His Word free us from? Sin. The law of God frees us from bondage to sin.

Freedom from Sin

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ... 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

The law of God gives us freedom by showing us the way out of bondage to sin. The Hebrew word for law (Torah), means *instruction*. God’s law is much more than just commands – it is His instruction on how to live. If you think of the law as a bunch of religious rituals that you can follow to make yourself acceptable to God, that will not work. But if you already have the righteousness of God that makes you acceptable in His sight through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you realize that the law of God is His instruction on how to escape sin and live in a manner pleasing to God, then it becomes your pathway to freedom from sin. It gives you the freedom to do what is in your heart to do, namely, to please God.

Think of a little kid who grows up dreaming of becoming a concert pianist. He wants to be able to sit down at a piano and make beautiful music. But he can’t. Why not? Because he does not know how to follow the laws of music. He hasn’t learned all the rules about chords and rhythm and dynamics and all the various musical notations. So he studies to learn all those laws of music. And the more he learns them, the more it frees him up to do what his heart desires - make beautiful music on the piano. The kid who grows up dreaming of being a scientist, or astronaut, or professional athlete - the more he learns and obeys the laws governing those disciplines, the more it frees him up to pursue his dream.

What is our dream as Christians? It is to sin less and to please God more in the way we live. And the law of God - instruction in His Word, shows us how to realize our dream.

Another way to understand this freedom is to think about what train tracks are to a train. Are train tracks restrictive? In one sense they are. They give you one choice - go where they are going or go nowhere. But on the other hand, when is a train more free - when it is on tracks or when it is removed from the tracks? If you derail a train and just set it out there on the dirt, is it free? No. Now it can’t even function as a train. If a train is stuck in the dirt, you set it free by putting it back on the tracks. Now it is free to do what it was designed to do - sail across the country at high speeds pulling huge loads. The Word of God sets us free like train tracks set a train free. It only points in one, narrow direction. But it frees you up to sail through life and accomplish what you were designed for.

How the Law Frees You from Sin

How does it do that? Here are several ways.

1. Conversion

First of all, it gives you spiritual life. When you are an unbeliever, you have no ability to obey God. And so God’s Word comes along with the good news of Jesus Christ, and how you can have forgiveness of sins through faith in Him, and so you believe and are born again. At that point you are forgiven of all

⁵ Anytime you have a question about what James means by something, the best bet is to go to Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels and look for similar language. James sticks so closely to the language of Jesus that it is not hard to find the parallels.

your sins so you are freed from the penalty of sin. And you are also freed from the power of sin. So, for the first time in your life, you are actually capable of obeying God's Word.

2. *Clarification*

It clears up your thinking and understanding so that you can see things as they really are. In reality, sin is ugly and repulsive and disgusting and deadly, and righteousness is good and beautiful and sweet and desirable. But the more we sin, the more our ability to perceive reality gets twisted so that sin looks desirable and beautiful, and righteousness looks boring and stuffy. And you can tell yourself all day long that a sin is ugly, but if it seems beautiful and pleasing to your soul, you are eventually going to cave into it. So to have a real victory, you need the Word of God to clear up your vision so that you can actually see the ugliness of sin and the beauty of holiness.

3. *Instruction*

The Bible is loaded with principles that teach us how to overcome sin in our lives. Dozens and dozens of times Scripture will say, "Do this and it will result in you getting more grace from God." And the more grace you get from God, the more strength you have to fight sin.

4. *Edification*

The word *edify* means to build up strength. The more you take in God's Word, the stronger you get spiritually. It is like eating food. It is the way God designed us to grow.

5. *Motivation*

The Bible is packed full of promises of reward if we do what God calls us to do. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, he began the sermon with the whole list of rewards in the Beatitudes. And right in the center of the sermon he devoted a long section - 21 versus - just to talk about rewards. He devoted 20% of the entire sermon just to that section. God wants us to be motivated by the promise of reward.

That is just a handful of ways that the Scriptures help us fight against sin in our lives. It is not an exhaustive list - you might be able to think of several others. The point here is that in all kinds of different ways, the law of God can free you from sin so that you can realize your dream of being more righteous. And if you understand that going in, that will help you listen to the Word in such a way as to remember it and put it into practice.

