

Notes & Outlines

JAMES

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GENERAL EPISTLES

James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2 and 3 John; and Jude are designated as “catholic” epistles in the sense of “universal,” because they are not addressed to a particular individual or church, but to the church as a whole.

JAMES

WRITER: James. The problem of authorship is a major one. Some find at least four men by the name of James in the New Testament. At least three are clearly identified:

1. James, brother of John, son of Zebedee, called by our Lord “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). He was slain by Herod (Acts 12:1, 2).
2. James, son of Alphaeus, called “James the less” (Mark 15:40). He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him.
3. James, the Lord’s brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3), in reality a half-brother according to the flesh. He became head of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). This James is evidently the writer of this epistle (Galatians 2:9).

DATE: A.D. 45-50. This was the first book of the New Testament to be written. Some have taken the position that James wrote to combat the writings of Paul. It is obvious that this is an erroneous position, since none of Paul’s epistles were in existence at the time of this writing.

JAMES AND PAUL: The seeming contradiction between James and Paul can be easily explained when the message of James is considered. James takes the position, as does Paul, that we are justified by faith but that the faith which justifies produces good works. Calvin said, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.” Justification is shown by works — not justified *by*, but *for*, good works. James and Paul present the two aspects of justification by faith.

Paul emphasized both phases:

Faith — not justified *by* works:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.... (Titus 3:5)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God — not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Works — justified *for* works:

...these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.... (Titus 3:8)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Faith is the root of salvation — works are the fruit of salvation. Faith is the cause of salvation — works are the result of salvation.

KEY VERSES:

But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:22)

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20)

THEME: Ethics of Christianity, not doctrine.

The Epistle of James has been compared to the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. Both emphasize the practical. In both there is the learning experience for the child of God.

Justification by faith is demonstrated by works. Justification by faith is poured into the test tube of:

Works — Chapters 1, 2

Words — Chapter 3

Worldliness — Chapter 4

Warning to the rich — Chapter 5

OUTLINE:

I. Verification of genuine faith, Chapters 1 — 3

A. God tests faith by trials, Chapter 1:1-12

(Twofold result: development of patience here, v. 3; reward hereafter, v. 12)

B. God does not test faith with evil, Chapter 1:13-21

(Evil comes from within — the flesh, v. 14)

C. God tests faith by the Word, not by man's words, Chapter 1:22-27

(Doing, not doctrine, is the final test of faith; knowing is not enough.)

D. God tests faith by attitude and action in respect of per-

sons, Chapter 2:1-13

E. God tests faith by good works, Chapter 2:14-26

(*Abraham is an illustration of works*, v. 21)

F. God tests faith by the tongue, Chapter 3

(*“What is in the well of the heart will come up through the bucket of the mouth.”*)

II. Vacuity and vapidness of worldliness, Chapter 4

(*Worldliness is identified with fighting and the spirit of dissension*, vv. 1, 2)

III. Vexation of the rich; value of the imminent coming of Christ, Chapter 5

(*The soon coming of Christ produces patience*, vv. 7, 8, and prayer, vv. 13-18)

A. Riches are a care (rich warned), vv. 1-6

B. Coming of Christ is a comfort, vv. 7-12

C. Prayer of the righteous is a power, vv. 13-20

COMMENT:

I. Verification of genuine faith, Chapters 1 — 3

A. God tests faith by trials, Chapter 1:1-12

v. 1 — “Servant” is *bond slave* (he was a half-brother of our Lord, according to the flesh). James does not get familiar with the Lord — notice that he uses the full name, Lord Jesus Christ.

“Scattered abroad” (Greek *diaspora*). The Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire in principal cities.

“Greeting” is *rejoice*, a warm word.

v. 2 — “Temptations” (KJV) are *testings*. The joy is the result of trials. There is a purpose in trials, they are not trivial or meaningless. The joy follows (see Hebrews 12:11).

v. 3 — When faith is poured into the test tube of trials, the result is patience. This is proof positive. “Acid of grief tests the coin of belief.” See John 2:23-25 and 6:64-66; Romans 5:3-5; Galatians 6:17; Psalm 131:2.

v. 4 — “Perfect” is *full maturation*.

“Entire” is *soundness*, not crippled. This is the normal Christian.

v. 5 — If any lack wisdom in attaining to Christian normality, let him ask of God wisdom in this direction.

“Liberally” is *simply*.

“Upbraideth not” — it is “pure, simple, giving of good, without admixture of evil or bitterness” (Vincent).

v. 6 — He is to ask without hesitation, with bold faith.

“Wave” is *surge*.

v. 7 — This is emphatic.

v. 8 — “Double-minded” is *undecided*.

“Unstable” is *confused*.

v. 9 — “Low degree” is the poor, in contrast to the rich.

“Rejoice” is *glory* or *boast*.

v. 10 — “Made low” is *humiliation*. Riches will not keep him alive or give him eternal life.

v. 11 — As the sun scorching the grass causes it to wither away, so the rich will fade from the earth.

v. 12 — The thought here is that there is a reward for the man who endures testing and is approved (tried) afterward.

