

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

THE EPISTLE OF  
**JAMES**

A FAITH THAT WORKS

JOHN STEVENSON

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To Dr. Gustavo Ferrer,  
Physician,  
Brother in Christ,  
whose labors allowed me the good health  
to complete this work

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

James is a book with which many Christians have struggled. Its presentation of faith and works seems at first glance to contradict the foundational doctrine of justification by faith. As a result, some have studied this epistle only with the aim of dispelling any “problem texts.” A closer examination will show great riches of spiritual teaching within this book.

This is a book which is rich in spiritual dynamics. It will be motivating and sobering in its message. It is a book of faith, a book of promise and a book of warning.

## AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE

The opening salutation identifies the writer as James. The Greek text describes him as Ἰακώβος (*Yakobos*)-- or as we would say, “Jacob.” The problem is that there are a number of different men in the New Testament possessing this name.

- James the brother of John and son of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2).
- James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3).
- James the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19).
- James the son of Mary (Matthew 27:56).
- James the father of Jude (Acts 1:13).

Early church tradition points to the writer of this epistle being James, the half-brother of Jesus. This James is first mentioned as coming with his mother and his other brothers to meet Jesus as He was preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth.

*And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? 55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all*

*with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:54-56).*

Mary had been a virgin when she became pregnant with that which was from the Holy Spirit. She had remained a virgin until she gave birth to Jesus. But there is no evidence that she remained a virgin after His birth. To the contrary, the evidence is strong that she and Joseph had four more sons and several daughters. We do not know much about the half-sisters of Jesus, but we are told that His half-brothers did not believe in Him while He was on earth.

*For not even His brothers were believing in Him (John 7:5).*

Imagine this! These men grew up in the same house with Jesus. They were daily witnesses of His holy and righteous character. Yet they did not believe in Him. They chose to reject Him.

When did James finally come to believe and accept Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of Israel? When did his unbelief turn to belief. I think that the answer is seen in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

*After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:3-7).*

After Jesus had risen from the dead, He appeared to a number of people. One of those appearances was to James, His unbelieving half-brother. James saw the evidence of the resurrection. He was confronted by the risen Lord. I think this is what turned James from an unbeliever into a believer.

We read in the book of Acts that in the day immediately after Jesus had ascended into heaven all of the brothers of Jesus began to meet with the disciples in the upper room.

*And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and*

*James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:13-14).*

Over the course of the next several years, James rose to prominence as a leader within the Jerusalem church.

- Paul refers to James as one of the leaders of the church with whom he met during his first visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19).
- When an angel broke Peter out of prison, he directed that James be told of the news (Acts 12:17).
- James stood up at the Council of Jerusalem and hammered out a workable compromise in bringing the Gentile Christians into the church (Acts 15:13-21). Following that council, James was one of the three leaders in the church who commissioned Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9).
- It was a delegation from James that stirred up the controversy between Paul and Peter concerning whether a Jew ought to eat with Gentile Christians (Galatians 2:12).
- When Paul presented himself before the Jerusalem elders after having planted churches in Europe, James is mentioned in a way that suggest his role as leader within the Jerusalem church. In Acts 21:18 we read that *Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.*

As James writes this epistle to the Israelites who are scattered among the nations, he does so as one of the leaders of the Christian church. For this reason, there is no need for him to establish his credentials or to defend his position as a leader in the church. He makes no reference to himself at all, for no such reference is required.

## DATE OF WRITING

It is commonly thought that this epistle was written around 45-50 A.D., making it one of the first epistles to be written. It contains no mention of Gentile believers or the controversy that eventually arose in the church concerning Gentile Christians and the Law. It was evidently written before this had become a widespread issue in the church.

The first of Paul's missionary journeys had not yet taken place and the church was made up almost entirely of either Jews or Jewish proselytes – Gentiles who had undergone circumcision and who had become Jewish.

There are no references in this epistle to church officers such as elders or deacons and no references to a number of established churches. We can therefore conclude that this was written at a time when the church was still in its infancy.

## STYLE OF WRITING

There are some notable similarities between this epistle and the statements of James made at the Jerusalem Council and the letter that was written by that Council.

- The phrase “beloved” (James 1:16, 19; 2:5 and Acts 15:25).
- The exhortation, “Listen, my beloved brethren” (James 2:5 and Acts 15:13).
- The use of the infinitive salutation, “Greetings” as the opening of the letter (James 1:1 and Acts 15:23).
- The idea of a man turning back to the truth (James 5:19-20 and Acts 15:19).
- The use of the word “soul” (James 1:21; 5:20 and Acts 15:24).

Even greater similarities can be seen when we compare the epistle of James with the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus gave in Matthew 5-7.

Epistle of James	Sermon on the Mount
Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials (1:2).	Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you (Matthew 5:12).
And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (1:4).	Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

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But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (1:5).	Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).
But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position (1:9).	Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).
For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away (1:11).	Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19).
Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God” (1:13).	And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 7:13).
For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:20).	Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court (Matthew 5:22).
But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (1:22).	Everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock (Matthew 7:24).
If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well (2:8).	Therefore however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).
For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (2:10).	Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).

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<p>For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (2:13).</p>	<p>But if you do not forgive men, then your heavenly Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:15).</p>
<p>But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (2:18).</p>	<p>Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).</p>
<p>You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone (2:24).</p>	<p>Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21).</p>
<p>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh (3:11-12).</p>	<p>You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? (Matthew 7:16).</p>
<p>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (3:18).</p>	<p>Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (Matthew 5:9).</p>
<p>You lust and do not have; so you commit murder (4:2).</p>	<p>You have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not commit murder” (Matthew 5:21).</p>
<p>You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (4:4).</p>	<p>No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).</p>
<p>Be miserable and mourn and weep (4:9).</p>	<p>Blessed are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4).</p>

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He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law (4:11).	Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged (Matthew 7:1-2).
Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten (5:2).	Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy (Matthew 6:19).
But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath (5:12).	But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth (Matthew 7:34-35).
...but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment (5:12).	But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” and “No, no”; and anything beyond these is of evil (Matthew 5:37).
Let him pray (5:13).	Pray then in this way (Matthew 6:9).

It is interesting that, in all of these instances, James does not once say that he is quoting the words of Jesus. Perhaps this is because his readers would not yet be familiar with the Sermon on the Mount or with any of the other sayings of Jesus. It is entirely possible that James is written before any of the other Gospel accounts had been composed. The stories of Jesus had up to this time been circulated only by word of mouth.

Another portion of Scripture that echoes with the same themes as those found in the epistle of James is Psalm 15. The Psalmist open with the question of what kind of person is permitted into the presence of God. The answer is given in the form of a description of outward actions that reflect corresponding character traits.

*O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?  
Who may dwell on Your holy hill?  
2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,  
And speaks truth in his heart.  
3 He does not slander with his tongue,  
Nor does evil to his neighbor,  
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;  
4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,*

*But who honors those who fear the Lord;  
He swears to his own hurt and does not change;  
5 He does not put out his money at interest,  
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things will never be shaken. (Psalm  
15:1-5).*

This detailed description of the man who dwells in the presence of God is given through his outward actions. We find out what kind of a man he is by what he does. To put it another way, his faith is manifested by his works. Each of these works will be mirrored within the epistle of James.

## **DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPISTLE**

There are a number of characteristics that set the Epistle of James apart from the other New Testament epistles.

### 1. A Lack of Personal Notes.

James makes no mention of any personal contact between himself and any of his readers. This is not a personal letter. Rather it is an official exhortation to the early church that was spreading through the ancient world.

### 2. A focus on Practice rather than Theology.

James Adamson points out that there is “more *theology* in Paul and others than in James or in the gospel preached by Jesus, but essentially they all hold the same *religion*” (1995:20). Although Christ is mentioned both in James 1:1 and James 2:1, there is no mention of His death or His resurrection. James gives us the teachings of Jesus rather than teachings about Jesus.

### 3. Absence of Gentiles in the Church.

There is no mention of Gentiles being within the church. In fact, James does not mention Gentiles at all. It is likely that this epistle was written before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and that Gentiles had not yet been accepted into the church.

4. Christianity and Judaism.

Christianity is not presented in contrast with Judaism. There is no “us versus them” mentality. Instead Christianity is presented in a distinctly Jewish setting. The only distinction is that Jesus is recognized as the Messiah, the Lord of glory.

5. Address to the Rich.

If Amos is the Old Testament prophet of social injustice, then James fills this role in the New Testament. He warns against partiality in a church that would elevate the rich and the powerful and calls them to repent of their abuses of the poor and the helpless.

## **PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE**

The message of the book of James is that faith must include a living reality. James writes that faith cannot exist without works. Many people have misunderstood James to say that he contradicts the teachings of Paul -- that he is teaching a gospel of works for salvation. This is not so. James does not teach works for salvation. He teaches works with salvation.

When you come to Jesus Christ in faith, trusting Him as your Savior and Lord, a process begins. The Bible calls it sanctification. The Holy Spirit begins to do a work within you, producing His fruit in your life and molding you into the character of Jesus Christ.

This process is not finished in this life. It is not complete until Graduation Day. Perhaps you've seen the bumper sticker that announces, “Be patient, God isn't finished with me yet!” That is true. But the message of the book of James is that your life ought to show a certain degree of progress if you really belong to the Lord.

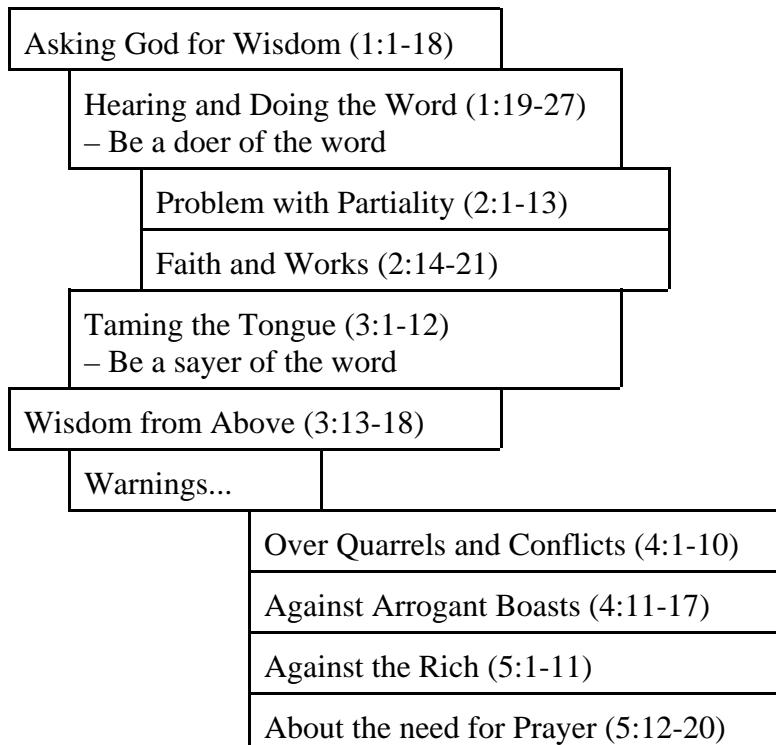
## **OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE**

The epistles of Paul often give themselves to a relatively simple structure in which they first tell you what to believe and then tell you how to live on the basis of what you believe. The structure of James is much more involved and there are a number of themes that are presented and which are also repeated

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throughout the epistle. Thus we are warned in chapter 1 of how riches are fleeting and this theme comes back in chapter 5 with a woe against the rich. The reader is instructed to ask God for wisdom in chapter 1 and he is told at length about the wisdom that comes from above in chapter 3. The following chart helps to outline some of the bigger ideas, but it should not be imagined that the ideas of James can be confined to a simple chiastic structure.



# OPENING SALUTATION

## James 1:1

*James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings (James 1:1).*

When you write a letter today, there is a normal format that is followed. If it is a business letter, then you place your name and address at the top, followed by the name and address of the recipient of the letter. Next follows a salutation such as, “Dear Sir.” Finally you move into the body of the letter. The customs of letter writing in the ancient world were only slightly different.

- First would come the name of the author.
- Then would come the name of the recipients of the letter.
- Finally would come a formal greeting.

These three elements, the name of the author, the name of the recipients and the personal salutation, are found in nearly all formal letters of that day. An example is seen in a letter written by Julius Caesar to the Phoenicians:

*Gaius Julius Caesar Imperator and high priest, and dictator the second time, to the magistrates, senate and peoples of Sidon, greeting.*

James uses much the same type of format in his epistle. He begins with his own name and title:

**HIS NAME:** *James* (1:1).

We have already noted that the name James is the Anglicized form of a Hebrew name. It is the name *Yakob*. We know it as “Jacob.” It was a common name among the Jews of that day. Many had been named after Jacob, the son of Isaac and the father of the Jews. There were two men named James among the twelve disciples of Jesus. He also had a half-brother

by the name of James.

*And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? 55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matthew 13:54-56).*

Mary had been a virgin up to the time when she gave birth to Jesus. But the Scriptures do not teach that she remained a virgin after His birth. To the contrary, we read that Joseph took her to be his wife and kept her a virgin *until she gave birth to a Son* (Matthew 1:25). The implication is that this situation did not continue after that time. Such a view is supported by the mention of half-brothers of Jesus.

*For not even His brothers were believing in Him (John 7:5).*

These brothers grew up in the presence of the holy One of Israel. They watched His sinless life, but that proximity did not bring them to faith. It was only when they were confronted with the resurrected Christ that they believed.

**HIS TITLE:** *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1).*

James does not begin this letter by claiming an exalted position for himself. He does not say, “James, the half-brother and good buddy of Jesus...” Instead he introduces himself as the slave of God and of Jesus. As we do not live in a slave culture, we miss some of the impact of such a title. A slave is one who has no rights of his own. All of his rights are held in the hands of his master.

James recognized something vital about Jesus. He recognized that Jesus was more than just the oldest son of Mary. He calls Jesus the Lord. This was the title that the Jews normally reserved for the name of God. They were afraid of taking God’s name in vain, so instead of pronouncing it, they would substitute the term “Lord.” That is what James calls Jesus.

And that is not all. He also calls him “Christ.” This is the Greek version of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” James says that, inasmuch as he is the slave of God, so he is also the slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t miss this! James is doing nothing less than attributing deity to Jesus.

## **HIS RECIPIENTS:** *To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad (1:1).*

There is a certain “Jewishness” to this epistle. It is a Jew writing to other Jews. He refers to their synagogue assemblies in the Greek text of James 2:2. He refers to Abraham in James 2:21 as “our father.” He refers to God as the Lord of Sabaoth, a distinctly Hebrew expression referring to the “Lord of hosts” (James 5:4).

The Jews had been dispersed abroad. The Assyrians had carried away the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity in 721 B.C. The Babylonians had later carried the southern tribes into captivity. Over hundreds of years, the Jews had been scattered over the face of the earth. Everywhere you went in the ancient world, you could find communities of Jews. In spite of this, many of them had retained their tribal identity.

- Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5).
- Anna was of the tribe of Ashur (Luke 2:36).
- John the Baptist was of the tribe of Levi (Luke 1:5; 1:60).
- Mary and Joseph were both from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1; Luke 3).

Many of these Israelites had heard the message of the Gospel – that Jesus had died for sins and had been buried and that He had risen from the dead. Many of these Israelites had come to believe this message. The early church was composed almost entirely of Jews.

But James does not address his letter to the Jews who live in Jerusalem or in the area of Israel. He addresses his letter to the diaspora – to those Jews who were living in foreign lands. Adamson suggests that “James is addressing his Epistle both to Christian and (hopefully) to non-Christian Jews (1995:51), but the later words of James when he speaks in 2:1 of *your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ* would seem to preclude such an idea. We can instead conclude that James is addressing early Jewish Christians at a time when Gentile Christianity was still a thing unknown. These Jews had heard

the message of the gospel and had believed. They had placed their faith in Jesus as their promised Messiah. They had become the first Christians.

Now some problems were arising within the new church. These problems necessitated the writing of this letter. What were these problems that occasioned this epistle?

1. Suffering and Persecution.

These Jews who had come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah were initially persecuted by the Jewish community. Because they were Jewish, they were already socially shunned by the Gentile community. Now they were also cast out of the synagogues and cut off from their families and friends.

Acts 7 tells of the first martyr in the infant church in Jerusalem. It was the deacon Stephen who was stoned to death. Subsequently a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, but instead of putting an end to the church, it had the effect of spreading the church throughout the world.

2. Partiality to the Wealthy.

The Jews held to a “Prosperity Theology” that taught wealth is a sign of God’s favor. They reasoned that God blesses the good with money and so people who have a lot of money must have a lot of God’s blessings. They reasoned that a man’s spirituality could be judged by his wealth. Because of this, partiality was often shown to those who were rich.

How different was this from the teachings of Jesus! He said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).

3. A Lack of Commitment.

It is possible that the teaching of salvation through faith had brought about an “easy believism” theology. There may have been those who declared their faith in Christ but there was nothing in their life to evidence the reality of such faith. To this end, James teaches the importance of a faith that produces a corresponding action in the life

of the believer.

4. Pride.

The Jews had a rich spiritual heritage in the possession and the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. This gave them a great advantage over Gentile proselytes. This knowledge, when not balanced with love and humility, led to pride. Such pride was manifested in the desire of many to be teachers and so to lord their exalted position over others.

5. Strife within the Church.

Have you ever seen a church in which strife was completely absent? I haven't either. The early church was no exception. In this case, the root of the strife within the church was covetousness. These people were guilty of lustng after the possessions of one another. James will speak of pleasures that "war against the soul." This brings us to the final problem, that of materialism.

6. Materialism.

The Roman Empire was at the peak of its wealth. There had been a period of relative peace and prosperity for the past seventy five years. Many of the early Christians were failing the prosperity test. They were becoming entangled in the details that accompany wealth. Their attention was being drawn away from the Lord.

Each of these problems can be found in the church today. It is important for you to see this. Our study of the Epistle of James will be designed to accomplish more than merely an appraisal of the situation in the early church. It will be extremely relevant to the church today. The commands that James gives are directed to you. They are to be read and studied and understood. They are to be lived.

# WHEN BAD TIMES COME

James 1:2-8

*Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. 12 Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12).*

What do you do when bad times come? How do you handle it? What is your attitude when your well-laid plans crumble into disaster?

Problems. Some are big problems and some are only little problems pretending to be big problems. It has been said that within every little problem is a bigger problem trying to get out. If you live on planet earth for any length of time, something bad is going to come into your life. You've heard of Murphy's Law that states, "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Nowadays we have Petrov's Law. It says that Murphy was an optimist.

# WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER TRIALS

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials (James 1:2).*

Notice that James does not say that you might encounter trials someday. He does not say, "Consider it all joy if you happen to encounter some trials." Instead he assumes that you will have hard times. Everything that follows is based on that assumption. Let there be no mistake about it; you will encounter various trials. You can bank on it. Jesus promised that *in the world you have tribulation* (John 16:33).

How many times have you heard some well-meaning preacher say that once you become a Christian all of your troubles will end and life will become wonderful and peaceful? All too often, such a message is presented in the church. The church becomes full of people who are smiling on the outside

but who are hurting on the inside. “How are you doing?” we pleasantly ask. “Fine,” comes back the answer. And meanwhile, each one is hiding behind his own smiling mask, thinking that he is the only one who doesn’t have it all together, each one afraid that the others might find out that he alone isn’t experiencing total victory.

It is because of this that I want to make an official announcement. You are in for hard times. You are going to encounter various trials. Bad times are coming. Perhaps you are in the midst of them right now.

I haven’t said this to discourage you. I’m not trying to turn you into a pessimist or to fill your day with gloom and doom. The reason I want you to be aware that bad times are coming is so that you can get ready to meet them.

I spent nearly thirty years as a fire fighter. In the fire service we used to put together preplans of hazardous areas so that we would know how to handle any emergencies that might arise in those areas. In the same manner, James provides a preplan for Christians. It gives us instructions on how to get past the hazardous conditions ahead.

What are you to do when hard times come? How do you meet problem situations? What do you do when disaster strikes? James gives the answer. He says to ***consider it all joy*** (1:2).

At this point, you might be ready to tune out and mentally discard James as another sweetness and light preacher who has left his head buried in a hole in the ground. Don’t do that. James isn’t looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. He is not denying that there are real problems or that they really hurt.