That's principle #3 on how to be a doer of the Word.

- 1) Be motivated by the promise of blessing to doers of the Word.
- 2) Look intently - examine it carefully and think deeply about it.
- 3) Understand the nature of God's Word (the law of freedom).

That is three of the five principles James gives us. We don't have enough time to cover the last two today, so I hope you can make it back next time, because those next two are absolutely critical if you want to have success in becoming a doer of the Word. But before I let you go, let me just point out one last observation about the nature of God's law.

Perfect Law

James does not just call it the **law of freedom**, but the *perfect law of freedom*. So let's do what we just learned and ask, "Why is that word there?" In the context, James is trying to teach us how to approach the Word of God in a way that will cause us to remember it and put it into practice. And one of the things that will help us do that is understanding that it is perfect. God's Word is perfect. It is flawless. There is nothing wrong with it. Every word of it is God breathed and profitable. You know how some people, when they talk to you, keep on throwing in details that have nothing to do with the point they are

making? The Bible never does that. It is not bloated with any extraneous material that we don't need. And nothing that we do need is missing from it. Everything necessary for life and godliness is there. Even if you don't have much education, or intelligence; you don't have much money power or influence, even if you don't have a house or a job and you are living on the street with nothing, if you have the Word of God you can be fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim.3:17).

The Word of God is eternal and stands firm in the heavens. The law of the Lord is perfect, and so it revives the human soul. It is trustworthy, making you wise. It gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes. It endures forever; it is sure and altogether righteous. It is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey (Ps.19:7-11).

Like a perfect compass, it always points you in the direction of God. It will keep your way pure and drive sin out of your heart. It will show you wonderful truths about God. It will preserve your life, strengthen your inner man, cleanse your mind, delight your heart, and save your soul.

It will keep you from shame.

It will comfort you in suffering.

It will make you wiser than your enemies and give you more insight than your teachers.

It will keep you from stumbling.

It will feed you and nourish you and satisfy the cravings of your soul.

It will deliver God's unfailing love to you.

It will guide you through life like a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

It will change your desires and your attitudes and your moods.

It will fill you with joy and hope and confidence and peace.

It will sustain you and uphold you (Ps.119).

It will make you like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever you do will prosper (Ps.1:3).

It is *perfect!* Listen to it intently, remember it, and do it.

Benediction: Proverbs 2:1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, 3 and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Describe an area of your life where you would especially like to have more blessing from God. Let that motivate you to seek that blessing by being a doer of the Word.
2. What most often prevents you from looking intently into the Word? And what steps are you willing to take to change that?
3. Of the tools mentioned in the sermon (Study Bibles, commentaries, Bible software, asking teachers), which would be the most practical next step for you right now?

Devotionals

Day 1

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

S is for Seek

Psalm 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

All our seeking after God will be worthless if He does not seek us. Begin by asking God to come near to you.

I is for Incline

Psalm 119:36 Incline my heart toward your statutes.

Inclination has to do with what you like and dislike. We do not observe life with a detached, robotic analysis. We have a sense of liking and being attracted to some things and disliking and being inclined away from others.

Before you open your Bible take a moment to remind yourself that you could begin reading, come across some wonderful truth about God, and be bored by it. Horror! What could be worse than being unable to be delighted by the glory of God? Before reading, ask the Lord to incline your heart toward whatever it is He is about to show you so that when you see it you will love it.

O is for Open

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

When you read something in Scripture about God and it does not thrill your soul and cause great joy, peace, comfort, or awe, there is only one explanation: your eyes are blind to what is wonderful about that truth. Every truth about God in Scripture would absolutely thrill you if your eyes were opened to see what is so wonderful about it. And only God can do that. So before reading, pray—“God, open my eyes.”

U is for Unite

Psalm 86:11 Unite my heart, that I may fear your name.

When we come to the Word of God, we usually come with a scattered, distracted heart. We must pray, “Dear God, please unite my heart so for this brief little time I can focus my entire being on You.”

S is for Satisfy

Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

The presence of God is like food—it always satisfies the soul. If you go away from your time in the Word unsatisfied, then, it is because you did not experience the presence of God. It is good, before we open the Bible, to remind ourselves of the purpose of coming to God's banquet table. The goal is not just to gather information, but to leave the table with our souls satisfied!

