



James

Rick Billingsley



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The Book of James

By Rick Billingsley



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Cover Photo: The cover photo features the ancient synagogue at Chorazim. Jesus did many miracles in this village and lamented that the people of Chorazim did not believe in spite of the many miracles that he performed there (Matt. 11:21).

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For Additional Study

The author of this workbook has also written the commentary on Zechariah in the *Truth Commentary* series and a workbook on *World Religions* in the Truth in Life series. Teachers, students, and congregations may wish to supplement their Bible classes and personal studies by using these additional resources.

Rick Billingsley was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1956. He and his wife Debra have three children. Rick has been preaching since 1977 for churches in Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and North Carolina. He received a B.A. in Pastoral Counseling and M.A. in Theological studies from Chicago Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois.



Introduction:

The book of James belongs to the section of the New Testament usually described as the General or Catholic Epistles. There are seven letters that are usually placed into this category: James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, and 1, 2, and 3 John. The term “General” or “Catholic” is used in its original sense of the word, which means “universal in nature.” Theologians gave these names to these epistles because they are addressed to Christians in general. Early Christians classified James as a “general epistle” because it was written to the church at large rather than to a specific church or group of churches.

James has been appropriately called the “Christian’s book of proverbs,” and the “Gospel of common sense”¹ because of its exhortation for practical Christianity. It is about the day-to-day living of one’s religion. It contains the kind of exhortation and encouragement that Christians need to hear constantly. James gives instruction and encouragement which enables God’s people to withstand temptation and to resist the devil.

Author

Christians in the early church disagreed concerning the identity of James, the author of the letter. Those who identified the name with the Lord’s brother tended to view the letter as genuine Scripture. Those who rejected the link between James and Jesus tended to ignore the letter. The author of this epistle gives his name as James or *Iakōbos* as the Greek has it; a

transliteration of the Hebrew name Jacob. James was a very common name among the Jews.

The New Testament speaks of four men by the name of James. They may be distinguished as follows: (1) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, one of the Twelve (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; Mark

1:19; Luke 9:54). This James was called, along with John, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). He was beheaded under Herod Agrippa I not later than the spring of AD 44 (Acts 12:2). It seems highly unlikely that this James could be the author of this epistle. (2) James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:13). The writer of James does not identify himself as an apostle. Most scholars believe, if he was

that James, he would have identified himself as such. (3) James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot, Luke 6:16). This James is obscure. Little is known about him. Therefore, no one regards him as the writer of James. Obviously, the James who wrote the epistle was so well known that he did not have to identify himself other than as “James.”

James has been appropriately called the “Christian’s book of proverbs,” and the “Gospel of common sense” because of its exhortation for practical Christianity.

(4). James, the brother of the Lord (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19). This James witnessed the first miracle by Jesus at Cana (John 2:12) and the Lord appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). Most scholars believe that this James is the author of the epistle.²

External evidence exists for James, the brother of Jesus. In his *Antiquities* 20:9.1, Josephus mentions “James the brother of Jesus,

¹ Robert Johnstone, *Lectures on the Epistle of James*, Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978, 47.

² For a more in-depth study on the authorship of James you may want to read the introduction in Joseph B. Mayor’s commentary: *The Epistle of St. James*. Also, consult Everett F. Harrison’s *Introduction to the New Testament* and Alfred Wikenhauser’s *New Testament Introduction*. In my opinion, the best work on this subject was presented by Theodor Zahn in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. I.

James: Pure and Undefiled Religion

who is called the Christ.” Eusebius (*Hist.* II.23) records a statement by Hegesippus who wrote in the last part of the second century. He iden-

- The *Shepherd of Hermas* (the date ranges from AD 97-140) quotes the Epistle of James.
- Polycarp (AD 155) referred to James in his writings.
 - Gregory of Thaumaturgus (AD 250), Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 260), Origen and Eusebius cited from James.³

Martin Luther called the epistle of James an “epistle of straw.” Martin Luther had a very poor attitude toward this epistle because he thought it contradicted Paul’s teaching on grace and justification.

tifies James as the brother of the Lord and distinguishes him from the apostles. The Catholic position that Mary had no other children besides Jesus is definitely refuted by the Scriptures and by historical writers.

Authenticity of James

Martin Luther called the epistle of James an “epistle of straw.” Martin Luther had a very poor attitude toward this epistle because he thought it contradicted Paul’s teaching on grace and justification. Despite his poor attitude, the epistle has not been disputed as being part of the canon of the New Testament since the sixteenth century.

- Clement of Rome (AD 96) cited James 2:23, 25; 1:8 in his works. Therefore, he was acquainted with the book of James.

- The following manuscripts include James: Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Ephraemi.
- James and Matthew on the teachings of Jesus are so closely connected that one must recognize the relationship between them. Notice the following parallels:

James		Matthew	
1:2	2:5	5:11	5:3
1:4	2:10	5:48	5:19
1:5	2:13	7:7	5:7
1:19-20	3:12	5:22	7:16
1:22	4:4	7:24	6:24

These are just a few of the parallels between these two books.⁴ James is also paralleled to the other synoptic gospels. Scholars also try to link James with Paul’s writings and Peter’s epistles.

The Purpose for Writing the Book

James writes as one who has deep moral and religious convictions. He has a deep sense of right, which compels him to speak out against wrong. To many scholars, such as Dibelius, Mayor, and Ropes, no order or theme is seen throughout the book. To these scholars, the teachings of James are unrelated or jumbled together. There is no more practical book in the New Testament than the epistle of James. The theme is sounded in the very beginning in 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion is this. . . .” Its purpose is to help God’s people to develop “pure and undefiled religion.” Within its sayings, it teaches the following:

- It teaches perseverance for those who are besieged by trials.
- It rebukes the prejudiced.
- It condemns idle faith that will not work.
- It instructs one on how to use his tongue.
 - It counsels one on how to minister to the sick.
 - It teaches against hypocrisy.
 - It reveals the power of prayer.

Throughout James, we see recurring connecting words that form threads of the key themes in the letter. These words include temptation, patience, perfection, lacking, asking, wavering, lust, sin, wrath, hearing, and doing.

³ J. B. Lightfoot’s *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1978 and Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, 1978. These two are in the Twin Brooks series.

⁴ For further study on this subject read Raymond E. Brown’s *An Introduction of the New Testament*, D.B. Deppe *The Sayings of Jesus in the Epistle of James*, and Mayor’s commentary on James.

Outline of the Book

- I. Introduction.
- II. Salutations (1:1).
- III. How to Face Trials (1:2-18).
- IV. Attitude toward the Word of God (1:19-27).
- V. Respect of Persons (2:1-13).
- VI. Faith and Works (2:14-26).
- VII. Instruction to Teachers (3:1-12).
- VIII. Wisdom That Teachers Need (3:13-18).
- IX. Friendship (4:1-10).
- X. Judging Others (4:11-17).
- XI. Instruction to the Wealthy (5:1-6).
- XII. Patience Is a Virtue (5:7-11).
- XIII. Power of Prayer (5:13-20).

James employed several literary devices throughout his writings which are very effective tools for providing emphasis and clarity. He uses several metaphors (a metaphor declares that one thing is another), simile (a simile states that one thing

naturally conveys its opposite, 2:14; 5:1.) The epistle of James is truly a literary masterpiece!

Date Written

Many scholars feel that the book is one of the earlier New

Testament books. There are two dates suggested (1) AD 44, or (2) AD 65—most certainly before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Some facts to note in dating this epistle are:

- Short Questions and Answers (3:13; 4:14; 5:13).
- Rhetorical Questions (2:5; 2:14; 3:12).
- Questions of Irony. (Irony is an expression of a thought that naturally conveys its opposite, 2:14; 5:1.)

The epistle of James is truly a literary masterpiece!

- Christians were scattered abroad; therefore, it was written after the persecution in Acts 8.
- James mentions the elders of the church (5:14).
- Christians were meeting in synagogues (2: 2).
- There was no mention of the problem over circumcision, recorded in Acts 15 and no specific reference is made to Gentile Christians meeting with the Jews.
- Hegesippus alleges that Ananus stoned James in AD 62, but Josephus said that James was stoned to death in AD 65.

The author of this material suggests that we date the book somewhere between AD 42 through AD 65.

While its authenticity remains under debate, some scholars believe the inscription on this unprovenanced first-century ossuary (or bone box) bears the name of James, the Lord's brother—the probable author of this epistle.

“James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus”



יעקוב בדיוסף אחיו יושע

Questions

1. What is the meaning of “Catholic (General) epistles”? _____

2. Name the seven “general epistles.”
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
3. Why is James called the “Christian’s book of Proverbs”? _____

4. With Scripture, identify the following men:
 - a. James, the Son of Zebedee: _____
 - b. James, the Son of Alphaeus: _____
 - c. James, the Father of Judas: _____
 - d. James, the brother of the Lord: _____
5. Who is the author of the book of James? _____
6. Give some external evidence for James being the brother of Jesus.

7. What is the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary?

8. List all the Scriptures that state that Jesus had brothers and sisters.

9. Who is the oldest sibling in Jesus’s family? _____
10. Who quoted the book of James in their writings? _____

11. How are James and Matthew related? _____

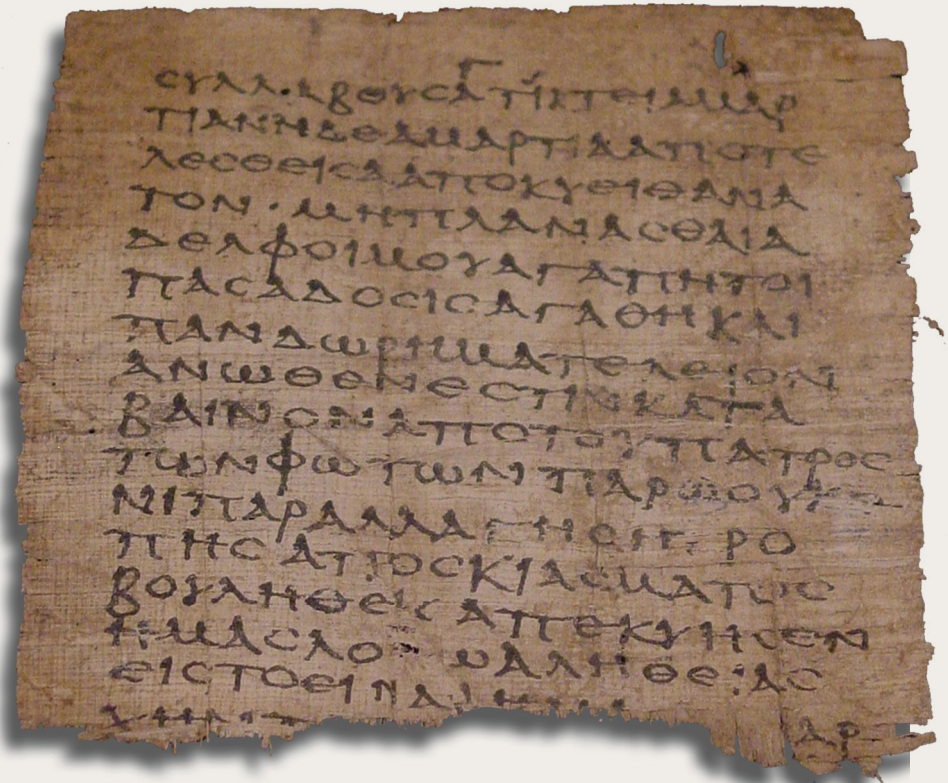
12. What is the purpose of the book of James? _____

13. Name several literary devices that James uses throughout his writings.

14. Approximately what date was the book of James written? _____

15. What makes James's message relevant to today's readers? _____

James 1:15-18 from P²³, an early third-century papyri of the book of James



Lesson 2

Salutations

James 1:1

1. Address. “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). In the discussion of the authorship of the epistle (Introduction), James was identified as the brother of Jesus. In reality, James would be Jesus’s half brother, since Jesus was virgin born. Prior to Jesus’s death and

If James the Lord’s brother wrote this letter, why does he not mention his special relationship to Jesus? No one really knows, but I suspect James was more concerned with his spiritual relationship than his physical relationship. This may contribute to his address of himself as a “bondservant.”

After James’s conversion, he considered himself to be nothing more than a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

resurrection, James was skeptical of Jesus being the Son of God and the Savior of the world (Matt. 13:55-56); however, somewhere along the way, James became not only a believer, but also an advocate for Jesus. Paul mentions James in his epistles as being a “pillar” of the church and perhaps one of the leaders in the early church in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 12:7; 15:13; 21:18).

2. Bondservant. After James’ conversion, he considered himself to be nothing more than a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “bondservant” in this verse comes from the Greek word *doulos* signifying absolute obedience, total surrender, and complete loyalty.¹ Most people rebel at this thought. They are willing to be partially obedient, but not completely so.

Doulos was neither a free man nor a hired servant; he was a slave,

the rightful property of his master. The term “slave” however, did not necessarily carry the degrading connotation attached to the word today. James was a servant who was proud to belong to God and to Jesus Christ. Paul uses this same phrase to describe himself in his epistles (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). Peter uses the same term in 2 Peter 1:1. Are we who profess to be Christians today any less slaves?

What does Jesus expect from His followers? Read the following Scriptures: John 14:15; 15:13-16; 12:47-48; Romans 6:16-18; Hebrews 10:26. Can we have a relationship with Jesus without obedience to His will? No! Our relationship with God is dependent upon our obedience to Jesus’s will (2 John 9).

