



Questions Answered by this Epistle

- What is biblical faith?
- Can the genuineness of one's faith be tested?
- Why do we have trials? How should we respond?
- What is the relationship between faith and works?
- What activities grow us in our faith?
- How does godly wisdom relate to true faith?

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Authorship

- Possibly first written book of NT; 45 AD
- James
 - Oldest of Jesus' brothers (Mark 6:3)
 - Unbeliever prior to the resurrection (John 7:3-10)
 - Jesus appeared to after the resurrection, resulting in conversion (1 Cor 15:7)
 - Leader of Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17)
 - Martyred in 62AD (Josephus)
 - Humble; referenced as "servant" of Jesus, not as "brother" (1:1)
- Written in Jerusalem

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Purpose of Epistle

- Audience: Dispersed Jewish converts due to persecution under Herod Agrippa (Acts 12; 44 AD)
- ‘Proverbs of the New Testament’; Wisdom Literature
- Practical aspects of Christian faith and living
- Explain works in their right relationship to faith for Jewish believers
- Explanation of the *Sermon on the Mount* in practical terms

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Sermon on the Mount

JAMES	MATTHEW	SUBJECT	JAMES	MATTHEW	SUBJECT
1:2	5:10-12	Joy in trials	3:18	5:9	Peace makers
1:4	5:48	God’s work in us	4:2,3	7:7,8	Asking God
1:5	7:7	Asking for good gifts	4:4	6:24	Friendship with world
1:17	7:11	God gives good gifts	4:8	5:8	Pure in heart
1:19,20	5:22	Anger	4:9	5:4	Those who mourn
1:22,23	7:24-27	Hearers vs. doers	4:11,12	7:1-5	Wrongly judging others
1:26,27	7:21-23	Worthless religion			
2:5	5:3	Heirs of the Kingdom	4:13,14	6:34	Focus on today
2:10	5:19	Keeping moral law	5:1	Luke 6:24,25	Woe to rich
2:11	5:21,22	Murder	5:2	6:19,20	Earthly riches
2:13	5:7, 6:14-15	Mercy & condemnation	5:6	Luke 6:37	Condemning wrongly
2:14-26	7:21-23	Dead faith	5:9	5:22, 7:1	Not judging
3:12	7:16	After its own kind	5:10	5:12	Wrongful suffering
			5:12	5:33-37	Hasty oaths

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James and Other Scripture

Not an isolated epistle with isolated commands and isolated ideas about the relationship between faith and works:

- 1 John
- Romans
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ephesians

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Jesus in James

An epistle of straw?

- All obedience commanded of us has first and foremost been lived out by Jesus Christ
- Entire epistle describes the obedience of Jesus Christ
- It is a book about how He lived
 - Look to the One who has perfectly endured the test (1:12)
 - Exhibits perfect humility (1:9)
 - Unstained from the world in perfect righteousness (1:27)
 - The perfect gift to come down from the father of lights (1:17)
 - Perfectly fulfilled God's demand & royal law (2:8)
 - Can alone save our soul from death and cover a multitude of sins (5:20)

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Contradiction With Paul?

Are we justified by faith alone?

- Yes, before a Holy God, as Paul declares (Rom 3:28)

James is addressing our justification before men—and Paul agrees! Faith must be *shown to be known*:

- Paul taught good works must accompany saving faith (Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 2:11-12).
- The error Paul corrected was justification before God by works of the law (legalism)

James is teaching justification by faith, but faith from above demonstrates its living nature in what it enables the spiritual man to do. (Abraham (2:21-24) and Rahab (2:25)).

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Nature of Saving Faith

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” (2:26)

- There is more to salvation than outward confession:
 - The sinner is saved by faith (Eph 2:8-9)
 - The believer must walk by faith (II Cor 5:7)
 - Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)
 - What ever we do apart from faith is sin (Rom 14:23)
- True Faith is productive AND visible. The internal change can be recognized externally.
- Spiritual character and good works will be observed by others as a result of obedience to God's Word.

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Nature of Saving Faith

“...prove yourselves to be doers of the Word, not just hearers who delude themselves...” (1:22)

- We are called to live what we claim to believe.
- The genuineness of a person’s profession in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is evidenced more by what a person does than by what he claims.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new!” (2 Cor 5:17)

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Faith That Does Not Save

James indicates clearly that there is a kind of professing faith that is dead and does not save.

