

Doubling-Up with James

Do you remember years ago when they had those TV ads for Wrigley's Double Mint Chewing Gum? And, they had this really catchy jingle that went along with them. The ads would always show a set of twins riding on bikes or bouncing a beach ball around on the beach or riding horses. And then the jingle would be played: "**Double your pleasure, double your fun.**" Of course, we think of that as a rather innocent little jingle, but subliminally, it was really a bit less than wholesome and played upon the males' somewhat baser instincts, because these were never just plain old twins. Oh no, these twins were usually youthful female supermodels. And when we heard the jingle and watched these ads, our male instincts became engaged and they caught our attention like a flame attracts a moth. And the women gum chewers who saw these commercials wanted to identify with these supermodels in any way that they could—so, hey, they'd want to get a mouthful of that gum so that they could double their pleasure and double their fun as well. This advertising campaign is rated by some as being among the top ten commercial strategies to ever come along.¹ But, the Wrigley Chewing Gum Company wasn't the first one to come up with such an effective presentation—this idea of **doubling-up** on things isn't new.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle James, the half-brother of Jesus, was quite familiar with doubling-up to communicate his message. But, He presented a much more important message—one that, in the most wholesome and holiest of ways, tells people how they can truly "**double their pleasure and double their fun**"—not under the pleasure-standards of this world—but under the spiritual standards of God's Word that brings eternal life to all who practice them. As we continue to consider the Apostle James' writings in his New Testament book, I'd like for you to observe how his teaching of the Gospel is so powerful because he really knew how to "**double up**" on the **flavor of God's Word**.

First, listen to what James tells us in Chapter 1, verse 5-8: ⁵ "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." James 1:5-8 (NIV) Now that is something that many Christians need to take to heart—this notion of "**double-mindedness**." If you want God's wisdom, you can't be double-minded. If you want to have any effective prayer, you can't be double-minded. So, what does James mean by someone being "**double-minded**?"

The Greek word that James uses is dipsycho (dip-soo-knos) which is derived from another Greek work (psyche) meaning "**two-spirited**"—in the sense of a **divided soul**.² Something that James says later

in Chapter 4 indicates that if you truly want to draw close to God, then this **double-minded, two-spirited** state of affairs is something that God will not tolerate because a **divided soul** is indicative of a person whose heart is impure.³ And this is never a good thing because it causes doubts to rise that leave us on that stormy sea that James refers to. Not only that, if your soul is divided—one minute it trusts God, the next one it doubts—a **Christian-wanna-be** might not even recognize themselves as having such a sinful impurity because a double-minded person is one who often deceives themselves. They somehow think that their wavering position—back and forth between faith and doubt—and back and forth between living for Christ, and then living for Satan—is something that will go unnoticed. They are like the former CIA operative, Aldrich Ames, who was charged with selling secrets to the Russians back in 1994. He was a double agent who worked for the U. S. while at the same time giving sensitive information to Russia. His treachery led to the capture and deaths of dozens of CIA spies in the former Soviet Union. But, his disloyalty could not be concealed, and it certainly did not go unnoticed. His extravagant spending on huge homes and fancy cars eventually raised suspicions that resulted in his arrest, conviction and a sentence to life in prison. What an awfully devious and despicable person! And yet there are a lot of Christians like that—those who think they can act as **double-agents**. On Sundays, they may go to Church, maybe even appear to be the most righteous person around. But, the rest of the week, they are totally different and their lives are dominated by the ways of the world. And, the reality is that they end up sabotaging themselves spiritually.⁴