He is not saying that bad times are fun. He does not say that suffering is joyful. He does not tell us to enjoy our suffering. He does not say to grin and bear it or to try to ignore the pain or to praise the Lord anyway.

Instead he says, “Consider it all joy.” Note the word “consider.” It refers to a mental evaluation. We are to evaluate our adverse circumstances and to consider them to have an end result of joy. How can we do this? How can we look at all of the problems that besiege us and consider them “all joy”? It is only by looking past the immediate problem to see its end result.

Jesus provides the perfect example. If anyone was ever faced with an adverse situation, it was Jesus as He was facing the cross. He went so far as to pray that He might be released from this suffering which was to come -- that the cup of His death might pass from Him. But when it was evident that it was the Father's will that He go to the cross, what was the attitude off Jesus? Did He grumble about the raw deal that had been handed to Him? Did He resign Himself to misery. No.

*Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).*

Jesus despised the shame of the cross and all that it implied, but at the same time He focused on the future joy that it would bring. He considered the cross to be "all joy" because of the future results that it would bring. He could approach His time of trial with joy because of those results. If we are to consider our trials to be "all joy," then we must do the same thing. We must look beyond the present trials to see that God has planned the future results of those trials. This brings us to the next point.

## THE REASON FOR YOUR TESTING

*Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance (James 1:3).*

Trials come for a reason. Bad times are not an end to themselves. They are designed to produce something in your life. The testing of your faith produces endurance. What is endurance? It is the quality of continuance.

Endurance is a quality of the mature. Children are noted as early quitters. Give a child a present and he may spend fifteen minutes playing with it, but after that he is off doing something else. His attention span has no endurance. Have you watched your child do his homework? The least little distraction will capture his attention. He has no endurance.

Endurance cannot be taught in a classroom. I cannot preach a sermon on endurance and thereby impart that quality to you. You cannot even get endurance through prayer. Endurance comes only through trials.

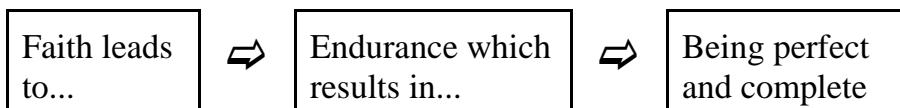
When I was in high school, I went out for the track team. I figured that I was reasonably fast on my feet and that I would run in some races and win some prizes and that everyone would say how wonderful I was. I learned very quickly that I had no endurance for long distance running. And I also learned that you cannot build up that kind of endurance in a single day. Endurance only comes through daily practice. The same is true of life.

At this point you might be asking yourself, “Why would I want to go through all of that in the first place? Why not just bail out now? After all, if at first you don’t succeed, quite before it gets to be a habit. What’s the sense of keeping on keeping on?” Jesus gives the answer in the next verse.

## THE NEED FOR ENDURANCE

*And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:4).*

Endurance is a necessary quality of growth. Like it or not, you are growing. If you are a child of God, if you have entered God’s forever family through faith in Christ, then you are in the midst of a growing process. James says that the end result of that process is that you one day be “perfect and complete.”



One day you will be completely like Jesus Christ. You will be perfect. You will be complete. But you aren’t there yet. Today you are in transition. You are like a caterpillar who is becoming a butterfly. You are growing.

Unfortunately many believers seem to have a “Peter Pan” syndrome. Remember the story of Peter Pan? He was the little boy who decided that he never wanted to grow up – that he wanted to be a little boy forever. Some Christians seem to have the same desire. The result is tragic. They become retarded Christians.

This is a painful way to go. It is painful because you keep having to go back and take the same trials and tests over and over again without any lasting benefit. Instead of considering it all joy, you will find yourself considering

it all drudgery.

Are you free from the Peter Pan syndrome? Are you ready to start benefitting from your troubles? Do you want to be able to count it all joy? If you do, there is one thing you will need. It is wisdom.

## IN SEARCH OF WISDOM

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8).*

James does not say to ask God for release from the suffering that we experience. He does not tell us to ask God for the strength to endure. He says to ask for wisdom.

What is wisdom? Wisdom involves seeing things from God's perspective. This is important. It is only as you are able to see your trials from God's perspective that you will be able to "consider it all joy."

When we see things from God's perspective, we get the bigger picture. It is like looking at a Persian rug. If you examine the threads with a magnifying glass, they appear as an ugly jumble of tangled threads with no visible pattern. It is only when you stand back to get a better perspective and when you are able to look at the rug as a whole that the beautiful pattern can be appreciated.

The same is true of life. When we are in the midst of our circumstances, they often appear to be tangled and without meaning. God sees the bigger picture. He has patterned your life into a beautiful mosaic. You may not be able to see that bigger picture right now. You are too close. Like the Persian rug, you see only the threads. You cannot see the bigger picture. But you can believe that it is there. You can accept it by faith. In believing, you can count it all joy.

This brings us to our next question. If wisdom is the key to obtaining the

bigger picture, then how can I obtain this wisdom of God? James gives the answer.

1. I must ask for it: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him* (1:5).

God is the source of all true wisdom. If I am to obtain such wisdom, it must come through Him. At the heart of such wisdom is the knowledge of God. A proper concept of God is the foundation of all wisdom. He tells us that *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111:10).

God wants us to be wise. He wants us to see things through His perspective. He wants us to share in His wisdom. This is why He gave us the Bible. As we read the Scriptures, asking for His enlightenment, we will be given the wisdom of God.

2. There is a second requirement to gaining God's wisdom. It is the requirement of endurance.

*But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*  
(James 1:6-8).

The description of being “double-minded” is unique to Greek literature, though after the writing of this epistle it came to be used extensively by Christian writers and even taken up by secular writers of a later generation. It sounds remarkably like the rendition of a Hebrew figure of speak found in the Old Testament.

*They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.* (Psalm 12:2).

The phrase translated “double heart” is בְּלֵב וְלֵב (*Belev walev*) – literally, “in heart and heart.” The translators have done a proper job of communicating the idea of a “double heart.” Though departing

from the rendering of the Septuagint, the idea expressed by James seems to carry a similar concept.

The words of James have often been taken to mean that if your faith is not strong enough that your prayers will not be answered. I believe that such an interpretation ignores the context. James is not speaking of the strength of one's faith. He has been speaking of the quality of endurance. There are several different kinds of doubt.

- There is the doubt of the ability of God. This is the doubt expressed by the man who had brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples. He turns to Jesus and says, “If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” (Mark 9:22).
- There is the doubt of the goodness of God. The leper who prayed to Jesus saying, “If You are willing, You can make me clean” (Mark 1:40). Such a prayer assumes that God is able, but that He might not necessarily be willing. This is the doubt that says, “God loves the world, but does He love me?”
- There is a doubt of personal commitment. This is the doubt of the one who is uncertain whether he really wishes to commit his life to the Lord. Alister McGrath describes it as “indecision, hesitation, and a resulting lack of progress: (2006:51). It is the doubt that was seen in the rich, young ruler who came to Jesus and who saw the truth, but who wanted to hold to his possessions rather than to the Lord. Such a person might come for a time, but when things get very bad or when things get very good, he will be tempted by either the hardship or by the cares of this world to depart.

The last of these can give rise to the others. If you have not staked everything you have and everything you are, then doubt acts as a cancer of unreality on faith. I believe it is primarily the last of these that is in view here.

James says that, if you want to gain the wisdom of God, you must ask for it and then you must endure in your desire to have it. You cannot decide that you want to follow God only on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays and expect to be granted the wisdom of God. Instead you must be single-minded and enduring in that desire.

<b>The Double-Minded Man</b>	<b>The Single-minded Man</b>
Double-minded in his desire to have God's wisdom.	Single-minded in his desire to have God's wisdom.
Unstable in all his ways.	Seeks the firm foundation of God's wisdom.
Does not receive anything from the Lord.	Receives wisdom from God.
Doubt hangs back.	Faith steps forward.

Many people want to play games with God. They want to come to church on Sunday and to do their bit for religion and then go back and put God on the shelf for the rest of the week. You cannot love God that way. He will not allow such divided loyalty. He will not reward that kind of relationship.

Do you know someone like that? He is like a man standing in two rowboats with a foot in each and trying to make up his mind which way he wants to go. Sooner or later he is going to fall.

Am I describing you? Have you been trying to hold onto God with one hand and to the world with the other? Look again. You're grasping at the wind. You're being tossed by the waves. You may be in the midst of trouble, but you are not benefitting from it. You can't consider it all joy because your trials are not being used as an opportunity for growth. You need to let go of the world and get off that spiritual roller coaster.

Ask God for wisdom. Ask Him to show you the bigger picture. Then in light of that bigger picture, begin to grow and mature into the kind of person God wants you to be. When bad times come, you will be able to consider it all joy.

# THE POOR AND THE RICH

## James 1:9-11

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

James has been dealing with the question of how a Christian is to act under trials. He said that we should “count it all joy” when we encounter such trials as we realize that they are able to bring about a positive quality in our lives.

Saying that is one thing. Putting it into practice is quite another. And so, he moves to a practical illustration of an area where Christians come under trial. It is in the area of finances. Are you rich? Are you poor? Are you somewhere in between? Then this passage is written for you.

## DEALING WITH POVERTY

James begins with the man who is in the midst of poverty. This is a common condition. It is a fact of history that there have always been more people who are poor than who are rich. How can you deal with poverty? How can you count it all joy when you are struggling financially? James has the answer:

*But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position (James 1:9).*

The believer who is poor has something in which to glory. He has a high position. It is higher than any earthly consulship or kingdom. It is his position in Christ.

If you have taken hold of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you entered into a union with Him. You were united with Christ. This means you share certain things in common with Christ.

- Because He is righteous, you have also been declared to be righteous.
- Because He is the Son of God, you have been adopted into His forever family and have become a child of God.
- Because He is the heir to the kingdom, you have become a co-heir with Christ.
- Because He has eternal life, you also have eternal life.

This is your new identity. It is what James calls “your high position.” You have become a member of God’s chosen race. You are a part of His royal priesthood. You are a citizen of God’s holy nation. You are God’s own personal possession.

What are your present circumstances? Are they of such that might be called “humble circumstances?” Are you lacking in some needed finances? Or are you poor in some other area of life? Is there something that you are lacking? If so, then this passage is for you. It contains a charge. You are called to glory in your high position. It is a call for you to go so far as to boast and to glory in that position.

You have a high and lofty calling. It is to serve the Lord in the circumstances in which you find yourself. How can you do such a thing? By recognizing that God has designed those circumstances and called you to serve Him in the midst of such circumstances.

## DEALING WITH RICHES

Perhaps the previous verse did not especially apply to you. It did not apply because you are relatively comfortable in the area of finances. Your circumstances could hardly be classified as “humble.” Jesus has something to say to you.

*And let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.*

*For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. (James 1:10-11).*

James is writing to Jewish Christians. One of the problems that was prevalent among the Jews was their concept of wealth. They believed that

material wealth was a sign of God's favor. In practical terms, they considered that the more money you have, the more God must love you. They had a proverb that said, "God loves the poor, but He helps the rich."

This same line of thinking had begun to filter into the early church. The rich were often shown preferential treatment in the church. The best seat was set aside for him. He might stand to be elected as an officer in the church. When he spoke, the others in the church would give ear. He was a VIP.

James is going to address such attitudes in chapter 2, but right now he issues a warning to those who are rich. He warns them not to focus upon their riches for their self-esteem or for their self-worth. Instead they need to focus upon their poverty.

Why? What is so bad about being rich? They say money can't buy happiness, but what is wrong with being miserable in comfort? It is because when you are rich and when you are financially comfortable you don't have any real needs and when you get to that point it isn't too long until you don't need God. Thus when you do come to God, it is no longer out of your sense of need but only because you are "doing God a favor."

God will not give a man anything unless he comes empty handed. He has nothing to say to the proud. He is opposed to the proud (James 4:6). He resists the one who has no need.

Just as He does not give His wisdom to the one who doesn't really want it (James 1:6-8), so also He does not give spiritual riches to the one who is satisfied with the riches of this world. He does not fill cups that are already full. But when you go to His with an empty cup, He fills it so that your cup runs over (Psalm 23:5).

This is not a call to be financially irresponsible. Rather it is a call to make some secure long-term investments. It is a call to invest for eternity.

Paula and I once sat down with a couple of investors. They were telling us how we should plan for our financial future and make certain investments. When they were done, I asked them if I could share with them some better investments; some investments with a guaranteed return that were not dependent upon the random fluctuations of the stock market. I told them how they could have true security -- the kind that goes beyond this life. It is the security that is found only in Christ. After all, what good is it if you gain

the whole world and lose your soul?

The best of this world's wealth is only temporary. James illustrates this temporary quality of riches by comparing it to grass.

*For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. (James 1:11).*

This is not a new illustration. It was a familiar one to these Jewish readers. James draws if from the pages of the Old Testament.

6     *A voice says, “Call out.”  
Then he answered, “What shall I call out?”  
All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.*

7     *The grass withers, the flower fades,  
When the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
Surely the people are grass.*

8     *The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:6-8).*

If you have lived in the suburbs all your life, then this illustration might lose something in translation. In the suburbs we have automatic sprinkler systems to keep our grass looking good year round.

This is written to people who were familiar with an agricultural economy. They knew what happened in the various seasons. In the spring the grass would begin to grow. And in the summer it would come to maturity. And in the fall it would die. Grass does not last. And neither does the wealth of this world. Diamonds aren't forever. If you have money it will eventually be lost or stolen or spent because you can't possibly take it with you.

If you measure your wealth in other worldly ways it will be equally fleeting. Your good looks will one day be masked in wrinkles. Social status and popularity are fleeting. If you actually win the rat race, you find that you are still a rat.

*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise*

*the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

*For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?*

*Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. 30 But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?*

*Do not be anxious then, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “With what shall we clothe ourselves?” 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:24-34).*

Sometimes people say, “That is well and good, but you still have to live in the real world.” But what is the real world? That is the question that we must answer. For what world are you living? And in which world do you believe?

This is not a call to laziness. Rather it is a call to make the Kingdom first and to allow everything else in your life to flow from that. You seek heaven and God will take care of everything else.

You need to focus on that which is eternal. You need to plan for permanence. You need to see that your worldly riches are really poverty in disguise. It is only then that you can begin to have true wisdom and to see your situation from God’s perspective and to align your priorities for those things that really count in life.

Isaiah's passage concludes that it is the Word of our God that stands forever. This is the conclusion of James, too.

- In verse 18 he will describe how God brought us forth by the **word** of truth.
- In verse 21 he will call men to receive the **word** which is able to save souls.
- In verses 22-25 he will warn of the dangers of being only a hearer of the **word** instead of a doer of the **word**.

What is it about the Word of God that brings salvation? The Word of God is the message of the gospel. It is the message of the cross. It is the message of the sacrifice that was made on our behalf. It is the message of how God sent His Son to die for those who were spiritually bankrupt, so that they could inherit all of the blessings of heaven in Him.

# TRIALS AND TEMPTATION

## James 1:12-18

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12).*

One of the forgotten themes that we see throughout the Bible is the goodness of God. The reason I call it a forgotten theme is because it seems so often to be overlooked. God is a good God. His goodness is not merely that which is held in reserve up in heaven. His goodness is seen in the world every day.

A number of years ago, a Jewish rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled, *Why do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* He felt that since there is pain and suffering in the world, then either God is not good or else God is not all-powerful. He concluded that God is good and would like to stop bad things from happening, but He is overworked and underpaid and is simply not up to the task.

James deals with the same question regarding the presence of evil in the world, but his final conclusion will be completely different from that of Rabbi Kushner.

## THE BLESSING OF PERSEVERANCE

*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. (James 1:12).*

James opened his epistle with a call to count it all joy when you encountered various trials. He now returns to that topic. He has never really left it.

1:1-4	We are to consider our trials to have an end result of joy because endurance is being produced in our lives.
1:5	We are to ask God for wisdom so we can see and understand the benefits of those trials.
1:6-8	There is a condition to the reception of God's wisdom. It is that we be single-minded in our desire to know God.
1:9-11	We are given a practical application in dealing with those trials. It is in the area of our finances.

As we come to verse 12, James concludes this initial section on the handling of trials. He now approaches a new question. It is the question of why we should try to endure in the face of trials. He has already alluded to this earlier when he pointed out that endurance produces a positive quality in our lives. Now he looks beyond that to show the promise of a future reward. The reason we can face hard times today is because of the promise of good times tomorrow.

This verse is given in the form of a beatitude. Do you remember the Beatitudes? They were given by Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.  
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Here is still another beatitude. Like those that were given by Jesus, it also begins with a blessing. *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial.* Like the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, the verb ("is") is not expressed in the Greek text. This is not a wish or a hopeful benediction. It is not a command. Rather, it is a simple statement of fact. The man who endures under trial is blessed – literally, he is "happy."

Why is this the case? It is because there is a reward at the end of the struggle. It is because *once he is approved, he will receive the crown of life.* The fact that the crown is not given until he is approved resonates with

The term for "crown" used here is στέφανος (*stephanos*) and refers to the victor's wreath.

the teaching of Jesus regarding the last judgment. Today is the day for perseverance, but there is coming a day when we will either be approved or disapproved. This brings us to a question. What is it that obtains for you the crown of life? Perseverance? Good hard work? No. It is true that you do not receive it apart from perseverance, but the next clause of this verse tells you the source of this crown and it is not based upon how good you are or in what you are able to earn or deserve. It is a crown that *the Lord has promised to those who love Him*. Do you see it? It is a gift. It is given to those who trust in the Lord and who love Him.

- God is the source of that gift.
- God has allowed the trials through which that gift came to you.
- But God is not the source of temptation.

## THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (James 1:13-15).*

Notice that the subject has shifted from trials to temptations. There is really not that much of a shift. The Greek word for “trial” in verse 12 and the Greek word for “tempt” here in verse 13 come from the same root. Trials often involve a corresponding temptation. What is the difference between a trial versus a temptation?

Trials	Temptations
A trial comes from the outside and moves into your life.	A temptation comes from the inside out.
Trials bring life.	Temptations bring death.
Trials lead to maturity.	Temptations lead to a maturing of sin.

God brings the outward trials into your life.	He does not bring the inner temptations; those come from within you.
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This is why we can say that Jesus was tempted by the devil while, at the same time, He cannot be tempted. His temptation was from the outside, but there was no sin within Him to correspond to that temptation. That is not the case with us. Our temptations come from within.

There is a game we often play. It is called “blame shifting.” It is a very old game, going back all the way to the Garden of Eden. You remember the story. Adam was in the Garden with his wife. They were still in the midst of their honeymoon. They had everything they could possibly desire. They had dream jobs, a marriage made in heaven, and no in-laws.

Then Eve went for a walk and met a smooth-talking serpent who focused her attention on the one prohibition that God had made. She was swayed by the serpent’s seductive speech and she ate of the forbidden fruit. She took it to Adam and offered it to him. I don’t know whether or not Adam heard Satan’s line and I doubt that Eve had the serpent’s subtlety. As a result, Adam knew what he was doing. He knew this was forbidden fruit, and even though he knew that eating of it was against God’s command, he ate it.

The next thing to happen was a familiar sound in the garden. It was the Lord. No longer was the presence of God a thing to be desired; it was now something to be feared. In their panic, Adam and Eve tried to hide from the presence of the Lord.

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

*9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." 11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:8-11).*

As God enters the scene, the man and his wife attempt to hide themselves. While the presence of God had previously been a blessing, it is now a reason

for fear and shame. They run and hide. The very thought of it seems quite childish. I am reminded of the times I used to play hide and seek with my three year old granddaughter. The places she chose to hide were usually in plain sight and, even when they were not, she would be unaware that sound travels. I would hear a little girl giggle coming from under the dining room table and I would ask, “Where is my granddaughter? Where could she be?”

God does the same thing. He calls out, “Where are you?” It wasn’t that God couldn’t find Adam. His question is meant to bring Adam to see the reality of his situation. As Adam answers, he finds himself becoming more and more entangled in his sin. Finally he is asked point blank, “Have you eaten from that tree?”

*And the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." (Genesis 3:12).*

Do you see what Adam is doing? He is trying to shift the blame. He does not know about Satan, so he cannot say, “The devil made me do it.” He does the next best thing. He blames his wife. But that is not all. He calls her, “the woman whom You gave to be with me.” He is also blaming God. He is saying, “Lord, if you had not gone and created that woman, then I would still be back in the garden eating strawberries.”