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Psalm 1. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

The motivation James offers us to become doers of God's Word is the fact that the doer of God's Word will be blessed. All of your activities that spring from an effort to put God's Word into practice will have the blessing of God on them.

Joshua 1:8 meditate on [the Book of the law] day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Prosperity and success are not in your power to obtain. You can work hard and do what you can, but God determines whether your efforts succeed or fail. God decides whether people will like you - or trust you. Do you have any areas of your life that are not being blessed right now? The more you are able to remember God's Word enough to put it into practice, the more blessing you will find in every area of life.

And step 1 to putting being able to remember and do God's Word is to get motivated by focusing your attention on the promise of blessing. For the next principle, let's go back to the beginning of the verse.

Ok, now that you are motivated, how do you do it? If you want to be able to remember God's Word so you can put it into practice, it starts with intensive looking.

James 1:25 the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom

That word translated **looks intently** means *to stoop down, bending back and neck*. It refers to a close, thorough examination. Looking at details. Studying beyond what is on the surface.

One of the most difficult and most important and most neglected steps in Bible study is thorough observation. Try writing out 50 observations about the passage. Then another 50. That exercise will teach you that after you think you have seen absolutely everything there is to see, there is still a whole lot that you haven't seen yet.

God did not design His Word to be understood at a glance. It is not a bumper sticker. Each passage of Scripture is like a nut inside a shell. You cannot get to the nourishment until you penetrate the shell. And that takes a lot of thought. There is no shortcut. Think of a lollipop with a tootsie roll center and there is no way to bite through it. You just have to take the time to roll it around in your mouth until you finally get through to the treat inside.

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Think about that. Timothy knew Greek, and the historical context – he even knew Paul personally! And yet even Timothy, in order to gain the insight needed to understand what Paul was saying, had to spend some time to **reflect** on what Paul had written. God took massive amounts of truth and folded them

down with an amazing economy of words so that millions of preachers and teachers and scholars studying this book for 2000 years have not exhausted it. But that folded up message takes some time to unfold.

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light

Most people read the Bible way too fast. If you want to train your heart to be bored with the Bible, just read something you don't understand, and then the next day move on to something else you don't understand. Do that every day and you will train your heart to hate Bible reading. Nothing is more boring and useless than looking at words that you don't understand.

Paul tells Timothy that gaining insight will take some hard work and reflection. But did you catch the promise?

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Do you believe that promise? Do you believe that God will give you insight if you persist long enough? I think a lot of people give up on a passage too soon because they don't really believe that. They don't believe there actually is a tootsie roll at the center of every passage of Scripture. They suck on a verse for a little while and then decide, "There's nothing here beyond the obvious. I'll move on."

God wants us to think deeply about His Word. That is what that word **reflect** means – to think deeply. Explore the passage like a little kid who just moved into a big mansion and you are all excited to go exploring every room.

Review James 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Psalm 1 today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Further Study:

One of the most important things you can do with the Word of God is to learn how to interpret it. The Bible does you no good at all if you misinterpret it. Without the skills of interpretation, the truth of Scripture will remain locked up out of your reach. Resources for learning how to interpret the Bible:

Read How to Read the Bible for all it's Worth by Fee and Stewart

Or, for a more detailed study: *How to Interpret the Bible* class on Food For Your Soul

Day 2

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Proverbs 1. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

How strong is your desire for insight? Do you want it enough to search for it like hidden treasure? Or is your desire for the Word so small that you are content to call it quits if you don't see any great insight lying right out there on the surface? In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable that no one understood, and the disciples asked, "Jesus, why do you do that?" And He said, "Because this truth is only for certain people to know and not for others." Who are these special people who get this exclusive insight? It was the group of people who were interested enough to come to Jesus afterward and ask, "What did that parable mean, Jesus?" The people who were content to shrug their shoulders and walk away – those people don't get to have the truth.

Here are some questions to ask when you are looking into a passage of Scripture:

1) "What is the original intent of the author?"

