



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## The God We Trust

James 2.20-23

### *Introduction*

1. “Trust me!” How you react when someone says that depends on several things.
  - a. An illustration from J. P. Moreland on how we should evaluate the evidence for the Christian faith helps us here. He asked a conversation partner to suppose Moreland saw his wife holding hands with another man at a mall. Is it reasonable to conclude she was cheating on him? If he relies only on what he sees, he might draw that conclusion.
  - b. But that ignores other evidence gathered from 25 years of marriage. Knowing his wife, he is sure she would never be unfaithful and there must be another explanation.
  - c. He continues. Suppose that, unknown to him, his wife had received a call from a man she helped become a Christian 20 years before. He happened to be in town, they had not seen each other in years, and met at the mall to share family pictures and reminisce. He was getting ready to leave, and like a brother and sister, they innocently held hands and talked at the mall (Strobel, 248-249).
2. In a similar way, how you respond to a person who says, “Trust me!” depends on how well you know him or her and the nature of your relationship.
  - a. Trusting doesn’t require you to know everything about every situation.
  - b. But it requires knowing enough about the person to be confident in his or her word.
3. The trust component of true faith is like that, as James reminds us in 2.20-23. Since Abraham knew God, when the Lord told him to sacrifice Isaac, he trusted him as a friend (v. 23).
4. Let’s explore that more in light of other things we learn from James.

### *Body*

- I. Who Is God?
  - A. The Bible and eternal life are about knowing God.
    1. James Packer wrote, “What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the ‘eternal life’ that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. . . . What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God. . . . What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. . . .” (Packer, 29).
    2. We see the idea of knowing God in multiple texts (e.g. Jer 9.23-24; Hos 6.6; Col 1.10; 2 Pet 2.2) and Jesus did define eternal life as knowing God and his Son (John 17.3).

- B. How practical and relevant is knowing God?
1. I once knew a Christian woman who experienced a family and personal crisis that led to a crisis of faith. She thought God had let her down. In fact, her distress was caused by her faulty expectation of God's nature, works, and promises.
  2. Truly, "ignorance of God—ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today" (Packer, 6).
  3. Like any relationship, knowing God begins with knowing about God (Packer 14-16).
- C. James apparently thought similarly, for he said a great deal about God.
1. James mentions God nearly 30 times.
    - a) God (θεός; *theos*): sixteen times — 1.1, 5, 13, 20, 27; 2.5, 19, 23; 3.9; 4.4, 6-8.
    - b) Father (πατήρ; *patēr*): three times referring to God — 1.17, 27; 3.9.
    - c) Lord (κύριος; *kurios*): eight times definitely refer to God the Father and two more ambiguous references are probably to God the Father — 1.7; 3.9; 4.10, 15; 5.4, 10-11 / 5.14-15.
  2. As he called for specific behaviors, he referred to characteristics of God's nature.
    - a) God is one, unique in every way (2.19).
    - b) God is pure, neither corrupt nor corruptible (1.13).
    - c) God is unchanging, never fickle like people are (1.16-17; cf. 1.5-8; 4.8).  
(1) Thus, we can count on God's promises (cf. 1.12; 2.5).
    - d) God is always concerned for the less fortunate who are often neglected (1.26-27; 2.1-7; 5.1-11).
    - e) God is the source of all that's good and right (3.13-18).
    - f) God is uncompromising: friend or enemy, allegiance or adultery (2.23; 4.4).

## II. At the heart of Abraham's faith was his knowledge of God (2.20-23).

- A. Hebrews 11.17-19 reports Abraham's reasoning (NIV) when told to sacrifice his "only son" (μονογενής; *monogenēs*; v. 17).
- B. Genesis 18.22-33 reports an episode that sheds light on the developing relationship; notice especially v. 25.
- C. In the context of the developing relationship of trust, Abraham's action in Genesis 22 makes more sense.

## III. Testing our trust: when faith meets trials (where James begins—1.2-8, 12-15).<sup>1</sup>

- A. Do we trust that our trials (which may include sickness—5.13-16) strengthen our faith, build our endurance (NASB), and help us become more mature (1.3-4)?
- B. Do we trust God to supply the wisdom we need to deal with our trials (1.5-6)?
- C. In a different slant on the same subject (see πειρασμός; *peirasmos* in both vv. 2, 12 and the verb πειράζω; *peirazō* four times in v. 13) do we attribute evil to God (vv. 13-15) or accept that he always gives good gifts (vv. 16-18)?

<sup>1</sup> James does not use the word "trials" after 1.13, but mentions other things that would have been trying, e.g., economic discrimination and oppression (1.9-11; 2.1-7; 5.1-11) and sharp interpersonal conflicts stemming from self-centeredness (3.13-4.3).

*Conclusion*

1. James Michener told of Urbaal, a farmer living ca. 2200 BC. He worshipped a god of death and a god of fertility. One day he is among those called to sacrifice his son, by fire to the god of death. The priests subsequently announce that one of the fathers will spend the next week in the temple with a new prostitute whose physical beauty is quite alluring. Much to his wife's dismay, Urbaal is selected, and lunges forward to carry the priestess into the temple. As his wife departs the temple, she thinks, "with different gods her husband Urbaal would have been a different man."<sup>2</sup>
2. The key to having the life for which we were created is seeing, then trusting, then acting for God and the Son he sent. Are you trusting him with your life?

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### Works Cited

J. I. Packer. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.

Lee Strobel. *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

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<sup>2</sup> See Erwin Lutzer's telling of this story at [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com). Accessed Mar. 10, 2010. The quoted line is from Michener's *The Source*, 140, at <http://books.google.com>. Accessed Mar. 10, 2010.