Times have not changed much. We still continue to try to find others to blame for our sins. We try to pass the buck. We usually try to shift the blame to three areas.

- Environment.

People seem to think that if we just clean up the environment and make the world a better place in which to live, then all of our problems will be solved. This is like taking a pig out of a pig pen, cleaning him off, and bringing him into the house. It will not be long before the house starts to look like the pig pen. The problem is not in the pig pen. The problem is in the pig. He has a pig nature and it causes him to act in a piggy way. Changing his environment will not change who he is on the inside.

- Evil Companions.

Others would have us believe that sin is just a matter of peer pressure. Keep a person away from evil influences and you will keep them away from evil. While I do not want to deny the reality of peer pressure, this does not explain the times when you sin in secret.

- Heredity.

If you cannot blame your shortcomings on your environment or on evil companions, then blame them on your genetic disposition. “I engage in this kind of lifestyle because I was born that way.”

It is true that certain people have a disposition toward certain actions and certain sins. But that does not excuse such behavior. It has become popular to insist that sexuality is inherited via genetics and that a person is born with a disposition toward various types of sexual behavior. It may be true that physical makeup makes one more or less susceptible, but the Bible teaches that the actions of sexual deviation are the result of sin and rebellion against God (Romans 1:20-23).

There is the temptation to blame all three of these aspects upon God. But James is quick to point out that God is not in the tempting business.

1. A Wrong View of Temptation: *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God” (James 1:13).*

James has been speaking of trials. He has been speaking of our reaction when bad things take place. This is covered in the first few verses of his epistle. Now he moves to the area of temptation. They are related. When you face trials, there is always a temptation to try to take a shortcut to get you out of the circumstances that led to that temptation. The shortcut often involves sin.

That is the temptation Eve faced in the garden. It was a temptation to eat the fruit and become like God. Being like God is not a bad thing. We are supposed to try to be like God. That is called sanctification. But Eve sought to do it by way of a shortcut.

That is the temptation Abram faced when his wife was barren and he had been promised a son. He took his wife’s handmaiden and had a child by her. It was to lead to four thousand years of unrest.

That is the temptation Moses faced when he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating an Israelite. He took a shortcut and murdered the Egyptian.

That is the temptation Satan tried to use with Jesus when he tempted Him in the wilderness. “Turn these stones into bread and satisfy your hunger; jump from the pinnacle of the temple and let everyone see God’s power as you are rescued; worship me and I will give you the kingdom.”

These shortcuts are not from God. They are from Satan. God is not in the tempting business. He does not entice people to sin. What He does do is to provide a way of escape.

*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).*

It is important for you to know that all temptations have a built-in escape hatch. There is a way of escape for every temptation. All you need to do is take it.

2. A Right View of God: *God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone (James 1:13).*

Have you ever tried to mix oil and water? They do not mix. You can take a beaker full of water and drop some oil into it and the oil will float on top of the water. We say that oil is not miscible with water. What is true of oil and water is also true of God and temptation. Temptation and God do not mix.

- God does not tempt others to evil.
- God cannot be tempted by evil.

The Greek phrase that James uses is, ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπείραστός ἐστιν κακῶν. We could translate is very literally to say, “For God is non-

temptable by evil.”<sup>1</sup> Why is it that God cannot be tempted by evil? It is because there is nothing within Him that responds in a positive manner toward evil. That is the difference between the righteous God and fallen, sinful man.

3. A Source of Temptation: *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (James 1:14).*

Our actions are nothing more than belated statements of that which we have been thinking. This is why your thought life is so important. Sin always starts on the inside and works its way out.

Notice that James does not blame Satan. He does not say, “The devil made me do it.” Why not? Because in our case, Satan cannot succeed on the outside unless there is something that corresponds to that temptation on the inside. The corresponding principle is “lust.” It is describing a strong desire. Strong desire can be good and it can be bad. Desire, in and of itself, is not necessarily bad. Desire is not necessarily sinful. But it can give birth to sin. The question is what you are going to do with that strong desire. Will you trust in the Lord? Or will you seek to fulfill that desire without Him?

4. The Process of Temptation: *Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (James 1:15).*

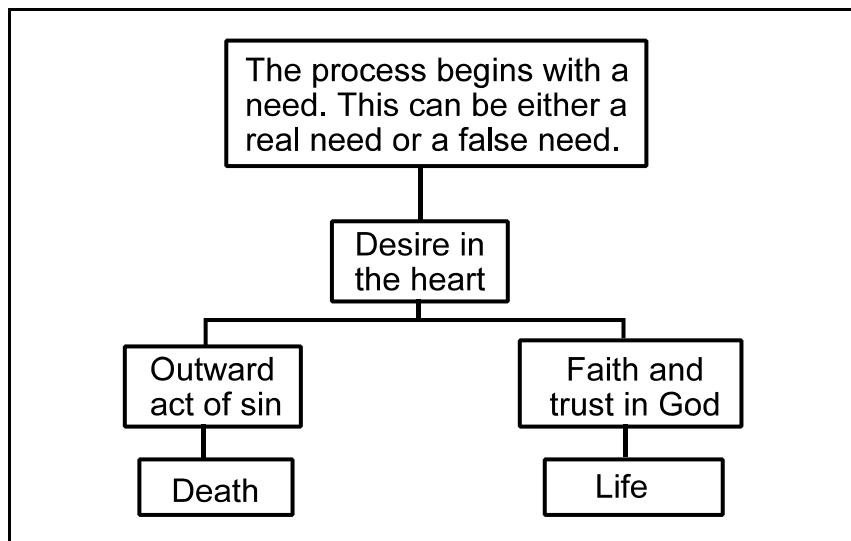
It almost seems as though lust is being personified in terms of a prostitute with whom a man has relations, not intending to bring forth any lasting fruit. They are not engaged in their activities in order to bear children. They only do it for the moment. But it results in

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<sup>1</sup> The Douay-Rheims Version translates this to say, *God is not a tempter of evils: and he tempteth no man.* While this version is smoother, the question is whether πείραστός describes that which is a “tempter” versus that which is “temptable.” This is made slightly more difficult in that this particular term is not found anywhere else in the New Testament or in the Septuagint. Moffatt suggests the word was coined by James himself (1947:18). Edmond Hiebert points out that such verbal adjectives can be either active or passive in meaning. The active would mean “not tempting to evil” while the passive means “not tempted of evil.” The context here calls for the passive meaning; the active would make the following statement sheer repetition. On the other hand, when the New Testament wishes to describe a “tempter,” it uses πειράζων, the present participle of πειράζω.

unwanted fruit. It gives birth to an unwanted child. The name of that child is sin.

There is a movement traced here from the desire in the heart to the outward manifestation of sin and then to resulting death. It begins with a need. It can be a real need or it can be a perceived need. This need leads to a desire.



At this point, you have one of two choices. Either you can depend upon God to meet that desire, or else you can seek to fulfill the desire in your own way. One road leads to faith while the other leads to sin.

There is no abortion that can prevent the birth of death once sin has been conceived. This death existence is the same existence in which we formerly lived before coming to Christ. Sin takes us back to the way we used to be.

However, there is good news. It is that God has performed a work in Christ that has resulted in a resurrection into a new life. James describes this in the next three verses.

## THE SOURCE OF GOOD

*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every*

*good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. (James 1:16-18).*

Somewhere along the line we got the idea that the message of James was antithetical to the grace of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. James is going to have quite a lot to say about works, but the basis of those works will be seen here on what God has first done for us.

1. The Danger of Deception: *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren (James 1:16).*

This command is given in the present imperative. In the Greek language, when a negative command is given in the present imperative, it carries the idea, “Stop doing that!” James is not speaking of a theoretical danger. He is speaking of a real life situation that was actually taking place. He is saying, “You are being deceived and I want you to stop it right now!” Over what were they being deceived? They were being deceived about the goodness of God.

You face the same danger. Every time you are tempted to sin, at the heart of that temptation is a deeper temptation to deny the goodness of God.

Man tends to look at all of the bad things in the world and blame God. James takes exactly the opposite approach. He tells us that we are to look at all of the good things in the world and thank God.

This is how Satan deceived Eve in the garden. He pointed to the forbidden fruit and how good it was and how it was to be desired and then he implied that God was doing a bad thing by keeping it from her. Instead of focusing on the one tree that was forbidden, Eve should have been looking at all the other trees that God had given to them.

If you believe that God is really good and that He cares for your needs and that He is able to supply them, then you will not be tempted into seeking to fulfill your needs in your own way. That

means every time you are being tempted to sin, there is an underlying temptation that would have you to distrust God. The answer to that temptation is to see that God is the source of every good gift.

2. The Source of Every Good Gift: *Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow (James 1:17).*

God is the source of all good. God gives gifts and His gifts are good. Not only does God give good gifts, but all good gifts that are given are from God. That means you cannot get a gift that is good without it being from God.

Not only has God given good gifts in the past, but also God continues to give good gifts. James points this out by his use of the present tense. God did not give and then stop giving. He does not say, “I already gave at the office.” He gives everyday. He is the giving God.

Furthermore, God does not change. There is no variation in God. He never wakes up on the wrong side of the bed. He is never in a bad mood. He does not change. He gave in the past and He continues to give in the present and, because He is unchanging, you can be assured that He will always be the giving God.

3. The Source Illustration in Salvation: *In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth (James 1:18).*

In verse 15, we saw that sin brings forth death. It was the image of a pregnancy bringing forth a child. The offspring of that pregnancy was death. Now we read that God brought forth us. The same Greek word is used for each of these “bringing forths.”

Our Will	God's Will
We exercise our own will independently of God when we sin.	God exercised His own will in order to save us.

Exercising our own will brings forth death.	Exercising His will led to bringing us forth by the word of truth
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James has been speaking of the gifts that God gives. Now he focuses on a particular gift that God gives. It is the gift of life. This is a reference to the spiritual life that we have in Christ.

I hear some people say they don't like the book of James because it does not clearly present the gospel of grace. They are wrong. You cannot get any more clear than the way grace is pictured in this verse. God brought us forth. He delivered us. He provided the new birth, not on the basis of our actions, but in the exercise of His will.

Do you see the sovereignty of God and the grace of God pictured in this verse? They are joined together in the very strongest sense. It was through God's gracious will that He brought us forth. We were saved by God's plan. We were saved by God's power. We were saved for God's purpose. That purpose is seen in the next phrase.

4. The Reason for God's Good Gift of Salvation: *In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures (James 1:18).*

There was a reason for God's plan. It was so that we might be at the head of creation. This is seen in the concept of the first fruits. When James speaks of the first fruits, he is using a phrase that is distinctly Jewish. It speaks of a Jewish feast that was observed in the first month of the Jewish year. There were three feasts celebrated that month.

The first was Passover. The Passover took place on the 14th day of the month. It was designed to be a reminder of how God had delivered the firstborn and brought them up out of their slavery in Egypt.

The second feast was Unleavened Bread. This feast was a week-long observance. During this week, the Jews removed all of the leaven from the bread they ate. This was a reminder of their separation from the culture of Egypt. God had taken them and made them a people

who were to be set apart from the rest of the world.

The third feast was Firstfruits. This took place during the week of Unleavened Bread. Whereas the Feast of Unleavened Bread always began on the Sabbath Day, the Feast of Firstfruits always took place on the first day of the week following the Passover. On this day, each Israelite was to bring the first sheaf of grain that he had harvested. Bringing the sheaf of grain before the Lord, he was to have the priest wave it before the door of the tabernacle. By doing so, he would be pledging the entire harvest that was to follow. Just as the people were God's people, so also they were demonstrating that the harvest was God's harvest.

Here is the significance. God has moved through Christ to save the world. He has started with us. We are the first part of God's creation to be redeemed from the bondage of sin. There is coming a day when all the rest of creation will follow suit. It will be a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

# THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

James 1:19-27

*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18).*

One of the distinctives of Christianity is that we have a God who has spoken. Christianity is not merely a system of philosophy in which men have sat down and pondered what God is like. We believe that we could not know God except that He first made Himself known to us.

We saw this in James 1:18 where we read that God “brought us forth by the word of truth.” That is a reference to our salvation. In a very real sense, we are children of the Word. You did not come to Christ apart from the Word of God. You might be thinking, “I didn’t read a verse from the Bible when I was saved. Someone explained the gospel and I believed.” But they used words to explain the gospel and the content of those words were taken from the Word of God.

The ministry of the Word in our lives does not stop when we come to Christ. It only begins there. James 1:18 says that *in the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth* – that is the message of salvation. But the passage continues to say that He brought us forth *so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures* – that is the promise of sanctification; the promise of present and future growth.

God calls us just the way we are, but He does not leave us the way we are. He has called us in order to change us. Just as the calling comes through the Word, so also the changing comes through the Word. That means the study of God’s Word is not an end in itself. It is a means to a greater end. It is that the Word may be received and applied in your life.

## RECEIVING THE WORD

*This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:19-21).*

When I was a lot younger, I attended Florida Bible College. It was an exciting time of learning and studying and, in those early days, I had visions of becoming something of a scholar. I found a lot of people whose heads were much further along than their hearts and it was not long before I became one of those people. It took me six years to get through Bible College and another six years to get over it.

I am not saying that Bible College or Seminary is bad or that it is necessarily bad to learn so much of the Bible before you have had time to spiritually digest it. But it is wrong if those spiritual truths that you learn are never translated into physical actions in your life.

James cuts to the heart of this matter. He will not be satisfied with a faith that sits in your notebook or up on your shelf and is only dusted off on Sunday mornings. He will demand a faith that works.

1. Receiving the Word means that you must first Know the Word: *This you know, my beloved brethren (1:19).*

The King James and the New King James Versions give us a slightly different reading when they say, “Therefore my beloved brethren...” The difference between these versions with the New American Standard is not one of translation, but rather a case of two different Greek texts. The difference is between the spelling of a single word: “Ιστε (“You know”) versus “Ωστε (“Therefore”).

In either case, James is forming a conclusion based on what he has just said regarding our new birth via the Word of God. Because we have been born again through the Word, we should now live our lives according to that word.

Sin	God
Verses 15-16	Verses 17-18
What we are able to accomplish	What God is able to accomplish
Brought forth sin	Brought us forth by the Word of truth
The result is death	The result is life
You know this, therefore...	
Because anger does not bring forth the righteousness of God...	← Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

If you are a Christian, then you know some things about God. But that knowledge is not to remain dormant. It is to have a practical outworking.

2. Receiving the Word is an ongoing Process: *But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (1:19).*

James is not giving a new teaching. He is telling them things that they already know. How did they know these things? They are taught in the Old Testament.

*Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;  
When he closes his lips, he is counted prudent  
(Proverbs 17:28).*

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,  
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly. (Proverbs 14:29).*

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. (Proverbs 16:32).*

James calls for a “speed adjustment” in three areas: What we hear,

what we say, and in how we feel.

Be Quick...	To hear
Be Slow...	To speak
	To anger

All three of these are given in the present tense. This gives the force of continual action: “Let each man **continue** to be...” This is to be an on-going process. You do not do this as a one-time action. You are to continue to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

3. Receiving the Word brings a New Governing Principle: *For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:20).*

It is noteworthy that James uses the Greek word ἀνδρὸς (*andros*) to speak of the anger of man. He is not merely speaking of the anger of mankind in general. He uses the word that specifically denotes the male gender.

Why is this? Perhaps it is because men seem to think that it is manly and masculine and macho to become angry. God, the One who made men and women, says that there is nothing masculine in anger. God’s righteousness is achieved quite apart from man’s anger. It is not anger that is to be our governing principle. Our governing principle is to be humility. This is seen in the next verse.

4. Receiving the Word is a Grace Process: *Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls (1:21).*

James does not merely say, “Receive the Word.” You must receive it with a certain type of attitude or else you will find that you have not received it at all. What attitude is required? It is the attitude of humility. This was not written just for your wife or for your husband or for your children. It was written for you.

Humility is the response of grace. Humility recognizes its own undeservedness. Humility recognizes that every gift comes from above, from the Father of lights within whom there is no turning or

change. Humility recognizes that you are undeserving and that everything you have is a gift of grace. It is only when the Word is approached with humility that the Word can be implanted.

5. Receiving the Word is an Organic Process: *Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted (1:21).*

Elsewhere we read of the Word being preached and of the Word being heard and even of the Word being the subject of diligent study. James speaks instead of the Word being implanted. This refers to more than merely the hearing or preaching or reading of the Word. This is what causes the Word to take root and to grow.

Do you recall the parable of the sower? There were four different types of hearers.

- There was the hard ground where the person heard, but there was no penetration and the word had no effect.
- There was the rocky ground where the word could obtain no deep roots.
- There was the ground in the midst of thorns where the word was choked by the cares of this world.
- It was only in the fourth ground where there was permanent growth. This was the good ground where the word was implanted and grew up to bear fruit.

How do you receive the implanted word? You do it by repenting of *all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness*. You do it by coming in humility to the cross. You do it by accepting the gracious gift of God, trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

6. Receiving the Word Results in Salvation: *Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls (1:21).*

When you come to Christ in faith, a process begins within you. It is a process of salvation. On the one hand, it is appropriate to speak of

salvation in completed terms -- you have been justified and declared righteous. You received something that is enduring because you are kept by His power and His strength.

And yet, your salvation isn't completed. You are still being saved. You are being transformed into something that you never were before. You are becoming like Christ.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).*

I like the bumper sticker that says, "Have patience, God isn't finished with me yet." That is true. You are not finished. You are only half-baked. You are in the process of salvation. It is a process that takes place as you continue *putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness* and as you come to the cross in humility to have the ingrafted Word do its work in your heart.

## RESPONSE TO THE WORD

*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25).*

As we saw in the previous paragraph, so now also the Greek text uses the present tense, indicating the demand for a continued action. You are to continue to prove yourself a doer of the word and not merely a hearer only.

A hearer was a technical term among the Greeks for people who attended lectures but who were not committed disciples of the teacher. They were under no obligation or accountability to obey the teachings that they heard. In colleges today it is similarly possible to audit a class. James uses this same image of an auditor.

This brings up an important aspect of the church. It is accountability. Every so often I hear of someone who has dropped out of the church and who merely wants to fellowship with Christians in an informal setting and attend home Bible studies. There is nothing wrong with home Bible studies. A great deal can be learned in that sort of informal setting where questions can be answered and where discussion is encouraged. But Bible studies cannot take the place of the church because they lack any system of accountability. Unfortunately, there are also many churches that have also failed in this important area of ministry.

1. A Dangerous Delusion: *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (1:22).*

One of the most dangerous things about being a hearer of the word and not a doer of it is that you can easily delude yourself into thinking that hearing is enough. You think, “I did my part for God by getting up on Sunday morning and coming and hearing the word. I put my money in the offering plate. I sang the hymns. I read the confession. I shook the preacher’s hand. I have fulfilled my Christian responsibilities.” If that has ever gone though your mind, you need to know that you have been deluded.

2. Doers Versus Hearers: *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer (1:23).*

There are two kinds of people described here. There is the hearer and then there is the hearer who is also a doer.

<b>Hearer Only</b>	<b>Hearer and Doer</b>
He contemplates the word (Greek). There is no fault in the way he looks, but he then goes and forgets.	He looks intently at the word. He bends over it and studies it.
He immediately forgets.	He becomes an effectual doer.
He deludes himself.	He is blessed in what he does.
He does not bridle his tongue.	He is slow to speak.

He is quick to anger and has not put aside all filthiness and wickedness.	He visits orphans and widows and keeps himself unstained from the world.
His religion is worthless.	His religion is pure and undefiled.

The contrast is the same that we see throughout the Bible. It is the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever.

3. Illustration of a Hearer: *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (1:23-24).*

The man who only hears the word and who does not obey it is like a man who has been out working. He comes in and he looks into a mirror. The mirror tells him that his face is dirty. It needs to be washed. He has a big grease smudge across his nose.

But instead of washing his face or otherwise utilizing the information that the mirror has given to him, our hero gets dressed and goes out for the evening and spends the rest of the night wondering why people are laughing at him. It is not that he didn't see the problem. The issue is that he failed to do anything about it. The sight in the mirror did not motivate him to go and wash his face. The result was the same as if he had not looked into the mirror in the first place.