James demands that his readers be “not merely hearers, but doers of the word” (Jas. 1:22). When a person truly surrenders to God and the Lord Jesus, he stands shoulder to shoulder in history with men like Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.²

3. Jesus’s Title. “God and the Lord Jesus Christ”: James could intend both titles, “God” and “Lord,” to apply to Jesus—Jesus Christ, both God and Lord.³ It stands to reason that, if James did not accept Christ until Christ’s appearance to him (1 Cor. 15:7), he now acknowledges Christ’s Deity. James’s point is that he serves both God and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are so used to the combination “Jesus Christ” that we forget that “Christ” is a title, equivalent to the OT/Jewish “Mes-

¹ *Doulos*—a slave, bondman, man of servile condition, metaph. “one who gives himself to another’s will,” “those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men” (*TDNT*, 2:261). It may, in fact, be an expression which means essentially “helper” (Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:460).

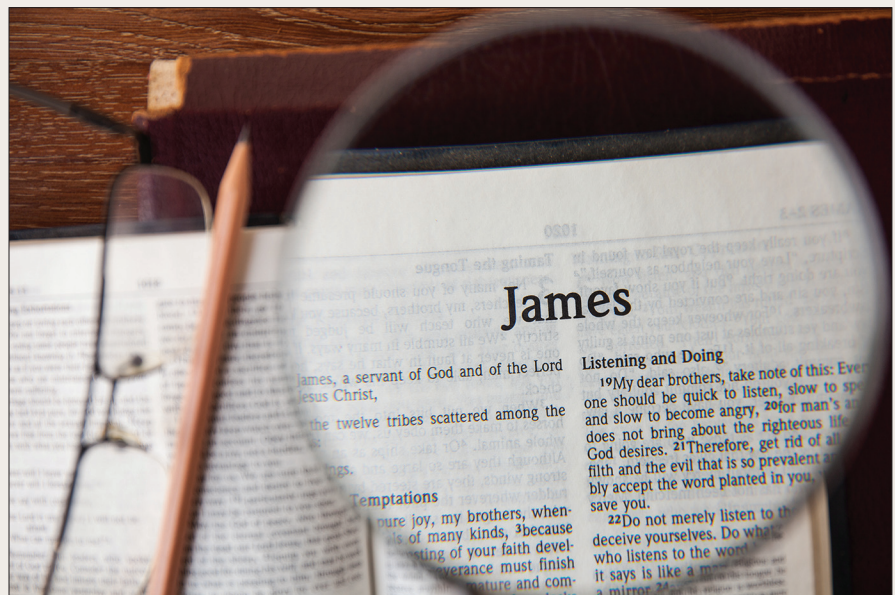
² Our judgment from Christ will be according to our acceptance and obedience of Jesus’s will (John 12:48).

³ Some commentators (Adamson, Dibelius, Mayor, and Ropes) believe and teach that “God” is a title for the Father and “Lord” is a title for Jesus.

siah.”⁴ Messiah denoted a deliverer/king expected by the Jews in the last day. James’s addition of the title “Lord” reflects a very early Christian understanding of Jesus, as seen in Peter’s claim in his Day of Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:36). Jesus is God and Lord!⁵

To the Twelve Tribes (1:1)

1. Twelve Tribes. The New Testament epistles were produced for specific people with a definite purpose in mind. Although James is considered to be a “general” epistle, James did have a specific group of people in mind—“twelve tribes of the dispersion.” Who were these people? During the first century, the phrase, “the twelve tribes” was used to describe or refer to the Jewish race (Acts 26:7). However, the twelve tribal divisions of Israel had long since disappeared and must, therefore, be understood metaphorically. There are two views taken by most scholars:



to our study. Whether they were Jewish Christians or all Christians, the readers were Christians. The church is described figuratively as the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The apostle John, in Revelation 7:4-10, uses the tribes as a figure to describe the redeemed Christians. The New Testament refers to Christians

2. Dispersion. James addresses the readers as “twelve tribes of the Dispersion.” The Greek word *diaspora* means “scattered abroad.” Peter uses the term *diaspora* to apply to those who are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God and the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience” (1 Pet. 1:2). Peter was writing to Christians bought by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 4:16). James could mean Christians throughout the world or Jewish Christians who were scattered beyond the borders of Palestine. The term *diaspora* is used in a figurative sense.

The nation of Israel was scattered several times in their history. In 722 BC the Assyrians captured the ten northern tribes of Israel and deported many of them to Assyria. During the time of Nebuchadnezzar, there was a voluntary exodus of many Jews to Egypt. This began in 650 BC and continued for a number of years. Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC brought Jews to Babylon.

The Jewish nation is not God’s chosen people anymore, but all in Christ are His people.

- That the twelve tribes refer to the Jewish Christians who had been forced to flee Jerusalem.
- That the twelve tribes might be an address to Christians in general—both Jew and Gentile.

Commentators have made strong arguments for both views. The author of this material doesn’t find it to be of great significance

as “true Jews.” The Hebrew writer said coming to the church is like coming to “Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22-23).

One thing is sure, the Jewish nation is not God’s chosen people anymore, but all in Christ are His people (Acts 10:34; Gal. 3:8-29; 1 Pet. 2:9).

⁴ Peter Davids believes and teaches that “Christ” became a name instead of a title (*New International Greek Testament Commentary: Commentary on James*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1983, 63).

⁵ Some of our brethren are teaching that Christ is not “God” on earth, that when Jesus left heaven to come to this earth he gave up his divinity.

Antiochus Epiphanes dispersed the Jews throughout the world.⁶ As a result of these scatterings, the Jews were in every part of the world (Acts 2:5-8).

Christians also were scattered abroad. We read in Acts 8:4, “Therefore, they that were scattered

abroad went everywhere preaching the word.” This persecution occurred during the vacancy of the Roman procuratorship, after the deposition of Pilate, and before the arrival of the new procurator Marcellus. The Jewish leaders took advantage of this political vacancy

and persecuted the Jewish Christians. It is believed that James and Peter (Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1) are writing to these scattered Christians. In a sense, all Christians are dispersed into the world (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 18:19-20). Therefore, James is writing to us also.

Questions

1. What do we know about James, the brother of Jesus? _____

2. Why do you suppose James did not mention his special relationship to Jesus? _____

3. What is the meaning of “bondservant”? _____

4. Are we forced to become a servant of God? Please explain your answer. _____

5. How does one become a servant of Christ (Rom. 6:3-18)? _____

6. What does Jesus expect from those who serve Him? _____

7. By what standard will all men be judged? _____

⁶ One of the most extensive works written on this subject was done by Irina Levinskaya, *Diaspora Setting*, volume 5 of the *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1996).

8. Name some titles that were given to Jesus? _____

9. What does “Christ” mean and how is it applied to Jesus? _____

10. Explain the meaning of the “twelve tribes.” _____

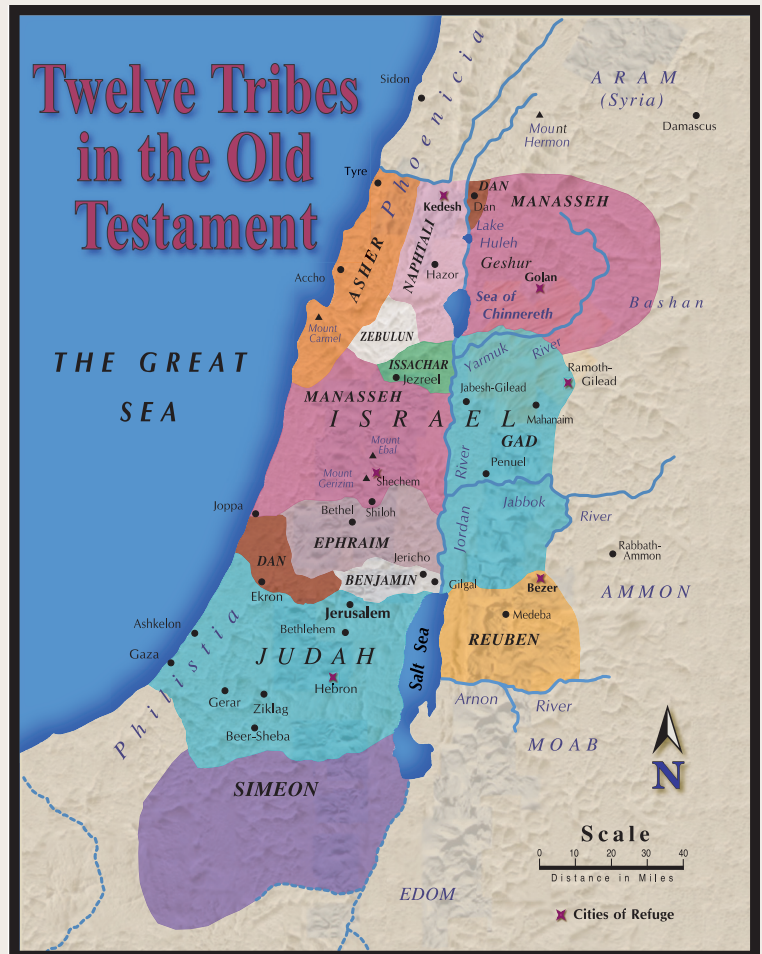
11. Who are God’s chosen people today? _____

12. Give the meaning of “diaspora.” _____

13. How is the word “diaspora” used in the New Testament? _____

14. Name some of the past dispersions of the Jews. _____

15. Why were the Christians dispersed in Acts 8:4? _____



How to Face Trials

James 1:2-18

Chapter 1 of James serves as an introduction to the topics that James will be discussing later in the following chapters. The topics mentioned in this first chapter include: trials, patience, prayer, humility, partiality, the rich, sin, having a strong faith, anger, works, and the word of God. In the chapters that follow, many, if not all, of these topics will be discussed in depth. For now, they serve as an introduction.

1. Trials Lead to Maturity (1:2-4). James presents trials in both their positive and negative aspects. Trials are to be viewed as

tion, homesickness, social isolation, language barriers, and culture shock. James is encouraging these Christians to look at these problems with a positive view. Various problems could have a good effect in their lives, especially in their spirituality.

James uses **my brethren** (v. 2) approximately seventeen times. The Greek word *adelphos* denotes a brother or near kinsman. James is not using this term in a physical or national sense, but in a spiritual sense describing their “family” relationship in Christ and within the

One who “encounters” a trial normally does not have the option of taking it or leaving it. These are unwanted and unwelcome experiences.

a reason to rejoice since they help produce mature faith, which God requires. The first readers of this letter, having been scattered and living outside Palestine, were likely experiencing serious adversity. This adversity could have taken many forms such as loneliness, grief, suffering, hardship, rejection, frustra-

tion, homesickness, social isolation, language barriers, and culture shock. James is encouraging these Christians to look at these problems with a positive view. Various problems could have a good effect in their lives, especially in their spirituality.

Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter vari-

ous trials (v. 2). The Greek word *periptō* behind the English word “encounter” is an interesting compound word made up of the preposition “around” and the verb “to fall.” It can be rendered “to fall in with or among,” or “to come across, face.” One who “encounters” a trial normally does not have the option of taking it or leaving it. These are unwanted and unwelcome experiences. When encountered, trials are to be endured and worked through.

Various trials (v. 2). The “trials” (*peirasmois*) describe things that put a person to the test. They may be difficulties that come from without, such as persecution, or they may be inner moral tests such as temptations to sin. James uses the word in the former sense in vv. 2-4 (*peirasmois*) and in the latter sense in vv. 13-18 (*peirazō*). Both meanings are used in the New Testament. (a) Outward trials: 1 Peter 4:12; Matthew 26:41; Luke 22:28; Acts 20:19; Revelation 3:10. (b) Inner enticement to sin: 1 Timothy 6:9; Luke 22:40, 46. In several verses, the meaning of the word is not clear. The Lord’s Prayer is a good example: most English translations have rendered “Do not lead us into temptation,” but many contemporary scholars argue for “Do not bring us to the time of trial” (NRSV).¹

Everyone has trials: (1) Jesus faced many trials (Luke 22:28; Heb. 2:8; 5:8-9). (2) Paul faced varied trials (Acts 20:19; 1 Cor. 11:21-29). (3) Every Christian will face them, too (1 Pet. 1:6; 4:16). The trials are not as important as the attitude one must have when he encounters them. When he understands the value and benefit, he will count it (them) with all joy. The

¹ In other verses, the meaning of *peirasmos/peirazō* may even combine these ideas, in the sense that the external trial is at the same time a point of temptation (Luke 4:13; 1 Cor. 10:13).



word “joy” (*chara*) means to be delighted or pleased with something. It is hard to be joyous when you are suffering or hurting, but it can be done!

What were the “trials” that James’s readers were enduring? (1) *Poverty*. James’s letter is filled with references to poverty and wealth (1:9-11; 2:1-7, 15-17; 4:13-5:11). (2) *Persecution*. James makes clear that religious persecution was one cause of poverty (2:6-7; 5:1-6). Why can believers react to trials with joy? God uses trials to perfect their faith and make them stronger Christians. The testing of the believer’s faith develops perseverance (*hupomonē*) and this perseverance works toward maturity. William Barclay wrote, “It is not simply the ability to bear things; it is the ability to turn them to greatness and glory” (73). Paul is a good example; by his imprisonment, he was able to further the gospel.

