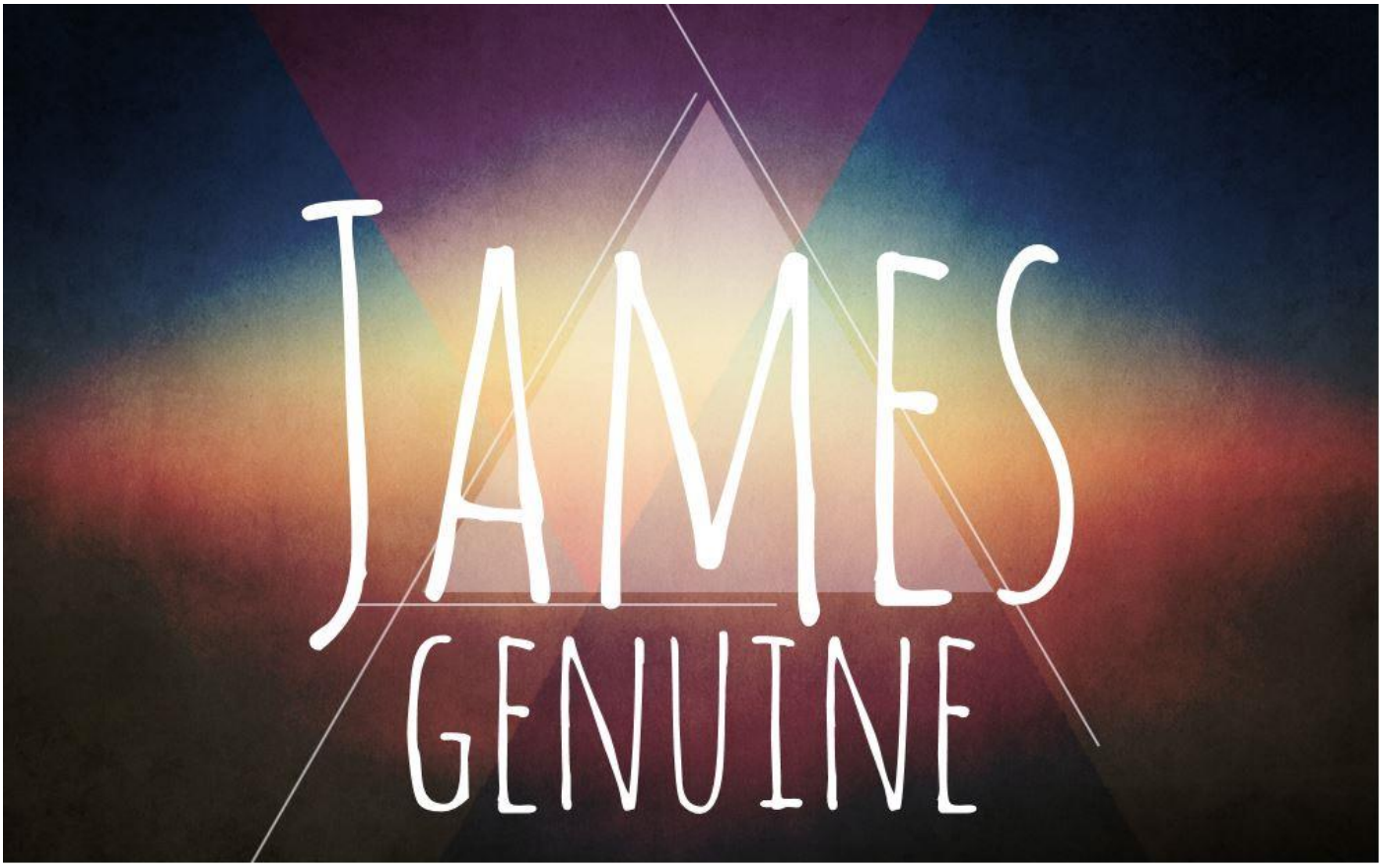
equip

community groups



TRETHOMAS
CHRISTIAN
FELLOWSHIP

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About

This guide has been created to help you engage with the James teaching series far beyond the Sunday morning sermon. We want this series, as with all our teaching series', to be more than sermons. We want it to be a journey we take together; that we immerse ourselves in, apply to our hearts and actual living. That the themes become the centre of our Bible reading and prayer life as we ask God to move us in these ways. We want to get the absolute most out of the letter of James. So I invite you to join us on this journey.

There is a session for each week which will develop the same theme that from the Sunday. Each section will begin with a summary of the overall themes and ideas and end with a similar review. The discussion questions in each session will seek not only to develop your knowledge but to reshape the motivations of your heart and apply the truths to your life. We hope this guide will help to form a basis for your Bible readings and prayer life as you follow the notes, the application points and the list of Bible readings. There are also sections providing definitions of jargon and insights from the world arounds us on the theme – perhaps a song lyric, or a movie quote.

If you are part of a community group, then each session will form the basis for your group's discussion. You can use this guide to be thinking and reading about the theme before and after each meeting. This will enable you to engage with the material on a deeper level, and hopefully make for lively discussion in your community group. If you're not part of a community group then this guide will help you to still engage with the same journey that community groups are on through this series. If you are sometimes unsure of where to start in terms of Bible-reading and prayer, then following the readings and themes in this guide will be a good place to start and mean you are going on a deep and consistent journey through one book rather than jumping around aimlessly.

Feel free to use as much of the material as is helpful and not be afraid to leave the bits that are not. I have deliberately provided you with more than enough material so you can do that. The point and aim of the book is to be helpful, so use it in the way that is best for you. There won't be one set way of doing that. James is a brilliant and challenging little book and I would encourage you and am praying that you would join us on a journey together in this community to really immerse ourselves in this little book and what it has to say to us and let yourself think on it deeply, pray around it and have it shape your faith.

I believe this is going to be a really brilliant series for us and we are going to learn so much, see so much of God and be changed so much so please join us on this exciting journey. I hope this guide helps you as you seek God through this series.

With love

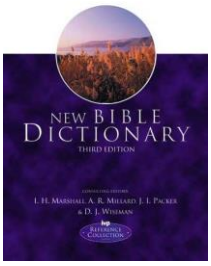
Dom [Senior Leader]

Useful Resources

Here we've compiled a list of helpful resources that you may like to consider getting if you would like to take your journey into James even deeper again.

General Reference:

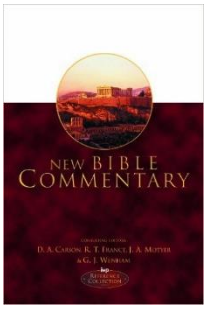
These books will be useful for you in giving good general background information – not only about the book of James, but many Biblical themes and questions you may have.



New Bible Dictionary (IVP)

Full of lots of helpful background information on different Biblical characters, buildings, themes, locations etc.

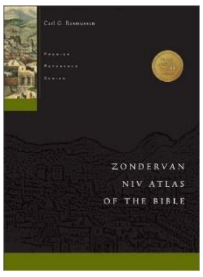
Best Price: £25.15 Book Depository via Amazon



New Bible Commentary (IVP)

Will give you a few notes of explanation on every chapter of every book of the Bible.

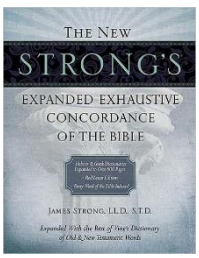
Best Price: £24.81 Book Depository via Amazon



NIV Atlas of the Bible (Zondervan)

This will give you useful maps, pictures and background information on various locations connected to the Bible.

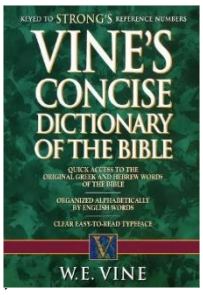
Best Price: £10.54 Amazon



Strong's Concordance (Thomas Nelson)

A concordance will show you every time a specific word is used in the Bible.

Best Price: £17.64 Book Depository via Amazon



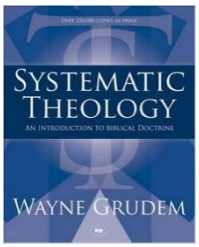
Vines Dictionary (Thomas Nelson)

Explains key words, phrases used throughout the Bible – their meanings, places they're used etc.

Best Price: £11.92 Book Depository via Amazon

Systematic Theology's:

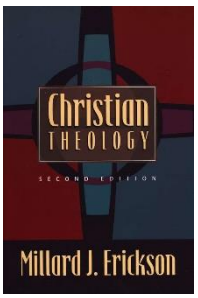
These are almost like an encyclopaedia for theology. You don't read through them page by page. But they are a great reference point. They'll give you a breakdown of some of the different viewpoints and some of the best resources. Without exception, every Christian home needs one to turn to when you are unsure.



Systematic Theology – Wayne Grudem

One of the most popular of its kind. Quite readable, for what it is. Will give you his position.

Best Price: £27.18 ICMBooks Direct via Amazon



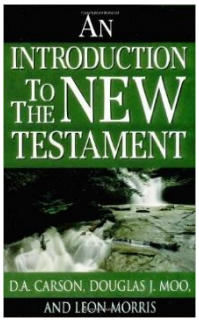
Christian Theology – Millard Erickson

Similar to Grudem, but will be a bit more open-ended in terms of leaving you to consider what position you think is best given the different bits of evidence and reflection. I use this one more than any other.

Best Price: £19.41 Book Depository via Amazon

New Testament Introductions:

These books will give you a brief outline and overview of every book of the New Testament and its overall purpose and content. It will give you background information rather than giving you a verse-by-verse meaning of the text.



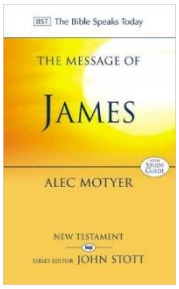
Introduction to the New Testament – Carson & Moo

This, for my money, is the best option on the market. Readable, to the point, with an excellent further book list if you need it, and written by two of the best New Testament scholars in the game.

Best Price: £21.94 FastMedia via Amazon

Commentaries

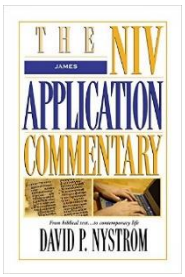
Commentaries will give you notes of explanation on the text of the Bible. They will tell you about the author of the book, their audience, the reason it was written, the major themes... They will provide historical information, explain the background of the people, and begin to explain what the passage means and how it can be applied to everyday life.



The Message of James – Alec Motyer [The Bible Speaks Today Series]

This series is probably the most readable series. Added to this, it is soundly researched and written. They tend to be thinner and cheaper. Sometimes they will have an excellent author – as in his case with Alec Motyer.

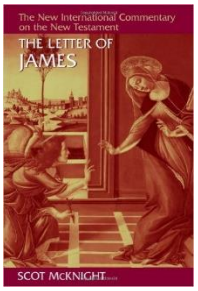
Best Price: £8.15 Book Depository via Amazon



James – David Nystrom [NIV Application Series]

The Application series has the readability of the Bible Speaks Today series but I would say will give you a bit more detail and makes a point to try to clearly apply everything to a modern context. I find them a very good series.

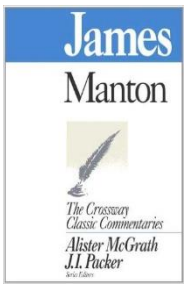
Best Price: £14.47 ICMBooksDirect via Amazon



James – Scot McKnight (NICNT Series)

This series tends to combine an outstanding level of research without going too far into that and losing sight of applying the message and meaning of the passage to today's life.

Best Price: £26.15 ICMBooksDirect via Amazon



James – Thomas Manton [Crossway Classic Series]

The Banner of Truth series are written by some excellent Evangelical (often Puritan) authors. There are some great insights in there. However, bear in mind, (i) the English is older, (ii) the historical research is outdated and (iii) they can be a little outdated in some ways. Still useful to look at.

Best Price: £7.67 Book Depository via Amazon

Genuine 

[jen-yoo-in]

Adjective:

1. Possessing the claimed character, quality, or origin; not counterfeit; authentic; real:
E.g. genuine sympathy; a genuine antique.

2. Properly, so called:
E.g. a genuine case of smallpox.

3. Free from pretence, affectation, or hypocrisy; sincere:
E.g. a genuine person.

4. Descended from the original stock; pure in breed:
E.g. a genuine Celtic people.

If I had to sum the book of James up into one idea, or one sentence, or even one word, it would be genuine. The book of James is all about finding and living a genuine faith; it shows us what a genuine people of faith look like. It is a short letter that holds much valuable material for us.

But it is a letter that has been often misunderstood, undervalued and mistaught. It is often thought to somehow offer an alternative theology to the letters of Paul and set the idea of being saved by faith against being saved by our own behaviour. It has been undervalued by significant Christian figures. The most significant has been one of my personal heroes, Martin Luther. It would be fair to say that Martin Luther misunderstood the letter of James. Luther saw James as running against the gospel presented throughout the rest of the New Testament and so did not know what to do with it. He denied that it was Apostolic as a result and described it as "a right strawy epistle."

But this little book does not run against the rest of the New Testament and I think it has a lot to show us. What could be more helpful than to find genuine faith; a faith that stands up to test and is seen to validate our beliefs by our unbelieving friends.

Section One:
Background to the Letter

The Author: who wrote it?

I should probably first explain why the issue of authorship is an especially relevant question to ask, as it may not seem obvious. There are a few reasons; (i) it decides how much authority the book should have, (ii) it will help answer when it was written which decides some of the context and meaning, and (iii) it affects the confidence we have in the writing. Our answer decides how much authority we give the book to speak into our lives. For example, if the book is written by an unknown person, who has not spent time around Jesus, should it be viewed as being as valuable as the writings of someone like Peter or John who were his close friends? It will also help decide when the letter was roughly written, and this in turn will help decide part of what caused the letter to be written and what it speaks about. Finally it affects the confidence we have in the book. If we do not know the author, we may not feel confident about the book's authenticity and so be cautious in listening to its teachings. So the question of authorship is worth asking.

The author identifies himself as James and that would seem to be a simple enough answer to the question. However, there is a significant debate as to which James it is that writes this letter.[1] A summary of the different answers that have been given (with dates) is supplied; in order to show you the extent of the debate.[2]

Candidate #1

Name: James son of Zebedee AKA: "the elder," "the greater."
Death: AD44

Prominence: very well known

Odds: unlikely

dead before the letter is likely published



Saint James the Greater by Guido Reni

One suggestion has been James the Son of Zebedee; sometimes known as James "the elder," or "greater" possibly referring to his stature to differentiate him from other James'. This James first appears as one of Jesus' earliest disciples along with his brother John (Matthew 4:21). Together, Jesus nicknames them 'Boanerges,' meaning 'sons of thunder.' (Mark 3:17) This James was certainly very prominent in the New Testament and so could believably commanded the respect to write a letter like this. However, one of the reasons that James the son of Zebedee is unlikely is that he was martyred very early on. Herod has

[1] P. H. Davids, 'James, Epistle of', in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Marshall, Millard, Packer et al. ed., Nottingham: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1996, 541.
[2] See Appendix A taken from, Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982, 4.

James put to death in his court (Acts 12:2) which has been dated at AD44.[3] The letter however, probably dates around from 48/49 AD,[4] some 4/5 years after the death of this James. If this dating is accurate, it would place James amongst the earliest New Testament documents. Mayor sees allusions to 'James' in subsequent New Testament writings,[5] which would make sense if this had been an early document. There is some debate as to the exact dating, but a date of 48/49 seems most likely. Harnack dates James at 120-140 AD,[6] due to an 'apparent synthesis of Jewish Christian and Pauline concepts.'[7] But the vast majority of scholars would avoid such radical assertions.

Candidate #2

Name: James son of Alphaeus AKA: "the younger/ less(er)"
Prominence: not very prominent

Odds: unlikely
Doesn't seem well known enough to write this letter



James the Less as depicted in The Menologion of Basil II produced c. 1000 AD

John Calvin, one of the key Protestant Reformers, and a prolific commentator, tentatively proposed James the son of Alphaeus as the author.[8] However, this is unlikely since he, like James the father of Judas, is not prominent enough in the New Testament.[9] Luther denied it was Apostolic,[10] he labelled it 'a right strawy epistle', attributing it to an unidentified James.[11] Calvin, however, did not see the same problems with it and received it 'without controversy'.[12]

Candidate #3

Name: James father of Judas (The Apostle)
Prominence: not well known

Odds: unlikely
Not prominent enough, not one of the apostles or close to them.

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[3] Dotha Blackwood, 'The Theology of James', *New Testament Theology*, for Moorlands College, 2010, 1.
[4] Davids, 'James, Epistle of', in *New Bible Dictionary*, 542.
[5] J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, Macmillan, 1913, lxix-lxxi, lxxxviii-cix.
[6] Adolf von Harnack, *Chronologie der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, 1897, 491.
[7] Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 3.
[8] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James*, trans. John Owen, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, 277.
[9] D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed., Leicester: Apollos, 2005, 622.
[10] Thomas Manton, 'A Commentary on James', *Geneva Series Commentary*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988, 10-11.
[11] Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle of St. James and St. Jude*, 1522.
[12] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James*, 276.

The other option proposed is a different writer, not part of the apostolic circle, assumes the authority of James to write the letter. The first problem is the author appears to have some prominence. It doesn't make sense for the author to be pseudonymous. The second is that in one of the most famous examples where this has happened in the New Testament – Mark (where John Mark essentially edits and reproduces Peter's memoirs) the writer's name is not attributed as Peter, but Mark. A pseudonymous author is usually proposed because they do not believe it to have Apostolic authority – e.g. Luther.

Candidate #4

Name: Pseudonymous – someone uses 'James' as a writing name
Prominence: total unknown needing to use the name for profile

Odds: extremely unlikely
Doesn't fit context, author seems very prominent.

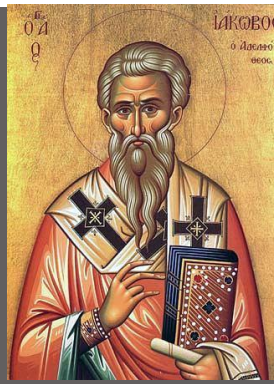
The context supports the author being James the brother of Jesus (Mat 13:55). This James was an incredibly prominent figure in the New Testament church. He was an eyewitness to Jesus post-resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). He was a church leader, head of the Jerusalem Council (Act 15:12-21). Paul describes him as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Moo asserts this James as the most likely author, not least because of his position of authority.[13] Davids summarises,

> The address "to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion"...the homiletic character of the work, it's Jewish Christian flavour, its concern with a communal ethic... its echoes of the later Jewish Wisdom literature... and the note of authority... are all consistent with the tradition that he was James the Lord's brother, first "bishop" of the church in Jerusalem.[14]

Candidate #5

Name: James the Just – the Brother of Jesus
Prominence: leader of Jerusalem Council

Odds: very likely
Profile, character and closeness to Jesus make him likely.



An icon of James the Just

[13] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1985, 20.
[14] Davids, 'James, Epistle of', in *New Bible Dictionary*, 542.

The author: James the brother of Jesus

We will assume from this point forward that the author is James the brother of Jesus. He would have been the most prominent of all the James' in question. He would have had very close access to Jesus and therefore naturally carried a lot of authority among the early church leaders. The rest of the New Testament seems to evidence the prominence of James the brother of Jesus. Added to this, James' prominence is evidenced even in secular history. Josephus writes of him:

> 'Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and **brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James**, and some others, [or, some of his companions]...' Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1

This shows that James was very highly thought of, not only among the Christians but also among the Orthodox Jewish scholars and leaders. That is consistent with the tone of the letter which suggests an authority commanding both great knowledge of Jewish scriptures and customs and also great authority as a teacher and leader. Only a character as large as this could really introduce their work, "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (James 1:1). It would make sense that the writings of this James would actually appeal to Jewish believers everywhere.

The Greek of James in this letter and as recorded in a speech given by James to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13), also has a lot of similarities. It also just makes a lot of sense that James the brother of Jesus who has previously not believed in him, actually thought he was 'out of his mind' (Mark 3:20), has then seen Jesus resurrected (1 Cor 15:7), was then given apostolic authority, became a key leader within the church at Jerusalem (Gal 2:9) and even the council of churches at Jerusalem (Acts 15) would sit down to gather some of his reflections on the future of the Jesus movement. It makes sense too, that this would be readily accepted and given authority by his readers bearing in mind not only his institutional authority, but his familial link to Jesus. That would indeed give him licence to be as direct as the author is in this letter. Some have suggested that perhaps what organises the content of the letter is a parallel with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount[15]; this would again make sense with the brother of Jesus gathering together his thoughts.

[15] 'James' in, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, 3rd Ed., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993, 426.

JAMES AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT		
James	**Sermon on the Mount**	**Subject**
1:2	Matt. 5:10-12 (Luke 6:22, 23)	Joy in the midst of trials
1:4	Matt. 5:48	God's desire and work in us: perfection
1:5	Matt. 7:7	Asking God for good gifts
1:17	Matt. 7:11	God is the giver of good gifts
1:19, 20	Matt. 5:22	Command against anger
1:22, 23	Matt. 7:24-27	Contrast between hearers and doers (illustrated)
1:26, 27	Matt. 7:21-23	Religious person whose religion is worthless
2:5	Matt. 5:3	The poor as heirs of the kingdom
2:10	Matt. 5:19	The whole moral law to be kept
2:11	Matt. 5:21, 22	Command against murder
2:13	Matt. 5:7, 6:14, 15	The merciful blessed; the unmerciful condemned
2:14-26	Matt. 7:21–23	Dead, worthless (and deceiving) faith
3:12	Matt. 7:16 (Luke 6:44, 45)	Tree producing what is in keeping with its kind
3:18	Matt. 5:9	Blessing of those who make peace
4:2, 3	Matt. 7:7, 8	Importance of asking God
4:4	Matt. 6:24	Friendship with the world = hostility toward God
4:8	Matt. 5:8	Blessing on and call for the pure in heart
4:9	Matt. 5:4	Blessing and call for those who mourn
4:11, 12	Matt. 7:1-5	Command against wrongly judging others
4:13, 14	Matt. 6:34	Not focusing too much on tomorrow
5:1	(Luke 6:24, 25)	Woe to rich
5:2	Matt. 6:19, 20	Moth and rust spoiling earthly riches
5:6	(Luke 6:37)	Against condemning the righteous man
5:9	Matt. 5:22, 7:1	Not judging—the Judge standing at the door
5:10	Matt. 5:12	The prophets as examples of wrongful suffering
5:12	Matt. 5:33–37	Not making hasty and irreverent oaths

Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts © 1993 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Representative Positions on the Dating of James

Jewish Origin

Pre-James the Just

L. Massebieau 1895
F. Spitta 1896

Post-James the Just

Meyer 1930
H Thyen 1955
R. Bultmann 1955?
B.S. Easton 1957

Non-Jacobean, early

L. E. Elliott-Binns 1956

James the Just

early (40-50 AD)

R. J. Knowling 1904
T. Zahn 1909
J. B. Mayor 1910
G. H. Rendall 1927
G. Kittel 1942
W. W. Wessel 1953
A. Ross 1954
D. Guthrie 1964
J. A. T. Robinson 1976

no pref. (40-62 AD)

J. H. Moulton 1907
A. Schlatter 1932
J Schneider 1961
F. Mussner 1964
J. Michl 1968
J. Adamson 1976

Late (51-62 AD)

W. H. Bennett 1901
R. St. J. Parry 1903
F. J. A. Hort 1909
J. Chaine 1927
R. V. G. Tasker 1956
C. L. Milton 1966
E. M. Sidebottom 1967
F. F. Bruce 1969

Post-Jacobean

partial authorship

W. O. E. Oesterley 1910
F. C. Burkitt 1924
W. L. Knox 1945
H. Windisch 1951?
E. C. Blackman 1957

Pseudonymous (70-130 AD)

B. W. Bacon 1911
J. H. Ropes 1916
J. Moffatt 1928
B. H. Streeter 1928
J. Marty 1935
E. J. Goodspeed 1937
F. Hauck 1937
F. Young 1948
H. J. Schoeps 1949
H. Windisch 1951?
A. H. McNeile 1953
R. Bultmann 1955
M. H. Shepherd Jr. 1956
M. Dibelius 1964, 1976
B. Reicke 1964
W. G. Kummel 1966
S. S. C. Marshall (Laws) 1968
W. Schrage 1973
J. Cantinat 1973
S. Laws 1980

The Recipients: who was it written for?

The letter is addressed to 'the twelve tribes in the Dispersion' (Jas 1:1). Bauckham notes that 'the only natural interpretation…is that it refers to all members of the people of Israel who lived outside of the land of Israel',[16] he then expands, 'James 1:1 does not specify that it is addressed to *Christian* members of the twelve tribes in the Diaspora. Yet the letter presupposes its readers' allegiance to Jesus the Messiah.'[17] The previous quote from Josephus, the secular historian, does indicate that James did have this kind of authority and influence. In that event people are brought before James as a kind of judge. So it is possible that James has written this to all ethnic Jews – whether they are following Christ or not. However, the particular tone and content of the letter does presuppose that the readers are follower of Jesus considering the many commands it makes. It does seem that there is a specific church congregation that may have been in mind – since he gives warnings concerning their "assembly" (2:2). The Greek here is εκκλεσια (ekklesia) – meaning gathering or assembly and is the word used for "church."