4. Looking at the Law of Liberty: *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does (1:25).*

By contrast, we see another type of man. This is the man who not only looks, but he looks carefully. The Greek word used here ( $\piαρακύπτω$ ) is the same word that John used to describe the disciple stooping over and peering into the tomb of the resurrected Jesus (John 20:5,11).

He looks carefully. And then he abides by what he does. But notice what it is at which he looks. It is *the perfect law, the law of liberty.*

To what does this refer?

James is writing to those who were well familiar with the Law. They knew all about the requirements of the Law, both its moral code as well as its various rituals for worship and sacrifice. The Law is good and it is holy and it is perfect. But one thing the Law was never called in the Old Testament era was “the Law of Liberty.”

- The Law was the manifestation of God’s righteousness.
- Those who are under the Law are under a curse, for the one who does not keep the Law is accursed (Galatians 3:10,13).
- The Law served as our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25).

The Law could not free anyone. The Law did not free you from your sins. It was like a mirror. It only pointed out your sins.

*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, <sup>39</sup> and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39).*

Jesus did that which the Law could not do. The Law could only declare you to be guilty. Jesus declared you to be righteous -- He justified you. He fulfilled the just demands of the Law upon the cross. Where the Law condemned our sins, He paid the penalty that the Law demanded for those sins. When the Law called for death of the guilty, He bore our guilt upon the cross and gave His own life.

*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4).*

There is a new Law in effect today. It is the Law of Liberty. It is not like the old law that was written on tablets of stone. This new law is written in the hearts of men.

This is not a new concept. The law was never meant to remain only upon tablets of stone. God promised that He would do something special. He promised that He would manifest the Law from the inside out. Throughout the Old Testament, there was a continuing emphasis upon taking the Law of God and allowing it to sink within the hearts of men.

*Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 32:46).*

God promised that there would come a day when this would be reversed. There would come a day when He would write His Law within the hearts of men.

*“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).*

There is a great freedom when you realize that the penalty of the Law has been paid -- when you realize that instead of the Law being a hindrance to coming to God, it is now the operating principle that manifests your liberty. You now have that within you that causes you to be a doer of the word and not just a hearer of it.

You are like the man who went to look at his face in a mirror and was transformed by what he saw because it wasn't his face that looked back at him.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory*

*of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).*

When you look at your face in a mirror, what do you see? If you only see your face, then you are missing something. You need to realize that, as a Christian, you have the very Spirit of the Lord within you. Realizing that will change your life.

## **RELIGION OF THE WORD**

*If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:26-27).*

We often think of religion in terms of what we say. We proclaim a message that we believe. We hold to a doctrine with which we verbally agree as we confess a creed together. But that is only one aspect of Christianity. Our religion is not merely made up of beliefs. It is also seen in action. Our truth should match our tongue.

James sets forth the example of the man who thinks himself to be religious. He is very sincere. He is not a hypocrite. He is not pretending. He really does think that he is religious. But he is wrong. He has deceived himself.

How then are we to understand true religion? James gives the answer in terms of our actions: *This is pure and undefiled religion ...to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (1:27).*

When you spoke of purity to a Jewish person, he thought in terms of ceremonial purity. He had a whole list of rituals that he went through to keep himself ceremonially pure. They were all outward things.

James has some outward things in mind, too. He says that our love of God is to be manifested in our treatment of others and in our pure life.

- How do you treat others? There was no more down-and-out class of people in the ancient world than orphans and widows. This was before the age of orphanages and social security. These were the people who had nothing. They had nowhere to turn.

It is easy to minister to those who have no needs. It is easy to keep our religion confined to the socially acceptable – to those who dress the way we dress and who talk the way we talk and who smell the way we smell. But that is not true religion. That is worthless religion.

We are called to reach out to the helpless and to meet the needs of the needy. This is not a new thing; it was proclaimed by the prophets and witnessed in the Old Testament.

*He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker,  
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.  
(Proverbs 14:31).*

- How do you keep yourself? Christians have been made pure through the work of Christ on the cross. We have been declared to be righteous. And then we have been told to go out and live in accordance with our calling. We are called to be clean in a dirty world. We are called to live in a manner that reflects our new purity.

# FAITH AND FAVORITISM THE PERIL OF PARTIALITY

## James 2:1-13

*In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.(Matthew 7:12).*

He was a brand new Christian, filled with all of the zeal that a new Christian usually exhibits. The Lord had mightily saved him from a heavy drug habit and his unbelieving friends were amazed at the change that had come over him. They were eager to hear the message that had so transformed his life and he was eager to share that message.

He began attending a home Bible Study and he found a new love in the study of the Scriptures. Next he visited a large church, eager to meet some more of his Christian family. But when he came into church, there were frowns and whispers. You see, his hair was a lot longer than they were used to and he wasn't wearing a jacket or a tie. One of the pillars of that church took him aside and told him not to come back until he had gotten a haircut. I never saw him again, although I thought of him and prayed for him.

The story is an old one and has been often repeated in the church. It is a situation that was taking place in James' day. It is the story of favoritism. We call it discrimination. It is present in today's church and it was present in the early church, but it is never to be excused.

It often takes a variety of forms. It might be seen in the way old people look at the young or in the way the young look at their elders. Or it might be seen in the way the rich look at the poor or in the way the poor look at the rich. Far too often, it has been seen in the way those of one racial group might look at another. No matter what the form, it is the antithesis of that which the church is called to be.

Jesus came to make us one. The oneness to which we are called is to supercede barriers of race, or gender, of social status, of appearance, and of wealth. When those things get in the way, it is because we have lost our focus upon Jesus and living for him. We might have the correct theology in

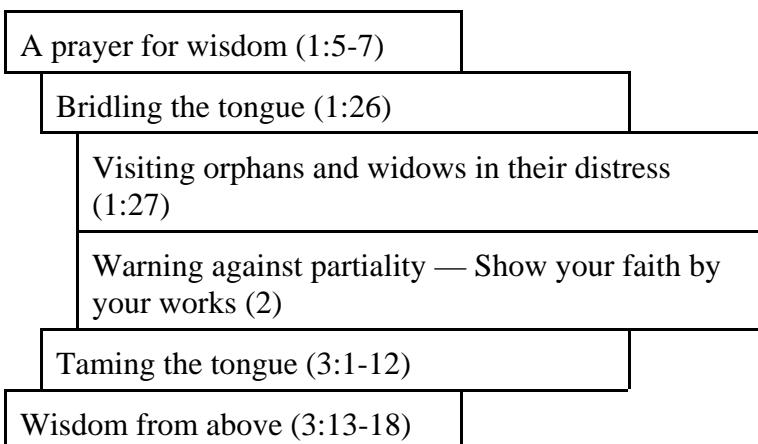
our notebooks, but we are not living the correct theology.

James 1:22-25 gives with an exhortation for us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. This is illustrated in verses 26-27 by looking at two areas.

- What a man says (1:26).
- What a man does (1:27).

James is going to return to this first issue in chapter 3 when he speaks of the control of the tongue – what a man says. But first, he deals with the question of what a man does – his actions toward the poor. It is in this context that he takes up the subject of partiality.

This sort of parallelism is commonplace in Hebrew writing. It is known as a chiasmus. It takes us full circle so that it begins and ends with a call for wisdom. James begins with a prayer for wisdom and eventually comes to speak of the wisdom that is from above. This makes wisdom the bookends around which this portion of the epistle is structured.



Thus the warning against partiality is seen in parallel with the call to visit widows and orphans in their distress. This means the section of faith and works in James 2:14-26 will really be an expansion of the previous section on partiality.

I have already suggested that the epistle of James can be seen as a New Testament commentary on Christ's Sermon on the Mount as presented in the Gospel of Matthew. The same parallels apply here in this section of James.

Matthew 7	James 2
Prohibition against judging (7:1-2).	Prohibition against judgmental favoritism (2:1).
Illustration of removing one's faults so that you can see to remove another's faults (7:3-5).	Illustration of removing one's partiality so that one can instruct or judge others (2:2-4).
Warning not to despise the holy in favor of dogs or pigs (7:6).	Warning not to despise the one rich in faith in favor of the rich (2:5-7).
A summary of the Law: Do to others what you want done to yourself (7:12).	A summary of the Law: Love others as you love yourself (2:8-11).
Warning against false prophets: You will know them by their fruit (7:15-20).	Warning against a dead faith: You will know real faith by its works (2:14-21).

James is not bringing a new teaching. He is simply echoing and expanding upon that teaching that had been given by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount.

## PARTIALITY IS PROHIBITED

*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (James 2:1).*

Having told his readers what pure and undefiled religion is in James 1:27, he now proceeds in this chapter to show what pure and undefiled religion is not. It is not characterized by favoritism. One of the principles that we see taught throughout the Scriptures is that God does not show favoritism.

*For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. (Deuteronomy 10:17).*

*Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be*

*very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe. (2 Chronicles 19:7).*

*And opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.” (Acts 10:34-35).*

After reading these verses, you might protest, “Does not the Bible teach that God predestines some to eternal life and then draws them to Himself while not choosing others? Doesn’t God say, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated’? Didn’t He determine that one would be blessed over the other before they were even born?

Yes, that is true. And yet, that is not partiality because God is not showing favoritism on the basis of how good or how noble or how smart or how worthy a person is. To the contrary, Paul reminds us that *there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;* 27 *but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,* 28 *and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,* 29 *that no man should boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).*

God delights in not being a respecter of persons. He delights in choosing the person who would be the least likely to be chosen by the world’s standards.

### 1. A Family Exhortation: *My brethren (James 2:1).*

James has already used the phrase “my brethren” three times in his epistle (1:2; 1:16; 1:19). Each time, it was used to introduce a warning or an exhortation.

Why does James call his readers “my brethren?” One reason is that they shared the same nationality. They were largely, if not exclusively Jewish. James is a Galilean Jew who is writing to Jewish people who have long since been dispersed in foreign lands (James 1:1).

There is an additional reason James calls them “brethren.” It is because they share the same spiritual Father. They are followers of

Jesus Christ. This is seen here as James speaks of them holding their *faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism* (2:1).

2. The Problem of Favoritism: *Do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (James 2:1).*

The phrase that is translated *personal favoritism* is taken from the Greek word προσωπολημψία (*prospolempsiā*). It is a compound word made up from the joining of two Greek words together.

- Προσωπον (*Prosopon*): Face
- Λαμβάνω (*Lambano*): To take.

It literally means to take note of a person's face, to pay regard to external appearances or to discriminate on the basis of that which is outward. We have an old saying that tells us, "You cannot judge a book by its cover." But the truth is that we are regularly tempted to make such a judgment. Studies have been taken to show our tendency to prefer rich people to poor people; to prefer slim people to fat people.

To have an attitude of favoritism and to hold to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is inconsistent. Jesus did not show favoritism. He did not minister only to the rich or to those who could financially support His ministry. He did not choose to fellowship only with other rabbis or with those of high social standing. He could spend an evening talking to a ruler of the jews and be equally comfortable spending an afternoon with a social outcast of a woman.

We are to have the same attitude Jesus had. The church is to be a place where there is *neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man* (Galatians 3:28). There is a principle here. The way we act toward other people indicates what we really believe about God.

## THE PORTRAYAL OF PARTIALITY

*For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a*

*poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:2-4).*

James now paints a vivid portrayal of discrimination. It takes place within the setting of the assembly – within the meeting of the church. Two visitors are described as coming into the church. Neither one is a believer. Neither one is a member of the church. They are both coming as guests.

1. The Example of the Rich Visitor: *For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes (2:2).*

The word that is translated “assembly” is the Greek word συναγωγή – literally, the “synagogue.” James is writing to Jewish Christians. It is only natural for them to refer to the meeting of their church by the same name they have always called their meeting place.

James describes a man coming into the church *with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes.* He is literally “a gold-fingered man.” He does not have merely one gold ring on his finger. His hands glitter with rings. He wears great wealth on his hands. He is dressed in the very best of clothes.

2. The Example of the Poor Visitor: *And there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes (2:2).*

In contrast to the first man, James describes the coming of a second visitor to the church. He has no rings on his fingers. He does not wear the finest clothes. By contrast, his clothes are a bit shabby and perhaps do not smell very good. He will not be putting much money into the offering plate because he does not have much to give.

The question before the house is how the church will treat these two men. Will they be treated equally? Or will the rich man be given preferential treatment because he is able to put more money into the offering plate?

Rich Man	Poor Man
Wears a gold ring and is dressed in fine clothes	Is dressed in dirty clothes
You say, “Sit here in a good place.”	You say, “Stand over there or sit down by my footstool.”

3. The Indictment against Partiality: *Have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (2:4).*

James began this portrait with a conditional clause when he started, “If a man comes...” He now brings us to the conclusion of that conditional clause. He says that, if it is true you act in accordance to the conditions previously described, then two conclusions follow:

- You have made distinctions among yourselves.

The phrase translated “made distinctions” is translated from the verb διεκρίθητε (*diekrithete*), the aorist passive of διακρίνω (*diakrino*). It is the same root that is translated “doubting” back in James 1:6. This means the showing of partiality within the church is a form of double-mindedness. It is accepting the world’s standard of judgment over against God’s standard. It is being two-faced with God.

- You have become judges with evil motives.

When you show discrimination in the church, you are no better than a judge to takes a bribe in order to release a murderer or to imprison an innocent man. You are taking that which is right and turning it to evil for the purpose of impure motives.

This brings us to a question. Does this mean that on one in the church should ever make judgments or that we should never make any distinctions? Not at all. What it does mean is that we should not make judgments from wrong motives and that we should not make false distinctions.

When we come to James 2:14-26, we will be given the proper basis

for making distinctions. It will not be according to what a person wears or what he smells like or how big is his bank account. It will be by what he does in serving the Lord.

This is important to understand because we live in an age where the only intolerable sin is that of intolerance. Yet the Bible teaches that there are some things we ought not to tolerate. There are times when we are called to judge, not the motives of the heart, but the outward actions of the body.

## THE POINTLESSNESS OF PARTIALITY

*Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? (James 2:5-7).*

James now goes on to show how the exercise of partiality toward the rich over the poor is not only wrong, but also that it is pointless. It is pointless for two reasons.

First, it is pointless because God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor” (Luke 6:20). Paul said that God has chosen the foolish and the weak and the base and the despised (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). The poor have been chosen over the rich. Does that mean people who have money cannot be saved? No, but it does mean that their money has nothing to do with their salvation. All men are poor when they stand before the Lord. Poor people tend to be more aware of this than the rich.

At the same time, all who come to Christ become rich. We have entered into a wonderful inheritance. We have become heirs of the kingdom. Our father is the King and there are no slums in His kingdom.

The second reason why partiality is pointless is because of the hostile actions taken by the rich against the poor in the church. Whenever the church has been persecuted, that persecution has come primarily from the hands of those who are rich and influential. It isn’t that poor people are never hostile toward

God. It is just that they do not have the power to do anything about it.

When the church gives preferential treatment to the rich and the socially acceptable, the church is honoring the world system over and above the grace of God. We are showing that we are more concerned with money than with the Lord.

The story is told of an old black man who had tried to join a rather exclusive white church, but had been turned away. He was heartbroken and, as he prayed, he poured out his grief, “Lord, you know that I love You and I want to be a part of Your church, but they just won’t let me in.” In the midst of his prayers, the Lord answered him, saying, “That is okay, son. I’ve been trying to get into that church for twenty five years and they won’t let Me in, either.”

## **THE PRACTICE OF THE ROYAL LAW PRECLUDES PARTIALITY**

*If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11).*

James has already shown that a Christian should not show partiality because it is incompatible with the name of Christ, because the poor have been made rich in faith, and because it is the rich who bring persecutions upon the church. Now he demonstrates that partiality is contrary to the royal law, thus making the one who is guilty of partiality a law breaker.

James makes reference here to the “royal law.” Why does he call it this? It is because it is the law of the King. The King to whom James refers is Jesus. This is the law that Jesus gave.

*And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”*

*37 And He said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40).*

Notice that the “royal law” was not a new law. It had been at the very heart and root of the Old Testament Law. It comprised the two greatest commandments of the Law. The Law said to love God and to love your neighbor. The command to love God was a part of the Shema and was considered by the Jews to be the most important verse in all the Bible.

*4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).*

The command to love your neighbor as yourself was also found in the Mosaic Law. It was a part of the Levitical code.

*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18).*

This principle was not limited to the Jews loving other Jews. It was even to be applied to Gentiles who were living in the land.

*The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:34).*

The foundational principle behind the Law was love. If you love your neighbor, you will also fulfill the Law with regard to him. If you love your neighbor, you will not murder him or bear false witness against him or commit adultery with his wife or covet his possessions.

The same is true of our love of God. If we really love the Lord, we will not be going after other gods, we will want to worship him on His day and we will realize that no physical image can possibly replace Him.

Love was the essence of the Old Testament Law. On the other hand, 1 John 2:8 calls this a “new commandment” because the light of the gospel brings a new light to that old commandment in the person of Jesus. He has shown us the truth of what it means to love in the ultimate sense as His gave Himself for us and in our place, dying the death we deserved that we might share in the life that He deserves.

He also took the principle of love even further. He instructed those who would be His disciples to love not only their neighbors, but their enemies (Matthew 5:44). How is this possible? Do I try to work up some great emotion? What do I do if I don’t feel love in my heart? Jesus gives the answer.

*Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12).*

Jesus did not say to work up some emotional response. He said to show love by what you do to others, even if you do not feel it. He said to treat others in the way you would want to be treated.

One of the errors of today’s society is to equate love with a feeling. That is why there are so many divorces today. Two people get married and then time passes and the feelings fade and they decide they have “fallen out of love.” Love is not defined in how you feel. Love is defined in what you do. We are not called to work up a feeling. We are called to treat people as we would like them to treat us.

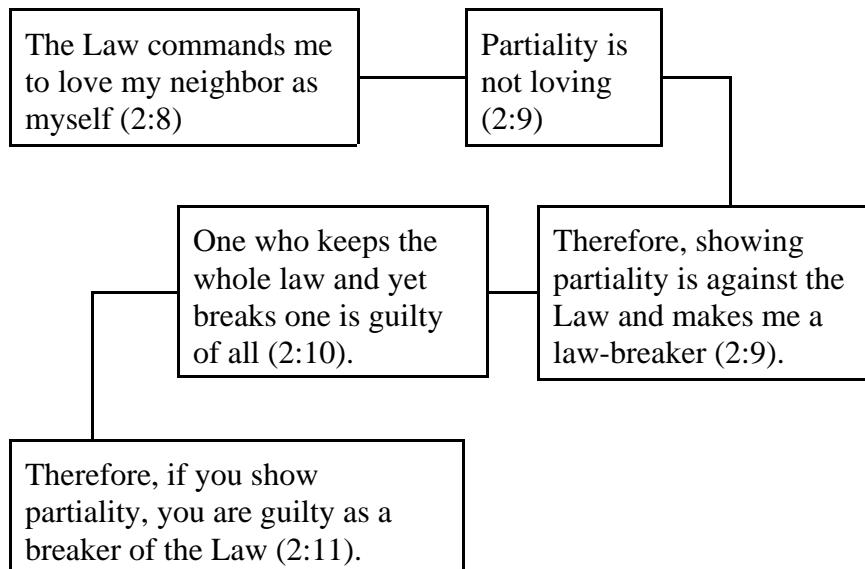
When you do this, you are fulfilling the Royal Law. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). He did this by demonstrating His love to use. He did this by going to the cross. His death upon the cross was His ultimate demonstration of love.

We have been called to do the same work Jesus did. He fulfilled the Law and we are to fulfill the Law, too. He showed His love for all men and we are to show our love for all men, too.

1. Partiality makes you a Transgressor of the Law: *But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (2:9).*

James sets forth an argument designed to show the results of

partiality with regard to the Law of God. He takes us step by step in a process of rational deduction. We can trace the flow of thought in the following chart:



If partiality is contrary to the Law because it does not love all men in the way the Law requires, then the one who shows partiality is guilty of transgressing the Law. This leads to a further problem.

2. Transgressing the Law makes you Guilty of all the Law: *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (2:10).*

The teaching of the rabbis was just the opposite of this. They taught that you could keep one law and it would make up for not keeping others, especially if the one you kept was a big one like the keeping of the Sabbath.

*The Sabbath weighs against all the precepts;  
if they keep it, they were reckoned as having done all.  
(Shemoth Rabb. 24).*

They viewed God as grading “on the curve.” You know what I mean when I speak of the curve. It is when you don’t do well on a test, but it is considered to be okay because no one else did god on it, either. Instead of failing everyone, the entire grading system is changed. A

curve is established so that the average grade level is raised to a passing level.

