

Wiseguy

Studies in the Book of James

Text
James 1:1

Topic
James introduces himself to his audience
as a bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

Title
"The Name is Bond Servant; James Bond Servant"

Introduction

Have you played *Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon*?

It's a game based on the 'six degrees of separation' concept, which assumes that any two people on Earth can be connected by six or fewer acquaintances.

Movie buffs challenge each other to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and Kevin Bacon.

I can connect myself to Kevin Bacon with only three degrees of separation:

My friend Marti has met actor and director Jon Favreau... Who was in *Iron Man 3* with Kendrick Cross... Who was in *Death Sentence* with Kevin Bacon.

We are going to be talking a lot about **separation** as we listen to the wisdom and warnings of the Book of James.

It's a different kind of separation. Biblical separation is the recognition that God has called believers out of the world and into a personal and a corporate purity in the midst of their surrounding sinful cultures.

It's a term that refers to your lifestyle choices as a Christian. Having been redeemed and regenerated by Jesus, your life is to be different from that of the nonbeliever.

Separation does not require Christians to have no contact with nonbelievers. Like Jesus, we should befriend the sinner without partaking of the sin (Luke 7:34).

The easiest way to think about separation is the famous but accurate Christian cliché, "Be *in* the world, but not *of* the world."

James was writing to a group of Jewish believers in Jesus who had recently been forced out of Jerusalem into the surrounding Gentile world. He is going to urge them to maintain separation.

We might not be Jewish Christians who have been forced out of Jerusalem, but we are forced to wait for our heavenly home, the New Jerusalem.

Everywhere we find ourselves, on the Earth, is foreign soil. And it is hostile territory, seeing that the devil is still the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the leader of malevolent principalities and powers who are seeking to overwhelm us, and to destroy us.

We need to be urged, as the world worsens, to maintain separation.

We agree that separation is biblical; but we frequently disagree over the *degrees* of separation. Those disagreements usually start with a question that begins with three words, "Can a Christian...?" You fill in the blank.

We must guard against reducing separation into a list of do's and (mostly) don'ts. We are not to be, or to become, rules oriented; we are in a relationship with Jesus.

Is there something that can guide us regarding separation?
Some starting point that will keep us from becoming either too lax or too legalistic?

I'm going to suggest two such guidelines from the starting point of the Book of James; from verse one. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Separation Is A Result Of You Being A Slave, and #2 Separation Is A Result Of You Being Scattered.

#1 Separation Is A Result Of You Being A Slave

Sing with me:

*Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay
My, oh my, what a wonderful day
Plenty of sunshine headin' my way
Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay*

Do you know where that song is from? Not *Splash Mountain*; not originally.

It's from the 1946 Disney film, *Song of the South*. I'm guessing a lot of you have not seen it. It's banned.

Or is it? So many myths to be busted and urban legends to be debunked.

Song of the South is **not** officially banned. There hasn't been any official "banning" going on anywhere. It seems that Disney has taken it upon themselves to withhold this movie from the public.

If you have seen it, you can probably guess why it has engendered so much controversy. I ran across this summary:

The general objections lie in the depiction of African-Americans within the live action sequences of the film, such as stereotyping. Some also believe the movie depicts slavery, and consequently believe that Disney tried to "sugarcoat" slavery. The tar baby sequence is especially troubling. The NAACP charged the film with giving the impression of "an idyllic master-slave relationship."

The History Channel recently remade Alex Haley's *Roots* for a new generation. It depicts the type of nightmarish, oppressive inhumanity we normally think of whenever the term "slave" is used. Certainly not idyllic.

Without dulling our sensibilities to the horrors of slavery, before we can get into verse one, we need to understand that **the slavery condoned and practiced in ancient Israel was of an entirely different nature.**

Israel as a nation were slaves for over 400 years. When they were freed God gave them laws regarding slaves that were not the same as the other nations.

Slaves had rights in Israel's social system.

They were not treated as non-human, or partially human, or as property, but as men made in the image of God.

Slavery was more like an occupation; it was servanthood with rights.

- Slaves had economic rights, including the right to own their own slaves (Second Samuel 9:9-10).
- They had religious rights, such as enjoying Sabbath rest (Exodus 2:10).

Some Israelites sold themselves into slavery (Leviticus 25:39; Deuteronomy 15:12-17). Others were sold to pay debts (Second Kings 4; Nehemiah 5:1-8).

Jewish slaves could not be held for more than six years and were then given a choice to leave (Exodus 21:2). They could voluntarily choose to remain; and many did remain.

