



Introduction

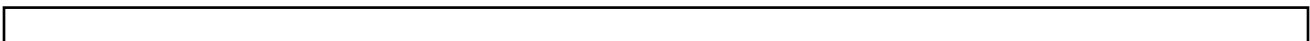
To learn the principles of Christian ethics, there are three New Testament sources: the Sermon on the Mount, the closing sections of Paul's Epistles, and the Book of James. James is a series of exhortations to the true Christian holiness of life and to perfect love towards God and man. The purpose of James is practical. There is little doctrine in James. The book abounds in imperatives, there are 60 in 108 verses. There is the believing side of James, but his chief interest is the behaving side. Faith and experience are of little value unless they lead to a consistent life. The world around us is little concerned with what we believe, but rather, with the way we live.

James Who?

Five men by the name of James appear in the New Testament. Two of them are only named James the brother of Jude, (not Iscariot - Luke 6:16); and James the Less - (Mark 15:40). The other three are better known. They are: James the son of Alphaeus, one of the 12 apostles, James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, also one of the Twelve, and James known as "the brother of Jesus".

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1)

Tradition has assigned the letter to one James, the brother of our Lord. Perhaps one reason James did not identify himself is modesty. Another possible reason why James



did not identify himself is he was so well known it was unnecessary. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, would be all the identification necessary.

James is concerned with some main subjects

Five topics prominently treated:

1. Temptation (1:2-8, 12-18)
2. The Rich and the Poor (1:9-11; 2:1-13; 4:13-16; 5:1-6)
3. Faith and Works (1:19-25, 27; 2:14-26; 3:13-18; 4:1-10, 17)
4. The Use and Abuse of the Tongue (1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11-17 5:12)
5. Patience and Prayer (5:7-11, 13-20)

James on Temptation

James offers a practical explanation of the nature and effects of temptation. The treatment of Christian conduct must give attention to the challenges temptation brings to personal integrity. Temptation is inevitable in this life. The most dangerous of temptations is to be conscious of none. Temptation has value, for untested faith is unsure faith, as well as the testing of commitment and the purging of purpose. Temptation builds faith in those who resist. But temptation by itself is not sin. Only after temptation conceives, does it bring forth sin.

The Rich and the Poor

Christianity was not without wealthy disciples from the first, but James recognizes the other side of the coin. The majority of Christ's followers then, as now, were numbered among the poor. 1 Corinthians 2:26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. The problems of wealth are practical, and they are two-pronged. The wealthy tend to trust in riches and tend to use their power to take advantage of those who are poor. James gives particular point to God's concern for the disadvantaged and that affluence is no particular evidence of divine favor.

Faith and Works

James's teachings about faith and works have brought misunderstanding and criticism. Martin Luther described the Epistle of James as made of "pure straw". There is no contradiction between James's emphasis on works and Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. James was a staunch supporter of Paul and Barnabas at the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15). What James attacks is not Paul's doctrine at all. James simply demands that faith shall not be distorted into a substitute for work. James insists that faith shall have results and must be applied to the whole range of life's experiences and relationships. Faith to some describes a mental assent to truth without a vital apprehension of its meaning. James underlines that a person's faith is shown, not by what he says, but by what he does. Is James at odds with Paul on this issue of faith and works? No: "for by faith and works" mean different things. By 'works' Paul means 'works of law'; James, the deeds of practical religion. There is no contradiction between them. James would have agreed with Paul that "faith worketh by love" and Paul would have agreed with James that 'faith without works is dead'; both would have agreed that the first thing to do with faith is to live by it.

The Use and Abuse of the Tongue

Christian ethics is incomplete without consideration of the power and problems of communication. Our words are fraught with great possibilities and peril. Concerning the use and abuse of the tongue, James reminds us most of the Book of Proverbs, from which indeed he appears to quote

James 3:2- Proverbs 21:23; James 3:6-Proverbs 16:27.

Patience and Prayer

The practical aspects of Christian living leads to a twin emphasis on endurance and on prayer. No Christian virtue has value unless its practice is maintained. James is an enemy of the on again, off again sort of religious living with which many seem content. God's delays are not denials. The "patience of Job" and the example of "the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord" (James 5:10-11) should be inspiration.

Topical Outline of James

Preface, 1:1

I. Chapter One

- A. Some Basic Aspects of True Religion, 1:2-27
- B. Faith and Wisdom, 1:2-8
- C. Poor Man, Rich Man, 1:9-11
- D. Temptation as Testing, 1:12-15
- E. Our Response to God's Faithfulness, 1:16-21
- F. Hearing Is Not Enough, 1:22-25
- G. True Religion, 1:26-27

II. Chapter Two

- A. Keeping Life Consistent with Faith, 2:1-26
- B. The Sin of Snobbery, 2:1-13
- C. The Proof of True Faith, 2:14-26

III. Chapter Three

- A. The Tongue and True Wisdom, 3:1-18
- B. Controlling the Tongue, 3:1-12
- C. Wisdom: False and True, 3:13-18

IV. Chapter Four

- A. Dangers to Christian Living, 4:1-17
- B. Sources of Defeat in the Christian Life, 4:1-10
- C. The Sin of Judging, 4:11-12
- D. The Uncertain Future, 4:13-17

V. Chapter Five

- A. Patience and Prayer, 5:1-20
- B. Another Warning to the Rich, 5:1-6
- C. Patient Endurance, 5:7-12
Prayer and Healing, 5:13-18
- D. Reclaiming Those Who Stray, 5:19-20