Endurance (v. 3). James now begins to explain why trials are valuable and necessary for Christian maturity. “The testing of faith produces endurance,” the word “producing” means to accomplish, to bring about, and to establish. Without these trials endurance cannot be produced. Endurance (patience) means to abide or remain when under pressure. It pictures the staying power

of the Christian (Col. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:5-7). The child of God must stand steadfast without yielding to outside forces or pressures. Faithfulness is a requirement for heaven. Jesus said, “The one who has endured to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). Therefore, the benefits of these trials help give additional strength to bear still greater trials. Every Christian needs perseverance and patience in his or her daily life.

Perfect results (v. 4). “Perfect” is from *teleion* which indicates the idea of, “complete, whole, finished, end, and maturity.” James is not talking about sinless perfection; rather, he means spiritual maturity. Maturity is the knowledge that one obtains from enduring these trials. This maturity helps one to discern what is right and what is wrong (see Heb. 5:12-14). Maturity, according to James, does not come as the result of many natural experiences, but comes from meeting and passing manifold testing along the course to heaven (Gal. 5:7).

2. Seeking Wisdom (vv. 5-8). Wisdom is very important to James. A quick reading of his epistle reveals his deep concern for wisdom (3:13, 15, 17). This wisdom is right understanding, moral discernment, spiritual insight, responsible words,

and worthy actions. The book of James is considered to be one of the earlier epistles; therefore, the Bible was not complete until much later. Christians then, unlike Christians today, could not turn to God’s word for knowledge (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The knowledge needed to help understand temptations was to be obtained by prayer.

Prayer (v. 6). To pray to God for wisdom is to recognize the fact that He knows all, and to acknowledge God’s providence. Praying to God is conditional! One must pray in faith without doubting. One must be righteous (1 Pet. 3:12), a worshiper of God (John 9:31), and obedient to God (1 John 3:22).

Doubting Faith (v. 6). Maturity obtained by endurance helps establish a stable faith. A stable faith is necessary if one wants to receive blessings from God. The Greek word for “faith” is *pistis* and means “reliance upon, trust, confidence, and assurance.” There can be no doubting in the Christian’s trust in God. This doubting could stem from three areas: (1) Doubting that the prayer request will come to pass, (2) Doubting the ability of God to bring it to pass, or (3) Doubting your real need for the thing being prayed for. The Christian believes that God is able to keep

His promises. James illustrates the kind of person who doubts. That person is “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” The tide rushes into the shore and pauses for a moment; in fact, it looks like it will remain there permanently, and then, suddenly it rushes out again in the opposite direction. This is an endless process.

Being Doubled-Minded (v. 8). “Double-minded” is a word made up of the words “two” and “soul.” It refers to a person who is double-minded about something, one whose soul is divided between faith and the world. One is reminded of the words of Jesus, “No one can

Brother of humble circumstances . . . (v. 9). The poor man may be prone to view himself as a failure whose very being is without worth or value. However, in Christ, this same man sees himself differently and comes to have a new sense of worth and self-esteem. Where humility is a problem with the rich, self-pity is a problem with the poor.

Rich man is to glory in his humiliation . . . (v. 9). The poor are raised, and the rich are brought low. The rich man is “to glory in his humiliation because like flowing grass he will pass away.” In other words, the rich man learns that his material riches are not able to buy

been dealing with external trials that suddenly come upon a Christian. Now he introduces the inner trials (temptations) that involve sin. These verses describe the inner desire which leads one into sin. Temptations are different from trials. Trials are an inevitable part of living. Temptations, however, spring from within when a person is tempted by his “own evil desire” (v. 14). James clearly states that God is not the origin of our temptations. Temptation to sin is the operation of evil desires. Evil desires may be material goods, money, sex, fame, position, influence, prestige, power, or even comfort. Read Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; 1 John 2:15-17, and Genesis 3:1-6. Notice the following illustration of this process of Genesis 3:1-6:

- Thoughts—The serpent planted the thoughts of the tree in Eve’s head (v. 1).
- Circumstances—She is before the tree and Satan is trying to influence her (v. 5-6).
- Desire—Eve saw the tree and desired the fruit (v. 6).
- Act—She took the fruit and ate it (v. 6).
- Sinned—Violated God’s will (1 John 3:4).

Satan tricked Eve into sin believing that she would become a god too. But Eve sinned because of her desires.

5. Good and perfect gifts (vv. 16-18). James is concerned that his readers may have adopted some false ideas about the life of faith. Therefore, James emphasizes that God is not the source of temptation, but the source of “every good and perfect gift” (v. 17).

The Greek word for “good” is *agathos* which means beneficial

Temptations are different from trials. Trials are an inevitable part of living. Temptations, however, spring from within when a person is tempted by his “own evil desire.”

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” (Matt. 6:24). It is much like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 who were lukewarm.

3. The problem of prejudice (vv. 9-11). Within these three verses, James is now presenting two specific examples of faith being tested. (1) Attitude of the poor, and (2) Attitude of the rich. Every generation is faced with prejudice and respect of persons. In James’s day, it was rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, and Roman and barbarian. Today it is between rich and poor, management and labor, white and black, educated and uneducated. The problem is still here, and each has to face it in the particular circumstances of his own life.

spiritual security. He recognizes that his right relationship to God is available only in Christ. This reminds us of the rich young ruler in Luke 17:18-27. The Jews thought that they could buy their way into the kingdom of the Messiah. See Mark 8:36; Luke 16:19-31.

Blessed is the man that perseveres . . . (v. 12). James now reveals the positive side of temptation and perseverance. “He shall receive the crown of life.” The Christian has won the victory over his trials; therefore, he receives the victor’s crown (2 Tim. 4:8). The Greek word for “crown” is *stephanos*, and it denotes that which circles and surrounds the head. It pictures a crown or wreath—a sign of victory, joy, or happiness.

4. The Process of Sin (vv. 13-15). In verses 2-12 James has

or necessary. The Greek word for “perfect” is *teleios* which means complete or whole. God has given man everything he needs to overcome temptations, whether these temptations are external or internal. Some of the “good and perfect gifts” that God has given man are Christ, His Word, and the church. These are necessary and helpful in making man complete in His sight.

A kind of first fruits of His creatures (v. 18). The instrument used to bring about this new birth is the word of truth. God’s word is truth (John 17:17) and has the power to set men free (John 8:32). Peter said, “you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). The word “firstfruit” is a figure taken

from the Jewish Law. Under the Law, an Israelite farmer would go out and pick a sampling of his crop; if the “firstfruits” were good, it promised a greater crop at harvest (Lev. 23:10; Deut. 26:2). These Christians were among the first “crop” of converts, which testified of a greater “crop” of converts to come—we are living proof of this promise today.

Questions

1. List the topics that James discusses in this first chapter?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
 - h. _____
 - i. _____
 - j. _____
 - k. _____
2. How should we view our trials? _____

3. How does James use the phrase “my brethren” in this chapter? _____

4. What does the Greek word *periptō* (encounter) mean? _____

5. In what way are trials used in this chapter? _____

6. Name some of the trials that James's readers were experiencing. _____

7. What is the meaning of endurance? _____

8. How do we develop maturity in our Christianity? _____

9. What is the wisdom that James's readers were praying for, and what is the wisdom we should be praying for today? _____

10. Name the conditions for prayer.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
11. What is a "doubting faith"? _____

12. What does it mean to be double-minded? _____

13. What was the problem in vv 9-11? _____

14. How is a person blessed by his perseverance? _____

15. How are temptations different from trials? _____

16. What is the process of sin? _____

17. What does James mean by "a kind of firstfruits of His creatures"? _____

It may seem at first glance that verses 19-21 are out of place or have no relationship with the context of verses 18, 22-27. Further examination, however, reveals significant links to the preceding and following contexts. The term “word” (*logō*) is found in verses 18, 21-25 and refers to the Scriptures, the Word of God. Verse 18 indicates that the “word of truth” had brought them forth into this new birth. A Christian’s responsibility to the Word does not end after the new birth, but he should “receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (v. 21). Verses 22-25 discuss the doing of the Word, “prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (v. 22). It would seem, then, that verses 19-21 emphasize listening to and receiving the Word, while verses 22-25 stress the doing of the Word.

1. Reception of God’s truth (vv. 19-21). James is attempting to clear the way for the reception of God’s truth (v. 21). James begins

by exhorting his readers to heed the word of God, “Take note of this.” (KJV’s “wherefore” is based on an inferior Greek text.) The reception of the Word demands a readiness “to listen.” Many of the internal problems that the church faces today are caused by poor communication. Learning to be a good listener is necessary for good communication. The same is true with God. We have to be attentive to God’s will.

“Be slow to speak” (v. 19). A continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says and, by the same token, will not hear the words of God. This is a specific command, “Be . . . slow to speak.” In the immediate context of James, this admonition no doubt applies to their haste in blaming God for their sins. The Proverb writer said, “He that is slow to anger is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly” (Prov. 14:29). The Christian must practice the wisdom of careful and deliberate speaking. Hasty speaking can render much harm. Being irrational in one’s thinking can cause irrational speaking.

Attitude toward the Word of God

James 1:19-27

Learning to be a good listener is necessary for good communication. The same is true with God. We have to be attentive to God’s will.

Slow to anger (v. 19). James is concerned with improper speech and anger. This concern is a traditional theme of Old Testament wisdom literature (Prov. 14:29; Eccl. 7:9; Prov. 16:32). The Greek word (*orgē*) for anger indicates vengeance, indignation, and any violent emotion. Often anger causes improper speech. James recognizes that his readers are struggling in this area—as his repeated attention to “the tongue” and “unbridled passions” shows (see 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:1-3, 11-12; 5:12).

For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (v. 20). “For” indicates that this verse gives reasoning that lies behind the last exhortation. Anger does not produce the righteous life of a Christian. The Christian must control his temper. Many Christians pass off their tempers, or the tempers of others, by saying, “O well, he has always had a bad temper, you will have to overlook it.” An angry man (whose temper is out of control) is never pleasing unto



God. The NIV’s “righteous life that God desires” is a paraphrase of the Greek, which, literally translated, says, “the righteousness of God.”¹ Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17). In order to receive the truth, one must control his anger. Anger can keep one from seeking God’s will.

If a person wants to stay saved, he must live a godly lifestyle and live according to God’s will.

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness (v. 21). In further preparation for the reception of the Word, one must get rid of all moral filth. The Greek word translated “get rid of” (*apothemenoi*) was primarily used in taking off garments. This indicates that man is in control of his actions and that each person is responsible to “get rid of” this ungodly living. One of the most serious problems facing the church right now can be summarized in one word: *unwillingness*. Many Christians who profess to follow Christ are *unwilling* to demonstrate it by their actions.

In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls (v. 21). Again, the

reception of the truth requires a meek attitude. Humility is the opposite of pride. Pride often causes ungodly behavior. Pride usually incites anger. The Greek word which is translated “meekness” (*prautēs*) describes a man who has perfect control of everything in his nature and accepts God’s dealings with him as good and just. A humble person will not resist God’s will or resist change.

The word “implanted” is the Greek word *emphutos* and is used metaphorically of the sowing of God’s word in the human heart. We

are reminded of the parable of the sower recorded in Luke 8:12-15. The word being sown into the hearts of men

is necessary, but before it can be sown, the heart has to be prepared. It is a two-fold preparation. Man’s heart must be receptive and God must find a sower to sow the seed. Paul said, “I planted and Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6).

The reason for receiving the word is that it has the power to save your soul. Keep in mind that James is addressing people who have been saved from their past sins. The salvation is eternal salvation. If a person wants to stay saved, he must live a godly lifestyle and live according to God’s will. Later James said, “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” (Jas. 5:20).

2. Being a Doer of Truth (vv. 22-27). A young minister preached his first sermon in the church with which he had been asked to serve. It was well received and the people expressed their appreciation as they shook his hand at the door of the church building. The next Sunday, the young man preached the same sermon. He continued to preach it for the following three Sundays.

Finally, his elders met and inquired whether or not he had any other sermons. When he said “yes,” they asked why he kept repeating the first sermon. He asked them, “Have you put into practice the first one I preached?” They admitted they hadn’t. “Why should I preach another until the first really means something to you in terms of your everyday experiences?” he asked. They were embarrassed and had no answer.

James emphasizes that the Christians who are only hearers of God’s Word are actually guilty of self-deception. “Hearer” comes from the Greek word *akroatai* which means those who listen attentively with a real interest in what is being said. The word “doer” is the Greek word *poiētai*. It denotes a maker or composer and is the word from which we get our word “poet” (Acts 17:28); it pictures creative action. In our verse it is in the middle imperative and means, basically, “exhibit yourself as a doer; keep on exhibiting yourself as a doer.”

The Greek word for “deluding” is *paralogizomai* which means, “to reckon wrong, to reach a false conclusion based upon false reasoning.”² This word occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (Col. 2:4)

¹ The KJV, NASB, NRSV, RSV, ASV, RWB, and BBE translates it as “the righteousness of God.” We must not confuse our righteousness with God’s righteousness.

² Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the N.T. and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

where it means to lead one astray from the faith. The main thought here is to put into practice what one professes to believe.

He is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror (v. 23).

James uses a simile to illustrate the importance of doing, and not merely hearing, the word of God. In the ancient world, a mirror was a specially shaped piece of polished metal used to inspect or decorate a person's body. The ancient literature is replete with references to the use of a mirror and its use as a metaphor for moral development. James implies two mistakes that occur when the believer fails to act upon the word: (1) the believer doesn't treat the truth of the word as reality, and (2) the believer ignores the message of the word.