The reference to 'the early and the late rain' (Jas 5:7) indicates a Palestinian location (either of writing or delivery) – since it is a local geographical reference.[18] James, and his audience, appear fluent in Hebrew Scriptures; 'the work is thoroughly Jewish in tone.'[19] James even uses the obscure transliteration κυριου σαβαωθ from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament), meaning 'Jehovah of Hosts'.[20] Thus hinting at an audience highly versed in Jewish culture, thinking and language.

James and Paul (Rom 9:29), quoting Isaiah (1:9), are the only New Testament authors who use this term. Barnett's suggestion, that 'there is nothing in the letter that suggests the Jewish origin of the readers,'[21] seems very ignorant. This is a letter written by someone very familiar with Jewish culture, to a readership who are similarly very aware. James is 'formulated almost entirely in Old Testament terminology without an explicit Christology.'[22] Kümmel sees the work as so Jewish in flavour, he argues the letter only ever became regarded as Christian thanks to two references to Christ (1:1; 2:1).[23] James composed this letter, for Jewish believers who likely formed a church body scattered as a result of persecution (Act 11:19). 'The writer appears to be addressing a broad audience, the scattered Christians, and yet seems to have a very specific congregation or congregations in view.'[24]

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[16] Richard Bauckham, *James: wisdom of James, disciple of Jesus the sage*, London: Routledge, 1999, 14.

[17] Bauckham, *James*, 16.

[18] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004, 106.

[19] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Donald A. Hagner rev. ed., Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1994, 635.

[20] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975, 239.

[21] A. E. Barnett, 'James', *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 2, 795-99.

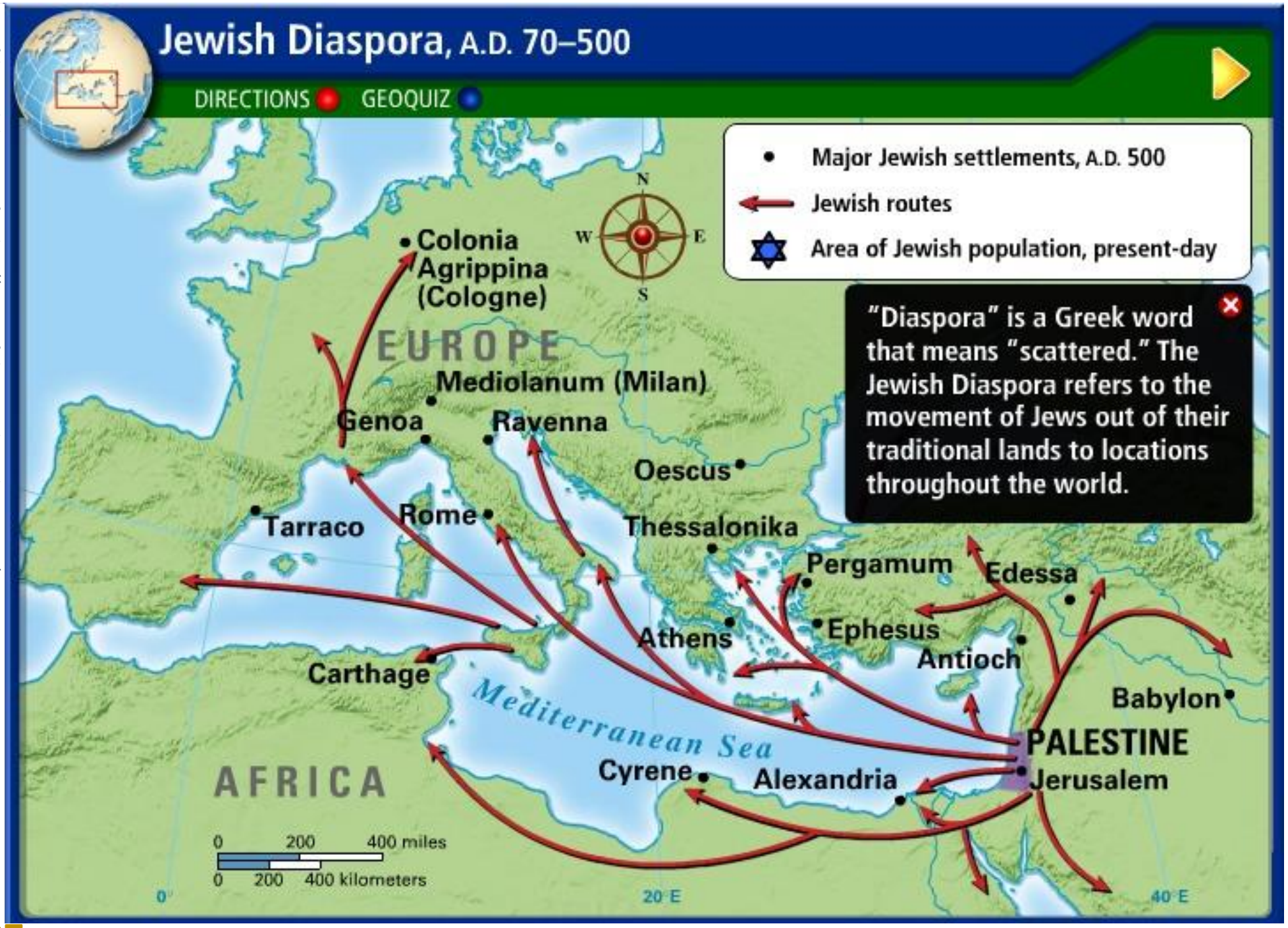
[22] Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, London: SCM Press, 1984, 444.

[23] W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1966, 286.

[24] I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*, Nottingham: Apollos, 2004, 629.

James has been included among the so-called General Epistles because it does not address a specific church. Yet the letter was almost certainly intended for a specific audience. Several features of the letter make it clear that the addressees were Jewish Christians: the unself-conscious way in which the Old Testament law is mentioned (1:25; 2:8-13), the reference to their meeting place as a synagogue (2:2), and the widespread use of Old Testament and Jewish metaphors. Furthermore, passages such as 5:1-6 suggest that most of the readers were poor – although a good case can be made that 1:9-11; 2:1-4; and 4:13-17 presume the presence of some wealthier Christians among the readers...The letter's address gives more detailed information: "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1). But this designation is so general as to be of little help in identifying the addressees. "Twelve tribes" need not even indicate a Jewish-Christian audience, since the phrase may have been one of many drawn from the Old Testament to designate the church as the new covenant people of God. The word translated "scattered among the nations" – diaspora (diaspora, "Diaspora") – was used to denote Jews living outside of Palestine (see John 7:35) and, by extension, the place in which they lived. But the word also had a metaphorical sense, characterizing Christians generally as those who live away from their true heavenly home (1 Peter 1:1)...Like other Jewish authors before him, James sends consolation and exhortation to the dispersed covenant people of God.

Carson & Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed., Leicester: Apollos, 2005, 628.



Map of the Jewish dispersion – from http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com/7.23

The Occasion: why was it written?



The first page of James in Miniscule 319, a Greek miniscule manuscript of the New Testament dating to the 12th Century

The epistle may be an edited transcript of several familiar homilies that have been brought together into one complete volume. It may be that a 'spoken original' lay behind it.[25] This might go some way to answer Luther's criticism, that it is composed 'chaotically.'[26] True, it does not have the organisation of a Pauline epistle; but that may reflect more the differences in the author's personalities. I think the book we know as 'James,' may be a written sermon, a lot like the book of Hebrews, but borrowing heavily from Greco-Roman rhetorical works[27]. This explains the blend of warmth, αδελφοι μου ("dear brothers"),[28] and blunt challenge. The sermon works as a chiasm, so that the discussion of justification by works (2:14-26) is the centrifuge around which the rest of the work fits around and builds up to.[29]

One of the major factors might be the dispersion that James mentions in his introduction:

> The word *diaspora* ["dispersion"] might have an even more specific note force. Acts tells us of Christians from Jerusalem who were "scattered" (from the verb διασπειρω [diaspeiro], a word cognate to "Diaspora" in James 1:1) because of the persecution and "travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews" (Acts 11:19). Identifying James's readers with these early Jewish Christians would fit the date of the letter and would furnish an explanation of the circumstances that called it forth: James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, must minister to his scattered flock by mail. While, tentative, this suggestion is better than most in explaining the circumstances of the letter.
>
> Carson & Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed., Leicester: Apollos, 2005, 629.

[25] Alec Motyer, 'The Message of James: The Tests of Faith', *The Bible Speaks Today*, John Stott ed., Leicester: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1985, 11.

[26] Martin Luther, 'Preface to the New Testament' (1522), in *Luther's Works*, 33, 397.

[27] Duane F. Watson, 'The Rhetoric of James 3:1-12 and a Classical Pattern of Argumentation', *Novum Testamentum*, 35 no 1, Jan 1993, 48-64.

[28] James 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 5:12, 19

[29] See Appendix B for detailed outline.

An Outline of the epistle of James

A Living faith

Trials and Temptations

1:1-12	Persevere through trials
1:13-15	All that is evil is from Man
1:16-18	All That Is Good Is From God

Listening and Doing

1:19-21	Two Ears, One Mouth: Be Quick To Listen, Slow To Speak.
1:22-27	Those Who Believe, Do.

A-Listers and B-Listers

2:1-7	No Favouritism
2:8-13	Favouritism Breaks the Law

B Justification by works

2:14-17	The Deedless Are Faithless
2:18	No Dichotomy Between Faith and Works
2:19-26	More than belief

A' Living Faith

Leaders

3:1-12	Leaders are few, called, and qualified

Six things to be

3:13-18	Be Peaceful: be gentle in wisdom
4:1-17	Be Humble: let go of ambition and pride
5:1-6	Be Content: do not seek to be rich
5:7-12	Be Patient: endure suffering
5:13-18	Be Prayerful: lift your needs to God
5:19-20	Be Protectors: save those who wander away

Themes of the Letter

Justification



Martin Luther: not a fan.

One of the accusations against the book is that its view of justification is at odds with the rest of the New Testament, especially Paul. It was this, more than anything else that led Luther to call it a 'right strawy epistle.' His comment draws upon the idea in 1 Corinthians that all who work to share the gospel build with different materials, gold, precious stone, straw. Luther is essentially characterising the letter as shoddy, poor quality work that is easily destroyed, unlike stone or gold.

This is a characterisation that people continue to, wrongly, place on the book. I do not think you have to see James as presenting something different to Paul. I think there is a way that we can see their two presentations as complimentary; indeed, I think that is how we are supposed to see them. And that is why, I believe, it has been included in the New Testament and why it is a book that is worth studying. Humanly speaking, who could be better (aside from perhaps his best friend John) to listen to about what it means to follow Jesus than James, his brother. No one could speak with more confidence and authority than him. That may be partly why he at times does not clarify the full meaning of some of his statements – that we're saved by works, for example.

> In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it. But more of this in the other prefaces.
>
> Martin Luther, *Preface to the New Testament*, 1522.

Luther's criticism of the book as running against the theology of Paul and concerning law rather than Christ has shaped views towards the book adversely. Luther did mellow his criticism somewhat, but that is rarely remembered:

> Few people realize — and liberal Luther interpreters do not particularly advertise the fact — that in all the editions of Luther's Bible translation after 1522 — the Reformer dropped the paragraphs at the end, of his general *Preface to the New Testament* which made value judgments among the various biblical books and which included the famous reference to James as an "Epistle of straw."[30]

In terms of the wider canon, James 2:14-26 presents a seemingly conflicting portrayal of justification, compared to Paul's; 'the topic of the entire section 2:14-26 is faith in relation to works.'[31] This issue divided the reformers. Luther felt James was at odds with Paul, especially Romans; but Calvin felt they could be 'reconciled.'[32] James surmises in 2:24, 'you see that a person is justified by *works and not by faith alone*.' This appears to be at odds with Paul's declaration (Rom 3:28), 'For we hold that one is justified by *faith apart from works of the law*.' Some have suggested that James might have a different understanding of justification to Paul; however, the Greek is identical,

εξ εϑργων **δικαιουωται**	*"...justified by works..."*	[James 2:24]
δικαιουωσθαι (apart from) εϑργων νομου	*"justified...apart from works of the law."*	[Romans 3:28]

Paul and James are both talking about justification as a legal declaration. The Greek, δικαιο is a forensic term that would be used to describe a courtroom situation. There are other words that could be used to have other slants but they are not used. They are both talking about justification in a legal sense. They both talk of the same works of the law. So we are left with a problem. One says we're justified *by* works εϑργων (ergon), the other says we're justified *apart* from works εϑργων (ergon). Either one is right, and by very nature the other wrong, or we must find a way of reconciling both (without being unfaithful to the texts, the author's intent and logic).

[30] John Warwick Montgomery, "*Lessons From Luther On The Inerrancy Of Holy Writ's*," Westminster Theological Journal Volume 36, 295

[31] Wiard Popkes, 'Two Interpretations of "Justification" in the New Testament: Reflections on Galatians 2:15-21 and James 2:21-25', *Studia Theologica*, 59, 2005, 132.

[32] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James*, 276.

Paul is right; only faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection can save. But James is also right; belief on its own will not save. In fact, the Hebrew understanding of belief really cannot imagine a person believing in something in their head and behaving inconsistently to that. This is something that Paul himself will argue; "how can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:2) In other words, if you believe that Jesus, at the cost of his life, put to death your old life and set you free; how can you keep on doing the very things that run up that cost? Unless, you do not actually believe that. The Hebrew idea of belief was very much integrated. That is, if you believe it you do it; if you don't *do* it, you don't really *believe* in it. That is not such a hard thing to understand we often say, "if they *want* to be there, they'll *be* there; they'll find a way." This expresses the same idea. Belief and behaviour, faith and works,

Genuine faith bears fruit! Real faith is never static, it is kinetic; 'faith, which is alone the means through which *pardoning grace* justifies, is also the faith through which *empowering grace* sanctifies.'[33] 'They [good works] are the effects of faith, and, as such, the evidences both of faith, and of justification.'[34] This is expressed by Jesus himself when he declares that a tree is to be judged by its fruit (Mat 12:33). Paul expresses it by saying that those who have died to sin will no longer walk in sin (Rom 6:1-2). The two are inseparable; that is faith in Christ and Therefore James can say that you cannot have faith without works (Jas 2:26), and that such 'faith', is a dead faith (Jas 2:17). This view is consistent with much historical theology – it's not a new idea – several major creeds have recognised this same dynamic.[35] You can see them on the following page.

The Augsburg Confession:
Genuine faith is a faith that necessarily, in its very nature, result in also doing the works of God. So that "faith" that does not do this is not genuine, in fact it is not faith at all. Perhaps it is no more than intellectual agreement or having had an "experience."

The Helvetic Confession:
As a result of genuine faith, such a genuine love (or affection) for God comes that it necessarily produces works consistent with the message of Jesus.

The 39 Articles:
As a result of genuine, living faith, good works necessarily come.

The Westminster Confession:
Faith is the only thing that justifies us before God, but that faith is never alone; it always comes with a change in living.

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[33] John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1995, 21.
[34] James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, 357.
[35] Piper compiled these sources in *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1995.

Relationship of Faith & Works in Historical Theology

The Augsburg Confession - 1530

[vi] 'this faith should [or, 'is bound to'[36]] bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do the good works commanded of God'[37]

The Helvetic Confession – 1536 & 1562 (Rev. 1564)

'From it [faith] love grows as a fruit, and, by this love, come all kinds of virtues and good works.'[38]

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England - 1563

'[good works] spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith'[39]

The Westminster Confession of Faith - 1646

'[faith] is the alone instrument of justification, yet it is not alone in the person justified.'[40]

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[36] Augsburg Confession, 1530, found at http://www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php accessed 15 October 2010.

[37] Philip Schaaf ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: Volume III The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007, 10-11.

[38] 'The Helvetic Confession', trans. John Piper, in *Future Grace*, 23.

[39] 'The Thirty-Nine Articles', in Schaaf ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 494.

[40] 'The Westminster Confession of Faith', in Schaaf ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 626.

Leadership

A significant section of this letter is given to addressing concerns about leadership. James is a leader himself, and as such worries for his scattered flock that bad leaders may damage the work that has been ongoing in them. It seems there are some specific characters, whether in leadership or aspiring to it, that he is particularly concerned about. And so the section 3:1-12 will focus primarily on leaders – especially the tongue as a test of character and aptitude and the primary tool of the leader, to build or to destroy.

The passage itself asks us to evaluate the calling of our leaders and those aspiring to leadership. They must be qualified in character and gifts. One of the key ways we see this is by the tongue, because the tongue is a window to the heart. This is significant to the church because 'most churches do not grow beyond the spiritual health of their leadership.'[41] The church must be rigorous in examining the callings of those who aspire to leadership, especially teaching. This is often described in terms of the candidate's private internal call, and external, the church's public affirmation of calling,[42] 'when one is desired by friends to preach a sermon.'[43]

The qualities Paul lists can only be verified by *other people* i.e. the church! *The church* must call leaders, because they live exemplary lives, of which the tongue is a litmus test. The church should ask questions of aspiring leaders. *What* do they talk about? *Who* do they talk about? *How* do they talk? *Why* do they talk? Answers reveal the heart clearer than a sermon ever could. Words will reveal the desires of the heart, what you love, what you fear, what angers you, what motivates you; words (or indeed maybe our lack thereof) hold a mirror to our soul.

Words reveal the carcinogens to Godly leadership; divisiveness (Rom 16:17-18; 2 Tim 2:14; Tit 3:10), boastfulness (2 Cor 11:12-15; 2 Pet 2:18), greed (2 Pet 2:3), inconsistency (Gal 2:11-14), not worshipping Jesus (2 Pet 2:1-2; 2 Jn 9-11; Jud 3-4), unaccountability (Tit 1:10), sinful living (Tit 1:16). Words also reveal the catalysts of Godly leadership; the ability to teach (2 Tim 2:24), kindness (2 Tim 2:24), gentleness (2 Tim 2:25), contentment (Phi 4:11-14; 2 Ths 2:5), toughness (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Tim 2:14), boldness (Act 20:22-23; 2 Cor 10:5; Phi 1:21), trustworthiness (1 Cor 4:2) and the ability to admit mistakes (2 Cor 12:11-13; 2 Tim 4:11). Words reveal the heart; this is James' real concern, because *well* leaders lead *well*; well leaders are few, called, and qualified.

[41] Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, 24.

[42] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume 2*, John T. McNeill ed., Ford Lewis Battles trans., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, 1062-1063.

[43] Martin Luther, *The Table Talk Theology of Martin Luther*, Thomas S. Kepler ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952, 234.

> Few areas of biblical theology are more difficult and engender more heat than the relationship of the gospel of promise to the law of God. However, the problem seems to rest more with the way we in contemporary times understand how the law in the Old Testament related to the promise of the gospel than in the way the gospel relates to the law in the New Testament.
>
> Walter C Kaiser Jr., *The Promise Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 249.

One of the other key themes of the letter is law and grace. Throughout the New Testament writings the question of how the gospel of promise and the law of God, the 'old covenant' and 'new covenant' relate to one another takes significant emphasis. Again this letter at times has been wrongly characterised; as being more focused on law than on grace.

> But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works. Besides, he throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper. Or it may perhaps have been written by someone on the basis of his preaching. He calls the law a "law of liberty" [1:25], though Paul calls it a law of slavery, of wrath, of death, and of sin...In a word, he wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task in spirit, thought, and words. He mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture. He tries to accomplish by harping on the law what the apostles accomplish by stimulating people to love.[44]

But I don't believe this to be the case. We have noted before that it might well be that what structures some of the material is following Jesus' pattern of teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount shows that the kingdom of God in the 'new covenant' is not unconcerned with the law of God. In fact, Jesus himself says;

> 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. [18] For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

[44] Martin Luther, 'Preface to James and Jude,' *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35, 395-398.

> [19] Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.[45]

I think this is more of a problem to us as we read the original documents than to the authors. We, influenced (whether we realise it or not) by Greek philosophy, like to compartmentalize. We don't see a problem with believing one thing, and doing another. We can have a work persona, a home persona, a romantic persona… We can believe one thing in our head and love another in our hearts. For example, many people are fairly relaxed about breaking speed limits. In Jewish thinking this is not imaginable. Belief and behaviour were not seen as separate. Faith, or belief, cannot be separated from actually working it out; you *believe* what you *do*.

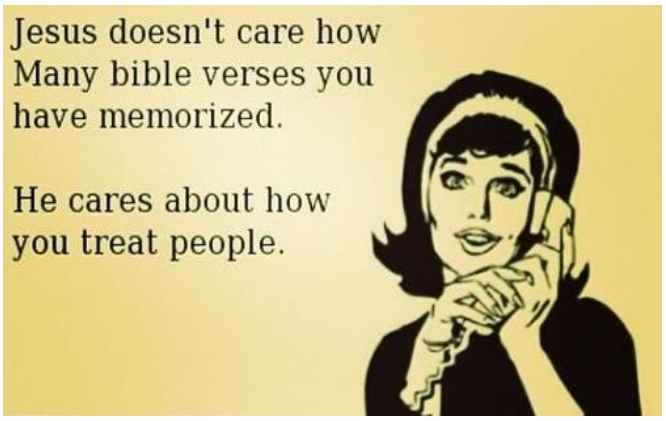
> The Law of God, understood as that part of it that dealt with the ceremonies and rituals carried out by the priests in the tabernacle and in the temple, was fulfilled, of course, in Jesus' death and atonement and therefore was obsolete for all who followed our Lord. In fact, Moses himself was cautioned at the time that those ceremonies were revealed to him in the Sinaitic code that there was a built-in obsolescence related to them (Ex 25:8, 40), for they were merely a "copy" or "model/pattern" of the real, which remained in heaven until Christ came and fulfilled the entire part of that legislation…However, the moral law and the Old Testament ethic, which Jesus also taught, remained. It is this law that we are concerned with as the church takes its first steps into Christian maturity. But under no circumstances, in either Testament, was the law to be used, either hypothetically or in reality, as a way of gaining eternal life. It was confusion of this point that caused so much difficulty, especially during the early days of the church in the first Christian century.
>
> Walter C Kaiser Jr., *The Promise Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 249.

[45] Matthew 5:17-20 (New International Version)

#1 Genuine

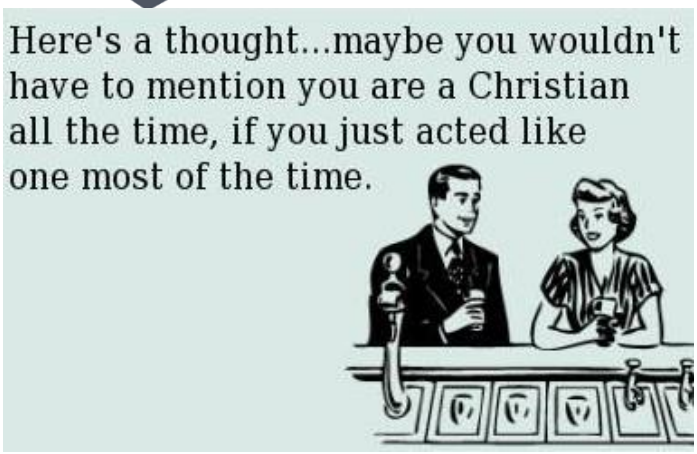
I would rather be hated for who I am, than loved for who I am not.

Kurt Cobain, Musician – lead singer of nirvana



I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians, your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

Mahatma Gandhi



In our culture Christians are known for a number of things...rarely do you hear people say, "Oh yeah, those are the people who never stop talking about love, oh a Christian Church – that's where you go if you feel beaten down and kicked and someone has their boot on your neck. You go there because it's a place of healing and a place of love.

Rob Bell, Christian Leader

I'd rather spend every Sunday of my life hanging off a cliff to rescue someone than spend one more time sitting in a pew next to hypocrites that talk about what they will do to better themselves and the world when they get around to it.

Shannon L. Alder, Author



In Focus

The focus of this series is genuine – having, experiencing and living out a genuine faith. A faith that is not just some facts in our head, a feeling, a social gathering but a faith that is the hope and certainty upon which we build all of our life. The thing that gives meaning and purpose to our relationships, our work, our families.

As I grew up, my single biggest problem with Christians was that I didn't believe that they believed what they talked about. That was not always fair of me; sometimes I judged too harshly. But sometimes it was fair. And it is definitely how many non-Christians feel today. That we may talk about grace but we're not gracious, we may talk of love but we're not loving, we may talk about forgiveness but we're not forgiving. Sometimes that is not the case. But sometimes they are right to make that judgment. Sometimes we *talk* better than we *are*.

In a world that is so saturated with advertising, people have learnt to spot a fake. The biggest thing that the current generation values is being "genuine", "real", "authentic" "organic." You can hear them say it, you can see it in the way communication is done, and you can see it in the way they buy. This partly explains the resurgence of vintage and antique items and the move back towards vinyl records among many young people. It is why more and more young people do not vote; because they don't believe any politicians are genuine. It is why young people are so dissatisfied with the form of Christianity they have grown up around. Because it's big on words and lousy at actually being any better.

The saviour we follow was genuine; Jesus was the real deal. There was no amount of inconsistency or hypocrisy about him. And he calls us to a genuine faith. To one that is fleshed out in real life and practical, everyday action. Who better to guide us through this journey than the brother of Jesus, who has gone from unbeliever to the key leader in the first church in Jerusalem and shows us what a genuine faith looks like?

