

THE RICHES OF THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD IN JOHN'S EPISTLES COMPARED TO "PURE RELIGION" IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

BY JAMES FITE

The entire New Testament is a revelation of the present and unveiled Lord Jesus Christ. The first verse of the first synoptic Gospel—referring to itself as “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ”—traces the ancestry of His humanity to David and to Abraham (Matt. 1:1), thereby implying that Christ, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament types, is the true Solomon and the real Isaac (cf. Matt. 12:42; Gal. 3:16). In the final verses of Matthew, Jesus promised His followers that they would have His personal presence until the consummation of the present age. Furthermore, He authorized them to disciple the nations and unite them through baptism into the name of the Triune God (28:18-20).

By contrast, the Gospel of John, as a conclusion to the Gospels, describes the steps of the process that the Triune God passed through to redeem fallen mankind so that He could regenerate man with the divine life and ultimately live and be expressed in man. John's Gospel opens with the eternal Word, who was God and was with God in eternity past (1:1-2). In time He became flesh through His incarnation, lived a God-expressing life among men, and accomplished an eternal redemption (vv. 14, 29; cf. Heb. 9:12). In resurrection He became the in-breathed Pneuma to indwell His disciples (John 20:22). In John's concluding chapter the Lord revealed that He remains invisibly present with His disciples whether they live or die, whether they are martyred or remain—until He visibly comes again (cf. 21:19, 22). When relating in his Gospel the path that the Lord took to accomplish His perfect redemption through His judicial death and to achieve His complete salvation by His resurrection, John mentions at least thirty descriptors of Christ.¹

The final New Testament book, Revelation, also authored by John, concludes with the Lord's promise of a prompt return: “I come quickly”; an affirming prayer to this promise by His witnesses: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus”; and the writer's blessing that “the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints” (22:20-21). Designating itself as the revelation, the unveiling, of Jesus Christ (1:1), this communication to the seven churches further reveals at least twenty-six aspects of Christ.²

The intervening New Testament section between the Gospels and Revelation comprises Acts and the Epistles. Acts, a continuation of Luke's Gospel, provides “a record of the continuing ministry of the resurrected and ascended Christ in heaven, carried out through His believers on earth” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1:11, note 2). Both John and Luke, in their unique styles, allude to this ongoing ministry. John testifies that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself could contain the books written” (John 21:25). Luke seems

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to end the book of Acts mid-sentence, describing how Paul welcomed all those who came to see him in his rented dwelling place: “Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered” (28:31).³ The Epistle writers include Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. This article particularly compares and contrasts the presentation of the Triune God in John’s three Epistles with that of “pure religion” in the Epistle of James (1:27).⁴

The juxtaposition in this article’s title of the terms *processed Triune God* with *pure religion* requires some additional commentary. While the word *processed* is not explicitly found in the Bible, the New Testament describes in so many words the economical steps, “the process,” that the Triune God has taken to redeem and ultimately incorporate man into His eternal habitation, that is, the New Jerusalem as the eternal, mutual dwelling place of God and the wife of the Lamb. These steps include Christ’s divine conception in the womb of a virgin to be a God-man, His birth, His human living, His redeeming death, His resurrection, His life-infusing as the breathed-out Spirit, and His power-imparting as the anointing Spirit.⁵ This process also includes the steps that He takes in and with each of His regenerated believers to inwardly transform and conform and outwardly transfigure them into His image.⁶

The Greek word for religion, θρησκεία (thrēskeía)—having the sense of ceremonial service and worship to God—appears in four New Testament verses and is used by both Paul and James. Paul, in his defense to King Agrippa in Acts 26:5, uses this term to describe how he lived as a Pharisee: “According to the strictest sect of our religion [θρησκεία].” Here Paul was using this word in a general sense to make the case that prior to his conversion to Christ, he was a zealous worshipper of God. Paul uses the same word negatively in Colossians 2:18, in reference to the worship (θρησκεία) of angels. James uses this term positively to refer to “pure and undefiled religion [noun]” (James 1:27). However, James prefaces this in verse 26 by noting the risk that one’s religion (noun) can be vain if he “thinks himself to be religious [adjective]” but “does not bridle his tongue.” Thus, for James, religion has both an inward, attitudinal aspect and an outward, observable component of practical perfection.

