

The Teaching of James

The Salutation (1:1)

1. Although he was the brother of Jesus, like Jude, he relates to Him as a “bond-servant” rather than using his authority as a brother.
2. The reference to the “twelve tribes” and being “dispersed abroad” makes us think that he was probably writing to Jewish Christians. James calls their place of meeting a synagogue (2:2), though many translations use the term assembly for clarification purposes.

Trials, endurance and joy (1:2-4)

1. James says that believers should find joy in trials because they produce endurance in us.
2. Endurance is not the final goal however; it is perfection, completeness in Christ. Believers will not attain this goal completely this side of eternity, but we should settle for nothing less.

Ask for wisdom in Faith (1:5-8)

1. God gives wisdom generously, all we must do is ask in faith. Believers have no reason for hesitation.
2. A doubting mind is one that never has a solid foundation, it is always shifting back and forth.

Evaluation based on Spiritual Standards (1:9-12)

1. James exhorts rich and poor believers to evaluate themselves based on their relationship to Christ rather than worldly material standards. The poor man boasts because he is exalted in heaven and the rich because he has been broken and shown his sinfulness.

God the giver (1:12-18)

1. Believers cannot blame God for temptation. Temptation is something that attacks our sinful lusts.
2. Instead of temptations, God gives good gifts. In particular, he gives His Word which brings salvation.

Hearing and Doing the Word (1:19-27)

1. Believers should not merely hear the word, instead, their knowledge of the word should be manifested in the way that they live, in genuine religion.

Fulfillment of the Word (2:1-14)

1. James provides the example before he gives the principle. Paul’s style is usually the opposite. Giving preferential treatment to someone because of their social status or wealth is sinful and runs directly against Jesus teaching that you should love your neighbor as yourself.
2. James also points out that committing one sin makes you as guilty as if you had broken every commandment.
3. While it is possible that there was murder going on in the church, it is more likely that James is talking about Jesus teaching on murder and adultery; being equivalent to anger and lust respectively (Matt 5:21-28)

Faith and Works (2:14-26)

1. This passage is not independent of the book as a whole. We must, like all other passages of Scripture understand it in the context of the book of James as a whole as well as the complete canon of Scripture (both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures).
2. Some things we must keep in mind:
 - a. Paul generally only speaks of one kind of faith, true faith that produces obedience. James, is not contradictory to Paul, but uses different terminology (living faith, dead faith) to say the same thing.
 - i. Today we might define dead faith as a faith of profession only.
Living faith is the kind of faith that produces good works, works of faith.
 - b. Both Paul and James believe that righteousness with God comes through faith (Rom 4:3, James 2:23)
 - c. Both Paul and James see faith as something that originates with the sovereign will of God (Eph 1, James 1:18 respectively) not human works.
 - d. Abraham and Rahab did not live under the Law. It seems that the Old Testament (and New!) explicitly use them as models of faith apart from the Law. Therefore, their salvation could not have come through works of the Law.
 - e. Abraham was reckoned righteousness (Gen 15:6) *before* he offered Isaac on the altar (Gen 22:9-12).
 - f. Abraham's action of being willing to slay Isaac on the altar was not just one of obedience to God's command to do so. In being willing to sacrifice Isaac, he was expressing his faith that God would still somehow fulfill His promise to bring the seed through Isaac. Likewise, Rahab's works were works that were based in her faith in the God of the Israelites.
3. James' point is that it is not just any faith that saves. Saving faith is the kind that will produce works of faith.
4. Such an interpretation of this passage is not one that was just cooked up by Calvin and Luther during the reformation. It is the ancient, historic interpretation of the passage. Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Bede, and others saw this passage as consistent with salvation by faith alone.

The Tongue (3:1-12)

1. James starts this section on the tongue with a warning to those who teach because the tongue is the very instrument of teaching. Those who teach will incur a stricter judgment.
2. James emphasizes the power of the tiny tongue through numerous examples. Despite its small size, it cannot be tamed.
3. James points out the contradiction in using our tongue to bless God and then to curse those who have been made in His image.
4. James ends this discussion by pointing out that the tongue merely pours out what is already in our hearts just as a spring pours out what is in it and a fig tree produces fruit consistent with itself.

True Wisdom brings Peace (3:13-4:3)

1. In 3:13-18 James contrasts false wisdom (3:14-16) with true wisdom (3:13, 17-18).

2. Like true faith, true wisdom is the kind which produces good fruit.
3. James continues his flow of thought at 4:1, though he shifts the focus from wisdom that produces peace to desires that produce conflict.
4. As with the churches in James' time, the source of conflict among Christians is selfish desires that go unmet. Unfortunately, we often think that the way to keep peace is to have the desires met. This however is not a biblical perspective. These desires are sinful and must be put to death. This will help us focus on the right desires, desires which God is happy to meet.

