



## Valid Faith: Impartiality and Works James 1

### Introduction

Two key words in the Book of James are FAITH and WISDOM. They go hand-in-hand. Faith needs to be used wisely and wisdom needs to be applied in faith.

James' main concerns were:

- that the believer's life be consistent.
- that the church prosper and grow without compromise.
- that each individual believer attain God's purpose for his or her life.

Some see the book of James as an unconnected string of proverbs, like a string of pearls of wisdom, but there is much more to it than that. The activity of faith underlies the gems of teaching. Faith in daily living is the theme of the book - faith overcoming and faith triumphant, the faith of Jesus Christ. How does your faith work in your daily life?

The second burden which underlies the book is that disciplined living, rather than a casual lifestyle, should characterize the Christian. James was an orthodox Jew who led a predominantly Jewish church of orthodox Jews. They lived by the Law of Moses. But the Law had been superceded by the higher law of Christ's love and faith. James presents a Judeo-Christian ethic of principles that span the two Testaments and apply to all times and places.

James uses Old Testament examples of living by faith, Abraham, Rahab, Elijah and Job. Their works proved their faith. Is there a gap between your faith and your works? Or, are you among the self-satisfied, thinking you've gotten by rather well thus far? Will you humbly let the word of God in the Book of James speak to you.

### Outline of James 1

- I. Overcoming Trials and Temptations by Faith  
- James 1:1-17
- II. Obeying God's Word by Faith - James 1:18-27.

#### I. Overcoming Trials and Temptations by Faith - James 1:1-17

- A. Greetings - James 1:1

James begins his letter by introducing himself. "James" is Greek for the Hebrew name, Jacob.

#### 1. Apostolic

James opens with an apostolic greeting. Although he is not numbered with the twelve apostles, the special post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ to James gave him a unique status. Also, he was head of the mother church in Jerusalem.

#### 2. Personal

James identified himself only as *a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:1). He made no mention of his privileged relationship or his position as head of the Jerusalem church. James learned humility, possibly from the One who humbled Himself (Philippians 2:7-8). Are you impressed with position, either yours or another's? Do you attempt to influence others by your title or background? Or are you willing to take upon yourself the role of servant?

#### 3. Pastoral

James writes to *the twelve tribes*, probably a euphemism for the entire church at that time, before the influx of the Gentiles. He writes in a didactic or instructional style, which was more Jewish than Gentile.

He pastored the Jerusalem flock, made poor because their belief in Jesus cut them off from the Temple services and benefits. They were persecuted, and they had witnessed the beating of Peter and John as well as the martyrdom of John's brother, James the apostle. If you are a Gentile, do you remember your spiritual Jewish roots which include the Bible and the Jewish Messiah as our Saviour? How is this evident in your life?

#### B. Trials Endured by Faith - James 1:2-12

1. Joy - the key to victory - 1:2

Christians are to *count it all joy* when difficulties multiply! Paul writes, *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice* (Philippians 4:4). Both James and Paul agree that the Christian life is hardly carefree; this is so because it is Cross-centered. Our Lord knew suffering and anguish, yet God anointed Him with the oil of gladness more than His companions (Hebrews 1:9).

When your path is hard, James says *count it all joy*

because good things are possible that would not be possible otherwise. Trials are opportunities to test and prove your faith in God. You can approach trials as a track runner approaches hurdles, with a burst of strength and confidence.

When trials multiply, as they often do, a joyful attitude provides a second wind to spur one on, whereas a negative, complaining attitude saps one's strength and increases the burden. Attitudes can be defeating or uplifting. Attitude is often the difference between being a victim or a victor. A joyous attitude is a choice and when chosen, it lifts.

## 2. Patience - 1:3 -4

### a. The purpose of trials

Joy is possible, *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience*. A person enduring trials can more readily *count it all joy* knowing that the trial has a purpose. This also leads to endurance.

