

GOD AND HIS WORD

God has spoken through the prophets in times past and through His Son in the last days (Hebrews 1:1-2). John wrote, *“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17). God has revealed Himself to man through His word. For example, *“And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel...”* (I Samuel 3:21; 4:1). We could not know the character of God without His word. We could know of a higher power, a God but we could not know His nature. God has revealed his mind to us. Paul wrote, *“But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”* (I Corinthians 2:10-12). Through inspiration God made known His will (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Let us now compare some of the attributes of God to His word. God is powerful; thus His word is powerful (Hebrews 4:12). The word of God reveals His power in the creation (Genesis 1:1ff). He spoke this world and universe into existence. *“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast”* (Psalm 33:6-9). Here is just one evidence of the power of God. Paul wrote the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). He said further in the Hebrews letter, *“the word of God is quick and powerful...”* (Hebrews 4:12). The Gospel is the power of God to save man. What should be my response to the Gospel?

God is sovereign, thus His word is authoritative (I Peter 4:11). Many today do not have the respect for the Holy Scriptures that they should. The word of God is the standard, the only standard by which the Christian should live in this life. Christ charged all Christians *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”* (Matthew 28:18-19). Notice he said *“Go ye therefore and teach!”* Based on the authority of the Lord we are to teach. Teach what? Continue in verse twenty. They were to *“teach all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”* The word must be our standard of authority in religious matters today.

God is holy; therefore His word demands holiness (I Peter 1:15-16). We are reminded of Peter’s words, *“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* Holy living is to characterize the child of God. Again from Peter we learn, *“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness”* (II Peter 3:11). Twice in I Peter 2, he refers to Christians as holy, in verse five as a holy priesthood, and in verse nine as a holy nation. This word means to be pure, blameless, sacred, consecrated. Our lives are to be different from the world.

God is merciful; and it is no surprise that His word calls for mercy from those that are His children. God has always been merciful. Remember what Moses wrote, *“And*

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

DARE TO BE DEPENDABLE

Text: _____

I. Dare to be a Dependable _____

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II. Dare to be a Dependable _____

Notes:

III. Dare to be a Dependable _____

Notes:

PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFILED

Text: _____

I. It is Practiced _____ and _____

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II. It is Practiced _____ and _____

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III. It is Practiced _____ and _____

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the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7a). God has been merciful unto us by forgiving our sins and iniquities (Hebrews 8:12). Is it surprising to us that God requires mercy from us (Matthew 5:7)?

God is love; and it follows that the first and great commandment is love (Matthew 22:37-38). We know of God’s love because He sent His Son (John 3:16). John, who is called the apostle of love, summed up this point very well. He wrote, I John 4:8-11: *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”* Matthew wrote that love is the first and great commandment. Love is the foundation of our salvation, and it must be the foundation from which we work as the children of God.

The Bible reveals to us the nature of God. It is interesting that this same word also requires us to conform ourselves to be like Him. Is not that our goal? In order to meet this objective, I must make myself familiar with the word of God. Not only will I grow in the knowledge of God’s nature and character, but I will increase my knowledge of the life He desires I live. Some do not, by words or actions, have the same attitude. We like to pick and choose what verses apply to our lives, and what verses apply to others. When a sermon is preached and I have someone else in mind, then I am on dangerous ground. Am I willing to accept the word of God?

Rejecting the word of God is equal to rejecting God himself (John 12:48). John wrote, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). Notice that the rejection is this passage is twofold. The rejection is both of Christ and His word. I cannot accept Jesus as my savior and then despise His word. I cannot accept the Son of God and Man and then deny the scriptures which would make me to repent and change my life. You want Christ, then you absolutely must have His word, his word in all its truth, whether you like what it teaches or not.

-Chris Butler

THE BOOK OF PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Just as Solomon's book of Proverbs contains practical wisdom in the Old Testament, the epistle of James contains practical wisdom for the Christian of the New Testament. In fact, the main purpose of the book is clearly to describe what a life of obedient faith truly is. As Dunn said, "Faith in God produces life according to the will of God, and life contrary to the will of God denies faith in God. Faith is shown by its works. The appeal of James is to prove your faith by your works and to perfect your patience by proving your faith. We must live what we preach."