The problem is that it is God who sets the curve. We are judged according to His standard of righteousness. He keeps the Law perfectly. The Law is a reflection of His own righteousness.

The gospel contains both good news and bad news. The bad news is that we have failed to live up to the righteousness of God. The good news is that the Son of God was righteous in our place.

When you commit a single sin, even if it is one that you consider to be only a little sin, it is still sin and it makes you a law-breaker in the eyes of the Lord. It is like a mass murderer standing before a judge and saying, “Your honor, I am a very moral man because I do not engage in illicit sexual relations, so therefore you ought to release me.” Just because he has not committed one certain sin does not lessen his guilt in committing others.

The specific sin of which James speaks in this passage is showing partiality; of discriminating against the poor. The point he is making is that such discrimination is contrary to the Law of God and makes the offender a law breaker. One who has engaged in this sin has become guilty of all. This brings us to our next point. It is that such lawbreakers will be judged.

## THE PENALTY OF PARTIALITY

*So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12-13).*

Sin has a continuing effect. Its effect is seen both in this life as well as in the coming judgment. We are going to be judged. The basis of that judgment will be the law.

You might object, “I thought that we are no longer under the Mosaic Law.” You aren’t. But you are under the law of liberty. You are obligated, not to keep all of the ceremonies and the rituals of the old law, but to fulfill all of

the love of the new law. That law is characterized by mercy.

James warns that *judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy*. What is mercy? Mercy is the disposition to help the helpless. God has been merciful to us. When we could not help ourselves, He sent His Son to die for us. When we were dead in our sins, He made us alive.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).*

Our new birth in Christ was given in accordance with the great mercy of God. Now we are called to show that same mercy to others. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples of the necessity of forgiveness.

*For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:14-15).*

Jesus says that the only people who will be forgiven for their sins are those who forgive others. This raises a question. Does this mean a man who holds a grudge is not a Christian? I think that is exactly what it means. This helps to define what is a Christian. A Christian is someone who forgives those who sin against him. The Scriptures give quite a number of such descriptions.

- A Christian is one who is poor in spirit.
- A Christian is one who mourns over his sins.
- A Christian is one who is gentle.
- A Christian is one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness.
- A Christian is one who is merciful.

At this point, one might argue that we are saying that the Bible teaches we receive God's pardon, not as a result of what we do, but as a result of what Christ has done on our behalf. This is true. However, the pardon of God never comes without repentance. Repentance is a sign that you have been pardoned. In the same way, your forgiveness of others is a sign of your true repentance.

Christ did not come only to reconcile you with God. He also came to

reconcile you with your fellow man. This is why we call Him the Prince of peace.

As a result of His work of forgiveness and our response in forgiving others, we can conclude that *mercy triumphs over judgment* (2:13). When you show mercy toward others, it is the evidence that God's mercy has produced a change in your life. Guilty people make other people feel guilty. Forgiven people forgive.

# FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

James 2:14-26

*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Matthew 7:21).*

In the days when I was working for the Fire Department a man came into my office with a soft drink can that he had purchased from the soda machine outside. He had put his money into the machine and had made his selection and was awarded with this can.

As he showed it to me, it looked perfectly normal. The writing on the side of the can said that it contained Pepsi. The tab was still in place showing that it was as yet unopened. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the can. But when he handed it to me, I could tell by the weight that there was nothing in it. Instead of the swish of the liquid soft drink, I could feel that it was empty.

An empty soft drink can is no great tragedy, but I've often wondered how many folks who claim to be Christians are like that can. They have the right label. They go to church that they sing the hymns and they listen to a sermon. But they are really just empty cans with a colorful label. There is no life in them.

This is the problem with which James deals in this passage. It is the problem of inward emptiness. It is the problem of faith without works. He began this chapter dealing with the problem of discrimination and partiality within the church service. He pointed out that we who are believers in Christ ought not to hold that faith while committing the sin of discrimination.

He now takes that specific lesson and expands it into a general principle -- that faith ought to produce a visible reaction in the life of the believer.

## THE VALUE OF A NON-WORKING FAITH

*What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith,*

*but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14).*

A number of years ago, a television commercial for a fast food restaurant featured a little old lady returning to the counter holding her hamburger and asking a penetrating question: “Where’s the beef?” This chapter asks a similar question: “Where’s the works?”

James asks two questions in this verse. They are both rhetorical question. In each case, the answer is obvious.

1. The First Question: *What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? (2:14).*

The first question deals with the man who claims to have faith, but has no works in his light that accompany the attested faith. It is not that he is insincere in his faith. He might really believe. But there is nothing manifested in his life to show his belief. There has been no change in his life. He continues to have no works in his life -- the Greek text uses the present tense denoting continuous action: *What use is it, my brethren, if a man continually says he has faith, but he continually has no works?*

The question is asked: “What use is it?” The man was once an unbeliever and he lived his life in sin. He now claims to be a believer and he still lives his life in sin. There has been no change.

The answer to the question is very obvious. His faith is useless. It has produced no effect. This brings us to a second question. Can this kind of faith save a man?

2. The Second Question: *Can that faith save him? (2:14).*

Of what kind of faith are we speaking? It is the kind of faith that produces no change in the life of the one who believes. The answer to this question is very obvious. This faith cannot save anyone.

As a young Christian, I studied under an evangelist who taught that this question ought to be answered in the affirmative – that this kind of faith could save a man (A. R. Stanford, *Handbook of Personal Evangelism*, Pages 102-103). This book went on to be used at Dallas Theological Seminary.

But the construction of the Greek text begins with a negative μη (*me*), indicating that it expects a negative answer. This kind of faith that does not manifest itself in works cannot save anyone.

At this point, I can almost hear the objections begin to voice themselves: “What do you mean by saying that this man’s faith cannot save him! Doesn’t the Bible teach that you are saved through faith and apart from works?” Yes, the Bible is very clear in teaching that the only way a man can be saved is through faith in Jesus Christ.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*  
(Ephesians 2:8-9).

This is not merely Pauline theology. This is not Paul teaching one thing while James teaches a contrary doctrine. James himself has already set forth the truth that our salvation does not originate in anything that we do, but rather in what God Himself does for us.

*Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.* (James 1:17-18).

When James describes God as bringing us forth *in the exercise of His will*, he is describing salvation by grace that is totally apart from human merit.

Don’t miss this! The only way that anyone is ever saved is because God has determined to bestow that salvation as a free gift. That salvation is accompanied by faith. Yet not all who have faith are saved. James is going to give the example of the demons. They have faith. They believe in the power of God. And yet, they are not saved. Here is the principle. The only faith that brings salvation is the faith that also produces a changed life.

	Paul (Galatians 2:18)	James (James 2:24)
Problem	Legalism	Laxity
Works	Jewish Laws	Christian Lifestyle
Focus	Root of Salvation	Fruit of Salvation
Purpose	How to become a Christian	How to show I am a Christian

## AN EXAMPLE OF NON-WORKING FAITH

*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (James 2:15-17).*

James is a practical book. It is a book about shirt-sleeve Christianity. He quickly moves to a practical example of faith without works. It is seen in the context of a need.

The illustration sees one who is without food or clothing. It is not merely an imagined need, but a real one. The person claiming to have faith is confronted by this situation. His response is to give the needy person a verbal blessing while doing nothing to outwardly help. James presents this illustration as an obvious fallacy. But it is just as much of a fallacy to think that saving faith can exist without resulting in works.

As an aside, the specific illustration deals with one who is *a brother or sister* (2:15). Whether you take this as referring to a believer or whether you see this as Jews thinking of other fellow Jews, the point is that these are members of the covenantal family. I mention this, not to say that we should only help believers and ignore the rest of mankind, but rather that we are instructed to take special care of our own.

*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:10).*

How do you treat those of your own household? You treat them as family. I know that if my brother or sister showed up on my doorstep in need of a hamburger or a sweater, I would not turn him away.

1. A Pious Platitude: *One of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled”* (2:16).

The phrase “go in peace” was a common Hebrew blessing (Luke 7:50; 8:48). Even today it continues to be a common greeting among the Jews. It sounds so good. But what it really means in this context is, “Go away and leave me in peace.”

2. A Passive Proclamation: *One of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?* (2:16).

“How do you know if real faith exists? It is by seeing its effects. Imagine for a moment that you go outside and you hear the ‘whoosh’ of what sounds like wind. But you don’t see the wind. You look at the trees and their branches are not moving or swaying. Flags are not flapping. You look down and see a tape player and it is giving off the sound of wind. That isn’t wind.

“In the same way, you are not saved by the sound of faith. You are saved by real faith. And the way you know it is real faith is because it causes your life to sway.” -- T.J. Campo

The phrase “*be warmed and be filled*” can be translated either as a passive or as a middle voice in the Greek.

- As a middle voice, the force of the statement would be reflexive as this person is saying, “Go out and get a job and warm yourself and feed yourself.” This is the professed Christian who thinks that the church has no business in reaching out to the poor or the homeless until they get a job and help themselves.
- As a passive voice, this statement is saying, “Let someone else do this work of warming you and filling you.” This person realizes that someone ought to be helping the needy, but has decided that this is a good job for someone else to do.

It is striking that Jesus Himself used this same illustration to describe what would be the basis of the final judgment.

*Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”*

*Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?”*

*And the King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:34-40).*

This is not a salvation by works. But it is a judgment of works. Your works are described here as the manifestation of your faith. How you treat others is a sign of how you feel about Jesus.

3. A Prohibitive Prognosis: *Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself* (2:17).

James is not putting down faith. He is saying that real faith must be alive or else it is not real faith. Only real faith can save. Only real faith is alive. Only real faith matters.

There is a principle here. It is that inward spiritual reality without an outward manifestation is a counterfeit reality. If something is really going on in the inside, then there will be a resulting effect on the outside.

## ORTHODOXY VERSUS WORKING FAITH

*But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (James 2:18-20).*

At this point I feel as though I should pause and make a disclaimer. I am not saying that faith is not important. The Scriptures teach that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). But not all faith is God's faith.

1. A Comparison with Working Faith: *But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (2:18).*

The problem with faith is that it is invisible. I cannot look at you and see how much faith you have. I can only look at the effects of that faith upon your life. The kind of faith that you have will manifest it in how you live.

There is one kind of faith that results in a changed life. It is a supernatural faith. It is a faith that God Himself brings about in the life of one whom He has chosen. It is the faith that results when God draws a man to Himself. It is the faith that comes about when God enlightens the heart of a man who has formerly lived in darkness. It is the faith of one who has been born again.

But there is also another kind of faith. This second type of faith is that which brings about no change in the life of the one who has it. We have all known people who have this second type of faith. They proclaim, "I believe that God exists." They might even know about the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for sins. This is the kind of faith that the demons have.

2. A Comparison with Demonic Faith: *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (2:19).*

James began his epistle by addressing it to the twelve tribes of the Diaspora (James 1:1). He is speaking specifically to believing Jews. What is the cardinal doctrine of Judaism? It is that there is one God. Every Jew was familiar with the Shema, the truth that God is one.

*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (Deuteronomy 6:4).*

There is nothing wrong with believing this. In fact, I do not think that you can be a Christian without believing this. But merely believing that God exists and that He is One is not enough to save you.

Even Satan and his demons believe that God exists. They believe that Jesus died and paid for sins and that He arose again from the dead. What is the difference between their faith and the faith of a child of God? It is that there is no life in them. They believe certain facts, but there has never been a faith that leads to repentance and obedience.

There is a lesson here. It is that orthodoxy is no substitute for a faith that works. But that is not all. James does not merely tell us that the demons believe. He also tells us that they shudder. The Greek term here is the third person plural of φρίσσω (*phrisso*). This is the only time that this word is used in the New Testament. But it is used three times in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Job 4:15; Jeremiah 2:12; Daniel 7:15). Each time it is used to describe an emotional response.

Do you see the point? Even an emotional response to the message of the Bible is not enough to save you. It does not matter that you had a great feeling or shouted or kicked your heels or walked down an aisle or spoke in tongues. None of those things will save you because demons are able to do all of those things and they are still not saved because *faith without works is useless* (2:20).

3. A Conclusion about Non-Working Faith: *But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?* (2:20).

There is one of those textual questions here in this passage that sometimes arises in our study of the New Testament. There are some manuscripts from the Byzantine family that say faith without works is dead (νεκρός – *nekros*). Older manuscripts, including those from which the New American Standard Version were translated, have a slightly different reading when they say faith without works is useless (ἀργός – *argos*). I tend to think this latter reading is the correct one and that the scribes who copied the text were merely repeating the earlier refrain found in verse 17 and later in verse 26 that faith without works is dead.

If that is the case, then what we have here is a play on words. It is seen in the fact that the description of a faith without works (χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων) is said to be useless (ἀργή). This term translated “useless” is the same word renders “works” except that it is singular and it has the alpha privative as a prefix. That means we could literally render this phrase *faith without works is non-working*.

This is stating the obvious, but that is the very point James is making. It is also the reason he refers to his imaginary opponent as, “You foolish fellow.” He addresses his foolish opponent with an obvious truism: A faith without works doesn’t work.

## EXAMPLES OF WORKING FAITH

*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.*

*And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:21-26).*

James has already given illustrations of non-working faith. It was seen in the examples of the one who says, “Be warmed and filled.” And it was seen in the example of the demons. Now James moves to examples of working faith. He does that by focusing upon two Old Testament heros. These two people could not be more different.

Abraham	Rahab
A man	A woman
Considered to be the father of the Jews	A Canaanite from Jericho

A holy man	A prostitute
He was prepared to sacrifice his only son	She risked her life by protecting Israelite spies

You could not find two people who were more different. And yet, they both exhibited a faith that worked.

### 1. Abraham our Father.

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. As such, he was the physical ancestor of those to whom James is addressing in this epistle. But that is not all. There is a sense in which he is the spiritual father of all who believe. He is my spiritual father and yours.

James tells us that Abraham was justified by works. When did this happen? It happened when he obeyed the commandment of the Lord to sacrifice his only son upon an altar.

James assumes that his readers are familiar with the story. It is told in Genesis 22. God comes to Abraham and instructs him to take his son to a far-away mountain and put him to death. Abraham does not question or debate. He simply obeys. He takes his son to the mountain. They climb to the top. They build an altar, Abraham ties his son and places him upon the altar and is about to cut his throat when the Lord stops him and orders him to release his son and sacrifice a ram in the place of his son.

Abraham's obedience was a fulfillment of the Scriptures that "*Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*" (2:23). This is a direct quotation from Genesis 15:6.

Now I want you to notice something. The belief of Abraham of which James speaks took place at least 25 years before the incident of the sacrifice. Abraham had believed the promise of God. That belief was manifested in an act of complete obedience 25 years later. That act of obedience *perfected* (the Greek word could be translated "completed") that faith that had begun so many years before. This means that there were two different points of justification in the life of Abraham.

Abraham's First Justification	Abraham's Second Justification
Took place when Abraham was about 86 years old.	Took place when Abraham was over 110 years old.
<i>Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness</i>	<i>Was not our Father Abraham justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar?</i>
Abraham was justified before God.	Abraham's justification was completed.

It is true that Abraham was declared to be righteous by God through his faith. But it is also true that his faith was manifested in his obedience and he was seen by all to be righteous in that perfect obedience.

## 2. Rahab the Harlot.

The second illustration that James uses is of a pagan prostitute named Rahab. Her story is found in Joshua 2. When Joshua was about to invade the land of Canaan, he sent out two spies. They came to Jericho and found their way into the house of Rahab, located on the wall of the city.

When the king of Jericho heard that Israelites had entered his city, he put out an APB on them and ordered their immediate arrest. When they came to search the house of Rahab, she lied and told the searchers that the two men had already left the city. When the searchers had gone, she went to the two spies whom she had helped and explained her reasons for helping.

*Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 9 and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you*

*utterly destroyed. 11 And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for THE LORD YOUR GOD, HE IS GOD in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Joshua 2:8-11).*

Everyone in Jericho had heard the news of what God had done and had become afraid. But the fear of this one woman turned to faith. It caused her to seek the Lord. And her faith was put into action in hiding and protecting these spies. How do I know that Rahab believed? It is because her actions bear testimony to her belief.

That is not the end of Rahab's story. She did not remain a prostitute. Instead she went on to marry Salmon, a Jew from the tribe of Judah. One of her descendants was Boaz, the grandfather of David. If you look at the genealogy of Jesus, you will see the name of a former Canaanite prostitute included.

I don't know about you, but I'm glad that James included Rahab in his illustration. He is teaching us something. He is telling us that God does not only use stained-glass saints. He uses wretched and vile sinners. He can use me. And He can use you.

3. Illustration of a Corpse: *For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead (2:26).*

This last illustration is of a corpse. The element that makes it a corpse is the absence of a living spirit within. In the same way, faith that is not accompanied by corresponding works is dead.

How do you make it alive? Do you go out and start doing a lot of works and hope that life will come? No. That would be like digging up a corpse in a graveyard and giving him a job at the grocery store in hopes that would bring him back to life. There is only One who can raise the dead. There is only One who can bring spiritual life. You go to Him and He will give you life.

# TEMPERING THE TONGUE

or

## How to Muzzle Your Mouth

James 3:1-18

*You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. (Matthew 7:16-17).*

I have an avocado tree in my back yard. I do not say that to show off my extensive knowledge of botany. To tell you the truth, I would not know that it is an avocado tree except for one thing – I have picked avocados from the tree and I know that you can only pick avocados from avocado trees.

The message of the epistle of James is that you can only pick the fruit of the Spirit from one who is filled with the Spirit. To put it another way, internal reality will always be evidenced by an external manifestation of that reality. If there is no external manifestation, it is because there is no inward reality.

James has been speaking of the importance of being a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer – of manifesting the truths of God in your life. To illustrate this lesson, he turned to the problem of partiality in the church and this brought up a principle – that while you are saved by faith alone, you are not saved by faith that remains alone. Faith is shown to be real faith when it is manifested outwardly by works. A faith without works is worthless.

Now James moves to something else that is worthless – a religion that does not restrict the tongue. There is an interesting contrast between this section and the previous paragraph.

James 2	James 3
Faith without works.	Faith without words.

Faith is perfected by works (2:22).	The one who does not stumble in what he says is a perfect man (3:2).
Illustrated by the problem of partiality within the church (2:2-4).	Illustrated by one who blesses God while cursing men (3:9-10).

In each case, James calls for an external response to the inward reality. It is not that Christianity is only concerned with the external, but when there is an inward reality, it will always be externally expressed.

## THE TONGUE BRINGS STRICTER JUDGMENT

*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1).*

There is a warning here for those who would teach the Word of God. It is not just that you might teach something that is wrong, although that is also a danger. It is that you might live wrongly.

1. This is a Warning for Teachers: *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren (3:1).*

Notice what James calls his readers. He calls them, “My brethren.” This refers to more than merely their standing as Christians. They are also his national brothers. James is writing this letter to the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel that are scattered throughout the world.

As the gospel came to the cities throughout the Roman Empire, both Jews as well as Gentiles came to believe in Christ. For the first time, Jews and Gentiles were intermixed in a single church.

When teachers and leaders began to rise up within these racially mixed churches, it was only natural that they should come from among the Jewish Christians. After all, they had been raised in the Scriptures. They were already familiar with the Old Testament.

They had not come from a background of worshiping idols. James now warns these Jewish Christians that they ought to think twice before taking the position of a teacher within the church.

2. This is a Warning of Stricter Judgment: *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment (3:1).*

The reason that you should take care before taking up the mantle of a teacher is because teachers incur a higher responsibility.

James has already warned *that judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy* (2:13). Jesus said it this way: *For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you* (Matthew 7:2).

A teacher is one who judges. He points to a certain type of activity and he says, “That is right” or “That is wrong.” By teaching others of such a judgment, he guarantees that he shall be judged by that same judgment.

Those who would teach in the church are taking on a great responsibility. There is a principle here. It is that great influence demands great responsibility.

If a bum declares war on China it doesn’t mean too much. But if the President of the United States does the same thing it becomes a lot more meaningful. This is why leadership demands responsibility.

## THE TONGUE HAS GREAT POWER

*For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.*

*Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of*

*great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (James 3:2-5).*

Teachers are more apt to stumble because their area of ministry involves the use of the tongue and the tongue is an effective tool for stumbling.

