

# Studies in James - Part 1

by W.F. Anderson

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*Faith is not just intellectual, but also volitional, and is tested through trials and temptations, but God is at work for good in all things.*

**Scripture:** Romans 10:9, Colossians 3:18, Hebrews 3:18, Hebrews 5:9, James 1:2-8

**Topics:** "Faith And Works", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of James, specifically chapter 1, verses 1-8. He emphasizes the importance of facing trials and temptations with joy, as they can lead to spiritual growth. The preacher also discusses the concept of faith and how it is not just about intellectual belief, but also about committing oneself to living out that belief through actions. He encourages the listeners to see challenges as opportunities for growth and to have a mindset of scattering seeds and multiplying the impact of their faith wherever they go.

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## Transcript

Let us pray. Our Father, it is with joy we come before you this morning in the fresh realization of our relationship to you and your goodness and grace and kindness to us. We pray that as we think and study together, our hearts may be open to your word and what you want to say, and that we will receive help in living more the way you want us to live, that our lives may bring pleasure to you and be a blessing to people around us.

We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, for me, this is a whole lot better than being at the chapel.

I'm much more at home than anybody. Sorry I didn't think about blackboard ahead of time when I flew without it. And if I get going too fast, don't give you time to say anything or ask questions.

Just interrupt me. Can you do that? This is supposed to be a conversation, but I don't give you time to have conversations. Now, just stop me.

If there are comments you want to make or questions, don't go ahead and interrupt. I just want to pick up something in the first chapter of Gene. And the Episcopal change, without going either to the pale opposite or trying to outline it, gives us, as I was suggesting last night, this test of faith.

As 1 John gives us this test of love, 1 John shows us what love really is. Gene gives us this test of faith, and shows us what faith really does. And it might be as well as just wanting to take a little time to talk about faith in Scripture.

And I want to begin by using the term believe in two ways that is used in New Testaments as well, except on the blackboard. If you want to jot down a couple of things, it may help. There's what I would call the intellectual use of the word believe.

And the way you can tell that in the New Testament is that the verb believe is followed by the word that. For instance, in John chapter 6, he responds to our Lord, we believe and are sure that thou art satisfied with the Son of God. And the verb believe is followed by the word that.

That gives the intellectual content of what I accept as true. That's what I would call the intellectual use of the word believe. It's the content of what I accept as true.

Paul writes in the Testimony and says, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, those are statements that I accept as facts. Jesus died and rose again. I believe that.

Now, you'll find that construction frequently in the New Testament, and surprise me by frequently in the Gospel of John. We believe that. I believe that.

If you believe that. That's the intellectual content. That's the fact content that I accept as true.

So, if I were to ask you this morning, what do you believe in? You can go down on this statement, and you would use the word believe followed by the word that. I believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. I believe that he was purged of sin.

I believe that he lived a sinless life. I believe that he died for my sins upon the cross. I believe that he rose again the third day.

All those are statements that I accept as true. I believe that. That kind of faith, or that aspect of faith, is always inadequate.

It's a beginning point, but it's a necessary point. You have to begin there. There isn't, if you might judge, but there really isn't any such thing as blind faith in the New Testament.

There is always a minimum of intellectual content. There isn't any such thing as blind faith. That's a starting point, but it is never enough in itself.

And, if this is the problem James was facing in James chapter 2, you believe that there is one God. That's fine. That's a good starting point, but that's not enough.

The demons believe that, in turn. So, I find a second use of the word believe in the New Testament, and I would call this the volitional use of the word believe. First is intellectual, what I accept as true.

The second is volitional, the commitment I make on the basis of the intellectual. The construction of the New Testament is the verb believe, followed by the word in, or on, or upon. Now, I am dealing with a response on my part to what I have accepted as true.

It's possible to have the first without the second, and that's a problem James is facing. I think all of us, or at least many of us, experience that. Some of us knew the gospel long before we presented ourselves to Jesus Christ, and if you had asked me, what do you believe, I would have given you a list of orthodox doctrines, but I had not committed myself to the person about whom those doctrines spoke.

So, you come to our well-known passages at John 3.16, "...whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." That is the response I make on the basis of what I believe. It's a volitional. In my own will, I commit myself to Jesus Christ.

I receive him as my Lord and Savior. Okay? Is that clear enough so far? So, you look for those two grammatical constructions in the New Testament on the word believe. Believe that, or believe in, on, or upon.

And salvation does not occur until I have come to volitional faith. I can believe that, and be absolutely correct, but until I believe in Jesus Christ, I am not a Christian. I do not have eternal life.

And the content, I believe that, is to give me a basis on which to act, on which to commit myself. Now, the second aspect of faith, believe in or on, what I call volitional faith, is equivalent, or works out, is obedience. John 3.36, before we get changed.

