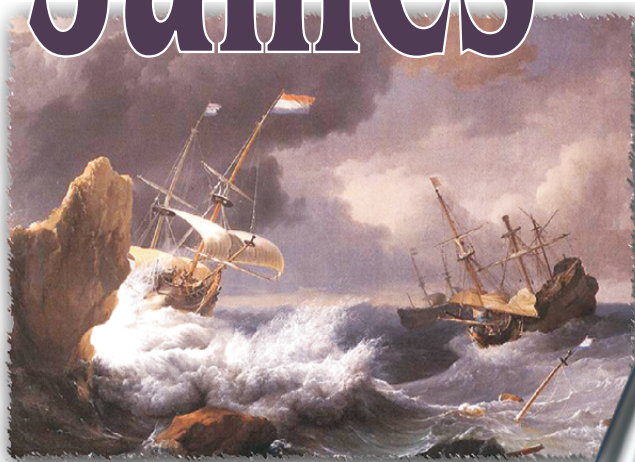


# The Anchor of Faith James



*"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." - James 1:6 (RSV)*

**by Ron Bontrager**

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The Epistle  
of  
James

Ron Bontrager

Instructor

Sunset International Bible Institute

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The Epistle of James

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**This Book is Dedicated to:**

all my family

who first of all gave themselves to the Lord and  
faithfully supported me through the years.



## Special Acknowledgment

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A special “*thank you*” to

The Rusty Russwurm family  
and  
The W.R. Collier family

for making the printing of this book possible.



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A companion workbook on the study of the Epistles of James by Ron Bontrager is available for purchase through the Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

# Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

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Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a worldwide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation / Editing Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.



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# Introduction to James

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## Introduction

James is an exciting little book written in the first century, filled with information very helpful to the church of today. Warren Wiersbe in his book entitled ***Be Mature*** wrote that “not everybody who grows old, grows up.” There is a vast difference between age and maturity. Ideally, the older Christians are, the more mature they become. Too often the ideal does not become the reality and the result is problems: problems in personal lives, in homes, and in churches.

James was written to help Christians to understand spiritual maturity. In the latter part of James 1:4 he wrote: “*that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.*” J. B. Philips in his translation of the New Testament wrote: “*And you will find you have become men of mature character. Men of integrity with no weak spots.*” Christians should want to grow in the image of Christ, to be mature in Him. James is a book that can help them to do that very thing. May God bless the reader of James to reach the goal of maturity.

## The Canonization of the Book of James

### The Authenticity of James

The book of James was one of the last books accepted as part of the Bible. Throughout history people have examined the books of the Bible to see if they were from God and if they belonged in the Scriptures. People in the early church, in the second and third centuries, and even up to this time have used the book of James.

The book of James was a late acceptance into the Canon. It was not like the writings of Paul in regard to being accepted by the early church, but it did find its way into the canon. Because James was accepted so late, many people wondered if it was in fact from God. In the year 180 A.D. the Muratorian Canon was compiled, and James was not included in that canon. A canon is a group of books that was compiled by Christians who believed that these books belonged in the New Testament. They had established certain criteria to determine the genuineness of the writings. More than a hundred years after the book of James was written it was not included in the Muratorian Canon. James is not quoted by Tertullian, a mid-third century scholar. Tertullian quoted or made reference to more than 7,000 verses in the Bible. Other church fathers such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, and Hippolytus did not write concerning the book of James.

The first traces of James did appear in the writings of Origen in the early third century. Origen believed that James did belong in the Scriptures. He said that “James, the brother of our Lord Jesus, was the author of the book called James.” He was aware that it was not universally accepted. In the year 325 A.D. Eusebius placed James among the New Testament books that were challenged. There were other books, like Jude and II Peter, that did not gain immediate acceptance, and James was in that group. Eusebius said that it was well known, approved by many, and did belong in the Canon.

Jerome’s version of the Latin Vulgate in the late fourth century, the standard text of the Roman Catholic church for more than a thousand years, included James in the canon, at least until the sixteenth century.

### **Martin Luther’s Objections to James**

Martin Luther had some trouble accepting the book of James. Luther was a Roman Catholic priest who was bothered by several things that were happening in the Roman church. He

taught the books of Romans and Galatians and understood that a man was justified by faith in Jesus Christ. He appreciated the grace of God, but the Roman Catholic Church did not teach about God's grace, As Luther taught. He was criticized and ostracized by the Roman Catholic Church. He was a very important man in the Reformation movement in Europe. As Luther studied the book of James, he did not initially feel that the book of James belonged in the Scriptures. In fact, Luther made the comment that "James is an epistle full of straw." Luther objected to James because it was not an evangelistic book. There is no reference in the book of James to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The name of Christ is only mentioned twice in the book of James, but not much is said about Him. Luther felt there should have been more reference to Jesus if it were a book inspired by God.