Next month, I will be going with my daughter, Emily, to an Avett Brothers concert at the Richmond Raceway Complex. Do we have any Avett Brother fans with us today? Well, don't feel bad—I really only know two or three of their songs, so it's going to be an interesting experience. But, one of the songs that I do know has a line in it that James might have approved to describe what he means by **"double-mindedness."** While I doubt if the Avett Brothers intended any spiritual meaning, the lyrics that are applicable to what James is trying to communicate to us go like this: **"One foot in and one foot back—But, it don't pay to live like that. So I cut the ties and I jumped the tracks—For never to return."**⁵ For any of those people who think they can live as **"doubt-agents"** when it comes to being a Christian, they might want to remember those lyrics. You can't live a Christian life with one foot in the Church, and the other foot firmly planted in the ways of the world—because it's true: **"It don't pay to live like that!"** Well, that's not quite right. It does pay. The problem is that the wages it pays are the wages of death.⁶ In other words, doubt-agents die and they're sentenced eternally to Hell. So, that's the first instance of James sort of using a double-mint gum approach to communicate to us an important spiritual truth—so, remember: **DON'T BE DOUBLE-MINDED.**

Now, James moves on and tells us something about “**doubling up**” when it comes to **hearing** and **doing**. He gets into how this pair of Christian practices must go together and mirror each other. And if they don’t double up, then they really do very little good apart from each other. Listen to what James has to say about **hearing** and **doing**: ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. James 1:22-25 (ESV)

It doesn’t do any good to just hear God’s Word. It doesn’t do any good to just read the Bible. If hearing and reading is all that you do when it comes to the Scriptures, then you might as well be going to an Avett Brother’s concert, even though you really don’t know most of their songs. What James is telling us is that we are broken people. If we want to become unbroken, if we want God to put us back together again, then we need to do something. We need to double-up and both hear God’s Word **and** do what it demands of us—apply it to our lives. It’s as if God’s Word is just sitting there like a bottle of glue. And all some people do is just read the label on the bottle, but never apply the glue. They hear or read God’s Word, but they never make the effort to let it out of the bottle and apply it to their lives in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to mend them.

And, notice something else that James says about this. He makes an analogy to a man looking in the mirror and then walking off and forgetting what he looks like. Now you might think that that is an absurd comparison—after all, who could possibly look themselves in the mirror, walk off and not remember what they looked like? Well, if you have ever heard the story of Andras Tamas, then you’d know that this is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Tamas was a Hungarian who was forced by the Nazis to fight for them on the Russian Front during WWII. He was taken prisoner by the Russians around 1944. Unfortunately, the Russians mistook his Hungarian language as being the mere gibberish of a mad man so they branded him a lunatic and threw him into a psychiatric hospital. Now, you might think that their mistake would have been recognized fairly quickly. But, it took them 53 years before they noticed their error. And over this long and exasperating time, this Hungarian basically lost his memory as to who he really was. When the Russian doctors realized what had happened, they tried to help this poor man to regain his memory so that he could begin to remember who he really was, and where he’d come from. Not only had this man forgotten his real name, he’d never seen his own face in a mirror for over fifty years. One newspaper that carried this story observed that: “**For hours, the old man studie[d] [his] face in a mirror. The deep-set eyes. The gray stubble on the chin. The furrows of the brow. It [was]**

his face, but [that fact was] a startling revelation [to him].” This man looked in the mirror and couldn’t even recognize his own face.⁷ James is talking about people like that. But, they are not prisoners of war, they are prisoners of sin.⁸

But, we need to understand James’ reference to a **mirror** in verse 23. We need to know what kind of mirror the man who walked away had been looking into. Mirrors in the ancient world were not like our mirrors today. They weren’t made of glass or even very big. Rather, they were usually small and made of some highly polished metal, like brass or even silver. And because of that they didn’t always reflect the clearest image when someone looked into them. The most familiar example of a mirror like this is found in 1 Corinthians 13, the “Love Chapter.” Referring to the time when Jesus will come again, the Apostle Paul said: “We can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a **poor mirror**; but someday we are going to see Him in His completeness, face to face. Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.” 1 Corinthians 13:12 (TLB) And when there is a mention of a mirror in Scripture, that is often the type of mirror we think of.

