

An Example of Maturity

#1 in series “Doing What We Believe”
(A Study in the Book of James)

James 1:1a

There are a couple of different people credited with the quote – “*We do what we believe, all the rest is just religious talk*”... I was in my teens when I first heard the statement, and it made an impact on me... There is a sobering alarm in those words ... because one may have the vocabulary of a Christian and really not be one.

In a similar way, a genuine Christian may even have the knowledge and speech of being a *mature* Christian, but how they conduct their lives is what will reveal their true maturity...

I not only want to BE a true Christian – I long to be a mature one... Don’t you?

Today, we begin a life-maturing study through one of the books that God has given us that will equip us for the journey toward maturity in Christ... I have long-desired that we would take this journey together, and want to encourage you to determine even now, if it is possible, to not miss any part of this series.

God’s Word is far more sobering than any words of man – and even though the “*We do what we believe...*” statement impacted me, and gave me a wake-up call in my walk with Christ – I realize it may not have that same impact upon you... So, what is it about this book that WILL call us to a determined life of maturity in Christ? I think the answer lies in the key verse of the book:

James 1:22 (NASB) “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

Just the simple reading of that verse alerts us to the reality that being a Christian is something “proven” – not merely declared... One who simply declares themselves to be a Christian, but lacks the transformed heart, that leads to transformed living – is one who “*deludes themselves*”... *Delude*, may be better understood as “*deceive*”...

Deception happens when one comes to believe something that is actually false – and they do so on the bases of false reasoning... Is it possible for someone to actually “deceive themselves” into believing a lie?... God’s Word says YES!

And who wants to believe a lie?...

Begin now asking God to guide and guard your mind and heart and let's begin our study together through a book that He uses to do just that!

We will focus today on the first part of verse one:

James 1:1 (NASB) “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...”

Let's consider first –

- **The Man James**

The author of this letter is James... You may see in your footnotes that the name Jacob may appear... The original name – Ἰάκωβος, has been translated into other languages and it is either Jacob, or James... “James” is how the name arrives to us in English, after the name traveled through a couple of different languages and was finally transliterated in English as “James”...

Ἰάκωβος was a common name in the first-century Palestine... There are four different men in the Bible who had the name James:

- James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John, who is sometimes called “James the greater” – who was the disciple of Jesus and was martyred by Herod in Acts 12.
- James the son of Alphaeus, who was one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus (Matt. 10, Luke 1) – but that's all we know of him...
- An “unknown” James, who was the father of Judas (not Iscariot) ([Luke 6:16](#)).
- James – the half-brother of Christ. He is sometimes called “James the Just” ([Matt. 13:55](#); [Mark 6:3](#)).

This is the James that conservative scholars believe wrote this book...

Next, let's look at –

- **The Transformation of James**

I believe James provides for us an excellent example of a truly transformed life looks like. We see in this James, not only what a genuine Christian looks like – but what genuine spiritual maturity looks like...

Let's look at what we know about him:

Though James was the younger brother to Jesus, he was not a believer in Jesus being the Christ throughout all of his childhood and perhaps through all of his twenties... **John 7:3-5** clearly states that Jesus' own brothers were "not believing in Him"...

We can only speculate what it was like growing up in the shadow of Jesus... Many have tried to paint a humorous picture of what that would have been like... Jesus was perfect, and His siblings were not...

In all-seriousness – unbelief is the most serious – dangerous – position to hold... I can only imagine that when James was in the process of writing the phrase in verse 22 "**who delude (or deceive) themselves**", if his mind didn't race back to his own unbelief – believing he had no need to believe in Jesus... Remember – "deception" is the act of falsely concluding a matter... For a long period of time – James had falsely concluded that His big brother was NOT One to follow... While in that state – he could not have been more wrong...

Unbelief is our greatest sin and our greatest barrier to knowing the truth.

Heb. 3:13 warns of the hardening affects of unbelief – which is identified in that verse as "**the deceitfulness of sin**":

Heb. 3:13 (NASB) "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

What was it that convinced James that his elder brother was / is the Christ of God?... What was it that persuaded him that he needed to become a follower of Christ?... The answer is simple... It was the resurrection of Christ from the dead! (**Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 15:7, Gal. 1:19**).

As a result, this younger brother of Jesus became a faithful, maturing follower of Christ! James actually became the preaching elder of the Jerusalem Church and is mentioned first in the list of the "**pillars**" of the church in **Gal. 2:9**.

So – the transformation of James begins with him coming to faith in Christ and continues throughout his life as he matures in his relationship with Christ...

