

No.26, James

The commonly held orthodox view of this epistle is that as to identity James was the Lord's brother, Gal 2: 19 – "*James the Lord's brother.*" Along with Jude, he was one of four brothers of Christ, the two of them being mentioned with two other brothers in Matt 13: 55, "*Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas.*" There is no reason to doubt this traditional view of the authorship of *James*; and there is certainly no weight in the objection that the writer of this epistle identifies himself only as *James* in ch 1: 1. If he were truly the Lord's brother why does he not say as much? But this same verse answers that query – for in it James does add the terms that he is "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, he identifies his spiritual relationship with God & with Christ. While he was Christ's half-brother to be exact as far as the flesh is concerned, James was more interested in his spiritual connection with the Lord and was glad to take the lowly place as a servant of the Lord. James could only rejoice in what the Lord had done for him. There was a time when he did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah, John 7: 5. But then the risen Christ appeared to him, 1 Cor 15: 7; and he is then found in the Upper Room with the disciples of the Lord, Acts 1: 14. He was a married man, 1 Cor 9: 5; and was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15: 13.

CRITICISM OF JAMES

But as a NT book, *James* has received much criticism, mostly from modernists, but even from no less a person than Martin Luther who referred to it as "a strawy epistle." At first Luther felt that James contradicted Paul on the issue of justification, because of the statement in ch. 2: 24. However, in *James* the same system of justification is taught as was taught by Paul, only from a different perspective. It is James's purpose to show that a true justifying faith leads to a godly and a faithful life; that godly behaviour is the identifying mark of the believer.

TWO MAIN ISSUES OF CONCERN

James wrote to the Jews of the dispersion, ch 1: 1; and he addressed them on two main areas of concern.

(a) First, their place in the world as Christ's people. He wrote to a people who were under great pressure, with their faith being tested constantly, ch 1: 3 where the words "the trying of your faith" means *your tested faith*. Their faith was tested in various ways, see ch 2: 6 & 7, ch 5: 4-6 – in these verses their oppressors are addressed and are identified again as the oppressors and murderers of these Jewish believers. This was their position in the world as God's people – setting the pattern for the place of the Lord's people in the world in every age. Thus, he exhorts them to be patient, ch 1: 2-4, the word *patience* meaning "stedfast endurance." But see the great examples of it, ch 5: 7-11 – especially pointing them to Christ, the thrust of the entire NT, Heb 12: 2 & 3. It is from Christ the greatest example of patience & the coming Judge that believers receive their strength.

(b) Second, James was troubled about the world coming into the Church. The epistle shows that some of the Lord's people were failing in their responsibility to remain faithful to Christ and were accommodating worldliness. See ch 1: 27 – here was James's concern: that the Lord's people would keep themselves unspotted from the world, see 1 Pet 1: 19 where the word is used of Christ, the Lamb *without spot*. Thus, note how James exposes the worldly spirit that some had imbibed. Showing respect of persons, ch 2: 1-4; misuse of the tongue, ch 3: 1-12, 4: 11-12 & 5: 9; a lustful & greedy spirit, ch 4: 1-4; a boastful attitude about life, ch 4: 13-14.

THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE EPISTLE

Due to James's concerns he writes this epistle, as already noted, to prove that godly behaviour is the identifying mark of a true child of God. He shows that justifying faith leads to a life of true holiness. Therefore, his burden is to show that true faith operates or it works. It does not lie idle in the soul, but leads to victory over opposition and the allurements of the world.

1. The believer is justified by faith that is a living, working faith. This point is presented in ch 2: 17-26 where a number of times James mentions being justified by works. V.18 is really the key verse where James states that he will show the reality of his faith by his works. Faith exists in the soul and the only way in which it can be seen to be real is by the works it produces. Note the example of Abraham, vs. 21-24. In v.23 reference is made to the time when Abraham actually was justified, Gen 15: 6 – that is, before Isaac was ever born. But see v.21 – the reference is to the later time, recorded in Gen 22, when Abraham demonstrated that he had a justifying faith by his willingness to obey the Lord in offering up Isaac. Thus, Abraham's works in offering up Isaac were not the cause of his justification but the proof of it. Thus, James's argument is that James's faith was a working faith, thus a living faith and therefore a justifying faith. The other example is Rahab, v.25, where the same point is seen.

2. This leads on to the vital truth that the believer is sanctified by faith that is a living, working faith. As noted already, James was very concerned about the Church succumbing to the world. Thus, he shows that there is need to overcome the world – which pertains to the issue of our sanctification. But it is by faith that the world is overcome, as John states, 1 John 5: 4b. Believers do not overcome the world by will-power or by adopting a legalistic code. Rather, it is by faith. Thus, in James 1 it is shown that *the pressures of the world* are overcome by faith, vs. 4 & 12. In ch. 2 *the persecutors of the world* are overcome by faith. In ch. 3 *the parlance of the world* is overcome by faith. In ch. 4 it is shown that *the pollution of the world* is overcome by faith. And in ch. 5 it is *the perversity of the world* is overcome.