For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (v. 24). The effort and time spent looking in the mirror does not benefit the man, because he turns away and does not do anything about his recognized need. As a preacher, I hear people say, "I sure needed that," or "You sure stepped on my toes today." But that is the end of their involvement in doing.

The perfect law of liberty (v. 25). The verb "look" (Greek *parakuptō*) denotes one who stoops sideways to look diligently into something. It is used in Luke 24:12; John 20:5, 11. This denotes a penetrating look. What are they looking at? "Perfect law of liberty."

The Greek word "perfect" (*teleion*) means full or completeness. "Law" (*nomos*) basically means "rule or standard." There are several reasons why God's will or law is complete: (1) It was given by the Holy Spirit (John 14 and 16). (2) It cannot be



improved upon (Jude 3; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19). (3) It contains all things one needs for life and godliness (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). (4) It shall never pass away (1 Pet. 1:23-24). (5) It will be the standard for judgment in the last day (John 12:48; Rom. 2:26).

Liberty (v. 25). Freedom!

Here are some aspects of this "law of liberty." (1) A person is free to come under subjection to Christ's rule of action. He is not forced to serve Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; 2 Cor. 3:17). (2) A person can follow the will of Christ and be free from sin (Rom. 6:3-8, 16-18). (3) A Jew is freed from the sacramental aspects of the Law of Moses (Col. 2:14-17). In summary, the man who fights the word of God is wretched and miserable as he struggles with a guilty conscience. The one who yields to God in obedience has a clear conscience and receives the blessings of God in his dedicated life.

If any man thinks himself to be religious (v. 26). After spending time revealing the proper attitude in receiving God's word, James is now revealing how one can demonstrate being a doer of the word instead of only being a hearer. There are three ways to prove that one is a doer of

God's will: (1) Have proper control and use of the tongue. (2) Show concern and compassion for the needy. (3) Have proper conduct in one's day-to-day living. A religious man does more than go to worship; he lives his faith and practices it every day. Keep in mind that Christianity is a way of life! "This man's religion is

vain" (v. 26). "Vain" means worthless, void, and empty. If a person can't control his tongue, his religion is worthless. "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:17).

Pure and undefiled religion

(v. 27). James now introduces the subject of the whole book: "Pure and undefiled religion is this." How can we develop and maintain pure and undefiled religion? The word "pure" is from the Greek word *katharos* which means "cleansed." It pictures something that has been polluted and now has been cleansed. Jesus cleanses us by his blood (Matt. 26:28). The word "undefiled" is from *amiantos* which means "free from contamination." When we practice living according to God's will, our religion is pure and undefiled.

Religion (v. 27). The word "religion" is from the Greek word *thrēskeia* which means "worship, that which consists of ceremonies." The things that we do externally are

natural products of our internal love for God and His word.

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (v. 27). Our religion, if it is to be pleasing unto God, must be practical. Pure religion is a practical religion. A true test of our religion is to visit those in need. “Visit” is from the Greek word *episkeptomai* which means “to look upon in order to help, or to benefit, to have care for.” This word indicates more than a casual visit.

The individual Christian is motivated by love, not only to send

money or a card, but also to express a personal interest in the needs of others. “Orphans” is from the Greek word *orphanos* which means without parents. The “widow” is from *chēra* which means without a husband. As individual Christians, when we see a need, we are to help fill that need (Gal. 6:10). As a collectivity (congregational cooperation), God has given us a pattern to help the needy saints. There is a scriptural means of supplying the needs of Christians, especially widows (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:3-10). “Affliction” means trouble, a burden, or distress.

Brethren who want to support institutions with the Lord’s treasury have misused this passage to condone their practice of building and supporting institutions to do the work of the church. In most of these institutions, we have non-Christians as well as Christians, thus making the church a benevolent society for the world, which the church has no authority to be. I do not believe that James is limiting our visiting or helping to these two groups. I think he chose the most destitute groups to show that genuine religion will be thoughtful and compassionate.

Questions

1. How do verses 19-27 relate to the rest of chapter 1? _____

2. Why is listening so vital for good communication? _____

3. How does John end every letter to the seven churches in Revelation (chapters 2 and 3)? _____

4. Explain the phrase “slow to speak.” _____

5. How can hasty speaking render much harm? _____

6. How many times did James use the word “anger”? Please list the passages. _____

7. Explain the following statement: “For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” _____

8. What is the righteousness of God? _____

9. What is the meaning of the word “anger” in this passage? _____

10. How can anger keep one from seeking God’s will? _____

11. What causes a person to become angry? _____

12. What must a person “get rid of” in his life (1:21)? _____

13. Why is humility important in the reception of truth? _____

14. How is the Word of God implanted into our hearts? _____

15. How does the Word save souls? _____

Lesson 5

Respect of Persons

James 2:1-13

1. Do not show favoritism (2:1-7). In chapter two, James continues to show what pure and undefiled religion is all about. Pure and undefiled religion does not show partiality. This no doubt is a test of one's faith on a daily basis. How one treats other people is vital to his service in Christ. Christianity is a religion of compassion, love, and concern for others. People play favorites, but God doesn't.

Do not hold . . . with an attitude of personal favoritism (v. 1). The Jews often showed favoritism to the wealthy. The Jews were divided into groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, etc.) who, basically, rejected each other for various reasons.

The Law of Moses condemned respect of persons. Moses wrote, "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; ye shall hear the small and the great alike" (Deut. 1:17). The Jews did not obey this command; and no doubt, many Jewish Christians brought this attitude into the church. "Favoritism" is from the Greek word *prosōpolēmpsia* meaning respect of persons. It is found in Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:24 and literally means, "to lift one man's face above another."



Favoritism becomes a fault when a person responsible to give judgment, gives respect to a person's position, popularity, or circumstances instead of that person's intrinsic conditions.¹

What makes a person prejudiced? There are many things that contribute to this sin. The following things can contribute to our prejudices:

- Our background. What we hear in our homes, schools, community, and offices. Our environment is a strong molding force in developing our attitudes toward others.
- Our status in life. Wealth, education, and position have a lot to do with our attitude toward others.

- Because of indoctrination. Some have been taught to "look down" upon others because of race, lack of education, or because they are poor.
- Because of a bad experience in the past. They had an unfortunate experience with a poor man, white man, black man, policeman, sailor, etc.; and they still have a tendency to be untrusting.

For if a man come into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, . . . a poor man in dirty clothes (v. 2). In verses 2-4, James uses a parable to illustrate the way respect of persons often works in the worship assembly. The first man is wearing a gold ring, a sign of great affluence, and fine clothing. "Fine" is from the Greek word *lampros* which means bright, clear, splendid, and gorgeous. The second man in this story is a very poor man. It is evident from his attire; he is wearing dirty clothes. Our faith is being tested by how we react and act toward these two. Which hand shall I shake first? Which one do I want to sit beside?

¹ The church needs to refrain from favoritism based on economic, educational, and social status. Moving from favoritism to fairness will please Christ and raise the credibility of the church in the community in which it is planted.

Which one will I go and speak to first? Pure and undefiled religion will not make a distinction in treatment.

... **And become judges with evil thoughts? (v. 4).** James is not teaching that to be wealthy is sinful. The rich man who came to the same church services as the poor man was not condemned because of his affluence. The usher committed the sin of giving greater respect to the rich man. James draws attention to the fact that the reason most people commit the sin of respect of persons is that they have an erroneous sense of values. This is made clear in verses 3 and 4. Prejudicial actions are the symptoms of a much deeper problem, evil thinking. There is an evil motive behind being prejudiced. This motive can be many things.

2. God's Discrimination (2:5-7). After the illustration, James proceeds to give his readers a statement of truth about God's discrimination. He constructed this section with a series of rhetorical questions:

- "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" (v. 5).
- "Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?" (v. 6).²
- "Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" (v. 7).

The expected, though unexpressed, answer to these questions is "Yes." James told his readers that they had insulted the poor and honored the rich. In raising these

questions, James gives three major reasons for accepting the poor.

a. God has chosen the poor. It wasn't until after the Day of Pentecost and the baptism of Cornelius that the apostles really understood that salvation is for everyone. Salvation is for the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2 Corinthians 8:9.

b. The poor were rich in faith. It is through an active, obedient faith that one becomes a child of God (Rom. 6:3-6; 16-18; Heb. 5:8-9); it is through faith, also, that one maintains his salvation (1 Pet. 1:9). Read Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Peter 1:3-7.

c. The poor were also heirs of the kingdom. The Greek word "heir" is from the noun *klēronomos* which means "one who obtains a lot or portion, especially of an inheritance." When a person (rich or poor) obeys the gospel, that person

becomes a member of God's family. Read Romans 8:15-17.

These great blessings were promises of God and can be given to anyone who will love God and obey His will.

3. The Royal Law (2:8-13).

What is the Royal Law? To some it is the New Testament, to others, it is referring to Leviticus 19:7,18. James defines this law as "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 8). James argues that rather than showing favoritism, Christians are to follow the Royal Law. Echoing the words of Jesus, "... you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). "Royal" is from the Greek word *basilikos* which means "nobleman, belonging to a king, kingly, and regal." Since Jesus quoted this portion of the law and Jesus is king over his kingdom, it has become royal and is to be practiced by Christians who are a royal priesthood according to 1 Peter 2:9.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James now comes to the climax of his teaching. If they are showing partiality, they are committing sin. In fact, the very Law they had appealed to is the one that had convicted them of sin. Leviticus 19:7,

Salvation is for the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated.

18 said to love both; they violated this by only practicing it toward the rich.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. James makes a strong claim. If a person

² This question refers to a custom, which was practiced daily in the society of which he was a part. It was the custom of summary arrest. A rich man would meet a poor man on the street who owed him money. He would seize him by the neck of his robe, drawing it tight so that he nearly strangled him. He would then literally drag him into a court of law where the poor man was required to explain why he had been unable to meet his financial obligations. If he could not give a satisfactory explanation, he was cast into prison where he remained until his debts were paid.

fails to keep even the small points of the law, he breaks God's entire law. He illustrates this claim with an example in verse 11. If a person doesn't commit adultery but murders someone, he breaks the entire law. The point James is making is that God's law exposes sin and its true nature. Sin in a person's life is never a question of breaking a single command, but rather of violating the integrity of the whole law.

4. The Law of Freedom (vv. 12-13). James closes this section on the Royal Law with two main points.

- The Christian lives under the law of liberty. What does it mean to live under the law of liberty?

This is the second time (1:25) that law is linked with freedom in this epistle. New Testament writers refer to the Old Testament as the law of bondage. Paul said, "Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). James alluded to the teachings of Moses, which many Jewish Christians still tried to follow but could not. The law of liberty must be the law of Christ, the law of judgment.

- Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy is a very important ingredient in human relationships because it is a direct indicator of how much we are aware of God's forgiveness of us. On judgment day, God will reserve His judgment where merciful faith is evident.

Favoritism is a complex sin and evil that leads to division within the fellowship of believers. The church of Jesus Christ must unite around the principles of Christ rather than follow the practices of the world. Believers are to "speak" and "act" as those who will be judged by God's will.

Questions

1. Why is favoritism wrong in the Lord's church? _____

2. What is the meaning of favoritism? _____

3. Name some things that may contribute to favoritism. _____

4. What illustration did James use to show his readers how they were guilty of favoritism? _____

5. How can the church today be guilty of showing favoritism? _____

6. Name some motives that people would have for showing favoritism? _____

7. Why do you suppose that “not many noble, not many mighty” have been called to God’s purpose? _____

8. How were the poor rich? _____

9. What does it mean to be an heir of God’s kingdom? _____

10. Explain what the Royal Law means. _____

11. How does one become guilty of breaking the whole Law? _____

12. What is the Law of Liberty? _____

13. What is mercy? _____



Lesson 6

Faith and Works

James 2:14-26

This passage is the third argument of this chapter, delivering the true content of faith according to James. Demonstrating the authenticity of faith is its primary focus.

The relationship between faith and works has been the cause of much religious debate. This controversy centers around James and Paul's teaching on faith, justification, and works. Many religious leaders say that James contradicts Paul's teaching on these subjects.¹ James and Paul do not contradict one another.

1. Faith That Saves (vv. 14-17). “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” (v. 14). Again James uses rhetorical questions to illustrate his point on the true nature of faith in Jesus Christ (v. 1). “Works” (*ergon*) means “that which one undertakes to do.” There are three different kinds of works mentioned in the Bible. (1) Man's works (Rom. 3:19-20; Eph. 2:8-9), (2) Satan's works (1 John 3:8), and (3) God's works (John 6:28-29).

James and Paul approached faith and works from different points of view. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul addressed those who denied that active faith in Christ will save one from sin and were saying one had to have the works of the law, too, in order to be justified (Gal. 4-5; Rom. 3:28).



James refers to the works that God ordained man to do in order to be pleasing and acceptable in his sight. Faith will give the Christian motivation to do the things that God has commanded.

This is called obedient faith (Heb. 11:7-8)!

Can that faith save him? (v. 14). No! A faith that is not proven by action cannot save!

If a brother or sister be naked and lack daily food . . . and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body, what doth it profit? (v. 15). James now illustrates their inactive faith.

His summary: “Even so faith, if it have not works is dead in itself.” A dead faith is an inactive faith; a faith that is not proven by doing what God wants man to do.