Consider next –

- **The Maturity of James**

At this point – you may be wondering what how can we build on this point?... Most everything already said about James demonstrates “maturity”... After all, he was not only a follower of Christ, he was a pastor in the Jerusalem Church – and if that is not evidence of maturity – what is?

Well – it has been my experience that just because one is a professing believer – and may even be a teacher, or pastor of a local church – does NOT automatically mean that they are a “mature” believer...

I contend that there is even greater evidence that James was a “full-grown” man of God – just in the introduction of the book that bares his name:

James 1:1 (NASB) “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”

When James introduces himself as the author – which was most often expressed in the opening words of letters in those days – he refers to himself as “**a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**”... He does not boastingly say – “*James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ*”. He does not present himself as one who has such “connections” or such authority – that his special relationship to Christ ought to bolster his image in the eyes of his readers...

Rather, we see him using the lowliest terms known in his culture to introduce himself. “Bond-servant”.

A bond-servant is a slave... The term *bond-servant* is the translation of the Greek word **doulos**, which means “one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave”... Sometimes, the term is translated *slave* or *servant*.

In the times of Roman rule – the term *bondservant* or *slave* could refer to someone who voluntarily served others... But it usually referred to one who was held in a permanent position of servitude. Under Roman law, a bondservant was considered the owner’s personal property. Slaves essentially had no rights and could even be killed by their owners...

There is a similar understanding of the term in the OT as well. The Mosaic Law allowed an “indentured servant” to become a bondservant voluntarily:

Exodus 21:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ ⁶ then his master shall bring him to [a] God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.

The term *servant* was often used to refer to those who gratefully obeyed God: Abraham, Joshua, David, Isaiah – and even the Messiah Himself is called God’s “Servant” (Isa. 53:11).

In all of these instances, the term *servant* carries the idea of humble nobility... Being God’s servant was – and is – an honorable position.

By the time the Romans came to power, and during the first-century church - it has been estimated that as much as 1/3 of the Roman population were slaves... Another third had been slaves during an earlier stage of life... In fact, it was common for a free-born person to work side-by-side with slaves as most anything from “street sweepers, dockworkers, doctors, teachers, and business managers” (gotquestions.org).

It was also common for convicted criminals to become bondservants to the state and usually died working in the mines or in the galleys of ships...

I’ve read that it was not unusual for Jews to own slaves during the New Testament period...

Slavery was a familiar part of that culture – as it has been in various forms throughout history...

There were times when Jesus Himself would refer to slaves and owners in His parables (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 12:41-48)... He also taught that the greatest in God’s kingdom would have to become “**the servant of all**”:

Mark 9:35 (NASB) “Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’”

That concept was something that a Roman citizen would never contemplate!... Romans were proud of their freedom and would never identify themselves as a bondservant.

But Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)!

Throughout the New Testament, the word *bondservant, slave,*

or *servant* is a metaphor of a “mature follower of Christ”!... It truly describes someone who is absolutely devoted to Jesus. Paul, Timothy, James, Peter, and Jude all describe themselves as “**bondservants of Christ**”.

Believers today should still consider themselves bond-servants – or even *slaves* of Christ:

1 Cor. 7:22 (NASB) “For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave.”

Eph. 6:6 (NASB) “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

2 Tim. 2:24 (NASB) “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged”

Jesus is our Lord – and He deserves our allegiance!... As bondservants of Christ – we renounce all other masters, and give ourselves totally to Him!

Matt. 6:24 (NASB) “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Finally – we also want to acknowledge that being a bondservant of Christ is a genuine joy – not a drudgery... Jesus says His “burden is light**” (Matt. 11:30).**

We have also been given the promise:

Rom. 6:22 (NASB) “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- What are your thoughts about the quote: “*We do what we believe, all*”

the rest is just religious talk”?

- **How do Christians have the tendency to “delude”, or “deceive” themselves? How can we be freed from any such deceptions?**
- Can you quote the key verse of the book of James? (James 1:22 “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”)
- **Who were the four men named James in the NT?**
- **Why did Pastor refer to the author of the book as the “half-brother” of Jesus?** (The question may be too insulting to the intelligence of your group, so feel free to NOT use it.)
- **Can you speculate why James may not have come to faith in Christ until after the resurrection?**
- **What evidence can you cite that demonstrates that James is an example to us of maturity?**
- **What’s the difference between a servant and a bond-servant?**
- **What are the various identifying terms of a Christian we see in the Bible? Which ones do you relate to the most?**
- **Is “bond-servant” a label we should aspire to? Why, or why not?**