Exo 21:5 But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'

Exo 21:6 then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

You might say they were "Awl-in." Get it?

Now we are more prepared to meet James.

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James 1:1

"The Name is Bond Servant; James Bond Servant"

Jas 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...

"James" is our English version of the Hebrew name, Jacob. We'll stick with James to minimize confusion.

This James is the the Lord's brother. After the virgin birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had four other sons - Joseph, James, Jude, and Simon. Because of the virgin birth, Joseph was not the father of Jesus so these were the half-brothers of Jesus. The last three mentioned are not to be confused with those who were disciples of Jesus by the same name.

Jesus also had at least two half-sisters.

John tells us that during the ministry of Jesus "even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). Later, however, they became active leaders in the church with two of them (James and Jude) writing letters that became part of the New Testament.

It would seem James got saved when big-brother Jesus made a personal, post-resurrection visit to him (First Corinthians 15:7).

James was not one of the twelve. Nevertheless it's clear from reading the Book of Acts that he was the recognized leader of the believers in Jerusalem.

He calls himself "a bond servant." He identified as a slave.

There's a lot of talk today about people identifying themselves as something they're not. Identity is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

Gender identity, for example, is said to be one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. Proponents argue that one's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender identity is resolved by something God said in Genesis; and that Jesus reinforced in His ministry. "Male and female He created them." God assigns gender; not society, or the individual.

James uses this idea of "identity" in a proper way, when he calls himself "a bond servant." James was *not* a bond servant in the civil sense of that designation. He was a free Jew.

But he **identified** as a bond servant *spiritually*.

We take this to mean that James identified with the type of slave who chose to stay with his master forever. The one who was "awl-in."

Because we spent time delineating the nature of Jewish slavery, what I'm going to say next shouldn't shock you, in context.

There are amazing benefits to identifying as a bond servant.

Have you thought about that? Usually we concentrate on all the serving and sacrificing. But there is a big up-side to bond serving.

Think of it: Your master was responsible for room and board, and to clothe you, and to educate and train you. He was responsible, even liable, for your health and well-being, and for your protection.

It sounds a lot like something Jesus once intimated about God:

Mat 6:25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Mat 6:26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Mat 6:27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

Mat 6:28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

Mat 6:29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Mat 6:30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Mat 6:31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

Mat 6:32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Why do we, in fact, worry about these very things? Maybe it is because we don't identify as bond servants. If we did, we'd know that everything pertaining to our daily life must be provided by our Master.

If you are God's bond servant, none of your endeavors can ever fail. I've had many failures; and, while I'm not planning to, I'm sure I'll have more.

But those are times I'm operating as self-employed, rather than a slave. When God is leading me, I cannot help but succeed.

Spiritual success isn't always what we think. It can, in fact, look like failure, outwardly, to the untrained eye.

The biblical example that immediately comes to mind is Jeremiah. No real converts; persecuted; thrown into a cistern and left for dead.

Would you say his ministry was a failure? Of course not; he did all that God asked of him, and excelled.

We read from Exodus that being a bond servant was a personal choice, and that it involved your ear.

Identifying as a spiritual bond servant is a personal choice involving your ear; only in this case, your ear has to do with hearing the Word of God.

The DoNut Man has a lyric that goes,

*I like the Bible, I like the Bible,
'Cause I read it and I do it, I read it and I do it*

Later in this letter James will make his famous remark, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (1:22).

I'm a bond servant when I read it and I do it.

While a Jew made a one-time, lifetime commitment to being a bond servant, we must identify as a bond servant over-and-over again.

Every time I am faced with a decision regarding an attitude or an action, I can be awl-in by obeying the Word. Or I can disobey and take life on by myself.

When I choose to function as the "bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," separation follows and flows from it. Separation is the *result*, not the *cause*.

That's why rules don't work. I can't establish a rule, like "Christians can't go to the movies," and think it will catapult me into a relationship with Jesus.

But if I relate to Him as my benevolent Master, and identify as His bond servant, I will make decisions about everything that are consistent with pleasing Him and, thus, I will find myself separated by many degrees from the surrounding sinful culture.

If He is providing me with all I need for life and godliness, why look to the world for its false satisfactions?

#2 Separation Is A Result Of You Being Scattered

San Bernardino is my home town; I grew up there from the age of three until I was almost 30 years old. I lived in Riverside for two years; and in Running Springs briefly. But San Berdoo is home.

I feel totally uncomfortable there now. Everything, it seems, has changed, and I wasn't around to change with it. Hanford is my home now.

You know that uncomfortable feeling you get when you're not at home? That is how we should feel all the time in our spirit.