Aspects of the Triune God in John’s Epistles Compared to the Epistle of James

The Epistles of John and James both reveal and describe many significant and experiential aspects of the person and work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Father and His Children in John’s Epistles

In the introduction to his first Epistle, John harkens back to the Word of life first mentioned in his Gospel, tracing the Word’s organic and eternal source to the Father (1 John 1:1-2). In John’s speaking to the maturity levels of his recipients (e.g., the fathers, who know the eternal and preexisting Christ, the Word, “from the beginning” and the young men, who have “overcome the evil one”), he particularly states that the “young children” know the Father (2:13). John continues by emphasizing that our being called the children of God is based on the fact that we truly are (3:1). The implication here is that this is not a mere euphemistic title but a designation based on the reality that His regenerated believers have “been begotten” of God organically (v. 9; 2:29; cf. John 1:12-13): “Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are” (1 John 3:1).

Verse 10 of chapter 3 speaks of two manifestations that proceed from two organic sources: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother.”

Loving the brothers is thus both an issue and a manifestation of having received the divine life: “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. He who does not love abides in death” (v. 14).

As regenerated believers, we love God the Father because He first loved us (4:10, 19). Practically speaking, if we are to love the Father, we cannot love the world, because the Father is versus the world. The apostle John is emphatic: “All that is in the world...is not of the Father” (2:16). The world is a replacement, a vain alternative, to the Father. This explains the apostle’s charge: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (v. 15).⁷

In John’s second and third Epistles he rejoices greatly upon hearing that some of the children were walking in truth, consistent with what they had received (2 John 4; 3 John 4).

God the Father in the Epistle of James

James describes the Father as the One above, whose way of giving is good and what He gives is perfect (1:17). Both His gift and the actions that He takes to give it are noteworthy. Furthermore, He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or shadow cast by turning” (v. 17). Witness Lee, in his commentary on this verse, explains,

Lights here refers to the heavenly luminaries. The Father is the Creator, the source, of these shining bodies. With Him there is no shadow cast by turning (in contrast to the situation with the heavenly orbs, where the moon waxes and wanes by its revolving, and the sun can be eclipsed by the moon), for He is not variable, not changeable. As such, He is incapable of being tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. (*Recovery Version*, note 2)

In addition to describing God the Father as the Creator, James also identifies Him as the begetting Father, who “brought us forth by the word of truth, purposing that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (v. 18). Lee comments that here His bringing us forth “refers to the divine birth, our regeneration (John 3:5, 6), which is carried out according to God’s eternal purpose” (*Recovery Version*, James 1:18, note 1). James’s designation *the Lord and Father* in 3:9 indicates that the Lord is equal to God the Father.

The Son and His Work in John’s Epistles

John, consistent with his Gospel, refers to the only begotten Son in his first Epistle (4:9; cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). Jesus Christ is unambiguously the Son of the Father (1 John 1:3; 2 John 3). As the Son of God, He was purposely manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Therefore, Jesus Christ is deity, God incarnate, who came in the flesh (4:2; 2 John 7). He was divinely conceived of the Spirit to be born as the incarnate Son of God (cf. Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:31-35). To confess otherwise is “of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3).

Jesus Christ came in the flesh as the redeeming Son with the sin-cleansing blood; as such, He is our sin offering and trespass offering to resolve our negative problem with God (2 John 7; 1 John 1:7-9). As the sin offering, He became the propitiation for our sins (2:2; 4:10). Our sins have been forgiven “because of His name” (2:12). Hence, if we walk with Him in the light, and we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins, because His blood “cleanses us from every sin” (1:9, 7). As the manifested Son of God, He also came to address the root cause of sin, that is, to undo and destroy the works and sinful deeds of the devil (3:8). Thus, He is the Savior of the world (2:2; 4:14).

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Positively, this Jesus is, on one hand, the Christ, the anointed One (2:22; 5:1). On the other hand, He is the anoint-“ing” Holy One (2:20; cf. Mark 1:24; Acts 2:27; 3:14), who is continually imparting Himself as the life-giving Spirit to supply and energize each of His believers for their function and service as a living member of His mystical Body. Furthermore, Jesus Christ the Righteous is the Advocate with the Father and brings us, God’s regenerated children, into fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2). Christ is also the light in whom we can walk and with whom we can fellowship (1:5-7; Col. 1:12).

John also indicates that the Son is intimately associated with the divine life (Gk. *zoe*): He is “the Word of life” (1 John 1:1), the “eternal life” (v. 2; 5:20), and “the life,” which was with the Father (1:2). This life is in Him as God’s Son (5:11). He came that we might “have life and live” (4:9). When we have the Son, we also have His life (5:12).