This is important. God doesn't judge teachers by how big their ministries are or how large the building is in which they meet. Teachers are judged by what they say.

*For we all stumble in many ways (3:2).*

Hearing what James has said about teachers, you might be inclined to think that, as long as you refrain from teaching, you will be okay. This is not true. Everyone has their own areas of weakness and stumbling. It has been said that life is filled with banana peels and there are some out there with your name on them. One of the most common areas of weakness is in the area of our speech. If you can control what you say, then you can also learn to control what you do.

*If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well (3:2).*

James has already described how the faith of Abraham was “perfected” (or completed) by his act of offering Isaac upon the altar (2:22). Now he shows how we can experience a similar “perfection” or completion. It is by not stumbling in what we say.

James uses the present tense as he describes this status of “not stumbling.” This is significant. He is not necessarily saying that the Christian will reach a plateau in which he never stumbles. Rather he is speaking about a habit of life. The mature Christian is one who is not continually stumbling over his tongue. He does not have a “foot-shaped mouth.”

Why is it so important to control the tongue? After all, aren't deeds more important than words? Not necessarily. Words often lead to deeds. James illustrates this in two ways:

1. The Illustration of a Horse: *Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their*

*entire body as well (3:3).*

When I was a lot younger, our family used to vacation on my grandfather's farm in the Ozarks. He and my aunts had several horses and we used to ride them upon occasion.

Once I tried to ride a horse without the use of a bridle. I jumped onto his back and away he went. That was the first and only time I ever tried that. I found that I had absolutely no say in the matter as to where we were going. The horse immediately headed toward a tree with a low, overhanging branch. I ended up in the branch instead of on the horse. That horse would have never been able to accomplish that maneuver if it had a bit and bridle. I would have been the one in control.

Here is the point. In the same way that a bridle controls a horse, so also the tongue controls the body. You would not think that a little piece of leather and metal would be able to control such a large animal as a horse. And you would not think that a little part of your body inside your mouth would be able to get the rest of your body into so much trouble. But it does.

2. Illustration of a Ship: *Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires (3:4).*

The second illustration is of a ship. A ship is a very ponderous affair. It is so big that it would seem impossible to maneuver. And yet, one man is able to steer a huge ocean liner without even breaking a sweat.

How can this be? It is because a huge ship is directed by a relatively tiny machine called a rudder. If James were writing today, he might have said, "Behold, the 747, a huge plane that is controlled by a single lever. In the same way, your body is directed by an organ that weighs only a few ounces – the tongue.

*Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (3:5).*

Most forest fires begin with a single match. Thousands of trees are destroyed by the spark of a single tiny splinter of wood. In the same way, a single careless word can cause enormous damage. You've heard someone say, "I don't hold my feelings in. I just explode and then it's over with." The same can be said of a nuclear bomb and the result is about as devastating. It is like the little rhyme that says:

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
But words will flat destroy me.*

Yet the warning of James does not refer only to words spoken in anger. There is a proverb that speaks of the danger of words spoken in jest, of idle gossip and of the contentious man.

*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death,  
So is the man who deceives his neighbor,  
And says, "Was I not joking?"  
For lack of wood the fire goes out,  
And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.  
Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,  
So is a contentious man to kindle strife. (Proverbs 26:18-21).*

The proverb describes three different types of men in this passage and they are all bad.

- First there is the practical joker. He tells a lie and causes discomfort and embarrassment and then says, "It's okey because I was only joking."
- Next is the whisperer. His continued back-biting seems to add fuel to the fire and he will never let anything die down.
- Finally is the contentious man. He seems to revel in an argument.

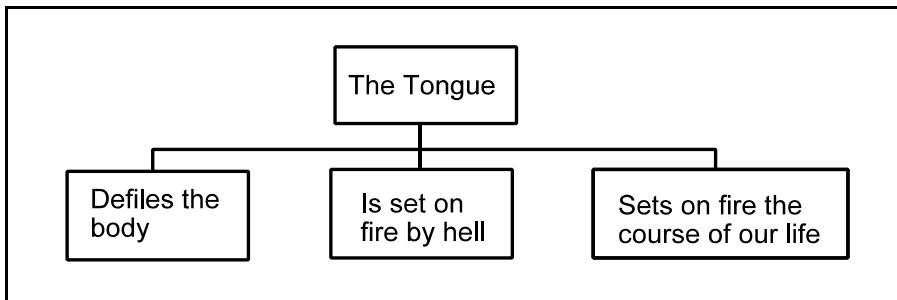
The three of these men are very different from one another, but they all have one thing in common. It is their misuse of the tongue.

## THE TONGUE BRINGS A DEFILING DANGER

*And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.*

*For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. (James 3:6-8).*

Having shown the power of the tongue as illustrated and compared to a horse's bridle and a ship's rudder, James now moves to his next point – that the tongue is uncontrollable. This is seen in three areas:



The tongue is not bad in itself. It was created by God and is a wonderful thing. The source of the fire described in this passage does not come from the tongue, but from the powers of hell. It is not that the tongue is inherently sinful. It is that it has such a powerful potential. It can do great good. And it can do great evil.

When the tongue is set on fire by hell (that is, when it is used in a sinful way), there are two results.

### 1. It Defiles the Entire Body.

Jesus Himself said that it is not that which goes into a man, but that which comes out of a man that defiles him (Matthew 15:11).

The point is that you are what you say. The words that you utter are indicative of what you are like on the inside.

2. It sets on Fire the Course of your Life.

Your words have a dramatic effect on the course of your life. Many years ago, a preacher asked me, “Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?” I only said two words: “I do.” My life hasn’t been the same since.

James goes on to say that *the tongue...is set on fire by hell* (3:6). The word here translated “hell” is not the normal Greek word for hell. This is the word *Gehenna*. It is not really a Greek word at all. Instead it is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *Ge-honom* – “Valley of Hinnom.” It was originally called “The Valley of the sons of Hinnom.”

The Valley of Hinnom lay outside the southwest walls of Jerusalem. During the days of Ahaz and Manasseh in the dark days of Judah’s history, human sacrifices were offered there to the pagan god Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). When Jeremiah was warning Judah of the coming judgment of God against the nation, he said that the Lord would turn the Valley of Hinnom into a valley of slaughter.

*“For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,” declares the LORD, “they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. 31 And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.*

*“Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. 33 And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away.” (Jeremiah 7:30-33).*

When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. there were so many killed that the bodies were dumped into the Valley of Hinnom. In later years, this valley came to be the dumping ground for the refuse of Jerusalem as well as for the bodies of criminals. Fires were kept burning constantly to destroy the rubbish and the filth. It became a place of defilement and continual fire. Because of this, the Valley of Hinnom came to be regarded as a picture of the

final punishment of the unrighteous.

When James uses the word *Gehenna*, it refers to all of the filth and the stench of sin that will one day be punished in the Day of Judgment. Jesus said that on that day we will have to give an accounting of all of the words that we have ever said.

*Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.*

*You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*

*And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned. (Matthew 12:33-37).*

Jesus said that the reality of what you are comes from the heart. If the heart is good, then it will bear good fruit that will be manifested in good words. The truth of the heart will be manifested in what you do and in what you say.

There is a danger here. It is that you begin to concentrate all of your efforts on cleaning up the outside. But God isn't worried about only cleaning up the externals. He doesn't say, "I want you to be a Christian so we are going to get rid of that habit over there and remove this item over here and then you will be okey." Instead He changes your heart. And if the heart is changed, then after a while the other things begin to change, too.

Being a Christian isn't primarily what you do as much as it is what you are. The corollary to that principles is that what you are will manifest itself in what you do.

Here is the point. You cannot tame the tongue because the tongue merely reflects that which is on the inside. Only God can tame the tongue and He does that by working from the inside out. You go to the Lord and ask Him to change you from the inside out and He will.

## THE TONGUE IS TO BE USED CONSISTENTLY

*With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.*

*Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh. (James 3:9-12).*

When you come to church and sing praises to the Lord and pray to Him, you are using your tongue to bless His name. And when you leave and get into your car and are driving on the highway and someone cuts you off, you find another use for your tongue. The point is that the two uses are inconsistent with one another.

There is a principle here. It is the principle of sanctification. When you came to Christ in faith, believing in Him as your Lord and Savior, something extraordinary happened to you. You entered into a process known as sanctification. It means that you began to be set apart from the world and dedicated to the Lord for His special purpose. Your hands are no longer just your hands. They are also His hands. Your tongue is no longer just your tongue. It is now His tongue. Here is the point. It is inappropriate for a tongue that has been dedicated to the worship of the Lord to be used in the cursing of the Lord's creation.

Imagine driving by your church next Friday evening and you see a great crowd gathered. Wondering what is going on and thinking that you might have slept through the announcements last Sunday, you stop and go inside. There you see that a disc jockey is announcing that mud wrestling will be held in front of the pulpit. What would be your reaction? I hope that you would think it is completely inappropriate. If there is a place for mud wrestling (and I'm not saying that there is), it certainly is not in the place that has been dedicated to the worship of the Lord.

If you are a Christian, then your tongue has been dedicated to the worship of the Lord. To use it for any purpose that does not honor Him is inconsistent. Here is the lesson. When both good and evil come out of the same mouth,

one is a lie.

## THE TONGUE IS TO BE USED WISELY

*Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*  
(James 3:13-18).

James turns to the subject of wisdom. Most commentaries seem to think that he has finished talking about the problem of the tongue and has turned to a new subject. I disagree.

The last three chapters have been speaking of wisdom.

- James called his readers to ask God for wisdom (1:5).
- He called for them to be doers of the word and not hearers only (1:22-24). In doing so, he was defining what wisdom is.
- He then went on to illustrate that kind of wise living in the example of the showing of partiality and more recently in the example of how you use your tongue.

We tend to think of wisdom in terms of what you know. James defines wisdom in terms of what you do as a result of what you are.

1. Wisdom is Shown by what you Do: *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom* (3:13).

It is not that good behavior makes you wise. It is that wisdom is manifested by good behavior.

You will remember that this chapter began with a warning to those who would be teachers. They thought themselves to have wisdom and understanding that they could communicate with others. But the test of a teacher is not only in what he says. It is also in what he does. There is a reason for this. It is because you teach just as much by what you do as by what you say.

Parents know this. One of the things that can really annoy me about my daughter is when she acts the way I do. I didn't tell her to do that. I didn't have to. She learned by watching me.

On the other hand, one of the things that can really please me about my daughter and make me proud of her is when she acts the way I do. She has learned a lot from the things that I have said to her; but she had learned a lot more from watching how I live.

That is why discipleship involves so much more than teaching in a classroom or preaching from a pulpit. You cannot disciple someone unless you give them the opportunity to see how you live.

2. Wisdom in Contrasted with the Way of the World: *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth (3:14).*

There is another type of wisdom that is not gentle or manifested by good behavior. This other type of wisdom is arrogant and proud. It is ambitious. It seeks to glorify itself. It is jealous when others outshine it. This other wisdom is not from God.

<b>Wisdom from Below</b>	<b>Wisdom from Above</b>
Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition	Good deeds manifest the gentleness of wisdom
Arrogant	Humble (1:21)
Lies against the truth	A hearer and a doer of the Word (1:22-25)

Earthly, natural and demonic: The world, the flesh and the devil	Pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy
Disorder and every evil thing	Fruit of righteousness is sown in peace
Earthly	Heavenly
Natural wisdom – the Greek term can be translated “soulish” – we would call it “humanistic”	Supernatural wisdom coming down from the Father of Lights.

3. A Wisdom that we Share with Others: *And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace* (3:18).

The Greek text literally reads: *The fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace by those who make peace.* We usually think in terms of growing seeds, not sowing fruit.

These elements of a fruit and of peace are borrowed from the previous verse. The wisdom that is from above is characterized, among other things, by peaceableness and by good fruits.

Apparently the translators of the New American Standard Version thought this way, too. But I think that there is a reason James said it the way he did. He points to the continuing nature of the fruit.

When you partake of the fruit of righteousness, the result is not only that you share in that righteousness, but also that you spread it around to others. What is this “fruit of righteousness”? It is embodied in the wisdom that comes from above. James makes mention in verse 17 of the “good fruits” that characterize this wisdom.

# QUARRELS AND CONFLICTS

## Sources & Solutions

### James 4:1-12

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9).*

There is a painting in an art museum in Europe. It pictures a dark, storm tossed seascape. There are great, roaring waves crashing on a ragged and rocky shore. Lightening splits the sky, tearing holes in the night. The title of the painting is Peace. Most people think it is horribly misnamed and walk away scratching their heads. But they fail to notice something; in the bottom right corner, nestled in a hollow of one of the rocks on the shore is a small bird. It is safe, warm, and secure in the cleft of the rock. Our world is in turmoil. It seems the storms of life are crashing on many of our heads. Yet we can be safe and secure in the peace of the Prince of peace, the Rock of our salvation, Jesus.

The last verse of chapter 3 ended on a note of peace: *And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:18).* Who are those who make peace? It is the church!. It is to be in us.

Here is our opening premise. The only place where conflicts ought not to occur is within the church. That is because the church is a body. It is a single organism. For the church to fight against itself is like having my hands rebel against my fight. And yet it is exactly such a condition that James describes in this chapter.

## THE PROBLEM DEFINED

*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*

*You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 3:1-6).*

Notice how James opens this section. It is with a question. It is a question as to the *source of quarrels and conflicts among you*. The fact that he asks this question assumes that there are conflicts within the church.

Let me make this clear. There are conflicts within the church. If you haven't seen any conflicts within the church, then you haven't spent much time within the church.

From where do these conflicts come? If we are all one body and we all have the same Spirit and we all serve the same Lord, then why do we fight? James lists several reasons.

1. Conflicts come from the Quest for Pleasure: *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? (4:1).*

The Greek word translated “pleasure” is *ἡδονων* (*hedonon*) – it is from this word that we derive our term “Hedonism.” In Greek thought, this described the system which sought to gratify the flesh.

It is similar to our word “amuse.” To muse is to think. The letter “a” before a word negates it. Therefore an amusement park is by definition a place where you go to experience the absence of thought.

Pleasure in and of itself is not bad. It is only bad when it becomes an overriding priority. Such pleasures can easily get out of hand so that they declare open war on our souls. James says that these pleasures

*wage war in your members.* There is a war going on. The battleground is inside you. And to make matters worse, it does not stay inside you. It spills out of you and it results in outward conflicts.

What is the opposite of making your pleasure a priority? It is in making the needs of others a priority. It is in the humility of mind in which you *do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others* (Philippians 2:4). It is that outlook wherein you *regard one another as more important than yourself* (Philippians 2:3).

2. Conflicts come from Wanting what you Cannot Have: *You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.* (4:2).

It is not that these Christians were actually committing literal murder. But Jesus said that if you hate your brother and refuse to forgive him, you have committed murder within your heart. Why do you do that? One reason is because you don't have the things that you want. James gives two reasons why this is the case:

- a. *You do not have because you do not ask* (4:2).

Often the issue is not that we pray poorly, but that we do not pray at all. We treat prayer as a last resort. It is like the sign on the parachute harness: "First pull the primary cord: if that doesn't work, pull the secondary cord; if that doesn't work, pray."

I am convinced that if we really believed in the power of prayer, we would pray a lot more.

- b. You ask with the wrong motives: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures* (4:3).

When we do pray, we don't do a very good job of it. We pray selfishly. We ask for what we want. We ought to be praying for what God wants. Instead of praying, "Lord, change my circumstances," I've learned to pray, "Lord, change me!"

There is a lesson here. It is that God does not answer prayers that are only designed to fulfill our pleasures. He acts in accordance with His own pleasure. That is the way He wants us to pray. He wants us to pray according to His pleasure. When we begin praying the way we ought to pray, then we will find our prayers being answered.

There is a challenge here. It is a challenge to check out your desires. God promises to grant all proper desires. It could well be that the reason God has not answered your prayers is because of His mercy toward you.

3. Conflicts come from Taking the Wrong Side: *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (4:4).*

Why does James use the word “adulteresses” to describe his readers? It is because adultery is the breaking of the marital vow. It involves unfaithfulness to that vow. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was viewed as having been bound to the Lord through a marriage vow.

*For your husband is your Maker,  
Whose name is the LORD of hosts;  
And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,  
Who is called the God of all the earth. (Isaiah 54:5).*

This same figure is seen of the church in the New Testament. You have been betrothed to Jesus. You are to be His bride. The marriage ceremony hasn't taken place yet. It awaits the return of the Groom at the Second Coming of Christ. In the meanwhile, you are called to be a faithful bride.

Can I tell you something about my wife? She is on my side. And I am on her side. That is how it is supposed to be. And it is how it is supposed to be with the Lord.

*For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. 3 But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his*

*craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).*

Those words are echoed here in James: *Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?* (4:5). While the New International Version has rendered this with a small “s” as it refers to the spirit God has given, the context favors the rendering by the New American Standard as it refers to the Holy Spirit. It is God’s own Spirit that He wishes to see manifested in your life.

Verse 5 seems to cite the Scriptures as being the source of this teaching. The problem is that we do not know any place where the rest of verse 5 is found in either the Old Testament or even in any other Jewish writings. On the other hand, verse 6 is echoed in Proverbs 3:34 which says: *“Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted.”* Thus it could be that we are not meant to understand the quote as coming until this point.

Another alternative is that it could be a paraphrase from the Septuagint translation of Genesis 6:3.

Don’t be led astray! Don’t be seduced! When your desires move you away from God and turn you toward the world, you are being unfaithful in your relationship with Him. It is a form of spiritual adultery.

*Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).*

You must make a decision. It is a daily decision. You cannot be married to the Lord and continue to date the devil.

There is a war going on. It is a spiritual war and you have been called to take sides. You cannot remain neutral in this war. You are either actively working for the Lord or else you are actively working for the world. The question is which side you are on.

4. Conflicts come from a Lack of Humility: *But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* (4:6).

Somewhere along the line we picked up the idea that God blesses the person that seems the closest to perfection, the one who does the most for God and who has studied the most theology and who knows the most doctrine. It simply is not true. We saw in the last chapter that those who are teachers of the Word, rather than being more blessed, are held to a higher standard of judgment. Those who teach are that much more vulnerable to pride and God is opposed to the proud. Instead He blesses the humble.

James is not teaching anything new when he says that God blesses the humble. It is a message that flows throughout the Scriptures.

*For though the LORD is exalted,  
Yet He regards the lowly;  
But the haughty He knows from afar. (Psalm 138:6).*

*Though He scoffs at the scoffers,  
Yet He gives grace to the afflicted (Proverbs 3:34).*

*For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15).*

God does not bless the proud. He blesses the one who comes admitting his own need. He blesses the humble. It is this lack of humility that is one of the causative factors for conflict within the church today. As we each elevate ourselves within our own minds, we become like little gods, each wanting to be worshiped.

## THE SOLUTION SUPPLIED FROM GOD

*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts,*

*you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. (James 4:7-10).*

The solution that James gives to the problem of quarrels and conflicts is given in the form of ten commands. They are given in rapid-fire succession. They are ten imperatives given with military-like precision.

- Submit therefore to God (4:7).
- Resist the devil (4:7).
- Draw near to God (4:8).
- Cleanse your hands (4:8).
- Purify your hearts (4:8).
- Be miserable (4:9).
- Mourn (4:9).
- Weep (4:9).
- Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom (4:9).
- Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord (4:10).

Each of these commands is given in the aorist tense. The aorist is a tense peculiar to Greek that views the action of the verb as punctiliar – point action. When it is used with a command, the aorist indicates an action that is called to begin.

James is saying, “I want you to start to do each of these things!” They are a call to move away from the double-mindedness that was described back in chapter one and to return to the Lord. They are a call for repentance. They are the solution to the problem that James presented in the first six verses of this chapter.

<b>The Problem (4:1-6)</b>	<b>The Solution (4:8-10)</b>
Quarrels and conflicts from focusing on your pleasures (4:1).	Submit therefore to God, resist the devil, draw near to God (4:8).
Spiritual murder (4:2).	Cleanse your hands (4:8).
Problems in prayer (4:3).	Purify your hearts (4:8).

Spiritual adultery (4:4-5).	Be miserable, mourn and weep (4:9).
God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (4:6).	Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord (4:10).

