

Practical Christianity¹

Editorial: Thomas R. Schreiner

Thomas R. Schreiner is a professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also taught New Testament at Azusa Pacific University and Bethel Theological Seminary. Recently, he completed a commentary on Romans in the Baker Exegetical Commentary Series. Currently, he is working on a theology of the apostle Paul and is co-authoring a work on perseverance and assurance (both due from InterVarsity Press). He is also serving as the preaching pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

For some of us it is easy to talk about the Christian faith. We are interested in exegesis, theology, church history, evangelism, missions, Christian education, church music, and what is happening in the Church throughout the world. Perhaps we have studied some of these subjects deeply, so that we are a fount of information to those who have not had that privilege. Perhaps some of us know the joy of preaching and teaching God's word, and have experienced the joy of being entrusted with holy things. Those of us who preach, teach, and write about the things of God could easily begin to imagine that our knowledge of God is deeper than it really is. Simply because we speak about these things often, we may deceive ourselves into thinking that our godliness matches everything we proclaim.

James brings us back to earth. He reminds us that not many of us should become teachers, since there is a stricter judgment for teachers (Jas 3:1). Our Christian maturity is not measured only by what we teach, preach, and write, but also by what we say in our homes, to our friends, and to those with whom we work (Jas 3:1-12). James reminds us that our everyday speech is a barometer of the heart, indicating whether we are truly praising God, or whether we are people who are easily irritated and provoked. We may be tempted to think that we are truly wise and discerning. True wisdom, James instructs us, is not determined by our intellectual ability (Jas 3:13-18). The wisdom of God is demonstrated by our godly behavior. If we are motivated by selfish ambition, and consumed by envy and jeal-

ousy, then we are not wise. If, on the other hand, we are full of humility, gentleness, love, mercy, and patience, then wisdom genuinely resides in our hearts.

Our religion—yes, even our preaching and teaching—can become a cloak for advancing our own reputations, so that our faith becomes a platform for idolatry. One test for all of us is how we treat the lowly people of the world (Jas 2:1-13). When the rich or prestigious come to our churches, do we treat them royally and attend to their every need? But when the “no names” attend, do we by comparison ignore them, knowing that they cannot assist our church as much? We may even justify such behavior by saying that some contacts are more “strategic” than others, revealing that we have swallowed the value system of the world.

James is a spiritual tonic for us, since we can easily confuse “hearing the word” with “doing the word” (Jas 1:22-27). We might think that we are progressing well in the Christian life if we read our Bibles and pray daily, and regularly attend services where God's word is proclaimed. James warns us against a disconnect between our hearing and doing, and reminds us that without the latter our “religion” is useless.

I am hopeful that this issue of the journal will prove helpful to our readers. Robert Stein tackles the difficult issue of “justification by works” in James (2:14-26), explaining how, when rightly understood, there is no contradiction between Paul and James. Timothy George's companion piece provides a history of interpretation of James 2, emphasizing Reformation per-

spectives. Mark Seifrid examines the text on anointing the sick with oil (5:13-18). How should we understand this difficult passage, and what does it say to us today? Seifrid's study provides insightful answers to these questions. Ron Julian gives us an inroad into the primary purpose of James—living lives that are pleasing to God. Dan McCartney opens a window into the relationship between James and other wisdom writings. Finally, Daniel Akin concludes this issue with a sermon on the tongue (Jas 3:1-12). Here is where the message of James speaks to every heart. I pray that the Lord will speak to every person who reads this outstanding sermon.

EDITOR'S NOTE

¹In Volume 4.2 in John Piper's article, *To Live upon God that is Invisible: Suffering and Service in the Life of John Bunyan*, the statement on p. 7, "After Cromwell's death, his brother Richard was unable to hold the government together," should read, "his son" rather than "his brother."