First John 5:4 says that “everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world.” The divine birth is repeatedly mentioned in John’s writings (John 1:13; 3:3, 5; 1 John 2:29), particularly as the means by which the believers in Christ receive the life of God (John 3:15-16, 36; 1 John 5:11-12). Commenting on 1 John 5:4, Lee points out that the divine birth brings in the divine life and is the basic factor of the mysteries of this life, such as: “the fellowship of the divine life (1:3-7), the anointing of the Divine Trinity (2:20-27), the abiding in the Lord (2:28—3:24), and the divine living that practices the divine truth (1:6), the divine will (2:17), the divine righteousness (2:29; 3:7), and the divine love (3:11, 22-23; 5:1-3) to express the divine Person (4:12)” (*Recovery Version*, note 2).

First John 5:5-8 continues by speaking of the threefold testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood in the person and work of Jesus the Son of God. Concerning these verses, Lee comments,

He, Jesus Christ, came as the Son of God that we might be born of God and have the divine life (John 10:10; 20:31). It is in His Son that God gives us eternal life ([1 John 5:]11-13). Jesus, the man of Nazareth, was attested to be the Son of God by the water He went through in His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:31), by the blood He shed on the cross (John 19:31-35; Matt. 27:50-54), and also by the Spirit He gave not by measure (John 1:32-34; 3:34). By these three God has testified that Jesus is His Son given to us ([1 John 5:]7-10), that in Him we may receive His eternal life by believing into His name (vv. 11-13; John 3:16, 36; 20:31). The water of baptism terminates people of the old creation by burying them; the blood shed on the cross redeems those whom God has chosen from among the old creation; and the Spirit, who is the truth, the reality in life (Rom. 8:2), germinates those whom God has redeemed out of the old creation, by regenerating them with the divine life. Thus, they are born of God and become His children (John 3:5, 15; 1:12-13) and live a life that practices the truth ([1 John]1:6), the will of God (2:17), the righteousness of God (2:29), and the love of God (3:10-11) for His expression. (*Recovery Version*, 1 John 5:6, note 1)

In his third Epistle the apostle John commends Gaius for his steadfastness in walking in the truth and his past love in receiving the traveling brothers. John specifically encourages Gaius to be generous in the future to send forward those who go out “on behalf of the Name” (vv. 6-7; cf. John 15:21; Acts 4:10; 9:28; 16:18; 19:17). Here John is referring to “the exalted and glorious name of the wonderful Christ (cf. Phil. 2:9 and note 3; Acts 5:41; James 2:7)” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 3 John 7, note 1). Third John 7 makes clear that “in the apostle’s time, the brothers who worked for God took nothing from the pagans” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 7, note 2).

The Lord Jesus Christ in the Epistle of James

James repeatedly refers to Jesus Christ as the Lord (James 1:1; 2:1): He is the tenderhearted and compassionate Lord (5:11), the coming Lord (vv. 7-8), the raising-up Lord (vv. 14-15), the exalting Lord (4:10), and the Lord of hosts (5:4). James also likens Him to the Old Testament God of Job (v. 11), reinforcing the fact that Jesus is God.

Whereas John, in his Gospel, contrasts Moses as the lawgiver to Jesus Christ as the grace Supplier, that is, as the One full of grace and reality (1:17), James describes the Lord as the One who is “Lawgiver and Judge” (James 4:12). James further encourages the recipients of his Epistle to be doers of the law, not a judge of others (v. 11).

James also advises the believers to be humbled before the Lord, and as a result, He will exalt them (v. 10). James reminds the self-assured ones who make future plans concerning travel and commerce that they “do not know the matter of tomorrow” and that their life is a vapor (v. 14). He counsels them to instead say, “If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that” (v. 15). Concerning this section, Lee comments, “The tone of James’s word here also is like the tone of the Old Testament (cf. *Psa. 90:3-10*). In any case, his word arouses a fear of one’s self-will and instills a confidence in God, as expressed in [James 4:]15. This kind of word always comes out of the mouth of a God-fearing person” (*Recovery Version*, v. 14, note 1).

In 2:7 James speaks of not blaspheming “the honorable name by which you are called.” James uses a similar phrase in Acts 15:17 with respect to all the Gentiles, “upon whom [God’s] name has been called,” which could also be rendered “who have been called by [God’s] name” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 17, note 1). In both Acts 15 and in his Epistle, James may also be referring to the Christian practice of audibly calling on the name of the Lord, as Paul describes.⁸ James goes on to state that the prophets “spoke in the name of the Lord” (James 5:10). This means that they spoke on behalf of this name; that is, they were representatives of this person.