Luther also objected to James being a part of the canon because it was not written by an apostle, in contrast to Paul's, Matthew's, John's, and Peter's writings. That was another reason Luther objected, though it was not his primary reason.

Another reason that Luther objected to the book of James being a part of the canon is because James referred to the Jewish Law. There is a very important reason for that reference. James was most likely written to Christians who had come out of Judaism. So reference to the Law would not only be appropriate, but it would be very helpful in matters of illustration.

The primary reason that Luther struggled to accept the book of James is because Luther believed that James taught justification by works. Luther believed there was a contradiction in James 2:14. This scripture will be studied in more detail later. Luther believed that James' and Paul's writings did not belong in the same book because their teachings were contrary to each other; Chapter seven will show that Luther's argument, or at least his understanding of James' reference to works and Paul's reference to works were two

different things. It should be noted that later in Luther's life he believed that the book of James belonged in the canon. Luther said James "contained many good things." He did not believe that it was among the great writings, like Romans and Galatians, that affirmed justification by faith, showed God's grace, and taught so much about Jesus Christ. While Luther did not think James was one of the greatest of the New Testament books, later in life he did accept it as from God. By the fourth century James was accepted into the canon, and for more than twelve hundred years it was believed to be from God, having its place in the Scriptures.

## **The Authorship of James and Date of Writing**

### **Discovering the James Who Wrote the Book**

James gives practically no information about himself: "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*" (James 1:1a). There are several men named James mentioned in the Bible. Commentators mention several possibilities for the author of the book of James, but most of them believe that the author was James, the brother of Jesus. Although he was not an early disciple (cf. John 7:5), he was one that would later become a pillar in the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:13). Josephus and other first century writers say that James was probably put to death in 62 A.D..

Another James who is mentioned in the Bible is the apostle James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee. He was a fisherman and was killed by Herod (cf. Acts 12:2) about the year A.D. 44. If it were James the apostle who wrote the book, then it had to have been written before the year 44 A.D.

A third James mentioned in the Bible, is another apostle, James, the son of Alphaeus (cf. Mark 3:18). The author of James did not identify himself as an apostle like Paul and Peter did in their writings. When an apostle wrote a book, he usually

designated himself as an apostle. Therefore, it seems doubtful that one of the apostles was the author of James.

The Bible also mentions a man called James, the “younger” or “the less” (cf. Mark 15: 40). Little is known of this James. He is also mentioned in Mark 16:1, but this James is not the brother of Jesus.

One of the twelve apostles was named Judas, or Thaddaeus, the son of James (cf. Luke 6:16). Nothing else is known about this man named James.

Some have suggested that the author of James may have been someone who was unknown to Biblical literature. But why would the author be an unknown person? It is obvious from the writing that the author knew his audience. The proximity of things within the book makes it clear that the writer lived near Jerusalem, certainly in Judea, as did the recipients of this letter.

Some have suggested that it might have been a pseudonymous author. The author was merely named James because that was a common name. This idea is suggested because the Greek in James is too elegant to have been written by an uneducated man. Some scholars say that James, who grew up in Galilee and spoke Hebrew, could not have written in such a sophisticated way, but that is a weak argument.

There is enough evidence from many sources to believe that the brother of Jesus is the author of the book of James. James was most likely well known to the early Christians and did not need a descriptive term other than the way he identified himself: *“James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* He was familiar with the audience. Sixteen times in the book of James he calls the recipients *“his brothers.”* He refers to his understanding of their problems of partiality and worldliness. James, the brother of Jesus, was familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. Several things in James' writing (cf. James 1:6, 10f; 3:4, 5b, 11f; 5:7) are similar to the Sermon on the Mount (cf.

Matthew 5-7). Also, James is familiar with the ethical instructions of the Old Testament. In fact, there are several things in James that are very similar to Leviticus 19. It is an important point that a Jew familiar with Jesus' teachings and familiar with the Old Testament Law was the writer of this book. Certainly, he was familiar with the topography and customs of Palestine, having grown up in Galilee. Later, being one of the pillars of the church, he performed an important role during the Jerusalem Council (cf. Acts 15:13). Therefore, James, the brother of Jesus, is the most likely author of the book of James.