We are not at home. We should be able to relate to the Jewish patriarch, Abraham, of whom we read,

Heb 11:9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;

Heb 11:10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

James was writing to a very unique audience. We meet them at the end of verse one:

Jas 1:1 ... To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

The "twelve tribes" means the physical descendants of the Jewish patriarchs. It is not a mystical, or even a metaphorical, name for believers of all ages.

James was writing to Jews; but they were Jews who had received Jesus as their Messiah. I guess today we'd call them Messianic Jews.

The first Christians were all Jews. It all started on the Day of Pentecost when the 120 disciples gathered in an upper room received the promise of the Holy Spirit and began praising God in languages familiar to all the pilgrims gathered in and around the Temple.

About three thousand Jews were saved as Peter presented the Gospel.

Not too long after, five thousand more were saved. We read, in fact, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

From the get-go, the Messianic Jews were in conflict with the religious leaders. It wasn't long before a zealous Pharisee began to persecute the believers, with the full support of the ruling council and the chief priests.

It was Saul, who we know better as Paul. He was there when the Jews killed Stephen, the first martyr of the church age.

Act 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Act 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

Act 8:3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

They were "scattered." The word means "dispersed." It's from a root word, *diaspora*, which is why you'll sometimes hear them referred to as the Diaspora.

(It's one of those words scholars use to feel smarter than us).

In Acts we see they went to "Judea and Samaria." But it wasn't long before they had to go further. By Acts chapter nine, they were in Syria, and Saul got permission to go hunt them there.

It was on that trip Saul was converted in an encounter with the risen Lord.

James was writing to these Messianic Jews "scattered abroad," and to any saved Jews anywhere in Gentile territory. He wrote somewhere around 45-50AD, making this the very first book of the New Testament.

One commentator noted, concerning the dispersed Jews, "Through their contacts with other people, the Jews of the Dispersion generally had a larger outlook on life and a greater openness to new ideas..."

In other words, they were more susceptible to being influenced by the surrounding sinful cultures. Instead of succumbing to the culture, James was warning them to maintain a certain degree of separation.

He even uses a special word - a word that summarizes his warning.

We find the word in two places in this letter, and no where else in the New Testament; in James 1:8 and 4:8.

It is the word "double-minded." It literally means *two-spirited*. It describes a person who vacillates between the *world* and the *Lord*.

Jas 1:8 (KJV) A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Jas 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

In other words, don't be lured away and drawn off by the things of the surrounding culture. Maintain your separation.

If you are familiar with the Christian classic, *Pilgrims Progress*, by John Bunyan, you might recall a character by the name of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. That name captures fully what James was saying with the word double-minded.

You can't be longing for the world and for the Lord at the same time.

James wasn't simply acknowledging that they were dispersed. They were to realize, no matter how far from Jerusalem they were, they were "the twelve tribes." They might be in Damascus, Syria, but they were, spiritually speaking, in Israel.

We are in Hanford. But listen to where **we** are spiritually:

Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
Eph 2:6 **and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

I can't improve on what William MacDonald says about our being seated in heavenly places:

By our union with Him we are seen as already delivered from this present evil world and seated in Christ in glory. This is how God sees us. If we appropriate it by faith, it will change the character of our lives. We will no longer be earthbound, occupied with the trivial and the transient. We will seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

No matter how "scattered" from Heaven you seem to be, you are to operate as if you were already seated there with Jesus.

Thus, reminding yourself you are a scattered stranger on the Earth will result in you keeping yourself separated.

James maintained separation. Hegesippus, a second-century Christian writer, recounts that his life of piety gained for James the title “James the Just” and that he spent so much time in the Temple praying that his knees became as hard as a camel’s.

Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* gives a simple and apparently authentic account of James’s death. He reports that upon the death of the procurator, Festus, and before his successor Albinus had arrived in 62AD, the newly appointed young high priest Ananus II “assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”

These, then, are the bulletpoints for our separation: You are a slave; You are scattered.

The *degree* or *degrees* of separation - those are up to you to determine, in grace, as you walk with the Lord.

James will have his suggestions as we proceed, and he's not shy, or politically correct about sharing them.

They'll provide a good baseline for us to gauge our individual degrees of separation.

As a chaplain, hanging around police and fire fighters, I frequently hear the term, "perishable skills." Perishable skills are those skills that depreciate in effectiveness over time if they are not practiced.

Instead of thinking of the bold statements James makes in this letter as stinging rebukes, maybe we should see him as a spiritual trainer, encouraging us to practice our spiritual separation, which loses its effectiveness over time as we are assaulted by the world.