Discussion

James 1:22-25 – True religion

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 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.

Luke 6:46-49 – The Wise man and the foolish man

46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and not do what I tell you? 47 Everyone who comes to me
and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building
a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the
stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But
the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground
without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of
that house was great."

Why does James insist that we must be hearers and doers?

What are the consequences: for being faithful and for not?

What are some of the inconsistencies that non-Christians sometimes spot in us?

Where are you personally sometimes prone to not doing what Jesus says?

James 1:26-27 – True religion

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this
person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father,
is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the
world.

Matthew 22:34-40 – The Greatest Commandment

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered
together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which
is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your
God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and
first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. 40 On
these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

What does genuine faith in Jesus look like?

What behaviour does it lead to? Why?

Why do you think James chooses the examples he does in describing genuine faith?

Who is our neighbour?

Review

This letter is all about genuine faith. What it looks like and how to live it out. It was an important message for these first believers who are scattered away from their homes. Living in new places, James is concerned for the believers he has known and led that they become healthy disciples where they are.

So it is a timely message; a message for this people in the situation they are in. But it is also a timeless message. The truths and wisdom that James gives are just as true for us today. And it is a prophetic message. That is, it speaks directly into our culture now. Our culture is desperately looking for "authenticity." And here James speaks, nearly 2,000 years ago, into what it looks like to genuinely follow Jesus. How that shapes everything you are and everything you do.

It's a prophetic message because we as Christians in the UK are known (whether it's fair or not) for being inauthentic, for not being genuine, for not living out what we talk. We talk about freedom but are riddled by fear, anxiety, insecurity, lying and manipulation. We do not look like a people of freedom. In comes James to show us what it really looks like to really follow Jesus. Being Genuine.

Apply

What would you like to get out of this series? How would you like to grow? How are you going to put that into action?

Are the places where you talk better than do? Commit to let God change that for you.

Meditate

Romans 12:9-21	Marks of genuineness
1 Corinthians 11:17-19	Not all division is bad
Philippians 2:12-18	Work it out
Matthew 7:15-23	You can't **do** what you **are not**
John 13:31-35	Love – the proof you know me

#2 Testing your faith

Your eyes can deceive you, don't trust them.

Obi Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars* 

You've got to know when to hold 'em
Know when to fold 'em
Know when to walk away
And know when to run
You never count your money
When you're sittin' at the table
There'll be time enough for countin'
When the dealin's done 

Kenny Rogers, *The Gambler*

The word of God steadies me. He says your trials and tribulations make you who you are. So you can see my whole story in the way I endured and overcame some testing experiences. 

Evander Holyfield, former Boxing World Heavyweight Champion

Never tell me the odds.
Han Solo, *Star Wars*

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world - that is the myth of the atomic age - as in being able to remake ourselves.
Mahatma Gandhi

In Focus

I once had a boss who liked to say that "everything was a test." He sort of half meant that. It wasn't that he was critiquing everything we did and marking us out of ten. But it meant that things didn't just go unnoticed. He was looking at the way we dressed – because of what that said about our pride in our work. The way we spoke – were we able to relate to different people. The way we treated the kitchen staff – did we value everybody in the company. How we were at the bar – did we offer to get some drinks or just take. How much we drank – did we have discretion and discipline? Everything was a chance for him to see what we were really like and to think whether we were a good fit for the company he was trying to build.

Everything is a test for the Christian. Those around you are looking at everything you do. They're not looking at what you know; they're looking at how you live. They're not looking at the roots; they're looking at the fruit. What difference does it make? Does Christianity "work?" Do you actually forgive people, or do you hold grudges over people? Do you like to point the faults in people and show how you're ~~"different"~~ better than them? Are you secure in your identity or are you enslaved by insecurities and anxiety. Are you someone who frees others to be who they really are around you or do they have to walk on eggshells around your neurotic behaviour? Is your life marked by joy, or by the unholy trinity; negativity, pessimism and criticism? Are you following Jesus on a constant adventure or are you trapped in a life of routine, ritual and fear of change? Is your life marked by honesty at your weaknesses and failures or by trying to bury them to seem perfect?

Simply, are <u>you</u> believable? Do you look and live any different? Are you genuine?

Discussion

James 1:1-8 – Perseverance through trials

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

What kind of trials do you think that they were facing? Why would they be tempted to quit?

How were they to find Joy in these circumstances?

Can you think of times where you have found joy and persevered through trials? How did you manage to do that – what did you do/believe/remind yourself of?

James 1:9-11; 16-18 – Trusting God's Provision

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business…

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

How can it be that the rich are in a low position and the poor are lifted up?

How do you see the world tells us the total opposite?

How do we see the church at times telling us the same as the world?

When is it hard for you to believe in God's provision? Why?

James 1:12-15 – Temptation

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person
will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 13 When
tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor
does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their
own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin,
when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

How is it that we are tempted at times to not trust in God and to sin?

Why is it that sometimes we choose the path of our temptation rather than God?

Is being tempted a sin? Why/why not?

Why does it matter how we react to temptation?

Luke 4:1-13 – The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
2 where for fourty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and
at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this
stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the
world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given
to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus
answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If
you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: "'He
will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their
hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 12 Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do
not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

What is it that the devil is tempting Jesus to – what is he trying to get him to question?

Why does the devil do this? Why did Jesus have to face this?

How does Jesus overcome this temptation? What do we learn about Jesus here?

How are we able to overcome our temptations? How can Jesus inspire us?

Review

It is often much easier to see if I'm really following and trusting in Jesus when the chips are down, when I'm facing challenges and when I don't have much else. Trials, how and whether I persevere through them will show me if I'm really believing Jesus. It's easy for me to say it when things are going great. But the message of Jesus is more about how you can know joy and contentment through trials, rather than trying to escape trials. He promises that we will not escape trials. That we must go through them to have our faith tested. So trials and tests are not to be avoided. In fact, we're able to celebrate that when we trust in God in the midst of them, and he pulls us through them, our faith is shown to be genuine. Standing strong through tests and giving us the hope needed to get through them. One of the things the non-Christians around you are looking at in you is this: do they still believe it when they're sick, or lose their job, or their kids' rebel against them, or when they lose their savings in a bad investment. Is it genuine? Does it make a difference? Does it make a difference - especially when times are tough? Or is it just talk? So tests are important at proving the genuineness of your faith and the genuineness of the work of Jesus for you and in you?

Apply

Is there an area in your life that you are being tested with/in at the moment? How are you going to get through it?

Where are you most tempted to not believe in/trust God's plans for you? How can you work to develop your faith in that area?

Meditate

1 Peter 1:3-12	A living hope
Matthew 13:1-23	The parable of the sower
Romans 5:1-11	suffering produces fruit
Hebrews 11:8-19	faith when tested
Psalm 66	Refined me like gold

#3 Hearing & Doing

Love is a verb; it ain't a thing,
it's not something you own, it's not something you scream.

When you show me love, I don't need your words
Yeah love ain't a thing, Love is a verb, Love ain't a thing, love is a verb.

Love ain't a crutch; it ain't an excuse,
No you can't get through love, on just a pile of I-O-Us

Love ain't a drug; despite what you've heard
Yeah love ain't a thing. Love is a verb, Love ain't a thing, love is a verb.

John Mayer, *Love is a verb*

Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue.

Francois de La Rochefoucauld

For me, comedy starts as a spew, a kind of explosion, and then you sculpt it from there, if at all. It comes out of a deeper, darker side. Maybe it comes from anger, because I'm outraged by cruel absurdities, the hypocrisy that exists everywhere, even within yourself, where it's hardest to see.

Robin Williams, Comedian

A practical doctrine must be practically preached, we must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again how to compose our lives as may most tend to men's salvation, as well as our sermons.



Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor, VIII, 339.*



In Focus

Following Jesus is a very practical thing, it's not just about a bunch of things we believe in our heads. That is why following Jesus is often characterised in the Bible as a "walk," "work," a "fight" and a "way." It involves all of our being. So if I'm not behaving consistently to the beliefs I say I have in my head, then my behaviour is revealing that I don't really believe those things in the first place. For example, if I act out of paranoia – listening in to other people's conversations – I show that I'm insecure about my identity; I need to know what others' think of me. And I need to make sure they think good of me. If that's how I behave, I'm not believing that (i) Jesus gets to define my identity, not others, (ii) Jesus gives me rest from doubt and insecurity, (iii) that Jesus has made me new. I'm not really believing the gospel.

If the truth of the gospel does not lead to a change in the way we actually live our life, then we have not come to really accept and apply it yet. Because the message itself calls for a change in the way we live. The message is not an idea or concept for us to agree with or not. It's a radical way of life we're called to live out. We're called to redraw our lives around the message, values and mission of Jesus. He does not ask you to agree with him, or compliment him. He asks you to submit to him as a learner to relearn life from him.

So if we're really hearing what Jesus is saying then we'll be doing it also. And if we're not doing it, it means we're not listening to Him. We need to be listening to the call of Jesus and be careful to make sure that leads to us actually doing it. Taking up our cross, forgiving one another, giving our possessions, loving our neighbours, giving our lives to His Kingdom and following him aren't ideas to think on they are commands he expects us to follow.

Discussion

James 1:19-21

19-21 Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger. So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.[46]

What do you think James means here when he says to lead with your ears?

In what ways can you see how we as Christians often don't do that? How do non-Christians feel about that? What has the fruit been?

What do you think it means to allow God to landscape your heart with his word?

In what ways do we often refuse God access to do this? Why? What is the fruit of that?

James 1:22-25

22-24 Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. *Act* on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.25 But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.

Are there some areas in your life where you listen to God's word but you don't act?

Why do you think that is?

How do you think you can spot the inconsistencies in your life?

What is the fruit of being a hearer and doer?

[46] Taken from *The Message*

Matthew 7:21-29

21-23 "Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance—isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'

24-25 "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. 26-27 "But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

28-29 When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

What is the surprise about the people that Jesus is turning away?

In what ways can we say we believe Jesus, but not really build our lives around his teaching?

Why did the crowd applaud Jesus? What was the fruit of their teachers approach with them?

How do we potentially put off unbelievers by not really living out Jesus' teaching?

James 1:26-27

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

What does true religion look like?

In what ways might we not keep a tight reign on our tongue?

What are some of the results of this?

Do we tend to take controlling the tongue as seriously as this? Why?

Why do you think James chooses widows and orphans here as an example?

Review

Following Jesus, and his teaching, is not about information and then being ejected from the earth with him. Instead it is about transformation – our transformation. Through us being made whole we are called to join Jesus as He is moving to renew the whole earth – where one day he will complete the job and dwell with us. So following Jesus is as much about doing as it is hearing.

It's a message that is a way of living. And it should affect every area of our lives. James here uses very every day, seemingly little examples – being quick to listen, slow to speak, controlling our speech, being patient and caring for the vulnerable. The reason James gives these examples (and they are not exhaustive) is they evidence a change of heart, a change of values and a change of focus. They evidence a genuine faith that really is affecting the way we live. They show that we are valuing others above ourselves, that we're caring for those others may forget.

Jesus is always calling us into a way of being, a way of living differently. And if we're truly listening to what he's saying, then we will be changing in the way that we are living.

Apply

Are there parts of your life where you don't really do what Jesus says – e.g. Gossip, bitterness, pettiness etc.? What do you think the fruit has been around unbelievers? Decide today to change.

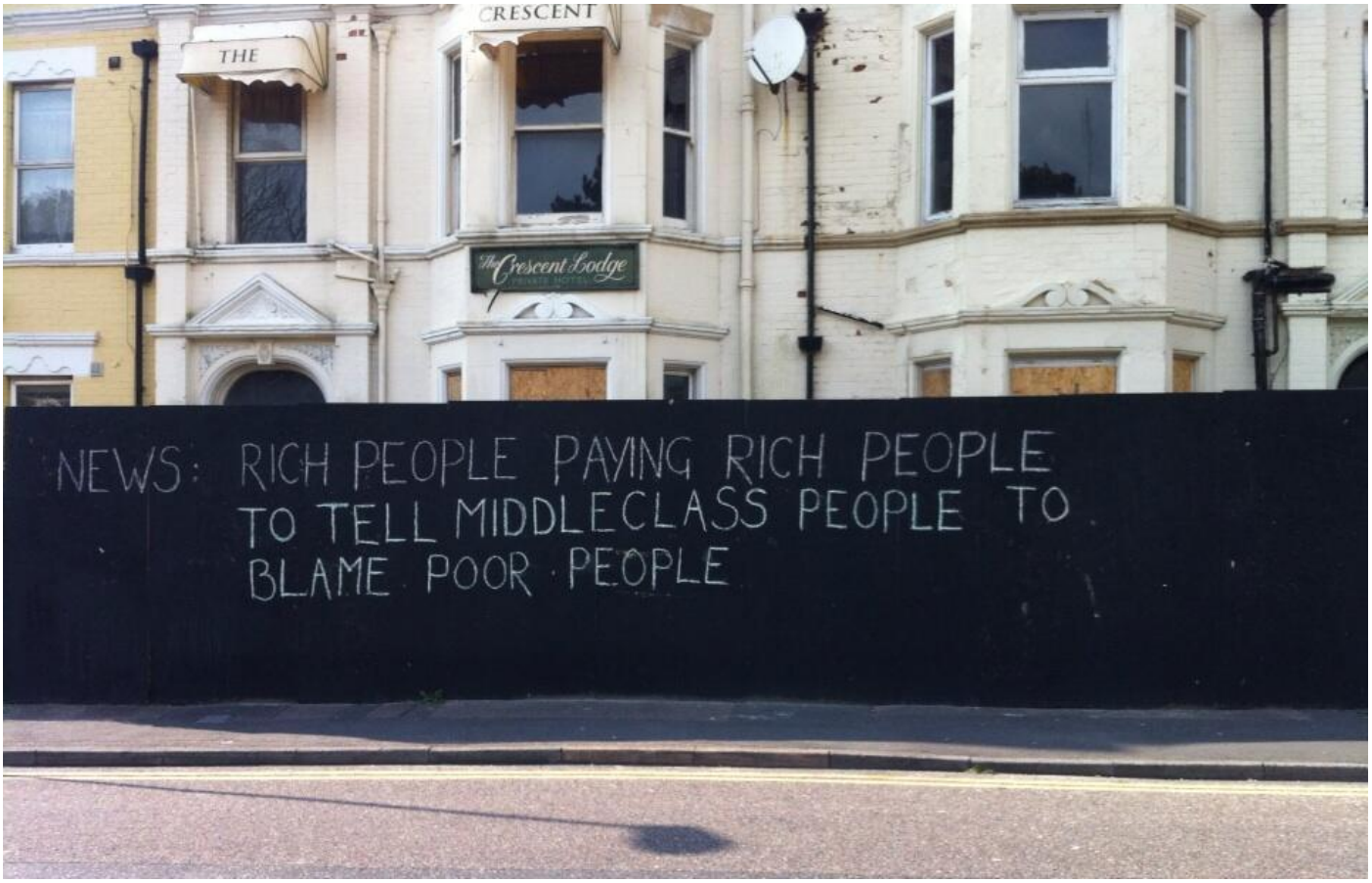
Around unbelievers, do you tend to be quicker to speak than to listen? Who is there around you who needs to be listened to?

Meditate

Jeremiah 22:1-5	God loves just leadership
Micah 6	Live justly
Romans 12	Living sacrifices
1 Thessalonians 4	A life pleasing to God
Colossians 3	Put on the new self

#4 Favouritism

Never hate your enemies; it affects your judgment.
Michael Corleone, The Godfather III, 1990.



Asking if it is okay for Christians to be rich is a strange question. It is like asking if it is okay for Christians to overeat, or watch too much TV. It may be permissible, but that doesn't mean it is a good idea. I believe Jesus came to set us free —and one of the things he wants to set us free from is our obsession with money and possessions.
Shane Claiborne, Author

One in 16 African Americans are subjected to the criminal justice system, compared to one in 106 of white people. A lot of that is drugs. The evidence, however, shows that black people don't use drugs any more [than white people]. But they are being arrested for it and charged with it [more frequently] and **some of that is implicit bias – particularly on the part of prosecutors**. Prosecutors are overcharging. **Ninety-five percent of all prosecutors are white; 88% of all lawyers in US are white.**

Paulette Brown, President of the American Bar Association

The Guardian, 'Black Americans failed by inherently biased legal system', ABA President says', 9 October 2015.

In Focus

The world is unfortunately very unfair. It is filled with inbuilt biases, built up over many years, sometimes unique to certain areas of the world. Some of these biases are easier to spot, longer-standing and harder to demolish than others. For example the biases towards the rich, white, male and heterosexual as opposed to poorer, other ethnicities, female and LGBT.

James addresses one potential source of bias (or favouritism) in particular, in this case wealth; in order to address the wider point of bias. That is because this is a particular source of tension within their community. And it is a not unfamiliar tale. They are tempted to be overly welcoming to rich people when they enter their community and offer them treatment that they would not give to poorer believers. It is easy to see how they might do this: wouldn't it be *good* to have the rich's influence? Wouldn't it be a mark of legitimacy? Wouldn't it be *good* to have the benefit of their financial giving? Wouldn't it be *good* if some of their friends joined too?

And in the midst of this they are presenting a different gospel. A gospel that is marginalising and devaluing poorer people who will not offer these "benefits." They don't get afforded the same welcome and care – because they don't offer the same return on investment. And all of a sudden the values of big business are actually replacing the values of Jesus at the heart of the life of the community. Jesus who actually loves and values people not based on what they can give him in return. This Jesus chose to come and live as a poor man, homeless. They're actually marginalising Jesus himself – who would not offer these benefits either. And so a key value at the heart of the life of the church must is not showing favouritism based on wealth, experience, background, race, class etc.

Discussion

James 2:1-4

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

How were they showing favouritism? Why do you think they were showing favouritism?

How do we sometimes show favouritism? Why do you think it is we do that?

Why is it wrong for us to show favouritism? What are we saying about God, and the Gospel?

What are some of the things (other than wealth) that we show favouritism with?

How do we need to change to be a community that doesn't show favouritism?

James 2:5-7

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Why do you think it is the poor are the ones that have been chosen by God?

How does that challenge our expectations and assumptions?

How have they dishonoured the poor? In what ways might we do that today?

Why is it they want the approval of rich people give how the rich are treating them?

Who are some of the people that we look for approval from as a church?

James 2:8-11

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you
are doing right. 9 But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as
lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty
of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall
not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a
lawbreaker.

Why have they let favouritism go and not tried to remove it – like they have with other things?

What are some of the things we are tempted to let go and not challenge?

Why do you think it is we do that?

What are some of the things we are quick to challenge? Is it always right?

Why is it wrong for us to let some things go and challenge others?

What are the consequences for us?

James 2:8-11

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13
because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy
triumphs over judgment.

What does this teach us about judgment?

What practical difference should this make to us as individuals?

What practical difference should this make to us as a community?

Review

We are all biased. We all have things we prefer above others. Truth be told, we all have people we will prefer. These prejudices are shaped by our background, upbringing and motivations. Key to breaking these favouritisms is to first admit that they are there and process why it is we are tempted to have them.

Being a community that is free of prejudice and favouritism is fundamental to being the people of God, the church. We're called to be a place that all are invited to, all are welcomed in and all are cared for in the same way. There should be not better, or worse, treatment for any one person (or kind of person) over another. Jesus' kingdom is to be one of justice, diversity and equality.

The way in which our community does life will have a huge impact upon the people who see it. If we are a community that practices favouritism; to the rich, the respectable, the educated, the white....then the message we are sending to the community arounds is that is who God loves and that is how God loves. That He loves the privileged and that he gives special privileges to those He loves. And so we grossly misrepresent God.

Apply

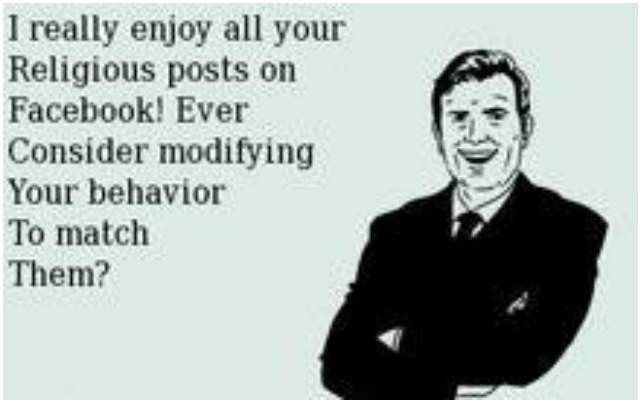
Are there certain kinds of people that you are tempted to give preferential treatment to? Why? What can you do to move beyond that into expressing God's inclusive love?

What cases of injustice and prejudice can you see in the world around you? What can you do to help challenge them?

Meditate

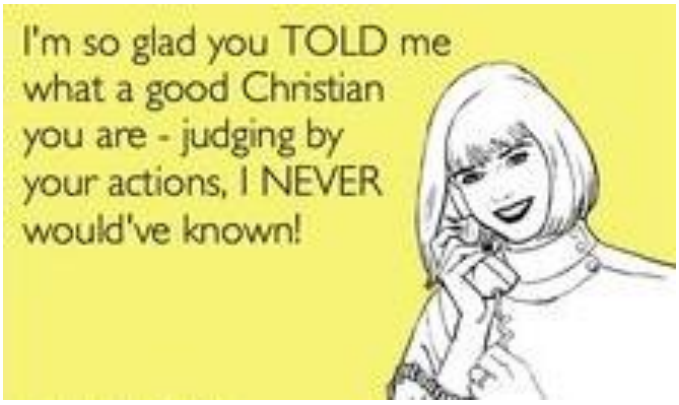
1 Timothy 5:20-25	Judge fairly
2 Chronicles 19:7-20	God is with the upright
Ephesians 2:11-22	One, but not the same
Luke 4:14-22	The Nazareth manifesto
Matthew 19:16-30	The rich and the kingdom

#5 Faith & Works

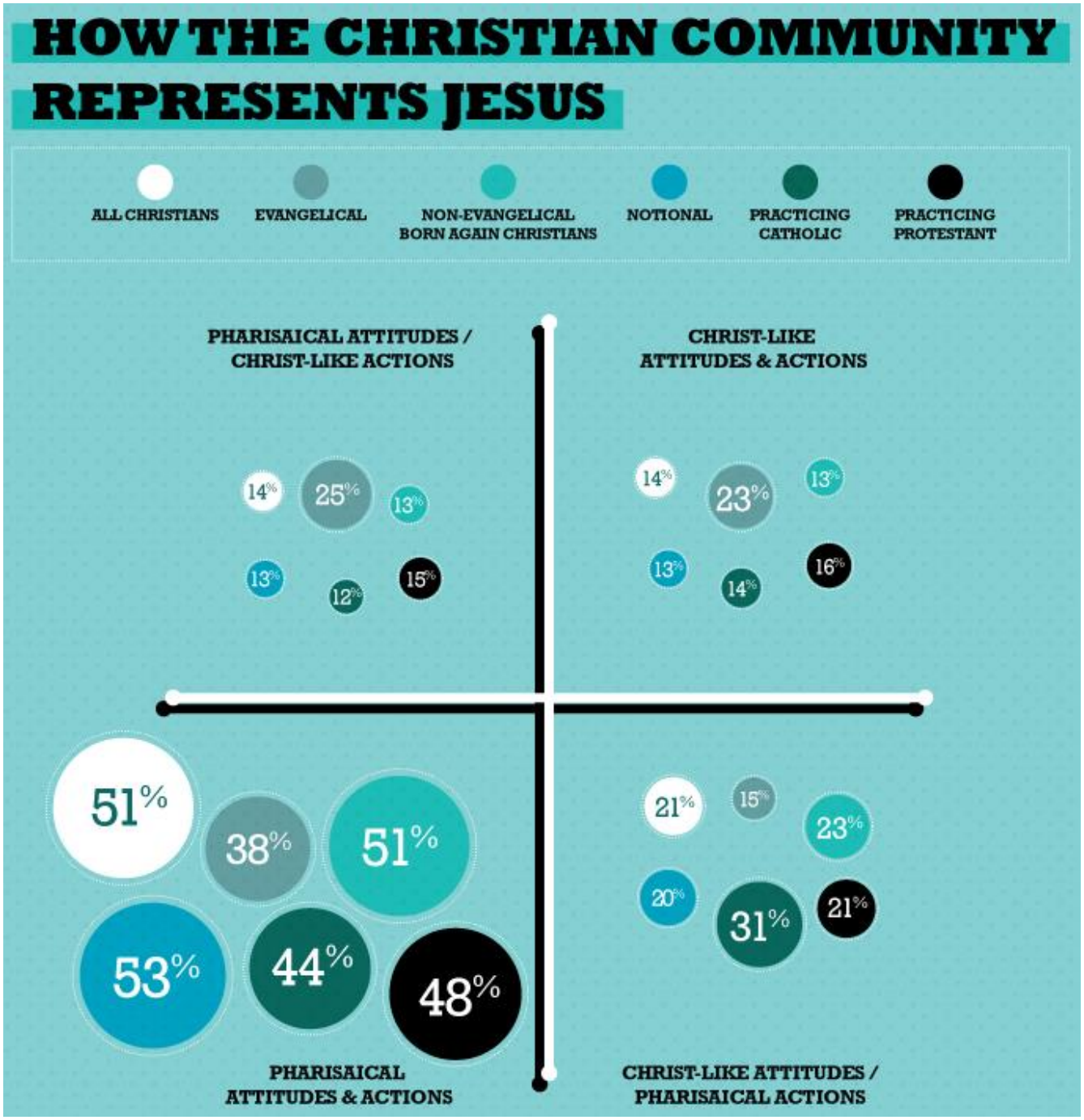


Hypocrite [hip-uh-krit] noun

1. a person who pretends to have virtues, moral or religious beliefs, principles, etc., that he or she does not actually possess, especially a person whose actions belie stated beliefs.
2. a person who feigns some desirable or publicly approved attitude, especially one whose private life, opinions, or statements belie his or her public statements.