The best argument is the one for a well-known author. James the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, was well known, but the book of James was probably written after his death. The content of the letter is consistent with James, the brother of Jesus. He is well known; he speaks with authority, understanding, and familiarity of the people and the teachings.

### **The Date of Writing**

If the writer of the book of James is the Apostle James, the date of the writing would have to be before 44 A.D., the date he was killed. If James, the brother of Jesus, was the author, then the book of James had to have been written before the year 62 A.D., the date James was put to death. In James 5:7 there is a reference to "*the Lord's coming*." In chapter eleven the possibilities of what the writer had in mind when he wrote "*the Lord's coming*," will be further discussed. If the coming of the Lord is reference to what some say is the destruction of Jerusalem, then James had to have been written before the year A.D. 70. The later date would seem to fit James, the brother of Jesus. James was probably written about the year 60 A.D.. In the bibliography of J. W. Roberts' Commentary, he suggests the early 60's for the date of the writing of James. On pages 21-22 Roberts gives additional arguments for that date.

### The Recipients of the Letter

James was written to the twelve scattered tribes: “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings*” (James 1:1). James is making reference to a phrase which was familiar to Jewish people. The “twelve tribes” had great significance in Israel’s history. The twelve tribes began in the days of Moses when the covenant was given. Jacob, later called Israel, had twelve sons some 400 years before Moses. The sons of Jacob became the twelve tribes of Israel. “*The twelve tribes scattered among the nations*” are spiritual Israel.

The recipients of the letter of James were people who were heavily influenced by Judaism, but they had become Christians. The word “*scattered*” means more than literally spread apart to various places. It also means that the people were away from home. The Christians had been scattered; they were not in their homeland. It is very important that God’s people understand that they are not home. Even if a Christian is born, reared, and dies in one geographical location, he is “*scattered*.” He is away from home. People of God are aliens and strangers in the world (cf. 1 Peter 2:11). They are passing through, looking forward to the eternal home.

The Greek word *diaspora* means “*a scattering*” like when the Israelites were scattered during times of captivity or when a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem and all the Christians, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (cf. Acts 8:1). God’s elect became strangers in the world when they were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (cf. 1 Peter 1:1).

### The Form of the Letter

The beginning of James is characteristic of writings of the first century. In America people generally begin a letter with



“Dear” and end with “Sincerely.” It is customary to begin a biblical letter with the author’s name and greet the readers. James begins the letter with his name and a greeting, but he does not give a salutation at the end of the letter in the typical biblical way.

There seems to be no central theme in the epistle of James. The theme of the book of Romans is that the Gospel is God’s power to save both the Jews and the Gentiles while the book of Galatians affirms the Gospel. First Peter was written to help Christians live during times of persecution. In James there does not seem to be a central theme, but rather there are several small unrelated sections. Reading James is like reading the book of Proverbs. From Proverbs 10 to the end of the book one brief statement after another is given. The statements are a little longer in James, but they seem to have very little connection from one section to another, which is also common in the hortatory sections in the New Testament epistles where the authors wrote about domestic responsibility and response to the government, but with very little depth. James wrote fifteen to twenty verses on a distinct theme, and then he began another subject. James could be an outline for a Gospel sermon on how to live better, how to grow, and how to mature in Christ.

## **The Purpose and Major Theme**

### **The Purpose of James’ Writing**

There are three major purposes for the book of James. First, James wrote to give instruction that would lead Christians to maturity. James wrote instructions to lead immature people to maturity. Reading through the book of James a person sees examples of immaturity and how it is being corrected. Second, James was written to correct problems that existed in the fellowship of Christians living in a foreign environment. The problems do not seem too immense, but still James corrects them with very straightforward language. Third, the book was

written to unite belief and behavior (cf. James 1:22). It is very important for God's people to not only believe the teachings of God, but they must be put into practice. James gave an illustration of uniting belief and behavior in James 2:15-17:

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, "but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

In each section of the book, James emphasized belief of God's Word and the need to put it into practice.

