

The epistles of James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude are usually called **general** epistles. They have this classification because they don't address a specific individual or church—they are more *general* as to who they address.

21. James

A. Authorship

- 1) “James” is said to be the author in 1:1
- 2) The NT tells of four James's though!
 - a. James the apostle, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John (Matt 10:2)
 - b. The other apostle James—called James the less—son of Alphaeus and Mary and the brother of Joses (Matt 10:3; 27:56; Mark 15:40)
 - c. The father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16; John 14:22)
 - d. James the brother of Jude (Jude 1) and half-brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19).
- 3) The author of this epistle is James the half-brother of Jesus—
 - a. He was well known (Jude 1), and the letter is written without any further description of the author
 - b. He was a leader in the early church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal 2:9, 12), and the letter is written in an authoritative tone
 - c. He was an eye-witness of the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:7)
 - d. As a half-brother, he would have had close access to the life and ministry of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3); the letter has parallels with Jesus' teachings
 - e. There are a number of similarities between this letter and the speech of James in Acts 15:13-21 and the letter sent out by the Jerusalem Church (15:23-29)

B. Recipients

- 1) Identified in 1:1 as “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad”
- 2) This letter is thus written to **Jewish** Christians who lived **outside** of Palestine
 - a. Whenever “twelve tribes” is used in Scripture it always refers to Jews, never figuratively for the church
 - b. “Dispersed abroad” is commonly used for Jews living outside of Palestine
 - c. “Hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1) clearly points to Christian believers, as does the reference to “elders of the church” (5:14). See also 1:1, 18; 2:7; 5:7
 - d. References to the *synagogue* as a meeting place (2:2), to monotheism (2:19), and to the Jewish wording for oaths (5:12) also supports understanding Jews as the readers

C. Occasion and Purpose

- 1) This letter does not specifically state its purpose, so we must identify James's purpose from what he wrote.
- 2) The vast majority of the letter consists of exhortations rather than teaching about doctrine or dealing with error. This means that James's purpose or reason for writing revolves around issues of **practical** significance.
- 3) From 2:14-26 it is clear that James writes to counter a superficial faith, a hollow, dead orthodoxy. He argues that **fruit** is the necessary evidence of **genuine** faith, of true salvation. Truly believing right doctrine involves the intellect, emotions, and will, not just the intellect.
- 4) Thus, James' purpose in writing is to exhort and encourage his readers to show the reality of their faith by conforming to the pattern of godliness in all areas of life. His emphasis is on godly **behavior**.
- 5) In this letter, James' purpose is to point out for the readers **how a living faith should respond to various areas of life**. Your profession is tested by your practice; your life should support your lips.

D. Characteristics

- 1) It is clearly Jewish in tone and "flavor" (cf. 5:4). James has over 40 allusions to the OT.
- 2) James uses many illustrations from nature and the ordinary activities of mankind:

Nature

Sea waves (1:6)
Grass and flowers (1:10-11)
The sun's heat (1:11)
Shadows from sun's position (1:17)
Water fountain (3:11)
Figs and olives (3:12)
Vapors (4:14)
Early and latter rains (5:7)
Drought (5:17)

Human Life

Conception and birth (1:15)
Firstfruits (1:18)
Looking into a mirror (1:23)
Begging (2:15-16)
Breath (2:26)
Horse bits (3:3)
Ship's helm (3:4)
Fire (3:5)
Taming of creatures (3:7)
Poison (3:8)
Sowing and harvesting (3:18)
Moth-eaten garments (5:2)
Rust (5:3)
Labor and wages (5:4)
Farming (5:7)
Anointing with oil (5:14)

- 3) It has a heavy emphasis on essential characteristics of genuine Christianity—good deeds and a faith that "works."

