

## Authentic Faith An Introduction to James

**Picture One:** If you think the Hyundai Genesis logo looks like the Bentley logo, you're right.

**Picture Two:** And the front of the Genesis has been styled to look like a Mercedes. The Genesis starts at \$34,000 and the E-Class Mercedes starts at \$49,000; a \$16k savings.

**Picture Three:** We all do this, don't we? A real coach bag can conservatively cost \$450. This one costs \$35.00

Ill – Years ago, a church member informed the Board of Directors that I wasn't a good steward of my money because Teana carried a Coach purse. It was fake. But Teana said, *"If I'm going to be accused of having a Coach purse, I might as well have a real one."* It cost me \$200.00.

When we can't or don't want to buy something real, we often purchase something that looks like the real thing. We are prone to settle for counterfeits; mud puddles instead of the ocean.

In spiritual matters, counterfeits are deadly. James wants us to be real Christians.

### First: Let's Acknowledge Counterfeit Gospels

Sin is not a thing. It does not exist on its own. Sin is a derivation of good, a lack of wholeness. We can rest assured the gospel has its derivations.

- *The Good-People Gospel* – You have a great life. Jesus can make it better

Romans 3:23 – *There is none righteous, no not one.*

Romans 6:23 – *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

Mark 2:17 – *I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*

- *The Self-Esteem Gospel* – God is all about you and your plans.

God chose us for his glory. He created us for his glory. He saves us for his glory. Jesus died for the Father's glory. He does not cast us away for his glory. Jesus sought to glorify the Father. He told us to work for God's glory. God answers prayer for his glory. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God. Everything we do is supposed to be for God's glory. Jesus is coming again for God's glory. He will be glorified forever.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/biblical-texts-to-show-gods-zeal-for-his-own-glory>

- *The Express Yourself Gospel* – Be true to you, follow your heart

Jeremiah 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

2 Corinthians 4:4 – *...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel...!*

- *The Prosperity Gospel* – Christianity guarantees you wealth and health

Mark 8:34-36 - *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life<sup>[d]</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*

- *The Faith-And Gospel* – You and Jesus can save you

Galatians 2:8-9 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

John 19:30 – *It is finished*

- *The Faith-So Gospel* – I'm a Christian so I can live like I want

Romans 6:17-18 - *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,<sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

- *The Jesus-Optional Gospel* – Jesus is a way but not the way

John 14:6 – *I am the way, the truth and the life*

Acts 4:12 – *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Jesus is the Good News/Gospel

Behind it all is that still, small voice whispering, *“Did God actually say...”* – Genesis 3:1

James is writing to insure his readers are practicing genuine Christianity. He knows that substitutes aren't just faulty, they are deadly.

## Second: Let's Identify James

- a) James, the son of Alphaeus and another disciple – Mt 10:3; Ac 1:12
- b) James, the father of Judas the apostle – Lk 6:16
- c) The son of Zebedee and the brother of John killed by Herod - Mt 4:17-22; Ac 12:1-2

### d) James, the brother of Jesus

- Jesus had a brother named James – Mt 13:55
- He did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection – Jn 7:6
- After Jesus appeared to him, he became a disciple – 1 Co 15:7; Ac 1:14
- He became the leader of the Jerusalem church – Ga 2:9
  - After deliverance from prison, Peter sent him a note – Ac 12:7
  - He led the church through the Jerusalem council – Ac 15:13-33
  - Paul visited Jerusalem and brought greetings to James – Ac 21:18-19

*While James did not specifically identify himself as to which “James” he was (James 1:1), the author is widely thought to be James the half-brother of Jesus. James was not a follower of Jesus during the Savior’s time on earth (Mark 3:21–35; John 7:5) but eventually became an apostle in the vein of Paul, as one who had seen and believed the Lord post-resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). After witnessing the Lord’s resurrected body, James became one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter singled him out among the other Christians there following Peter’s miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:17). James made the deciding speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:13–22), and Paul called James one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9)*

- Chuck Swindoll

## Third: Let's Connect with His Audience

- a) Jews – 1:1 – “to the twelve tribes...”
- b) Scattered Jews – 1:1 – “in the Dispersion”

The dispersion was the result of the OT exile. Dispersed Jews are any Jews not living in Jerusalem.