When this was first written, what was the writer trying to communicate to the people he was writing to? Whatever idea he was trying to convey – that is the meaning of the passage. That is the only meaning the passage will ever have. You can save yourself from a whole lot of foolishness just by asking, "Is it really likely that is what the original writer was trying to communicate to the original readers?"

2) "Why is this word/phrase/sentence here?"

Think about when you are in a conversation and the other person throws in a comment and you don't know why they said it. You say to your friend, "Hey, are we still on for lunch today at noon?"

"Yes. I'm planning on it. And I'll be on time."

And you walk away thinking, "Why did he throw in the part about he will be on time? What was he getting at with that remark?" That is the question you need to ask every time there is a word or a phrase in the Bible that is not immediately obvious why it is included.

Sometimes it is helpful to take the word out and see how the verse reads without that word. For example, back in verse 21 James said **humbly receive the implanted word which can save your soul**. And we asked the question, "Why does he throw in the word **implanted**"? Why not just say, "Humbly accept the word which can save your soul"? If I can't answer that question, then I am not understanding what James is saying.

3) "How does this fit with what came right before and with what follows?"

In other words, what is the flow of thought? Again, if you are in a conversation with a friend, and they say something that makes perfect sense by itself, but you don't understand the connection between that and what they were just talking about, you assume you must have missed something.

"Man, that was a great movie we saw last night, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, sure was. I'll tell you – I absolutely hate it when people aren't honest with their friends."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

Why would you be confused at that point? The sentence itself is clear enough – "I hate it when people lie to their friends." No big words or anything – very straightforward sentence. The reason you say you don't understand is because you don't get the connection between that and the conversation about the movie.

We naturally do that in conversation. But many people fail to do that when they read the Bible. They read about persevering through trials in the first paragraph of James, and they say, “That’s really some great stuff.” Then they read about praying for wisdom in the next paragraph and they think, “Yeah, I’ve really got to pray for wisdom.” But they don’t do what they would do in a normal conversation and say, “Wait a second, why did you suddenly go from perseverance and trials to praying for wisdom? What is the connection between those two comments?”

4) “What is the main thing being commanded or asserted?”

It can help to go through and underline the commands or the statements of fact. Then most of the rest of the phrases will just be giving you the how or the why or the when of those commands or statements. For example, in James 1:2, the command is **Consider it pure joy**, so you underline that. Then above **my brothers** you write, “who” – that is who this command is for. Above **whenever you face trials of many kinds** you write, “when” Above **because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance** you write, “why.”

Now you have the message of the text at a glance – The command is to consider it pure joy, and it is for a certain group of people, at a certain time, for a certain reason.

5) “What are the implications for my life?”

All Scripture is useful for training in righteousness. So how is this particular passage useful for training in righteousness in my life right now? What does God want me to do in response to what I have just learned?

Every morning after your devotions write it down: “Today I will…”

6) “What does this imply about the nature of God?”

Nothing is more valuable than learning more about what God is like. Almost every passage in the Bible at least implies some things about what God is like. And if you don’t consciously watch for those implications, you can really miss out on a lot of wonderful truth.

7) “Why is it important to God that I know this?”

Of all the billions and billions of things God could have revealed to us and said to us, He narrowed it down to this one book – the Bible, so every single word in it is absolutely crucial. So if you can’t see the importance of it, that means you need to study all the more. If I know that something is important but I can’t see why it is important, then I am missing something.

Few things in life will pay more dividends than learning the science of how to correctly interpret the Bible. Think about it - What is God’s Word? Paper and ink? No, God’s Word is His thoughts, His will, His desires, the revelation of what He is like, His law and commandments, His encouragement to us – all of that is His Word. And right now all of that is encoded by a bunch of English letters and punctuation marks sitting in the pages of your Bible. So what does it look like to decode it and get that life-giving truth from those pages inside your heart? It is the process of interpretation. Consider going through the *How to Interpret the Bible* class on FoodForYourSoul.net. It is such an important class, because what good is the Bible if you misinterpret it? If God said one thing, and you interpreted it to mean something else, then it is worthless.

