

# New Year: Hearing or Doing?

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(James 1-2)

## I. Introduction

- A. Happy New Year! I hope you rang in 2019 in a successful and safe way
1. News Years is celebrated in differently, often having to do with food
    - a. In Chili, you eat New Year lentils; in Spain, it's 12 white grapes.
    - b. In Austria, it's a roasted pig... and even pig shaped ice-cream
    - c. In Asia, you eat extra-long noodles... to point to a longer life
  2. In the south, you eat collards and black-eyes peas (*missed it this year*)
    - a. This was thought to represent prosperity in the coming year
    - b. Black-eyes peas are coins and collards are folding money!
- B. One big part of New Year's traditions is "*New Year's Resolutions*"
1. We become self-politicians, make promises we don't intend to keep
    - a. The number one new Year's Resolution in US, "*To lose weight*"
      - **2016:** *I will get my weight down to below 180 pounds.*
      - **2017:** *I will follow my new diet until I get below 200 pounds.*
      - **2018:** *I will develop a more realistic attitude about my weight.*
      - **2019:** *I will drive past a gym each week on way to McDonalds*
    - b. This practice didn't start with us; here are a couple of old quotes  
*Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.* (Mark Twain)  
*New year's resolutions are simply checks that we draw on a bank where we have no account.* (Oscar Wilde)
  2. Making and breaking resolutions is a tradition just like collards/peas
    - a. But we need to understand that it is a counter-productive tradition
    - b. We look to see what should be changed... but with a wink-n-a-nod
      - 1) Man resolves to quit smoking, and bums a cigarette from friend
      - 2) He says, "*I'm in phase one of my plan; I stop buying smokes*"
    - c. We see the good that we should do... and don't do it (**Jam 4:17**)
  3. In fact, James has a section of his book on New Year's Resolutions

## II. Resolutions: Hearing Vs Doing

- A. James was not one of Martin Luther's favorite book ("*epistle of straw*")
1. The reason was that James didn't fit into Luther Reformation vision
    - a. Luther fought idea of "*ex opere operato*" ("*from the work worked*")
      - 1) Salvation (*and grace*) came from keeping the church sacraments
      - 2) Obedience (*work*) to the church was the way that God saved
    - b. Luther came to believe that salvation was by faith, not works
      - 1) We're saved by trusting God, not by obedience to church
      - 2) He risked Diet of Worms, which was worse than it sounds
    - c. Luther narrowly missed death because of his faith in faith
  2. Yet, James seems to weigh in on the "works" side of the issue
    - a. James says things that gave Martin Luther heartburn (**Jam 2:24**)
      - 1) Only time NT says "*faith alone*" and it's "*not by faith alone*"
      - 2) We're seen as righteous by what we do, not just what we think
    - b. Luther blew the whistle and kicked James out of the Bible pool
    - c. Actually, he relegated James to an appendix at the end of the NT
  3. James isn't saying that we come to salvation by our good deeds
    - a. He isn't telling how to be save; he's telling us what faith leads to
    - b. The faith that allows us to be saved is a faith that leads us to obey
      - 1) We're saved by faith (only), but we then must live by our faith
      - 2) And living faith will lead us to obey God to best of our ability
- B. This is why James makes a good and annoying text for New Years
1. He says hearing (*and preaching*) must lead to doing (**Jam 1:22**)
    - a. We stress study, right? We have Bible classes twice a week
      - 1) When we get together informally (groups) where is a study
      - 2) One of the strengths of our movement is emphasis on study
    - b. James doesn't say not to hear or study—we can do that ONLY!
    - c. Problem for many of us is a problem in golf—no follow through
      - 1) We come to church to hear word... and it goes out the other ear
      - 2) We must follow-through; we must put knowledge into action
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2. This is the introduction to section on faith and works (**James 2:14**)
  - a. This is a rhetorical question, right? The answer is “*No good at all*”
    - 1) His illustration is seeing someone who is both cold and hungry
    - 2) It does no good to say, “*Be warmed and filled.*” We must act!
  - b. His point is that faith without action is pretty lame (**James 2:17**)
  - c. It’s not that must get everything perfect... some take it that way
    - 1) The Bible says, “*Repent and be baptized.*” And in that order
    - 2) If your theology is off an iota, then your baptism is invalid
    - 3) There was one guy in 1800’s that was baptized 20+ times
  - d. James isn’t saying that faith without absolute perfection is dead
  - e. He’s saying faith, like a good golf swing, has a follow-through
3. Faith that leads to action or effort shows faith as alive (**James 2:26**)
  - a. Remember, James is talking to the church—not to outsiders
    - 1) His point is that it was faith has led them to be part of church
    - 2) That same faith should lead you be live faithfully (not perfect)
  - b. Just casually thumbing through James gives some example
    - 1) Faith makes a difference in how you face trials (**Jam 1:2-3**)
    - 2) Faith makes a difference in how you see wealth (**Jam 1:9-10**)
    - 3) It makes a difference in how we control temper (**Jam 1:19**)
    - 4) It makes a difference in how we see the weak (**Jam 1:27**)
4. All of that is just James 1, but you get point. *Works do matter!*

### III. Conclusion

- A. Here’s where tradition of making casual resolution is counter-productive
  1. What are the most often made resolutions this time of the year?
    - a. **Country:** losing weight, exercise more, quit smoking, take time off
    - b. **Christians:** Read more, pray more, attend more, get more involved
    - c. **Church:** More community action, more evangelistic, more positive
  2. What should you resolve as person or we resolve as a church in 2019?
    - a. If we make them only to break them—that’s faith without works!
    - b. We end up being more a lot like Calvin... as in Calvin and Hobbes

- B. In other words, we condition ourselves to expect NOT to follow through
1. James has a silly picture of the person who won't follow through
    - a. He says it's like a guy looking in mirror (**Reading: James 1:23-24**)
    - b. To look at scripture without making changes? *That's just silly!*
      - 1) Like looking in mirror and finding gunk in your teeth
      - 2) Then you leave and don't get the gunk out of your teeth
    - c. It does no good to look if you're not going to act on what you see
    - d. Looking at God's word is to motivate us to get gunk out of life
  2. What is the gunk that you need to remove from your life?
    - a. What resolutions could you or should you make in 2019?
    - b. It's doesn't help to be resolved unless you follow through