Faith and works are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God trusts God; and he that trusts God obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith.
Charles Spurgeon



In Focus

Christians are very often known for the disconnect between what they say and what they do. Sometimes we see this in how much quicker we are to speak than to act. Other times we see it in how our behaviour does not match our words. And sometimes it is even the tone of the way we speak; in speaking about *grace*, we often are *graceless*. These things kill any chance of extending the kingdom in our community. Jesus calls us to a living faith, a faith that is fleshed out in a distinct way of living. It's not about memorising some information, it's about actually being transformed. Your behaviour therefore will reveal what you really believe, where your hope really lies. Jesus calls us to a faith that changes the whole of our person; our beliefs our motivations and affections and our behaviour. For this we need to let the Holy Spirit do this work in us and to be honest where it isn't actually happening rather than trying to pretend we're perfect.

Does James' 'justification by works' conflict with Paul's 'justification by faith'?

In terms of the wider canon, James 2:14-26 presents a seemingly conflicting portrayal of justification, compared to Paul's; 'the topic of the entire section 2:14-26 is faith in relation to works.'[47] This issue divided the reformers. Luther felt James was at odds with Paul, especially Romans; but Calvin felt they could be 'reconciled.'[48] James surmises in 2:24, 'you see that a person is justified by *works and not by faith alone*.' This appears to be at odds with Paul's declaration (Rom 3:28), 'For we hold that one is justified by *faith apart from works of the law*.' Some have suggested that James might have a different understanding of justification to Paul; however, the Greek is identical,

εξ εργων **δικαιουται**	*"...justified by works..."*	[James 2:24]
δικαιουσθαι (apart from) εργων νομου	*"justified...apart from works of the law."*	[Romans 3:28]

Paul and James are both talking about justification as a legal declaration. The Greek, δικαιο is a forensic term that would be used to describe a courtroom situation. There are other words that could be used to have other slants but they are not used. They are both talking about justification in a legal sense. They both talk of the same works of the law. So we are left with a problem. One says we're justified *by* works εργων (ergon), the other says we're justified *apart* from works εργων (ergon). Either one is right, and by very nature the other wrong, or we must find a way of reconciling both (without being unfaithful to the texts, the author's intent and logic).

Paul is right; only faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection can save. But James is also right; belief on its own will not save. In fact, the Hebrew understanding of belief really cannot imagine a person believing in something in their head and behaving inconsistently to that. This is something that Paul himself will argue; "how can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:2) In other words, if you believe that Jesus, at the cost of his life, put to death your

[47] Wiard Popkes, 'Two Interpretations of "Justification" in the New Testament: Reflections on Galatians 2:15-21 and James 2:21-25', *Studia Theologica*, 59, 2005, 132.

[48] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of James*, 276.

old life and set you free; how can you keep on doing the very things that run up that cost? Unless, you do not actually believe that. The Hebrew idea of belief was very much integrated. That is, if you believe it you do it; if you don't *do* it, you don't really *believe* in it. That is not such a hard thing to understand we often say, "if they *want* to be there, they'll *be* there; they'll find a way." This expresses the same idea. Belief and behaviour, faith and works.

Genuine faith bears fruit! Real faith is never static, it is kinetic; 'faith, which is alone the means through which *pardoning grace* justifies, is also the faith through which *empowering grace* sanctifies.'[49] 'They [good works] are the effects of faith, and, as such, the evidences both of faith, and of justification.'[50] This is expressed by Jesus himself when he declares that a tree is to be judged by its fruit (Mat 12:33). Paul expresses it by saying that those who have died to sin will no longer walk in sin (Rom 6:1-2). The two are inseparable; that is faith in Christ and Therefore James can say that you cannot have faith without works (Jas 2:26), and that such 'faith', is a dead faith (Jas 2:17). This view is consistent with much historical theology – it's not a new idea – several major creeds have recognised this same dynamic.[51] You can see them in the introduction section.

[49] John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1995, 21.
[50] James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, 357.
[51] Piper compiled these sources in *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity-Press, 1995.

Discussion

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?
Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.
16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about
their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not
accompanied by action, is dead.

How can it be that we are saved by faith, but faith without works will not save?

What does it say about our faith when we don't look to actually meet people's needs?

What are some of the ways where you are tempted to say "go in peace" but not **do** anything?

Why do you think that is?

Why is it that faith without works is dead? What does that mean?

James 2:18-19

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe
that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

What do you think James means here?

Why do some want to say "You have faith; I have deeds"?

Why is that a problem?

How do we see some of that same spirit around us today?

How do we begin to approach engaging, in a positive way, with that way of being with people?

James 2:20-26

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not
our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on
the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was
made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham
believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.
24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did
when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body
without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

How was Abraham saved by his works; wasn't he saved by faith?

How does James explain the connection between works and faith?

How can we be saved by faith alone and also by works?

What other examples can you find of people being saved by what they did in the Bible?

If we were to look at the balance between our works and our faith how do you think we would come out? Do you think we would be imbalanced? How so?

Review

We very often do not reflect Jesus' life and teachings well. Jesus was a man who was radically humble and gracious. He was unafraid to associate with those most people would want to avoid. One of his titles is "friend of sinners." How many of us are really known as friends of sinners? How many of us instead are known for judging sinners? At the same time Jesus calls us to really be transformed in all our life by his very different values given in his good news. How many of us are known for being really like Jesus? The tragedy is that this combination – being quick to judge and speak out on others failings and our own inability (often plain unwillingness) to live out Jesus' message – makes us necessarily hypocrites. In this context, people have (understandably) become much less willing to be honest about their life, and therefore vulnerable. So instead we fake it. And we pretend we're ok; when we all know we're not. And so our community can become false and honestly, pretty toxic. We're called to be community living out this distinct lifestyle together, helping one another with our weaknesses. And our posture therefore becomes one which is honest, open, vulnerable, non-judgmental, inclusive, gracious, forgiving, and patient. It becomes, as it's meant to be, an attractive and provocative

Apply

Are there some concerns and injustices and needs in this community that are in your heart to do something about but that currently we just say "go in peace" to? What might you be able to do to actually meet those needs?

What is the balance like in your life between works and faith? What can you do to get balance?

Meditate

Romans 9:6-29	God's choice
Ephesians 2	God's work
Colossians 3:1-17	New Identity
Hebrews 11	Faith does something
Philippians 2:12-18	Work it out

#6 The tongue

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.
John F. Kennedy, 35th President of United States

All I need is a sheet of paper and something to write with, and then I can turn the world upside down.
Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosopher

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.
Mother Teresa

In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.
Martin Luther King Jr.

No matter what people may tell you, words and ideas can change the world.
Robin Williams 

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.
George Orwell, *1984* 

In Focus

James now turns his focus to address a specific problem he seems to have become aware of among them; that some were overestimating their progress. He tells them – not many of you should presume to be teachers. Why? He calls them to look at their speech and see how it disqualifies some of them from leadership. The leader (actually everybody) deals in the currency of language. It is your words that reveal your thoughts, your desires, your motivations, your health, your person. And the problem seems to be that, as is so often the case, the words of some of these people were catching them out and catching up with them.

Words have the power to build someone up and have the potential to destroy them too. The skill and wisdom of the leader is knowing how to employ words effectively. To speak at the right time and to stay silent at the right moment. To have a well-timed encouragement or a constructive correction. Some are not fit to lead because they have not learnt to use their words effectively. And in fact, there words are even revealing inconsistency in their faith. James' point is, "how can you *possibly* be a freshwater source made and emanating from Jesus the saviour and yet pour forth salty, sour curses at the same time?" You cannot be both. It may just well be that you find yourself to really be a saltwater pond. Words are a window to the soul. And if we listened to yours what would we see? The overall message though is not one of simple criticism, but a call to again submit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit who will make us freshwater springs, giving refreshment to all for the glory of God and the joy of others.

Commentary Corner

What/Who is a "teacher"?

To understand the significance of the 'teacher' we must remember James' Jewish heritage. The Greek διδάσκαλοι (didaskaloi – teacher), carries far more meaning than modern understanding. James is talking not just about an activity but a role; in the New Testament those that governed the church were the teachers. He is talking about the office of leadership that is seen expressed in teaching; only 'overseers' (leaders) are expected to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). The link between teaching and leadership is noticeable throughout the New Testament and could be rooted in the Old Testament (Ezra 7:6-21; Nehemiah 8:1-8). Paul marries the roles of pastoring and teaching (Ephesians 4:11), Paul preaches and makes plain (Ephesians 3:8-9), Jesus links 'making disciples' and 'teaching to obey' (Matthew 28:19-20), Paul sees his role as Apostle, herald and teacher (1 Timothy 2:7). Rawls claims James was writing, 'to those in the church who held positions of instruction and leadership.'

Various counter-interpretations of 'teacher' exist. Calvin felt it was those seeking opportunity to correct or reprove others; translating 'teachers', 'masters'. He identifies this as a common Greco-Roman understanding. He concludes; those who judge like this are judged more strictly, by their own standards. This is Biblically true (Romans 2:17-24), but it is not the message of the passage, διδάσκαλοι (teacher) is not used in this sense. The argument is a lesser to greater; we should all walk in works of love, and even more so if we are teachers. A second view sees διδάσκαλοι addressing any expression of teaching role; parents, schoolteachers, lecturers and church leaders are all in view. However, we have established that James has the gathered church in mind; implying church leaders exercising teaching roles are in mind. Specifically, James has the elder/overseers (1 Peter 5:1-2), and especially those who serve as pastor/teachers (Ephesians 4:11), in mind. Despite the three labels, James has one office in mind, 'the various words are used interchangeably to refer to the same person in the same office.'

Qualification & Accountability: Why should they not presume to be leaders?

'The common… universal interpretation of this passage is, that the Apostle discourages the desire for the office of teaching.' It has been suggested that there should only be a few teachers in the church. The passage has been seen as equivalent to Jesus' charge, 'do not judge or you too will be judged' (Matthew 7:1). However, the New Testament encourages aspiration to leadership. James is not discouraging aspiration to the role per se. Instead James focuses attention upon the characters of the aspirants; the problem is with the aspirants, they are not qualified in character.

Scripture outlines rigorous character and gift qualifications for leaders, a pastor must be blameless (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), compassionate (Hebrews 5:2), consistent (Romans 2:21), courageous (Acts 20:22-24), full of the Spirit (Acts 4:8, 6:3,5, 11:24; Galatians 2:8), live

an exemplary life (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 2:7; James 3:16; 1 Peter 5:1), be a good teacher (Titus 2:1) and be humble (2 Corinthians 4:5) to name a few. Since, 'leaders are prone, very prone to sin', they must have strong characters to withhold temptation. These aspiring leaders/leaders were causing trouble in the church. James 3:1-12 may parallel these passages and especially 2 Timothy 2:14-17. James is asking those who aspire to leadership consider their characters, are they fit? Perhaps existing leaders needed to step down as a result. The tongue is not the exhaustive test, but for James this is the litmus test; the tongue says the heart's thoughts. Leaders will be exposed by their tongues; 'that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their [the church's] ears.' Whoever aspires to lead must be qualified in character and gifting (2 Timothy 2:2). Or the church will contract gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17).

But further, they are storing up judgment for themselves! Scripture pictures leaders as role models; 'remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith' (Hebrews 13:7). Leaders can 'unpreach' their sermons by ungodly living. Leaders must preach by mouth and life, 'a practical doctrine must be practically preached.' Leaders who fail at this, face judgment. The judgment (3:1) is not a meritorious judgment related to salvation, but accountability for the shepherding of God's people. Leaders are held accountable 'for the righteousness of the people.' They will be judged on how well the church live, because they are the example they will follow. James may have had 'two courts in mind'. The human court where the community sought to silence Christian leaders, and the heavenly one where leaders are held 'accountable for the righteousness of the people.' However, the heavenly court is James' focus.

The structure of James 3:1-12

1.0 Statement

2.0 Explanation

3.0 Making the case

James now explains his initial statement further, employing six metaphors to develop his argument. Each one builds upon the last and develops the argument into a slightly new realm.

1 Horses

A simple bit in the mouth controls the horse, the most powerful animal and tool known to man. From the control of the mouth a powerful force is controlled. The tongue is to be viewed in the same way.

2 Ships

Again developing the last metaphor, a tiny tongue shaped rudder controlled the course of ships. In a similar way, the tongue can direct the course of your life, for good or bad.

3 Forest Fires

A devastating forest fire can be caused by the tiniest of sparks. In a similar way a small word said can cause mass devastation in someone's life.

4 Animals

Many wild animals can be tamed and domesticated, but such is the power of the tongue, no-one can totally control their tongue.

5 & 6 Fresh water salt water, figs and olives.

From our mouths can come fresh water that refreshes and strengthens the hearer (encouragement), and bitter salt water (judgment), foul tasting and degenerative. It is wrong that both things should come from our mouths. Further, those who are naturally Judgmental produce encouragement; just as a fig tree will not bear olives, a grapevine cannot produce figs and salt water sources cannot produce fresh water.

Statement:

[a] 1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers,

Explanation:

[b] because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Fleshing out the Case (Six Metaphors):

2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

[1] *3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.*

[2] *4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.*

[3] *Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

[4] *7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*

[5 & 6] *11 Can both fresh water and salt[a] water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

Rounding it up: The message of James 3:1-12

Several scholars agree that 3:1-12 is a rhetorical unit, which I have outlined. Vouga sees "the wise and understanding" (3:13), as paralleling "teachers" (3:1), so that it completes the discussion. I agree with Martin, Ropes, and Wanke; it continues the theme but also marks a new section. In verse 1 [a] James issues the statement, then he issues the reason (1 [b]), then he develops his case using six metaphors (3-12); horses (3), ships (4), forest fires (5-6), animals (7), fresh water & salt water, figs & olives (9-12). This section is skilfully crafted and employs excellent Greek.

The first two metaphors are paired together. James says that horses, the most powerful agricultural and military tool known to man, are controlled simply by a bit in the mouth. By controlling the tongue we control the whole body! The next metaphor is ships. Ships have three factors that make them difficult to control, they are 'so large', 'driven by strong winds', and are 'steered by a very small rudder'. The tongue likewise is very small, and yet has the ability to steer lives, and for the leaders, to steer the church. The ship is alluding to the church leader. The leaders' words will either steer the church on its course or off into storms!

The next metaphor is fires. James shows that only a tiny spark is needed to create a devastating forest fire. The tongue sends tiny sparks (jokes, insults, judgments, put-downs), which cause mass devastation to the church body (3:5-6). The next metaphor is animals. Man has learned how to control many inanimate (ships 3:4) and animate things (animals 3:3, 7), but not the tongue. Nobody can perfectly 'tame' his or her tongue (3:8). James then combines the metaphors of water and fruit. A water source that gives off salt water (insults, arrogance etc.) has become contaminated; it can no longer give off fresh water (encouragement, compliments etc.). A fig tree cannot produce olives, a leopard cannot change its spots; if you are a salt-water giver, you cannot suddenly change in leadership.

The leader should consider their calling soberly. Can they keep themselves under control, setting a good example? Can they preach with their life? Can they use words to steer the church into righteousness? Can they avoid the collateral damage wreaked by thoughtless words? Can they give cool, refreshing, life bringing words from God, or will they give rancid salt water? If the believer is called to have a living, acting, loving faith, which is evidenced, not exhaustively but significantly by the use of the tongue, how much more should the church's leaders exhibit this faith? There is no more pertinent issue of conduct than the tongue; 'since words are the teacher's trade and the tongue is his/her tool, James reminds the teacher to choose words with great care, because words exercise a power disproportionate to their size and substance.' Nobody will be perfect at taming their tongue, James affirms, 'no human being can tame the tongue' (Jas 3:8). His statement that 'anyone who does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man' (Jas 3:2), is irony! But a good leader will use their words for good not evil since, 'their words – more than the words of others – are crucial to the spiritual formation of the faith community.'

The qualities Paul lists can only be verified by other people i.e. the church! The church must call leaders, because they live exemplary lives, of which the tongue is a litmus test. The church should ask questions of aspiring leaders. What do they talk about? Who do they talk about? How do they talk? Why do they talk? Answers reveal the heart clearer than a sermon. Words reveal the carcinogens to Godly leadership; divisiveness (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:10), boastfulness (2 Corinthians 11:12-15; 2 Peter 2:18), greed (2 Peter 2:3), inconsistency (Galatians 2:11-14), not worshipping Jesus (2 Peter 2:1-2; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3-4), unaccountability (Titus 1:10), sinful living (Titus 1:16). Words also reveal the catalysts of Godly leadership; the ability to teach (2 Timothy 2:24), kindness (2 Timothy 2:24), gentleness (2 Timothy 2:25), contentment (Philippians 4:11-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:5), toughness (1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:14), boldness (Acts 20:22-23; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 1:21), trustworthiness (1 Corinthians 4:2) and the ability to admit mistakes (2 Corinthians 12:11-13; 2 Timothy 4:11). Words reveal the heart; this is James' real concern, because well leaders lead well; well leaders are few, called, and qualified.

Discussion

James 3:1-2

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

Why is it that they should not seek to become teachers?

How do we make sense of this, considering we are elsewhere told that desiring to become a leader is a good thing?

What does it mean that leaders will be more strictly judged? What will they be judged on?

Is it possible to be perfect in your speech? Why?

How is it that by controlling your speech you can control your body?

James 3:3-6

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

How do we see some of what James is talking about here happen in life?

What are some of the ways of speaking (and the heart behind them) that cause this kind of damage?

Being honest, do we as Christians actually take the way we speak this seriously?

What things do we tend to take more seriously than speech? Why? Is that always right?

James 3:7-8

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Why do you think it is that no one is able to tame their tongue?

Where do we see the evidence around us that no one is able to perfectly tame their tongue?

As Christians are we always better at this than non-Christians? Why?

James 3:9-12

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

In what ways can we curse people with our words?

Why do you think it is that we use our words in these negative ways sometimes?

What are we believing in those moments?

In what ways can we bless people with our words?

What would it take for our speech to go to being more refreshing to others?

Review

You can tell a lot about a person from the way they use words. When they use them and when they recognise the need to listen. What tone they use. The discretion they exercise (or not) with them. The tone that is used. How what they say reflects to the truth. Whether they seem to flow out without thought or they are in fact considered.

The tongue is not the be all and end all, but it is a pretty good barometer of who we really are; what we really think, how we really feel and what really motivates us. So it makes sense as a place to start to check whether we're really living out the message of Jesus. Do our words tally with what Jesus teaches us and commands us? Are we consistent with Him, or even ourselves?

If we're following Jesus then we'll have very distinct speech, because it will be like him; gracious, patient, not flippant, non-judgmental, encouraging, funny, generous, kind, sensitive to the situation, challenging...And the way we speak and how much we speak will be different. This is important because it's not just about our speech changing, it's actually about our very heart, motivations and affections changing to be like his.

Apply

Is there a particular area of speech that, being honest, is a problem for you – e.g. gossip, criticism, negativity...? What can you do to go from life-taking with your words to life-giving?

From your everyday speech how obvious would your devotion to Jesus be? How can you make your speech more effective and distinct?

Meditate

Job 19	How long will you crush me with words?
Ephesians 4:25-32	pure speech
Matthew 12:30-37	The mouth speaks what the heart is full of
Matthew 15:1-21	What comes out of your mouth is what is unclean

Proverbs 10:14/11:9/12:13-14/13:3/14:3/15:2/18:6-7/18:21/21:23

#7 Wisdom

In politics and in life, ignorance is not a virtue, it's not cool to not know what you're talking about. That's not keeping it real or telling it like it is. That's not challenging political correctness. That's just not knowing what you're talking about. And yet, we've become confused about this.
Barack Obama, 44th President of United States

I'm glad these organisations aren't on my side, I think people in this country have had enough of experts, saying that they know what is best.
Michael Gove, Conservative MP



"Listen, I'm no expert, but I still want you to listen to me ramble on about this for a while."

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important things is not to stop questioning.
Albert Einstein, Physicist

True wisdom comes to each of us when we realise how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.
Socrates, Philosopher

In Focus

When we think of wisdom we tend to think of knowledge, of people who know lots of information; to be wise is to be informed. And certainly wisdom is not less than that. It is not being uninformed. But wisdom surely is about more than having the facts, that is information. Wisdom is about knowing what to do with them. And that includes being informed but it reaches to the depths of your character, who *are* you? What will you *do* about it?

Knowledge that is disconnected from our behaviour is not wisdom. The one who may know a lot of information but who is arrogant and thinks they know everything is not wise. The beginning of wisdom is the realisation of how little we know, or are ever capable of knowing. And this will always lead to a humility and a consideration. Fools rush in to a statement or freeze for fear of making a mistake. The wise make a considered and deliberate decision. Wisdom knows when to just listen to someone. Wisdom knows when a defensive response is not needed. Wisdom is being able to see everyone's point of view.

True wisdom actually leads to a very different way of life. One that builds up and does not destroy relationships. One that looks out for the interests of others too. One that leads to bringing people together, not simply your own ambitions. This kind of wisdom is in short supply and the message here is that God, through the Holy Spirit, will bring this wisdom that will make a real practical difference to your life – for the benefit not only of yourself (though it will benefit you) but for the whole community.

Discussion

James 3:13-16

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds
done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish
ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not
come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and
selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

What does the world think makes someone wise?

Who is seen as wise in our world?

Why does James say these people aren't really wise? What does that tell you about wisdom?

Why is it that envy and selfish ambition lead to disorder?

Can you think of some examples of this you have seen?

How does following the way of Jesus lead us to behave differently?

James 3:17-18

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate,
submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in
peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

What's the difference between Godly wisdom and worldly wisdom?

What difference does worldly wisdom make? What difference does Godly wisdom make?

How do we see a kind of wisdom in Jesus? What is it like? How is it different to the wise in his day?

In what ways can you see how sometime we're striving for the same kind of worldly wisdom?

Why do you think that is – why is it sometimes we're afraid/reluctant to follow Jesus' example?

Review

For all in these early Christian communities, wisdom was seen as important and needed. How were they to live in the light of what Jesus had done? What things of the old order could they now dispense with? What were still essential to the life of a disciple? In the midst of this it seems, as is so often the case, this wisdom had been reduced to pure information. The very ones who may have known the most were sometimes proving themselves to actually be unwise in the way they were speaking, carrying themselves and dealing with others.

In our day there is something of a distrust of knowledge. We see formal education painted as the poor little brother of "street smart." But wisdom combines both those aspects. Because it's not about being uninformed, or even intimidated by formal education but neither is it about information that makes no practical difference to life. Wisdom is often about knowing what to do with the information and situation in front of you. So it should lead to you living wisely; building relationships, encouraging others, navigating conflict, avoiding unnecessary arguments, seeing others' points of view, not rushing to speak, listening to people's stories, working with different people and brokering peace.

Apply

How are you seeking to grow in wisdom in your life? – What are you reading, who are you listening to, what are you thinking about.....

Do you have a tendency to have a wisdom that looks like this worldly wisdom – what can you do to change to have a more Godly wisdom like Jesus?

Meditate

Matthew 7	A different kind of teaching
Ecclesiastes 7	Wisdom
Proverbs 3	Trust in the Lord
1 Corinthians 1:10-31	Wisdom & Power
Matthew 5:1-12	The Beatitudes

#8 The heart

Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead.
Oscar Wilde, Author

Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.
C.S. Lewis, Author

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.
Martin Luther King Jr.

In Focus

Arguably the single biggest problem the church in the west has faced in the last two generations is about credibility. It is not that society is that much worse than it used to be. It is not that the message of Jesus is less attractive. It is not that we just need to get better at presenting it. Our crisis is a crisis of credibility. People find Christians unbelievable.

Specifically I mean that people are not compelled, or in any way convinced by us, by our way of life. And when non-Christians express this, which they do, what they mean to say is your doctrine is better than your worship, your talk is better than your walk; we don't look much like Jesus in our living. And we lose all credibility. Because it doesn't seem to make any difference whatsoever to how we actually live. We talk about the hope of the gospel, the forgiveness of Jesus, the security of our identity and future in Christ, the comfort of the Spirit, the grace of Jesus. And all the while we are downbeat and risk averse, we fear other people, we have no hope for redemption for our communities, we're petty, unforgiving, impossible to work with, we're among the most insecure people on the planet, we're pathologically anxious, fretful and fearful of change and the future, we're tactless, don't listen, judgmental, think we know it all and quick to look down on anyone who lives differently.

This all comes down to we love the same things as the world that we hate. We need to be honest about that and we need to instead be shaped by the values of Jesus.