- 4) It is simply organized.
- 5) There are many similarities with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (there are more than 20)

- 1:2 Joy in the midst of trials (Matt 5:10-12)
- 1:4 Exhortation to perfection (Matt 5:48)
- 1:5 Asking for good gifts (Matt 7:7ff)
- 1:20 Against anger (Matt 5:22)
- 1:22 Hearers and doers of the Word (Matt 7:24ff)
- 2:10 The whole law to be kept (Matt 5:19)
- 2:13 Blessings of mercifulness (Matt 5:7)
- 2:14-26 Mere profession insufficient (Matt 7:21-23)
- 3:11-12 Character is evident in actions (Matt 7:16-20)
- 3:18 Blessings of peacemakers (Matt 5:9)
- 4:4 Friendship of the world as enmity against god (Matt 6:24)
- 4:10 Blessing of the humble (Matt 5:5)
- 4:11-12 Against judging others (Matt 7:1-5)
- 5:2ff Moth and rust spoiling riches (Matt 6:19)
- 5:10 The prophets as examples (Matt 5:12)
- 5:12 Against oaths (Matt 5:33-37)

- 6) James is sometimes called “the NT book of Proverbs.”
- 7) Because it has little *doctrinal* content, we have to understand it within the context of the whole NT.

E. Keys

- 1) Theme – The **Tests** of a **Living** Faith
- 2) Words – “faith” and “works”
- 3) Verse – **2:17**

F. Outline

Here's a basic outline of James—

- 1) Stand with Confidence, 1
- 2) Serve with Compassion, 2
- 3) Speak with Care, 3
- 4) Submit with Contrition, 4
- 5) Share with Concern, 5

Here's a more detailed outline of James—

1. Stand with Confidence, 1

- 1) Rejoice in diverse trials, 1:2-12
- 2) Resist in deadly temptation, 1:13-18
- 3) Rest in divine truth, 1:19-27

2. Serve with Compassion, 2

- 1) Accept others, 2:1-13
- 2) Assist others, 2:14-26

3. Speak with Care, 3

- 1) Control talk, 3:1-12
- 2) Cultivate thought, 3:13-18

4. Submit with Contrition, 4

- 1) Turn hatred into humility, 4:1-6
- 2) Turn judgment into justice, 4:7-12
- 3) Turn boasting into belief, 4:13-17

5. Share with Concern, 5

- 1) Share in possessions, 5:1-6
- 2) Share in patience, 5:7-12
- 3) Share in prayer, 5:13-20

James can also be outlined by listing the various “tests” of genuine, living faith—

1. The Test of Perseverance in Suffering, 1:2-12
2. The Test of Blame in Temptation, 1:13-18
3. The Test of Response to the Word, 1:19-27
4. The Test of Impartial Love, 2:1-13
5. The Test of Righteous Works, 2:14-26
6. The Test of the Tongue, 3:1-12
7. The Test of Humble Wisdom, 3:13-18
8. The Test of Worldly Indulgence, 4:1-12
9. The Test of Dependence, 4:13-17
10. The Test of Patient Endurance, 5:1-11
11. The Test of Truthfulness, 5:12
12. The Test of Prayerfulness, 5:13-18
13. The Test of True Faith, 5:19-20

Explanation of 2:14-20—

The solution for harmonizing Paul and James does not lie in different meanings for “works,” “faith,” or even “justification.” Rather, the solution lies in their respective *contexts*—their purposes and occasions for writing. Each addresses a different *problem* and so we must *distinguish* their perspectives regarding justification and works.

The Problem Paul Addresses: some form of Jewish legalism, confidence in human works as the *basis* for a right standing before God. Thus, Paul asserts the necessity of faith.

The Problem James Addresses: some form of dead orthodoxy, which sees no importance in works at all. Thus, James asserts the necessity of works as the evidence of true saving faith.

Thus, James and Paul aren’t crossing swords—they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the gospel. They do not have different *definitions*, they have different *perspectives*—that is, they are looking at justification and works from different angles.

Paul’s Viewpoint: when Paul claims a person is justified by faith and not by works, he is referring to works that *precede* salvation (conversion). **Paul’s view of justification sees God declaring the sinner righteous, thus gaining a right standing before God.** In Romans 4:5 Paul says that God is “the one who justifies *the ungodly*.” Abraham’s status *before* justification was such that he was incapable of doing any good work that would be acceptable to God. Thus since it is the sinner who is justified, works have no role in justification. This declaration resulted in Abraham gaining a right standing before God, and was the result of his faith, not his works.

James’ Viewpoint: when James claims a person is justified by works and not by faith alone, he has in view works that are *produced* by faith, works that *follow* salvation. **James’ view of justification sees God affirming the believer’s status as a righteous individual, thus demonstrating a right standing before God.** This declaration occurred *after* his gaining a right standing before God and consisted of God *affirming* Abraham as righteous, and was the result of his faith *and* his works.