The congruence between these portions in Acts 15 and James 2 provides solid support that the writer of this Epistle is indeed the same James in Acts 15 who oversaw the conference of the apostles and elders held in Jerusalem to resolve the circumcision controversy.⁹

The Spirit in John’s Epistles

In his Epistles the apostle John repeatedly mentions the Spirit in an experiential context.¹⁰ In 1 John 4 the believers know the Spirit of God by the confession of a genuine prophet that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (v. 2). John emphasizes the relationship of the apostles with God, and he connects the positive response of those who hear the apostolic message to the Spirit of truth: “We are of God; he who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception” (v. 6). This Spirit is also the reality of what Christ as the Son of God is: “This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood; and the Spirit is He who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality” (5:6).

Furthermore, according to John, this Spirit is the anointing, who subjectively moves, works, abides, and teaches in the believers (2:20, 27). By the anointing of the indwelling, all-inclusive, compound Spirit, who is the composition of the Divine Trinity, the believers can know and enjoy the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as their life and life supply. It is by the Spirit that the believers can also know that the Triune God abides in them

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and that they abide in Him (3:24). This is a mutual abiding, which can be known and experienced because He has given to us of His Spirit (4:13).

The Spirit in the Epistle of James

The paucity of the word *pneuma* in James is the conundrum and perhaps the major theological challenge of this Epistle. James uses this crucial and ubiquitous New Testament word¹¹ only two times.

In his first mention of *pneuma*, juxtaposed with a reference to the human body, James is undoubtedly referring not to the divine Holy Spirit but to the human spirit: “Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (2:26). Here James is affirming that the human spirit is the animating life source of a living physical body.¹² By analogy, James is asserting in this context that the works of a Christian are the motivating source of a living faith.

The verse containing the second mention of *pneuma* in James poses several interpretational difficulties; James 4:4-5 says,

Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: The Spirit [*Pneuma*], whom He has caused to dwell in us, longs unto envy?

The fact that no one has successfully identified the specific Scripture to which James alludes adds further to the conundrum. In his commentary on James 4:5, Adam Clarke says, “This verse is exceedingly obscure. We cannot tell what scripture St. James refers to; many have been produced by learned men as that which he had particularly in view... There is not a critic in Europe who has considered the passage that has not been puzzled with it.”

The first interpretive challenge to many Bible readers and commentators is determining whether *pneuma* here refers to the Holy Spirit of God, to the human spirit, or to a third alternative. The second interpretive challenge derives from the assumption that James is indeed referring to the Holy Spirit:¹³ Why does he juxtapose the positive aspect of the indwelling Holy Spirit with the negative context concerning being a friend of the world that provokes the Spirit to long “unto envy”? The negative context, which associates the Spirit with “envy,” is perhaps the main reason Bible readers have difficulty accepting that *pneuma* here is referring to the divine Spirit of God.

Albert Barnes is an example of commentators who propose an alternative understanding—that the word *Spirit* here refers neither to the Spirit of God nor to the human spirit but, rather, to the essence of the natural human disposition:

The spirit that dwelleth in us. Many have supposed that the word *spirit* here refers to the Holy Spirit, or the Christian spirit; but in adopting this interpretation they are obliged to render the passage, ‘the spirit that dwells in us lusteth *against* envy,’ or tends to check and suppress it. But this interpretation is forced and unnatural, and one which the Greek will not well bear. The more obvious interpretation is to refer it to our spirit or disposition as we are by nature, and it is equivalent to saying that we are naturally prone to envy. (71)

John MacArthur is among those who conclude that James is referring to the human spirit:

This difficult phrase is best understood by seeing the “spirit” as a reference not to the Holy

Spirit, but to the human spirit, and translating the phrase “yearns jealously” in the negative sense of “lusts to envy.” James’s point is that an unbelieving person’s spirit (inner person) is bent on evil (cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Prov. 21:10; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-23). Those who think otherwise defy the biblical diagnosis of fallen human nature; and those who live in worldly lusts give evidence that their faith is not genuine (cf. Rom. 8:5-11; 1 Cor. 2:14). (1893)

Henry Alford is among those who conclude that James is speaking of the Holy Spirit who indwells the believers. In his *New Testament for English Readers* he renders James 4:5 as, “Or do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that he placed in us jealously desireth us?” Commenting on this verse, he says, “These words connect naturally with the foregoing. We are married to one, even God, who has implanted in us His Spirit: and He is a jealous God, who will not suffer us to be friends of His enemy and His friends at the same time. The only difficulty seems to be, to trace this latter saying in any part of Scripture” (1616).