In John 3:16 it says, "God so loved the world." But in 1 John 2:15, same writer says; "love not the world," due to the things that are in the world. So which is it? It says God so loved the world, but then it says I'm not to love the world. Which is it?

Well, it depends on the meaning of the word 'world.' In John 3:16 God is talking about the people of the world, and in 1 John 2:15-16 he's talking about the values system of the world. We are to love the people and hate the values system.

You know what the problem is? We do the exact opposite. We hate the people and we love the values system. Every advertisement is built on these three values:

*15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,** and **the pride of life**—comes not from the Father but from the world.* [1 John 2:15-16]

The lust of the flesh is the temptation **to feel.** "I want to feel good." People think lust of the flesh is sex, oh yeah it's sex, but it's so much more than that. It could be television, it could be food, it could be drugs...

The lust of the eyes is the temptation **to have**. I see it, and I want it. The lust of the flesh is greed, the lust of the eyes is possession...to think the opposite of what Jesus said: "a man's life consists not in the abundance of things that he possesses."

The pride of life is the temptation **to be**. It is "I want to be." I want to be loved, I want to be known, I want to be famous. No really...I want to be worshiped. I want other people to think I'm better than them. That is the pride of life; the temptation to be.

It is passion, possession, position. It is sex, it is salary and it is status. Every single advertisement ever made appeals to one of those three temptations.

Rick Warren
At Resurgence Conference 2013



Discussion

James 4:1-6

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."

Why is it that they were having fights and divisions?

Why was it that they loved the same things as the world around them?

What things does the world tell us to love? How do some of those things run against what Jesus teaches us?

What are some of the things that we in churches tend to love (which we shouldn't)?

What effect does this have on those who are not yet Christians or part of the church?

James 4:7-12

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?

Who is it that James is here addressing? Why might that be a surprise?

Are you surprised at James' tone here?

How does our tone differ when we're talking to believers and not-yet-believers?

How do not-yet-believers expect us to be with them? What can we do to be more effective?

Review

The honest truth is that Christians very often love the very things and values that are loved in the world around us. Most of our problems, divisions, tensions and conflicts come down to us not being different. Jesus calls us to have our values turned completely upside down. If we really allowed Jesus in to do this for us then we would see far less needless conflict. There would still be some, since there are times when other people's demands or expectations are wrong, inconsistent or out of step with the gospel.

The church would be a much more compelling and provocative community if we were truly shaped by the good news of Jesus in every area of our life. That is one of the reasons the early church grew so explosively; they were modelling a very different way of life and the teachings of Jesus and his apostles really was forming the basis of the way they lived all of their lives.

Too often today, Jesus is just kept in a box alongside all of the other things that we let control our life. Instead of being driven by his values, we follow him a little bit but mostly make it up ourselves the rest of the time – this is a cause of conflict and a block to growth.

Apply

Of the three temptations that Rick Warren spoke of at the beginning, which do you find the biggest struggle? Why?

What can you do to get to a place where, in that area, you are following the call of Jesus rather than the call of the world?

Meditate

Proverbs 4	Above all guard your heart
Matthew 6	Where is your treasure?
1 John 4:7-21	Love one another
1 Timothy 4:6-16	Train yourself for godliness
Psalm 51	Create in me a clean heart

#9 Life-plans

The truth is you don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. Life is a crazy ride and nothing is guaranteed.
Eminem, Rapper 

In the end it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.
Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of USA 

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'
Martin Luther King Jr. 

I went to the woods [he lived for two years in a forest] because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.
Henry David Thoreau, Author/Philosopher 

The Lord has a plan. We always think the plans are A, B, C and D, and everything is going to be perfect for us and it may not be that way, but it's still His plan.
Tony Dungy, Superbowl winning NFL coach

Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.
Augustine of Hippo

In Focus

What difference does following Jesus make to your life? Is faith another compartment of your life alongside the others; work life, home life, family life, social life, love life... Something that competes alongside all the other aspects of your life for your time. Something that comes out when it suits, like when your career isn't a success, or your love life is a mess or when you feel insecure. Does it seem to drift into irrelevance when the other aspects of your life are going well? Does your faith in Jesus affect your decision making and planning in life? Do you give it the importance that it actually affects how you're going to live? Or is it an afterthought? Is Jesus there just to approve the decisions you've *already* made, *without* him, for *your* benefit, to possess the things you *really* care about?

Jesus could not be clearer that the life of faith, of following him, of being his disciple means that he is everything. He is not to be one compartment alongside the others. He's not to be a token we pay shoddy homage to for two hours a week. As if he's that stupid. He says to take up your cross and follow him, to leave behind family if you have to, to leave behind jobs and livelihoods if he asks; he asks you to submit your life to him. So that our faith in Jesus and calling to follow him in all of life as a disciple and to make disciples of others is what governs our plans and decision making. So who I marry, where I work, what I do for work, how I spend my time, where I live, how I use the resources God has given should all be informed by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The end result isn't always *doing different things* but we will end up *doing things differently*!

Discussion

James 4:13-14

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

For most people how do they come to most of their big life decisions?

How does the world around us tell us we should live? Why?

Being honest, have there been times you've made decisions/plans without God being in it?

How did that go?

Why is it we actually need to seek wisdom and leading for God for our lives?

Why is it sometimes we are all tempted not to let God really lead our lives?

What can you tell from the plans of the people in the passage?

James 4:15-17

15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

It says "if it's the Lords will then..." do we really believe that?

What is it they were boasting about?

Why were they boasting? Why was it wrong?

What things are we as Christians tempted to boast about? Why is it wrong?

Why is it that those who boast in churches seem to be let off?

Why is it wrong to not live the way we know we're told to live by God?

Why is it we're tempted not to do it?

What can we do to encourage each other to live the life God has called us to?

Review

We often like to put Jesus in a neat box and reduce following him to just one part of our life. That's because, truth be told, we would actually rather focus on career, or getting that house we really like, or having the perfect family, or the social life and hobbies we enjoy or maybe just retreating to our own space. And Jesus might get in the way of that if we give him too much room. It's not that these things are wrong in and of themselves. And it's not that Jesus would call you not to care about work, family, relationships and recreation. But he's calling you to live all of life through him.

Imagine two glass jars. The first is full of coloured balls, these represent all the different areas of your life (family, faith, career, romantic etc.) This is how we often try to live. Jesus is calling us to the 2nd jar. The second jar has a filter above it, that filter represents Jesus call to be a disciple who makes disciples. Now, everything that enters that jar, all the different aspects of our lives, have to pass through that calling. He's not calling you to abandon your life, but to run everything first through the filter of that primary calling on your life to be a disciple who makes disciples through all the different things you do, roles you play and responsibilities you carry.

Apply

Being honest, does following Jesus tend to be just another area of your life?

What would your life look like if your calling to Christ became the filter through which you made all your life-plans and decisions?

Meditate

Psalm 90	Number my days aright
Luke 14:25-35	The cost
Deuteronomy 6	Love him with everything you've got
Luke 9:51-62	Don't look back
Acts 16:6-10	Listening to the Spirit

#10 Money Problems

Especially at risk are the impressionable 18- to 29-year-olds who are largely tuning in and spending whatever time and little money they have to feel more aligned with their favourite reality stars. Many young adults are watching from their parents' living rooms or basements, longing for the day they can live independently. This group is struggling to find work or, perhaps, stringing together a few part-time jobs to make ends meet. Others are saddled with insurmountable debt. Taking a break to watch the Kardashian sisters fight over, say, a missing Birkin bag from Kim's closet, **is at best, some escapism. At worst, it sends the message that when you're rich, you, too, can afford to be neglectful of a $25,000 handbag. Isn't wealth fun?**

Farnoosh Torabi, *When watching the wealthy a fictional barrier is healthier, in New York Times*



Lesson number 1: never underestimate the other guy's greed.



Frank Lopez, *Scarface,* 1983.

Yeah, you know, it occurs to me that the best way you hurt rich people is by turning them into poor people

Billy Ray Valentine, Trading Places, 1983.



The United States have developed a new weapon that destroys people, but it leaves buildings standing, it's called the stock market.



Jay Leno, US Talk show host

Money, get away; Get a good job with more pay and you're O.K.
Money, it's a gas; Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash
New car, caviar, four star daydream, Think I'll buy me a football team

Money, get back; I'm all right, Jack, keep your hands off of my stack.
Money, it's a hit; don't give me that do goody good bull****
I'm in the hi-fidelity first class traveling set, and I think I need a Lear jet

Money, it's a crime; Share it fairly but don't take a slice of my pie
Money, so they say, Is the root of all evil today
But if you ask for a rise it's no surprise that they're giving none away

Pink Floyd, *Money*, 1973.

In Focus

Money has an almost irresistible allure to it. For some it is the power that comes with it, for some the status, for some the opportunities, for some the lifestyle, for some the chance to give their children all they didn't have. People have different reasons for wanting it, but we all want it. That doesn't change automatically when you become a Christian. There are movements within Christianity that cater, almost entirely, to this concern. What has become known as the prosperity movement will tell you that Jesus wants you rich too. And if you'll follow them and invest into their ministries, then Jesus will just have to make you rich. The results are ugly. Discipleship is reduced to a get-rich-quick scheme and the mission of God becomes those who have having more. The idea of being called to give your life to bring the kingdom to others is alien.

Jesus calls us to pursue a life of simplicity. It is not easy to have money. Because immediately you will be less likely to see your need of Jesus. You will be tempted to rely on your ability to provide all your needs through the opportunities your money affords. Having money is not a problem, being rich is. You get rich by hoarding. You get rich by becoming wilfully blind to others' needs around you. If you have more money than you need that isn't a sin. But the reason you have it is to redistribute it to those who don't have enough to get by. You are not given that wealth by God simply to hoard it for yourself. To do that is to see yourself as more valuable than others; they don't deserve to be able to get by too. And that is not to see yourself, and others, how God sees them. And it is to neglect the calling you have on your life to love your neighbour. But we struggle, because we all want to be rich, because we're told we should so much. So we need to pray that we could see things as God sees them and avoid this temptation.

Discussion

James 5:1-6

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.
2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are
corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have
hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed
your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of
the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have
fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the
innocent one, who was not opposing you.

What is the difference between being rich and having money?

Why is being rich something actually to be avoided not sought?

How were the rich abusing people here?

How do we see the abuse of the rich in our world today?

Considering the way the rich are treating people why were the church seeking to please the rich (chapter 2)?

James 5:7-9

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits
for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You
too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against
one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

How is Jesus' message to us different to that of the world? What is the hope that we are to look to?

Being honest, is this actually the message that we want to hear or actually listen to? Is it sometimes the case that we are just as much focused on money as the world?

James 5:10-12

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets
who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have
persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally
brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

What examples can you think of that show patience in the face of suffering?

How did those people get through it? Did they feel they were losing out? Why/why not?

Review

It is not wrong to be careful with money, it's not wrong to budget carefully, it's not wrong to avoid overspending and debt and it's not wrong to pursue promotions. In fact, this could all be good stewardship. However, if it becomes something that dominates your thinking and living, it is going to stop the work of God in you. Because financial uncertainty is not a reason to ignore the call of God. And pursuing selfish financial betterment is not your life calling. If you don't have much money you're called to learn contentment with what you have. If anything, you have avoided the trap of the rich; the trap of thinking you can meet all your needs. If you do have more money than you need you are called to put that money to work for the kingdom of God. You have the responsibility of redistributing that money for the good of the kingdom and to bless your community. You are not called to hoard it like some oligarch. In fact, the idea of being rich and Christian are opposed. They are different wroldviews. You can have money, yes, but the point of it is to share it – so that you're never rich (even if your income is large). This is where the rubber really hits the road for disciples of Jesus, since they say, "the wallet is the last thing to be converted."

Apply

Being honest, have/are finances an area that you have struggled to give to God? Make the decision to give your finances to God

If God was to bless you with money where would you give it? Change your approach today from looking to get it to hoard it, to looking how to let go of it.

Meditate

Philippians 4:10-20	My God will supply all your needs
Malachi 3:6-12	Bring it all in
Matthew 6:25-34	Don't worry
1 Timothy 6:3-21	Godliness with contentment is great gain
Deuteronomy 15:1-11	Be open handed

#11 Prayer of Faith

Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.
St. Augustine of Hippo

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.
Thomas Aquinas

There is nothing that wastes the body like worry, and one who has any faith in God should be ashamed to worry about anything whatsoever.
Mahatma Gandhi

True prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that - it is spiritual transaction with the Creator of Heaven and Earth.
Charles Spurgeon

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to bf alive without breathing.
Martin Luther

Well I never pray, but tonight I'm on my knees yeah
I need to hear some sounds that recognize the pain in me, yeah
I let the melody shine, let it cleanse my mind, I feel free now
But the airways are clean and there's nobody singing to me now

'Cause it's a bittersweet symphony, this life
Try to make ends meet, try to find some money then you die
I'll take you down the only road I've ever been down
You know the one that takes you to the places where all the things meet yeah

The Verve, Bittersweet Symphony, 1997.



In Focus

Is prayer for you, as it so often is for me, the last place you to? Is it what you do when you say to yourself, as I do, "all I can do now is pray?" As if there's all this other stuff I could do instead but that hasn't worked, so the last resort is prayer. I frustrate myself because the truth should be the opposite in my life; prayer should be the first place I go. But unfortunately it is often what I do when I've exhausted my own efforts to solve a situation.

The point and the call here is that how prayer is effective in all the different situations and struggles that we may face and it is to be the first port of call, not the last resort. That is because it is the only thing that is guaranteed to be effective. The answer may not always be what we wanted, or expected, but it will always be the right answer. It is fitting that the book should end on this note. That as the people go forward into an uncertain, risky future they remember to at all moments be carrying their concerns and needs to God. Though the future may be uncertain and treacherous at times, it is God who will carry them through and they can bring these needs before him.

Much ink has been spilled about the idea of the prayer of faith. Is there a right formula that will get what you wanted every time? Is it simply the prayer of anyone who has faith? Does it work for everything you ask? Is it dependent on me or God? I think the most important point is the way prayer works as conversation between us and God and how that changes us and changes what we ask for. That is what happens with Moses. And that is some of what is in play here – especially considering James has said the reason they don't get what they pray for is that they ask for the wrong things (not because of a lack of faith). The prayer that comes from faith, is shaped by it, and has that expectation has power to change situations for the glory of God and the joy of all people.

Discussion

James 5:13-16

13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of
praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them
and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make
the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.
16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be
healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Does prayer tend to be more of a last resort of first port of call for you?

Why do you think that is? What is the fruit of it?

What would it take to see prayer become a more significant and powerful part of your life?

James 5:17-18

17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and
it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave
rain, and the earth produced its crops.

What does James tell us here about Elijah and his prayer?

Why was Elijah praying for the rain?

Is the focus and purpose of our prayers like Elijah's or more self-focused?

What other examples can you think of where people prayed big prayers and God answered?

How big are your prayers? What do you think that says about your faith?

James 5:19-20

19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should
bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way
will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Who are the people in your life that you feel God leading you towards helping?

What can you do in the coming weeks to try to help share something of the good news with them?

How much of our prayer life is concerned with lost people coming to know Jesus vs physical needs?

Review

Prayer changes things. Most of us have stories of how seemingly impossible situations have been resolved after prayer. But we so easily end up just going through the motions and our routine in life. We forget to carve out time to live to a different rhythm where we pray before situations arise. When this happens we miss out on so much. For one thing, life will be much more stressful and unenjoyable. But we miss out on being in God's presence. The point of prayer, and why it is supposed to be the first stop, is that it's being in God's presence. And being in God's presence changes our attitudes and motivations and changes what we ask for. We end up coming away with the huge, global vision of his kingdom coming, rather than bombarding him with a list of "needs." Sometimes our prayer life is less effective simply because we ask for the wrong things and we ask for small things. Rather than asking for the renewal and redemption of our community we're asking for help with the argument at work. Not that God isn't interested, or doesn't work in those situations, he does. But he's about so much more than that. The more we're in prayer, the more God wrestles us away from looking at our belly button. Prayer is a chance to know God more deeply and it is also our hope for breakthrough – more than anything we ourselves can do.

Apply

Being honest, does prayer tend to be your last resort? What are you going to do to reverse that?

On balance, is your prayer life more need focused than focused on the expansion of God's kingdom? What can you do to change that?

Meditate

1 Timothy 2:1-8	Pray for all people
Ephesians 6:18-20	Pray in the Spirit
Exodus 32:7-14	Moses' heart is changed
John 17	How Jesus prays
Matthew 6:1-14	How Jesus tells us to pray

Going Deeper

Useful Resources

#1 Genuine: Millennials search for religious authenticity (Article 1)

Below I have attached an interesting article that explores in a little more detail how Millennials (those who are coming of age post 2000) are searching for authenticity and how this is affecting their expectations, experience and engagement with Christianity.

Millennials Search For Religious 'Authenticity'

Posted By *Gracy Olmstead* On June 18, 2015 @ 12:05 am In | 10 Comments
- The American Conservative - http://www.theamericanconservative.com –

Millennials are forging their own path when it comes to church attendance and religion.

As a popular May Pew poll pointed out [1], many of these young people are veering sharply away from organized religion and towards the "nones" category, an opaque motley of agnostics, atheists, and the "free range faithful," as Elizabeth Drescher calls them in her article for *America* magazine. They are, as she puts it, "ambling all about the religious landscape to partake of its diverse offerings without seeking a single set of answers (or questions) or intending to settle in one spiritual place."

However, while they seem to be seeking more flexibility, Drescher's article also notes that most "nones" have some specific goals in mind: they want something "relational and experiential, oriented toward being present to the spiritual based in the self, the other and the world instead of in structures of belief, belonging and behaving associated with traditional religions."

Those who remain inside the church are seeking a similarly specific and personal religious experience—even if they're looking for it in more conventional venues. Take this list of church qualifications, put together by a millennial named George. When Southeastern Seminary professor Chuck Lawless asked him what he would like to see in a local church, he responded with these personal guidelines:

- *Bold preaching and sound doctrine that is not watered down. The church should speak truth without sugar-coating the gospel.*
- *Genuine opportunities to get involved, where he can make a real difference in the world.*
- *A real community of believers, people with whom he can hang out, but who also push and challenge him.*
- *A strong commitment to evangelism, especially locally. He would like opportunities to connect with and influence the local community for God.*
- *Worship services that are "unrehearsed, naturally flowing and Spirit-led," but that also have an "authenticity that validates the message and structure that follows the Lord's leading." He would also like to see a "strong, team-focused worship leader" and variety in worship.*

- *Hospitality that welcomes others. He would like a church that welcomes strangers and does not "cocoon itself" around the familiar.*
- *Humility in leadership and flexibility in terms of where and when the church gathers. The "where" is not as important as that the congregation "truly be the church" and "truly know God."*

There is a danger to creating lists such as these: it means that we come to the church with the attitude of a consumer, looking to see how it fulfils *us*, rather than approaching it humbly, with an awareness of our own insufficiencies. That said, George seems to have a refreshing appreciation for strong biblical doctrine, delivered forthrightly. This would seem to indicate that, despite some broader cultural trends, there are at least *some* millennials who want the Gospel—not a politically correct, modernized version of the Gospel.

Additionally, we can applaud George's desire for tangible community connection within the church, reinforced by a strong local vision. There has been, amongst some churches, an abdication of local outreach—whether for the glamor of globalized missions, or for the ease of intra-church networking. His list indicates a desire for more thoughtful and thorough ministry in the church's own backyard.

But consider some of the other words used in George's list to describe his desired church: "genuine," "real," "unrehearsed," "natural," "authenticity," "flexibility."

These words are reminiscent of the "free range faithful," who are also engaged in an earnest search for something raw, organic, "authentic." They're just searching for it in a different venue than George is. The urge for a more natural religious experience is an old one, and it's been touted by various romanticists for ages, from Thoreau in *Walden Pond* in the 1850s to the unbound hippies of the 1960s.

In seeming stark contrast to these free-range faithful are today's high-church hipsters: people searching for authenticity, often seeking it in the old or obscure, scorning the modern trappings of their society. By going high church these hipsters have rejected the flexible and unrehearsed vibe that George is looking for. Rather than demanding *less* structure and tradition, they're finding their comfort in *more*.

But in their embrace of the old liturgical service, they often are tapping into an aesthetic preference—like Thoreau and George—more than they are embracing a doctrinal and theological way of life. Take Jimmy Fallon, who talked to Teri Gross of NPR [2] about attending mass growing up: "I just, I loved the church," he said. "I loved the idea of it. I loved the smell of the incense. I loved the feeling you get when you left church." Fallon stopped going to church when the service became less traditional.

Of course, there are legitimate problems with attempts to "modernize" old and carefully preserved traditions of worship, and Fallon is right to point these out. But at least some of the millennials who are going high church seem to be doing so because they see in it that vintage, nonconformist vibe they are after. Like smoking pipes and playing old records, it

gives them a sense of authenticity, of separation from the vulgarities of modern culture. And in this sense, they are still members of the free range faithful: seeking something "genuine" and "real" perhaps, but not necessarily looking *beyond* the beautiful traditions to understand their core. Their definition of real and genuine involves more structure and form than George's, but even liturgy can become another consumer's choice in today's church.

The search for "authenticity" is difficult to define or to complete, because we ourselves are a mess of contradictions and charades. How can we properly scrutinize our own motivations—and the motivations of others—determining what is real, and what is fake? Both in personal and communal living, there are layers of facade we must break through, subconscious lies that must be confronted. Most attempts to liberate ourselves from societal or religious masks will lead to greater confusion and disguise: the hipster who smokes his pipe or listens to old records out of a desire to separate himself from society is acting out a part he has scripted for himself.

We can treat church the same way: like something that's supposed to give us a sense of nonconformist identity, something that will go against the grain amidst a mainstream culture gone mediocre. We can create our lists, and check them twice: noting with derision any perceived melodramatic elements or rote routines in a service or its congregants. We can leave with a shrug of our shoulders, explaining that the church just wasn't "authentic" or "genuine" enough, explaining that things seemed too rigid and rehearsed.

But to merely abdicate the church for its flaws is an improper response—just as bringing a long list of qualifications and demands is also flawed.

Leaving the church should not be done merely out of an aesthetic frustration with perceived artificiality. Pretension is truly indicative of the sin that cakes and coats our lives, covering us in layers of unreality, insulating us from each other. Whether we seek genuine religious experience within or without Christianity, we will find that artificiality constantly gets in our way—because truth is difficult to seek, and often easily disguised.

But this is what church is about: the slow stripping away of such unrealities, the slow sanctification of the body as we come—again, slowly—to see each other, and ourselves, with truth and grace. It's a painful process, one that is often stalemated or short-circuited by our own flaws and shortcomings. No church is perfect, because no person in the church is perfect. Therefore, we will have to go through the process of becoming-real, no matter what church or denomination we join, no matter what pastor or priest we follow.

The truth is, the longer you are part of a church, the more you will begin to notice its dust and dimness, its fake smiles and half hugs. Many have memorized rituals that have no heart or purpose behind them. You will begin to see the church's flaws, and they may frustrate or even disgust you. But if you seek church (or religious experience) somewhere else—revelling in all its polished "authenticity" and golden sheen—it will not take long before there, too, you will see the fatal flaws, the pretensions. And they may again drive you away, urging you into a "free range" faith that is ever seeking the authentic.

But you can choose to stay and to love this flawed and marred church, still so far from perfection. You can choose to walk amongst the faltering limbs of this body, this ailing bride, because you know that you too are a flawed limb. You know that you, too, have caked makeup over your raw sores, and have attempted to look "normal," even perhaps "authentic." You know that you've whitewashed your tombs.

Church is not about our perfection or authenticity. There are layers of sin and blindness that we have yet to uncover. But church is about Christ, as Rod Dreher reminded his readers last week. It's about the Gospel. And that truth reaches out to us in our states of inauthenticity, giving us a chance to rise above the facades.

[1] pointed out: **http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/**
[2] talked to Teri Gross of NPR : **https://www.catholicvote.org/bad-liturgy-is-not-a-victimless-crime-just-ask-jimmy-fallon/**

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Below I have attached an interesting article that appeared in an issue of Forbes magazine. The article explores the way in which people's desire for "authenticity" is effecting the way in which businesses deal with people; both employees and clients.

Forbes

Leadership 8/14/2014 @ 4:40PM 10,251 views

Authenticity: The Way To The Millennial's Heart

The authentic self is a goal for all four generations alive today: Seniors, Boomers, Xers, but most especially, Millennials. It can mean something different for each generation, and it evolves over time. We believe that Millennials are the most critical – they are the future. The better you are at being an authentic leader, the more your Millennials employees will appreciate you.

A key point in our forthcoming book, ~~*Leading, Managing*~~, *Effectively Working with Millennials* (we cross out Leading and Managing because they are too strong words for them) is that Millennials have been taught a postmodern worldview, which is quite different from the generations before. We must better understand the postmodern worldview to effectively work with Millennials.

This was written with Sienna Zampino
We've heard time and time again that the postmodern worldview is increasingly shaped by the influence of technology and social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram… the plethora of social media has made it harder to fake it. People can learn about others much easier in this day and age and put their stories to the test. Before any scheduled meeting, strangers can (and do) simply Google your name and have instant access to your information, from your LinkedIn profile to other more random information about you. I am amazed what people I have never met can bring up in our first meeting. Being authentic, these days, has much to do with the self you portray both online and offline – do they match up, or is one, presumably your on-line one, merely a persona?