While works are ruled out as a *condition* for salvation, they are insisted upon as the *evidence* of salvation. These are not the same, and so Paul and James do not contradict each other.

In effect, James and Paul were answering two different questions:

Paul answers the question, *How can a sinner be justified before a holy God?* Paul’s answer is *by faith alone*.

James answers the question, *What kind of faith saves—what kind of faith justifies?* James’ answer is *a faith that produces works*.

A living faith is a working faith. “Works” are the active exercise of Christian character in practical ways. *This does not contradict Paul’s teaching of justification but complements it.*

22. 1 Peter

A. Authorship

Pete is identified as the author (1:1).

B. Recipients

- 1) Identified in 1:1 as “those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”
- 2) The recipients are most likely **Gentile** Christians—
 - a. No reference to “twelve tribes” as in James
 - b. The regions to which the epistle was sent were primarily Gentile in population, as were the churches located there.
 - c. The readers are described in terms used almost exclusively for Gentiles but not for Jews (1:14; 2:9-10; 3:6; 4:1-4).

C. Occasion and Purpose

1) Occasion

- a. The readers were experiencing great suffering and persecution because they were believers. This was during the time following the burning of Rome, and Nero, whom the people suspected of initiating the fires, sought to redirect blame from him to the Christians. Thus, a vicious persecution against Christians spread through the Roman Empire.
- b. They may have been concerned how such suffering was consistent with God’s grace.

2) Purpose

The purpose is clearly stated in 5:12. Peter wants his readers to be **steadfast**, and he does so based on the facts of the gospel. Thus, Peter instructs and encourages his readers that—

- a. Christians must be faithful to Christ in the fire of suffering
- b. God’s grace is sufficient for persevering through persecution

“From the separateness of the Church two results, according to Peter, should follow—in the first place **purity**, and in the second place **courage**. Members of a holy race, purchased by the precious blood of Christ, elect from before the foundation of the world, cannot engage in those evil practices which were natural to them in their former state. And citizens of a heavenly commonwealth, members of a holy family, with Christ as their supreme example of courage and self-denial, can never fear anything that men can do” (Machen, p. 255).