This indicates that James is writing from Jerusalem where he serves as an elder in the church.

The book has four direct quotes from the OT and more than 40 references to the OT. In addition, James is going to remind us of two OT personalities – Abraham and Rahab – to prove his main point. All of this lets us know that James is writing to Jews.

- c) Scattered Jewish Christians – 2:1 – “My brothers...”

d) Scattered, suffering Jewish Christians – 1:2 – “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...”

This is a book for suffering Christians who are not yet home. We have two fundamental things in common with James’ audience: We are strangers and we are suffering because of it.

#### **Fourth: Let’s Examine the Book’s Provenance** (occasion for writing)

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 gave Gentiles equal access with Jews to the gospel and the church. James was a leader in that decision-making process. If written after the Council, James would surely have mentioned this free and unencumbered access to the gospel and the church. There is no mention of it or the conflict with Gentiles about the gospel, giving it a date earlier than A.D. 49 when the Jerusalem Council took place. This means that James is one of, if not the earliest New Testament book to be written.

His point was not that of Paul in Galatians who spoke to Jews about the freeness of the gospel and freedom in it.

James is writing to his readers because when we are under pressure, we have a tendency to be the wrong people, to say and do things are inconsistent with Jesus and his teaching. James wants his readers to react to the pressure of living in a

ILL – Orange – When you are squeezed, the real you comes out. James was concerned about what was coming out of these Jewish Christians who were being squeezed.

James has one single point: Is your faith genuine? Are you an authentic Christian? How can we know that we are genuinely Christians? This is what real Christianity looks like.

**James 1:23-25** - *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*

A life that reflects Jesus – a life that is consistent with our profession and God’s kingdom, is what James wants for us.

It’s not in a creed or a confession –

**James 2:19** - *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

To make his point, James doesn’t claim to be Jesus’ brother but calls himself a servant of God, an appropriate name given the practical emphasis of the book. Throughout the book, he argues that authentic faith produces authentic deeds consistent with the character of God, the person of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, Christians are people whose lives are consistent with their claim to be children of God. In language and themes that sound similar to Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, James

- a) rallies our hearts for gospel wholeness/integrity
- b) rails against the hypocritical person who says one thing but does another.

For James, faith is not an abstract principle because Jesus is not an abstract person nor is the present or kingdom an abstract proposition.

ILL – I love Teana. And that changes everything about my life.

Loving Jesus has real effects in the real world. James offers numerous practical examples to illustrate his point: for instance, faith endures in the midst of trials, calls on God for wisdom, bridles the tongue, sets aside wickedness, visits orphans and widows, does not play favorites, does not live self-indulgently, is patient waiting on Jesus and loves justice.

He stresses that the life of faith is comprehensive, impacting every area of our lives and driving us to truly engage in the lives of other people in the world.

Four examples:

**1:26** - *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*

**3:14** - *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*

**4:11** - *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers*

**5:7** - *Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord*

James acknowledges, **"we all stumble in many ways" (3:2)** but faith cannot coexist with persistent sin and faithful people will not live lives dominated by sin.

**James puts the spotlight on our behavior as the truest test of our belief.**

James is going to say that authentic faith:

- a) Doesn't break when it is tested – ch 1
- b) Doesn't fail when it is pressed – ch 2
- c) Doesn't explode when it is expressed – chs 3-4
- d) Doesn't panic when it is distressed – ch 5

In effect, James is the Proverbs of the New Testament. His emphasis is balancing right belief with right behavior.

Authentic faith procures authentic living

If it isn't practical theology, it isn't Christian theology

James: "The people of God should act like the people of God."

Key verses:

Negatively: 2:17 - *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Positively: 2:18 - *I will show you my faith by my works*

Imperative: 1:22 - *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*

**CAVEAT:** Is there a conflict between Paul and James?

Romans 4:4 - *And to the one (Abraham) who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,*

James 2:24-25 – (Abraham)...*was justified by works and not by faith alone.* And in the same way....*Rahab (was) justified by works...*

There is no conflict. We are justified by faith that works. If it doesn't work, it is not saving faith.