We believe that authenticity can be considered to be one of the ten values regarded as most essential to Post moderns. The academic literature suggest that one good way to look it is to view it from two perspectives: constructive and existential.

Constructive authenticity refers to the cultural context of what is considered to be authentic. Social media has enabled Post moderns to communicate their true feelings with much less anxiety about being personally judged. It also gives them the ability, however, to distort information to fulfil an agenda without much consequence. Facebook, Twitter and other social media/networking sites provide an outlet for endless self-expression.

Many Post moderns struggle to separate their online and offline personas; online, they are able to say and do whatever they like with very limited consequences. They can mask their true emotions and shape themselves to appear to be whoever their online peers expect them to be, thereby fulfilling the social expectations of each other user. Or at times, just play with alternative identities.

In life, however, the truth may be quite different. They could be very unhappy with their offline situation. By confusing the two worlds, they adopt their online image in the real world, thereby losing their authentic self. This can make the "true self" hard to identify.

In the age of social media, authenticity for Post moderns is characterized by a consistency and continuity between their online personas and their lives in the real world. The more congruence there is between the two, the more authentic the Postmodern appears to be.

Existential authenticity refers to the current pressures of societal expectations, norms and values. Why is this important? Post moderns want to be able to be themselves. They are not interested in playing "the game" their parents once did. For many Boomers, the cost of playing the game was too high: failed marriages, too much travel, too little work-life balance, etc. Reacting to the pressures that many of their parents felt, Post moderns don't want to be squeezed too much into a corporate model. They want their employers to respect their individual differences and embrace the potential that these unique qualities can bring. Corporations, however, too often expect workers to conform to the pre-existent culture of the corporation. From the 1950s, we had the rise of the Organizational Man: Post moderns are expected to not only be qualified for the job itself, but also be a good fit for the specific business unit in which they will work, and the existing culture of the organization.

Trying to conform to these restrictive and possibly outdated expectations, Post moderns are forced to hide their true feelings and engage in emotional acting in which they project 'appropriate' feelings. The very expectation to obey the rules and guidelines of the company runs counter to their worldview, which values diversity. It restricts their ability to show who they truly are.

Millennials tend to be idealistic. They have great stores of energy and hope. They want to believe that every person's apparent character represents who they truly are (their authentic self) and that the culture within organizations will encourage and enable this authenticity.

The reality, however, is that the environment in which Post moderns find themselves is not as rosy as they had hoped. That being said, a culture which supports the expression of the

authentic self should not be seen as a utopian impossibility. Rather, it should be acknowledged that there are certain modern obstacles that must be understood and removed in order for that to become reality.

Authentic Leadership

So, what does authentic leadership look like? Researchers describe an array of elements and actions, however, drawing on management thinkers Kevin Kruse, Jon Mertz and Maureen Laufenberg, four basic principles struck us as particularly helpful:

1) Authentic leaders need to be **self-aware** and **genuine**. Before they will be able to encourage and support self-authenticity among Post moderns, Moderns must be aware of their own strength, limitations and emotions. A starting place for excellent leaders is self-knowledge and awareness. Moderns need to be able to demonstrate their weaknesses and be more open in communicating their feelings. They need to acknowledge their imperfections and mistakes. Give up trying to present a perfect façade, it is untrue and, thankfully, a bad thing with this generation.

2) Authentic leaders need to be **mission driven** and **focused on results**. They must focus on the goals and missions of the organization before their own self-interests. They do not allow the lure of power, money or ego to limit their ability to get the job done. They connect with people and motivate them to pursue common objectives. They embrace the idea of community; a community focused on doing something worthwhile in the world, in a way that reflects excellence. For Boomers, at the peak of your career or on the down side, giving up on the power thing should be less problematic. Throw out those books on power and how to get it and keep it.

3) Authentic leaders lead with their **hearts**, not with their **minds**. They are concerned with the well-being of the group. They follow a guiding set of empowering principles which lead them to consider all actions taken insofar as the outcomes should result in increased well-being for all involved. They emphasize trust and respect in order to create an empathetic, supportive environment. Karl has been shadowing senior women leaders. Other excellent academic work and his research seems to suggest that many, but not all, senior women leaders over 45 are good at being empathetic. If you are not, take the time to lean back and watch some senior women show this trait in action – a great chance to learn.

4) Authentic leaders focus on the **long term**. They evaluate the possible future impacts of their day to day activities. They strive for sustainable and enduring results, rather than those which are immediate and short-lived.

Being authentic is challenging. Some of the world's greatest leaders struggle with being authentic, so don't be discouraged if you're finding this difficult to implement. However, just by being aware of these characteristics, you'll naturally steer towards exercising authenticity, which your Post moderns will love.

Sienna Zampino is a research assistant of mine and a freshman at McGill next month. This post is based on a new book co-written with Margaret Snell, coming out this fall, ~~*Leading, Managing*~~, *Working More Effectively with Millennials.*

Below I have attached an interesting article that appeared in an issue of Forbes magazine. The article explores the way in which people's desire for "authenticity" is effecting the way in which businesses deal with people; both employees and clients.

THE CHRISTIAN POST

CP Church & Ministries.

Tuesday, Jul 05, 2016

Billy Graham: Having Shallow Faith in God Is Dangerous



By Katherine Weber , Christian Post Reporter
April 14, 2016|3:45 pm

Having a shallow faith in God is not enough, the Rev. Billy Graham wrote in a recent column.

The evangelical leader wrote in a post for the Kansas City Star this week that it is not enough to simply say you believe in Jesus and then do nothing to live out or nurture your faith.

Such a shallow view of your relationship with Christ can put you in "grave spiritual danger," Graham says, referencing James 2:14-17, which reads: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? [...] Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Christians need to live out an active faith instead of a passive, weak faith because Jesus died on the cross for their sins, Graham continues, and we need to fight the power of sin daily.

"[Jesus] came to free us from both the penalty and the power of sin. We have sinned and turned our backs on God, and we deserve only his judgment. But on the cross, all our sins were placed on Christ, and he took upon himself the judgment and hell that we deserve," the preacher writes. "Jesus came to free us from sin's penalty, cleansing and forgiving us so we can go to heaven."

Despite this generous gift from Jesus, sin still tries to "pull us down," Graham continues, so we must fight to live an active faith to counteract the dangers of temptation, which could easily affect someone who has a lazy relationship with God.

"When we open our hearts and lives to Christ, however, God himself comes to live within us by his spirit, to help us in our battle with sin. In other words, Christ also came to free us from sin's power," the evangelical leader says, adding that it is because of sin that Christians must ensure they are fully committed to Christ.

The 97-year-old Baptist minister has spoken on the topic of weak faith before, writing in the "My Answers" portion of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's website in February 2011 that it is God's will for everyone to have a strong faith filled with "patience and endurance."

However, Christians cannot just sit idly by waiting for their faith to grow strong. Rather, having strong faith takes effort, Graham writes.

"Our faith grows stronger only as we nourish and exercise it; if we don't, it will always be weak. Just as we need food and exercise to grow and become strong physically, so we need spiritual 'food' and 'exercise' in order to grow and become strong spiritually. And God has provided everything we need to make this happen," the pastor says.

There are two ways to nourish our faith: through the Bible and prayer.

"Make the Bible part of your life every day — read it, study it, learn about it from others," Graham encourages, saying that Christians should also take advantage of the "privilege of prayer."

"Instead of worrying about our problems (or worse yet, refusing to admit they exist), we can bring them to God in prayer," the evangelical leader says.

Source URL : http://www.christianpost.com/news/billy-gaham-having-shallow-faith-in-god-is-dangerous-161722/

#3 Hearing & Doing: Are Christians really hypocrites? [in *Christianity Today*]

Below is a short article which is the source of the infographic in the weekly notes. The article gives the graph a bit more context.

GLEANINGS

July 5, 2016
Print this page | Close this page
The following article is located at: http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/may/are-christians-really-hypocrites-barna-researchers-examine.html
Research

Are Christians Really Hypocrites? Barna Researchers Examine Actions, Attitudes

Barna survey suggests that overcoming self-righteous tendencies is difficult for Christians–regardless of denomination or demographics.
Melissa Steffan [posted 5/03/2013]

A new report from Barna Group indicates that most of today's Christians are more like the Pharisees than Jesus.

Barna surveyed 718 self-identified Christians from a variety of denominations to find what extent their actions and attitudes line up with Jesus's. Researchers found only 1 in 7 Christians manages to hold Christ-like beliefs and also act in Christ-like ways. Yet, 1 in 2 Christians tends "to have attitudes and actions that are characterized by self-righteousness." (See the full infographic at the bottom of this post.)

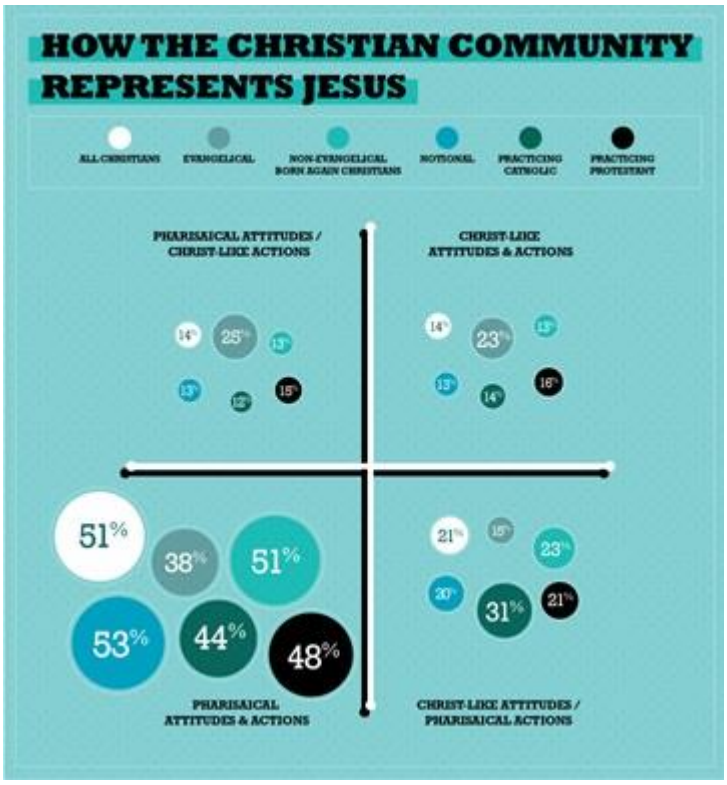
"This research may help to explain how evangelicals are often targeted for claims of hypocrisy; the unique 'sin' of evangelicals tends to be doing the 'right' thing but with improper motives," says Barna Group president David Kinnaman.

However, it's important to note that "Pharisaical" does not necessarily mean "hypocritical." In a recent blog post, Scot McKnight cautions against misusing the term "Pharisee," which should be used "only for those who through the abuse of their teaching authority are leading people astray."

"Jesus accuses the Pharisees for 'hypocrisy' because they had abused their teaching authority by teaching false things, not living according to what they taught, and for the desire for power," McKnight says. "To be 'hypocrite' is to be a false teacher who leads both self and others astray from the will of God. The term should not be limited to 'contradiction between appearance and reality.'"

That's what the Barna survey appears to measure. Barna used a four-quadrant graph to analyse how well participants agreed with 20 statements that represented "Jesus-like" or "Pharisee-like" actions.

Self-identified evangelicals fared better than their non-evangelical, born-again counterparts, but not by much: "About one-quarter (23 percent) of evangelicals are characterized by having Jesus-like actions and attitudes, which was higher than the norm. About half were a mixture of Christ-like actions and Pharisaical attitudes (25 percent) or vice versa (15 percent)."



(Courtesy of Barna Group)

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

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#4 Favouritism: 'Black Americans failed by inherently biased legal system, ABA President says' [in *The Guardian*]

Below I have attached a fantastic article that appeared in The Guardian newspaper. It includes reflections from Paulette Brown, the 1st president of the American Bar Association – basically the lawyers union. She explains how their legal system is built on inherent bias against certain groups.



Black Americans failed by inherently biased legal system, ABA President says

by Owen Bowcott

African-American citizens are being failed by the US criminal justice system because of ingrained racial bias in the way suspects are treated, according to the head of the United States's largest legal professional body.

Paulette Brown, who became the first black female president of the American Bar Association (ABA) in August, is determined to transform the negative image that many people hold of lawyers.

Speaking to the Guardian during a visit to London for the formal opening ceremonies of the legal term at Westminster Abbey and in parliament, Brown said one of the priorities of her year in office would be to lead the drive to encourage the ABA's 400,000 members to carry out more voluntary, pro-bono work.

But after going to Ferguson, Missouri, and other places where there have been protests over the treatment of black suspects, she has also become more concerned about the way defendants are processed through US courts.

"One in 16 African Americans are subjected to the criminal justice system," Brown explained, "compared to one in 106 of white people. A lot of that is drugs. The evidence, however, shows that black people don't use drugs any more [than white people].

"But they are being arrested for it and charged with it [more frequently] and some of that is implicit bias - particularly on the part of prosecutors. Prosecutors are overcharging." She added: "Ninety-five percent of all prosecutors are white; 88% of all lawyers in US are white."

Brown, who was brought up in Baltimore, moved to New Jersey where she specialised in commercial litigation and employment defence. She has also served as a municipal court judge for three years.

"In our system, prosecutors have so much control – sometimes more than the judges," she added. "They decide whether someone is to be charged with a crime and what crime that will be. The judge doesn't have discretion. The prosecution has so much power so they have a bad reputation in the community.

"Public defenders think they are really the do-gooders, but are they encouraging a group of people to plead to higher offences than others? For example, there's no evidence that black people use drugs more than whites, but they are arrested at a rate more than six times than that of their white counterparts for drug use."

Public defenders, she added, do not have the same resources as prosecutors – nor are they paid as much, "so you are sending a message saying that public defenders are not as important".

Brown said the ABA is supporting efforts to redress the "implicit bias in the justice system". Sometimes public defenders, she said, might be representing two people – one white, one African American – and they may enter a "less favourable plea deal for the brown character. There are so many subconscious messages that are given to us that say white is good and black bad.

"During Hurricane Katrina, for example, when you saw an image of black people with food, they were [said to be] looting. When you saw an image of white people with food, they had found it for their family. Sometimes it's subliminal."
Advertisement

If any good had come out of the confrontations in Ferguson and elsewhere, she said, "it was that people from all sorts of backgrounds got riled up about it: lawyers, prosecutors and police are willing to [accept] they may have bias".

Brown also pointed out that 53% of African-American youths who are arrested under the age of 18 are charged as adults. "Sometimes," she said, "they [charge people as young] as 13 or 14 year olds and treat them as adults.

"[That means] they go to a completely different court and have trials by jury as opposed to being in a juvenile court. The prosecution have the discretion to charge them as adults; in some states there's legislation pending saying there should be a minimum age threshold."

Brown said she would like to talk to Barack Obama about the US's prison population, which is the largest in the world. "We are beginning to recognise there's a problem of over-incarceration."

If she hasn't spoken to Obama, Brown has, at least, met the Queen. Both were at Runnymede in June for the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta. "I shook hands with the Queen," she recalled. "We chatted for about 30 seconds. She knew who I was. It was fantastic. She was very happy I was there."

The mediaeval charter remains a more potent cultural icon for Americans than for Britons. "We were taught about Magna Carta at my elementary school," Brown said with pride.

The role of pro-bono work is becoming more important on both sides of the Atlantic. In the UK, the new justice secretary, Michael Gove, has called on British lawyers to do more voluntary work to ensure justice is available for all.

In the US, mandatory pro-bono work is becoming more common. "There's now mandatory pro-bono work of 50 hours a year for new lawyers in the year they qualify in New York before they get their full licence," she explained.

"Many states have mandatory pro-bono work. They assign a case for you every year which has to be done on a pro-bono basis; usually one day's court work. They give you written instructions, but the instructions are often pretty basic. If you don't do it, you get done for contempt.

"[But] lawyers still have to be able to earn a living. While it's wonderful that lawyers do pro-bono work, it's not a substitute [for all funded legal representation] and they can't fill that gap completely."

#5 Faith & Works: All Christians are hypocrites [at *Relevant*]

Below I have attached an article written by Jayson Bradley in Relevant magazine it explores the problem of Christian hypocrisy and how we might move beyond it.



It's probably no surprise that many people associate the word "Christian" with the word "hypocrite." Christians have developed a reputation for saying one thing and doing another.

I live in a small town that excels in Saturday night drunkenness and Sunday morning church attendance. In the news, we're regularly confronted with embezzlements, affairs, abuses of power and worse from high-profile Christians. We all have Christians we consider frauds in our lives. And if we're being honest, hypocrites stare back at us while we brush our teeth.

I'm convinced that some form hypocrisy is nearly inevitable. Our ability to live up to our aspirational virtues is impossible without spiritual empowerment. As Robert Robinson wrote in *Come Thou Font of Every Blessing*, we're all "prone to wander."

I think we need to look at the ways that the church reinforces or even rewards hypocrisy—and why non-believers often get so giddy when it's exposed. When we stand at the intersection of these points, we'll benefit from a less fraudulent faith.

Behaviour Monitoring Enables Hypocrisy.

I'm not much of a drinker, but I do enjoy an occasional adult beverage. One year, I made the mistake of commemorating an exceptional pumpkin ale with an Instagram/Facebook post. A couple weeks later I found myself having a conversation with a dear woman who felt the need to share her disappointment with me.

I lead worship in a Nazarene church, and although the denomination has made huge strides in its philosophy and practice, it has a strong "holiness" background. Not too many decades ago, you couldn't be a member in good standing and dance, play cards or see a movie. This woman, who was brought up by a strict holiness pastor, saw my beer and was instantly trying to figure out if I needed to be relieved of my church responsibilities. Even though this conversation had a positive outcome, I found myself thinking carefully about what I posted, worrying that things I was comfortable with would be used to incriminate me.

While the threat of disapproval may get us to change or hide our behaviour, it doesn't change our beliefs—it simply drives them underground. This woman's strong and negative reaction to my beer didn't change how I felt about pumpkin ale. It just made me question how forthright I could be about who I am, and how much I could trust my community.

This is always the outcome of behavioural watchdogs. I know many people raised in holiness churches who'd load their kids up and take them three towns over to see a forbidden movie so that no one in their church would find out. The message that gets reinforced is that if people are going to get upset at you, just hide it. It greatly undermined the ability for the children in those families to be honest in churches when they grew up.

While this kind of suppressive behaviour starts because we want to avoid the hassle of nosy, judgmental Christians, it eventually paves the way for abuse. Once we learn to avoid problems by compartmentalizing areas of our lives, we become way too comfortable with duplicity. What starts out as simply hiding the fact that we enjoy an occasional beer or listen to secular music can comfortably morph into hiding more disastrous behaviour like affairs or addictions.

Behaviour Modification Creates Hypocrisy

There's a common response to the problem of Christian duplicity. I've attended too many youth and men's groups where this was the underlying message of a gathering: "The world is watching you, so for the sake of your Christian testimony, quit doing stupid and/or bad stuff." The problem is that this kind of image-oriented posturing actually hurts Christians more than it helps them.

A lot of this misunderstanding stems from our turning Christian evangelism into an emotional appeal followed by a "repeat this prayer after me" response. Instantly people who haven't really given Christianity much thought or counted its costs find themselves on the inside. After they've already made the purchase, they're given a bill featuring all the things that their new, free faith is going to cost them. It's no wonder that they want to hold on to the religious perks *and* their personal preferences.

It's kind of amazing how many people in the first-century wanted to follow Jesus but were sent away frustrated. (Mark 10:17–27, Luke 9:57–62) I think we need to present Christianity in a way that encourages people to wrestle with its claims and sacrifices. We're so set on getting people "saved" that we end up packaging the gospel with a complimentary set of Ginsu knives—anything to get them to buy now. Unfortunately, Jesus encouraged us to make disciples, not just "save" people. (Matt. 28:16-20)

Neither Monitoring Nor Modification Work.

I have come to the conclusion that it's okay for me to have different convictions or beliefs than other people in my faith community. In the past, I tended to downplay or hide those differences in order to make other people happy. But that was terrible for everyone involved because:

–I wasn't being open and transparent;
–I couldn't be confronted in areas I was wrong;
–I wasn't giving judgmental people the opportunity to learn to be good neighbours; and
–I was enabling my own dishonesty.

I no longer worry about whether people agree with me. I don't hide my politics, opinions or the things that I'm into, and it all stems from a desire to live a more integrated, holistic inner life. I'm open to dialog with people who question my preferences, but I don't feel the driving need to make them agree with me.

I do, however, recognize my need to be open to correction.

I have found that the church is full of people who are concealing feelings or perspectives they think will get them ostracized. Sometimes living transparently gives permission for people around you to do the same.

I really wish behaviour modification worked, but it doesn't. I understand the draw of focusing on conduct change. After all, it's measurable and quantifiable. On the other hand, true spirituality is a mess and there's no way to really know for certain how someone is progressing. Being the pragmatists that we are, it's no wonder that we're drawn to to-do list Christianity. We want progress to be easily quantitative and reproducible.

But if we're pushing an agenda focused on outward appearances, we're creating hypocrites—a glittering image of godliness. The only real way we can get at the root of someone's spiritual sickness is to expect, encourage and equip them to pursue Christ—not good behaviour, not approval and not theology.

We are just not equipped to look at someone's life and easily dictate who is and who isn't "acting like a Christian." Sometimes the people closest to God, are the people we would least expect. And the minute we think the gospel's credibility rests on how good we are doing Christianity, we've completely lost the plot.

What to Do About It.

The pursuit of Jesus Christ is your true testimony. Everything else is window dressing.

Being honest with yourself can be difficult, but it's important. If you find that you're making changes in your life, you need to ask yourself whether those changes are for the approval of others or in order to facilitate a more spiritual awareness. If you're doing it to impress others, don't bother.

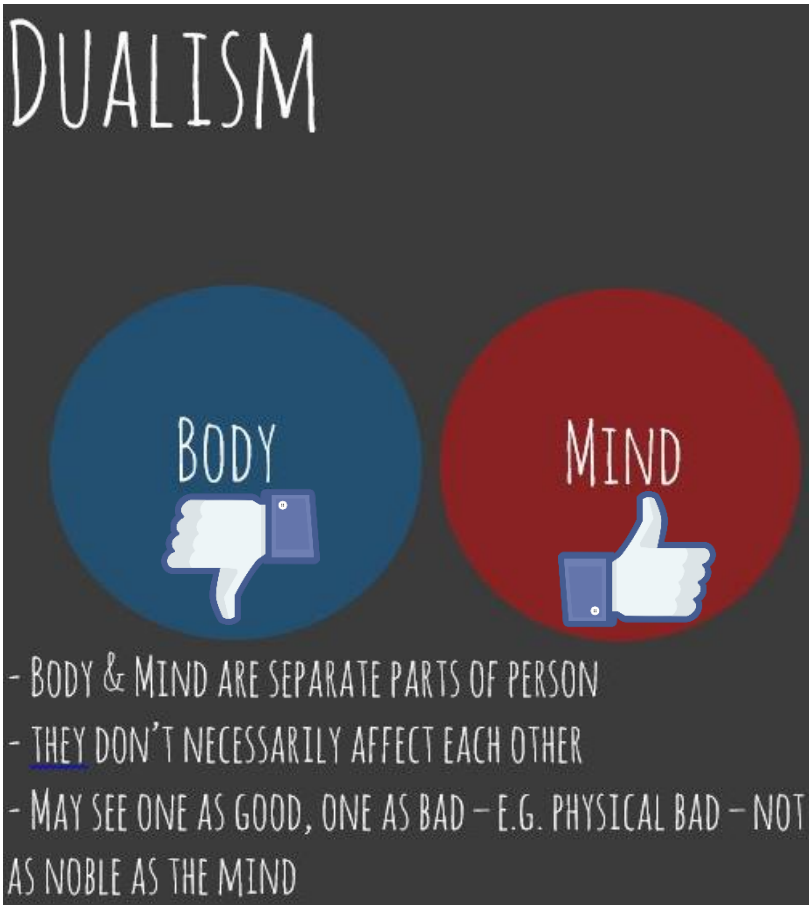
The only way we'll truly beat hypocrisy is by being willing to recognize that every single one of us is a spiritual novice. Christianity doesn't make us better, smarter, righter or happier than anyone else. It re-aligns us with God and allows Him to begin the messy, mysterious and often brutalizing work of untangling our twisted lives.

The effort we waste on appearing more godly to others and ourselves is wasted, and only the effort poured into pursuing Christ matters.

#5 Faith & Works: Philosophy of the person and faith

The person and Faith

Some of the discussion concerning faith & works is explained by understand the philosophy of the person. At the time, and often still today, there were two different philosophical approaches that were clashing; these were the Greek dualists and the Hebrew Monists.



