

Studies In The Book Of James Faith In Action!

Introduction

Background:

In my research for this introduction there were a few writers that stood out in their wisdom and understanding of the book of James. One such person was the late Pastor Ray C. Stedman in his book "Adventuring Through The Bible" along with Warren W. Wiersbe in his book "Wiersbe's Expository Outlines On The New Testament". Another outstanding resource was "Talk Thru The Bible" by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa in which he says, *"Faith without works cannot be called faith. Faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must be there, but it must be more. It must inspire action."*

This year's theme is ***Faith In Action!*** Pastor Ray Stedman said, *"Faith means more than simply agreeing with a set of doctrines. Genuine faith involves commitment that is expressed through actions. If we do not demonstrate behavior that is consistent with what we say we believe, then what good is our supposed faith? Faith that is not demonstrated by action is dead indeed! Works cannot save us, but works demonstrate that we do have a saving faith."*

The book of James is the practical application of all the doctrines that Paul sets forth on faith. Dr. Lehman Strauss said, *Paul deals with the inner faith of man's heart as God sees it, while James concerns his discourse with the outward fruits of faith as man sees them. God knows whether or not I am a true believer on the basis of my faith apart from works, but men can only know whether or not I am a true believer as they observe my life outwardly. Jesus said, we can distinguish between the true and the false only by man's fruits (Matt. 7: 16 – 21)."*

The book of James is where our faith is expressed in tangible ways through our actions. This letter is very important in understanding what our faith is all about and how we are to live out our faith. This little book of James is one of the most powerful, inspired, life-changing books of the Bible! It is the road map for the walk of faith.

Author & Date of Writing:

In many ways the book of James is like the book Proverbs of the New Testament. It has also been compared to the Sermon on the Mount with its beatitudes. The book of James is unique because of who it was written by, James the half brother of Jesus. It's amazing to think about James growing up in the same home as Jesus did.

Having the same parents Joseph and Mary along with his brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55). It's interesting James grew up with the Lord in Nazareth and saw Him through those silent years of which we have no record. James and his brothers saw the healings and the miracles Jesus did, yet they did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah (John 7:5). It was not until after the resurrection of Jesus and the Lord appeared to James that he believed (1Cor. 15:7).

He and his brothers were among those waiting for the promise coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). James led the early church according to Acts 15: 13 – 21 as a "Messianic Jew", a term referring to someone who has been reared in the traditions of Judaism and who acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah. The date would have been around A.D. 49. According to Josephus the Jewish historian, James was martyred for his faith in A.D. 62 (Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, fixed the date of James's death at A.D. 66).

Most scholars, with that information, places a date ranging from A.D. 45 to the end of his life the book of James was written. Some believe the book of James could possibly be the earliest writing of the New Testament placing the date as A.D. 46 – 49.

Purpose For Writing:

James was writing "*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*" (James 1:1). The purpose of his letter was not doctrinal or apologetic but practical. He sought to challenge these Jewish believers to examine the way they were living their daily lives. What action were they taking in living out their faith? – *Faith In Action!* James stresses throughout his letter that real genuine faith will produce changes in a person's conduct and character. These Jewish believers were overcome with problems that tested their faith, and James was concerned that they were giving in to impatience, bitterness, materialism, disunity, and spiritual apathy. The apostle James as one of the leaders of the church and being a Jewish Christian felt the responsibility to encourage and exhort those struggling in their faith.

James would tell them that faith will endure trials. Trials will come and go, but a strong faith will face the trials, learning from them, and by doing so would produce perseverance and endurance. Faith will understand the tide of temptation is certainly to come, however we need not fall to its desires or enticements because faith will stand strong against the winds of adversity. Faith will obey God's Word by doing what God says. Faith harbors no prejudice and where faith is favoritism cannot coexist. Faith will always display itself in works because faith is more than mere words or having great knowledge it demonstrates itself by obedience to the promises of God. Faith will give you the power to have self-control over your tongue and to speak words of wisdom and kindness. Faith produces separation from the world and submission to the Lord.

Finally, faith will wait patiently for the coming of the Lord and while waiting for the Lord's return faith will demonstrate itself by praying for those who are sick. James closes his letter with an exhortation to pray. *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5: 14 – 16).*

True faith should always result in actions. In Romans 4, Paul used the example of Abraham to show that justification is by faith, not by works. But James says Abraham, was justified by works (James 2:21). In spite of the apparent contradiction, Romans 4 and James 2 are really two sides of the same coin. In context, Paul is writing about justification before God while James writes of the evidence of justification before men. A faith that produces no change is not saving faith.

Key Scripture Verses:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (James 1:2 – 3).

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:19).

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2: 18).

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, by those who make peace (James 3:17 – 18).

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:8 – 10).

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that (James 4:13 – 15)."

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5: 7 – 8).

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment (James 5:12).