### Major Themes of James

There is not one dominant theme throughout the book of James. Perhaps the book is a collection of sermons preached by James. First, a call to Christian maturity is a recurring subject in the book of James. God's people need to continue to grow spiritually. James 1:2-4:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

The Greek word **teleios** is translated "mature." **Teleios** is used eight times in James: twice in 1:4; once in 1:17, 25; 2:8, 22; 3:2; 5:11. **Teleios** means "brought to its full end, finished; nothing necessary to completeness; perfect." Christian maturity is very important. Christians are to be joyful when they have trials, knowing their faith will be tested and will produces

endurance. When perseverance has finished its work, a Christian will be mature and complete.

Second, patience and endurance during difficult times are other themes in the book of James (cf. James 1:2-12, 5:1-11). Christians need to bear with the failings of their brethren. James wrote that the man who perseveres under trial will be blessed and will receive the crown of life (cf. James 1:12). James warns people to resist the devil and come near to God (cf. James 4:7-8). Christians are to be patient until the Lord's coming like the farmer waits for the land to yield its crop (cf. James 5: 7-8). The Lord is full of compassion and mercy for His Children who are patient in times of persecution like the prophets and Job (cf. James 5:10-11).

Third, wisdom is another theme in the book of James. James wrote that Christians should ask God for wisdom: "*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*" (James 1:5). Christians need wisdom to mature. Wisdom is very important. James compares the wisdom that is of the world with the wisdom that is from above (cf. James 3:13-18).

Fourth, prayer is an important theme in the book. James encourages Christians to seek wisdom through prayer without doubting (cf. James 1:6-8). James wrote of the importance of speaking to God with correct motives. James 4:2-3:

*. . . You do not have, because you do not ask God.  
When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask  
with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get  
on your pleasures.*

James wrote that the elders should be called for prayer when a person is sick (cf. James 5:13).

Fifth, the treatment of rich and poor people is another theme in the book of James. James wrote strong words to warn that poor people must not be mistreated. His brother, Jesus,

gave the same warning. Nearly everything that is written in James 2 is related to the proper treatment of the poor. In James 5:1-6 a warning is given to rich people who were oppressing the poor.

Sixth, the use of the tongue is another theme of the book. James wrote something in every chapter of the book regarding what Christians should say. They should speak in a way that is helpful, not sinful (cf. James 1:19-21, 26; 2:2-3). James wrote a long discussion about taming the tongue. The tongue is destructive in its nature, like fire (cf. James 3:2-12). Christians are not to slander or speak against one another (cf. James 4:11-12). James wrote that Christians are not to grumble against each other (cf. James 5:9). How often are God's children guilty of grumbling and complaining against each other?

The conclusion of the Introduction to the book of James is found in chapter two. The seventh, and last, major theme of James will be studied.

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# PATIENT IN SUFFERING

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## Introduction

Understanding the purposes and major themes of any writing helps the reader to better comprehend what the author wanted those reading the letter to know. There are several repeated subjects that James wrote about.

Warren Wiersbe wrote in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, “One of the major problems in the church was a failure on the part of many to live what they professed to believe. Furthermore, the tongue was a serious problem, even to the point of creating wars and divisions in the assemblies. Worldliness was another problem. Some of the members were disobeying God’s Word and as a result was sick physically. Some were straying away from the Lord and the church.

“As we review this list of problems, does it appear to be much different from the problems that beset the average local church today? Do we not have in our churches people who are suffering for one reason or another? Do we not have members who talk one way, but walk another way? Is not worldliness a serious problem? Are there not Christians who cannot control their tongues? It seems that James is dealing with very up-to-date matters!”

## Major Themes of James Continued

In the first chapter the study of the major themes was begun. Six major themes of James were discussed: **Christian maturity, patience, wisdom, prayer, treatment of the rich**

**and the poor, and the tongue.** The seventh major theme in the book of James is **the uniting of belief and behavior.** James made reference to this theme in virtually every section of the book. God has given Christians a revelation informing them of His Son, His Son's nature, and the way they ought to live. James wrote about the importance of faith with works (cf. James 2:20). In other words, the things that God's people do, manifest what they believe.

James wrote several verses that emphasize the importance of bringing together what Christians believe with what they do: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"* (James 1:22). Many people are deceived. They are tricked into thinking if they merely hear enough then they are fine, but Christians need to be doers of the word as well. James 1:25:

*But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

It is very important that believers know the Truth, but they will be blessed when they do what it says. James used the example of the treatment of the rich man and the poor man who came to the assembly to teach against showing favoritism (cf. James 2:1-4). James reminds the readers not to show favoritism because they are going to be judged: *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom"* (James 2:12).