Who the James is to whom this epistle is ascribed, is of question to many. There are four men mentioned in the New Testament by the name of James. Two apostles shared the name James, one the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19) and one the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18). A third James is mentioned who is the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and finally the brother of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot) is named James (Luke 6:16). There is obviously no basis upon which to claim the brother of Judas to be author because he is mentioned as a mere fact of history. James, the son of Zebedee had been martyred at the hand of Herod in Acts 12:1ff, thus he would not have written it. Between the final two, James the son of Alphaeus and James the brother of the Lord, there is a general consensus that the author of this epistle was the latter, the brother of the Lord. Most evidence seems to point in this direction.

To whom this epistle is written is of the utmost important regarding how it is to be interpreted. Interestingly enough, James very clearly identifies the audience he is trying to reach in the very first verse. "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting*" (James 1:1). Who exactly is being addressed as the "twelve tribes scattered abroad?" The only conclusion that can be reached is that it is addressed to the church as a whole. In more than one passage in the New Testament the church is identified as the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; Revelation 7:4). The church indeed is "spiritual Israel" as the children of God today. Thus, regardless of nationality, each and every child of God, the church collectively, is being addressed as "the twelve tribes."

As to the message of the book of James, as mentioned above, the writer seems to deal generally with wisdom in how to live faithfully as a Christian. Specifically, though, chapter by chapter, James targets a particular portion of Christian living and with depth discusses how that area can be targeted and improved upon in each life. For instance, in chapter one James deals with the topic of pure religion. In James 1:27 that pure religion is described as two-fold: outward and inward. Outwardly, the church practices pure religion through benevolence such as tending to the needs of orphans and widows. Inwardly, pure religion is attained by keeping one's self spotless from the world, an accomplishment that comes not by sorrowing in temptation, but by using it as a point of growth (James 1:2ff). Thus practical Christianity demands the practicing of pure religion.

Second, James 2 points out that practical Christianity comes through a consistent working of faith. There is no justification for bigotry or prejudice among Christians because there is no such distinctions made in Christ (James 2:1). By embracing the ignorance of discrimination, faith without works is displayed and promises no profit. However, yielding to God's divine will displays our faith by our works wherein is life (James 2:14ff). Thus practical Christianity demands the addition of faith and works wherein is righteousness.

Third, chapter three indicates that need to control the tongue as a Christian. There is the obvious need to generally control what we say lest we cast forth an un-Christian example (James 3:6). However, its not just the matter of not being blasphemous or avoiding the ever increasing popular habit of cursing, but there is special mention of the need to be accurate in what we say, especially when it comes to teaching the word of God. "*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*" (James 3:1). Thus practical Christianity demands the control of the tongue that only that which is pure and true might be uttered forth.

Fourth, the fourth chapter of James deals with the general topic of sin. Sin is the result of arrogant selfishness and pride. When we yield to lust we sin and submit to the draw of the world, but the plea is to submit to God and resist the devil. How will this be accomplished? Not by bowing to selfish desire, but rather we should "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up*" (James 4:10). Thus practical Christianity demands that we in all humility resist sin and yield ourselves to God.

Then fifth, James 5 briefly discusses the need of personal discipline. The selfish rich do not practice proper discipline and that which they love will actually lead them to their demise. Instead of yielding to carnal want, James pleads for us to yield to spiritual need, a task accomplished only by personal discipline. By applying patience and practicing prayer we will be counted happy as those who endure (James 5:11). Thus practical Christianity demands that we discipline ourselves in the areas that promote godliness.

James, by inspiration, knew the "ins and outs" of Christianity and how an individual can truly succeed as a Christian. Thus just as those to whom he specifically wrote, we can learn what it means to be a true Christian today according to the same divine advice.

-Andy Brewer