

Introduction:

What we think of God impacts every aspect of our lives. It will determine how we act and what we teach. I think we clearly see that in the book of **James**. Though on the surface, it may appear that **James** is not a very theological book, that is, it doesn't seem to say a whole lot about the study of God, the reality is James's theology is very evident. This letter, or perhaps we could say sermon, is helping us examine the ideas of practical holiness as we strive to pursue holiness. While James doesn't give us a dissertation on the nature and character of God, his comments demonstrate that just about every step of his practical holiness and wisdom is based on what he believes about God. Let's examine **James** and see what we need to believe about God if we are going to pursue James's practical holiness.

Discussion:

I. God is holy.

- A. Perhaps we can say that **James 1:13** provides the baseline for the character of God. God is holy. This passage highlights the extent of God's ethical holiness, His righteousness. God always does what is right. In fact, God is so holy, pure, righteous, His desires are completely holy. **James 1:14** explains that we are tempted by our desires which lead us to sin. God, by contrast, is so holy that He has absolutely no desire that can lead Him astray.
- B. We know that **Leviticus 11:44** and **I Peter 1:16** explain that we are to be holy because our God is holy. Notice that James demonstrates this in a very practical way. Having highlighted God's ethical holiness and righteousness, in **James 1:19-20**, James explains why those who pursue holiness must get their anger in order. Why? Because man's anger doesn't produce the righteousness of God.
- C. This practical aspect that James demonstrates supports a powerful idea: we become what we worship. If we devote ourselves to lesser idols, man-made, fickle, unholy, unrighteous, immoral, we will become all of those things. When, however, we devote ourselves to the holy God, surrendering ourselves to Him, worshipping and honoring Him, we will pursue His holiness. We will become more and more like Him.

II. God is creator.

- A. Granted, James does not wax long about the creative nature of God. However, in **James 3:9**, James expresses his faith in **Genesis 1:27**. God created mankind. He created us in His own image and likeness. In this we see the majestic holiness of God. We see His distinctness and separateness from us. That is, He is Creator and we are creation. We are His handiwork.
- B. **James 4:5** is another potential demonstration of this. Some suggest this refers to the recreation of God as He causes His Holy Spirit to dwell with Christians. However, this may also be a reference to **Genesis 2:7**. God breathed the breath of life into man. "Breath" and "spirit" are the same word. We live because of God and because of His creative power.
- C. Once again, James demonstrates that the impetus for our practical holiness is the very nature of God. Why must we tame the tongue in regards to the people around us? Why do we refrain from cursing them? Because they are the handiwork of God. Why should we not speak against a brother (**James 4:11**) or grumble against one another (**James 5:9**)? Because they are created in the image of God. We would not curse God. Why would we curse His handiwork? Why would we curse those who are in His image?

III. God is in charge.

- A. Having seen the interrelated ethical and majestic holiness of God, we must conclude the amazing power of God. But we don't simply infer it, James actually states it. God is the Holy Creator. As such, He is in charge of this world and everything in it. In **James 4:13-17**, James highlights the arrogance of those who think their future is based on their own planning. The wealthy who brag about their business dealings, the money they will make, the purchases they will buy, the investments they will pursue are bragging in arrogance. Instead, they must say, "If the Lord wills." They must recognize they are but a mist. Here today, gone tomorrow. If any of their plans have success or have had success, it is only because of God. The successful business dealings they had in the past, on which they are likely basing their certainty of the future, have not been because of their own awesomeness, but because of God's willingness. God is in charge.

- B. Not only is God in charge of outcomes. But He is in charge of processes. I do not mean He makes us act in certain ways, but He is in charge of how we are supposed to act. He gets to determine how we are supposed to live. According to **James 4:12**, there is only one Lawgiver and Judge. And very specifically that one is neither you nor me. We don't get to be lawgiver or judge. He determines who is saved and who is destroyed because He is in charge.
- C. James continues to demonstrate that the nature of God should determine our action. He begins this encyclical saying, "James, servant of God..." (**James 1:1**, ESV). Some modern English translations use this word "servant" because that seems to sit better in our ears, but we need to read that "slave of God." James didn't see God as his boss, giving overtime pay for extra service or days off. God was His master. God is in charge.

#### IV. God is generous.

- A. Knowing that God is in charge can be a frightening thing. Having a master is scary. Is He a good Master, a bad one, an indifferent one? James demonstrates again and again that God is a generous and benevolent Master. Yes, He is a judge who has destruction in His hand. But that is not what God wants to give. He isn't waiting around to simply zap people just because He can.
- B. **James 1:16-17** explains that every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Whether we want wisdom (**1:5**), life (**1:12**), the kingdom (**2:5**), or grace (**4:6**), it all comes from God. If something is good, it is from God. If it is from God, it is good.
- C. Further, **James 1:5** says, specifically of seeking wisdom, God gives generously without reproach. That is, God doesn't begrudge generosity. He doesn't feel duped or manipulated or forced. He gives generously because He is generous, because He does love us.

#### V. God is merciful.

- A. In **James 5:11**, James explains why he asks these Jewish Christians to maintain their steadfastness in the face of adversity. He explains why he expects them to patiently endure when they are suffering so much. Because God is merciful and compassionate. This suffering is not at the hand of the Lord and the Lord has a plan to deal with the suffering of His children.
- B. In **James 5:4**, James calls to mind **Deuteronomy 24:14-15**. God told the employer to give the wages to the hired worker lest they call out to God against them. I believe James also calls to mind the crying out of the Jews in **Exodus 2:23-25**. God hears the cries of His children who are oppressed and suffering. He will visit His children with mercy and compassion. He is the judge. Therefore, He will bring judgment on those who oppress His people. As He brought plagues upon Pharaoh and deliverance upon Israel, God will visit His people with mercy and compassion.

#### VI. God is savior.

- A. If we are not careful, we will think James says nothing about the grace of salvation. In fact, if we are not careful, we may walk away from James thinking our only hope of salvation is if we perfectly keep God's law. However, note **James 1:18**. "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (ESV). God is not only creator, He is recreator. He is not only judge and destroyer, He is Savior (cf. **James 4:12**).
- B. **James 1:18** contrasts the "word of truth" with our desire and sin in **James 1:14-15**. Our desire conceives and gives birth to sin which when fully grown gives birth to death. The word of truth, however, brings us forth as living creatures. Is this the written Word or incarnate Word? Perhaps James is purposefully vague. **1 Peter 1:23-25** makes a similar point about the written/spoken Word of God. But **John 1:1, 9-13**, demonstrates the Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is also the means by which we are reborn and brought forth as children of God.
- C. Finally, consider what **Jeremiah 2:3** says about God's firstfruits. When Israel was the firstfruits of God's harvest, any who ate of Israel, that is, any who attacked or harmed Israel, incurred guilt and disaster. God is our deliverer. He is our Savior. By His Word, He has made us His firstfruits, which is why we are able to and why we need to pursue this practical holiness.

#### Conclusion:

What a great God we serve. He is the Holy Creator, in charge of all things, but uses His charge in generous mercy for those He is saving. Don't you want Him to be your God? Don't you want to be part of His people?