Christians can take their eyes off the difficulty and look toward the purpose. If trials have no purpose, joy would be irrational, inappropriate, and foolish. According to James, the purpose of trials is to learn patience: to learn to wait for God's timing and God's resolution.

### b. Valued in past generations

Earlier generations valued patience enough to name their daughters Patience. Today it seems less popular to do so. There are no courses nor degrees in patience. Patience is only learned through trials.

### c. Fruit of the Holy Spirit

Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). *Love is patient* (1 Corinthians 13:4). Patience means long-suffering, endurance. Moses endured as seeing Him Who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). God is patient and long-suffering with His children. (2 Peter 3:15).

Are you full of patience or self pity? Do you know that your present trial is for your growth and God's glory? God desires that you come through the trial better and stronger. A rebellious child, difficulty with a spouse, a sudden complication, or a crushing disappointment may require enduring patiently. Faith never gives up. Faith keeps looking to Jesus. *Tribulation worketh patience* (Romans 5:3 KJV).

### d. Perfection or completion

God wants His people to be *perfect and complete, lacking nothing*. That is how He created us to be. Endurance, produced by trials, is part of that process. Hebrews 12:6

tells us that, *whom the Lord loves, He chastens*. Trials represent God's discipline chipping away at a believer's fallen human nature to reveal the diamond of Christ's many-faceted personality. Otherwise, God could take a person to heaven at the moment of conversion. Why leave a new believer here, except that He has work to do in and through those who are His? Nothing less than perfection is His goal for His children (Matthew 5:48).

Will you endure your present trial joyfully and become more like Christ? *Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2).

## 3. Prayer - 1:5

### a. If any of you lacks wisdom

Wisdom is knowing how to handle a situation. The first need in affliction is to know how to handle it, namely wisdom. James, having begun with the key attitude, joy, and the end result, patience, now gives the means, prayer.

Prayer is a key theme of James. Without the preparation of prayer, disaster is possible. God, who allows and tailors the trial, knows the way through and will reveal it to those who humbly ask. "My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is follow," says an old hymn. If any of you lack wisdom, join the crowd. No one has all the answers. God must reveal them.

### b. God gives wisdom.

Here is a promise. God, the source of all wisdom, will give it if you ask. How marvelous! You need not stumble. When did you last ask God for wisdom? You need it daily. Jesus said we must come as little children. "Father, show me what to do," is a powerful prayer because it is simple and honest. God does not mock His children. When His children ask for bread, He does not give them a stone (Luke 11:11-13).

James 1:5 has been called (wryly) "the student's prayer" when facing an exam. Trials are like exams which test your faith. Do you believe that God is sufficient for each circumstance? Will you seek His wisdom in each situation? Prayer can turn every difficulty into an opportunity for praise. Prayer raises your sights and broadens your vision. It removes blinders and opens up possibilities. Prayer provides solutions previously unimagined. Prayer provides the wisdom you lack.

### c. Without reproach

Your lack of wisdom does not surprise God. He doesn't

blame you for needing Him. It is self, pride, and Satan who keep you from God's supply. Ask without delay for wisdom today.

d. *Ask in faith*

Asking in faith means to ask without doubts. Doubt and faith are mutually exclusive. James uses the metaphor of a wind-tossed wave in a tempest. The term he uses is found only one other time in the New Testament, in Luke 8:24, where Jesus was wakened in the boat on the storm-driven Sea of Galilee and proceeded to quiet the storm. The word for "raging" waves is the same word used by James for the "wind-driven" wave.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. James does the same, as though familiar with the incident. Those who doubt, we are like wind-driven waves, tossed to and fro. Faith must not waver, as the disciples' wavered. Faith knows that God is loving, wise and good. Faith commits the matter to Him. James says *nothing wavering* (KJV), zero doubt is allowed.

James 1:5 is God's promise to you. It is a blank check over his signature. Why not take it to the "Bank of Heaven" right now? Ask for the next step and believe with all your heart that He will reveal it. Then the next, and the next, until you make it through the trial, NOT SOMEHOW, BUT TRIUMPHANTLY.