Learn the basics of how to interpret, get a good study Bible, use commentaries and Bible software, and if you need more help, ask your pastor! That is why God gave teachers to the church – to teach! God called us to help you look intently into His Word.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Proverbs 1 today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 3

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Proverbs 2. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

A third principle that will help us become doers of the Word is to understand what the Word is.

James 1:25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work - this person will be blessed in his doing.

James seems to be trying to correct a problem that existed in his time and that still exists in our day. There are some Christians who seem to think the Law is a bad thing. They think it is this oppressive system that used to exist back in Old Testament times, and it was a failure, and now we have been set free from the tyranny of that bad system. Many times you hear people pit law against grace. People tell me, "You preach too much law – you need more grace," as if law and grace were opposites.

And that creates a lot of confusion, because if you define law as anything God commands, then those people are, in essence, saying we shouldn't put forth effort to obey God. And the whole doctrine ends up being self-contradictory, because they say, "Instead of striving to obey God's commands, we should just rely on the Holy Spirit." And that is a contradiction because God commands us to rely on the Holy Spirit. So when they tell you to rely on the Holy Spirit, they are telling you to obey one of God's commands!

Many people are very confused about the role of God's law in the Christian life. And that same problem existed in the time of James. Some Christians were evidently thinking of the law of God as a burdensome restriction on their Christian freedom. So James is going to set them straight by calling it the **law of freedom**.

That is definitely an attention-getting phrase, because normally we think of a law as restricting freedom - by definition. (The speed limit restricts your freedom to drive faster.) But James is letting us know that the law of God is different. Rather than restricting freedom, it gives us freedom.

Freedom to do what? Freedom to disobey God? No. Glance through the rest of the book of James and you can tell he is not a fan of disobedience.

James 2:12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

One of the commands in God's law is that we must love our neighbor and be merciful. And in the same sentence where he calls it the law of freedom he warns us not to break it or we will be judged without mercy. So it is not freedom to disobey.

So what kind of freedom does the law give us? What did Jesus say about freedom in relationship to His Word?

John 8:30 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

So there Jesus talked about the freedom that comes from remaining in His Word. Freedom from what?

34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

What does His Word free us from? Sin. The law of God frees us from bondage to sin.

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ... 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

The law of God gives us freedom by showing us the way out of bondage to sin. The Hebrew word for law (Torah), means *instruction*. God's law is much more than just commands – it is His instruction on how to live. If you think of the law as a bunch of religious rituals that you can follow to make yourself acceptable to God, that will not work. But if you already have the righteousness of God that makes you acceptable in His sight through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you realize that the law of God is His instruction on how to escape sin and live in a manner pleasing to God, then it becomes your pathway to freedom from sin. It gives you the freedom to do what is in your heart, namely, to please God.

Think of a little kid who grows up dreaming of becoming a concert pianist. He wants to be able to sit down at a piano and make beautiful music. But he can't. Why not? because he does not know how to follow the laws of music. He hasn't learned all the rules about chords and rhythm and dynamics and all the various musical notations. So he studies to learn all those laws of music. And the more he learns them, the more it frees him up to do what his heart desires - make beautiful music on the piano. The kid who grows up dreaming of being a scientist, or astronaut, or professional athlete - the more he learns and obeys the laws governing those disciplines, the more it frees him up to pursue his dream.

What is our dream as Christians? It is to sin less and to please God more in the way we live. And the law of God - instruction in His Word, shows us how to realize our dream.

The Word of God sets us free like train tracks set a train free. It only points in one, narrow direction. But it frees you up to sail through life and accomplish what you were designed for.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Proverbs 2 today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 4

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Proverbs 3. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

How does the law of God free you from sin? There are several ways.

1) Conversion

When you are an unbeliever, you have no ability to obey God. And so God's Word comes along with the good news of Jesus Christ, and how you can have forgiveness of sins through faith in Him, and so you believe and are born again. At that point you are forgiven of all your sins so you are freed from the penalty of sin. And you are also freed from the power of sin. And so, for the first time in your life, you are actually capable of obeying God's Word.

