

Preface To The Epistles Of Saint James And Saint Jude 1545 (1522)

(1546 and 1522)

Though this Epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and hold it a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men and lays great stress upon God's law. But to state my own opinion about it, though without injury to anyone, I consider that it is not the writing of any apostle. My reasons are as follows.

First: Flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes righteousness to works, and says that Abraham was justified by his works, in that he offered his son Isaac, though St. Paul, on the contrary, teaches, in Romans 4:2, that Abraham was justified without works, by faith alone, before he offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15:6. Now although this Epistle might be helped and a gloss be found for this work-righteousness, it cannot be defended against applying to works the saying of Moses in Genesis 15:6, which speaks only of Abraham's faith, and not of his works, as St. Paul shows in Romans 4. This fault, therefore, leads to the conclusion that it is not the work of any apostle.

Second: Its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all this' long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times, but he teaches nothing about Him, and only speaks of common faith in God. For it is the duty of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and Resurrection and work of Christ, and thus lay the foundation of faith, as He Himself says, in John 15:27, "Ye shall bear witness of me." All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Romans 3:21), and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Corinthians 15:2). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod did it.

But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works; and he mixes the two up in such disorderly fashion that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took some sayings of the apostles' disciples and threw them thus on paper; or perhaps they were written down by someone else from his preaching. He calls the law a "law of liberty," though St. Paul calls it a law of slavery, (of wrath, of death and of sin (Galatians 3:23, Romans 7:11).

Moreover, in James 5:20, he quotes the sayings of St. Peter, "Love covereth the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) and "Humble yourselves under the hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6), and of St. Paul (Galatians 5:10), "The Spirit lusteth against hatred"; and yet, in point of time, St. James was put to death by Herod, in Jerusalem, before St. Peter. So it seems that he came long after Sts. Peter and Paul.

In a word, he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and is unequal to the task [in spirit, thought, and words, and rends the Scriptures and thereby resists Paul and all

Scripture] , and would accomplish by insisting on the Law what the apostles accomplish by inciting men to love. Therefore, I cannot put him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from putting him where he pleases and estimating him as he pleases; for there are many good sayings in him.

Concerning the Epistle of St. Jude, no one can deny that it is an extract or copy from St. Peter's second epistle, so very like it are all the words. He also speaks of the apostles as a disciple coming long after them, and quotes sayings and stories that are found nowhere in the Scriptures. This moved the ancient Fathers to throw this Epistle out of the main body of the Scriptures. Moreover, Jude, the Apostle, did not go to Greek-speaking lands, but to Persia, as it is said, so that he did not write Greek. Therefore, although I praise the book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books, which are to lay the foundation of faith.