Repentance isn't very popular these days. Our post-modern generation doesn't like the idea that we have anything from which to repent. We would rather hold onto our dignity and our pride and approach God as an equal. It is a problem of pride. And that is where James begins.

1. *Submit therefore to God (4:7).*

Submission speaks of recognizing that we are under the authority of God. We are already there, whether we recognize it or not. But we are called to submit ourselves willingly to that authority. That is what a Christian is. He is one who has recognized Jesus Christ as Lord and who has accepted Him as his master.

You will find that you always submit to something. The opposite of submitting to God is not freedom, but merely a submission to a different master. If you are not submitting to God, then you are submitting to Satan. That brings us to the next point.

2. *Resist the devil and he will flee from you (4:7).*

How do you resist the devil? You do it by submitting to God. You do it by letting go of your pride and by taking a spirit of humility. When you are proud, you are following in Satan's footsteps. He is the prince of pride.

I hear a lot of people claiming this promise that if you resist the devil, he will flee from you. But that only takes place as you have made the first part of this verse operational. It will only take place as you have first submitted to God.

Do you recall Disney's movie, "The Lion King?" There is a scene in the movie where the little lion cub is being threatened by several large, hungry hyenas who are going to eat him for lunch. He makes a little baby cub growl of resistance and they merely laugh their hyena laugh and continue their advance. But suddenly they stop and

their eyes grow wide and they slink away. What changed? They have realized that the Father is standing behind his cub and he is big and he is strong and he is not to be trifled with.

Our resistance to the devil is like that. It is the Lord who has defeated Satan. He defeated Satan when He went to the cross and died for our sins and then rose from the dead. He conquered sin and death and then He arose from the dead with a roar.

Satan is a defeated enemy. But he is only defeated when you are with the One who is Satan's Conqueror. It is only when the Lion of the Tribe of Judah stands behind you that you are able to resist the devil and have him flee from you. It is for this reason that James tells you to draw near to God.

3. *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (4:8).*

Do you see the movement? The Christian life is not static. You are always moving. Either you are moving toward God or you are moving away from Him.

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? The younger son had taken his inheritance and had left his home and his father. He moved out into the world and lost it all. In sorrow over his lost condition, he decided to return home and to throw himself on his father's mercy. He planned how he would come and knock at the father's door and plead with a position as a servant.

But it didn't happen that way. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and ran out to meet him. That is what the Lord does with us. You draw near to God and He will draw near to you. It has been said that if you feel as though you aren't as close to God as you used to be, it wasn't He who moved. Yet if you come back to God, you find that it was He who initiated it.

I am rather fond of the way Steve Brown puts it: You take the first step. The Lord will take the second step. When you get to the third step, you will find that it was the Lord who took the first step.

4. *Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (4:8)*

Cleansings and purifyings were familiar themes to the recipients of this epistle. This epistle was written to the Jews -- to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. Their religious background was full of ritual cleansings and ritual purifyings. But James is speaking about more than mere ritualism. There is both an inward and an outward aspect to this command.

Outward Action	Inward Attitude
Cleanse your hand	Purify your hearts
You sinners	You double-minded

“*Sinners*” focuses on the outward sins that are committed. “*Double-minded*” (the Greek text reads “double-souled”) looks to the attitude of the heart. Our repentance is to be both inward and outward.

5. *Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom (4:9).*

This is the language of repentance. When I was a lot younger, I was taught that repentance has nothing to do with a sorrowful emotion. It was presented as though you only needed to make a mental adjustment in your thinking regarding Christ. But this is not Biblical repentance. The repentance that the Bible describes affects the entire man – body, emotions and mind.

Jesus said that those who mourn are blessed (Matthew 5:4). This is not just mourning over the general hardships of life. It is not mourning over a flat tire or a stubbed toe or even over a personal tragedy like the loss of a loved one. Repentance involves a mourning over your own spiritual condition. It is seeing your sinful state the way that God sees it and hating your sin and being sorry for it with a genuine sorrow. Jesus said that if you mourn in such a way, you will be blessed by being comforted.

You will find that God is able to justify the unrighteous.

6. *Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you (4:10).*

If you have not been humble in the presence of the Lord, then you have not been in the presence of the Lord.

This command is given with a passive voice. Instead of humbling yourself, you are to “be humbled.” How can you “be humbled?” You do it by seeing yourself as you really are and by seeing God as He really is and by realizing that there is no comparison. Such a paradigm shift does not come easily. We are trained from infancy to put ourselves first. John Ortburg is correct when he says that such humility “involves a Copernican revolution of the soul, the realization that the universe does not revolve around us” (2002:112). The world says, “Toot your own horn because no one else will.” The Scripture says, “Don’t toot your own horn because you have nothing about which to toot, but the Lord will do it for you because He is worthy and He has reckoned His worthiness to you.”

This verse is a contrast in opposites. The opposite of humility is exaltation. You bring yourself down in humility and the Lord will lift you up in exaltation. That is what salvation is all about.

The message of Christianity is that we have failed to measure up to God’s demands. And so, God sent His only Son to die in our place and to take upon Himself the penalty we deserved. Anyone who humbles himself and who trusts in Jesus, recognizing his spiritual poverty, repenting of his pride and accepting by faith the eternal life that is given by God as a free gift will be brought from death to life.

## THE SOLUTION APPLIED TOWARD MEN

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*  
(James 4:11-12).

Up to this point, we’ve been speaking of the problem of quarrels and conflicts and the solution to that problem. But we don’t want to leave that solution as mere theory. James takes the principles that he has stated and applies them to the problems in the church. We need to do the same.

Verses 7-10	Verses 11-12
Looks at the believer's relationship with God	Looks at the believer's relationship with other men
Commands given in the aorist tense	Command given in the present tense

James began this chapter by asking about the quarrels and conflicts within the church. He now returns to that issue.

*Do not speak against one another, brethren (4:11).*

In verses 7-10 we saw ten commands being given in the aorist tense. The force of that tense was that you begin to do these things. Now there is a change. The command here is given in the present tense. Furthermore it is a negative command.

In the Greek language, when a negative command is given in the present tense, it carries the force of, “STOP doing that!” When James is saying, “Stop speaking against one another,” he seems to be suggesting that they had previously been guilty of this activity. We are not to speak against one another; rather we are to use our words to build up one another.

Words matter. There is an old saying that goes, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” It simply is not true. Words can destroy and words can heal. In the previous chapter, we were reminded of the great and awesome power of the tongue. That warning echoes in this matter of speaking against one another.

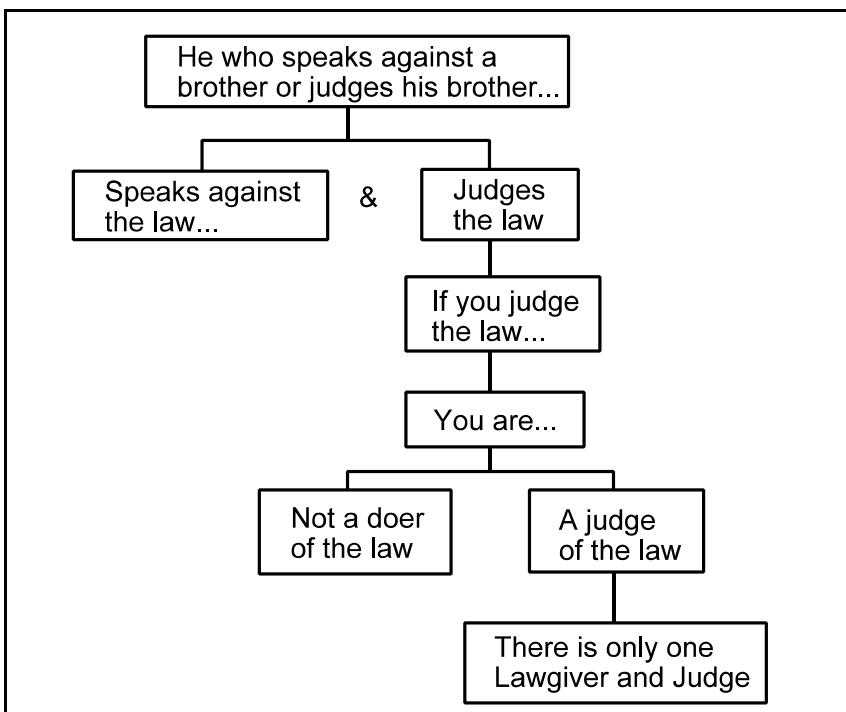
*He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it (4:11).*

The word “law” appears four times in this verse. Some commentators have noted the absence of the definite article and have concluded that this is not a reference to the Mosaic Law but is rather merely the Royal Law that was spoken of in chapter 2. But such a suggestion ignores the identity of the recipients of this epistle. They were Jews. When you spoke of Law to a Jew, he thought in terms of

Torah. This is not a denial of the relevance of the Royal Law of chapter 2. It is an either/or question. The Royal Law is merely the New Covenant ramifications of the Law. It is what the Law was all about.

Note the flow of James' argument. A person who speaks against his brother is not showing the kind of love demanded by the law and is therefore making himself a judge of that law. If you try to judge the law, you are in effect trying to do something that only God can do, for he is the only Lawgiver and Judge and you are taking for yourself a prerogative that rightly belongs to Him.

The following chart captures this flow of thought as it moves from the one who judges to the One who is the ultimate Judge of all:



It is one thing to set yourself up against another person. It is quite another thing to set yourself up against the One who holds your eternal destiny in His hands. He is the ultimate Judge and we must take care that we not take upon ourselves that which is His own prerogative.

*But who are you who judge your neighbor? (4:12).*

God is able to judge your neighbor, for He is the Judge and Lawgiver. But you are not God and you do not have that prerogative. You are neither qualified nor capable to carry out such a judgment.

Jesus once told a story of a man who was in debt to the king. He worked and saved up and he tried to pay off his debt, but it was no use. The more he tried, the deeper he fell. Finally he was forced to sell himself into slavery.

As a slave, he was called before his king to stand trial on his delinquent debt. In a show of tremendous grace, the king completely forgave the slave his debt and then even went on to purchase him out of his slavery and set him free. The freed slave was speechless. He pledged his devotion to his king and then, after thanking him, started home.

On his way home, the freed slave happened upon another of the king's slaves who owed him several dollars. He demanded the slave repay him at once. When the slave explained that he had no money and this time, the freedman became angry and beat him.

News of the incident reached the palace and the king called for the man who had been freed. He came before the throne and the king called for an accounting.

*Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:32-33).*

The man was speechless before his king. You will be, too, if you do not forgive others in the same way you have been forgiven.

# PITFALLS IN PLANNING FOR PERMANENCE

James 4:13 - 5:9

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).*

The man was on the verge of fulfilling his lifelong dream. For years he had planned to build this house. With infinite care, he had designed each nook and cranny. He had spent hours pondering over the architectural drawings. A construction crew had been hired and they descended upon the site like a swarm of bees, laying the foundation, installing the utilities, and raising the walls and roof. Finally, the day came when it was finished. It was with a great sense of satisfaction that the man moved with his belongings into the house.

As night fell, raindrops began to patter on the roof of the new house. The man was snug inside, resting comfortably before the warm fireplace. The rain increased throughout the night, but the house had been built well and there were no leaks.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a sickening lurch and the house swayed and collapsed in a sudden ruin. What had happened? It was built of the finest material. It had been carefully constructed with the finest craftsmen. But its foundation lat upon shifting sands. It isn't my story. It comes from the lips of Jesus.

*Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:26-27).*

The point of the story is not about houses or building sites. Those are merely figures in the analogy. The point of the story is about how you build your life. Are you building only for the short term? Or are you building for permanence?

In the last two chapters of his epistle, James warns of five pitfalls to those who would build for permanence. This is part of his bigger message of how we ought to live out the reality of our Christianity.

## THE PITFALL OF A LIMITED PERSPECTIVE

*Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”<sup>14</sup> Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (James 4:13-14).*

Notice that James does not refer to those whom he is addressing as “brethren.” Up to this point, he has been speaking to believers. He has used the word “brethren” ten times in the first four chapters of this epistle. When he comes to James 5:7, he will use it again and we will see its use five more times in that chapter. But he does not do so in this section.

James has changed his audience. For the moment, he has turned to address those who are unbelievers. His warning is directed against those who have a view of life that is different from a Christian view of life. It is directed toward those who look at life from what the writer of Ecclesiastes calls an “under the sun” perspective.

The warning is also for our benefit. It serves as a reminder that we should take care not to live after the manner of the unbeliever. We are called to live differently and we are called to see life differently.

A number of years ago, Paula and I went to Universal Studio in Orlando. While we were there, we went to an attraction where we were to wear 3-D glasses. They brought things into focus. Without the glasses, the view looked fuzzy. But with the glasses, it looked as though the movie came right out to you. James gives us some glasses with which to view out life and world. They are the glasses of a right perspective on life.

*You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (4:14).*

Have you ever been out on a cold winter morning where you could see the condensation of your breath? Down where I live in Florida, that only takes place twice a year. The next time it does happen, you stop and remember that little vapor cloud that dissipates so quickly is a picture of your life from the perspective of eternity.

Your time on earth is limited. Your birth certificate came with no guarantees, not even of twenty years or fifty thousand miles, whichever comes first. There is a brevity to life. The older you get, the more brief it seems.

Why does James tell us this? Is it so that we can get depressed at how many candles are on our birthday cake? No. It is so that we will determine to live in a meaningful way. This same truth is found in the Psalms when the Psalmist speaks about the brevity of life.

*As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,  
Or if due to strength, eighty years,  
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;  
For soon it is gone and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10).*

*So teach us to number our days,  
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.  
(Psalm 90:12).*

What does it mean to number our days? It means to make each day count. It means to stay away from mediocrity. It means to live with purpose. You are building for eternity, but you only have a short time on which to build. Your time for building is like a vapor. It appears and then it vanishes. Make it significant. Make it count.

## THE PITFALL OF INDEPENDENCE

*Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” (James 4:15).*

We need to live within sight of the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of

God is not a very popular teaching today. We are a nation that tends to reject sovereignty. We are a nation of rebels. We even have a holiday on July 4th that celebrates a rebellion and a Declaration of Independence. I am not saying these things are bad, but there comes a danger when we want to be independent from God. The theory of separation of church and state has grown into a movement of independence from God.

The place where independence ends is the place where dependence and faith begin. That is what faith is all about. Faith is dependence upon the Lord. This is not just faith for salvation. This is faith for everything. This is the realization that God is in control; that nothing comes into my life unless it has first passed across His desk and has been approved with His signature.

There are many who could be classified as practicing atheists, even though the claim might be made to believe in the God of the Bible. The real question is whether you live as though the God of the Bible was the sovereign ruler, not only of the universe, but also over your own life. That has been the whole message of the book of James. You can talk all day about what you believe, but the real issue is whether your beliefs are reflected in your living.

This brings us to a question. Does this mean we should stop making plans about the future? Does this mean we should never develop goals? I do not believe so. What it does mean is that our goals and our plans are subject to the will of the Lord. As such, they need to be flexible.

Have you ever had to take a detour? I don't like detours. They are usually bumpy and unpleasant and take me miles out of my way. I would much rather take the straight, uninterrupted highway. When the road of my life comes up against a signpost telling me there is a detour up ahead, my tendency is to become impatient and angry. But I will not have that reaction if I realize that detours are from the Lord; that detours are driveways to God's opportunities.

## THE PITFALL OF PRIDE

*But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:16-17).*

The Proverbs tell us that pride goes before a fall, or as the NAS renders it, pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). This means that pride precedes almost every other sin. Pride involves the inflation of self and sin involves exactly the same thing. By contrast, the Christian has only one ground of boasting. It is in the cross of Jesus Christ.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

God saved you in the way He did so that you could never have a ground for boasting in yourself. There is no room for pride within the kingdom of God. This is graphically illustrated in a story that Jesus told. It is the story of two men. They had come to the temple to pray.

*And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” (Luke 18:9-13).*

Two men. Both are Jewish. Both are descendants of Abraham. Both have come to the temple to pray. The first is a Pharisee. He is orthodox in his faith. He holds to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. As a member of the sect of the Pharisees, he has dedicated his life to the keeping of the Law of God. He reads the Law daily. He prays several times a day. He gives his tithe to the Temple. He is respectable in the eyes of the religious hierarchy. Everyone agrees that he is a good man.

Standing nearby is the other man. This man is a tax-gatherer. He has gone to the Roman officials and has purchased a franchise from the Roman Empire to collect taxes from the subjugated people on behalf of Rome. He is required to turn over a specified amount of money to the Romans, and anything over this amount he is permitted to keep for himself. Therefore, he makes his profit by deliberately overcharging people on their taxes. He has

betrayed his countrymen to become a thief for the Romans. He is a Benedict Arnold. He has sold out to the Romans for money. No one will have anything to do with him. He holds the same social caste as a prostitute.

Each of these men come to the Temple. Each of them pray. I think that I can even say that each of them was sincere in his prayer. But notice what Jesus said about these two men and the results of their prayers...

*“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”*  
(Luke 18:14).

Both of these men were sinners when they came into the Temple, although one was much more obvious in his sinning. But one of these men went out of the Temple different than the other. The Tax-collector was justified. Why? Because he did not come in his pride; he came only with his faith.

There are no good people in God's kingdom. There are only those who need a savior. That means we cannot look down our noses at people. It means we cannot think that we are any better than someone else because we are Presbyterian or Baptist or Independent and they are not. It means we have no basis on which to pat ourselves on the back. We have absolutely nothing that has not been given to us.

The conclusion to which James draws us is that, *to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.* (4:17). The point is that righteous living is more than merely the abstinence from certain activities and avoiding sin involves more than a mere engagement with inactivity. There are sins in which we actively participate and there are sins in which we passively engage through our inactivity. When we come to realize the full realm of sinfulness of which we are guilty, the result will be to remove all pride.

## THE PITFALL OF MATERIALISM

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness*

*against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. (James 5:1-6).*

The picture James paints is one of materialism on the rampage. What is materialism? It is the collecting and the treasuring and the worshiping of things. We spend our lives collecting stuff. If you don't believe that, take a look in your attic or in your garage or in your closet.

The fact that James begins this section with the phrase, "Come now," just as he did in 4:13 suggests these sections are to be seen as a single unit. It is for this reason we have ignored the chapter division to see this section as a unified whole.

The late comedian George Carlin used to point out that we begin our lives with only the stuff that is given to us, but as we grow and move out into the world, we decide we want a house in which we can keep all of our stuff. We rent or we buy a house and when we move in, it is empty, so we immediately go out and buy a lot of stuff to put into it. We soon start to run out of money because all of this stuff is expensive, so we get a second job so that we can buy more stuff and also to afford the upkeep on the stuff that we have gotten. After a while, our house is so full of stuff that it is too crowded, so we go out and buy a bigger house, but then there is some empty space in the new house so we rush out to buy more stuff with which to fill it.

One day, we decide we need a vacation from all our stuff, so we take some of our stuff and we pack it into five suitcases and we take a plane to a resort hotel. When we arrive at the hotel, we check into a room and the first thing we do is to put up all our stuff. Then we look around the room and there is so much empty space in our room and in our suitcase that we rush out to buy more stuff.

James does a lot more than to merely mock the foolishness of materialism. He brings a blistering curse upon the rich as he points out that their riches will serve as a witness against them in the day of judgment. The maxim among materialists is that "he who dies with the most toys wins," but James reverses that to claim its complete antithesis. Materialism is to be avoided

because...

1. Material wealth does not last: *Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted (5:2-3).*

James looks at the rich and describes them as though their end were already in sight. The point is that riches are fleeting. Everything you own will be thrown away a hundred years from now. A visit to your local junkyard can be quite instructive. It is a gripping reminder of the ultimate destination of everything you own.

2. Material wealth is a witness of that which you love: *And their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure (5:3).*

James envisions the final judgment and the accusations of a witness that will be called upon to bring testimony against you. That witness is encompassed in the sum total of all that you own. The picture is of you sharing in the fate of those temporal possessions. They are consumed with rust and, like an infection that passes on its disease, you are seen to have been likewise infected.

Jesus said that you cannot love God and money. One love will edge out the other. That means a love of wealth is diametrically opposed to the keeping of the greatest commandment of the law – to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your being.

