

James 1:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

Analysis

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: The hearer-only is likened to a man observing (katanoounti, κατανοῦντι) his natural face in a mirror. Mirrors in antiquity were polished metal, requiring careful attention. James shows that Scripture reveals identity, yet a mere glance accomplishes nothing.

The metaphor underscores the transformative intent of the Word: its reflection demands response. Reformed believers understand Scripture as means of grace; negligent hearing wastes the mirror that God provides to conform us to Christ.

Historical Context

Jewish wisdom literature also used mirror imagery (Sirach 12:11). James adapts it for Christian congregations accustomed to synagogue readings. Paul's use of mirror imagery in 2 Corinthians 3:18 parallels this, showing apostolic harmony.

In diaspora settings, where believers often met in humble homes without ornate decor, the idea of a traveler glancing at a bronze mirror before leaving would resonate strongly.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What recent Scripture reflection exposed something you were tempted to ignore?
2. How can you slow down to look intently into God's mirror?
3. Who can help you remember and respond to what Scripture reveals?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι εἴ τις ἀκροατὴς λόγου ἔστιν καὶ οὐ ποιητής
For G1487 G5100 a hearer of the word be and not a doer
G3754 G202 G3056 G2076 G2532 G3756 G4163

οὗτος ἔσικεν ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς
he is like unto a man beholding face
G3778 G1503 G435 G2657 G3588 G4383 G3588

γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ
natural in a glass
G1078 G846 G1722 G2072

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:47 (Parallel theme): Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

Jeremiah 44:16 (Word): As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.

Luke 6:7 (Parallel theme): And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.