**FYI:** <https://www.gty.org/library/Questions/QA81/Does-James-2-contradict-Romans-4>  
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/does-james-contradict-paul>

**Fifth: Let's Rejoice in the Source and Sustainer of our Faith**

James 2:1 - *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

"Faith in our Lord Jesus changes everything."

Ephesians 2:8-10a - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,*

- We are saved by grace through faith
- Faith is not our work but God's gift
- God creates his work in us in Christ Jesus

This is why it's impossible for us not to look like Christians. The same grace that saves us sanctifies us.

**Christianity cannot be attained.** We cannot work to save ourselves or keep ourselves saved.

**Christianity can be obtained.** We obtain it by Jesus' work at Calvary and through the empty tomb.

Christianity is not about what you have done but what Jesus has done and is doing!

**Example:** How do the Ten Commandments begin? Most people think *"You shall have no other gods before me."*

Exodus 20:1 - *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."*

After the ten plagues and the Red Sea, what person would choose any other god?

**Christianity is not about what we have done but what Jesus has done and is doing.**

Christianity is the expression of Christ's life in us. We are able to do what James commands us to do as we *"hold faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

This is really good news. I didn't work to save myself and I don't work to keep myself saved.

### **Sixth: Let's Apply the Book to Our Lives**

- a. We all need someone who cares about us to lovingly, unhesitatingly, directly remind us that it is not our neighbor's sin or even the sin of our enemies but our own sin that will most likely hurt us.

When was the last time anyone sincerely asked you, *"Is that attitude or action consistent with your Christianity?"*

Who is this person in your life? Parent? Spouse? Friend? Child? CG member?

James is that person for his Jewish Christian friends and for us.

- b. We all need to regularly look into God's mirror, the word for consistency of character

There's nothing wrong with a Hyundai Genesis. The problem is when the Genesis pretends to be a Bentley or a Mercedes.

Don't be a hypocrite. Be the real thing. The book of James is going to be our mirror.

c. We don't want to miss out on the joy Christianity offers us and we do want to miss the sorrow of living unhealthy lives

d. There is an inescapable judgement coming

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 - *if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.<sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

Jeremiah 17:10 - *"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."*

If you're a knock-off, you get knocked off.

### **Conclusion:**

If we are not Christians, we want to be exposed. This is how we become Christians and escape God's wrath.

If we are living hypocritically, we want to be challenged. Health and wholeness are derivatives of the gospel.

Think about how your life proves your Christianity.

\* If it doesn't on the whole, repent now and trust Jesus.

\* If inconsistencies exist, repent and realign your life asking God for his power to enable you to live the Christian life.

### **Small Groups:**

1 – In life, why do we choose the knock-off, copy-cat version of the real thing?

2 – Why might we do this in our spiritual lives?

3 – Of what counterfeit gospels are you most aware?

4 – Has a counterfeit gospel affected you or someone you know or love?

- 5 – What does it mean “when you are squeezed, the real you comes out?”
- 6 – Give some examples of this from your own life.
- 7 – Read James 1:23-25. Why and how are we “blessed” in our doing/obeying God?
- 8 – Read James 2:19. Why is it not enough just to confess a believe about God or Jesus?
- 9 – How does the gospel affect our everyday living? Think about the four examples in 1:26; 3:14; 4:11; 5:7.
- 10 – What does James 2:17 mean?
- 11 – Read James 2:24-25. How are we “justified” by works?
- 12 – Why is faith in Jesus so important to good works?
- 13 – Explain these thoughts: “Christianity cannot be attained but it can be obtained.”
- 14 – Why do the Ten Commandments begin with what God has done for Israel rather than what Israel is supposed to do or God?
- 15 – Who in your life acts like James to call you into account for your behavior? Take time to name this person. If people can’t name some, outline how they can find someone who will be an ‘accountability’ partner for them?
- 16 – If this is your spouse, how do you navigate having someone so 24/7 close to you call you into accountability? What is your initial reaction? How have you trained yourself to respond appropriately to loving concern?
- 17 – Why is obedience so much better than hypocrisy?