John 3.36, which you know well. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Does anyone have a different translation, or a marginal reading? He that believeth not the Son.

Is that a marginal reading, or a translation? I'm not asking for an English translation. What do you have for an English translation? What is it? Whoever rejects the Son. Well, the New International, yes.

Whoever rejects the Son. Okay. Any other translation of that? Everybody agrees on the first part, if we believe we have eternal life, but whoever does not, Obey.

That's the word. It's the Greek word for obey. Whoever does not obey the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Now, do you see the parallel? What is the opposite of believing? Disobeying. What does it mean to believe? It means to obey. And, this volitional faith, this commitment of myself to Jesus Christ, this receiving of Jesus Christ, works out as obedience.

Hebrews chapter 3. Here again, I'll need help with other translations. It says, Now, just as the author is talking about the experience of Israel and not getting into Cain, he says in verse 17, Disobedience. To them that were disobedient.

Now, note the contrast in verse 18. So, we've seen that they would not enter in because of unbelief. Unbelief and disobedience go together.

Belief and obedience go together. Chapter 5, our Lord is a high priest who gives eternal life to all that obey Him. So, the commitment of myself to Jesus Christ, receiving of Jesus Christ, or believing in Him, or believing on Him, as the New Testament puts it, works out in obedience.

Now, if that's what Jesus is talking about, I don't see His obedience. What does that tell me? You have stopped at the intellectual content, the orthodox doctrine. You have not taken that other step of committing

yourself.

Volitional faith. That's what James is wrestling with in chapter 2. And, it seems to me, unless we see the two uses of the verb believe in the New Testament, we may run into problems when we come to James chapter 2. Faith at work. All James is saying is, this kind of thing, the commitment to Jesus Christ, works itself out in obedience to Him.

If the obedience isn't there, the faith isn't there. Hebrews 3 is saying the same thing about Israel and the wilderness. If the obedience isn't there, the faith isn't there.

You may have the intellectual faith. I believe that must be volitional faith, the commitment. The receiving of Jesus Christ, the personal relationship with Him, is not there.

And, when I take that active, my will in receiving Him, committing myself to Him, I believe in Him or on Him. That commitment, that receiving of Him, brings me into a personal relationship with Him which is absent from the intellectual content. Now, don't rush to the volitional without the intellectual.

Too often we do that. We try to get people to make commitments when they have no information on this to make the commitment. Or, in evangelistic meetings, we get everybody all emotional, and they make an emotional commitment, but without any solid intellectual content, the routine that everyone starts going on.

And, we pull them. We don't want to stop short of the first. But, neither do we want to bypass it.

We believe that in order that we may believe in. Okay? Now, this is what James is talking about when he comes to his epistle. And, we've got the test of the faith.

And, what is being tested is whether or not I have believed in Jesus Christ. And, that's really what he's talking about, as I understand it, in James chapter 2. But, I want to turn to James chapter 1. Now, there are many questions about that. You look for those two constructions following the verb believe when you're reading through the New Testament.

Believe that, or believe in, or on. And, you'll find it quite frequently. I had a list, but I was talking this way with a group of young people, and I had gone through the brief recording, and just brought down a whole list of verses where you have those two constructions, and somebody wanted to fire up some of your copy, and I never got it back.

So, I've got to do it all over again. But, I don't have it with me this morning. But, you can just go through the New Testament, and you can see that, even in our English translations.

Now, let's come to James, James chapter 1. Are there questions or comments you want to fill in there? Add to it. Straighten me out. Whatever it is.

No? All right. Let me throw in another contrast, by the way. We sometimes talk about believing with the head and believing with the heart.

I would rather say the ego, actually, than the volition. The real contrast in the New Testament is not between the head and the heart, but between the lips and the heart. What I say is what I really believe.

If thou shalt confess with thine mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in thine heart, that God is gracious with thee. Because, too often, there's a contradiction between what I confess and what I really believe, what

I've committed myself to. Since people draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

That's the contrast in the Scripture. Not between head and heart, but between lip and heart. What I say may be quite different from what I have committed myself to.

What I have committed myself to shows up the way I live. We were saying the other night, it's not by their words that you know, but by their deeds, what they do. That shows what a man is committed to.

Not what he says, but what he does. That's the evidence of that volitional faith. So, you get past all the words, and what is going on in the life.

That's the evidence of this commitment to volitional faith. I accept a person on the basis of what he says. It's hard.

He tells me the truth, and I accept that. But, whether or not that volitional faith is there, will show up in the words. What I do, not what I say.

What I do. That's the real test. That's the real danger creatures face.