The actions of Christians are very important: *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:17). Faith is extremely important, but faith must be put into practice. Christians need to show their wisdom: *"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from*

*wisdom*” (James 3:13). Wisdom is seen by the way wise people live, by deeds done with humility.

James concludes a thought about people who boast of going to other cities to make money with no thought of God or of their temporary lives: “*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins*” (James 4:17). It is very important that Christians know the will of God and do it so they will not sin.

James wrote instruction to people who were sick, hurting, suffering, and in need of prayers. James 5:16:

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

This verse shows the importance of uniting belief and behavior. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful.

### **Spiritual Maturity**

Warren Wiersbe gives a five-point outline of the book of James in his book, ***Be Mature***. The five points, marks of a mature Christian, are easy to remember because they center on key words that begin with the letters “P” and “T.”

The first mark of a mature Christian is that he is “patient in testing” and is found in James 1. The second mark of a mature Christian, in James 2, is that he “practices the truth.” A child of God practices what he knows to be true. The third mark of a mature Christian, found in James 3, is that he has “power over the tongue.” The tongue can be very destructive, and Christians need to exercise control over it. The fourth mark of a mature believer, from James 4, is that he is a “peacemaker” and not a “troublemaker.” The fifth mark of a mature Christian, in James 5, is that he is “prayerful in times of trouble.” A

Christian needs to mature in all five of these areas of his life. Let's introduce the book itself.

## **Patient in Suffering**

**James 1:1–12**

### **Introduction**

William Barclay wrote, “In order to attain Christian maturity and holy conduct, it is essential to have a firm foundation. The Believer must be able to stand with confidence. He dare not be pushed down by trials. He must not be pulled over by temptation. ‘Push, pull—stick, stick’ must be his motto. How can such stamina be achieved? A believer can stand by pursuing, perceiving, and practicing the Word of God. Trials from without and temptations from within are no match for a Christian who stands in the truth from above.”

“All too often trials prompt groanings and complaints. This kind of response does not contribute to Christian maturity. It only makes matters worse. Trials are not to be seen as tribulations but testings. A test is given to see if a student can pass, not pass out. James gave sound advice on how to score high on every test. One who brings the right attitude to the trial, who understands the advantage of the trial, and who knows where to obtain assistance in the trial will certainly end up on God's honor roll.”

## **The Place of Trials in Gaining Maturity**

### **The Right Attitudes in the Midst of Trials**

James calls himself a servant, one who has given himself over to God. “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings*” (James 1:1). He is a slave of the one who is his God and his Lord, not just his brother, but the Lord Jesus Christ.



The letter is written to the twelve tribes of the dispersed, those people who are dispersed abroad.

Christians should consider it pure joy when they face trials. James 1:2–4:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James wrote to count it pure joy when facing trials, but a person would ordinarily be filled with sorrow, sadness, disgust, and anger when facing trials. To grow into mature, godly people, Christians “*should consider it pure joy.*” The word “*consider*” means “*to think, to take into account.*” Christians face obstacles, problems, trials, and misfortune that they do not like. The key is to make the decision to consider the things as trite, as joy. James wrote that the testing of a person’s faith produces endurance. All Christians need to endure, to persevere, which leads to maturity. Life’s trials bring about spiritual growth and maturity. Various trials will come to every person, and Christians need to consider them as opportunities from God for growth. Is joy the same thing as happiness? Did James write to be happy when everything goes wrong? In the English language to be happy and to be joyful are used almost synonymously, but in the Greek language the meaning of the words is a little different. To be happy is based on what is going on in life. When life is going well, people are happy. When life is not good, people are sad. Scripture does not say to be happy and smile all the time. Joy is based on something God’s children have within — a belief in a resurrected Christ, an assurance of salvation, a joy in the return of Christ, and the hope of being with Him. Joy does not have to be altered every time circumstances change. Christians have joy because Jesus

was raised from the dead. They can be joyful in the midst of trials.

A trial is an event which gives a person a test to prove whether or not he is faithful to God. It shows if he wants to grow and how tough he is. A Christian should consider it pure joy when he faces various trials. It is important to note that the word “*trial*” is translated “*temptation*” in some translations of the English Bible. It is also translated “*temptation*” or “*to be tempted*” in James 1:13–14. Even as words in English might have a different significance in different contexts, it is also true in the Greek language. James did not write to consider it pure joy when one is tempted to sin in various ways, but rather consider it pure joy when one has various trials, upsetting moments, that are not pleasant. God’s children can consider those times to be joyful knowing that they are the testing of his faith. The proving grounds of faith come during difficult times. When life is pleasant, it is easy to be faithful, but faith is put to the test when Christians face trials. To be effective as God’s people and win the battles, Christians need to understand that the testing of faith produces endurance or steadfastness.