B. God does not test faith with evil, Chapter 1:13-21

v. 13 — No man is tempted with evil from God. God is incapable of being tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no man.

v. 14 — A man is tempted with evil when he is trapped and hooked by his own lust (flesh).

v. 15 — Desires of the flesh lead to sin, and sin to death. Sin gives birth to death in an unholy union.

v. 16 — This is a warning.

v. 17 — God never sends evil. He is good and He gives good gifts for He is the Creator. There is no variation, as the laws of creation reveal.

“Neither shadow of turning” means that there is no shadow cast by turning, like the dark side of the moon.

v. 18 — The Word of God gave birth to a son of God (1 Peter 1:23).

v. 19 — “Wherefore” is *know ye*.

v. 20 — The anger of man is contrary to the will and work of God.

v. 21 — “Filthiness” (of the flesh).

“Superfluity of naughtiness” (KJV) is *abundance of wickedness*. The

implanted Word is a preventative against the sins of the flesh.

“Save your souls” — see Romans 1:16.

C. God tests faith by the Word, not by man’s words,

Chapter 1:22-27

v. 22 — “Doers” — see Matthew 7:21. The Word demands decision and action. To give only a mental assent to it is to rationalize, which leads to self-deception.

v. 23 — The Word reveals the natural man in reality.

v. 24 — To ignore the Word leads to tragedy. To ignore the x-ray that reveals a cancer leads to death.

v. 25 — “Looketh” means to look attentively, penetratingly. To obey the Word leads to blessing and life.

v. 26 — “Religious” means to go through the ritual and forms of religion. The tongue is the true index of the reality of religion. Psalm singing on Sunday and filthy stories on Monday identify a heretic.

v. 27 — “Pure” is the positive side. “Unfiled” is the negative side.

Positive: “Visit” — contact with the sorrow of the world and problems of people.

Negative: “Unspotted” — contact with the world does not mean to be implicated in the things of the world.

D. God tests faith by attitude and action in respect of persons, Chapter 2:1-13

v. 1 — “Have” is *hold* — “Hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” Don’t be a spiritual snob.

v. 2 — “Assembly” is *synagogue*, meaning a coming together. The Jewish Christians evidently used the word “synagogue” even if they did not meet in an actual synagogue building.

“With a gold ring” means not a single ring, but a man loaded down with gold rings, which was an evidence of wealth.

“Goodly apparel” (KJV) is *fine clothing*, contrasted to the clothing of a poor man.

v. 3 — This is discrimination made in favor of the rich.

v. 4 — “Are ye not then partial in yourselves?” should be, *Are ye not divided in your own mind?* This means that they revealed a doubt concerning their faith by these actions.

v. 5 — Poor by the world's standards, but heirs of the kingdom.

v. 6 — James is rough on the rich (see Proverbs 22).

v. 7 — “Worthy” is better *honorable*.

v. 8 — The law is summed up in this statement, even as the Lord Jesus Christ stated.

v. 9 — To discriminate between rich and poor is sin, and it makes a person a transgressor of the law.

v. 10 — To break the law in one point makes one a lawbreaker.

v. 11 — To break one law makes a lawbreaker as if he had broken any other law.

v. 12 — “The law of liberty” is the Word of God.

v. 13 — The lawbreaker will be judged without mercy, as he showed no mercy in breaking the law.

E. God tests faith by good works, Chapter 2:14-26

v. 14 — Works follow saving faith. Calvin said, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

v. 15 — This is a practical illustration.

v. 16 — Pious clichés and Christian verbiage are not the evidence of saving faith. There must be a vocation to go along with the vocabulary.

v. 17 — James is speaking about saving faith. He is not speaking of the works of the law, but of faith (see Romans 3:20).

v. 18 — Faith is demonstrated to a skeptical world by works.

v. 19 — Lip service is not the evidence of saving faith — even the demons believe.

v. 20 — Faith without the fruit of faith is empty and futile as far as the world is concerned.

v. 21 — Abraham is an illustration of saving faith. By offering his son, he demonstrated his faith.

v. 22 — Abraham's faith was made real.

v. 23 — Abraham proved he had saving faith.

v. 24 — Saving faith can stand the test of life.

v. 25 — Rahab is another example of saving faith (see Hebrews 11:31).

v. 26 — Faith without works is like a dead body in a morgue.

F. God tests faith by the tongue, Chapter 3

v. 1 — Teachers have a greater responsibility.

v. 2 — “Offend” (KJV) is *stumble*. The tongue is the index to the body.

vv. 3, 4 — The horse is controlled by a bit (bridle). A ship is directed by a small helm (rudder).

v. 5 — The tongue is a little member, but it needs to be controlled.

v. 6 — The uncontrolled tongue is a forest fire, a world of iniquity, and it is set on fire of hell. (See author’s booklet, “Tongues on Fire.”)

vv. 7, 8 — Beasts can be tamed — but not the tongue.

vv. 9, 10 — The tongue is capable of praising God or blaspheming Him. The tongue lifts man above the animal world. Man is not a jibbering ape nor an aping parrot. Man is not a mockingbird. Man can communicate with man and with God.

vv. 11, 12 — Man can be two-faced, double-minded, and forked-tongued; that is, he can say good and bad. No fountain gives forth sweet and bitter water, nor does a tree bear figs and olives.

v. 13 — The tongue reveals genuine faith.

v. 14 — Strife and bitterness are not the fruits of faith.

v. 15 — “Knowledge is proud that she has learned so much, Wisdom is humble that she knows no more.”

v. 16 — An uncontrolled tongue produces envying and strife, which lead to confusion and evil work.

v. 17 — True wisdom comes from above and produces fruit: purity, peaceableness, gentleness, etc.