It's so easy to come out with words. The real test is not how he preaches, but how he is. That's the real test.

But, we won't go into that. Come on. James chapter 1, verse 1. Let's read through the first eight verses.

James, the servant of God, who is the Lord Jesus Christ of the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad. Greetings. My brethren, tell you all joy when you fall in the various trials or dire temptations, knowing this, that the temptings on your feet were deficient.

But, let patience give her perfect work, that ye may be perfect in the entire, lacking nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God to give it to all men liberally, and the greatest number, and it shall be given you. But, let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind in his heart. For lest not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Now, again, I don't want to go into the background of the letter, who James was, and to whom he was writing. I just want to try to help us in what James is saying. One word out of verse 1. He's writing to the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad.

The marginal meaning would say, in the dispersion. And, you know, primarily it goes back to the dispersion of the twelve tribes of Israel. So the Gentiles took over the land of Palestine, and Syria conquered it. And the Zinroder team was in battle with the two southern tribes, and Israel was scattered throughout the entire world.

We can think of ourselves that way. Gentiles' people are scattered all over the world. And the word for dispersion, I couldn't translate it literally.

One word is the form of two other words. But it's the idea of these being scattered. The diaspora.

The early Jewish diaspora. And the second part of that word is the word for seed. How does God view his people scattered all over the world? He sees them like seeds.

When the farmer goes out in the springtime, he scatters. And they did it by hand. He scatters the seeds.

Why is he scattering the seeds? I'm sitting home. I'm a city fella. I don't know anything about that.

Why do you fellas up in that garden of the farm scatter seeds? Alright, but what's your purpose of scattering? Go grow. Reproduce. That's when.

Multiplication. So, when God looks at the diaspora, he sees it has an opportunity. He's got his seed scattered all over the world.

Reproduce. We look on it as a tragedy, unless we have God's view for it. God looks on it as an opportunity.

The early church saw that. The persecution that arose of that seed. What happened? Is those Hellenistic Christians were driven out of Jerusalem.

Driven out of their homes. Trying to escape this persecution in Judea. So they do.

Remember? They did. But everywhere they were. They saw something of the opportunity.

We're driven out of our homes. Oh, what a tragedy. You can look at it that way.

Or you can say, oh, what an opportunity. And those early Christians saw it as an opportunity. And you had other Christians all over that part of the country.

Because these early Christians were scattered as seeds. And they reproduced. And the church multiplied and grew.

And I wonder if this is in James' mind as he's writing that book. You're scattered as seeds. You reproduce and multiply wherever you go.

And the harvest increases as a result. So the scattering wasn't just a tragedy. It was an opportunity.

It all depends on how you look at life. Won't it? I can look at it from a selfish point of view. Or I can look at life from God's point of view.

I can see life in what it gives me. Or I can see life in what I give to it. And by the way, that point of view is going to determine the kind of people we are.

And it's going to determine whether or not we are happy in life. I don't like the word happy, but that's what it determines. If I see life for what I can get out of it, I'm going to be miserable.

Because it never gives me what I expect. Including Florida. I only came out of here with certain expectations, but Florida was more than life.

It rains, it's cold, it's dangerous. You sit around, the crowd's miserable. Or I can see coming to Florida as an opportunity to help other people and to serve God.

And then it doesn't matter what the weather's like. It all depends on your viewpoint. Whether you're scattered as seeds, or scattered as a seed.

Or not. You see it as an opportunity to reproduce the life of God. And that's what James is saying.

Okay, this is good. My brethren. Verse 2. Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

I have often wished that James hadn't written that. Count it all with joy. As soon as I began to look at it, I began to realize very clearly.

James did not say I'm supposed to enjoy suffering. Oh, thank God I'm so miserable. No, he didn't say it.

And when we talk that way, we pick the easy example. Praise God for suffering. I don't think he said that.

Maybe I'd better hurry on to make myself free and we'll come back to it tomorrow. What does he say? First he uses the word count. We'll talk about that word tomorrow.

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. Now, look what period there is. Knowing that.

Ah! How is it I am able to count it as joy? Not the trial, but what can be produced from it? That's where the joy lies. Knowing that, the testing of your faith for salvation. There's where the joy lies.

Not in the trial, but in what God can work out of the trial. Now, to me, it's important to distinguish between those two things. People go around talking about, oh, they really praise God for their suffering.

And then I can think about myself, what more kind of Christian are you? I can't do that. No, what James is talking about is what God produces out of it. That's what I rejoice in.

Not in the trial. No, I say, we get all kinds of easy examples. Don't we praise God that Lazarus died? You can't.

Martha and Mary didn't. Hell, if you're running. That's easy.

And Jesus didn't rebuke them for weeping. In fact, he wasn't there then. What's a glorious resurrection? I rejoice in a resurrection.