Lee also provides the context of God being a loving and jealous Husband as a basis for understanding this mention of *pneuma* to refer to the Spirit of God, despite its seemingly negative connotation:

When God acquired us to be His spouse, He put His Spirit into us to make us one with Him (1 Cor. 6:19, 16-17) that He may occupy our entire being (cf. Eph. 3:17) for God, causing us to be wholly for our Husband. God is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5), and His Spirit is jealous over us with the jealousy of God (2 Cor. 11:2), longing, jealously desiring, that we not be His lover and make friends with His enemy at the same time. (*Truth Lessons* 66)

Verse 5 of [James] chapter 4 is the only time James mentions God’s indwelling Spirit. His one mention of the Spirit is negative, concerning the abolishing of the friendship of the world. It is not positive, concerning the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Greek word rendered “dwell” in 4:5 may also be translated “make His home.” The indwelling Spirit makes His home in us so that He may occupy our entire being for God (cf. Eph. 3:17), causing us to be wholly for our Husband. (*Life-study of James* 78)

Lee posits that the Spirit longing “unto envy” is an expressive reaction of an intensively loving God.

Translators differ on how to render the Greek words translated “The Spirit, whom He has caused to dwell in us, longs unto envy.” I believe that *longs unto envy* is the most accurate translation. This longing comes out of love. For example, a husband who loves his wife is full of longing for her and would be envious if she were to love someone else. He does not want her to love another besides him.

In [James 4:]4 and 5 James uses marriage to illustrate our relationship with God. God is the Husband, and we are His counterpart. As God’s counterpart, we should love Him. If we love anything or anyone in place of Him, we become adulteresses. The indwelling Spirit whom God has put within us longs to keep us singly for Himself. Whenever we would not be solely for Him but would love the world, this indwelling Spirit will not only be offended but will also be envious. (*Life-study of James* 79)

In his further exposition on James, *Crystallization-study of the Epistle of James*, Lee again calls attention to the fact that James refers to the Spirit of God only once, as the indwelling Spirit (37). Lee provides at least five aspects of the Spirit mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament that are absent from the writing of James.¹⁴ Lee thus

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asserts that James “falls far behind” by not referring to “the highest revelation concerning the Spirit of God that was revealed to Paul and John in the age of grace” (38).

The Experience and Enjoyment of the Triune God in John's Epistles Issuing In the Church of Brotherly Love

In his Epistles, John presents the Triune God in an experiential, rather than a doctrinal, context. The recipients of his second Epistle are greeted with grace, mercy, and peace from “God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (1:3). The recipients are then urged to abide in the teaching of Christ; he who does so “has both the Father and the Son” (v. 9). The first part of verse 9 equates Christ with God by noting that everyone who “does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God.” In conjunction with the second part of verse 9, John positively implies in verse 3 an aspect of the Trinity by noting that both the Father and the Son are God. *The teaching of Christ* in verse 9 refers to Christ coming in the flesh in verse 7, implying the procedural stages that the Son passed through to accomplish redemption, a process that includes His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection (cf. 1 John 4:9-10, 13-14). Furthermore, this teaching includes the fact that the Son, as the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b; cf. John 14:17) so that the believers “might have life and live through Him” (1 John 4:9). This process enables a mutual indwelling and abiding of God with His believers (vv. 12, 15). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in the believers (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; John 14:17). Experientially, however, the believers have only One who dwells in them—the Triune God. First John 4:12-15 is quite profound: God the Father abides in such a believer, His Spirit has been given to him, and this believer's confession that Jesus is the Son of God enables God to abide “in him and he in God.”

Furthermore, John's Epistles reveal the true God (1 John 5:20), who is light, life, and love. The God who is light has given us eternal life (1:5; 5:11). John particularly emphasizes the love of God and even states that God Himself is love (4:8, 16). This is because love is the inward essence of God and the heart of God. Therefore, as the regenerated children born of the Father whose essence is love, we should spontaneously have a living in which we love one another in the love of God. This mutual love among the believers will be the perfection and completion of the divine love in its manifestation in us (vv. 11-12; 2:5). Furthermore, this living expression of love will be manifested corporately in the church life, which should be a life of brotherly love (4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17). Our abiding in this “perfect love” is also the secret of how to stand boldly before the judgment seat of Christ (1 John 4:16-18). “Perfect love is the love that has been perfected (v. 17) in us by our loving others with the love of God. Such love casts out fear and has no fear of being punished by the Lord at His coming back (Luke 12:46-47)” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 John 4:18, note 2).