Relationship with God is opposed to sin (4:4-10)

1. In this section, James commands (which some say are the strongest in the NT) are centered around a relationship with God.
2. He makes the point that a life of sin is one that is not near to God. Drawing near to God consists of turning from sin.

Slander sets you over the law (4:11-12)

1. James' point is that in slandering another believer we are standing in judgment over that believer. Furthermore, in slander, we fail to keep the law. This is a denial of the authority of the law in our lives.
2. What's more, we stand in place of God himself when we stand in judgment of another believer.
3. James is not prohibiting church discipline or the use of discernment. He is speaking to some of the specific problems associated with their conflicts (4:1-3).

A life which ignores God vs. a life which embraces Him (4:13-5:11)

1. There are two sections here. In 4:13-5:6 James is speaking to those who live as though God did not exist. In 5:7-11 James exhorts faithful Christians to reaffirm a Biblical view of life.
2. The first group lives arrogantly, ignoring God's sovereign control (4:13-17) and using their wealth for their own luxury rather than for righteousness (5:1-6).
3. The second group lives in eager expectation of the coming of the Lord, enduring whatever trials may come.

Final Exhortations (5:12-20)

1. James declares that the believer's truthfulness should be so dependable that just yes or no should suffice (5:12). When we feel the need to take an oath, that might say something about our trustworthiness.
2. In 5:13-18 James ties together prayer and healing. While sickness is not always the result of some particular sin in our lives, it certainly could be. God certainly does sometimes chasten believers through sickness. In such cases, repentance will bring healing. The believer's prayers offered in faith can accomplish a great deal.
3. 5:19-20 is a concluding call to action. His letter has been full of rebukes and exhortations, therefore it makes sense that he should end with a call to the church to intervene on behalf of a believer struggling with these commands.

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The Teaching of 1 Peter

The Salutation (1:1-2)

1. Though he uses language that sounds like it could refer to Jewish Christians (exiles, dispersion), we can say that the epistle is to those who were primarily Gentile Christians because the sins that they were once involved in seems to be very Gentile forms of immorality (1:14, 4:3). Also he says that they were once "not a people" (2:10) which would seem horrifically out of place to refer to Hebrews. At the same time, Peter often uses the imagery of the nation of Israel to refer to these believers.
2. At the very beginning of the letter, Peter makes very clear that it is God who elects believers for salvation.
 - a. He tells why they are elected (the foreknowledge of God the Father)
 - b. How they were elected (the sanctifying work of the Spirit)
 - i. In this epistle Peter sometimes uses the term sanctification slightly differently than we may traditionally understand it.
 - c. And for what reason they were elected (to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood)

Salvation is a Blessing! (1:3-12)

1. Peter's readers were undergoing persecution. They may have been tempted to conform to the world around them to fit in or even to renounce the faith. In this section, Peter writes to remind them that salvation is indeed a blessing. He gives 3 reasons:
 - a. It is Certain (1:3-5) – Since God is the author of salvation, and Jesus has purchased it, genuine salvation cannot be lost. God protects it.
 - b. It is Joyful (1:6-9) – Even the trials have a purifying effect on our faith
 - c. It is Privileged (1:10-12) – believers are partakers of the very thing that the prophets were prophesying about (the coming Messiah and the Gospel). See Isaiah 53 or Psalm 2 for example.

The Practice of the Saved Believer (1:13-25)

1. Here Peter gives 4 principles for Christian living:
 - a. Fix your hope (1:13) – put your hope in the return of Christ
 - b. Be Holy (1:14-16) – Instead of being like you used to be, be holy like God
 - c. Live in Fear (1:17-21) – Peter is saying, “don't think that being a child of God excuses your sin.” God does not just ignore your sin. Yes, it has been paid for, but recognize that as a father, he may choose to chasten you if you persist in unrepentant sin because he loves you and desires you to walk with him. This is not a fear of utter terror, but it is a reverent fear like a young child might have for his father whom he loves.
 - d. Love the Church (1:22-25) - This is not just a warm feeling you have toward the people you see on Sunday morning, but it is a matter of demonstrating a love for each other that often involves deep, wounding, sacrifice.