These are Paul writing to the central audience, doesn't say we don't sorrow. But we do not sorrow hopelessly. Now, when people talk this way, oh, we praise God for our suffering.

I am right on edge waiting to give them some examples and find out how in the world we're supposed to rejoice. Let me give you one. We had in our assembly in Florence.

This is not being recorded, is it, Bob? We had in our assembly in Florence a lovely 90-year-old woman. Absolutely ridiculous. She lived in a home for over 40, 50 years in Florence.

Even when she went out to sweep her front porch, she dressed as though she were going to church. Just a delightful woman who refused to live with her children in Florence, because she prized her independence. Delightful Christian woman.

One morning, about four o'clock in the morning, someone broke into her home and brutally assaulted her, beat her up terribly, and raped her. She never recovered. Then she died.

She was the only witness. The man who did it is walking the streets of Florence today because she was the only witness. Now, am I supposed to rejoice when that woman was dead? When I rest up to that emergency room and call her, am I supposed to praise God? Not on your life.

Not on your life. And James isn't saying we rejoice because we are in trial. No! We rejoice because of what God brings out of us.

Now, distinguish between the two. Please! I don't rejoice in sin. I rejoice in the grace of God that brought the Savior.

I don't want to recall sin. I want to recall the grace of God. I don't thank God for sin.

I thank God for His grace in responding to my sin and bringing the Savior to the living world. I thank God for what He can bring out of us. And, to me, I must make that distinction.

I can thank Him for His grace. I thank Him for what He works out of us. That, I can thank Him for.

It is an issue I give a lecture on this issue to you, but it is a very necessary issue to me if I go through the Scripture. Now, James says, count it all joy. Yes.

Yes. Yes, let me re-translate that. God is at work for good in all things.

To them that love God. I thank Him for His work, but not for the altering. God is at work in all things.

And that takes the totality of my life. Where is God going in all this? One day to present me before Himself in the likeness of Jesus Christ. That's His goal.

That's where He's bringing me. And in all of life, that's where God is directing me. That's where God is bringing me.

But I thank Him. I thank Him for His works. God is at work.

And if I will respond as in James chapter 1, I will see through that verse of God. Yes. God is at work in all things for our good.

Okay? What about Job? What about Job? Oh, that's Job they brought. The man brought. Ah, I thank God for the end.

But Job never saved people from suffering. But the curse is saying we're torn. Yes.

What was it, by the way, that finally brought Job out of war? The answers to his questions? The restoration of his health or his wealth? No. Actually, it's death. God saved him.

And that was before his health was restored, before his wealth was restored. All his questions disappeared. And God saved him.

Yes? I have none. Oh, yes. You know, you're going to start making comparisons that way.

But when you sit down with people... I had a brother come to me the other day. I know him quite well. He and his wife.

I don't have any problems. I want to take better. Let me sit down with you for five minutes.

I'm pulling that thought into you now. But you don't look that way. You don't compare this person with this person and say, this person has more troubles than this person.

You only do comparisons. Every heart knows its own bitterness. And to us, it seems, some people are relatively free.

And not only free, they may be. But if that person begins to open up his heart to you, if you have that kind of relationship, you'll find that every heart knows its own bitterness. True.

Right. Relatively speaking, this person suffers more than that person. And God, one of the things I try to tell my students, they say to me, well, it's not fair.

It's not really fair. Well, who in the world said life is not fair? Life is not fair. The only place where everything is going to be straight down is heaven.

Or hell. And there, everything you want to happen is just. Not here.

So, yes, there are... I don't account for that. I can't. How do I account for James being beheaded and Peter being delivered? I can't account for that.

Why? I don't know. I don't know. But there it is.

My response, to go back to what we were talking about last week, is trust God. Not trusting to do something, trust Jesus. Period.

Whether like James you get beheaded, or like Peter you get delivered, that's out of our control all the time. We trust God. Okay, I'm way past time.

But I want to get to that word count tomorrow morning, because he has the key to it. Count it all joy. Joy is not something that comes automatically.

It's something you control. Count it all joy. So, we'll get to that word count tomorrow morning.

We want to see what James is saying about the absence of our trust. Our Father, we thank You for Your grace toward us, Your kindness, Your presence with us. One thing we can say, there is never a trial that we go through, that we go through alone.

And we thank You, You are with us. And we thank You for what You are building into our lives. We thank You for the lessons.

We thank You for the fresh evidences of Your grace. We thank You for every way in which faith has been strengthened, patience has been increased. We thank You for Your goodness.

And we pray, our Father, that increasingly our desires will be brought into line with Yours. And we will want to be the kind of people that You want us to be. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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