2. A Question of Proof (vv. 18-19). “But someone may well say, you have faith and I have works” (v. 18). James was anticipating an

objection from his readers. Perhaps Christians had come to see some believers in the church as having faith and others works. James is saying that it is impossible to have faith without the works. He uses himself as an example.

¹ It was this passage that so seriously challenged Martin Luther's theory of salvation by faith alone that he designated the entire epistle of James “an epistle of straw” and left it out of his canon of the New Testament books. In his general introduction to the “Septembertestament” (published on Sept. 21, 1522), he wrote: “Therefore the epistle of James is a right strawy epistle in comparison with them [i.e., John, Romans, Galatians, and 1 Peter], since indeed it has no evangelical nature to it.”

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (v. 19). Belief in God is not saving faith! There is a widespread movement in the religious world that takes the position that one's willingness to declare verbally his faith in Christ is all that is necessary to make him a Christian. James now uses the demons as proof that belief in God is not saving faith. The demons not only believe but they know that God exists and they shudder at the thought of God. But they don't have faith. They are against God.

There is no proof that a man has faith at all unless some fruit is borne of it in his life. If one claims to have faith and then proceeds to develop Christian character by his obedience to the word of God, he is proving his faith that he has in Jesus Christ. James is teaching the Christian how to have "pure and undefiled religion." It is simple; demonstrate your faith with works.

3. Faith Exemplified (vv. 20-26). James uses two different people to illustrate this truth about faith and works.

First he uses Abraham. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" (v. 21). James authenticates the story of Abraham

and Isaac by using it as reference. Whose idea was it to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice? Was it Abraham's idea or God's? God's! Abraham was not justified before God until he had obeyed the requirement to

This historical account is recorded in Joshua 2:1-21. No one knows for sure why James chose Rahab as his example. Perhaps it was to illustrate that this Canaanite harlot's² faith was justified the same way as Abraham's

There is no proof that a man has faith at all unless some fruit is borne of it in his life. If one claims to have faith and then proceeds to develop Christian character by his obedience to the word of God, he is proving his faith that he has in Jesus Christ.

give Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham's belief in God was not fulfilled until he had obeyed the Lord. See Genesis 22:1-19 and Hebrews 11:17-19.

... And he was called a friend of God (v. 23). The Greek word for "friend" is *philos* which means an associate or companion. Abraham's faith moved him to be obedient to God's commands, and thus Abraham developed a relationship with God. Read 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. How do we maintain a friendship with God today (John 15:14; 1 John 1:5-7)?

Secondly, he uses Rahab. "In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works" (v. 25).

faith, thus, demonstrating that active faith has no bounds. If anyone (Jew, Gentile, Greek, or Roman) is to be acceptable to God he must have an obedient faith.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead (v. 26). What a graphic picture this is! When physical death occurs, the soul is separated from the body. Immediately the body begins to decay and decompose (Eccl. 12:7).

James closes this chapter by reemphasizing verse 17, stating that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead."

Questions

1. What is the relationship between faith and works? _____

2. Explain the differences between James's teaching on faith and Paul's teaching on faith. _____

² In James' day, prostitutes were ranked with tax collectors among the lowest class of people.

3. What is “saving faith”? _____

4. Name the different kinds of works mentioned in the Bible? _____

5. How did James use the demons to illustrate his point about faith and works? _____

6. What do some denominations teach about faith? Can faith alone save? Why or why not? _____

7. Is baptism a work? _____
8. Is repentance a work? _____
9. How can we befriend Jesus? _____

10. How did James use Abraham as an illustration to prove that works justify faith? _____

11. Who was Rahab? _____

12. Why do you suppose James used her as an example? _____

13. What graphic picture did James use to show that faith without works is dead? _____

It is rather significant that James introduces the subject of the tongue at this point in his epistle. Up to now his emphasis has been upon works, not words. James has already mentioned the tongue in 1:19, 26, and in chapter two, he emphasizes the failure of talking without doing. Perhaps James wants to be sure that a person does not conclude that actions are all important and words do not matter.

1. Being a Teacher (3:1). In the early church, teachers were important people. Wherever genuine teachers are mentioned, it is with honor. Paul stressed the official position of the teacher in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, and 2 Timothy 1:11. The Jews had freedom of speech and even strangers could express themselves. Jesus was always ready to take advantage of these occasions to speak in the synagogues (Matt. 12:9; Mark 1:39; Luke 6:6). Even after the church was established, this freedom was still permitted. In his ministry, Paul took advantage of this freedom to address his audiences in various places (Acts 13:14, 15; 18:6). All of James's comments are as applicable today as the day he wrote them. The first 12 verses of this chapter, perhaps more than all of the others, need to be emphasized in the church since we are all teachers in one way or another.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren (v. 1). In Judaism the most respected person was the religious teacher. He was called “rabbi,” which actually means, “My great one” or “Master.” Everywhere he went he was accorded the utmost respect. But many men went into the profession primarily because they loved the

position, the prominence, and the praise of the crowd.

Unfortunately in the church, just as in Judaism, there are those who set themselves up as teachers because they want the acclaim of their fellow believers. As the result of this false motivation, there were



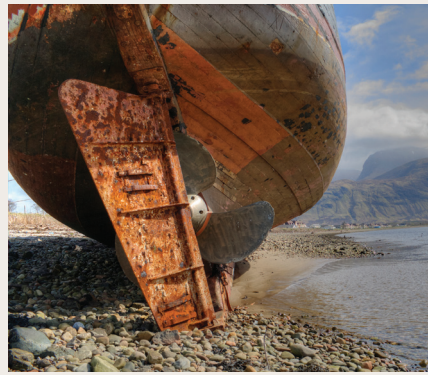
teachers who did not live according to that which they taught (Rom. 2:17-19), others taught before they knew anything themselves (1 Tim. 1:6-7), and some cared nothing for sound doctrine, but taught what they thought the people wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:3). So James warns against anyone becoming a teacher for selfish reasons, such as that of desiring the position.

... Knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment (v. 1). The teacher, and James includes himself in this statement with the word “we,” will be judged more strictly. The word “judgment” is from the Greek word *krima* and means “a decree or condemnation”¹ The word “stricter” is from the

Greek word *meizōn* which means “greater, or stronger.” James is simply saying that a teacher will have a stronger judgment than non-teachers. *The greater the responsibility and knowledge the greater the judgment!* Read 1 Peter 2:20-22.

2. Tongue Control (vv. 2-12). The teacher's primary tool is speech, and its instrument is the tongue.

¹ Hellenistically *krima* meant the “decision of the judge.” “Usually the decision is unfavorable, and it thus bears the sense of condemnation” (TDNT 3: 942).



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 (v. 2). Every child of God has a problem that centers on the words that fall from his lips. This includes the great, the near-great, and the not so great. The true sign of “pure and undefiled religion” is the ability of the Christian to control his tongue.

The tongue receives major attention in the Bible. The tongue was thought of as expressing a person’s true nature since speech is viewed as more than just a verbal phenomenon (Ps. 64:2-3; Prov. 10:20; 17:20).

The wisdom writings of the Old Testament emphasize the practical results of the use of the tongue (Prov. 12:18; 18:21; 21:6, 23).

Jesus revealed that speech reveals the condition of one’s heart (Matt. 12:34-37; 15:11). We need to give attention to James’s teaching on this important matter since it applies to every Christian.

3. The analogies of the size of the tongue (vv. 3-5). Here James delivers three analogies that illustrate how small things can have control over large things, relating those to the nature of the tongue.

- **A horse’s bit (v. 3).** Bits are placed in the mouths of big horses to direct them. With this small bit, the rider controls the entire horse. The analogy is clear, the tongue may be small, but the whole body is controlled by it.
- **A ship’s rudder (v. 4).** Small rudders are used by pilots to guide large ships. A ship is an excellent illustration of bringing under control a very large object with a small but effective instrument.
- **A spark in the forest (v. 5).** Although deceptively small and seemingly insignificant, a small spark has the potential for massive destruction. The same with the tongue!

4. The analogies given to show the force or power of the tongue (vv. 6-8).

Fire (v. 6). James wrote that the tongue is a “fire” that corrupts the whole person. James uses three statements to show the potential deadly nature of the tongue:

- It “defiles the entire body” meaning it can be responsible for making or causing a man to sin (Matt. 15:11).
- It “sets on fire the course of life” meaning the sins of the tongue can spread throughout the entire being like cancer, thus consuming our lives (2 Kings 5:15-27).
- It “sets on fire by hell” the meaning here is difficult because of the word “hell” (*geenna*) and the words “sets on fire” (*phlo-*

Every child of God has a problem that centers on the words that fall from his lips.

gizomene). “Set on fire” may mean a continual setting on fire.² Hell can have reference to future punishment or the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city are cast into and burned.³

Despite the difficulty, the meaning is still clear; the tongue, though small, is one of the most active members of the body. It can be destructive, deceptive, and dangerous.

² *Phlogizomene* is a present passive participle of *phlogizō*, referring to continually setting on fire.

³ *Geenna* is of Hebrew origin taken from 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6. It became a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction (*TDNT* 1:657).

Taming the Tongue (vv. 7-8). But no one can tame the tongue. . . . Man can bring a wild animal under control, but man generally fails to control the tongue. This does not mean that man can never control the tongue, but that the tongue needs constant supervision.

5. Analogies of Incompatibility (vv. 9-12). At the outset of these verses, James refers to the fact that men and women have been made in the image of God, “God’s likeness” (v. 9). Too often, man can praise God and at the same time curse man, whom God created in His image. Read 1 John 4:20.

Praise and cursing (v. 10). The tongue has the capacity both to give praise and to curse. The question is obvious, how can speech that builds up and speech that tears down come from the same month?

Fresh water and salt water (v. 11). Can a well produce fresh water, which is good or desirable, and salt water, which is bad or undesirable, at the same time?

Fruit trees and their fruit (v. 12). James closes his series of analogies with two illustrations about the fig tree and the grapevine. Rather than presenting a contrast

here, he focuses on the natural order of living things: they produce after their own kind.

James’s conclusion is that a believer’s speech is a revelation of his character. A person’s speech comes from the heart. A Christian is not to be hypocritical in his speech.

More friendships are broken, more families are divided, and more churches are split by what is said than by what is done.

Questions

1. To whom is the chapter addressed? _____

2. Can this chapter be applied to all Christians? _____

3. What responsibility did James assign to teachers of God’s Word?

4. Why did James place such an emphasis on the use of the tongue?

5. What do James’s analogies about the tongue and speech teach us? What truths especially stand out for us today? _____

6. Name some sins of the tongue. _____

7. How can a man control his tongue? _____

8. What do anger and the tongue have in common? _____

9. In what way can we be hypocritical in the use of the tongue? _____

10. Who is the perfect man? _____

11. What is the best cure for gossip? _____

12. Explain James 3:10. _____



In the passage that covers 3:13-4:10, James focuses on two main ideas: those who are friends of God and those who are friends of the world. Those who are friends of God embrace heavenly wisdom; those who are friends of the world embrace earthly wisdom. In our current text, James proceeds to teach what is the difference between these two wisdoms.

1. The Two Wisdoms (3:13-15). James couples the terms “wise” and “understanding” to describe people who embrace heavenly wisdom. Such people measure up to God’s standards with both attitudes and proper behavior.

Who among you is wise and understanding? (v. 13). His opening rhetorical question asks his readers to take inventory of themselves and determine which wisdom is guiding them. James addresses the person who is “wise and understanding.” The word *sophos* (wise) means “skilled, expert, one who is learned.” This term was used among the Jews for the teacher, the scribe, and the rabbi.¹ James is continuing his admonition to teachers; he points out the quality that is needed—wisdom. This wisdom is not the wisdom of the world, but wisdom from above!

Although James couples the words “wisdom and knowledge” there is a difference between these two words. They are not the same thing. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts; wisdom is the ability to use those facts. The “word of truth” (Jas. 1:18), which is implanted in the believer’s heart, becomes a primary source of wisdom needed to skillfully handle the affairs of daily life.

Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom (v. 13). James is saying two things here: true wisdom produces good behavior and true wisdom produces humility. “Gentleness” is from the Greek word *prautēs* which means meekness.² The wisdom from above

A wise person will demonstrate his wisdom by his conduct and by his humble attitude.

produces wisdom of meekness. A wise person will demonstrate his wisdom by his conduct and by his humble attitude.

2. Earthly Wisdom (vv. 14-16). James now gives the kind of wisdom that would disqualify a teacher. He describes this wisdom as being earthly, natural, and demonic.

- *Earthly*—The Greek word *epigeios* means existing on earth. This wisdom views life from the viewpoint of this world instead of heaven’s viewpoint (Phil. 3:19-20).

- *Natural*—The Greek word *psuchikos* means “a nature subject to appetite and passion.”
- *Demonic*—The Greek word is *daimoniōdēs*; this phrase “of the devil” is an umbrella description for both the directly satanic and all human opposition to God and His Spirit.

Note the characteristics of this earthly wisdom as summed up from verses 14-16.

