



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Servant of One and All (Part 1): James 1:1

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Please Lord; grant us to say in the very depths of our hearts exactly what the psalmist expressed so passionately when he wrote:

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Lord please illumine our minds as we hear Your Word taught, and grant us hearts to obey You. Capture our affections; stimulate our thinking about Your holy character and the glories found only in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Impart grace in the hearing of your Word, and reach and teach our hearts to agree with you. By the power of the Holy Spirit help us to skillfully meditate upon and apply your Word to our lives. Teach us to view all our trials from the bigger picture of your will for our lives and from the perspective of eternity. Grant us great joy in fellowship with You and Your people and teach us afresh what it means to be Your servant people, as we contemplate what James meant when he referred to himself as "...a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1: 1). Help us understand and to serve You, rather than ourselves, in every sphere You have placed us. We confess now that You are the Lord, of heaven and earth and the source of all wisdom, so please grant wisdom to all who are here, and to all who call upon Your Holy Name, without any doubting of your faithfulness (James 1: 5-6). In Christ's name we pray, Amen!

INTRODUCTION

The author of the book of James described himself as "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." That is an extremely short introduction, almost too short. Either James was in a hurry to get right to the point of his letter, or he wanted us to remember the significance of being a servant of God.

Like two wings of a bird, there are two characteristics that are essential for exemplary service to God. The first characteristic of a servant of God is that they are devoted to serving God above man; the second characteristic necessary for exemplary service to God is that servants of God are committed to serving all people without partiality, in a way that is pleasing to God, in order to glorify Him in everything. In today's study we will focus on the first characteristic, namely that servants of God are primarily devoted to the service of One. Next time we will take up the second characteristic essential to exemplary service, namely that the servant of God is committed to serving all to the glory of God.

If your desire to is to be an effective witness for, and an exemplary servant of, the Lord Jesus Christ whether it be at home, church, or at work, you will want to commit your life to serving God in these two ways. You will devote yourself to serving God above men, and you will devote your life to serving all men impartially to the glory of God. In order to do so you must rely upon the strength that God supplies. This alone is how you will prove yourself to be a blessed doer of the Word, and not merely a hearer of the Word who according to James, is deluded. The promise we have from God, beloved, is that when we trust in God with all of our heart, and lean not on our own understanding, but seek to acknowledge Him in all our ways, He will direct our steps (Pr. 3:5-6), and if we prove to be doers of His Word by the grace He supplies, then God has promised according to His grace and mercy, that He will greatly bless us not only in this life, but also in the life to come (James 1:25, 1:12).

In fact, looking at it from the negative, apart from prioritizing your devotion to God over men, and simultaneously serving all people impartially, one cannot hope to bring honor or glory to God, as it would be the antithesis of His blueprint for being an effective servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Positively, you will find that if by faith you devote yourself to serving God above men, and yet strive to serve all men appropriately, you will be moving in the direction of bringing continual glory and honor to God—regardless of the circumstances you face.

I think it is fair to say that most of the challenges you will face in this life whether at home, at work, or school, or in the various relationships you have, will be challenges that test your resolve to serve God wholeheartedly, and serve all men with the love and impartiality they God calls us to. Let's focus now on part one, which ultimately will lead us to one main point and that is that believers are called to demonstrate their love and devotion to God by keeping the priority of serving Him, above all others.

BECOMING A SERVANT OF ONE: BY GOD'S GRACE

1. UPHOLDING THE BIBLICAL EMPHASIS OF SERVICE TO ONE

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

BIBLE STUDIES

WED. @ 7:00 - 7:30 A.M., ROOM 19 IN THE STATE CAPITOL
(TAKE ELEVATOR TO THE LOWER LOBBY, EXIT LEFT)

A Servant of One and All (Part 1): James 1:1

The emphasis in Scripture is both clear, from Genesis to Revelation that those who serve God are primarily a servant of One. In fact, even as I write and deliver these notes I am striving to please an audience of One—namely God. Similarly, in the first verse, of the first chapter of the book of James, the grammar is equally clear, James is not self-serving. He is not his own boss, and not following his own agenda, or seeking to bring glory to himself; it is just the opposite. James is singularly described as God’s servant and Jesus Christ’s servant—namely—He is God’s man through and through. Can you say that about yourself? The grammatical breakdown could not be clearer as the nominative words “James” and “servant” belong to their genitives “of God” and “of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Though a clear enough statement on its own, it may not immediately stand out to you as earth shattering. Yet, when one examines the historical background and usage of the word chosen for “servant,” the picture immediately becomes much more vivid, and colorful, and I pray much more meaningful in your hearts.