Some translations have the word “*patience*” instead of the word “*perseverance*.” The word “*patience*” comes from the Greek word that means “*unswerving from your deliberate purpose in life*.” Christians are to be unswerving even when everything around them is chaotic. In West Texas where I live there are a lot of storms in the springtime. Occasionally, tornadoes come through, and people head for storm shelters. They get underground where they are protected from the storm. Everything above them is chaotic. The wind blows the trees and sometimes knocks them over. Often, the tornadoes destroy houses and other property. Everything is chaotic above ground, but the people under ground are protected. Patience is the same way. Even though things around are miserable and upsetting, Christians are unswerving. The testing of a person’s faith

produces the ability to be steadfast in the midst of spiritual storms and be strengthened and perfected.

In similar language, Paul wrote the Romans to rejoice in their sufferings: “... *we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope*” (Romans 5:3–4). Christians can rejoice in difficult times because the difficulties serve to make them better, if they endure.

Paul wrote that God works for the good of those who love him: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). In all circumstances God works for the good of those who love him, those who endure.

### **The Right Strength or Power in Overcoming Trials**

James continues his thought about the trials and the difficult times Christians face: “*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*” (James 1:5). Wisdom is a part of how Christians respond to trials. Contextually, the idea of needing wisdom is a part of how children of God respond to problems. James 1:12:

*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

When trials come, Christians often wonder why. Then they read that James wrote that Christians ought to rejoice when they face trials. It does not make sense to their human minds. They need wisdom to understand the situation. James is saying that if a person lacks wisdom to understand the importance of rejoicing when facing various trials, then he should ask God for help. He

should ask God who gives generously, without reproach, and wisdom will be given to him.

Christians need wisdom that is strengthened through trials. The Greek word *sophia* translated “wisdom” means “*full intelligence or knowledge acquired by experience.*” It is not hard to get knowledge about the way things work, but often people do not get the wisdom to use the knowledge. Wisdom is needed to deal with every situation. The source of wisdom is not a person’s intelligence, but it is the treasure house of God’s wisdom (cf. James 3:17).

Notice what James wrote about God’s nature: “*God gives generously to all without finding fault.*” Ask for wisdom from God, and He will give it. God is a generous God; He has both the power and the desire to give!

When a Christian asks for wisdom, he must ask expecting God to give him wisdom. James 1:6–8:

*But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

James wrote an illustration that was familiar to the recipients of the geographical region. They understood “*a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*” Many of the recipients of James lived on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in the region of Palestine. Other recipients lived by the Sea of Galilee, a sea where there are large waves during a storm. Waves in a storm are unstable as are Christians who doubt. If Christians doubt, they should not expect to receive anything from God. They will be tossed to and fro like the stormy sea. Christians ought to ask in faith, without doubting, knowing that God will give them wisdom.

A double minded man is literally an immature man, one whose mind is divided. Maturity must bring about all things in life and unite them together. A divided mind is split in different directions and produces immaturity. Christians are to ask God to give them wisdom because God is a giving God. He gives generously, in large portions. God gives openly because He has a great desire to bless, and He does it without reproach. Christians need to ask God for wisdom so they will know how to deal with the trials of life.

Christians must ask in faith, without any doubting. For a long time the author of this book, Ron Bontrager, thought that this verse referred to a person who prayed and did not think God would answer his request. So I decided not to pray if God was not going to answer my prayer. Since that time I have come to a correct understanding of the text. When James wrote “*he must believe and not doubt*,” he means that Christians should not doubt God's ability. Often an immature person, a non-praying person, does not believe that God can help him. The double-minded, unstable man may not even believe in the existence of God. That Christian needs to ask God for wisdom. Children of God should not be unstable in their ways like the surf tossed by the wind. Immaturity should not describe their life. If a man of God does not understand the importance of rejoicing when facing various trials, then he should ask God for wisdom, not doubting God's ability. He should ask in full assurance of faith.