2. The motivation for all of this is not guilt or condemnation, but because of the greatness of salvation, as we saw in 1:3-12. If we miss that vital point, the whole thing can quickly slip into legalism or moralism rather than the genuine Christian life

Long for the Pure Milk (2:1-3)

1. This is essentially an issue of putting off the things in 2:1 and putting on the things in 2:2.
2. Concerning 2:3 Tom Schreiner accurately says, “Longing to grow spiritually comes from a taste of the beauty of the Lord, an experience of his kindness and goodness. Those who pursue God ardently have tasted his sweetness. Christian growth for Peter is not a mere call to duty or an alien moralism. The desire to grow springs from an experience with the Lord's kindness, an experience that leaves believers desiring more.”

Living stones are like The Living Stone (1:4-10)

1. Peter calls the believers living stones to emphasize their close relationship to The Living Stone, Jesus Christ.
2. Here Peter uses imagery associated with the Temple for these believers. They may have been outsiders and aliens to the world, but they were intimate insiders to God and were called to be holy.
3. Peter also points out that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (see Dan 2:34-35, 44-45; Ps 118:22; and Is 8:11-15). He is the stone of salvation, and he is also the stone of stumbling against which many of those in Israel unfortunately stumbled, ignoring these prophecies.
4. Again Peter uses the imagery associated with the nation of Israel for these believers to demonstrate their close relationship with God. At the same time I don't think that we can go so far as to say that the Church is the replacement for Israel (Romans 11:11). Peter's usage of imagery is a far cry from saying that the Church is the new Israel and the promises of God to the nation of Israel have been spiritualized and transferred to the Church and ethnic Israel has been rejected as a whole. I don't believe he is saying that.

Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile world (2:11-4:11)

1. Believers are called to live godly lives amidst a watching world (2:11-12). This is evangelistic holiness and runs directly contrary to many of the current movements in evangelicalism! We do not need to be more like the world to win the world. We need to be more like Christ.
2. Testifying to the Gospel in the Social Order (2:13-3:12)
 - a. Submit to Human authority (2:13-17) – Believers are to obey the governing authorities as God is the supreme authority. Our freedom in Christ should not be a pretext for evil.
 - b. Slaves submit to Masters (2:18-25) – same could be applied to the employer-employee relationship of our time.
 - c. Submission of Wives to Husbands (3:1-6)
 - d. Honoring of Wives by Husbands (3:7)
 - e. Conclusion: Live a Godly life (3:8-12)
3. Respond in a Godly way to Suffering (3:13-4:11)

- a. The Blessing of Suffering for Christ (3:13-17) – Believers are blessed if they suffer for the sake of righteousness. Great is their reward in heaven (Matt 5:1-12). No one can ultimately harm them when they are zealous for doing good (see 1:3-12). When believers encounter a hostile world, the temptation to respond with harsh words is greater. When we defend the truth we must do it with gentleness and reverence.
- b. Christ is our model for suffering (3:18-22) – Suffering is not necessarily a result of God being angry with us. Suffering is not the last word, believers will be exalted like Jesus is. Three points:
 - i. Christ suffered for the unrighteous to bring believers to God (3:18)
 - ii. He was raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit and proclaimed victory over demonic spirits (3:18-19)
 - iii. He is now exalted on high and demonic powers have been subjected to him (3:22)
- c. Preparing to Suffer as Jesus did (4:1-6)
 - i. A believer's resolution to suffer for Christ indicates that they have ceased to let sin control them (4:1)
 - ii. Don't live for worldly lusts, live for God (4:2-4)
 - iii. The scoffing of the unbelieving world is not the last word. All will give an account to God (4:5-6)
- d. Living in light of the End (4:7-11)
 - i. Since the end is near believers should live like it. They should be sober in prayer, love one another, be hospitable, and serve one another with their gifts. All this to bring glory to God.

Persevere in Suffering! (4:12-5:11)

- 1. Suffer joyfully in accordance with God's Will (4:12-19)
- 2. Exhortation to Elders and the Church (5:1-11)
 - a. Elders: Shepherd the flock (5:1-4)
 - i. Not because you have to, because you want to
 - ii. Not for yourself but with eagerness
 - iii. Not as an authoritarian, but as an example – your authority does not come so much from your office as much as from your earned respect.
 - b. Younger men: Don't be arrogant rebels, respect your elders (5:5)
 - c. Church: Resist the Devil (5:6-11)

Conclusion (5:12-14)

- 1. Peter wrote the letter to exhort the believers and testify to God's grace (5:12). He concludes with greetings from various people that would have been important to his readers and a benediction of God's peace on the believers.

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