There were other words James could have chosen to communicate that he was a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this particular choice of Words (*doulos* in the Greek) would have popped-out to the original readers as a servant who was marked by lifelong devotion to God—and to fully carrying out God’s revealed will.

WHAT IS A DOULOS?

The Greek word for “servant” in James 1: 1 is *doulos* and was most likely pronounced “doolas.” All James told us about himself was that he is a “*doulos* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do you want to know **why** for James, one word alone, ***doulos***, was sufficient to describe himself to his recipients and why his recipients would have been fully satisfied by all that this one word means?

Consider the following descriptions of a *doulos* or servant:

*To be a **doulos** of God was considered a great honor in Jewish culture. Such Old Testament luminaries as Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Isaac (Gen. 24:14), Jacob (Ezek. 28:25), Job (Job 1:8), Moses (Ex. 14:31), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), Caleb (Num. 14:24), David (2 Sam. 3:18), Isaiah (Isa. 20:3), and Daniel (Dan. 6:20) are described as God’s servants. In the New Testament, Epaphras (Col. 4:12),*

*Timothy (Phil. 1:1), Paul (Rom. 1:1), Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), John (Rev. 1:1), and our Lord Himself (Acts 3:13) all bore the title of **doulos**. **By taking that title, James numbered himself with those honored not for who they were, but whom they served—the living God.***¹

I think this is one of the main reasons James can merely refer to himself as a *doulos* or servant. In essence James was saying, “I am one of these guys.” That information alone would have been sufficient for the early readers to have warmly received authoritative teaching from God by the pen of James.

*By taking the title of a **doulos**, James numbered himself with those honored not for who they were, but whom they served—the living God. --- John MacArthur Jr.*

BECOMING A SERVANT OF ONE: BY GOD’S GRACE

2. UPHOLDING THE BIBLICAL DURATION OF SERVICE TO ONE

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

IS THERE A TERM LIMIT FOR SERVANTS OF ONE?

If the emphasis of James’ service was not on who he was, but on Whom he served, then his duration of service would have been considered no less significant.

The original recipients of the book of James were largely very early church Jewish believers who scattered throughout the known world outside Palestine—while many knew the content of the Hebrew Scriptures, most would have been familiar with the Septuagint (which was the popular Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). So when the early Jewish recipients heard the word *doulos*, their minds would have recalled Exodus 21: 5-6 in the Septuagint.

A Servant of One and All (Part 1): James 1:1

*When used in the New Testament of a believer's relationship to Jesus Christ, *doulos* describes willing, determined, and devoted service. It reflects the attitude of an Old Testament slave who refused the opportunity for freedom and voluntarily resubmitted himself to his master for life. The Mosaic Law provided that "if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' then his master shall bring him to 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" (Ex. 21:5–6).²*

Thus we do not associate the concept of "spiritual retirement" with being a *doulos*—in fact attitudinally, one who serves God does not do so under an external compulsion, but out of a willing and joyful internal desire, knowing there is nothing better they could do with their life than to serve the living God of all mercy who has saved their soul.

BECOMING A SERVANT OF ONE: BY GOD'S GRACE

3. UPHOLDING THE BIBLICAL PRIORITY OF SERVICE TO ONE

So far we have been looking at the Scriptural emphasis placed upon serving One—namely God, illustrated by servants honored not for who they are, but for Whom they serve, and honored by life-long service to God motivated by their love for their heavenly Master (Ex. 21:5-6).

Now I want to focus on the Biblical priority which characterizes all true servants of God. A question may arise regarding how I can practically arrange the priorities in my life. I really want to keep it simple. I do not want to give you a long list, but rather uphold a single principle, namely that servants of God have one singular priority in this life, they determine in their hearts to serve God over and above men.

Serving God above men is by no means antithetical to serving all men (which will be covered in part two). The distinction that Scripture makes is that service to all people is always a qualified service to them: we are to serve all people without showing partiality, it is true, but we do not serve them as they might like to be served if for example serving them requires us to sin against God! Service to others is always qualified by that which clearly brings honor to God, and is in keeping with the standard he has

already established and revealed in Christ and in Scripture. In fact, this is one of the primary purposes of Scripture—to equip God's beloved children for every good work to the glory of their Father.

1 Corinthians 10:31 ... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Keeping this biblical priority of service to God over men will lead you to numerous applications in every sphere you live in. As you have no doubt heard numerous times, the study of Scripture is never for the purpose of gaining biblical content for its own sake; rather we study Scripture for the purpose of glorifying God by seeking to humbly and prayerfully honor and obey God in everything, according to the powerful grace He provides.

So, when we are challenged with a choice to obey God, or to obey men (and that would even include our sinful flesh), according to the Scriptures we should always choose obedience to God. Note just a few passages which indicate this priority (Proverbs 29:25; Galatians 1:10; Matthew 6:24; James 1:8).