4. Perspective - 1:9-11

a. Lack of goods

Does the world from you withhold of its silver  
and its gold?  
And you have to get along on meager fare?  
Just remember in His word how He feeds the  
little bird;  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.  
(author unknown)

Most of the people in the world are poor. Poverty is the most universal trial. The "have-nots" struggle to be "haves", while the "haves" struggle to hold on to what they have. There is no inherent benefit in being poor! The daily anxiety about food, shelter, clothing, health, education, and accomplishment is oppressive and soul-shrivelling.

James recommends the upward look and the eternal perspective: do not to rejoice in your accomplishments, but rather that *your names are written in heaven* (Luke 10:20). This is the proper relationship between the temporal and the eternal. Spiritually, anyone can be wealthy. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:3).

As difficult as poverty is, the believer can rejoice in its brevity. Life on earth may be a hand-to-mouth existence, but "it's His hand to my mouth", to quote one missionary. Many Christians have experienced God's supply of their needs in miraculous ways. You can do more to better your situation by an hour on your knees, than by days spent in protest or bitterness.

b. The rich...made Low - 1:9b

The wealthy and powerful are reminded of how temporary and illusory possessions are. Their lifestyles are as fragile as last season's flowers, as fading as grass. If today's millionaire is tomorrow's memory, why rejoice? Rejoice because God gives true riches which never fade.

5. Blessing - 1:12

a. A crown

Nothing done for Christ will lose its reward. The person who endures the trial will receive the King's "well done" with glory, possibly represented symbolically by a "crown".

Several crowns are mentioned in scripture, such as the elder's crown (1 Peter 5:4) and the martyr's crown (Revelation 2:10). Not everyone is eligible for these, but one crown is available to all, the "crown of life" promised to those who love Jesus. If you love Him, you will endure a little inconvenience, discomfort or suffering for Him. *For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison* (1 Corinthians 4:17 NASB).

b. New quality of life

The crown may represent greater ability to serve God and share His love or it may refer to the elation which accompanies having overcome, such as mountain climbers experience at the peak.

C. Temptation - James 1:13-17

1. A major kind of trial - 1:13-16

Thus far, the trials have been external, things which happen to believers. Now James names another type of trial, namely temptation. Temptations are internal, unseen trials which must be met alone.

Jesus met temptation "head on" at the beginning of His ministry. Alone for forty days, He proved His Father's loving provision and care (Matthew 4). Thus, He is our example and also, according to Hebrews 2:17, our faithful High Priest to guide us through temptation.

## 2. Blaming God - 1:13

It is important to know that the source of temptation is not God. He ordains temptations and has control over them, nevertheless God is not to be blamed.

## 3. From within - 1:14

Samson saw a Philistine woman and desired her. David saw Bathsheba and desired her. Others could see the same women and not desire them. The response is inside each person. The lust is one's own.

## 4. A fatal slide - 1:15

There is a deep root of sin within each person. Human nature is attracted to the forbidden. People are then deceived when they think that lust will not bring with it sin and some kind of death. Are you toying with some temptation? Do not be deceived. What may look beautiful can be lethal.

## 5. Warning against deception - 1:16

*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.* Lust leads to adultery, over-eating and drinking, violence, gossip, nagging, greed, selfishness, and a wasted life. You may resist many of the temptations around you, but when you yield to even one and rationalize your indulgence, you fail to prove by faith that God has something better for you.

## D. God's provision and gifts - James 1:17

## 1. Provider - 1:17a

Every gift God gives is good and perfect. He has given natural desires as gifts meant to glorify Him in their use. For example, Hebrews 13:4 states that marriage is honorable among all, and the marriage bed undefiled. But promiscuity and fornication He will judge (see also Proverbs 5:3-6). Every desire has a godly means of fulfillment. Will you trust God to satisfy your desires?

