

The Epistle of James

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

THIS is the title James puts upon himself—a servant, literally, a bond servant—a slave. Now a servant cannot do as he pleases, a true servant serves his master faithfully in all things, so how many of us could rightly claim this title?

In vs. 2-4 he speaks of those things that are common to all such servants during their time of probation—

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

In the days of James these temptations would be two-fold. There were the fiery trials by their pagan persecutors—hardships of probation which none in our day experience.

Then there would be the constant struggle to overcome the weakness of their own natures. James uses the authority of Jesus as he exhorts to count these trials as joy; for we find in this epistle about 14 references to Jesus' address given on the mount.

There are always some in the Household who are passing through a period of severe trial, each of us having our own peculiar troubles, difficulties and problems. But we can find encouragement in verse 12—

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

Thus we see that **endurance is an evidence and measure of our love of God**, and will ensure for us a blessing in the day of account. Knowing this, would we wish to be free from our trials and troubles? Would we wish for them to be taken away, when we know they are necessary for our salvation?

How much rather should we rejoice in the things God sees fit to bring upon us, that may work in us patience and long-suffering.

There is encouragement for the aged and the infirm, as they look forward beyond the days of their failing health to the Kingdom of God, to that perfection of health far exceeding anything experienced in this life. Thus they are able to bear with patience the many trials that come with age.

Those who are related to God and His future kingdom do not feel that depression and despondency such as are common to those who have no hope.

James implies that there is no excuse for the servants of God who lack wisdom (v. 5); for it may be ours for the asking, if we ask in faith, nothing doubting.

In this epistle James is very insistent that every believer irrespective of circumstances should be zealous in the task of working out his own salvation.

He points out that the poor and the prosperous meet here on common ground; the physically weak with the strong; none have priority over the others. He shows that **eternal life depends upon service rendered to others**.

Faith must be demonstrated by works. Faith or knowledge is of no value if not supported by works. Therefore, true faith is not a quality we can secretly possess; not something we can keep from others and just have it between ourselves and God.

If we fail to show our faith by service to others, then we have NO FAITH.

To speak to or of another spitefully or unkindly is clear evidence of faithlessness. This is plain from v. 26—

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain."

The practical works as given by James in v. 27 are the equivalent of the fruits of the Spirit, as given by Paul, and which are born of knowledge. Knowledge and faith of themselves are unacceptable unless they produce the fruits of the Spirit and work by love; but a living, active faith is wholly acceptable to God, and in the end will bring salvation. James says—

"Faith without works is dead."

The measure therefore of our individual faith in the things we believe, **is the amount of our service to the Body**—whether in the example of our patient and cheerful endurance of trials, or the tireless use of the talents given us in whatever field of endeavour we may be called, such as lending a helping hand in the various needs of others, whether we think they deserve it or not.

That is the only faith that will be recognized when we stand before the Judge. Have we always shown our confident hope in the Gospel implanted within us by our thoughts and actions of each day?

Is it not because we need each other that God has brought us together in ecclesias and fellowship? The weak need the strong; the stubborn need the clear thinking; we are all dependent one upon the other.

To resent, or to give service grudgingly; to discourage others in their work in the Truth, or to offend, is to give the lie to the profession of faith and love for God and His children.

James clearly teaches that one cannot afford to plow his lonely furrow in the way to the kingdom. It is important that each one judge the extent and value of his own services, and not that of others. James insists that there must be no exceptions, no partiality whatsoever, irrespective of conditions or circumstances. We find a wonderful example given in Mark 12:41. There we find Jesus sitting and watching as people cast money into the treasury—

"And a certain poor widow threw in two mites, which make a farthing."

Who could better have excused themselves than that poor widow as she stood before the treasury? Who could more justifiably have passed by and said—

"There is nothing I can do to help; my two mites are as nothing?"

But what did Jesus say?—

"Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury."

She had done a work in the Master's service, and her work has come down as a memorial of her, just as the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; likewise the good Samaritan, and Mary who anointed Jesus for his burial.

Nothing can escape the penetrating eyes of God. **Nothing can be too insignificant, if done in love for the Master.** James says (2:15-16)—

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

The next verse supplies his own conclusion—

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

There are always those who need a helping hand, encouragement, sympathy and love.

One third of the epistle of James is in condemnation of those with strife in their hearts. In 3:5 he says—

"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

A word here or there in contention or controversy can become a major issue (v. 8)—

"But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

"Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing."

Then he adds—

"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

In Eccl. 7:21-22 we read—

"Take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others."

Thus James continues his warnings. And Paul also points out that Jesus died for all of us; we therefore mock the work of Christ when we speak evil one of another.

James emphasizes faith and purity of motive in all our works that we may be a genuine help to those who need it (and who of us do not need help at some time?).

Being quarrelsome and wrangling, and critical of others will never further the work of the Truth; for we read—

"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

To hold resentment or grudge against another will be against US when we stand before Christ; for such is disobedience to the command of Christ that tells us to love one another. —

C.H.T.
