

James 1:19-27

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, ²⁰ for human anger does not produce God's righteousness.^[e] ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves^[d] in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

²⁶ If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

How does James advise us to hear God's words and put them into practice in our lives today?

James: 2:14-26

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is worthless?^[b] ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was brought to completion. ²³ Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,"^[e] and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers^[d] and sent them out by another road? ²⁶ For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

What is the relationship between faith and action described by James, and how do we work it out in our lives?

James 3:2-12

² For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is mature,^[a] able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴ Or look at ships: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of life, and is itself set on fire by hell.^[b] ⁷ For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue—a restless^[c] evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless the Lord^[d] and Father, and with it we curse people, made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth comes a blessing and a curse. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

How does James help us understand the impact of our speech on our faith?

James 4:1-10

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet^[a] something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ Adulterers!^[b] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose that the scripture speaks to no purpose? Does the spirit that God caused to dwell^[c] in us desire envy? ⁶ But God gives all the more grace; therefore it says,

“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James seems to say choose the world or Christ. How can we be in the world but not of the world?

James 5:13-18

¹³ Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth yielded its harvest.

How does James' advice on prayer motivate us to act out our faith?

Other Epistles

John Hazzard

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THE LETTER OF JAMES

- Moral exhortation in the form of a general letter addressed to “the twelve tribes of the Diaspora (Johnson)
- Subject: the practice of Christian life including specific directions to Christians about things they should and should not do, attitudes they should adopt and others they should reject (Scheef)
- Perspective: theocentric making explicit statements about God who creates, calls, blesses and judges (Johnson)
- Format: collection of edited traditional materials (Scheef), but given vibrancy in the exhortation to practical faith and active love (Johnson)
- Challenge: readers must choose to be friends of God or friends of the world (Johnson)

AUTHORSHIP

- Claim: James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
- Traditional View: James, the brother of Jesus writing to correct Paul's teaching on faith and works (Scheef) and sent it to Christians who lived outside of Palestine (Powell)

James is called a brother of Jesus in the Gospels

Brothers of Jesus referred to as believers in Acts

Paul says that the resurrected Jesus revealed himself to James

He is included among the apostles Paul wrote about in Galatians

Paul met with Peter and James at the Jerusalem Council (Barclay)

AUTHORSHIP

- Critique: A later author writing under the name of James (Yacov) suggesting leadership of the scattered Jewish believers in Christ

James does not claim to be the brother of Jesus

The letter needed to have written prior to James' execution in 62 c.e., but seems not be known in the early church until Origen refers to it near the end of the 2nd century

The Greek is too good to be written by a Palestinian Jew

James would have written on his own authority on the basis his brother's teaching (Scheef) instead of using Hellenistic and Jewish traditions

- Conclusion: Arguments have strengths and weaknesses. We really don't know who wrote the letter

TABLE STUDY

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Chapter 2:14-26

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Chapter 3:2-12

How does James help us understand the impact of our speech on our faith?

Chapter 4:1-10

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Chapter 5:13-18

How does James' advice on prayer motivate us to act out our faith?