2) Clarification

The Word clears up your thinking and understanding so that you can see things as they really are. In reality, sin is ugly and repulsive and disgusting and deadly, and righteousness is good and beautiful and sweet and desirable. But the more we sin, the more our ability to perceive reality gets twisted so that sin looks desirable and beautiful, and righteousness looks boring and stuffy. And you can tell yourself all day long that a sin is ugly, but if it seems beautiful and pleasing to your soul, you are eventually going to cave into it. So to have a real victory, you need the Word of God to clear up your vision so that you can actually see the ugliness of sin and the beauty of holiness.

3) Instruction

The Bible is loaded with principles that teach us how to overcome sin in our lives. Dozens and dozens of times Scripture will say, "Do this and it will result in you getting more grace from God." And the more grace you get from God, the more strength you will have to fight sin.

4) Edification

The word *edify* means to build up strength. The more you take in God's Word, the stronger you get spiritually. It is like eating food. It is the way God designed us to grow.

5) Motivation

The Bible is packed full of promises of reward if we do what God calls us to do. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, he began the sermon with the whole list of rewards in the Beatitudes. And right in the center of the sermon he devoted a long section - 21 versus - just to talk about rewards. He devoted 20% of the entire sermon just to that section. God wants us to be motivated by the promise of reward.

That is just a handful of ways that the Scriptures help us fight against sin in our lives. It is not an exhaustive list - you might be able to think of several others. The point here is that in all kinds of different ways, the law of God can free you from sin so that you can realize your dream of being more righteous.

And if you understand that going in, that will help you listen to the Word in such a way as to remember it and put it into practice.

Review James 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Proverbs 3 today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 5

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Proverbs 4. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

One last observation about the nature of God's law. James does not just call it the **law of freedom**, but the **perfect law of freedom**. So let's do what we just learned and ask, "Why is that word there?" In the context, James is trying to teach us how to approach the Word of God in a way that will cause us to remember it and put it into practice. And one of the things that will help us do that is understanding that it is perfect. God's Word is perfect. It is flawless. There is nothing wrong with it. Every word of it is God breathed and profitable. You know how some people, when they talk to you, keep on throwing in details that have nothing to do with the point they are making? The Bible never does that. It is not bloated with any extraneous material that we don't need. And nothing that we do need is missing from it. Everything necessary for life and godliness is there. Even if you don't have much education, or intelligence; you don't have much money power or influence, even if you don't have a house or a job and you are living on the street with nothing, if you have the Word of God you can be fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim.3:17).

The Word of God is eternal and stands firm in the heavens. The law of the Lord is perfect, and so it revives the human soul. It is trustworthy, making you wise. It gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes.

It endures forever, it is sure and altogether righteous. It is more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey (Ps.19:7-11).

Like a perfect compass, it always points you in the direction of God.

It will keep your way pure and drive sin out of your heart.

It will show you wonderful truths about God.

It will preserve your life, strengthen your inner man, cleanse your mind, delight your heart, and save your soul.

It will keep you from shame.

It will comfort you in suffering.

It will make you wiser than your enemies and give you more insight than your teachers.

It will keep you from stumbling.

It will feed you and nourish you and satisfy the cravings of your soul.

It will deliver God's unfailing love to you.

It will guide you through life like a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

It will change your desires and your attitudes and your moods.

It will fill you with joy and hope and confidence and peace.

It will sustain you and uphold you (Ps.119).

It will make you like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever you do will prosper (Ps.1:3).

It is *perfect!*

Listen to it intently, remember it, and do it.

Review James 1:19-21 one time from memory

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Proverbs 4 today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to give you a heart like the psalmist had toward His Word.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Appendix: The Purposes of the Law

Some of the confusion over the Law of God stems from a failure to understand that the law has more than one purpose. Someone sees a passage that speaks of the law as having the purpose of exposing sin, for example, and assumes that must therefore be the *only* purpose of the law.

Calvin's three uses of the law:

John Calvin, in his Institutes of Christian Religion, suggested there are three purposes for God's Law according to Scripture:

- 1) To convict all people of sin
- 2) To restrain sin by warning about punishment (the law cannot change the heart of an unbeliever, but it can restrain the outworking of that person's sin by threats of punishment)
- 3) To teach believers how to live in a way that is pleasing to God

Freedom from the Law

Paul did make several statements about us being free from the Law, but he was not saying that we are free to disobey God, or that we are not required to do what God has commanded.