“Without partiality” is *without doubting*.

v. 18 — These are the fruits of faith.

II. Vacuity and vapidness of worldliness, Chapter 4

v. 1 — “Lusts” is *sensual passion*.

“War in your members” — strife and turmoil are created by conflicts and overweening demands of the members of the body for satisfaction.

v. 2 — Selfish desires lead to war. This spirit of strife is worldliness. This is not the Christian approach. The desires should be taken in prayer to the Lord to have them satisfied, denied, or refined.

v. 3 — Requests are denied because they are selfish.

v. 4 — This spirit of trying to *get* more rather than to *give* more is the spirit of the world and is the enemy of God. God says, “Love not the world.”

v. 5 — Or, it may be translated, *Does the Spirit desire in an envious manner?*

v. 6 — This is one of many references that show God’s hatred of pride and His love of humility.

v. 7 — The child of God must first of all be subject to God. Then he is in a position to resist the devil.

v. 8 — The door to God is always open.

But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

(Psalm 73:28)

There must be confession of sin.

“Double-minded” — see James 1:8.

v. 9 — Certain conditions call for mourning, not for joy. Sin is never to be treated lightly.

vv. 10-12 — This is an exceedingly practical section (see Matthew 7:1, 2).

“Who art thou that judgest another?” (v. 12) is *Who do you think you are?*

v. 13 — “Go to now” (KJV) is *come now*, a phrase for calling attention. James reminds us of the uncertainty of life.

v. 14 — Life is like a mist on a mountainside — uncertain, transient, and temporary.

v. 15 — Our lives are in the hand of God.

v. 16 — Man cannot boast — if he does, it is sin.

v. 17 — This is another definition of sin: refusing to do the right thing. Doing nothing is sin.

III. Vexation of the rich; value of the imminent coming of Christ, Chapter 5

A. Riches are a care (rich warned), vv. 1-6

v. 1 — “Go to now” (KJV) is *come now*.

“Howl” is a descriptive Greek word, *ol-ol-uz-o*. This is strong language.

v. 2 — No radical ever spoke more strongly against the rich than does this section. This is clear-cut condemnation of the rich. Money is not evil, but the love of money is.

v. 3 — It is not the making of money, but the accumulation and abuse of riches that is condemned. The condemnation is of the rich with a big bank account in the last days; a big bank balance, when the Lord comes, will be a sin. (See Ecclesiastes 10:19; Proverbs 11:4; Jeremiah 17:11.)

v. 4 — Here he condemns the way in which riches are made.

v. 5 — God condemns the riotous living of the rich in pleasure and in the satisfying of selfish lusts.

v. 6 — God is doing nothing about the injustice of the world now, but He will straighten out everything at His coming.

B. Coming of Christ is a comfort, vv. 7-12

v. 7 — The coming of Christ will correct the wrongs of the world (see Psalm 45:3-7; Isaiah 11:3-5; Matthew 6:19-24). Waiting for the fruit to ripen should be the attitude of the child of God.

v. 8 — We are to be patient in view of the coming of Christ.

v. 9 — Set your house in order; get your affairs straightened out before He comes and straightens them out Himself.

v. 10 — The prophets are an example. They suffered.

v. 11 — Job is an example of one who suffered. He doesn't seem very patient. Look at the end of his trial (Job 42:1-6).

v. 12 — Be the kind of person who needs not to be under an oath to tell the truth. A believer's word should be as good as his bond.

C. Prayer of the righteous is a power, vv. 13-20

v. 13 — The afflicted are to pray. The merry are to sing psalms.

v. 14 — The sick are to do two things:

(1) Call for the elders (officers) to pray;

(2) Anoint with oil — anointing can be either ceremonial or medicinal. Here it is medicinal; oil is to be applied as medicine for healing (see Isaiah 38:21). In effect, James says to call the elders to pray and to call the doctor to apply the medicine.

v. 15 — Man is to use every means that God has provided, but it is the prayer of faith that will save the sick. Sins must be forgiven, that means confessed (1 John 1:9).

v. 16 — Confess faults to one another, but confess sins to God.

vv. 17, 18 — Elijah was the same sort of human being that we are, and God heard and answered his prayer. He controlled the weather for three years.

vv. 19, 20 — I used to hold the view that this referred to a child of God who has gone astray. But now I believe it is an unsaved person who is converted. His sins will be covered (see Psalm 32:1; Proverbs 10:12).

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

- Adamson, James. *The Epistle of James*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976. (For advanced students.)
- Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Practical Epistle of James*. Great Neck, New York: Doniger & Raughley, 1955.
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- McGee, J. Vernon. *James*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991.
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