Proverbs 29:25 -The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

Galatians 1:10 ~ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Note that Scripture clearly warns us not to fear man in an ultimate sense. What is Scripture's alternative to fearing man? The alternative to fearing and obeying man is fearing and obeying the Lord your God.

Regarding the Galatians passage, it is important to note Paul's choice of words, he wrote that if he were still trying to please men—then he would not be a *doulos* of God.

As a *doulos* of God, if Paul failed to obey God by warning the Galatians of the real and present danger facing their church then Paul would have had a serious failure in his duty as a *doulos* (servant) of God. Paul demonstrated that a servant of Christ is more interested in doing what is pleasing in God's sight than appeasing man's sinful desires. Attitudinally, the foundation for that kind of sincere obedience is primarily a matter of love which expresses itself in devotion to God. As an earthly *doulos* both loves and obeys their human master—so a spiritual *doulos* is characterized by maintaining the priority of love and obedience to their heavenly Master.

A Servant of One and All (Part 1): James 1:1

The last proverbial nail in the coffin of dual allegiance to differing masters is found coming from Jesus Christ. He deflated any hope of attempting to serve two opposing masters—from the standpoint of its sheer impossibility.

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (emphasis mine)

Note Jesus did not say we “should not” serve two masters; he said we “could not” serve two masters. The Lord’s word choice for “serve” (in both cases of this verse) was a verbal form of the same root word, *doulos*.³

What does the book of James teach us about the one who refuses to trust in God’s wise counsel and instead pursues the route of duality of devotion? James teaches that such a person is double-minded, and is unstable in all of his ways (1:8). I pray that God might strengthen you to serve Him today with a singular-minded approach, so that you may be stable in all of your ways.

What kind of servant was James? James was noted for lifelong service and devotion to God. As the prominent servant-leader of the early church at Jerusalem, he gave direction at the Jerusalem counsel when the early Jewish church was trying to figure out how to incorporate Gentile converts into the fold, and most-likely he penned the letter which followed in Acts 15. James was a noted prayer warrior—church history reveals that he had calloused knees from constantly praying for all men. He was concerned about aiding the church in helping widows and orphans and remaining unstained from the world (James 1: 27), he emphasize self-control in speech (James 3), he emphasized faith that practically met the needs of others (2: 14-17) and he exalted moral, ministerial and even doctrinal unity in the church (3:13-18, 4:17, 5: 19-20). It seems that when the church suffered financially he spread the word to other churches so those who were able and desired to help could practically benefit those who were without (Romans 15:25-26). So in these ways and many others James proved himself a faithful doer—serving God and the Lord Jesus Christ until his death by martyrdom for speaking of the things he had seen firsthand regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. James proved faithful until the end, and he was characterized for serving God above men.

WHAT IS THE SERVANT’S BENEFIT PACKAGE?

Do you think God would ask so much of his servants without giving them very much in return? There is a spiritual principle in Scripture that reminds us that God always out gives us. God will truly reward you for all that you do in His Name. In fact, I think it is true that what we normally consider sacrifice is actually gain when we consider God’s gracious treasure in heaven. Below are just a few passages to keep you vertically minded and future oriented as you seek to serve our gracious Master and King.

Matthew 6:19-20 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (emphasis added)

James 1: 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (emphasis added)

I believe that keeping this vertical and future orientation is essential for persevering in faithful service to our great Lord. Are you presently keeping vertically minded and future oriented as you persevere daily in faithful service to our Lord? Are you keeping this Biblical priority of serving God above men? I pray that you are.

TAKE AWAY/APPLICATION

So what does all of this talk about service have to do with you today? Try as we may, we cannot keep of God’s commands apart from His grace. Sin in us is the problem, and we need God’s powerful grace to live for Him.

If you have never placed your faith in Christ, then God’s calls is clear; God commands “all men everywhere to repent” of their sins, and place their faith in the death of Jesus Christ’s for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 17:30). To know Christ is to love Him, and when you are moved by His love, one of the ways it will show, is by your service to the Lord Jesus Christ above men, and by your service to all men, to the honor and glory of God.

A Servant of One and All (Part 1): James 1:1

If this is characteristic of your Christian walk then Christ is your peace, if it is not, then I urge you right now to ask Christ to help you, and to let Him completely reign in every area of your life. You will not regret doing so.

¹ John MacArthur Jr., *James* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 12.

² John MacArthur Jr., *Philippians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 13.

³ This particular grammatical form emphasizes an ongoing habit of practice—so Jesus was essentially stressing the fact that we cannot be continually serving two different masters with two different agendas—it is impossible, therefore we ought to be wise and seek to serve Jesus Christ.