Dualist Worldview (Greek)

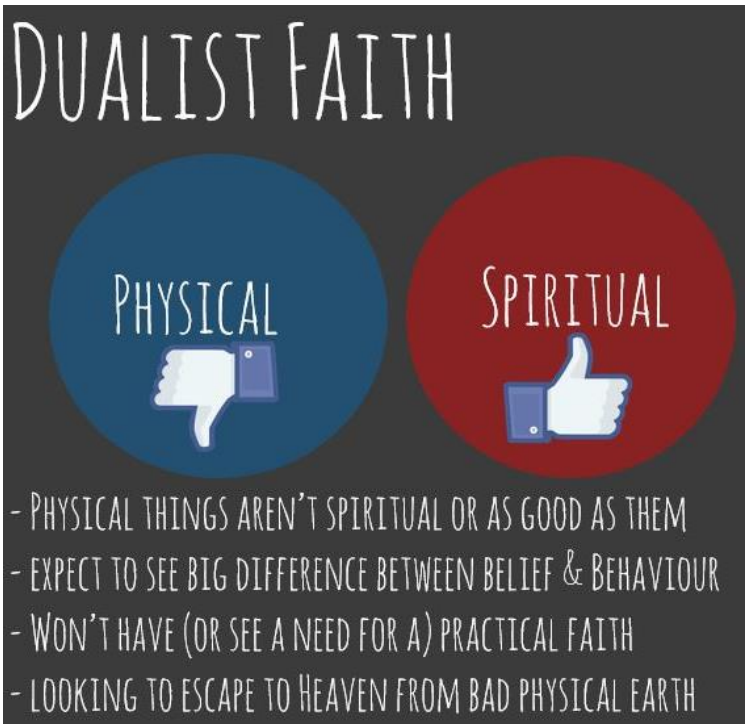
The Greek dualist philosophers believed that there were two distinct and separate realms; the physical and the mental, the body and the mind. These two parts of us were not connected. Very often (as with Platonic thought) one of those would be characterized as bad and the other good; one to be given priority one to be escaped. So you might (as Plato did) characterise the body, the physical, the material as bad; and the mind as good, pure and noble. The result would be to make every effort not to satisfy physical desires or pleasures. On the other had you may say only physical things really matter and focus on them and not concern yourself with thinking.

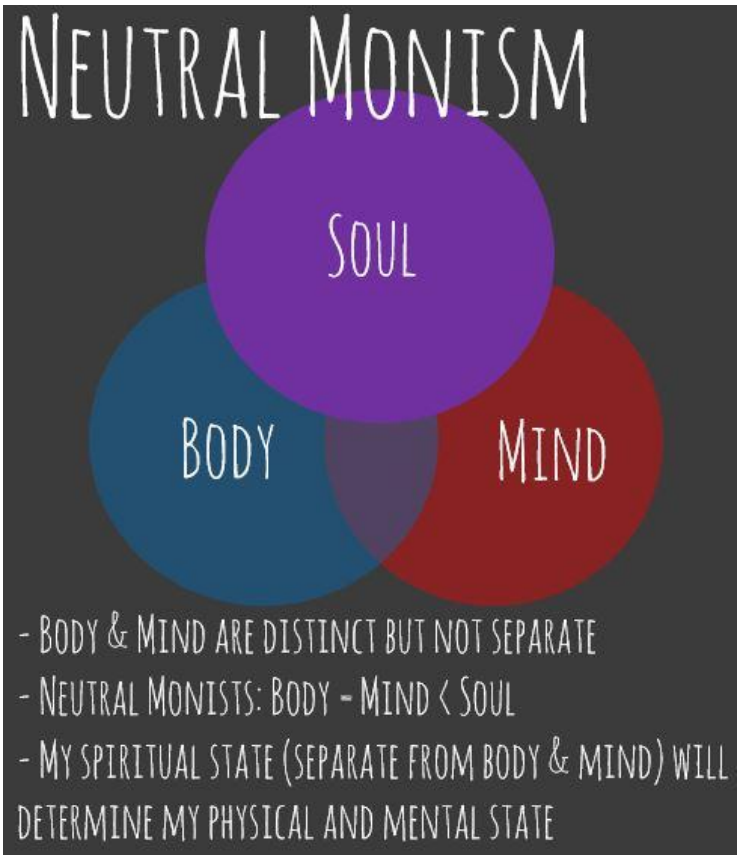
This was a real issue for the people of this letter as they were living in places and cultures now that had bought into, and been shaped by these ideas. And this was the prevailing worldview at the time. And it was hard, maybe impossible, for them not to be in some way shaped by this thinking. And it does have a real impact upon your faith. But actually this worldview has been incredibly dominant in Western culture to this day.

It is only really quite recently that we in the west are beginning to see in medicine, mental health care etc. that there may be much more connection between the body and the mind; the "spiritual" and the "physical." Some people will be willing to add a third element in here; the soul. For some this will be equated to the mind anyway. But for those who would add a soul to this they might say that it is the soul that then determines the physical and the mental; so if your soul is healthy the rest of you will be. And they will believe that the soul has priority over the body and the mind.

Dualist Faith

This has a huge knock on effect in faith. What it will do is to make a real accentuated difference between your "spiritual" life and person and your "physical" life and person. You will most likely not have a very practical faith as you will see it as a private, spiritual matter. Your faith won't necessarily affect your daily life, which is another realm. It will mean you are more likely to have a big divide between what you "believe" in your head, and what you do with your body. It will also mean you're more looking to escape to a spiritualised heaven than joining Jesus in modelling the New Earth. It is a faith that is highly compartmentalised, just one part of your life, alongside other parts. It is not defining and shaping all of your life.



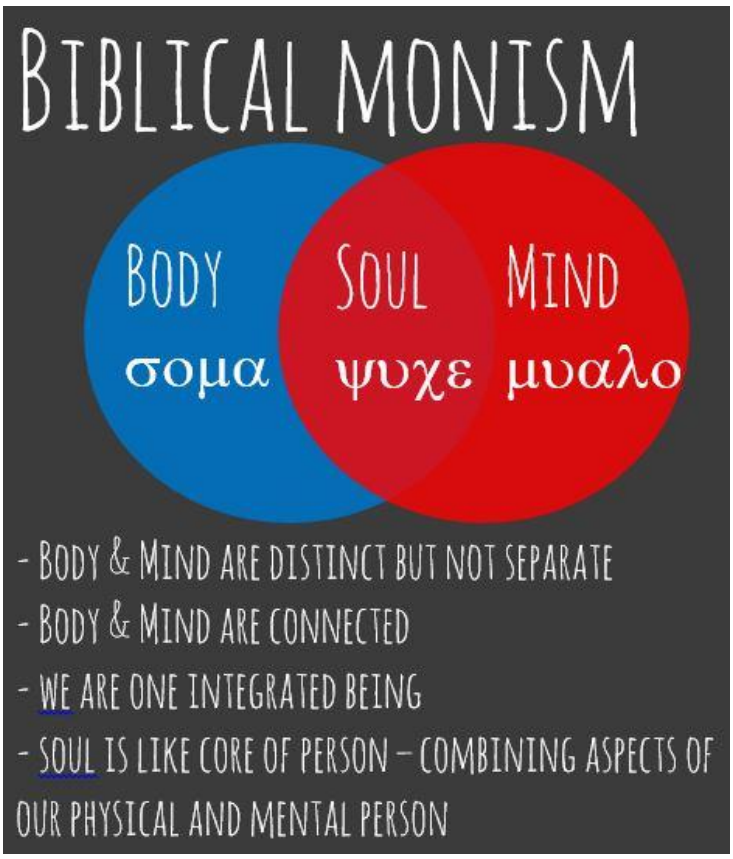


Monist Worldview (Hebrew)

On the other hand, the Jews had a very different view of the person. They were Monist, that is, they believed that people are one integrated person. That means that there is no clear divide between the body and the mind or the soul. And in fact the soul really is a meshing together of both the mind and the body to form a kind of inner core of the person. So if you wanted to be healthy you had to really address all of these elements, not one or the other. And it was not the case that either body or mind was better. And it was not the case that physical things were not also spiritual. The diagram to the left display neutral monism; that is body and mind are seen as equal as the "3rd element", here the soul, is predominant.

Biblical Monism

The Bible teaches a form of monism. Though I would draw it a little differently to this view of neutral monism. The difference I would make is that I don't believe the soul is a 3rd, separate element. I believe that the soul is the meshing together of the body and the mind, it is simply the inner core of the person; who they "are." And so I like to draw it as coming out of the two elements in the middle and being the meeting point. The reason for this is that the body and mind are equal. That physical things can be just as spiritual as mental ones; a loving embrace can be just as spiritual an experience as a mental awakening is. Because it's not as though physical=bad. God made a good, physical, creation – one that he says speaks of Him, if you'll listen.



The results for faith

The result of this for faith is to make it, like the person, a much more integrated experience. It is all at once both physical and spiritual. There is not a clear divide between what is sacred and spiritual and what is secular and unspiritual. That means that actually so may more of life's experiences actually have a deeper point and meaning to them. My work now isn't just the way by which I feed myself, because I suppose I must. My work can be a spiritual experience, as I use my body and mind to serve God and to serve my community. It means that faith is not just compartmentalised into one small part of my life. It can actually be the thing that helps define all the other things that I do. It means that my faith will be very practical; it will affect how I eat, how I spend my time etc.

It does something else very significant. It means that my behaviour can tell me what I really believe. Because if I say I believe something, but I actually behave in a different way, then I show that I don't really believe it. Because my thinking, my affections and motivations and my behaviours are all inter-connected. Similarly, if I want to know why I do a certain thing, then I can ask myself, "what is it that I'm believing to cause me to behave in this way?"

#7 Wisdom: Obama mocks Donald Trump: 'ignorance is not a virtue' [at *The Telegraph*]

Below is a recent newspaper article including quotes from President Obama addressing Donald Trump's anti-intellectualism.

The Telegraph

By Associated Press
15 May 2016 • 9:57pm

President Barack Obama on Sunday urged college graduates to shun those who want to confront a rapidly changing world by building walls around the United States or by embracing ignorance, as he delivered a sharp and barely concealed critique of Donald Trump.

Obama used his commencement speech at Rutgers University to illustrate a world view antithetical to the ideas espoused by the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. Looking out at a sea of red and black gowns, Obama told the roughly 12,000 graduating students that the pace of change on the planet is accelerating, not subsiding, and that recent history had proved that the toughest challenges cannot be solved in isolation.

"A wall won't stop that," Obama said, bringing to mind Trump's call for building a border wall between the US and Mexico. "The point is, to help ourselves, we've got to help others - not pull up the drawbridge and try to keep the world out."

The president never mentioned Trump by name, but his intended target seemed clear. Repeatedly, Obama referred to disparaging comments about Muslims and immigrants, and opposition to free trade deals. But he appeared most incensed by what he described as a rejection of facts, science and intellectualism that he said was pervading politics.

"In politics and in life, ignorance is not a virtue," Obama said. "It's not cool to not know what you're talking about. That's not keeping it real or telling it like it is. That's not challenging political correctness. That's just not knowing what you're talking about," the president said.

"And yet, we've become confused about this," he continued, warning that the rejection of facts and science would lead the US on a path of decline.

Obama's rebuke came as Trump is close to clinching the GOP nomination, raising the prospect that November's election could portend a reversal of Obama's policies and approach to governing. In recent days, Trump has started focusing on the general election while working to unite a fractured Republican Party around his candidacy. Democrats are readying for a fight against a reality TV host they never anticipated would make it this far.



Obama has mostly steered clear as Democrats Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders compete for the nomination. But he has used speeches such the Rutgers address to lay out themes that Democrats may ultimately use as they work to deny Trump the White House.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who ran against Trump for the GOP nomination, has since endorsed him and become one of his most vocal surrogates. Christie didn't attend the president's speech at Rutgers, instead spending the day at nearby Princeton University for his son's baseball game in the Ivy League championship.

In his speech, Obama told graduates that when they hear people wax nostalgic about the "good old days" in America, they should "take it with a grain of salt."

"Guess what? It ain't so," the president said, rattling off a list of measures by which life is better in the US than in decades past.

Some 50,000 students and their families packed High Point Solution Stadium for the ceremony, the first at Rutgers to involve a sitting president. The public university's leaders lobbied the president for years to come to campus for the school's 250th anniversary.

Sunday's address was the second of three commencement speeches that Obama will deliver during his final graduation season as president. Earlier in May, Obama echoed similar themes about progress in the US when he spoke at historically black Howard University in Washington. The president will also speak on June 2 at the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The university also bestowed an honorary law degree on the president, adding to the half-dozen or so other honorary degrees that the Columbia and Harvard Law School graduate has received.

Below is a recent newspaper article analysing the theology of Presidential candidate Donald Trump but also those evangelical leaders who are supporting his campaign.

The New York Times

The Theology of Donald Trump



Peter Wehner JULY 5, 2016

Credit Christian Northeast



SINCE Donald Trump assures us that the Bible is his favourite book, it's worth asking: Just what is his theology?

After Mr. Trump met with hundreds of evangelical Christians a couple of weeks ago, James Dobson, who is among the most influential leaders in the evangelical world and serves on Mr. Trump's evangelical executive advisory board, declared that "Trump appears to be tender to things of the Spirit," by which Dr. Dobson meant the Holy Spirit.

Of all the descriptions of Mr. Trump we've heard this election season, this may be the most farcical. As described by St. Paul, the "fruit of the Spirit" includes forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, hardly qualities one associates with Mr. Trump. It shows you the lengths Mr. Trump's supporters will go to in order to rationalize their enthusiastic support of him.

Dr. Dobson is not alone. Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University, has praised Mr. Trump's life as in many ways exemplary and said that he believes that "Donald Trump is God's man to lead our nation." Eric Metaxas, who has written popular biographies of William Wilberforce and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has rhapsodized about Mr. Trump and argued that Christians "must" vote for him because he is "the last best hope of keeping America from sliding into oblivion."

And should your conscience tell you that Mr. Trump might not be the right choice, Robert Jeffress, the influential pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, explains that "any Christian who would sit at home and not vote for the Republican nominee" is "motivated by pride rather than principle."

This fulsome embrace of Mr. Trump is rather problematic, since he embodies a worldview that is incompatible with Christianity. If you trace that worldview to its source, Christ would not be anywhere in the vicinity.

Time and again Mr. Trump has shown contempt for those he perceives as weak and vulnerable — "losers," in his vernacular. They include P.O.W.s, people with disabilities, those he deems physically unattractive and those he considers politically powerless. He bullies and threatens people he believes are obstacles to his ambitions. He disdains compassion and empathy, to the point where his instinctive response to the largest mass shooting in American history was to congratulate himself: "Appreciate the congrats for being right."

What Mr. Trump admires is strength. For him, a person's intrinsic worth is tied to worldly success and above all to power. He never seems free of his obsession with it. In his comments to that gathering of evangelicals, Mr. Trump said this: "And I say to you folks, because you have such power, such influence. Unfortunately the government has weeded it away from you pretty strongly. But you're going to get it back. Remember this: If you ever add up, the men and women here are the most important, powerful lobbyists. You're more powerful. Because you have men and women, you probably have something like 75, 80 percent of the country believing. But you don't use your power. You don't use your power."

In eight sentences Mr. Trump mentioned some variation of power six times, to a group of individuals who have professed their love and loyalty to Jesus, who in his most famous

sermon declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and "Blessed are the meek," who said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness," and who was humiliated and crucified by the powerful.

To better understand Mr. Trump's approach to life, ethics and politics, we should not look to Christ but to Friedrich Nietzsche, who was repulsed by Christianity and Christ. "What is good?" Nietzsche asks in "The Anti-Christ": "Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is evil? Whatever springs from weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power increases – that resistance is overcome."

Whether or not he has read a word of Nietzsche (I'm guessing not), Mr. Trump embodies a Nietzschean morality rather than a Christian one. It is characterized by indifference to objective truth (there are no facts, only interpretations), the repudiation of Christian concern for the poor and the weak, and disdain for the powerless. It celebrates the "Übermensch," or Superman, who rejects Christian morality in favor of his own. For Nietzsche, strength was intrinsically good and weakness was intrinsically bad. So, too, for Donald Trump.

Those who believe this is merely reductionism should consider the words of Jesus: Do you have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear? Mr. Trump's entire approach to politics rests on dehumanization. If you disagree with him or oppose him, you are not merely wrong. You are worthless, stripped of dignity, the object of derision. This attitude is central to who Mr. Trump is and explains why it pervades and guides his campaign. If he is elected president, that might-makes-right perspective would infect his entire administration.

All of this is important because of what it says about Mr. Trump as a prospective president. But it is also revealing for what it says about Christians who now testify on his behalf (there are plenty who don't). The calling of Christians is to be "salt and light" to the world, to model a philosophy that defends human dignity, and to welcome the stranger in our midst. It is to stand for justice, dispense grace and be agents of reconciliation in a broken world. And it is to take seriously the words of the prophet Micah, "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love kindness and mercy, and to humble yourself and walk humbly with your God?"

Evangelical Christians who are enthusiastically supporting Donald Trump are signalling, even if unintentionally, that this calling has no place in politics and that Christians bring nothing distinctive to it — that their past moral proclamations were all for show and that power is the name of the game.

The French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul wrote: "Politics is the church's worst problem. It is her constant temptation, the occasion of her greatest disasters, the trap continually set for her by the prince of this world." In rallying round Mr. Trump, evangelicals have walked into the trap. The rest of the world sees it. Why don't they?

Peter Wehner, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, served in the last three Republican administrations and is a contributing opinion writer.

Follow The New York Times Opinion section on Facebook and Twitter (@NYTOpinion), and sign up for the Opinion Today newsletter.

Below is an article about the danger of compartmentalizing our faith.

THE CHRISTIAN POST

CP Church & Ministries.

Thursday, Jul 07, 2016

Women, Don't Compartmentalize Your Spiritual Life, Urges Christian Blogger

By Brittany Smith , Christian Post Reporter
March 27, 2012|5:59 pm

Christian women often try to organize the messiness of life by creating "happy little compartments that we suppose will bring peace," said Trisha Wilkerson, a Christian blogger and mother.

As the wife of a pastor at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Wash., and as a writer for Mark Driscoll's The Resurgence blog on subjects like work and worship, Wilkerson is no stranger to juggling the busyness of everyday life.

But she notes in her post, titled "Ladies, Don't Compartmentalize God," that women often try to control the chaos of life the wrong way. They create checklists and compartments in their hearts, "gladly tucking devotional and Bible thoughts into that 'Jesus' category."

This leaves them feeling inadequate if they haven't completed something and they think they are condemned by what is lacking. "Jesus seems distant, unavailable, and cold. We briefly acknowledge him and get back to work, sure that God will understand our mess," writes Wilkerson.

She emphasized that this kind compartmentalization can be dangerous and draining. "Our lives aren't neatly arranged. We try for 'neat' and it never happens," she said. "Our hearts are full of wandering desires distracting us from Christ, making those good works and loving acts of service sometimes non-existent, or just simply scattered across the disorder of our lives."

This urge and ability to compartmentalize only takes women so far because life is broken and complex, Wilkerson says. And it creates the assumption that they are in control, causing them to "limp through life…searching for 'balance' amid the chaos."

Wilkerson advises that instead of compartmentalizing and obsessing with organizing, women have to learn to trust God with the details. The real question should be, "If Jesus is our treasure, do our lives continually reflect this rich grace?"

This involves handing the reins of life over to God. "We can tenderly acknowledge the propensity to compartmentalize (which isn't always sinful) and pray for discernment, that we may see our distracted worship, and desperate need for Christ," she writes.

It is a matter of changing our perspective of life into a view of worship. Wilkerson cites theologian D.A. Carson who said, "Christian worship is the response of God's redeemed people to his self-revelation that exalts God's glory in Christ in our minds, affections, and wills, in the power of the Holy Spirit."

She says in light of this, women can change the perspective of their checklist or agenda and let Christ work on the details of their lives.

"To worship Jesus throughout our stressful, busy days without putting him in some compartment means that we truly see him as Lord over all of it, deeply loving us in the details. Yes, even the mundane tasks of life," she writes.

Wilkerson asks women to stop the next time they are doing dishes, cleaning, or in a meeting and think about God, and how He is in control.

Ultimately if we "can relinquish control, knowing that our holy, perfect, and attentive God is Lord over all these self-made compartments and gives us his Spirit to demonstrate his wisdom and grace daily. We are invited to live this out, as worship," she says.

Source URL : http://www.christianpost.com/news/women-dont-compartmentalize-your-spiritual-life-urges-christian-blogger-72188/

#9 Life-plans: Top ten symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality [in *The Christian Post*]

Below is a fantastic article about how we, even as Christians, can order our lives in an incredibly ungodly, unhelpful and unhealthy way.

Ten top symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality

Written by Pete Scazzero

Jay, one of our church members, recently shared with me: "I was a Christian for 22 years. But instead of being a 22-year-old Christian, I was a one-year old Christian 22 times! I just kept doing the same things over and over and over again."

Angela, in explaining why she had not attended church for over five years, asked me privately, "Why is it that so many Christians make such lousy human beings?"

The following are the top ten symptoms indicating if I am suffering from a bad case of emotionally unhealthy spirituality.

1. Using God to run from God

Few killer viruses are more difficult to discern than this one. On the surface all appears to be healthy and working. But it's not. In my case, using God to run from God is when I create a great deal of "God-activity" and ignore difficult areas in my life God wants to change. Some examples: I use God to run from God when I do God's work to satisfy me, not Him

- I use God to run from God when I do things in His name He never asked me to do
- I use God to run from God when my prayers are really about God doing my will, not my surrendering to His
- I use God to run from God when I demonstrate "Christian behaviours" so significant people think well of me

2. Ignoring the ungodly emotions of anger, sadness and fear

Many of us Christians believe wholeheartedly that anger, sadness, and worry are sins to be avoided. They indicate something is wrong with our spiritual life. Like most Christians, I was taught that almost all feelings are unreliable and not to be trusted. They go up and down and are the last thing we should be attending to in our spiritual lives.

It is true that some Christians live in the extreme of following their feelings in an unhealthy, unbiblical way. It is more common, however, to encounter Christians who do not believe they have permission to admit their feelings or express them openly. This applies especially to the more "difficult" feelings of fear, sadness, shame, anger, hurt and pain. When taken in its entirety, the practical implications of such an imbalanced, narrow, Biblical belief system are enormous. It leads to a devaluing and repression of the emotional aspect of our humanity that is also made in the image of God. Sadly, some of our Christian beliefs and expectations today have, as Thomas Merton wrote, "merely deadened our humanity, instead of setting it free to develop richly, in all its capacities, under the influence of grace."

3. Dying to the wrong things

True, Jesus did say: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). But when we apply this verse rigidly, without qualification from the rest of Scripture, it leads to the very opposite of what God intends.

It results in a narrow, faulty theology.

We are to die to the sinful parts of who we are —such as defensiveness, detachment from others, arrogance, stubbornness, hypocrisy, judgmentalism, a lack of vulnerability— as well as the more obvious sins described for us in Scripture.

We are not called by God to die to the "good" parts of who we are. God never asked us to die to the healthy desires and pleasures of life — to friendships, joy, art, music, beauty, recreation, laughter and nature. God plants desires in our hearts so we will nurture and water them. Often these desires and passions are invitations from God, gifts from Him. Yet somehow we feel guilty unwrapping those presents.

God never asks us to annihilate the self. We are not to become "non-persons" when we become Christians. The very opposite is true. God intends our deeper, truer self, which He created, to blossom freely as we follow Him.

4. Denying the past's impact on the present

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, whether as a child, teenager or adult, we are, in the dramatic language of the Bible, born again (see John 3:3). The apostle Paul describes this way: "The old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The work of growing in Christ (what theologians call sanctification) does not mean we don't go back to the past as we press ahead to what God has for us. It actually demands we go back in order to break free from unhealthy and destructive patterns that prevent us from loving ourselves and others well as God designed.

5. Dividing our lives into "secular" and "sacred" compartments

It is so easy to compartmentalize God to "Christian activities" around church and our spiritual disciplines without thinking of Him in our marriages, the disciplining of our children, the spending of our money, our recreation, or even our studying for exams.

According to Gallup polls and sociologists, one of the greatest scandals of our day is that "evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centred and sexually immoral as the world in general."

The statistics are devastating:

- church members divorce their spouses as often as their secular neighbours
- church members beat their wives as often as their neighbours
- church members' giving patterns indicate they are almost as materialistic as non-Christians
- white evangelicals are the most likely people to object to neighbours of another race
- twenty-six per cent of the "higher-commitment" evangelicals and 46 percent of the "lower-commitment" evangelicals think premarital sex is acceptable

Ron Sider, in his book The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, summarizes the level of our compartmentalization: "Whether the issue is marriage and sexuality or money and care for the poor, evangelicals today are living scandalously unbiblical lives. . . .The data suggest that in many crucial areas evangelicals are not living any differently from their unbelieving neighbours."

6. Doing for God instead of being with God

Being productive and getting things done are high priorities in our Western culture. Praying and enjoying God's presence for no other reason than to delight in Him was a luxury, I was told, that we could take pleasure in once we got to heaven. For now, there was too much to be done.

Are all these things wrong? No. But work for God that is not nourished by a deep interior life with God will eventually be contaminated by other things such as ego, power, approval of and from others, and buying into the wrong ideas of success and the mistaken belief that we can't fail. When we work for God because of these things, our experience of the gospel often falls off centre. We become "human doings" not "human beings." Our experiential sense of worth and validation gradually shifts from God's unconditional love for us in Christ to our works and performance. The joy of Christ gradually disappears.