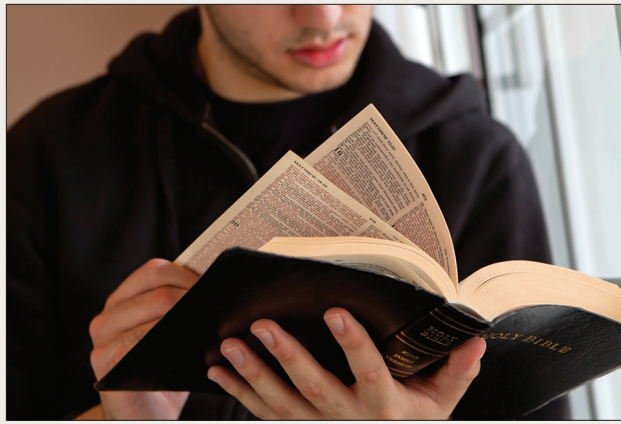
Bitter jealousy	Earthly
Selfish ambition	Natural
Arrogant	Demonic
Lie against truth	

The results: . . . there is disorder and every evil thing (v. 16). James shows the results of this earthly wisdom; it brings disorder, confusion, and chaos. It also becomes the source of all evil things. Behind every sin is selfishness (1 John 2:15-17).

¹ *Sophos* was a technical term used among the Jews for rabbi (TDNT 7:505).

² Douglas Moo gives a good explanation of this passage in his commentary. He states, “What James appears to mean, however, is that good works are to be done in a spirit of humility—a humility that itself is the product, or result, of wisdom (taking the genitive *sophias* as a genitive of source)” (*The Letter of James*, 170).

3. Heavenly Wisdom (vv. 17-18). Just as James gave the characteristics of earthly wisdom, he now gives the characteristics of heavenly wisdom. Notice the contrast: the first wisdom was from the earth, but the second is from above.



The result: “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (v. 18). The result of this heavenly wisdom is peace. Notice the result of this heavenly wisdom in contrast to the earthly wisdom. The earthly is jealous, selfish, and arrogant; it causes strife and division. But the heavenly is merciful, kind, and generous; it brings peace and harmony.

Above (v. 17). “Above” is from the Greek word *anōthen* which means “from first, from beginning, and from a higher place.” It is a wisdom that comes from God. In 1:5-7, James taught that God would give wisdom to those who ask for it. Now James describes the characteristics of that wisdom. As one reads the description of this wisdom, one is reminded of the Beatitudes that Jesus taught in Matthew 5.

Note the characteristics of this heavenly wisdom as summed up from verses 17-18.

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| Pure | Full of mercy |
| Peaceable | Good fruits |
| Gentle | Unwavering |
| Reasonable | Without hypocrisy |

If we are going to develop “pure and undefiled religion” we are going to need wisdom from above. If we are going to have the fruit that is righteousness, we must have the wisdom that comes from God (Rom. 1:16-17).

Questions

1. How are verses 13-18 related to the previous verses in this chapter?

2. Explain how a person can show his wisdom.

3. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

4. How can one obtain this knowledge (Jas. 1:5)?

5. What has been implanted into the hearts of believers (Jas. 1:18)?

6. How did James describe the wisdom that would disqualify a teacher?
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
7. Name the characteristics of the earthly wisdom and give the meaning of each characteristic.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
8. What are the results of this earthly wisdom? _____
- _____
- _____
9. Name the characteristics of the heavenly wisdom and give the meaning of each characteristic.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
 - h. _____
10. What is the result of heavenly wisdom? _____
- _____
- _____
11. What are the comparisons of James 3:17-18 to the Beatitudes of Matthew 5? _____
- _____
- _____
12. What is the “key” to attaining true wisdom? _____
- _____

Lesson 9

Friendship

James 4:1-10

The first part of this chapter (vv. 1-10) is a continuation of the theme about the two kinds of wisdom and how they play out in a person's life. James's readers apparently were plagued by conflicts and disputes. He addresses these conflicts directly. His opening in verse 1 is a question to ask his readers whether they want to submit to the will of God or satisfy their own desires for the pleasures of this world. The two choices before them are (1) friendship with the world, or (2) friendship with God.

1. The Source of Their Conflicts (4:1-5). James begins by addressing the quarrels and conflicts, which are the opposite of the peace suggested in 3:18.

Quarrels and conflicts (v. 1). Some translations may have "wars and fightings." The Greek word for "quarrel" is *polemos* which means war, battle, dispute, strive, and quarrel. If this is a battle, it is a figurative battle of their spiritual condition.

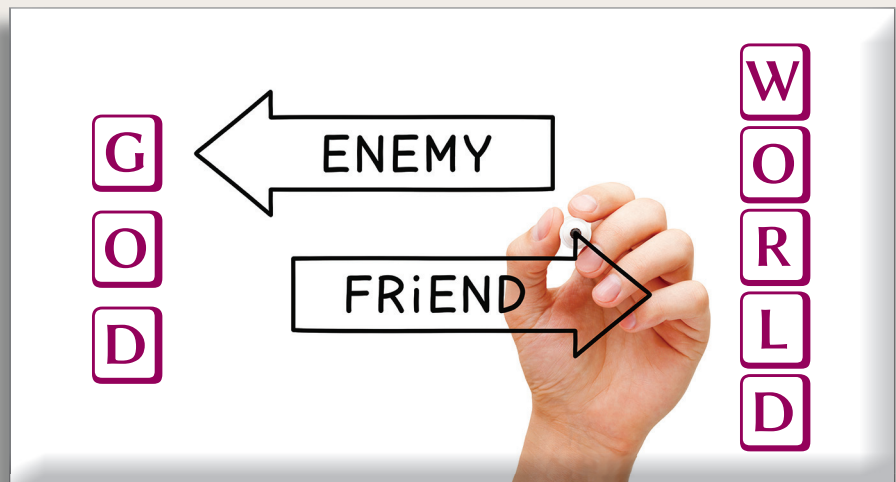
Is not the source, your pleasures that wage war in your members? (v. 1). After raising this question as to why Christians have quarrels and conflicts, James answers with another question. The contention and hostility so often seen among Christians, resulting in dissension and division in the

churches, is due to the fight that is constantly going on in the life of the believer. This battle is between the carnal nature of the Christian, his evil desires, passions, and desire for pleasure, and the Spirit of God who dwells within him.

ing for selfish gain. Some Christians succumb to their evil passions and thereby become troublemakers in the church.

Those that **murder**. Obviously James doesn't mean killing people physically. The key to understanding this is found in the meaning of the word "murder." The Greek word is *phonuete* which has a metaphorical meaning of "the killing or the assassination of character or reputation."

Their selfishness is manifested by their actions. Note carefully the following expressions: "ye lust," "ye kill," "and covet," "ye fight," and "ye ask." The outcome of such an attitude: "have not," "cannot



You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel (v. 2). There are two groups mentioned here that make up those who are ambitious to achieve personal glory.

Those that **lust**. Wisdom from above does not lead to one seeking his own desires. Earthly wisdom was and is selfish and it leads to strife, but heavenly wisdom is generous and establishes peace. "Lust" has reference to coveting, to desir-

obtain," and "have not." James makes clear that his readers' failure to possess these things stems from neglected or improper prayer life. Verse 3 shows the improper attitude when they pray. They ask with the wrong motives. Why? Because they seek their own desires instead of God's desire.

Ye adulteresses (v. 4). James uses this expression to expose their spiritual condition. This no doubt is borrowed from the Old Testament (Ps. 73:27; Jer. 3:20). Like the

children of Israel who were unfaithful to God, these Christians have been unfaithful to Christ.

Know ye not that the friendship with the world is hostility toward God? (v. 4). A Christian who cultivates the friendship of the world to the point that he is motivated by worldly pleasures and worldly desires actually becomes an enemy of God. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one or love the other” (Matt. 6:24). Read 1 John 2:15-17.

Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us? (v. 5). This verse is considered to be one of the most difficult verses in James. Scholars have found v. 5 difficult to translate, as there are a variety of ways the verse can be punctuated, leading to different translations. Two of the main problems are the words “Scripture” (*graphē*) and “Spirit” (*pneuma*). If James is quoting Scripture and no doubt the word *graphē* has reference to Scripture, then which one? The Scripture he is quoting cannot be found.¹ The second problem lies with the word *pneuma*. Is this the human spirit or the Holy Spirit? No one really knows! The Greek does not help matters, because the Greek word for “spirit” is a noun and has the same nominative case form (subject) as the accusative form (direct object). One could make a good case for both translations. The writer tends to believe it is the

human spirit for a couple of reasons: (1) *The Context*. Throughout the book thus far, James has been dealing with the sins of the flesh; in fact, that has been his charge in Chapter 4:1-4. Back in Chapter 1:14-15, James taught that man’s lustful spirit is responsible for his becoming a sinner. To me, it fits the context of the book and this chapter. (2) *Because of the popular translations* (although these do not make it correct). The King James, the New American Standard, the Revised Standard Version, and the New Revised Standard Version translators believe that the human spirit is under consideration.²

overcome their sins. Read Romans 5:20.

3. Drawing Close to God (vv. 7-10). After laying the foundation in verse 6, James began a series of imperatives that spans the next four verses. “Submit therefore to God” (v. 7). “Submit” was a military term, meaning literally to be “arranged or ordered under.” When one submits, he aligns himself under the authority of another. Of course James is talking about submitting to God’s will. Read John 15:13-15.

Resist the devil (v. 7). James next instructs his readers to put up an active resistance to the devil. A

A Christian can overcome the influence of Satan. Satan has no power except influence, and God has provided everything one needs to overcome Satan’s attacks.

2. Being a Friend of God (4:6-10). What is the solution to this problem? How can one be at peace with God, himself, and people around him? The answer is given in the next few verses.

Grace for the humble (v. 6). James is providing the antidote to spiritual adultery by quoting from the Old Testament book of Proverbs: “Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted [humble]” (Prov. 3:34). James reminds his readers that God gives “more” grace and that, by appropriating that grace, they could

Christian can overcome the influence of Satan. Satan has no power except influence, and God has provided everything one needs to overcome Satan’s attacks. Read Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 10:25.

Draw near to God (v. 8). This nearness to God is a basic call of the Christian faith. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The Greek word for “draw” is *engizō* which means, “to join one thing to another.” No-

¹ Nicol, Moo, and Perkins believe that James is quoting NT Scripture. Meyer, Mayor, Reicke, and Alford believe that James is combining the general sense of the Scripture. Bengel, Davids, Martin, Adamson, and Ropes believe that he is quoting the LXX version of Genesis 6:3-7; Exodus 20:5; and Zechariah 1:14. Dibelius and Spitta believe that James is quoting from *Herm. Mand. 3.1* or some apocryphal book (*Hermeneia A Critical and Historical Commentary*, 235).

² For a lengthy discussion on this subject you might want to consult Mayor’s commentary, *The Epistle of St. James*, 142-146.

tice that we have the responsibility of joining ourselves to God.

Wash, cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (v. 8).

These are reconciling actions that bring to mind the ritual purity required of worshipers and priests at the temple. James is actually drawing from the Old Testament rituals (Exod. 30:19-21; Lev. 16:4), which later became symbols of moral purity. James intentionally combined the hand and the heart, as they both must move in harmony, in action, and commitment before God. As the believer draws near to God, God

and the heart of the believer come together.

Be miserable and mourn and weep (v. 9). This verse calls for a deeper transformation of a person's attitude toward God. James's readers were to be remorseful in their attitude and display their remorsefulness. Instead of being arrogant and having laughter, they should become humble and be in mourning.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord (v. 10). Humility is the key to having a right relationship with God and our fellow man. Read 1 Peter 5:5-6.

In summary, there are ten commandments necessary for these brethren to repent:

1. Be subject to God.
2. Resist the devil.
3. Draw nigh to God.
4. Cleanse your hands.
5. Purify your hearts.
6. Be afflicted.
7. Mourn.
8. Weep.
9. Turn laughter into mourning.
10. Humble yourselves before God.

Questions

1. What were the two choices given by James unto his readers? _____

2. What is the source of the conflict in the believer's life? _____

3. What is the believer's responsibility regarding conflict? _____

4. Why were their prayers hindered? _____

5. List some things that may hinder our prayers today. Please give Scripture. _____

6. Why is verse five so difficult to translate? _____

7. What did James mean by the phrase “friendship with the world”? _____

8. How does God provide grace unto man? _____

9. What does it mean to resist the devil? List some ways that we can resist the devil. _____

10. In what way can we “draw nigh to God”? _____

11. List the ten commandments necessary for repentance and give their meaning.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
 - h. _____
 - i. _____
 - j. _____
12. List three main points in this lesson that can help you today in your Christianity. _____

Judging Others

James 4:11-17

1. Warning against Slander (4:11-12). James opened this section by addressing his readers as “brothers” rather than “adulteresses.” “Brothers” could be an address to all the saints instead of the teachers whom he had previously addressed. What will follow next is an exhortation to all his readers.¹

Do not speak against one another, brethren (v. 11). “Speak” is from the Greek word *katalaleō* and it is translated as speak evil, speak against, or to slander. The Greek word for “slander” is a compound word made up of two words: a prefixed preposition meaning “against” and the verb “to speak.” Literally, the word means, “to speak against,” and “to defame.” It could be by the use of this verb that James has reference to “speaking evil” behind the brother’s back.

There are many ways that we can slander our brother:

- By criticizing what he does.
- By insulting him.
- By cursing him.
- By exaggerating his faults.

This is just another misuse of the

tongue that James is warning his readers about.

He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother (v. 11). What does it mean to judge his brother? Does this mean we cannot correct or discipline a brother? James is using the Greek word *krinō* which means to condemn unjustly. The idea here is that of criticizing or finding fault with another, not correcting.