## 2. Creator - 1:17b

God is the *Father of lights*. Light was His first creative act (Genesis 1:3-4). He dwells in light and emits pure light, no shadow. He has not swerved from His original purpose for His creation. Sin entered and all of creation was thrown off course until Christ's sacrifice brought reconciliation between God and man. His good gifts can be used as originally intended, or greed and rebellion can lead to desiring more than He ordains. This reaps tragic consequences.

**II. Obeying God's Word by Faith - James 1:18-25**

## A. Overcoming Temptation - James 1:18-22

The word of God holds the key to victory over temptation. As Jesus used it against Satan (Matthew 4:4-10), so believers may also bring *every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5). God's word is *living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).

## 1. Conceived by the word - 1:18

Just as the universe was brought forth by God's word (Genesis 1:6-7,9,11,14-15,24,29-30, *God said....and it was so*), believers are born spiritually by His word. In Ephesians 1:13, the apostle Paul lays out the succession of events leading to salvation, *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*

## 2. The word of truth - 1:18

God's word is totally true. It contains no error or false teaching. Jesus based His life upon it and declares it necessary for life (Matthew 4:4). The Bible will never deceive. It is the source of all truth. Do you set aside time to read and study your Bible? Do you believe and obey it?

## 3. A replacement for bad habits -1:19-22

*Let every man be swift to hear.* Is anything interfering with your eagerness for God's word? The secular world has no place for the word of God. But a diet of study, meditation, and memorization of God's word helps to overcome loose talk and angry responses, giving encouragement to be *slow to speak and slow to wrath*. How are you faring in controlling your speech and temper?

## B. A Mirror - James 1:23-25

## 1. A true reflection - 1:23-24

Most people do not know their true appearance. All that is seen is a likeness in a mirror or photograph. Does a mirror have power to change a person? Of course not! It can only reflect an image and most people only see what they want to see anyway. Robert Burns wrote:

O would a gift the Giftee 'gee us,  
To see ourselves as others see us.

If we do not know how we appear to others, how can we know how we look to God?

## 2. Change needed - 1:25

The Bible describes people just as they are. The Bible reveals as much about our hearts as the mirror does about our faces. To ignore its truth is to deceive oneself.

### C. Working out religion - James 1:26-27

James writes that the doer of the word will make three changes. Practice control of the tongue, care for the needy and live a pure life. True faith works.

#### 1. Verbal expression - 1:26

Speech tells others what you think and who you are. The Spirit "bridled" tongue will not say things the uncontrolled tongue will say.

#### 2. Visitation of the needy - 1:27

Kindness and concern for those less fortunate is a reflection of God's love. To take time and energy to visit someone, particularly those without the support of family, is an act of tender, Christ-like compassion. Throughout His ministry, Jesus gave special attention to those with fragmented families, while not neglecting the average or privileged people, who also have needs.

#### 3. Purity of life - 1:27b

Jude, brother of James, used almost the same expression as *unspotted from the world* when he wrote, *hating even the garment defiled by the flesh* (Jude 23 KJV). The world and the flesh soil those who would be "unspotted". Isaiah says *all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6). It is no easy task to keep oneself *unspotted from the world*. The media, philosophy, education, and value systems are fallen, flesh-oriented, self-glorifying, and corrupt if they are not Christ-centered and Christ-exalting. These things threaten pollution daily. Only by being a doer of the word can one practice pure religion and be undefiled.

Do you hate being polluted and spotted by the world's influence and the flesh's insistence on being indulged? Do you need to be sophisticated and "up on the latest"? Do you indulge every whim and wonder why you have no power and no joy?

### Applications

1. Will you consult the mirror of God's word daily and make the changes necessary to conform to the image of Christ?
2. How bridled is your tongue and how much under the control of the Holy Spirit?
3. How often do you go out of your way to visit someone who is ill or lonely?
4. How patiently are you enduring your trial? Are you experiencing Jesus' victory in it?



