



In Conclusion

James 5:19-20



Considering the Ethics in James

□ James is full of ethical¹ instruction. See page 3. How does this list compare to the ethics taught in your background?² Consider the following questions and compare the Christian view to the view from your background.

1. What is the *basis* of ethics from your background? What is the *basis* of Christian ethics? Where do ethics come from? (1:17; 4:12)³



2. What motivates people to live according to ethics in your background? What motivates Christians to live according to biblical ethics? (1:12; 2:5)

□ “To glorify God, and enjoy Him forever”⁴ is a good summary of the motivations involved in faithfully living the Christian life. Christian believers should be motivated by God’s purpose, love and blessing, which is realized in a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

3. What are the consequences of violating ethics in your background? What are the consequences of violating biblical ethics? (1:15; 2:12; 5:1; 5:9; 5:12; 5:20)⁵



¹ ‘ethics’ – moral principles; standards or rules of right and wrong behavior.

² Our backgrounds may be different – Christian, nonreligious, other religion. But all of us have had ethical teaching.

³ Biblical Christians believe that ethics must have an objective standard of good. Without God, there is no sound basis for ethics. Of course, this does not mean that nonbelievers have no ethics. The Bible teaches that all humanity is created in the image of God, which includes a moral component. All human beings are designed as moral agents with moral faculties. Furthermore, all human beings have some degree of moral knowledge, received through God’s ‘general revelation’ (creation, history, and conscience). But God’s moral will is more explicitly revealed through ‘special revelation.’ The Bible is God’s primary means of special revelation today.

⁴ ‘What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever’ (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*). To ‘glorify God’ is to reflect Him in our attitudes and actions in order to bring honor and glory to Him.

⁵ James 1:15 and 5:20 mention ‘death’ as a consequence. We all die physically, but the Bible also uses death in the spiritual sense. Spiritual death is separation, or broken relationship, between humans and God – the Source of life and blessing. The Bible teaches that spiritual death is the necessary result of sin. Sin may be defined as any attitude or action opposed to the authority and moral will of God. Due to ‘the fall’ (Genesis 3) sin is the natural condition of all humans. It is the disease; and specific sins are the symptoms of the disease. In other verses (like James 5:9, 12), the judgment of God is mentioned. God is just, and violations against his moral will must be punished. While a person can escape ‘spiritual death’ by God’s grace through faith, it does not mean the person becomes sinless! (1 John 1:8). It should be emphasized that a person’s ‘salvation’ is not based on his/her own efforts, but on *Christ’s* righteousness, which is ‘credited’ to him/her through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:18-25, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Still, sin in the Christian life harms ‘fellowship’ with God, and has various destructive effects.

4. Is it possible to live perfectly according to the established ethics? (2:10; 3:2; 4:17)⁶
5. What is the solution to the ethical problem? (1:17-18) What does a person need to do from the view of your background? What does a person need to do in response to the Christian message? (1:21-22; 1:5; 3:17; 4:6-10)⁷



Final Exhortation

- 📖 “My brothers, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back,²⁰ let him know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20, HCSB)
6. Read James 5:19-20. What are the consequences of “straying from the truth?”⁸ Who is responsible to do something if another person is seen straying from the truth? What are some practical steps a person can take when he/she sees someone straying from the truth?



Reflection/Application

- Go through questions 1 through 5 again, comparing the biblical view with the view from your background. Biblical teaching claims to be the “truth” (1:18). If you *are not* a Christian believer, consider these claims and continue to seek truth. If you *are* a believer, learn to communicate the uniqueness of biblical Christianity relative to other worldviews.
- This week, review the list of ethical instructions on the next page, and reflect on James 1:21-22; 1:5; 3:17; and 4:6-10. Identify one or more specific attitudes or behaviors in your life that need to change, and commit to be a “doer of the word” by God’s grace (1:22).
- If you are a believer, and you know another professing believer who is “straying from the truth,” take steps to bring him or her back. If you need assistance, seek help.

⁶ In relation to Christian ethics (God’s moral will), the answer is *no!* Romans 3:23: ‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ James 3:2: ‘for we *all* stumble in many ways’ (*emphasis added*). James 4:17: ‘So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good and doesn’t do it.’ James 2:10: ‘For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.’ The consequences of this imperfection are the same as noted in footnote 3, ultimately eternal spiritual death (separation from God, who is the Source of life) and judgment. This is the necessary consequence due to the holy, righteous, and just nature of God.

⁷ The solution is God’s goodness and grace, realized in Jesus Christ. The needed response is to ‘repent’ – that is, to turn away from the sin of our old life and turn toward God who is the Source of new life. We need to humbly receive God’s word – that is, the good news concerning Jesus Christ along with his teachings. It’s important to emphasize that we are *not* ‘saved’ by our own performance or conformance to God’s ethics (which is impossible). We are saved through our union with Christ (the perfect Son of God, who died for us). Through faith in Christ, we are set free from the penalty and controlling power of sin, and we are enabled to live the Christian life by the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, the Christian must continue to submit to God (4:2) and ‘do what the word says’ (1:22) in order to live the Christian life as God intends (2:17, 26).

⁸ ‘stray from the truth’ – to reject the revealed will of God (as recorded in the Bible); to act contrary to it.

Instructions from James

- Consider it a great joy whenever you experience various trials. (1:2)
- Ask God for wisdom. (1:5)
- Believe and do not doubt when you ask God. (1:6)
- Persevere under trial. (1:12)
- Boast (rejoice) in humble circumstances. (1:9-10)
- Do not blame God or others for your sins, but accept full responsibility. (1:13-14)
- Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. (1:19)
- Get rid of all moral filth and evil. (1:21)
- Humbly receive God's word. (1:21)
- Do what the word says. (1:22)
- Do not show favoritism. (2:1)
- Keep the royal law – "Love your neighbor as yourself." (2:8)
- Speak and act as those who will be judged. (2:12)
- Show your faith by your works (actions). (2:14-26)
- Control your tongue – that is, the things you say. (3:1-12; cf. 1:26)
- Show godly wisdom by good conduct and gentleness. (3:13)
- Do not have bitter envy or selfish ambition in your heart. (3:14)
- Be pure, peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. (3:17)
- Get rid of selfish desires. (4:1)
- Do not fight and quarrel. (4:2)
- Do not pray with wrong motives. (4:3)
- Do not be a friend with "the world," which is hostile to God. (4:4)
- Do not be proud, but be humble. (4:6)
- Submit yourself to God. (4:7)
- Resist the devil. (4:7)
- Draw near to God. (4:8)
- Clean up your life, and purify your heart. (4:8)
- Be sorrowful about your sin, and repent (turn away from your sin to God). (4:9)
- Humble yourself before the Lord. (4:10)
- Do not speak against or judge others. (4:11-12)
- Do not boastfully presume you are in control, but humbly acknowledge that God is in control. (4:13-16)
- Do the good you know you ought to do. (4:17)
- Repent (turn away) from self-indulgence, greed, and oppression of others. (5:1-6)
- Be patient and stand firm, trusting in God. (5:7-8)
- Do not complain about one another. (5:9)
- Do not swear, but speak with integrity. (5:12)
- Pray, praise God, and request prayer. (5:13-14)
- Confess your sins to one another. (5:16)
- Pray for one another. (5:16)
- Help those who have strayed from the truth to turn back. (5:19-20)