Galatians 2:19 For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

Paul died to the law in the sense of his (misguided) effort in his previous life to gain justification through lawkeeping. The Judaizers of Paul's day were teaching that you could generate your own righteousness through law keeping - particularly keeping the ceremonial laws like circumcision.

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

That is a quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26. The correct interpretation of that verse is not that a person would have to perfectly obey all of God's commandments or be cursed. If that is what it meant, every single person in the Old Testament would have been cursed. When Moses wrote Deuteronomy 27:26, he wrote it in the context of a proper understanding of the Old Testament gospel. The Old Testament gospel teaches that righteousness is credited through faith (Gen.15), and that God cleanses the repentant sinner (Ps.51, 32), so that the person who has faith in God and who repents of his sins is justified in God's sight. So with that background understanding, the proper interpretation of Deuteronomy 27:26 is that in order to avoid being cursed, a believer must strive to obey God's commands, and when he fails, he must repent and trust God to forgive him. Paul's point in Galatians 3:10 is to show the Galatians that their view is untenable. Their view is that righteousness can be gained through law keeping. And Paul is showing that if that were true, then Deuteronomy 27:26 would require perfect obedience. Deuteronomy 27:26 does not require perfect obedience, but Paul is showing that if we adopt their approach, then Deuteronomy 27:26 would require perfect obedience.

The same is true of Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18:5 down in verse 12.

Galatians 3:12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

Leviticus 18 is a chapter that prohibits various forms of sexual perversion, such as bestiality and incest. And Paul is quoting verse 5 from that chapter.

Leviticus 18:5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

The point of Leviticus 18:5 is not that a person could generate his own righteousness if he perfectly obeyed the rules against bestiality and incest. Again, Moses is writing with the assumption that the readers already understand the Old Testament gospel. But he is pointing out that according to the Galatians' approach, verses like Leviticus 18:5 would require perfect obedience.

In verses 23 through 25, Paul describes a time in the past when we were held prisoners by the law, and now we have been set free from that.

Galatians 3:23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

The question here is whether that time in the past refers to before Jesus (in Old Testament times), or before our conversion. I would argue that it must be the latter, because it is clear that in that former time faith was not in existence. Faith most certainly was in existence in the Old Testament. But faith did not exist in my heart prior to my conversion. So the point of the passage is that in the life of an unbeliever, God puts the law over that person for the purpose of creating an awareness of his need for salvation. They attempt to gain righteousness through law keeping and it doesn't work. Once salvation comes, that purpose is accomplished and there is no longer any purpose for attempting to generate righteousness through law keeping.

Perhaps the most difficult passage in Galatians is the second half of chapter 4 where Paul develops a metaphor around Sarah and Hagar. There are a great number of different views on the various portions of that passage, and it is beyond the scope of this article to explore them all. For our purposes now, the most difficult part is Galatians 4:24, where Paul refers to Sinai as

Galatians 4:24 ... One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.

Is Paul saying that the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai (where He delivered the 10 Commandments) designed to make all the Israelites slaves without any promise? That view seems untenable because without a promise and faith in that promise, salvation is impossible. And we know that there were people in Old Testament times who were saved through faith. It seems to me more likely that the Mount Sinai covenant produces children who are slaves only when faith in the promise is not present. In other words, the law makes slaves out of unbelievers. That interpretation is consistent with what Paul has been saying in chapter 3.

The freedom Paul speaks of in chapter 5, then, is not freedom from being obedient to what God has commanded. Rather, it is freedom from the slavery of trying to generate righteousness through law keeping.

Romans 10

In Romans 10:4, Paul says that Christ is the end of the law. However, the context of that statement is a discussion of unbelieving Jews who were seeking to establish righteousness through law keeping rather than submitting to God's righteousness.

Romans 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ... 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul's point, then, is not that the law is abolished altogether. Rather, that the (misguided) effort to generate righteousness through the law comes to an end when a person has faith in Christ. Then, in verse 5, Paul makes the same point that he made in Galatians 3:12. If we accept law keeping as the appropriate way to generate righteousness, then Leviticus 18:5 would require perfect obedience.

