

Three Marks Of Practical Christianity (James 1:19–27; 2:14–18; 3:1–12)

The epistle of James presents Christianity as something that must be lived rather than merely professed. Genuine faith affects the way we speak, the way we act, and the way we respond to the difficulties of life. James therefore challenges us to examine whether the faith we profess is actually being demonstrated in our everyday conduct (James 1:22; 2:17–18).

Introduction:

1. James emphasises throughout his epistle that hearing and knowing God's word are not enough. Christians must become “doers of the word,” allowing what God has revealed to shape the way they actually live (James 1:22–25).
2. It is possible for someone to appear religious while failing in some of the most basic areas of Christian conduct. James warns that a person may deceive his own heart and practise a religion that is ultimately vain (James 1:26–27).
3. Genuine Christianity therefore produces visible changes in everyday life. James particularly emphasises the importance of controlling our words, demonstrating our faith through our actions, and remaining faithful when our faith is tested (James 1:2–4, 26; 2:17–18).

1. Practical Christianity Controls The Tongue (James 1:19, 26; 3:1–12):

- a. Our words reveal much about our spiritual condition. James warns that if someone appears religious but fails to bridle his tongue, he deceives his own heart and his religion is vain (James 1:26).
- b. Although the tongue is a small part of the body, it can exercise enormous influence. James compares it to the bit that directs a horse, the rudder that controls a ship, and a small fire capable of causing tremendous destruction (James 3:3–6).
- c. Christians must therefore guard against gossip, angry words, dishonesty, unnecessary criticism, and other forms of harmful speech. Our words should instead be used to strengthen and encourage others rather than tearing them down (Ephesians 4:29, 31–32; Colossians 4:6).
- d. Controlling the tongue also means learning when not to speak. James instructs Christians to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” reminding us that careful listening should come before a hasty response (James 1:19–20; Proverbs 10:19).

2. Practical Christianity Shows Itself In Our Actions (James 1:22–25; 2:14–18):

- a. Christianity was never intended to consist merely of hearing sermons or knowing what the Bible teaches. Those who hear God's word without obeying it deceive themselves because genuine discipleship requires putting Christ's teaching into practice (James 1:22–25; Luke 6:46).
- b. Faith should affect the way Christians respond to the needs of others. James illustrates this by describing a brother or sister who lacks adequate clothing and food, showing that kind words without practical assistance accomplish nothing when we are able to help (James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17–18).
- c. This is why James declares that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Works do not replace faith; rather, obedient actions demonstrate that our faith is living and active (James 2:17–18, 22).
- d. Christians should therefore examine whether their everyday conduct agrees with what they profess to believe. Jesus taught that His disciples would be recognised by the fruit produced in their lives, not simply by the claims they make (Matthew 7:16–20; Titus 1:16).

3. Practical Christianity Remains Faithful Through Trials (James 1:2–4, 12):

- a. Becoming a Christian does not remove difficulties from life. James tells believers to recognise that trials can test their faith and produce patience, helping them to develop spiritual endurance (James 1:2–3; 1 Peter 1:6–7).
- b. Trials reveal the strength and character of our faith. It is comparatively easy to trust God when circumstances are favourable, but genuine faith continues to rely upon Him when life becomes difficult and the outcome is uncertain (Job 13:15; 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 16–18).

- c. God can use difficulties to develop qualities in us that might never develop in easier circumstances. James therefore tells Christians to allow patience to complete its work so that they may become spiritually mature (**James 1:3–4; Romans 5:3–5**).
- d. Christians must look beyond present difficulties to the reward God has promised to those who remain faithful. James declares, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,” because after being tried he will receive “the crown of life” (**James 1:12; Revelation 2:10**).

Conclusion:

1. James reminds us that Christianity is not merely something we profess but something that must be demonstrated in everyday life. Our conduct should show that God's word is changing us from within (**James 1:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17**).
2. We should therefore examine ourselves honestly and ask whether our speech, actions, and response to difficulties demonstrate genuine faith. Christians are commanded to examine themselves rather than simply assuming that everything is spiritually well (**2 Corinthians 13:5; James 1:23–25**).
3. The goal is not simply to know more Scripture but increasingly to become the people God wants us to be. Those who hear God's word and faithfully practise it will be blessed in what they do (**James 1:25; John 13:17**).

Applications:

1. Before speaking, we should consider whether our words are true, necessary, helpful, and consistent with the character of Christ. A Christian's speech should minister grace rather than cause unnecessary hurt or division (**Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 15:1**).
2. We should look for practical opportunities to put our faith into action rather than being satisfied merely with good intentions. Whenever we have opportunity, we should do good to others and especially to fellow Christians (**Galatians 6:10; James 2:15–17**).
3. When difficulties arise, we should resist the temptation to conclude that God has abandoned us. Trials can strengthen faith, develop patience, and prepare us for greater spiritual usefulness if we remain faithful through them (**James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–5**).

Questions:

1. Why is hearing God's word without obeying it dangerous (**James 1:22**)?
2. What does James say about the person who appears religious but does not control his tongue (**James 1:26**)?
3. What illustrations does James use to demonstrate the power of the tongue (**James 3:3–6**)?
4. Why does James describe faith without works as dead (**James 2:14–18**)?
5. What can the trying of our faith produce in our lives (**James 1:2–4**)?
6. What reward is promised to the person who faithfully endures temptation (**James 1:12**)?
7. What three marks of practical Christianity have been considered in this lesson (**James 1:19–27; 2:14–18; 3:1–12**)?

Summary

James presents Christianity as a way of life rather than merely a collection of beliefs. God's word must move from the mind into everyday conduct, so that what Christians profess is demonstrated by the way they actually live (**James 1:22–25**).

One important evidence of practical Christianity is control of the tongue. Another is a faith that produces obedient and compassionate action. Our words and deeds should therefore provide visible evidence that the teaching of Christ is influencing our character and behaviour (**James 1:26; 2:17–18; 3:9–10**).

Practical Christianity is also demonstrated by perseverance. Trials test the reality of our faith, develop patience, and give us opportunities to remain faithful to God when obedience is difficult. Those who continue steadfastly can look beyond present difficulties to the crown of life God has promised (**James 1:2–4, 12**).

Questions & Answers:

1. Why is hearing God's word without obeying it dangerous (**James 1:22**)?

Answer: Because those who hear God's word without putting it into practice deceive themselves (**James 1:22**).

2. What does James say about the person who appears religious but does not control his tongue (**James 1:26**)?

Answer: James says that he deceives his own heart and that his religion is vain (**James 1:26**).

3. What illustrations does James use to demonstrate the power of the tongue (**James 3:3–6**)?

Answer: James compares the tongue to a bit controlling a horse, a rudder directing a ship, and a small fire capable of causing great destruction (**James 3:3–6**).

4. Why does James describe faith without works as dead (**James 2:14–18**)?

Answer: Because genuine faith produces obedient action, whereas a faith that produces no works is merely an empty profession (**James 2:14–18**).

5. What can the trying of our faith produce in our lives (**James 1:2–4**)?

Answer: The trying of our faith produces patience and can help us develop spiritual maturity (**James 1:2–4**).

6. What reward is promised to the person who faithfully endures temptation (**James 1:12**)?

Answer: The person who faithfully endures temptation is promised the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him (**James 1:12**).

7. What three marks of practical Christianity have been considered in this lesson (**James 1:19–27; 2:14–18; 3:1–12**)?

Answer: Practical Christianity controls the tongue, shows itself in our actions, and remains faithful through trials (**James 1:19–27; 2:14–18; 3:1–12**).