### **The Right Approach to Trials**

James continued the context of counting it pure joy when facing various trials. James 1:9–10:

*The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.*

If a person were to leave for a while after studying James 1:1–8 and then return to read James 1:9, he might think that the subject matter had changed. But the context is still about counting it pure joy when facing various trials. It does not matter whether a person is rich or poor he still needs to endure difficult times with joy. The fact that a person is rich does not mean he will be exempted from the trials that come in this life. Even the poor can rejoice in their position before God. James wrote that the brother in humble circumstances is to take pride in his high position. James reminded the recipients of the letter that a person could be poor financially but rich in Christ. When trials come, a Christian should not feel sorry for himself, but he should remember his rich position in Christ and count it pure joy. The poor man should seek wisdom from God and rejoice in his high position.

Christ brings a new sense of his own value to the poor man. The poor man learns that he matters in the church, in the world, and to God. He is a priest of the most High God (cf. Revelation 1:6). He reigns with Jesus over the world (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:14).

The rich man *“should take pride in his low position.”* He should glory in his humiliation. That statement almost seems like another contradiction. How is it that the rich man would glory in his humiliation? It maybe that the rich man’s trial is humiliating him. It could be a disappointment to the rich man to face trials, but the trials may help him not to trust in his riches. When the wealthy, who have everything they need, lose something, they may learn that they did not need the item anyway. When the one who is rich loses his car, his wealth, or something that is very precious to him, he needs to rejoice in his humiliation because the trials have a way of helping a Christian to refocus his mind on God. The trials help Christians look to God. So the rich man is to glory in his humiliation because like flowering grass he will fade away. This is another reference to the land of Palestine. The recipients of the letter

knew that the hot sun scorched flowers in Palestine certain times of the year.

The rich man will one day fade away as do the withering plants that are scorched by the heat in Palestine. James 1:11:

*For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*

James wrote that the people who are pursuing the things of the world will all pass away. So if trials come, the rich need to rejoice because, thanks be to God, life will be better when their attention is again focused on God.

James wrote to rejoice, to count it pure joy, in the midst of suffering and to seek God's wisdom. Both the rich and the poor are to glory in God. In verse nine James wrote that a brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; in verse ten he wrote that the rich brother is to glory in his humiliation. Both groups of people are to glory in God.

### **The Right Reward of Persevering in Trials**

Blessed people persevere under trial and will receive the crown of life. James 1:12:

*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

“*Blessed*” is the same word that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:3–11). The person who is blessed, filled with joy, is the one who perseveres, who endures. “*Perseveres*” is a verb that comes from the noun “*endurance*” that James used in verses three and four. The Christian who is

filled with joy bears up under trial. He endures because the testing of his faith develops perseverance (cf. James 1:3). Christians who pass the test will receive the crown of life.

In the Greek language there are two words that are translated “crown” in our English language. The Greek word *diadem* means the “*crown of royalty*.” The word *stephanos* means the “*victor’s crown*.” The later of the two words is translated “*crown of life*” in verse twelve. James wrote that Christians who persevere under trial will receive the victor’s crown, the crown of life. The person who receives the victor’s crown is the one who went into battle, fought the enemy, and was victorious.

James wrote Christians to encourage them to persevere under trial so they can receive the crown of life. This is a promise that Christians can trust even today. God’s people can help other people see this promise by the way they live. When Christians accept various trials as joy, they influence other people to trust God. James may be a collection of sermon outlines. James contains information that God’s people need to hear because everybody has to endure difficult times. In homiletic courses as I teach preaching students how to prepare sermons from biblical text, I also teach about the topics they ought to preach. I believe that one in every four or five sermons ought to deal with how Christians should glorify God in the midst of suffering because all humans suffer. There are no exceptions. So count it pure joy when suffering because it is an opportunity to grow in Christ. May this study be a blessing to each reader to help him grow to maturity. Use these teachings from the book of James to unite belief with behavior. The Lord has given great promises so Christians need to live in such a way that God will be pleased. Christians need to manifest their love for God through their behavior.



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## Wisdom in Temptations

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### James 1:13–25

#### Introduction

From the beginning of time it has been man's first instinct to blame others for his own sin. The Ancient writer who wrote the story of the first sin in the Garden of Eden was a first-rate psychologist with a deep knowledge of the human heart. When God challenged Adam with his sin, Adam's reply was, "*The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*" When God challenged Eve with her action, her answer was, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*" (Genesis 3:12–13). Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Man has always been an expert in evasion. Robert Burns wrote,

"Thou knowst that Thou has formed me  
With passions wild and strong;  
And listening to their witching voice  
Has often led me wrong."