The Grace-giving God and the Giver of the Crown of Life in the Epistle of James

In introducing himself as “a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” James ranks Jesus Christ—whom he calls Lord—with God (James 1:1). In verses 5 through 7 he reinforces this equivalence by urging the believers to ask of God in faith (vv. 5-6), saying that they will otherwise not receive anything from the Lord (v. 7).

James refers to the promised “crown of life,” which will be received by those “who love Him” and become “approved by testing” (v. 12). However, it is difficult to ascertain precisely whom James considers to be the object of this love from the believers: is it God the liberal Giver in verse 5, or is it the Lord, the Promiser in verse 7? This seeming ambiguity

implies the operational activity of the Triune God as both God and the Lord. Elsewhere in his Epistle, James unambiguously declares that “God is one” (2:19). This One is the choosing God who chose the poor in the world (v. 5). He is also both the proud-resisting God and the grace-giving God (4:6).

The Paucity of Certain Crucial Topics in the Epistle of James

James’s letter to the “twelve tribes in the dispersion” (1:1) concentrates on the “practical virtues of Christian perfection” (Lee, *Life-study of James* 1). In the scope of this subject, James uses the title *Christ* only twice in this Epistle without elaboration. As already noted, he refers to the Holy Spirit at most only once, and then in a negative context. Furthermore, what James does not mention is perhaps as significant as what he chooses to present in support of his thesis and burden. Surprisingly, James makes no mention of the cross of Christ and only once of the divine life—“the crown of life” (1:12). Lee denotes these and other topics as “lacks in the Epistle of James” (*Crystallization-study of the Epistle of James* 39). By way of contrast, John in his writings refers to the divine life (*zoe*) over 40 times (33 times in his Gospel and 10 times in 1 John). Paul also repeatedly refers to the divine life in his Epistles (38 times) (Slick).

A Pursuing Spirit to Continue to Know the Inexhaustible Christ

Logically speaking, James should have known the Lord most intimately. According to the flesh, he was one of the half brothers of Jesus; he surely observed and saw Jesus in His secret, daily human living and should have had some impression of the Lord’s uniqueness. Instead, James and the Lord’s other half brothers did not believe in the Lord during His earthly ministry (John 7:5); it was not until after the resurrection, when Christ specifically appeared to James, that he believed (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7). It seems that even as a Christian believer, James was unable to fully cast off the influence of his Judaic religious background.

In contrast, both Paul and John exemplify an enthusiastic lover, seeker, follower, and pursuer of Christ. Paul is a notable positive and encouraging pattern to us. When the Lord appeared to him, Saul was temporarily blinded (Acts 9:8), as a sign that his religion was preventing him from seeing and knowing the Lord Jesus. However, the obscuring religious scales on Saul’s eyes fell off (v. 18), and he became a positive pursuer of Christ. Even while in prison in Rome at an advanced age, Paul verbalizes this as his continuing aspiration: “To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Paul then describes his active cooperation to experience more of Christ: “I pursue, if even I may lay hold...I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (vv. 12, 14). We should imitate Paul’s indefatigable Christ-pursuing attitude, particularly emphasizing knowing Him not according to the flesh but according to His invisible presence as the Spirit: “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16; cf. 3:17-18; 4:18).

These examples should be both a negative warning and a positive incentive to all Christ-lovers. There are ongoing veiling influences (such as mere facts about a historical Christ, theological “boxes and compartments,” prior knowledge and experiences, and current habits and rituals) that can obscure and hinder the present, fresh, living, and active experience of this wonderful person. The first stanza of George Rawson’s hymn is an apt positive encouragement to continue to know and experience the real and true God unveiled in the person of the incarnated Word of God and in the Bible as the written word of God:

WHAT JAMES
DOES NOT MENTION
IS PERHAPS
AS SIGNIFICANT
AS WHAT
HE CHOOSES
TO PRESENT.
SURPRISINGLY,
HE MAKES
NO MENTION OF THE
CROSS OF CHRIST
AND
ONLY ONCE
OF THE
DIVINE LIFE.

