

09.12.10 / James 1:1

Passage Insight

While it may seem strange to have an entire Curriculum Guide devoted to a single verse of Scripture, we'll see that it will be helpful in gaining proper context for studying the rest of this marvelous book of the Bible.

James mentions the Dispersion, or the Diaspora, which is a word representing all the Jews who had been scattered following the exile from Jerusalem. In Genesis 12:3, the Lord promises that through Abram He will bless all peoples of the earth: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." From the beginning the Lord knew that His chosen people, the Jews, would be scattered, including those Jews who professed faith in Christ. James is focusing His attention on these Jews who were now believers in Christ, as they were struggling with, among other things, how to translate their newfound faith in Christ into meaningful action. We'll see more on this in the coming weeks as we study James together.

A key to moving from an inward faith to one that results in genuine action, lies in a word from verse 1, "doulos". Often translated as "slave", "bondservant", or simply "servant", its meaning is clear: one who willingly submits to the complete and total authority and mastery of another. A slave simply does what his/her master asks, leaving no room for his/her own input, and so for a slave, action is simply an act of obedience to the master. We who confess Jesus as our Lord are slaves to Him. While at first glance the notion of being a slave may seem unattractive at best, especially for many who have been experienced or had loved ones experience slavery in the most awful of ways. However, slavery to Christ is actually freedom in the truest sense of the word, as we'll see here.

We first enter the world as self-serving people who are already slaves . . . slaves to sin, and it is an option for us to die this way as well. But, in place of this, the Lord has provided another way, slavery to Him instead. We can be enslaved to sin and all that comes with it, including a separation from God, or we can be enslaved to God, who is pure love and truth and perfection. As long as we are at the center of our universe, and as long as we call our own shots, we will actually be slaves to sin and death, but when we let go of our assumed control and trust Jesus to save us from the sin that is at our core, He does so lavishly, even making us into His own image over time. That's some serious freedom and love. And so at the end of the day, we have two options: 1) remain slaves to sin, or 2) become slaves to the Lord, who has purchased us and is our new Master.

Let's look at slavery to Christ and see what this really looks like according to the Scriptures:

Slavery to sin is oppressive, while slavery to Christ is joyous:

Matthew 25:33 – "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

Being a slave to Christ shows us how we're to relate to one another within the body of Christ. We are to deny ourselves, consider others more important than ourselves, and love one another within the body of Christ in this way. The Lord provides for our needs and the needs of others through the working of His body:

Matthew 20:26-27 – "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave . . ."

Philippians 2:3 – "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than

yourselves.”

Being a slave to Christ means there’s a certain way are to relate to those outside of the body of Christ as well. We as slaves are to proclaim the gospel, and God will use this act of obedience as He saves others:

2 Timothy 2:24-26 – “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

Being a slave to Christ means we have freedom FROM EVIL and freedom TO LIVE AS WE WERE CREATED TO LIVE. While the analogy isn’t perfect, consider this: it doesn’t make any sense for a t-shirt to be used as a candle. The t-shirt catches on fire, burns up fast, doesn’t provide lasting light and if you’re able to blow out the fire before it consumes the whole shirt, it’s likely not much of a t-shirt anymore. We’re meant to live as slaves to the Lord, and when we live as slaves to something else (the only other option is sin), only death awaits. But when we live as slaves to Jesus, all that we were truly created to be and do comes to full fruition by God’s power. The only way we truly EVER live as we were created to live is to willingly sell ourselves into slavery, become bondservants of the living Christ.

1 Peter 2:16 – “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”

Finally, the end result of living as a slave to Jesus is that we will become like Him.

Matthew 10:24-25 – “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”

2 Corinthians 3:18 – “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” May this be what marks the lives of us as His followers as well.

Application Questions

Sin or the Lord

- 1) We will all be slaves to something, whether to sin or to the Lord. When we follow Jesus, though we take on a new master, Jesus Christ, we at times still serve our old master, sin. Where are you currently enslaved?
- 2) Serving this sin buys you something. What does it buy you?
- 3) Following Christ and gaining entrance into the kingdom of heaven buys you something infinitely more valuable (Matthew 13:44). What has Christ bought on your behalf?

Struggling With Slavery

- 1) In our culture and times, it is often very difficult to accept that slavery in any form could be a positive thing. Let’s talk about this. How does the idea of being a slave to Christ offend you?
- 2) What idea or belief of yours is offended specifically?
- 3) What do the Scriptures say about the provision of Christ (if you’re not sure, that’s not a problem at all – look to those in the group for help with this)?

- 4) Jesus is perfect love, demonstrates perfect humility, is perfectly merciful, and perfectly just. When we trust Jesus, we not only have fellowship with Him, but He also lets us become like Him. We are powerless to do this ourselves, but when we trust Him, He makes this possible. If you struggle to believe this, what's standing in the way?
- 5) Your church loves you and wants to serve you. How can your group help you with this specifically?

God Has Conquered Sin and Death

- 1) God is greater than sin. He has already conquered sin and death. If you are a follower of Jesus, where do you believe that you are powerless in the face of sin and temptation?
- 2) If you have died to sin, and if God now lives inside of you, what's the truth?
- 3) If you struggle to internalize this truth, what is the lie that's speaking to you louder than the truth?
- 4) Read Hebrews 3:13 – "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." What exhortations can you as a Community Group share with one another (an exhortation is when someone shares urgent advice)?

Sources

- Prayer
 - Biblical Expository Commentary
 - Barclay
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