

Bible Survey, part 15 – The New Testament

The Epistles – James

“The Tongue”

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- **Sermon Notes** – content of the PowerPoint slides in Word document

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#1 – Who wrote it?

James – the half-brother of the Lord Jesus – wrote this letter.

“A pillar of the church [in Jerusalem]” Galatians 2:9

According to Eusebius, James was martyred for his faith in Jerusalem in A.D. 61-62.

#2 – When did James write it?

James makes no mention of the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 47 – Acts 15) where he played a major role. Nor does James mention the enormous theological issue of the council: the admission of Gentiles into the church.

So most scholars date James’ letter before the Jerusalem Council – to c. A.D. 45-46.

#3 – To whom did James write it?

“... to the twelve tribes [Jews] who are dispersed abroad ...” James 1:1

It is clear from the contents of James’ letter that the recipients were **Jewish BELIEVERS** scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

#4 – Why did James write it?

James addresses a variety of topics, but all of them deal with the issue of authenticity in living out our Christian faith.

“Be **doers** of the Word and not **hearers** only ...” James 1:22

In the early 1500’s, the Book of James became the centerpiece of a huge theological controversy between Martin Luther and the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

In A.D. 1520, Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk and theologian.

As he studied the Bible – and especially the Apostle Paul’s writings – Luther became convinced that salvation is a “free gift” [Romans 5:15] God **GIVES** to people.

The way a person qualifies for this – is by placing their **total reliance** for their salvation in Jesus’ work on the cross plus no human works of any kind – not even any “religious” human works!

“Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the Law . . .” Romans 3:20a

“For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith – and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God – **not by works**, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

“. . . not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His mercy God saved us . . .” Titus 3:5

Luther began writing about his position – and before long, his writings spread across Europe like wildfire.

“It is clear that salvation cannot be acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit . . . And we cannot yield on this point, even though heaven, earth and everything else falls.” Martin Luther

All this put Luther in direct conflict with the **hierarchy** of the Catholic Church.

They taught that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ **PLUS** the “**works**” that the Catholic Church offered people: confession, indulgences, penance, communion, etc.

In 1521, the Pope excommunicated Luther and convened the Council of Trent – where he specifically appealed to James chapter 2 to refute Luther’s position.

“What good is it if a person claims to have faith but has no works? Can such faith save him?” James 2:14

“So you see, that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” James 2:24

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.” James 2:26

The truth is: James is right . . . **AND** . . . Paul is right!

“James is saying that, if a person says he has faith, but his faith shows no outward fruits of obedience or works of righteousness, it is not saving faith . . . and Martin Luther would absolutely agree with James on this.” R.C. Sproul

[Jesus] “Every good tree bears good fruit, and every bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit . . . Therefore, by their fruit you will know them.”
Matthew 7:17-18, 20

“If you say you’ve come to know Christ, yet you do not keep His commandments, you are a liar and the truth is not in you.” 1 John 2:4

[John the Baptist to the rabbis] “You brood of vipers! . . . Produce fruit in keeping with [that fits with – NKJV] your repentance.” Matthew 3:7-8

“James is saying, **not** that a person is justified before God by his works, but that his claim to have saving faith is proven to be genuine by the outward evidence of his works.” R.C. Sproul

Paul (and Martin Luther) were looking at the **ROOT** of a person’s salvation: we’re **made righteous in God’s sight** by faith in Jesus’ work on the cross alone.

James was looking at the **FRUIT** of a person’s salvation: “saving faith” – if it’s genuine – will **always result in changed behavior** that reflects obedience to God and His Word.

James: “If there’s no **FRUIT** . . . then there’s no **ROOT**.”

“Examine yourself and make sure you are in the faith; test yourself.” 2 Corinthians 13:5a

“Thanks to Calvary, I don’t come here anymore.”

SO WHAT?

“The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of our body.” James 3:6a

“All kinds of animals have been tamed by man . . . but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.” James 3:7-8

“With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse men, who have been made in His image.”
James 3:9

“Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be!”
James 3:10

Reason #1 – Because it causes strife between people

“Without wood, a fire goes out; and without gossip, strife quiets down.” Proverbs 26:20

Where there is conflict and strife, there is always somebody with a big, unkind, slanderous mouth at the bottom of it!

Reason #2 – Because it poisons people’s hearts toward others

“The words of a slanderer are like dainty morsels that go down into the innermost parts of the body.”
Proverbs 18:8

We may slander a person and never think about it again – but the person who hears it will never forget about it.

Slander always has **TWO victims**: the person we’re **slandering** and the person we’re **poisoning**.

Reason #3 – Because slander has eternal consequences

[Jesus] “Every careless word that a person speaks, they will have to give an account for it on the day of judgment.” Matthew 12:36

Suggestion #1 – Ask the Holy Spirit to change and purify our hearts

“Out of the abundance of the **heart**, the mouth speaks.” Matthew 12:34b

The reason we slander people **with our mouths** – is because we’re already slandering them **in our hearts first**.

What comes out of our mouths is just the “**symptom**.” The **real disease** is what’s in our hearts.

Suggestion #1 = We ask God to **purify how we’re thinking and feeling** about people in our hearts!
If our hearts get purer – our mouths will follow!

Suggestion #2 – Simply talk **LESS**

“... Let every one of you be quick to hear, **slow to speak**...” James 1:19

“Where there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” Proverbs 10:19

“I’ve never regretted something I **didn’t** say – but I sure have regretted a bunch of stuff I **did** say!”

Suggestion #3 – Decide that (with God’s help) when we do speak – we’re going to say only those things that honor God and build people up

“Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building others up ...” Ephesians 4:29

President Woodrow Wilson

“He sat in the chair next to me, and every word he uttered showed a personal and vital interest in the man who was serving him.”

“After the man left, I lingered in the room and observed the effect that his words had made upon the barbers.”

“They talked quietly, in undertones. They did not know the man’s name but they knew that his words had elevated their thoughts, and as I left the barbershop, I felt as though I was leaving a place of worship.”

That man was Dwight L. Moody.