Speaks against the law and judges the law (v. 11). The “law” (*nomos*) may have reference to the Law of Moses, or the Law of Christ, but it seems that James has

reference to the “royal law” which states, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Jas. 2:8). To unjustly condemn a brother is to judge a brother unjustly.

There are two sins involved here: (1) He is breaking God’s law which Jesus summarized in the two great commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. It is impossible for a Christian to love a fellow Christian as he loves himself and at the same time maliciously slander him. If he gossips about him, he doesn’t really love him and violates God’s law. (2) The slandering, gossiping Christian is guilty of taking over God’s prerogative of judgment. When a believer maligns another believer, he is actually guilty of judging that believer.

2. The One Lawgiver (v. 12). “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge” (v. 12). The one lawgiver and judge is Jesus Christ, the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8), who judges according to His word (John 12:48).

Able to save and to destroy (v. 12). The pre-eminence of the One



¹ The word “brethren” is proof that this command is aimed directly at Christians for the only brotherhood that the Bible recognizes is the brotherhood in Christ Jesus.

² The combination of the terms “save and destroy” is a picture of God’s power (see Matt. 10:28). It is also a common idea in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7).

lawgiver and judge is also seen in the fact that He alone has absolute power over life and death (Matt. 10:28; 2 Thess. 1: 8-9).²

Who are you who judges your neighbor? (v. 12). This somewhat sarcastic rhetorical question was to shame those who were guilty of judging their brother.

3. Man's Dependence upon God (vv. 13-17). The lack of any reference to “brethren” suggests that these people could be outsiders or merchants. But James does not always address his readers as brethren, sometimes he addresses them as adulteresses, sinners, double-minded, and slanderers. James's readers no doubt are Christians, although some of them could have been merchants.

Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city (v. 13). This person made a sad mistake of buying a false philosophy of life. The verb “say” in verse 13 is a translation from the Greek word *legontes*, which means “to speak or to say as the result of sound reasoning and careful planning.” This man sat down and carefully planned his life on the basis of his own reasoning without taking God into consideration at all. Notice the four verbs are in the future: “will go,” “will spend time,” “will do business,” and “will make money.” We are reminded of the parable of the foolish rich man who wanted to build bigger and better barns recorded in Luke 12:18-21.

Answer this question: What are your dreams, plans, and goals for the future? What type of answer did you give? Completing your educa-

tion? Getting married? Starting a family? Buying a new house? Becoming rich? Retire someday? Or do you interpret life in terms of spiritual considerations—salvation, spiritual growth, service rendered, heaven and hell? Too many people place the emphasis in all the wrong places when they think about the future and what they will do with their lives. At times we are too earth-bound in our thinking, and

he thought he was born. His answer was a classic, “That I may meditate upon heaven.” This is exactly the point—that physical life is temporary.

Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord will” (v. 15). James now states a proper attitude that one must have toward God and life. The key is “if it is the Lord's will.” Read Matthew 6:9-15.

The famous Greek philosopher, Anaxagoras, was once asked why he thought he was born. His answer was a classic, “That I may meditate upon heaven.” This is exactly the point—that physical life is temporary.

we leave God out of our plans (read Matt. 6:33).

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow (v. 14). James focused on the irony of boasting about tomorrow, reminding his readers that they know nothing about their future. He then presented a metaphor to illustrate the shortness of life.

You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (v. 14). Our lives are like a morning mist that the sun soon burns away.³ The lesson is simple: Life is short, and therefore, the believer must place his trust in God. Our lives are in His hands. Only God knows the future (Ps. 139:1-2). Read Psalm 90:9-10.

The famous Greek philosopher, Anaxagoras, was once asked why

Boast (v. 16). To “boast” means to glory in something. Those who were boasting were doing so without any reference to God. This boasting was done to impress others.

... To him it is sin (v. 17). “To him” refers to the one who is making the plans to go and do business. This person is a Christian and, above all people, he should know that he must consider God's will in his plans.

This word *sin* means, “to miss the mark.” This person is guilty of missing the mark of eternal fellowship with the Almighty. He will spend eternity in hell. Read Romans 14:23; Hebrews 10:26.

³ In the Bible, a mist often appears as a symbol for something that quickly passes away. It can refer to water, fog, or clouds (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998, 562).

Questions

1. Name some ways that a Christian can slander another Christian? _____

2. What is judging? _____

3. Is rebuking sin in a person's life judging? Why or why not? _____

4. How does one judge the law? To what law is James referring? _____

5. What sins are involved in judging unjustly? _____

6. How do we know that Jesus will be our judge (please give Scripture)? _____

7. Who is able to save and destroy our souls? How will He do this? _____

8. How can a Christian depend upon God? _____

9. Why is life so uncertain? Name some things that one cannot control. _____

10. What analogy did James use to illustrate the brevity of life? _____

11. Explain the meaning of "If the Lord wills." _____

12. What kind of sin is involved in verse 17? _____

13. Give the definition of sin. _____

In this final chapter, James begins by returning to the theme of the rich. However, the themes that he introduced in the first chapter (patience which is produced by faithfully enduring trials, the use of the tongue, the rich, the treatment of others, sin, prayer, and faithfulness) are also covered in this last chapter. It is as if chapter one is a prologue and chapter 5 an epilogue. In this final chapter James is giving a series of exhortations. He is recapping or finalizing what he introduced in chapter one and what he covered in chapters two through four.

1. The Wealthy (vv. 1-3). Who are these people, Christians or non-Christians? There has been much discussion by many commentators trying to determine who is being spoken to in these verses. Most take the position that James is addressing wealthy non-Christians who have wandered into the assembly.¹ One reason for this view is because he does not call these rich men “brethren.”

The other view is that James is using an apostrophe (a turning aside from the direct subject matter to address others; the speaking to an imaginary group or person).² The third view is that James is addressing Christians. James often finds fault with his fellow Christians (as in 1:26, 3:10-16, and all of chapter 4). In James 2:1-9, it is suggested that both poor Christians and rich Christians thought too much of wealth. Whether they were Christians or non-Christians, the arrogant, selfish rich will reap what they have sown (Gal. 6:5-8).

Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you (v. 1). The Greek tense gives strong force to the mood

of James. James is expressing anger against the rich because of the way they had treated the poor and less fortunate. The rich are often objects of other people’s envy. The person who drives a Mercedes, travels a lot on business, dines at the most expensive and exclusive restaurants, and wears custom-tailored clothes is envied.



In the Bible, the rich are often the objects of divine scorn and condemnation. Read Luke 6:24-25; 18:24. This strong rebuke to the rich is not to teach that there is sin in being rich or there is merit in being poor. The Bible is warning people not to put trust in riches, but to trust God who is the Giver of all things.

Weep and howl (v. 1). The Greek word for “weep” is *klaiō* which means, “lament, and bewail, weeping as the sign of pain and

grief.” The Greek word for “howl” is *olouzō* and it means a loud cry whether for joy or grief. These two words together suggest anguish and suffering. Why all the wailing and expressed anguish?

For your miseries which are coming upon you (v. 1). “Miser-



ies” is a translation of the Greek word *talaipōria*. The word conveys the idea of hardships and distress. This hardship will come upon them because that which is so valuable to them will be taken away. The comfort and easy living will be gone. Read Luke 16:24.

Your riches have become rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten (v. 2). In verses two and three, James is using several graphic statements to portray

¹ Adamson, Dibelius, Martin, Moo, and Ropes all embrace the position of the non-Christian.

² E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, New York: Young & Co., 1898, 903.

the degrading influence of wealth. During the days of James, wealth was achieved by accumulating expensive garments (Luke 16:19; Acts 20:33), food or grain (Luke 12:18), and precious metals.

Your riches have rotted (v. 2). The picture here is that of produce or crops that have rotted. The verb tense James uses indicates the state or condition of the wealthy. They have already rotted and are moth-eaten. This statement and the following two are prophetic in their anticipation.

Your garments have become moth-eaten (v. 2). Their fine clothing has been moth-eaten. Moths have destroyed their clothes in the closet. James might have intended a connection between the “fine clothes” of 2:2 and the moth-eaten garments here.

Your gold and silver have rusted (v. 3). Gold and silver do not rust. James is not using the word “rust” in a literal sense; he is using it metaphorically. The meaning is obvious. The rich persons’ wealth is no longer valuable.

Note the following:

Wealth	Judgment	Truth about Ill-Gotten Wealth
Riches	will be “rotted”	Hoarded wealth will be gone
Clothing	will be “moth-eaten”	Clothing will be destroyed
Gold and silver	will be “corroded”	Investment values will be lost

With these three illustrations, James made a statement that trusting in wealth is a mistake because the idea that it retains its value is a myth. Trusting in wealth is a damaging and degrading attitude (read Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; 12:21; 1 Tim. 6:9).

. . . In the last days that you have stored up your treasure! (v. 3). There are three explanations given by commentators on the expression “last days.” (1) The second coming of Christ. (2) The Christian age, any time after Pentecost (Acts 2:14-39; Heb. 1:1-2). (3) The destruction of the Jewish nation

James is letting the rich know that the cries of injustices do not go unnoticed by God. He hears their cries and He is ready to answer.

in AD 70. It is the opinion of this writer that the “last days” has reference to the second coming of Christ. The reason for this view is found in verses four and five. The cries of the poor and ill-treated were heard by the Lord of Host (v. 4). The rich have fattened their hearts for the day of slaughter (judgment, v. 5). Read Luke 12:13-21 and Romans 2:5.

2. The Misery of the Innocent (vv. 4-6). James condemned the ill-gotten wealth of the rich because it had been accumulated through fraud

and the expense of others. He issued several indictments against the rich.

Pay of the laborers . . . withheld by you (v. 4). The rich landowners withheld wages from those who worked for them. In the first century people worked for a day’s wage and were paid daily. In today’s industrialized nations, how-

ever, fraud by the rich is perpetrated not just against manual laborers, but against consumers, and taxpayers.

. . . Has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (v. 4). “Sabaoth” simply means “host.” The Lord of Host! James is letting the rich know that the cries of injustices

do not go unnoticed by God. He hears their cries and He is ready to answer.

You have lived luxuriously on the earth (v. 5). These rich people lived in luxury and self-centered pleasure at the expense of their laborers. In the ancient world, luxurious living was regarded as moral laxity. James told these wealthy ones that they were actually fattening themselves for the “slaughter.” “Slaughter” is used for the judgment to come.

You have condemned and put to death (v. 6). James has accused the “rich” of hoarding wealth (vv. 2-3), cheating workers (v. 4), and living self-indulgently. Now, he is

accusing them of condemning and murdering “righteous” men. James expresses anger toward the rich because of their mistreatment of the poor and less fortunate. Immediately, he addresses the future condemnation of the wicked rich. God will eventually judge the wicked rich.

Questions

1. Compare the topics discussed in chapters 1 and 5. _____

2. Why were the wealthy on the mind of James? _____

3. Why should the rich start their crying early? _____

4. What is an *apostrophe* in speech? _____

5. Why is it difficult for a rich person to be saved? _____

6. What are some of the specific difficulties in life faced by the poor?

7. What are some of the specific difficulties in life faced by the rich? _____

8. What three illustrations did James use to show that trusting in wealth is a mistake?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
9. What three views have been given for the meaning of “last days”? _____

10. Are we living in the “last days”? _____
11. Who heard the cries of the ill-treated laborers? _____

12. What did James accuse the rich of doing to the poor?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

13. What is “the day of slaughter”? _____

14. According to James, what judgment awaits the rich who oppress the poor and hoard wealth? _____



This important epistle presents the most practical approach to everyday Christian living to be found in the entire New Testament. Every doctrine is examined in the light of how it affects the believer in his daily walk.

1. Be patient and strengthen your hearts (vv. 7-8). The word “therefore” (*oun*) suggests that the oppression of the righteous poor described in verses 1-6 is what gives rise to the call for patience in verses 7-11. In the former section, James warns the oppressing rich of coming judgment; in the latter section, he encourages the oppressed poor to “be patient” until the coming judgment.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord (v. 7). James began by encouraging his “brothers” to be patient in the midst of their suffering. The word “patient” is from the Greek word *makrothumeō* which means, “to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles.” Being patient is not a new subject for the readers of James. He introduced it in chapter one and encouraged them to develop it during the many trials that they were facing. The Christian, knowing that he is never going to be free of harassment in this life and that he is never going to be without problems that are seemingly unsolvable, must not allow himself to be frustrated by these things.

James uses three illustrations to encourage a lifestyle of persistent devotion in serving God.

a. The farmer (v. 7). Some, if not many, of James’s readers were

farm-hands; this was likely a very appropriate illustration for James to use. Eventually, the farmer’s patience and endurance pays off and the land yields its valuable crop. The wise farmer learns to wait patiently

(1) The apocalyptic presentations of God’s judgment upon the wicked is found in the Old Testament prophets. This argument suggests that James is not referring to the coming of Christ, but the coming of God’s punish-

The Christian, knowing that he is never going to be free of harassment in this life and that he is never going to be without problems that are seemingly unsolvable, must not allow himself to be frustrated by these things.

for the harvest. There are two participants in this process: First, is the farmer, who must cultivate, fertilize, and plant the seed. Second, is God, who supplies the rain, sunshine, and germination of the seed. Man must do his part, and God will do His part. The same is true for salvation. Read 2 Timothy 6:12.