The story is told of a man who decided he wanted to take all of his money with him when he died. Whenever he found himself in a dangerous situation, he would grab onto his wallet. However, he got to thinking that if he was to die in his sleep, he would not have a chance to grab his money. This bothered him for a while until he got the idea of putting his money on a table in the attic directly over his bedroom. He reasoned that, if he died, as he was ascending to heaven, he would be able to grab his money on the way up.

Sure enough, one night he died in his sleep. When his wife saw him lying there the next morning, she raced up to the attic. All his money was lying there just as he had left it the night before. “Darn it!” She exclaimed, “I knew he should have put it in the basement!”

You can't take it with you. The Cairo museum contains millions of dollars worth of riches, dug from the tombs of the ancient pharaohs. These are all a fitting tribute to the truth that you can't take it with you.

3. Material wealth often comes at the expense of others: *Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (5:4).*

Very few, if any, get rich on their own. The idea of a self-made man is a myth. The rich are able to get rich by finding ways to motivate the poor to make them rich. I am not speaking against capitalism. Indeed, capitalism has the good quality of rewarding industriousness and creativity. On the other hand, there are some evils to which capitalism tends to lead. The chief among these is that it feeds the monster of greed and, according to Colossians 3:5, greed amounts to idolatry.

4. Material wealth tempts us to live for present pleasures: *You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter (5:5).*

We read back in James 4:1 of *your pleasures that wage war in your members*. We live in a pleasure-driven society. We even have parks that are dedicated to amusements. These things are not necessarily bad in themselves, but they are completely insufficient for a goal to living. A life that is spent in the pursuit of pleasure is a life that will ultimately find itself empty of meaning.

The Bible tells the story of a man who engaged in such a pursuit. He was a man who had it all — power, wealth, women, and health. He did everything there was to do and he went out to engage in every possible pleasure. His name was Solomon and, in the end, he said that it was all empty.

5. Material wealth has a tendency to subvert justice: *You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you (5:6).*

Though this was more evident in the first century, it is still true that

there is often a sliding scale of justice for those who are rich versus those who are poor. One needs only to consider some of the high profile court cases that have made the public spotlight to recognize that the rich can often literally get away with murder because of their access to high-priced attorneys and high-priced respectability.

## THE PITFALL OF IMPATIENCE

*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. (James 5:7-9).*

We live in the instant age. We have instant coffee, instant photo processing, fast food, and push button entertainment. We are not used to waiting for anything. We find ourselves fretting at the traffic light or if the aisle in the grocery store seems to move too slowly. I confess that I am not immune to such impatience.

The comment of James that “the Judge is standing right at the door” has been taken by some commentators to speak of his expectancy of the soon return of the Lord. While this is certainly possible and there are other Scriptures that bear testimony that the church was already on the lookout for the Second Coming of Christ, the force of this statement need not be limited to that event. None of us know when our lives on earth will end and thus each of us stands a mere heartbeat away from facing the Judge.

There is one profession that has not been “instantized.” It is the one of which James speaks in this passage. It is that of the farmer. Even today, farmers do not expect instant growth. The farmer puts a seed into the ground and he knows that several seasons must pass before he can partake of the harvest.

What is the point? It is that you need to have that kind of patience. It is not easy. When you see people who live life with a limited perspective and who live independently from God and who are arrogant in their pride and who worship at the shrine of materialism, you are tempted to either join them or else to pass judgment upon them and seek to bring them down. Neither of these is a proper response.

We have already been called in the early verses of James 4 to resist the sins of the rich and the proud. But we are also called to resist the temptation to judge the rich and the proud. We have not been appointed as judge over all men. There is only one judge. When He comes, His judgment will be as thorough as it is just. My concern is not to be how He will judge the world. My concern is to be how He will judge me.

# PATIENCE, PROMISES AND PRAYER

## **James 5:7-20**

*Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11).*

*Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? (Matthew 6:26).*

We have seen the epistle of James as the practical epistle. He has been providing a picture of shirt sleeve Christianity. As our passage opens, James has been focusing on the sins and the eventual condemnation of the rich. Now he turns to those whom the rich have been oppressing. What is to be their reaction? How are they to handle the oppression of the rich? The answer is in one word – patience.

## **CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PEOPLE OF PATIENCE**

1. The Necessity of Patience: *Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains (James 5:7).*

This passage begins with a command. It is a command to be patient. The Greek word here translated “patient” is rare in ancient Greek. There is a reason for this. Patience was not considered to be a virtue by the Greeks. They admired the man who was able to retaliate against an

The Greek word for patience in this passage is μακροθυμεω (*makrothumeo*). It is a compound word made up of μακρος (*makpros*), meaning, “far away,” and θυμος (*thumos*), the word for “anger.” The picture is of one putting his anger far away.

injustice and who wrought vengeance upon his enemies. You have only to look at their folk tales and their legends to see examples of this attitude.

When James tells believers to “be patient,” you would have expected him to use the present tense – that is, “be continually patient.” But he does not. Instead he uses the aorist tense. He calls men to be patient in a point in time: “Be patient now!”

Why does he say it this way? I’m not really sure. Maybe it is because these believers were going through some special hardships at that particular time that would require an immediate patience. Or perhaps it is because I can only be patient for today because I do not know what tomorrow will bring.

On the other hand, there is a time limit attached to this command to be patient. You are to be patient *until the coming of the Lord* (5:7). We are not called to be patient forever. Not even the Lord will be patient forever. There is coming a time when His patience will end. It will be at His coming.

This tells me something about the Christian view of patience. Christian patience has a goal in sight. This is seen by the illustration that James provides.

*Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains* (James 5:7b).

The farmer pictured here is not the common day-laborer. This is the landowner. He is the man who has his life invested in the fruit of his labors. He gets up each morning and he goes out and he plows the ground and he plants the seed and he pulls out the weeds and he cultivates and he fertilizes. And then he waits. And he waits. And he waits some more. For a long time, nothing happens. The fruit will not come until a long time has passed.

First the early rains will come, ushering in a series of thunderstorms in October and November. They result in softening the hard baked soil and making it fertile. Those rains do not stop. They continue throughout the rainy season which lasts until the springtime.

The latter rains come in March and April, accompanied by the warmer temperatures. These help to ripen and to mature the fruit, increasing the yield.

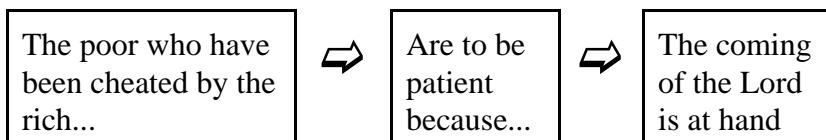
This was a familiar picture to the Jewish people. The Old Testament used the early and latter rains as a picture of the blessings of God upon the nation (Jeremiah 3:3; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zechariah 10:1).

There is a lesson here. Perhaps you are going through one of those “dry seasons,” one of those times when things just don’t seem to be going your way. There is a message of hope for you. The rains are on their way.

2. The Reward of Patience: *You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.* (James 5:8-9).

There are a string of commands given by James and each of them continues in this same aorist tense, each with the idea, “Do it now!” There is an urgency to his tone as he says, “Be patient now. Strengthen your hearts and do it right now.”

How do you master the quality of patience? It is by going to the source. The source is given in this passage. The source of patience is in its eventual reward. Notice the flow of thought:



The coming of the Lord is at hand. It is imminent. It could take place at any moment. As Christians, we need to live in the light of the return of Christ. In doing so, there are two possible extremes to which we can go:

- The first extreme is the one which views the return of Christ as being so close that it makes no plans for the future.

When I was in college, I sat under some Bible teachers who

predicted that Christ must certainly come within the next five to ten years (this was in the early 1970's). The implication was that the time was short so that you should only plan for short term ministry.

The same sort of thinking in the early church evidently led some people to quitting their jobs and running up their credit cards (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 with 3:10-12).

- The other extreme is to think that the Lord's coming is so far in the future that it has no impact in my life. After a while, we can forget that He is coming at all.

Of course, this passage need not be limited to the Second Coming of Christ. None of us know how long we shall live or when some unexpected disaster might strike us down. For each of us, the Judge awaits us at the door.

3. An Example of Patience: *As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.* (James 5:10-11).

The stories of the Old Testament fathers are stories of patience. Why do I say that? It is because they all looked forward to the coming of the Lord, but none of them say it in their day.

*All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).*

Abraham was given a promise of a seed that would fill the entire earth. Did he live to see that promise fulfilled in his lifetime? No! He died without seeing the fulfillment.

And yet, the story of Abraham is not a story of failure. We don't look back at Abraham and say, "That poor fool! Waiting all those years for nothing!" Instead we consider Abraham to have been

greatly blessed by God.

James says in verse 11, *we count those blessed who endured*. The phrase translated “*we count those blessed*” is a transliteration of a single Greek word: μακαρίζομεν (*makarizomen*). It is from the same root as that which Jesus uses in the Beatitudes when He says, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit; blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the gentle...” We can translate it as “happy.” James is saying, “We see those Old Testament saints as being happy because they endured.”

This is significant because endurance is not normally considered to be a very happy quality. Endurance tends to be a bit monotonous. It describes the daily grind. I like the way Shuck Swindol puts it -- the problem with daily life is that it is so daily.

How can enduring people be counted as being happy? It is because there is a worthy goal that is to be obtained as a result of this endurance. There is coming a day when we shall be done with enduring and when we can hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” And in those times when you wonder whether you are being good enough or faithful enough, you remember the message of the gospel that *the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful*.

## **CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PEOPLE OF PROMISE**

*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment. James 5:12).*

One of the areas in which Christians are called to endure is in the keeping of their word. When they say a thing, it is to be true. And because of they, they ought not to try to bind their word and make it extra special by means of an oath.

This can best be understood when compared to its parallel passage in

Matthew's account of the sermon on the Mount. You will recall that I have suggested that this entire epistle is a commentary on that sermon and visa versa. That is especially seen in this passage.

*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.”*

*But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”; and anything beyond these is of evil. (Matthew 5:33-37).*

I want you to notice at the outset that this has nothing to do with profanity or strong expletives. I'm not saying that it is alright to curse; I am only saying that this is not the passage that deals with that particular issue. This passage deals with the making of promises. The Old Testament gave some very strict regulations concerning the making of oaths in the name of the Lord.

*And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:12).*

The rabbis of Jesus' day had taken this passage and twisted it to make a legal loophole. They said that if you took an oath by God's name it was binding, but if you took an oath by something that was merely close to God, it was not binding.

When we speak of an oath, we normally refer to an especially emphatic promise. But an oath in the ancient world was much more than that. An oath called for the destruction of the thing on which it was sworn if the oath was broken. Thus if you swore by the name of God, you were wishing the destruction of God if that oath were broken and, since God cannot be destroyed and is able to destroy anyone that seeks to destroy Him, you were effectively calling His judgment down upon yourself. Likewise, if you swore on the life of your children, then you were wishing and even praying for the death of your children if that oath were not fulfilled.

An oath is nothing less than a curse that you placed upon the thing by which

you swore. If the conditions of the oath were not fulfilled, then you were calling for that curse to come into effect.

This is what the epistle of the Hebrews is describing when it tells us that when God made His promise to Abraham and “He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself” (Hebrews 6:13). The implication is that if God did not keep His promise to Abraham, then God would cease to exist.

There were those who had taken these practices of oath-taking and twisted them as a legal form of lying. They would say, “I don’t have to keep my promise to you because I only swore by the throne of God and not by God Himself.”

However James does not speak concerning such a practice. He does not merely say that Christians should keep their oaths. He goes much further than that. He says that Christians should not make an oath in the first place.

Why is this? Why shouldn’t Christians swear with an oath? I believe that is it because it implies that a simple “yes” or “no” is not enough. When you swear to make yourself sound credible, you are saying something about yourself. In the words of Shakespear, “Methinks thou dost protest too much.”

The problem with Christianity today is that there is a credibility gap. The world has seen Christians who lie, cheat and steal. It is no wonder that they do not believe us! The solution is not to strengthen our oaths. The solution is to present a life before the world that is true.

## **CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PEOPLE OF PRAYER**

According to church tradition, James had a nickname among the believers of the early church. He was known as “Old Camel Knees.” Have you ever seen the knees of a camel? The look like old sacks of baggy flesh. I know that most men’s legs are not worth a second look. That is why you rarely see me wear a pair of shorts. But the knees of James were worthy of mention. They reflected his prayer life.

Why was James known for his prayer life? What was it that motivated James

to pray? I believe that it was because he had seen that prayer really changes things.

- James had been with the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem following the ascension of the Lord. During those days they devoted themselves to prayer. The result of that time of prayer was a great pouring out of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
- James had been there in the early days of the Jerusalem church as they met daily to pray together.
- James had been there that night after Peter was imprisoned and the church gathered in the home of John Mark for a midnight prayer meeting. He remembered the knock at the door and a young girl running in with the news that their prayers had been answered and that Peter had been miraculously released.

There is a lesson here. It is that the reason we do not pray more is that we do not really believe that prayer works. If we believed more, we would also pray more.

Prayer is not a natural thing. Society teaches us to be independent. Prayer, on the other hand, teaches us the lesson of dependency on God.

1. We are to Practice Prayer in all of the Circumstances of Life:

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. (James 5:13-16a).*

In the preceding verses, James warned against swearing - a negative use of the tongue. Now he turns to the subject of prayer - a positive use of the tongue.

James begins this section by asking three questions. He has been doing this same sort of thing all throughout this short epistle (2:5-7; 2:14-16; 2:20-21; 2:25; 3:13; 4:1; 4:4-5; 4:14). These questions are diagnostic in nature.

- Is anyone suffering?
- Is anyone cheerful?
- Is anyone sick?

These three states summarize all of the experiences of life. At any one time, you can probably place yourself into at least one of these three categories.

- *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray (5:13).*

Are you going through difficult times? There is something here for you. There is One to whom you can go. He is One who also went through hard times. You can go to Him because He knows what it is like to experience hardship.

- *Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises (5:13).*

It is not wrong to be cheerful. Some people seem to think that it is wrong for a Christian to crack a smile. But we have a God who laughs. Our prayers should not be limited to when we are in trouble. We need to pray in the good times as well as in the bad times.

- *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (5:14).*

Sometimes it is not enough to merely pray ourselves. There are times when the urgency of prayer is so great that we are told to call the leaders of the church to join with us in prayer.

This passage is used by the Roman Catholic priests for the phenomena of “extreme unction” in which a priest goes to a dying person and performs certain last rites that are supposed to result in the saving of his soul. But this passage does not refer to priests. It speaks of elders – the Greek term is πρεσβύτεροι

(*presbuteroi*), the term from which we get “Presbyterians” (this doesn’t mean that Baptists can ignore this passage).

The elders are to come at the request of the sick believer and they are to pray over him as they anoint him with oil. This brings up an interesting question. What is the significance of this anointing?

The first thing that you need to know is that this is not the usual word for “anointing.” When we normally see the word “anointing,” it is translated from the Greek word *χριω* (*chrio*) from which we derive our word “Christ.” But this is a different word. This is the aorist active participle of *αλειφω* (*aleipho*). With this one exception, it is a word that is found only in the gospels and it is always used of the physical act of anointing (Matthew 6:17; Mark 6:13; 16:1; Luke 7:36; 7:46; John 11:2; 12:3).

This is very different from *χριω* which is used of spiritual anointings (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Corinthians 1:21; Hebrews 1:9). In these instances it is the Lord who is always seen as the One performing the anointings.

It is for this reason that some scholars have taught that this anointing is medical in nature and that these elders are described as applying whatever medicinal cures are available for the ailment. But I do not think so. I’m not saying that medicine is wrong; it is just not what James is describing.

Anointing in the Scriptures almost always has a symbolic meaning. Even when it is a physical anointing, it has spiritual implications behind it. It is a symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that to be the case here as seen in verse 15: *...and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*

The second thing we should note is that there are two different words used here for the one who is “sick.”

Verse	Greek	Meaning
Is anyone among you <b>sick</b> ? (5:14).	Astheneo (ἀσθενεω)	Literally, “without strength” (often carries the idea of being ill).
The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is <b>sick</b> (5:15).	Kamno (καμνω)	“Weary”

The point we should make is that this need not be limited to the one who is suffering a medical illness. It can apply equally to anything sort of suffering with which one is wrestling.

We are told that when the elders of the church come and pray over the one who is sick, there will generally be two results:

- The Lord will raise him up.
- His sins will be forgiven.

There are three different circumstances of life that James has described – the one who is suffering, the one who is cheerful and the one who is sick. In all three instances, James gives the same prescription. It is that you are to pray. This is a prescription for everyone.

2. We are Motivated by the Power of Prayer: *The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16b).*

A more literal translation of this passage would read: “There is much accomplished in the working of a righteous man’s request.” James has already described a faith that works. Now he speaks of a prayer that works.

Prayer really works. That sounds rather basic, but if we ever come to terms with the implications of that truth, our spiritual lives will be revolutionized.

When you pray for rain, do you bring an umbrella? Do you live in

the light of your own prayers? Or do you think of answered prayer as only being within the realm of experience of certain “super saints” that are beyond your experience? James has some good news for you.

3. We are Encouraged by an Example of Prayer.

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:17-18).*

Why did Elijah pray for a thing like this? It is a bit like praying for the Stock Market to crash. Why would anyone ask for a thing like this? It was because Elijah had read of the promises of God in the Old Testament.

The word for “prayer” is used twice in the Greek of verse 17. In typical Hebraic repetition, it says, “He prayed with prayer for no rain.” The repetition of the word points to its intensity.

In the days of Moses, God told the people of Israel that if they did not continue to be faithful to Him, if they turned away to worship false gods, then He would judge them by stopping the rain from watering their land.

*Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).*

The Lord had given His people a land flowing with milk and honey; a land of hills and valleys that drank “water from the rain of heaven” (Deuteronomy 11:11). It was a land that had two rainy seasons; both early and latter rains.

But in the days of Elijah, the people of Israel did exactly that against which they had been warned. They turned away from the Lord to

worship other gods until the worship of Baal had become more popular than the worship of Yahweh. As a result, Elijah prayed that the promise of God's judgment would be fulfilled against an unrepentant people.

One cannot help but to contrast this with the way we typically pray today. We hear of a calamity taking place somewhere in the world and we immediately pray for a physical deliverance. We read of a hurricane or a typhoon creating havoc and disaster and we pray that the physical damage might be averted. We read of terrorists hijacking airlines and deliberately crashing them and we pray that all such activities might come to an end. But if we took a lesson from Elijah, our prayers might be very different. We might instead begin to look for the warning hand of God in such instances and pray that we might listen to His call to repent and to turn from our sins. This brings us to our final and concluding point.

## A CONCLUDING PRINCIPLE

*My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20).*

There has been some thought given as to whether these last two verses are to be connected only with the preceding section on prayer or whether they summarize the entire message of the book of James. We have already noted how the illustration of Elijah spotlights the fact that his prayer was one that called for the judgment of God to fall on the land so that people might turn from their sins and return to the Lord.

I want to suggest that, while these last two verses do relate in a special sense to the one who has received the intercessory prayer of the elders, that they have a much wider application to the entire message of this epistle and to all who have a ministry of restoration with regard to the teachings found in these chapters.

James is a diagnostic book. You can look at the epistle of James and you can look at someone's life and when you see areas that do not match, you have a basis upon which to proceed with this ministry of restoration.

1. The Process of Restoration: *...if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back (5:19).*

This passage begins with a conditional clause. It is an “if/then” clause. The first part of this clause presents the situation of one who has wandered from the faith and is then turned back.

- He might have been guilty of double-mindedness.
- Perhaps he had faith without works.
- Or maybe he was embroiled in quarrels and conflicts.
- He might have been rich and proud, or he could have been poor and impatient.

Whatever the case, this was one who has been counted as “my brethren,” but then he strayed from the truth. The important point is not that he left the truth. The important point is that he came back. That is what a Christian is. He is one who, even when he leaves, he comes back.

This is important for you to know. You need to know that when you have fallen into sin, there is a place of forgiveness and restoration.

2. The Results of Restoration: *He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins (5:20).*

This is the language of the Old Testament sacrifice. When the blood of the sacrificial animal was sprinkled upon the altar, it was said to be a covering – an atonement – for sins.

We have a sacrifice that is much better than any that was made in the Old Testament. We have a sacrifice that was made once and for all. The death of Christ served to cover a multitude of sins. When you come to the cross, you find a salvation from death and a covering for all sins. It is at that point that you are able to reach out and invite another to find the same salvation.

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