- True justification before a Holy God produces spiritual fruit:
“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-24)
- Is believing enough?
“You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” (2:19)
- The faith of the demons stirs their feelings but does not change their conduct. James challenges his reader to recognize that a faith which does not produce works is *“useless, barren like a field that produces no crop” (2:20).*

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The Tests

James is concerned with the effectiveness and maturity of our faith. The book of James, like 1 John, can be viewed as a set of ‘tests’:

“Test yourself to see if you are in the faith - examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you...unless indeed you fail the test.” (2 Cor 13:5)

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Test of Obedience to God's Word

He chose to give us birth through the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” (1:18)

- God chose His Word as the means of spiritual regeneration – our response to it is appropriately presented as the first test of a living faith.
- A believer accepts initial regeneration through the Word and ongoing submission to the Word for spiritual maturity.
 - Obedience requires a receptive heart (1:21)
 - Obedience requires practical implementation of the Truths of God's Word (1:22)
 - Contrast between a forgetful hearer (1:23-24) and an effectual doer (1:25)

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Test of Perseverance in Suffering

“Count it all joy...knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.” (1:2,3)

All true believers will experience trials and testing. Why?

- *Living faith* produces Christ-like character
 - Trials force dependence on the power of Jesus Christ in prayer.
 - Trials enable us to draw on God's faithfulness and provision.
 - Trials require patience as we wait on God
 - Completed trials build faith in God, enabling perseverance through the next trial

The end result for the believer is increased spiritual maturity, a powerful and effect witness and the accumulation of heavenly rewards in his eternal account.

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Test of Partiality

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and convicted by the law as transgressors.” (2:9)

- Favoritism is inconsistent with biblical faith
 - Gives preference to one person over others *with equal claims*.
- James was addressing partiality to the rich and disregarding the poor
 - Applies to social class, wealth, clothing, actions, looks, education, etc. - any sort of partiality based on external factors
- Violates the second great commandment of God's law, to love your neighbor as yourself
 - Faith demands a life in accordance with the law of liberty
 - Believers will be judged by the law of liberty (2:12).

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Test of the Tongue

“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.” (3:5)

- Genuineness of a person’s faith will inevitably be demonstrated by his speech. The words that flow from the tongue are a reflection of one’s heart where sin originates.
- Self-control (fruit of the Spirit) is most readily tested by one’s use of his tongue. A tongue tamed by God:
 - praises the LORD Jesus rather than self
 - builds up others rather than tearing them down

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Eph 4:29)

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Test of Worldliness

“You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (4:4)

- Quarrels and factions (4:1)
- Presumptuous planning independent of God (4:13)
- Wrong response to injustice (5:1-11)
- Self-serving oaths (5:12)
- Distinguish between worldly culture and heavenly wisdom. Follow the latter producing separation from the world and submission to God (3:17)

“...the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Cor. 1:25)

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Test of Humility

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.” (4:10)

- Saints are aware of their sinfulness before a Holy God:
 - “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.” (1:9)
- Pride and humility are the two opposing forces of human nature.
 - The proud man lacks the wisdom of God.
 - When our pride is submitted to Christ, then true humility occurs.
 - Those not in Christ remain in their natural state with a heart ruled by human pride.

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Test of Prayerfulness

*“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”
(5:16)*

Where do we turn?

- The natural response of the redeemed and joyful heart in Jesus Christ is to pray to the One who was able to save him.
- The response of the natural man is to look to himself or other men.

There is power in prayer. It is the work of the saint to pray:

- for grace in their own walk
- to seek God for help in the lives of others

Prayer constitutes the very heart of a vital Christian faith.

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Nature of Biblical Prayer

“But let him ask in prayer, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways!” (1:6-8)

- The Bible assures us this is what is pleasing to God in the life of the saint:
“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” Proverbs 15:8
- The living, active Christian life of faith, described by James, comes to us through *dependent, submissive, obedient, humble prayer* to the only One who can live and endure and produce the fruit of His Spirit in us...our Father and God in Heaven.

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Wisdom of James

“For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10)

- James' theology is the wisdom of Jesus, as our Lord, the Savior taught it and lived it.
- It is a comprehensive life theology, requiring faithful obedience.
- Designed to show the existence of the living God as the source of vitality in every Christian.
- A living faith coinciding with the perfect law of liberty will never fail in producing divine good works.

How well do your actions mirror the faith that you proclaim?

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