

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **Knowing & Doing the Right Thing James 4:17**

The ability to know what is right and to do what is right is simply biblical practice. The Christian life is a life lived here on earth in the hands of God among wicked people (the world). Every believer desires to be able to live as God desires among this world. The City of Man flourishes as it has done since Eden cast out Adam & Eve. The City of God also flourishes. The seeming difference today in the hearts and minds of evangelicals is that somehow the City of Man flourishes more than the City of God. This is the way of unbelief and not of faith.

Unbelief looks at the world and sees with its eyes the ways of the world. Faith looks up into the night sky and worships the unseen eternal God who has promised that we are heirs of Jesus Christ. All of the promises of God are guaranteed because of Jesus. Faith lays hold of these promises.

The world brings fear and chaos to our minds. Satan comes with his signature attack – “*has God said that?*” Faith comes with its signature and says, “*I believe.*”

The Apostle James understood the relation of faith to life very well. He brings us a rich theology of how faith and works exist together, both proving each other, yet faith necessary to produce faith, and works necessary by faith. The ability to live life as God wants us to live life must always be by way of faith. Faith sees that which is invisible. We walk by faith and not by sight. We will encounter many trials of differing kinds through all of life. James says it is possible to live life in the midst of such a variety of tribulations.

Unbelief looks at the problem and sees the magnitude of it, and shrinks away muttering something about the trials of life. Faith looks at the size of the dilemma and says, how can I fail to overcome this since it is so big. This was how Abraham grasped the significance of what God was saying to him as he gazed at the stars (Rom.4:13). James recognizes that all trials are testing's of our faith (James 1:2, 3).

We must remain steadfast under the trial (1:13) for the reward is a crown of life which God has *promised* to those who love Him. Reacting in anger, sulking, despair or unbelief does not produce the righteousness that God requires (1:19 -21). These reactions are simply inward focused and do not believe God. We are to receive the implanted word which is able to save our souls, and in this way we defeat the world.

In other words, we are to be doers of the word and not just simply those who hear the word. The fact that we hear the word immediately places us under obligation to respond to that word. We cannot make excuses after having God's word to us that it wasn't for us, but rather for someone else. If we hear it – it is for us. This is why faith practices what it hears. Faith does not speak merely, but it works (1:26, 27), and when it is acting, we are unspotted from this defiled world.

Augustine said that “*faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.*” As Christians we practice our faith among our fellow believers every week. There are to be no discriminating aspects to our relationships with each other. We are not to love one above another or prefer someone else. This is why James points out to us that the people we naturally offended by (those with shabby clothing, poor in goods) are the very ones that God is building His kingdom with. To discriminate is

unbelief and not faith. The poor believer in our eyes is rich in God's eyes – rich in faith. We truly must love our neighbors as ourselves (2:1 – 9). Faith acts in times of distress and hardship, even when we recognize this in the lives of others. Faith works – it is not ethereal. It is real and vital and practical.

Justification is by faith only (Rom. 5:10), yet if our works do not accompany our faith, then our faith is spurious – not real, not saving. It is in this way that James recognizes that justification is also by works. Faith acts – it works, it is alive (2:24, 25).

Works need to be done, not spoken about. This is why James has a lot to say about the tongue. We love to talk, and the more we talk, the greater the danger. The tongue is a wild fire that cannot be controlled (3:6-10). The boasting of the tongue is in direct contrast to the wisdom of God (3:13 - 18). God's wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (3:17). This is reflection of the character of God, so when we speak, let us aim at speaking the wisdom of God and not the folly of our own lips (Prov. 27:1, 2).

Faith does not mingle with the world. Unbelief yields to the world. Faith rejects the way of man and receives the way of God. Unbelief rejects the way of God and accepts the way of man – every time. Unbelief is a friend of the world. Faith is a friend of God. Unbelief is proud. Faith is humble, and God gives more grace to the humble who already have experienced His grace. The more we submit to God and live and act in humility, the nearer God comes to us. The devil will flee the submitter to God and the resister of temptation. Humility leads to exaltation (see James 4:1 – 10 for the above).

In case we miss what James has been saying to us, James introduces some very practical thoughts about how we approach life and how we live life (James 4:13 – 17). Many Christians live their lives giving very little time to God. The amount of time spend in the presence of God is very small in comparison to life at large. Perhaps Sundays is the only time we think about God a little deeper than we did during the week. We conduct all transactions in life, going to the grocery store, washing clothes, planning vacations, doing business and expecting a return on the investment of our time and money, often without a thought for God (whether God approves or not seems far from our minds – see 4:13).

James says such thinking is wrong and arrogant. We cannot say that we shall do such and such with impunity since we do not know what tomorrow will bring (4:14). Life and the plans of life can change overnight, in a moment. Indeed, life is fragile and short (4:14). It is like the mist that rises from the earth and then vanishes with the coming heat of the day. You see it and then it is gone and you wonder where did it go and was it really here (4:14). Unbelief casts about for answers but there are none for the arrogant boaster of life. Faith sees the fragility of life and gives it to God (4:15).

Faith desires the will of God in every situation. Where you do not desire the will of God and arrogantly march forward in your own strength - you will find faith conspicuously absent. Faith acknowledges that I can only do what I do if God wills it. We must approach all of life with this providential provider hanging over us. We will travel here and there, we will do this and that but only if God wills. This is faith. Where we do not think in these terms – there you will find unbelief.

Let us not boast in our own sufficiency. We are not sufficient to handle this life and this world (4:16). If we know the right thing to do and we do not do it – then that is sin (4:17). Knowing and doing the right thing stems from faith. Unbelief rejects the right thing, therefore it is sin. Let us exercise patience since Jesus is coming (5:8). The Judge stands at the door (5:9). Let us emulate Job in his steadfastness relying upon the Lord, and let us emulate Elijah who prayed believing that God would do what He said (5:11, 17). Righteous prayer works (5:16) because it comes from faith. Let us know and do the right thing because we love God and desire His will in every situation, and thus we shall prove that we are those who have faith. Faith works and faith loves. Let unbelief lie in the dust cold and dead.