Our activity for God can only properly flow from a life with God. We cannot give what we do not possess.

7. Spiritualizing away conflict

Nobody likes conflict. Yet conflict is everywhere — from law courts to workplaces to classrooms to neighbourhoods to marriages to parenting our children to close friendships to when someone has spoken or acted toward you inappropriately. But the belief that smoothing over disagreements or "sweeping them under the rug" is to follow Jesus continues to be one of the most destructive myths alive in the church today. For this reason, churches, small groups, ministry teams, denominations and communities continue to experience the pain of unresolved conflicts.

Very, very few of us come from families where conflicts are resolved in a mature, healthy way. Most simply bury our tensions and move on.

Jesus shows us that healthy Christians do not avoid conflict. His life was filled with it! He was in regular conflict with the religious leaders, the crowds, the disciples — even His own family. Out of a desire to bring true peace, Jesus disrupted the false peace all around Him. He refused to "spiritualize away" conflict.

8. Covering over brokenness, weakness and failure

The pressure to present an image of ourselves as strong and spiritually "together" hovers over most of us. We feel guilty for not measuring up, for not making the grade.

We forget that not one of us is perfect and that we are all sinners.

The Bible does not spin the flaws and weaknesses of its heroes. Abraham lied. Hosea's wife was a prostitute. Peter rebuked God! Noah got drunk. Jonah was a racist. Jacob lied. John Mark deserted Paul. Elijah burned out. Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. Thomas doubted. Moses had a temper. Timothy had ulcers.

And all these people send the same message: that every human being on earth, regardless of their gifts and strengths, is weak, vulnerable and dependent on God and others.

9. Living without limits

The core spiritual issue here relates to our limits and our humanity. We are not God. We cannot serve everyone in need. We are human.

Jesus modelled this for us as a human being — fully God yet fully human. He did not heal every sick person in Palestine. He did not raise every dead person. He did not feed all the hungry beggars or set up job development centres for the poor of Jerusalem.

He didn't do it, and we shouldn't feel we have to. But somehow we do. Why don't we take appropriate care of ourselves? Why are so many Christians, along with the rest of our culture, frantic, exhausted, overloaded, and hurried?

Few Christians make the connection between love of self and love of others. Sadly, many believe that taking care of themselves is a sin, a "psychologizing" of the gospel taken from our self-centred culture. I believed that myself for years.

It is true we are called to consider others more important than ourselves (see Philippians 2:4). We are called to lay down our lives for others (see 1 John 3:16). But remember, you first need a "self" to lay down.

As Parker Palmer said, "Self-care is never a selfish act — it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch."

10. Judging other people's spiritual journey

I was taught it was my responsibility to correct people in error or in sin and to always counsel people who were mixed up spiritually. I therefore felt guilty if I saw something questionable and did nothing to point it out. But I felt even guiltier when I was supposed to "fix" someone's problem and had to admit "I don't know how" or "I don't know what to say."

Of course, many of us have no trouble at all dispensing advice or pointing out wrongdoing. We spend so much time at it that we end up self-deceived, thinking we have much to give and therefore little to receive from others. After all, we're the ones who are "right," aren't we? This often leads to an inability to receive from "ordinary," "less mature" people than ourselves. We only receive from "experts" or "professionals."

Like Jesus said, unless I first take the log out of my own eye, knowing that I have huge blind spots, I am dangerous. I must see the extensive damage sin has done to every part of who I am — emotion, intellect, body, will and spirit — before I can attempt to remove the speck from my brother's eye (see Matthew 7:1-5).

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#10 Money problems: 'Is it ok for a Christian to be rich?' [at *Patheos*]

Below I have attached a brilliant article by the Christian author Shane Claiborne posted on the Patheos blog – it tries to answer and challenge the question "is it ok for a Christian to be rich?"



Is it ok for a Christian to be rich?

by Shane Claiborne

Asking if it is okay for Christians to be rich is a strange question. It is like asking if it is okay for Christians to overeat, or watch too much TV. It may be permissible, but that doesn't mean it is a good idea. I believe Jesus came to set us free — and one of the things he wants to set us free from is our obsession with money and possessions. Which is why he says such harsh things like "Woe to you who are rich…" (Luke 6:24).

Why would we want to try and accumulate the stuff that Scripture says the love of which is the root of all sorts of evil? John Wesley said so well, "If I have money in my hands, I get rid of it quickly lest it make its way into my heart."

A constant thread in Scripture is that we are not to take more than we need while others have less than they need, a radical critique of the world we live in. The early Christians went so far as to say that if a Christian has more than they need while their neighbour is in need, the Christian is a thief. "If we have two coats we have stolen one."

But here's the important catch — this is about love. To love our neighbour as our self, redefines how we hold our possessions, and how we define what is "enough." One of the signs of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, was that they all started sharing… Acts 2/4: "No one claimed any of their possessions as their own, but the shared everything they had… and there were no needy persons among them."

In the end Jesus did not come to give us guilt — but to give us life. And the lilies and the sparrows know that freedom, and that trust in God… even Solomon in all his splendour could not compare to them. There is no greater thing to do with the gifts of God than to share

them, especially with those in need. The best thing to do with the best things in life — is give them away.

Let me follow up with one more reflection. This one is especially for folks who look to the Bible as a framework for how we are to live. Building on the work of some great thinkers like Ched Myers and Ron Sider – let's consider a "THEOLOGY OF ENOUGH."

Rather than reacting to the extremes of the "prosperity Gospel" (God blesses people with wealth) or the "poverty Gospel" (God demands that all of us live in poverty), I want to suggest we build a new framework for thinking about money and possessions — a theology of ENOUGH. The idea is that God wants every one of us to have the things we need. And there is enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed (as Gandhi said).

There is a vision weaved throughout Scripture of "this day our daily bread." Or as Proverbs says – give me neither poverty nor riches, for in my poverty I might be forced to steal and in my riches I might forget my God (Proverbs 30:8).

One of the earliest stories we have in the Bible is Exodus 16. Before God's people even have the 10 commandments they are commanded by God to take only enough food for each day, and they are ordered by God to take one day's ration in the Ark of the Covenant to remind them of God's provision – and to remind them not to stockpile for tomorrow while folks don't have enough for today. God even threatens to send maggots to eat up any excess they start to hoard.

We see this idea of "enough" reiterated all through Scripture, Old and New Testaments. Paul articulates this "theology of enough" as he scolds the early Christians for not sharing:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

The only reason any of this seems radical is that we have come a very long way from God's vision for everyone to have this day our daily bread.

Just consider this: The world's three richest people own more than the combined economies of 48 countries. 85 people own the same amount of wealth as 3.5 billion (half the world).

The average CEO in the US is making 380 times the average worker. That means the average worker needs to work an entire month to make what the CEO makes in one hour.

We live in a time of unprecedented inequity between the rich and poor. It's time to rediscover this theology of enough.

We hear the echo of "enough" in the Lord's Prayer as we are taught to pray for "this day our daily bread." Not just "my bread." Not tomorrow's bread. But for all of us to have enough TODAY.

In the early Church, not only did they radically share their possessions with open hands "claiming nothing as their own" — they went so far as to do a community-wide fast if they were running short.

Until everyone could eat, no one would eat. In fact, it was the ethic of the early Christians that no one has a right to more than they need while others have less. Vincent de Paul demonstrates this ethic well when he suggests that when we give food to the hungry, our posture should be to get on our knees and ask forgiveness, for we are only returning what is rightfully theirs.

God did not create one person rich and another poor. Generosity is not a noble virtue of the saints, it is simply what Christian's do … to love our neighbour as ourselves redefines how we hold our possessions. Generosity flows naturally from a heart of love. How can we pass by our neighbour in need and not share with them (1 John 3:17)?

What we are talking about is a global movement committed to loving our neighbour as ourselves. And the love we are talking about comes with a daunting responsibility that goes along with being "born again." It means that if someone else's child goes without, it is as tragic as if that were our own child. We start to feel uncomfortable buying stuff we don't need when we realize that we have brothers and sisters who are dying because they don't have a mosquito net that will prevent malaria… a mosquito net that costs $3, the price we pay for coffee. That's tough to swallow.

But nonconformity doesn't mean uniformity. There's not one anecdote for how we are all to live. But loving our neighbour as ourselves is the goal, and seeking "this day our daily bread" helps refine our vision. Some, like Matthew in the Gospel, will sell everything. Others like Zacchaeus will sell half of everything and pay people back four times what they owe them. But for all of us it is call to radically reorient the way we think about money and possessions – lest the things we own begin to own us.

Here's the deal. Generosity cannot be forced. It cannot be legislated. It has to be provoked… by love. That's why we're not talking about a new form of socialism or communism or anything that ends in "-ism."

Jesus did not come to give us guilt, but to give us life. The current economic patterns are not good for the poor or the rich. Studies show that some of the wealthiest corners of the world have the highest rates of loneliness, depression, and suicide. Someone once said to Mother Teresa: "I couldn't live like you if someone paid me a million dollars." And she responded by saying, "I wouldn't do it if someone paid me a million dollars either… I do it because it is what

I am made for." What we are talking about is the life we are made for. And many of us settle for something short of that life.

I will never forget learning one of my best lessons in economics — from a homeless kid in India. Every week we would throw a party for the street kids, kids 8-10 years old who were homeless, begging all day to survive. Each Tuesday we would get about 100 of them together and throw a party, play games, eat a big meal. One week, one of the kids I had grown close to told me it was his birthday.

So I got him an ice cream. He was so excited he stared at it mesmerized. I have no idea how long it had been since he had eaten ice cream. But what he did next was brilliant. He yelled at all the other kids and told them to come over. He lined them up and gave them all a lick. His instinct was: this is so good I can't keep it for myself. In the end, that's what this whole idea of generosity is all about. Not guilt. It's about the joy of sharing. It's about realizing the good things in life – like ice cream – are too good to keep for ourselves.

This is an article about some of the problems with the word of faith movement – a movement that believes you can (if your faith is strong enough) have whatever you ask from God

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10 Ways the Word of Faith Movement Went Wrong

9:00AM EDT 9/19/2013 Joseph Mattera



As a product of the Word of Faith movement in the early 1980s, I will forever be indebted to the books and teachings of Kenneth Hagin Sr., Smith Wigglesworth, John G. Lake, T.L. Osborn and the like. These were holy men of integrity who turned the world upside down with their faith and teaching.

I learned how to pray for the sick by reading Osborn's book *Healing the Sick*, and I learned how to resist the devil by reading Hagin's *The Believer's Authority*. In reading many biographies of Smith Wigglesworth, I have always been challenged by his utter consecration to Christ and to walk in the light of His Word whether in or out of the pulpit. I shudder to think where I would be right now if not for being influenced by these men and this movement.

That being said, as I continued to grow in the Lord and His Word, I saw several flaws in the teaching and in the movement in general. This article is not meant to dampen anyone's faith but to bring a more balanced picture of the ways of God—especially since many have been

discouraged in this movement because they did not understand the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and did not have a theology that included certain things that challenged their faith.

I have found that whenever we preach or emphasize one truth of God's Word to the exclusion of the others, it becomes a mixture and produces both good and bad fruit. For example, this has happened with the hypergrace movement, as well as the view of hyperfaith. From an overemphasis on outward holiness, we get legalism. And we come into a form of fatalism when we emphasize God's sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility.

However, I will go on record saying that I would much rather be with people attempting to walk in faith and victory than be hanging out with depressed saints filled with unbelief and doubt. Also, like most other movements, the Word of Faith movement restored to the body of Christ a biblical truth that was neglected by the church—and in doing so, overemphasized it. But after several years, more balance comes as folks like myself "eat the meat and spit out the bones." Also, I believe that Brother Hagin never approved of some of the excesses that came out of the faith camp—especially regarding the unbalanced teachings on prosperity that came from some of his more radical followers.

The following are some of the flaws of the Word of Faith movement from my perspective (and I realize these are generalizations that don't fit exactly every person classified as "Word of Faith"):

1. They preach a "rights centred" gospel rather than a "stewardship centred" gospel.

Perhaps influenced by our Jeffersonian heritage of individual rights in America, the way the gospel is applied to individuals in the Word of Faith movement is based on personal rights in Christ. Although this is partially true, the New Testament balances our rights in Christ with our responsibility that goes along with these rights.

For example, in Deuteronomy 8:18, we learn that God gave believers "power to get wealth, that His may establish His covenant." This passage clearly teaches us the primary purpose of prosperity is for the kingdom—not only for our individual comfort and pleasure. Many in the faith movement used to "claim" houses and cars and attempt to use their faith merely for their own individual needs, which, in and of itself, goes against our call to seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33) as a prerequisite for our individual needs and wants being fulfilled.

2. Their dispensational belief precludes the role and importance of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant age.

I heard Brother Hagin brag several times in his teaching sessions that he did not read the Old Covenant because we have a new and better covenant now in Christ. The challenge with that teaching is that he did not understand the relevance and role of the moral and civic law of God found from Exodus to Deuteronomy—especially the Ten Commandments that were repeated over and over again either exactly or in principle by the New Testament writers. Without the

moral law of God, we have no standard for holiness and will lack the conviction of sin the moral law gives as our standard of holiness and ethics.

Furthermore, Hagin and others like him would only quote the Old Testament when convenient—when it comported to his view of faith. For example, he would quote Exodus 23:25, where God told the Jews He would take sickness from them, but he neglected to also teach that in order to walk in health, they had to follow the strict dietary code as found in Leviticus 11. Thus, healing for the Jews included not only claiming a promise of God but also staying away from unclean food. (In my opinion, walking in physical health also involves having a healthy diet and lifestyle—or else we are tempting God by intentionally violating His natural laws and then expecting Him to heal us.)

3. They have a semi-gnostic dualism regarding their view of God.

Word of Faith preachers have a simple view of God: Everything that is good is of God, and everything bad is from the devil.

While I totally agree God is a good God, sometimes He has to bring judgment or allow things to take place that in our natural minds may be interpreted as bad. What do Word of Faith preachers do with passages like Isaiah 45:7, in which God says He not only brings prosperity but also disaster? Or 2 Samuel 24:13, where God told King David to choose one of three calamities He would bring upon the land of Israel as punishment for his sin? Or Amos 3:6, which clearly says God sometimes brings disaster to a city? What about the book of Job, where God allows Satan to afflict Job physically with boils as well as bring disaster to other areas of his life?

I remember Brother Hagin teaching that Job doesn't count in the New Testament because Job 42:10 says God turned the captivity of Job and that Luke 4:18 says Jesus set the captives free. That would all be fine, except for the fact that the book of James carries the life and story of Job into the New Testament for the church age—specifically, James 5:11 offers a lesson for us regarding God's ways and dealings. (Also, without the book of Job, we have nothing to say to Christians who unexpectedly lose a loved one or experience great personal challenges and loss. Job is comforting to me as a pastor because it shows me that God is sovereign over all things—in both the good and the bad—even when it is hard to explain and understand in the natural. Furthermore, God never gave Job an explanation for why He allowed disaster to strike.)

Finally, what do Word of Faith teachers say about Revelation 2:22-23, where Jesus says that He will cast people on a bed of sickness and even strike people dead? This does not go along with the simple dualism they teach.

Now, I will be the first to say that God's general will, as revealed in the Gospels, is for divine health (see also 3 John 2) and that, in general, He always wants us healthy in spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23) and that Jesus came for us to have an abundant life (John 10:10). But those in the Word of Faith movement have such a narrow view of the Word of God that they do not have any explanations for mysterious things that happen to us that challenge our faith.

It is not always true that something bad happened to a person because they had sin (John 9:1-3) or that they didn't get healed or calamity came to them because they lacked faith. Of course, the instance where Jesus brought sickness and death in Revelation 2:22-23 had to do with disobedience, which took people out from under the covering of the Lord (Ps. 91:1).

In summary, it is still generally God's will to bring us health and prosperity in the context of obedience to His Word.

4. Positive confession sometimes leads to dishonesty and superficial Christianity.

I have been around many believers who are afraid to be honest and admit they are struggling with their faith. This brings people into bondage and even a form of superficial religion. Some believers are like robots—when you ask them how they are doing, they routinely say, "I am blessed and highly favoured!" However, I know some of these people, and they are merely trying to keep a positive confession even though their world is falling apart.

Now, I do believe in speaking the Word of God to our challenging circumstances and not giving in to negative talk, but that is different from what James 5:16 tells us when he exhorts believers to confess their faults one to another. Positive confession is good and biblical (Prov. 18:21) as long as it doesn't stop a person from getting pastoral counsel and being honest with fellow believers when they need prayer.

5. Their view on prosperity is only based on giving.

While it is true that the Bible teaches we reap what we sow and that if we give, it will be given back to us (Luke 6:38), one of the flaws of the Word of Faith movement is that it only teaches people one side of prosperity. I believe the church needs to equip the saints not only to give but also to get, as well as how to manage what they get while investing and saving for the future.

When we only teach the saints how to give, we limit the amount of creativity and blessing some people can experience—because without combining giving with hard work, education and an understanding of how to manage and create a budget, many folks will continue in cycles of poverty even though they may experience elements of God's provision based on their giving. God can only bless in proportion to our ability to manage what He gives us!

In poor countries, I have found that when the only solution presented to the people for breaking poverty is "giving to the church," the only person who becomes prosperous is the preacher. In the kingdom of God, the church is called to have a more empowering and holistic approach in regard to prosperity and breaking cycles of poverty.

6. They have faith in their faith as a principle rather than it emanating out of the person of Christ.

I have found in many instances where this movement presented faith almost as an impersonal force, like the law of gravity. This led to teachings like "having faith in your faith." When this

is taught, it can disconnect faith from intimacy with the Lord. The more I get to know a person, the more I can trust them. Faith is not a force. It is a result of growing in simple trust based on growing in an experiential knowledge of the Lord. Faith is relational. It is not an impersonal force.

7. Some pastors have modelled their church preaching after these "specialists" in the body.

Brother Hagin, T.L. Osborn, Smith Wigglesworth and the like were not typical pastors called to oversee a flock. Thus, they were able to preach based on their primary assignment, which was faith and healing.

The challenge is, many pastors who don't understand this began to mimic these great men of God and attempted to build congregations only around those three themes—faith, prosperity and healing. That is OK if you are a traveling teacher or evangelist, but a congregation needs to have a balanced diet of the Word that includes the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). A pastor needs to preach on healing but also holiness; faith but also tests and trials; moving mountains but also marriage; giving financially but also stewardship and hard work. I love preaching on faith and healing, but as a pastor I often had to preach subjects I really did not have a great passion for but knew others needed to hear to fully mature in the Lord.

8. It can put guilt and bondage on believers.

I have heard of many people who walk around in guilt because they are not healed or because they are struggling financially. In some cases, I have even heard of famous faith preachers who checked into a hospital under a different name so word would not get out that they were sick and under a doctor's care!

We need to have a culture of faith in our churches, but we also have to engender a culture of humility, honesty and brokenness—admitting that we don't always walk in victory over sin and sickness as well as making allowances for mystery. The fact is, we don't always understand why certain things happen to believers. (See again the book of Job.)

9. It can produce independent, narcissistic believers.

When the Word of Faith movement went from a stewardship-centred gospel to a rights-centred gospel, it also attracted many self-focused people—people who used God as an excuse for their lavish lifestyles and who frowned upon those living in simplicity. Unfortunately, this teaching often appealed to the narcissistic tendencies in all of us, and many large ministries were built more upon the American Dream of having a nice house and a nice car than upon taking up our cross and following Jesus. Jesus said in Luke 14:33 that we have to lose everything in order to be His disciple, but many in this movement only focus on what we gain. Truly, you can't be resurrected until you first go to the cross!

10. It is not connected to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Last but not least, the Word of Faith movement did not go far enough. Instead of limiting faith to merely believing for individual healing and health, the Word of God teaches that our faith should also transform whole cities and subdue kingdoms! (See Isaiah 61:4 and Hebrews 11:33.) The gospel is a blueprint to disciple and baptize whole people groups, not just individuals (Matt. 28:19-20). It not only deals with individual sinners but systemic evil. The Word of Faith movement, though, brings faith for individual victory but doesn't say much about corporate victory. However, regarding the community of believers, faith is also based on the corporate culture and anointing of a congregation. (First Corinthians 11:27-32 and Hebrews 3-4 teach that whole congregations can be negatively affected by a culture of unbelief or disobedience.)

The Word of Faith movement in general separated the gospel from the kingdom and, in doing so, made it more about individual prosperity then societal transformation. When you separate the gospel from the kingdom, you tend to become more self-focused because the Good News gets disconnected from our responsibility to steward the earth. With the gospel of the kingdom, we believe in individual, congregational and societal transformation!

Finally, I believe with all of my heart that there was more good than bad in the Word of Faith movement and that it was God's intention that biblical faith for the supernatural be restored back to the church. All of us only know in part and see through a glass darkly—even the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). Consequently, it often takes years for the body of Christ to discern how to have balance when old truths are restored. One of the keys to life is balance—and biblical balance cannot come until we attempt to embrace the whole counsel of God!

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This is an article that handles the specific question of what is meant by the phrase "prayer of faith" used in James 5.

What Is the Prayer of Faith?

from Sinclair Ferguson May 18, 2016 Category: Articles



Years ago, the editor of a publishing company asked me to write a book on prayer. The theme is a vitally important one. The publishing house was well known. To be honest, I felt flattered. But in a moment of heaven-sent honesty, I told him that the author of such a book would need to be an older and more seasoned author (not to mention, alas, more prayerful) than I was. I mentioned one name and then another. My reaction seemed to encourage him to a moment of honesty, as well. He smiled. He had already asked the well-seasoned Christian leaders whose names I had just mentioned! They, too, had declined in similar terms. Wise men, I thought. Who can write or speak at any length easily on the mystery of prayer?

Yet in the past century and a half, much has been written and said particularly about "the prayer of faith." The focus has been on mountain-moving prayer by which we simply "claim" things from God with confidence that we will receive them because we believe that He will give them.

But what exactly is the prayer of faith?

Association with the Dramatic

Interestingly, it is in the letter of James (who has so much to say about works) that the term occurs. It climaxes the marvellous teaching on prayer that punctuates the entire letter (see 1:5–8; 4:2–3; 5:13–18).

What is even more striking is that the significance of the phrase seems to be illustrated by the experience of one individual, the prophet Elijah. In his case, the prayer of faith was instrumental in shutting the heavens. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that the phrase has come to be associated largely, if not exclusively, with dramatic, miracle-like events—with the extraordinary rather than the daily.

Yet this misses the basic thrust of James's teaching. The reason Elijah is used as an example is not that he was an extraordinary man; James stresses that he was "a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17). It is his ordinariness that is in view.

Elijah's praying is used as an example not because it produced miracle-like effects but because it gives us one of the clearest of all illustrations of what it means for anyone to pray with faith: it is believing God's revealed Word, taking hold of His covenant commitment to it, and asking Him to keep it.

The Prayer of a Righteous Person

Shutting up the heavens was not, after all, a novel idea that originated in the fertile mind of Elijah. In fact, it was the fulfilment of the promised curse of the covenant Lord: "If you do not obey the Lord your God … these curses will come upon you… . The Lord will strike you … with scorching heat and drought… . The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder" (Deut. 28:15, 22–24, NIV).

Like every "righteous man" (James 5:16), Elijah sought to align his life with God's covenant promises and threats (which is, essentially, what "righteousness" means in the Old Testament—to be rightly covenantally related to the Lord). He lived his life in the light of the covenant God had made, and so he held on to its threats of judgment in prayer, as well as to its promises of blessing.

This, then, is the prayer of faith: to ask God to accomplish what He has promised in His Word. That promise is the only ground for our confidence in asking. Such confidence is not "worked up" from within our emotional life; rather, it is given and supported by what God has said in Scripture.

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This, then, is the prayer of faith: to ask God to accomplish what He has promised in His Word

Truly "righteous" men and women of faith know the value of their heavenly Father's promises. They go to Him, as children do to a loving human father. They know that if they can say to an earthly father, "But, father, you promised … ," they can both persist in asking and be confident that he will keep his word. How much more our heavenly Father, who has given His Son for our salvation! We have no other grounds of confidence that He hears our prayers. We need none.

Legitimate Prayer

Such appeal to God's promises constitutes what John Calvin, following Tertullian, calls "legitimate prayer."

Some Christians find this disappointing. It seems to remove the mystique from the prayer of faith. Are we not tying down our faith to ask only for what God already has promised? But such disappointment reveals a spiritual malaise: would we rather devise our own spirituality (preferably spectacular) than God's (frequently modest)?

The struggles we sometimes experience in prayer, then, are often part of the process by which God gradually brings us to ask for only what He has promised to give. The struggle is not our wrestling to bring Him to give us what we desire, but our wrestling with His Word until we are illuminated and subdued by it, saying, "Not my will, but Your will be done." Then, as Calvin again says, we learn "not to ask for more than God allows."

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True prayer can never be divorced from real holiness

This is why true prayer can never be divorced from real holiness. The prayer of faith can be made only by the "righteous" man whose life is being more and more aligned with the covenant grace and purposes of God. In the realm of prayer, too (since it is a microcosm of the whole of the Christian life), faith (prayer to the covenant Lord) without works (obedience to the covenant Lord) is dead.

Excerpt from *In Christ Alone* by Sinclair Ferguson.