Until the coming of the Lord (v. 7). How long must one be patient? Until the Lord’s coming! There are three basic interpretations of this phrase “coming of the Lord.”¹

ment upon these offenders. (2) The judgment that will come upon them during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Scholars who believe this view base it upon the phrase “at hand” (*engus*) found in verse 8, referring to the coming of the judgment that Christ pronounced on Jerusalem (Matt. 24:27-30). (3) The last view is the second coming of Christ, the Judgment day! This more than likely fits the context and the rest of the book of James. *Parousia* (coming) is a technical term for the coming of Christ.²

¹ “The majority of commentators note the strongly Christian tone throughout James, the doubtfulness of references to the *parousia* (coming) of God, and the common technical sense of *parousia* (coming) in the NT, and therefore argue that the event referred to here is the coming of Christ” (Peter Davids, *New International Greek Testament Commentary on James*, 182).

² *TDNT*, 5:865-871; Dibelius, 242-243; Laws, 208-209; Ropes, 293.

Do not complain (v. 9). In addition to patiently waiting, his readers are also to “stand firm” and not “grumble” among themselves. This is the first negative command found in this verse. The word “complain” is most interesting. It comes from the Greek word *stenazō* which means “to groan, to mutter, to murmur.” It is the idea of complaining and criticizing in a negative way. The Christians were not to blame each other for the difficulties that they were encountering.

b. The Old Testament prophets (v. 10). This is the second illustration that James uses to encourage patience. The prophets suffered greatly because of their faithfulness

of physical health (Job 2:7-9), (4) Loss of support from his wife (Job 2:9).

How did Job overcome these adversities? The answer is stated in Job 1:20, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” What was the outcome of his patience? Read Job 42:10-17.

Summary of the three illustrations used by James:

Example	Lesson to be Learned
The Farmer	We must patiently wait for God.
The Prophets	We must maintain attitudes of faithfulness and obedience.
Job	We must suffer trials to prove our faith.

and obedience to God. They displayed the proper attitude of faith in the midst of trials. Read Acts 7:51-52; Hebrews 11:36-38.

c. Job (v. 11). The third illustration that James uses is Job. Job is an example of patience and endurance. James substantiates the historical event recorded in the book of Job. Job was a real person who endured trials and tribulations like the readers of James were enduring. Job’s patience is seen in the trials that he experienced: (1) Loss of wealth and estate (Job 1:13-17), (2) Loss of family (Job 1:18-19), (3) Loss

2. Oaths forbidden (v. 12). James is now returning to the subject of the use of the tongue. He has frequently addressed this subject in his letter. This is his final note on this subject. This negative command is similar to a command found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:34-37. In both of these commands, the Scripture is saying that a Christian should be so honest that his word need not be backed up by an oath.

Swear not (v. 12). The Greek word used by James is *omunō* which means “to affirm, promise.”³ Unfor-

The Scripture is saying that a Christian should be so honest that his word need not be backed up by an oath.

tunately, brethren who advocate that it is wrong for a Christian to take an oath in a court of law have misused this verse. James is writing to those who have a habit of flippantly using God’s name, or any other name or object, to guarantee the fulfillment or truth stated or promised.

- Christ’s teaching on oaths (Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62).
- Paul’s use of oaths (1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Rom. 1:9; Phil. 1:18).

In times of distress, Christians could easily use God’s name in a careless, irreverent way. James

warned against invoking God’s name to guarantee truth.

But your yes is to be yes and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment (v. 12). The understanding of this half of verse 12 is obvious. One needs to be careful of the words spoken. A Christian’s speech is always simple and understandable. His word is his bond.

³ Using the Lord’s name in an oath appeals directly to His involvement regarding testimony and establishes Him as the supreme enforcer and judge. To violate the Lord’s name is to violate the Lord; therefore, oaths that use God’s name carelessly are condemned (Exod. 20:7; Lev. 19:12).

Questions

1. How does patience relate to their oppression by the rich? _____

2. Which “coming of the Lord” is under consideration in verse 7? _____

3. When James originally wrote this epistle, what circumstances were tempting the Christians to be impatient?

4. What circumstances in our day subject people to the same temptation? _____

5. Why did James present three examples of patience? _____

6. Who tempted Job? _____
7. What were the losses that Job experienced? _____

8. What was the final outcome of the patience of Job? _____

9. What do we know about Satan from Job 1? How does Satan tempt Christians today? _____

10. Why did James forbid swearing? _____

11. Besides using God's name in vain by a broken oath, how else can a person use the Lord's name in vain?

12. Can a Christian take an oath in court? Why or why not? _____

13. What have you learned from this lesson that can help you in your daily walk of life? _____

In this last section of chapter five, James gives the ultimate way of encouragement—prayer! Prayer can help the Christian in times of trials, temptations, persecutions, troubles, and sickness. If the cries of the ill-treated were heard by the Lord of Hosts, how much more will He be attentive to their prayers? James said, “Effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

1. Pray (vv. 13-18). This is an easy command to state, but an exceedingly difficult one to put into practice. It is especially true today because of the tight schedules that most people keep. Most people believe in prayer, but they don’t have enough hours in the day to practice it unless suddenly confronted with some grave crisis.

A careful analysis of verses 13-18 reveals that God expects the Christian to be prayerful in times of affliction, in times of happiness, and in times of sickness. In doing so, he is assured that the Almighty will hear and answer his prayers according to His will.

Is anyone among you suffering? He must pray (v. 13). James has come full circle since he began his letter with a reference to trials (1:2). Trials have been a major theme throughout James’s epistle: 1:2,12; 2:6-7; 5:1-11. James now asks another rhetorical question, “Is anyone among you suffering?” The answer is obvious for James just encouraged those who were mistreated by the rich. What is his remedy? Prayer!

“Suffering” is from the Greek word *kakopatheō* which means “troubles, hardships, to be afflicted.” It is easy when experiencing troubles to grumble against one another. Prayer serves as the antidote to grumbling. James previously instructed his readers on prayer in chapter one. Prayer

is to be: (1) for wisdom (1:5), (2) Whole-hearted (1:6).

Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises (v. 13). James posed a second question, “Is anyone happy?” Happiness is the opposite of suffering. Times of happiness are a blessing from God. “Happiness”

Is anyone among you sick? He must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him (v. 14). In these two verses, James is emphasizing the responsibility of the church. Problems of sin and sickness challenge unity within a church. As with happiness, times of



is from the Greek word *euthumeō* and denotes an outward display of gladness. That is why James said, “to sing.” Cheerful, thankful, and happy people usually sing. Read Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

In all reality, Christians are to be cheerful even during trials. “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (Jas. 1:2).

sickness are to be shared with other believers. In verse 14, James sets forth a threefold pattern for prayer on behalf of the sick.

- The sick person is to call the elders.
- The elders are to anoint the sick person with oil.
- The elders are to pray over the sick person for healing.

The word “sick” simply means “weak or without strength.” James uses the Greek term in a general way. This word could be used for physical weakness or spiritual weakness. It is difficult to tell which is intended in this verse. More than likely James is using this word for physical sickness. The Greek word *astheneo* (sick) stands in conjunction with *kakopatheō* (affliction, 5:13) and points to physical illness.

Calling for the elders shows the great responsibility that elders have. There are a number of reasons why the sick are to call for the elders:

- They have the rule over you spiritually (Heb. 13:7).
- They are to feed the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- They are qualified men (1 Tim. 3).
- They are mature and spiritual men who can help in times of trouble (Titus 1:9-10). James said, “A prayer of a righteous man can accomplish a lot.” These men are supposed to be righteous men.

Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (v. 14). Anointing a person with oil was a common practice among people in the Orient.¹ There were many uses for oil. It was used as medicine to treat wounds (Luke 10:34). James could be referring to this use. It was a ceremonial

ritual involving washings (Mark 6:13). It was used to soothe the feet and other parts of the body (Luke 7:45-46). Whatever the use was, the name of the Lord was to be invoked.

Restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up (v. 15). The Greek word for “restore” is *sosei* meaning, “to make whole, to be sound again.” The other important word in this verse is “sick.” It is

If physical sickness is under consideration, the person is healed and made whole again. Faith healers today offer excuses when the person is not cured of his illness.

not the same word in verse 14. The word here is *kamnō* a verb, meaning “to grow weary, to become weak, to be faint or sick.” Usually, this word is used for a spiritual condition (Heb. 12:3). Once again it is hard to tell whether this is spiritual sickness or physical sickness. Either way, the Lord is able to raise this person up. This raising up is an act of the Lord, not man. Unlike faith healers today, “*proof is in the pudding.*” If physical sickness is under consideration, the person is healed and made whole again. Faith healers today offer excuses when the person is not cured from of illness.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be

healed (v. 16). There are two interpretations given to this verse:

a. That James is continuing to teach on praying for the sick in verse 15. The word “therefore” (*oun*) does show a continuation of thought from verse 15. The idea or understanding is this: If the one who was sick has committed sins, then that person must confess his sins to be forgiven and prayer is to be offered.

b. The other is that James is beginning a new thought in verse 16. He is dealing with the brethren in general. The word “sin”

(*paraptoma*)² means “trespass, offence, fall, and sin.” This is not the same word used in verse 15. The word “healed” (*iaomai*) means to “cure, to make whole, to be free from errors and sins.” The thought here is, if one has a fault with another, that Christian is to confess to his brother and prayer is to be offered, so they can be whole again in their fellowship.

There is nothing in the word “confess” to indicate whether this is public or private. Catholics often cite this passage to support their doctrine of Auricular Confession (confession to a priest). If this teaches that one is to confess to a particular person, then that person who heard the confession is to confess to the confessor.³ The key point

¹ A more in-depth study of this subject is given by Peter Davids in his commentary: *New International Greek Testament Commentary on James*, 193. A person may want to consult *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:226, 227.

² The Koine reads *ta paraptoma* (faults, sins, and transgressions), instead of the reading *tas hamartias* (sins). Some manuscripts use this term *paraptoma* because it has a meaning of personal offense (to man) instead of a Divine offense (to God). In all reality, both words can be used to mean transgression against God or man. Read Matthew 6:14; Mark 11:24.

³ The Greek word for “confess,” *exomologeisthe* (present middle imperative) means, “to agree, to acknowledge wrong.” Both parties are involved in working together in healing this relationship.

here is that mutual confession leads to prayer for each other.

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (v. 16). The word “righteous” in the Greek means observing divine law, keeping the commands of God. Before prayer can accomplish much, a person must keep God’s will. Read John 9:31; 1 Peter 3:12.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours (vv. 17-18). James uses an Old Testament example to illustrate effective prayer. Elijah prayed and God withheld rain from the earth for three-and-one-half years (read 1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-45). As Job is an example of patience, Elijah is an example of a man of prayer. “Elijah was a man just like us” means that he had the same kinds of feelings as we do, endured the same kind of circumstances we face, and had the same life experiences as we do. The idea is that Elijah’s prayer did not lie in his supernatural greatness, but rather in his humanity.

2. Restoring thy brother (vv. 19-20). The final command is revealed in these verses. The disciplined Christian life involves not only patience, purity of speech, and prayer, but also concern for the brethren.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back (v. 19). “Strays” in our text is in reference to the truth. To “stray” means to “wander away, to cause to err.” Jesus emphasized the importance of truth when he said, “and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Read John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; Ephesians 4:15. To stray from the truth, therefore, is to stray from God’s will.

One turns him back (v. 19). We are our brother’s keeper. We must have concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ. One cannot have a relationship with Christ without having a relationship with the church. Read Matthew 25:35-40; Acts 9:1-6. Christians have an

obligation toward an erring brother to help him. Read Galatians 6:1-2.

Will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (v. 20). James shows why it is important to win a soul back to Christ. You can “save a soul from death.” This death is spiritual death! Contrary to what some denominations believe and teach, a person can fall from Christ and be eternally lost. Read Matthew 24:10; Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 6:1-6; 2 Peter 2:20-21.

Cover a multitude of sins (v. 20). When a fallen Christian is restored to Christ, the blood of Jesus once again covers his sins (1 John 1:7). This phrase implies forgiveness (Ps. 32:1; 85:2; Dan. 4:24; Rom. 4:7). “Multitude” suggests the extent of the forgiveness.

The joys, victories, and triumphs of “pure and undefiled religion” are for those who live under the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and who are doers of the Word.

Questions

1. Why is prayer so important in times of suffering? _____

2. What kind of suffering is James referring to in verse 13? _____
3. How does singing relate to being joyful or happy? _____

4. What was the pattern that James set forth for praying for the sick? _____

5. What kind of sickness was James discussing in our context? _____
6. Why should the sick call for the elders? _____

7. If James is referring to physical illness, and elders are spiritual leaders, are elders to attend to physical matters as well as spiritual matters? _____

8. Name some uses for anointing oil. _____

9. What is the meaning of the word “sick” in verse 15? _____

10. Name the two different views taken from verse 16. _____

11. What is Auricular Confession? Does verse 16 teach such a doctrine? _____

12. Can we use verse 16 to encourage public confession? Why? Or why not? _____

13. What is effective prayer? What makes it so powerful in the life of the believer? _____

14. Who is to restore the erring brother back to the truth? _____

15. What does it mean “to save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”? _____

16. List at least three things that you have learned from this book that can help you in your daily walk of life.

Bibliography of Study Materials on the Book of James

For further study, one may want to consult the following introductions and commentaries. All of these works will greatly aid in the reader's study, teaching, and presentation of James.

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Credits

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