



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

JAMES: PRACTICAL TEACHING ABOUT GOD

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Since Jesus said eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3), should we not do all we can to grow in that knowledge? James apparently thought so. Included in his 108 verses along with 55 imperative verbs are more than 20 direct references to God.

He presents himself as a servant of God (1:1), says that those who lack wisdom should ask God (1:5), and assures us that nothing evil ever comes from God (1:13). He points to the righteousness of God (1:21) and defines the religion that is undefiled before God (1:27). He says that God chooses those who are rich in faith (2:5), extols the value of belief in God (2:19, 23), and says people are made in the likeness of God (3:9). He calls readers to friendship with God (4:4), humility before God (4:6), submission to God (4:7), and to draw near to God (4:8). When we add the times he uses “Lord” to refer to the Father (1:7; 3:9; 4:10, 15; 5:4, 10, 11, 14-15), we can make a case that one of the most important themes of James’s letter is God.

What is God’s nature as James refers to him? He is both lawgiver and judge (2:8-12; 4:12; 5:1-11), traits James mentioned to warn readers to be faithful and reassure them when they were (cf. 5:4). But James’s God is not Jonathan Edwards’s “angry God.” The law he gives is a law of liberty (2:12). He judges, but shows mercy, too (2:13). He also gives grace to those who are humble and seek to draw near to him (4:6, 8).

In light of these statements, we are not surprised that James calls God “the Father of lights” and says he exhibits “no variation or shadow due to change” (1:17). Nor are we surprised to learn that pure religion’s eminently practical outcome of caring for orphans and widows is rooted in the knowledge that those groups have always held a special place in the heart of “the Father” (1:27; cf. Deut 10:18; 24:19; 27:19; Psa 68:5; Isa 1:17).

How should we respond? James says we should use our hard-to-control tongues to bless (i.e., eulogize; *eulogeō*) God as “our Lord and Father” (3:9). And we should deepen our friendship with God (2:23; 4:4).

What could be more practical?

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