

- Last week we looked at the letter that Paul writes to the Churches in Galatia. We noted the reason why it was written, and talked about the fact that Paul wrote this letter as a “circular letter” to be handed around to various Churches in the Galatian region, and that he wrote the letter either right before or right after the council. In letter we noticed how Paul encouraged and built up the Christians there even as he was warning them about the possible dangers facing them if Jews insisted that Gentiles must keep the Jewish Law. We also looked at some basic doctrinal assumptions which Paul made that have become well known in our churches today.
- This week will introduce the book of James. We will talk about who wrote it and why. We will look at what James says about testing of our faith, how we believers should conduct themselves, and what true religion looks like according to James.
- James opens the book by identifying himself as the author ([James 1:1](#)), but he doesn’t say which James he is. There were at least six people we read about named James. Jesus had two apostles named James – one of these (James the son of Zebedee) was killed already as we studied in [Acts 12:2](#), the other apostle named James (James the lesser) does not play a prominent role, at least that we read about. The best evidence points to authorship by James who was the brother of Jesus ([Matthew 13:55](#)). This person did play a central role in the early church ([Acts 21:17-18](#), [Galatians 1:18-19](#)). Several historians at the time record that sometime in the AD 60’s he was killed by being thrown from the top of a cathedral then stoned and clubbed. We can’t be sure who wrote the book or when it was written. He does address the book to the Jewish believers in Christ who scattered from Jerusalem after Stephen was put to death and Saul started persecuting the church. ([Acts 8:1](#))
- James notes that testing of our faith makes us stronger. ([James 1:2-4](#))
- James assures that if we ask for wisdom God will give it to us if we ask without doubt. ([James 1:5-8](#))
- James explains that life is short and death is the great equalizer – it will happen to everyone regardless of riches or social status. ([James 1:9-11](#))
- James says that God cannot tempt anyone, but everyone is responsible for their own sin because their own lust (desires) brings forth sin, and sin ultimately leads to death. This is “the LSD of the Bible:” lust leads to sin which results in death. ([James 1:12-15](#))
- James points out that every good gift is from God. We sing a song “Great is Thy Faithfulness” that contains a quote from this passage when it says, “there is no shadow of turning with Thee.” ([James 1:16-18](#))
- James points out that we should be slow to become angry. ([James 1:19-21](#))
- James says that we should be doers of the word and not just listeners. This is the reason Martin Luther ripped this book out of his Bible and probably one of the reasons it took so long to add the book of James to the New Testament (it was one of the last books of the New Testament to be included in our Bible). ([James 1:22](#))
- James points out that a person who does not act on his faith is like a person who looks in a mirror, walks away, and forget what they look like. The person who does act on their faith is using the Bible to consider and calls it the “Perfect Law of Liberty.” ([James 1:23-25](#))

- James also points out that if a person says they are religious but do not control their tongue their religion is worthless. (James 1:26)
- James puts forward three evidences for what he calls “pure religion:” 1. Visiting orphans 2. visiting widows and 3. not be influenced by the world. James is essentially saying true religion is helping people who can’t possibly help you. (James 1:27)
- James says not to be partial towards people who are wealthy since they are the ones who usually do bad things to people and partiality is against God’s law anyway. (James 2:1-13)
- Even Christ noted how hard it would be for the wealthy to be saved. (Matthew 19:24)
- James explains that just as Abraham had to put Isaac on an altar (something the Jewish people James is writing would know very well), our faith without works is dead. (James 2:14-26)
- Even Christ explains there will be good and bad people active in the church, but the way you will know the good ones is by their “fruit” – their works. (Matthew 7:16-20)
- James talks again about the importance of controlling our tongues, this time more extensively. He uses some examples to show how a small thing like the tongue can control a big thing like our body. He uses the examples of 1) steering a horse by using a bridle 2) controlling an entire ship direction with a rudder and 3) creating a forest fire from a small campfire. (James 3:1-12). This is what our song “Love One Another (also called “Angry Words”) is all about.
- James explains that there is a contrast between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. (James 3:13-18)

Questions:

1. Who wrote the book of James? When? To whom?
2. What does James say about testing of our faith?
3. What does James say about asking God for wisdom?
4. Why does James say that death is the great equalizer?
5. Who cannot tempt anyone?
6. What is the LSD of the Bible?
7. What does James say we should be slow to become?
8. James says we should not just hear the word of God but also what?
9. What does James say a non-doer of the word is like?
10. What is the “perfect law of liberty”?
11. What does James say about a religious person who cannot control their tongue?
12. What three things for James say are evidence of true religion? What did he mean?
13. What two reasons does James give when he says we shouldn’t be partial toward the rich?
14. What does James say faith without works is?
15. How does Christ say we will be able to recognize good people in the church?
16. What examples does James give us of how powerful our tongues can be?
17. What two kinds of wisdom does James contrast?