But, here in James’ letter, we need to understand that he is **not** referring to a mirror that casts a poor reflection. Quite the opposite is true. The mirror James is talking about shows an incredibly true and clear image. So what is he getting at when he says that a person who merely **“hears”** God’s Word, but never becomes a **“doer”** of His Word, is like a man who looks intently in the mirror at his **natural face**? Well, a person’s **“natural face”** is their face exactly as it actually is—with all its wrinkles, blemishes, warts and dirt. The mirror James is talking about shows all these unsightly things **very clearly**. And James says that after seeing this, the man just walks away, and forgets what he looks like. Actually, the Greek wording is more like, **“he goes away and does not return.”**⁹ The picture offered here by the man peering into the mirror and seeing his sorry looking face, only to walk away and forget it, is the picture of a complacent Christian. They are the Christians who at one time thought that they had come to know Christ. They thought they knew Him just by listening. At first, they maybe even cleaned up their act a little bit and washed that dirty faces—that face that was so oblivious to sin in their life **BEFORE hearing** about Jesus. But, the problem is that they never progressed beyond **hearing** about Jesus. And they surely never came to **know** Jesus. Because if they did know Him, then they would love Him. And if they actually loved Him, they’d apply His commands to their lives. They would, quite voluntarily, quite naturally and quite joyously, take up their Crosses and be **“doers”** of His Word, and not **hearers only**.

Yet, when they look into the true mirror of **God's perfect law**, it reflects their sluggish, lazy and dirty condition as Christians. And they don't like what they see, but really—way down deep inside—they don't want to change. And so, they ignore what they see and just turn and walk away. Remember—James said these **"hearers-but-not-doers"** deceive themselves. And that's true, because when they do turn and walk away, what is it that they cannot remember? They cannot remember how much their old lives of sin mirror their present lifestyle even though they are now supposed to be Christians. And so, they engage in the greatest self-deception of all—thinking that they are saved when, in fact, they are more lost than they have ever been. And sadly, they are completely oblivious to that fact.

So what are we to do to guard against such a terrible state? Well, maybe we'd all do well to take a tip from those old chewing gum commercials, because we surely need to **"double-up"** and be **both "hearers" and "doers"** of God's Word. James assures us that the one who is more than a mere **"hearer,"** but is also an **active "doer"**—whose actions reflect a lifestyle that applies God's perfect law on a daily basis—that person is truly blessed. And not only that, James is trying to get Christians to look into the mirror. He wants them to examine themselves closely each and every day, and then not to turn and walk away never to return. Rather, he begs them to step out and walk with Jesus. Not just stepping out with one foot in faith, and the other foot left in doubt, because the one thing that I do know about the Avett Brothers is that they are right about this: **"It don't pay to live like that."** We are called to **"cut the ties" with the ways of this world and "jump the tracks"—and ask the Holy Spirit to help us "never to return" to that old lifestyle.**¹⁰ If you, or anyone that you care about, won't cut those ties or make that jump of faith, then they will be missing out on so much. The **double message** that James offers to you is that you can't be **"double-minded,"** but must **live in faith** with a singleness of mind, spirit and purpose in Christ, **AND** be doers of His Word. If you will do exactly that, then you will truly **"double your pleasure and double their fun,"** in this life and in the one to come. I think that we'd all do well to seriously chew on that!

Let us pray.

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¹ Garth Sundem, "Top 10 Catchiest Commercial Jingles, <https://people.howstuffworks.com>.

² James Strong, *Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch Corp., 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1374."

³ James 4:8 (ESV) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁴ Daily Wisdom for Men, "Everyday Double Agents," Feb. 21, Barbour Books:China (2017).

⁵ The Avett Brothers, "I and Love and You," American Recordings, released 2009.

⁶ Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁷ Tom Hundley, "'Last Prisoner of WWII' Looks for a Memory," www.chicagotribune.com, Chicago Tribune, September 7, 2000.

⁸ Galatians 3:22 (NLT2) But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

⁹ George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible – Volume 12*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 32.

¹⁰ The Avett Brothers, "I and Love and You," American Recordings, released 2009.