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## QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### **DAY ONE: Read the notes and the references.**

1. What change(s) in your life did this lesson make?
  
2. a. Is some trial in your life easier to endure because you accept it joyfully? Explain.
  
- b. Did you overcome some temptation this week with God's help? Will you share this with your group?
  
3. Give from memory the three points of "true religion" according to James.

### **DAYS TWO AND THREE: Read James 2:1-9, I Samuel 16:7, I Corinthians 1:26-31.**

4. In James 2:1-4, what is incompatible with true faith in Christ? (See also 1 Samuel 16:7 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.)
  
5. a. What does James say might influence one's response to others?
  
- b. How does God judge people according to 1 Samuel 16:7?
  
- c. How does a person's opinion of people affect his or her behavior toward them (James 2:1-4)?
  
6. What are some advantages to being "poor" according to:  
Matthew 5:3  
  
1 Corinthians 1:27  
  
1 Corinthians 1:28  
  
Galatians 2:6  
  
James 1:9  
  
James 2:5
  
7. a. What is the *royal law*? (Give Verse) See also Matthew 19:16-22.
  
- b. How did Jesus recommend this *royal law* in Matthew 19:16-19?

c. Suggest some ways of obeying this *royal law*.

8. If you practice favoritism, what are you doing according to James 2:9?

**DAY FOUR: Read James 2:10-13 and Exodus 20.**

9. Re-phrase the "all or none" principle of 2:10 in your own words. See Matt. 5:48 for God's standard.

10. Who said "Do not commit adultery" and "Do not commit murder " (2:11)? Give verses from Exodus 20.

11. Explain how all sin is really committed against God (Psalm 51:4 and 2 Samuel 11:26-27) even though others may be involved and may be hurt also?

12. Why should you be merciful and forgiving, not harsh and judgmental toward others who sin?

**DAY FIVE: Read James 2:14-20.**

13. a. How does James 2:14 seem to contradict Ephesians 2:8-9?

b. Does Paul say people are saved by their works or by their faith in Ephesians?

c. Does James 2:14 say people are saved by their works or by faith?

14. In James 2:18, what purpose is served by works?

15. Taking James 2:14-17 verse by verse, rephrase in your own words James' argument against a "dead faith" or lifeless faith.

16. How did these people reveal their faith by their works?

a. The centurion (Matthew 8:5-13)

b. Martha (John 11:39-41)

17. a. What belief do demons have that causes them to tremble (vs. 19)?

b. Do you believe at least that much? How does your belief affect you?



**DAY SIX: Read James 2:20-26; Genesis 22; Romans 4; Hebrews 11:17-19.**

18. Do you think Genesis 22 illustrates Abraham's faith, his works or both?
19. a. Abraham's faith was supremely tested by God. In Hebrews 11:17-19, what was the test of Abraham's faith?
- b. What was the act that proved Abraham's faith was genuine and that he really trusted God?
- c. What did Abraham believe that enabled him to work out his faith?
20. What did Rahab do that proved her faith (Hebrews 11:31 with James 2:25)?
21. What is there about Abraham and/or Rahab that challenges your own faith?
22. a. Fill in the blanks from James 2:26: *As the \_\_\_\_\_ without the \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ so \_\_\_\_\_ without \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.*
- b. Formulate a ratio: \_\_\_\_\_ is to \_\_\_\_\_, as \_\_\_\_\_ are to \_\_\_\_\_.
23. What does James' conclusion in 2:26 mean to you?
24. a. ♥(Heart Question) Try to imagine stepping out of your "self" and looking at your life as an impartial observer. Name the works that you think reveal your faith to others.
- b. ♥(Heart Question) Has God ever put your faith to the ultimate test by asking "the unthinkable" of you as He did of Abraham? If so, please share with your group.
25. What risk of faith, similar to Rahab's, might God be asking of you?