It can't be that Moses was teaching in Leviticus 18 that a person could be saved through perfect obedience, which is impossible. In that chapter Moses was clearly expecting the people to be able to follow what he was saying (it is a chapter prohibiting all kinds of sexual perversions). And we know Paul did not believe that Moses contradicted himself between Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 30 (which Paul quotes in the next verse).

So again, Paul's reference to Leviticus 18 is not a reference to the correct interpretation of it, but rather to the legalist's wrong interpretation. In the previous two paragraphs Paul makes the point very clearly that they are misinterpreting the law and pursuing righteousness the wrong way. It is that wrong method that Paul is showing to be wrong by saying, "According to your approach, Leviticus 18 would be saying this ... and that would be a contradiction with Deuteronomy 30." But Paul is not endorsing that interpretation of Leviticus 18. The correct interpretation of Leviticus 18 would be to take it in light of the whole Old Testament Law, with all its grace (Gn.15 credited righteousness by faith, the provision for forgiveness of sins with and without sacrifice, etc.).

Godet takes this same view in his commentary on Romans 10. Here is his comment:

...But if it is certain that this way is impracticable for fallen man, how is it to be explained that Moses seriously proposed it to the people of God? Or must it be thought that there was here a sort of irony: "Try, and thou shalt see that it is too hard for thee." It is enough to re-peruse the passage of the law, Lev_18:5, to be convinced that the latter cannot be the sense in which this invitation was addressed to the people by the lawgiver. Now, if this exhortation and promise were serious, the way thus traced out was practicable. And, in fact, the law of Jehovah rightly understood was not given independently of His grace. The law, taken in the full sense of the word, contained an entire provision of means of grace unceasingly offered to the pious Israelite. From the moment he sinned, he could have recourse humbly to the pardon of his God, either with or without sacrifice, as the case might be; comp. Psa_51:16-17 : "Thou delightest not in sacrifice...; the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;" Rom_10:10-12 : "Create in me a clean heart, O God; let the spirit of freedom uphold me...; restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." The law thus humbly understood and sincerely applied was certainly the way of salvation for the believing Jew; it led him to an ever closer communion with God, as we find exemplified so often in the O. T., and what was yet wanting to this theocratic pardon and salvation was to be granted one day in the Messianic pardon and salvation which closed the perspective of the national hope. There was nothing, then, more serious for the Israelite who understood and applied the law in its true spirit and in its full breadth than the saying of Moses. But, unfortunately, there was another way of understanding the law and using it. It was possible to take the law in a narrower sense, solely in the form of command, and to make this institution thus understood a means of self-righteousness, and of proud complacency in self-merit. Such was the spirit which reigned in Israel at the time when Paul wrote, and particularly that of the school in which he had been brought up. Pharisaism, separating the commandment from grace, deemed that its fulfilment, realized by man's own strength, was the true title to divine favor. It is against this point of view that Paul here turns the law itself. He takes it as it is regarded by those whom he wishes to convince, as simple law, *nuda lex* (Calvin), law properly so called. And he reasons thus: "You wish to be justified by your own doing. Well! But in that case let your doing be complete! If your obedience is to make you live, it must be worthy of Him to whom it is offered." Such is the hopeless pass into which the apostle had himself been driven by the law thus understood and practised, and into which he drives the Pharisees of his time. If man wishes to raise the edifice of his own righteousness, let him take out every element of grace in the law; for the instant he has recourse to grace for little or for much, it is all over with work: "work is no more work" (Rom_11:6). This is probably also the reason why the apostle expresses himself as he does according to the true reading, saying, not: "Moses writes that"... , but: "Moses thus describes the righteousness of the law, to wit, that"... The intention of Moses was not to urge to such righteousness. But in his saying there is formulated the programme of a righteousness that is of the law "as law." If the law be once reduced to commandment, the saying of Leviticus certainly implies a mode of justification such as that of which the apostle speaks. Calvin is therefore right in saying: *Lex bifariam accipitur*; that is to say, the law may be regarded in two aspects,

according as we take the Mosaic institution in its fulness, comprehending therein the elements of grace which belonged to it in view of a previous justification and a real sanctification, or as we lose these elements of grace out of view to fasten only on the commandment and turn it to the satisfaction of human pride.