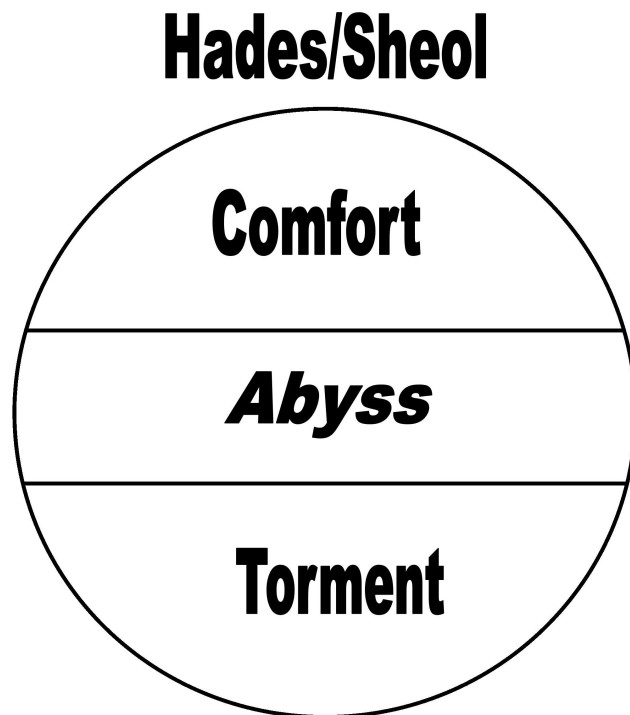
D. Characteristics

- 1) 1 Peter is distinctively the epistle of Christian suffering/persecution (1:6; 2:19-21, 23; 3:14, 16-17; 4:13-16, 19; 5:10).
- 2) Peter gives a NT commentary upon the OT prophets' understanding of what they wrote (1:10-11). While they enjoyed the Spirit's ministry in their lives and wrote about both the cross and the Kingdom, they did not recognize that two comings were involved in fulfilling this. They evidently wondered, "If the Messiah will reign, why must He die? How can He reign if He dies?"
- 3) 1 Peter teaches the doctrine of Christ – His incarnation (1:20), sinless life (1:19; 2:22), suffering and death (2:24), resurrection (3:21-22), ascension (3:22), presence at the right hand of the Father (3:22), and Second Coming (1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:1, 4).
- 4) One of the most difficult passages in the Bible—3:18-22.
 - a. Context
 - In this section (3:13-22) Peter makes a transition from the believer's response to mistreatment (3:8-12) to the necessity of doing good even if Christians are mistreated for it (4:1ff—"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh...").
 - Believers are to suffer for righteousness, 3:13-14a
 - Believers must submit to Christ, 3:14b-16
 - 3:17-22 gives the support for the exhortation to submit to Christ in 3:14b-16. That support is the example of Christ.
 - b. The purpose of Christ's death, 3:18—to bring the unjust to God that they might become servants of righteousness; believers are delivered from sin to be God's servants, and that purpose is fulfilled by submitting to Christ
 - c. The consequences of Christ's death, 3:19-22—here Peter reinforces our need to obey Christ and maintain a good conscience
 - In His descent, 3:19-21—vv. 19ff describe Christ's activity after his death...His descent into Hades (called *Sheol* in the OT; see diagram on the next page) in connection with His death, proclaiming doom to disobedient who are contrasted with the obedient who were delivered. Similarly, Peter's readers were to follow Christ's pattern of obedience as expressed in their baptism—to experience a like deliverance from divine chastisement
 - In His ascent, 3:22—Christ gained dominion over all, therefore *believers must submit to His authority, even if the consequence of that is suffering*

We can summarize Christ's work in Sheol/Hades thus:

- 1) **Christ descended into Hades but was not abandoned there** (Acts 2:27-32; Rom 10:7; Eph 4:9). Christ did not go to Hades/Sheol to finish His punishment or complete His atoning work for mankind. So, what did Christ do there, then?
- 2) **Christ confirmed the doom of certain sinners (1 Pet 3:19)**. Christ's "preaching" was not the good news; rather, He confirmed the justness of their condemnation. This was no offer of salvation or a message of hope.
- 3) **Christ brought good tidings to the righteous (1 Pet 4:6)**. The gospel that was "preached" was that the work of redemption was accomplished, that the guilt and condemnation of sin was finally taken away (cf. Heb 9:15). These were OT saints who did trust God for salvation, but whose sins ultimately required Christ's death for full payment. They were not being punished (cf. Lazarus, Luke 16:25).
- 4) **Christ led the righteous out of Hades (Eph 4:8)**. When Christ rose from the dead the spirits of righteous men were made perfect (Heb 12:23) and they were taken to the third heaven where God dwells.

To summarize: Because of Christ's resurrection and ascension, a significant change took place in the intermediate state. All the righteous in the "comfort" side were taken to heaven. From that point on every saved person will go to be with Christ in heaven at the moment of physical death.



E. Keys

- 1) Theme – The **True Grace** of God
- 2) Word – “suffering” (16x)
- 3) Verse – **5:12**

F. Outline

Here’s a basic outline of 1 Peter—

- 1) The Destiny of the Christian, 1:2-2:10
- 2) The Duty of the Christian, 2:11-3:12
- 3) The Discipline of the Christian, 3:13-5:11

Here’s a more detailed outline of 1 Peter—

Greeting, 1:1

1. The Destiny of the Christian, 1:2-2:10

- 1) Plan of Salvation, 1:2-12
 - a. Its program, 1:2-5
 - b. Its problem, 1:6-9
 - c. Its prophecy, 1:10-12
- 2) Products of Salvation, 1:13-25
 - a. Holiness, 1:13-16
 - b. Reverence, 1:17-21
 - c. Love, 1:22-25
- 3) Purpose of Salvation, 2:1-10

2. The Duty of the Christian, 2:11-3:12

- 1) Subjection in the State, 2:11-17
- 2) Subjection in the Household, 2:18-25
- 3) Subjection in the Family, 3:1-12

3. The Discipline of the Christian, 3:13-5:11

- 1) Suffering as a Citizen, 3:13-4:6
- 2) Suffering as a Christian, 4:7-19
- 3) Suffering as a Shepherd, 5:1-4
- 4) Suffering as Saints, 5:5-11

Conclusion, 5:12-14