

Spiritual Self-Image **James 1:22-25**

When someone looks in the mirror, what do they see? Of course we would think that the obvious answer is “they see themselves”, but is that true? Some people see something terrible. All of their faults and imperfections glare out at them. Others see the best, and ignore the things that need to be repairs. Some people see the person they used to be, while others see the person they want to become. So as you see, there are many different things people see when they look in a mirror.

The Word of God is like a mirror. In James 1:22-25 James describes the Word of God as a mirror that people look into in order to perfect themselves. Just as we use a mirror to prepare ourselves to go out into public, the Word is an instrument to prepare us to meet God. However, just like a physical mirror, James suggested that we can misuse the mirror. In our case now, we want to suggest that there are four false reflections that people see in the Mirror of the Word.

First False Impression: Under-esteemed

Sometimes we look into the Word and feel an utter failure. There are some extraordinary examples of faith in the Bible, and we do not feel that we come close. The problem here is that we cannot differentiate between self-depreciation and humility. Humility is the ability not to elevate ourselves above others. Self-deprecation is the destructive attack on our esteem. Jesus was an excellent example of being humble but not self-destructive. The problem can be seen in men like Moses (Exodus 3); when called to serve God, he refused. Wrong answer! Another example is the Corinthian Christians who were saying that because they could not do all things perfectly, they would do none (I Corinthians 12). What happens when this mindset prevails? We have no elders, deacons or teachers.

Second False Impression: Over-esteemed

If I were to boast that in 30 years I never sinned, never lied, never lusted, etc, that might sound like a remarkable achievement. What if we said it is not? Jesus taught in Luke 17:7-8 that when a servant does what is expected of him, he is not exceeding expectations, he is merely meeting them. We are expected to live without sin; there is no reason to boast of such things since it is the expectation. When we look into the Gospel Mirror and believe we have achieved our successes, we fail. We are warned that we need to be cautions since at any time we can fall (I Corinthians 10:12, Romans 11:19-22).

Third False Impression: Past obsessive

As time moves on, we look less that our previous selves. Sometimes we are desperate to slow that process. As Christian sometimes we are possessed by our past. Maybe we cannot escape the shame of our previous lives of sin. Maybe it is the exact opposite; we rest on the laurels of previous good works. Either way, we miss the mark here. Paul was a man who could look at the past with either view. In Philippians 3:4-8 he said that he was once something remarkable among Judaism, excelling in great ways. At the same time, he was a terrible persecutor of the church. It was necessary that he put aside both to serve God. We too need to set aside the past

and live in the present. We are forgiven of our past sins, and our past good works, while not forgotten by God, will count for naught if we do not labor now.

Fourth False Impression: Future obsessive

Young people are often obsessed with the future. Children dress up in the working clothes of those they desire to be. We forgive this in children, but appreciate that it is not reasonable in adults. Yet many live in a world where life is all about what they intend to do. Planning to do is not doing. For one thing, the future is not yours to claim. James 4:13-15 reminds us we have no promise of the future. Anything you need to do in life, you need to do NOW. King Agrippa told Paul that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian (Acts 26:28); almost persuaded is not persuaded, and so it did him not good.

Four False Impressions (Under-esteemed, Over-esteemed, Past obsessive, Future obsessive) can be countered with right minded views to the Scriptures. Elevated by God, Esteeming my brethren above myself, the past removed, and the future in His hands reflect a better Spiritual Self-Image. Ultimately, when we look into the mirror of the Gospel, we are meant to see not ourselves, but Christ. This the image we put on at baptism (Galatians 3:27), and the image in which God will know us.