SAUL WAS
TEMPORARILY
BLINDED AS
A SIGN THAT
HIS RELIGION
WAS PREVENTING
HIM FROM
SEEING AND
KNOWING THE
LORD JESUS.
HOWEVER,
THE OBSCURING
RELIGIOUS SCALES
ON SAUL'S EYES
FELL OFF.

We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial, and confined.
Now let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word.

As the lovers of Christ, may we be rescued from the stupefying influence of mere objective religious knowledge and ritual. May we instead have the living and experiential fellowship, participation, and enjoyment of this living person with all His positive designations, virtues, and attributes. May we take the pattern of the apostle John, who did not tire of knowing Christ in all His aspects. At the end of his Gospel, John implies that the record of the Lord's acts is inexhaustible: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself could contain the books written" (21:25). To this day, the writing has not stopped. **A&C**

Notes

¹**Descriptions of Christ in the Gospel of John:** In His perfect redemption through His death judicially and in His complete salvation by His life organically for the carrying out of God's eternal economy, Christ is: (1) God (John 1:1, 14; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9); (2) the Word of God (Rev. 19:13; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; John 6:63); (3) the life (1:4; 11:25; 14:6; 10:10); (4) the light of life (1:4-12; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46); (5) in the likeness of the flesh of sin through His incarnation (1:14; cf. Rom. 8:3); (6) the tabernacle of God (John 1:14); (7) the Lamb (v. 29); (8) the Spirit (v. 32); (9) the Messiah, Christ (v. 41); (10) the house, Bethel (v. 42; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:12); (11) the heavenly ladder (John 1:51; cf. Gen. 28:11-22); (12) the temple of God as the Father's house (John 2:15-22); (13) the bronze serpent, in the likeness of the flesh of sin but without sin (3:14; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3); (14) the eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36); (15) the bridegroom (vv. 29-30); (16) the fountain of living water springing up (4:14); (17) the Feast of the Passover (6:4; 1 Cor. 5:7-8); (18) the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2); (19) the Shepherd (10:11, 14); (20) the door (v. 9); (21) the pasture (v. 9); (22) the flock (v. 16); (23) the resurrection (11:25); (24) the life (v. 25); (25) the one grain of wheat (12:24), which refers to Christ as the divine seed to produce many grains (the people who receive Him); (26) the way (14:6); (27) the reality (v. 6); (28) the life (v. 6); (29) the Comforter, referring to Christ coming in the flesh to be the first Comforter (Paraclete) to take care of our cases and affairs and to Christ realized as the Spirit to be our second Comforter both in us and in heaven before God the Father (vv. 16-17; 1 John 2:1); (30) the all-inclusive, consummated, life-giving Spirit as the breath of Christ (John 20:22; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45b). (Lee, *Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John* 53-86)

²**Christ from A to Z in Revelation:** A. Jesus Christ (1:1); B. the faithful Witness (v. 5; 3:14); C. the Firstborn of the dead (1:5); D. the Ruler of the kings of the earth (v. 5); E. the Son of God (2:18); F. the Son of Man (1:13); G. the First and the Last (v. 17; 2:8; 22:13); H. the Beginning and the End (v. 13); I. the Alpha and the Omega (v. 13); J. the living One (1:18); K. the Holy One (3:7); L. the true One (v. 7); M. the faithful One (19:11); N. the Amen (3:14); O. the beginning of the creation of God (v. 14); P. the Root of David (5:5); Q. the Offspring of David (22:16); R. the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5); S. the Lamb (v. 6; 21:23; 22:1); T. the King of kings (19:16); U. the Lord of lords (v. 16); V. the Word of God (v. 13); W. the morning star (22:16; cf. Mal. 4:2); X. the lamp (Rev. 21:23); Y. the Husband (v. 2); Z. another Angel (7:2; 8:3; 10:1; 18:1). (Lee, *Life-study of Revelation* 41-46)

³This implies that the book of Acts is still being written.

⁴There are different opinions among Bible readers concerning the various references to James

in the New Testament. I agree with the conclusion of others that the author of the Epistle of James (1:1) is the James mentioned by Luke in Acts (15:13; 21:18) and by Paul in Galatians (1:19; 2:9, 12). This James, the half-brother of Jesus (1:19), is different from the one who was a “son of thunder,” the brother of John (Mark 3:17) and different from James the son of Alphaeus (Acts 1:13).

⁵The steps of His process include incarnation (Matt. 1:16, 20; John 1:14; cf. 1 Tim. 3:16), birth (Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:6), human living (cf. vv. 40, 52), ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem (4:14-15; 9:51), redeeming death (23:46; John 19:34), burial (Luke 23:52-53), resurrection (Matt. 28:5-7; cf. John 20:9), and becoming the life-imparting and anointing Spirit (v. 22; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 John 2:20, 27).

⁶The believers’ process of full salvation includes regeneration (John 3:16), transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), conformation (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:10; 1 John 3:2), and transfiguration (Phil. 3:21).

⁷John’s charge to not love the world is consistent with that of Paul, who says that instead of walking “according to the age of this world” in the vanity of the mind (Eph. 2:2; cf. 4:17), God’s children should live and conduct themselves in the “holiness of the reality” (v. 24; cf. v. 21).

⁸Paul in Romans 10:13 unambiguously states that “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (cf. Acts 2:21). Saul, prior to his conversion, used this audible calling as the sign to recognize and arrest the early Christians (9:14). After the Lord appeared to him, Ananias was sent to Saul and specifically instructed him: “Rise up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (22:16). By Saul’s audible calling upon the honorable name of Jesus Christ, he became a Christian. By Paul’s ongoing habitual and audible calling after his conversion, he could be identified with the Christians whom he formerly persecuted.

⁹At that time some of the Jewish Christians were insisting that converted Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses as a condition of salvation (Acts 15:5).

¹⁰John refers to the divine Spirit 14 times in his Gospel and at least 7 times in his first Epistle.

¹¹Appendix 101 by E. W. Bullinger in *The Companion Bible*—“The Usage of Pneuma in the New Testament”—provides some insightful statistics and commentary on the occurrence and application of the Koine Greek word πνεῦμα (pneuma). Of the 385 occurrences in the Received Text (as rendered in the Authorized Version), 93 refer explicitly to the Holy Spirit (89 “Holy Ghost” and 4 “Holy Spirit”). Another 133 mentions of πνεῦμα are translated (capitalized) “Spirit” (i.e. referring to the Spirit of God) (146).

¹²Genesis 2:7 indicates that God created the tripartite man (cf. 1 Thes. 5:23) with a body “from the dust of the ground” and a human spirit from His breath (Heb. *neshamah*; cf. Job 32:8). Such a union of the divine breath and the physical dust produced “a living soul” (1 Cor. 15:45).

¹³To not interpret as the Holy Spirit is, in a sense, to assert that the book of James does not mention the third of the Trinity at all. In a backhanded way this would place James’s Epistle in a similar category as the Old Testament book of Esther, which does not anywhere explicitly mention God.

¹⁴For example, there are five crucial aspects of the Spirit of God revealed in the writings of Paul and John, which aspects were “not yet” before the resurrection of Christ (John 7:39); none of these are mentioned by James: “A. The life-giving Spirit as the consummated Spirit of God, even as the consummation of the processed and consummated Triune God (1 Cor. 15:45b);” “B. The compound Spirit compounded with Christ’s divinity, humanity, death with its effectiveness, and resurrection with its power to be the anointing ointment to sanctify all the people, matters, and things in the service of God (Exo. 30:23-28; 1 John 2:20, 27);” “C. The all-inclusive Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ with His bountiful supply through which the believers live Christ and magnify Christ (Phil. 1:19-21);” “D. The Lord Spirit, indicating that Christ the Lord is the Spirit from whom the believers are transformed into Christ’s image of glory (2 Cor. 3:18);”

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and “E. The sevenfold intensified Spirit for the believers to overcome all the negative things in the degradation of the church (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)” (Lee, *Crystallization-study of the Epistle of James* 37-38).

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We Limit Not the Truth of God

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial, and confined.
Now let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. | And grow it shall, our glorious Sun
More fervid rays afford:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. |
| 2 Who dares to bind by his dull sense
The oracles of heav'n,
For all the nations, tongues and climes
And all the ages giv'n!
The universe how much unknown!
That ocean unexplored!
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. | 4 The valleys past, ascending still,
Our souls would higher climb,
And look down from supernal heights,
On all the bygone times;
Upward we press, the air is clear,
And the sphere-music heard!
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. |
| 3 Darkling our great forefathers went
The first steps of the way;
'Twas but the dawning yet to grow
Into the perfect day; | 5 O Father, Son, and Spirit, send
Us increase from above;
Enlarge, expand all Christian hearts
To comprehend Thy love;
And make us all go on to know
With nobler pow'rs conferred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word. |

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