In effect, Burns is saying that his conduct was because God made him as he was. The blame is laid on God. So men blame other people, blame their circumstances, and blame the way they were made for their sins. James sternly rebukes those views.

## **Temptations — Their Source and Outcome**

### **The Correct Understanding of Temptations — Not From God**

No one should say that he is being tempted by God: *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone”* (James 1:13). People should not blame God when they are tempted, nor should they blame anyone else. All through history since the time of Adam and Eve, man has been blaming God and other people for his mistakes. But James wrote that no one should say they are tempted by God because God cannot be tempted by evil. God does not lust after sinful things so He cannot be tempted by sin. There is nothing in God to which evil can make an appeal. God is literally unable to be tempted. God does not tempt anyone nor can He be tempted by evil.

The Greek word *peirasmo* is a verb that is translated *“tempt”* and is used four times in verse thirteen. In verse two the noun form of the word is translated *“trials.”* God may bring about certain trials or events in life to prove or strengthen Christians, but He does not tempt anyone to sin. James made that very clear. In verse 12 the reader learned that God’s motive for trying or testing men is that they may be proven faithful and receive the crown of life. The context makes it very clear. Therefore, the New American Standard and the New International Version use the word *“trials”* in verses two and twelve, but the word *“temptation”* in verse thirteen.

### **The Source of Temptation — From Within**

A person’s own evil desire is the source of temptation: *“But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed”* (James 1:14). Temptations come from a man’s own lusts. He is dragged away and enticed.

As a boy in Bible class I heard teachers on a number of occasions talk about how bad sin is and how wrong it is to

commit sin. In my innocence I had the thought that if a person committed a sin, he would really suffer. Now I understand that it is true spiritually, but I was naive enough to think that if a person committed sin he would not have any fun, and he would be bothered by his sin. Every person is tempted and has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (cf. Romans 3:23).

James wrote that a person is tempted when he is “*dragged away and enticed*.” These are words that fishermen and hunters use. A person may be lured into sin as a fish is lured. It is common in hunting and fishing to set a snare or a trap to capture a fish or animal. But it is not good when a Christian is snared or trapped in sin. Satan hooks, lures, and traps Christians with evil desires. People should ascribe evil not to the “Father of lights” but to the “prince of darkness.”

### **The Steps in Temptation — The Genesis of Sin**

When sin is brought to completion, it brings death: “*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers*” (James 1:15–16). James described four steps in the process of temptation. First, desire or lust draws a person toward evil indulgence. Temptations come when one is carried away and enticed to fulfill his own lust. So temptations are from inside a person. When Christians commit sin, they can blame themselves. Maybe they are in the wrong crowd. Maybe they have spent too much time in sinful activities or thinking about sin. It is a person’s inner craving or lust that causes a person to do wrong.

Second, the will yields to the desire which brings action. Somewhere in the process, the lust stage has a conception. Christians have to put an end to the desire before it is brought to completion. In human conception there is birth unto life, but in temptation there is birth of sin and separation from God.

Third, sin then is born. James warned his brothers and sisters not to be deceived or led astray. Just as a right response

to trials can result in growth to full spiritual maturity, so a wrong response to lust will result in decline to abject spiritual poverty and ultimately to death.

Fourth, sin matures and produces its own offspring, death. Christians must not be deceived. Temptations are strong and deadly. Christians need to fight to resist temptations because they can lead to death.

Satan is a great deceiver. Temptation to sin is powerful. Do not be deceived. Christians need to consider their desires and change the desires that are from Satan so they do not give themselves over to Satan. Christians need to understand the destructive effect of sin. When children of God choose the things of the world, they lose every time.

To survive temptations, Christians need to understand the devil's schemes so he will not outwit them (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:11). Christians need to know their own weaknesses so they can be prepared to resist the devil. They should resist the devil and draw near to God (cf. James 4:7–8). Knowing the Word of God will help God's people to resist the devil as it helped Jesus to resist him in the desert (cf. Luke 4:1–13). The nature of God is shown in this section on temptation. James wrote that God does not tempt anyone, nor is He tempted by evil.

## **The Goodness and Gifts of God and Our Response**

### **Every Good Thing Is From God**

James assures us that every good thing comes from God, that God is the source of all good gifts. He states in 1:17:

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

James wrote earlier that temptations do not come from God. God is a giver of good things. God generously gives wisdom to those who ask (cf. James 1:5). He is a giving God who gives generously. Every good gift comes from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

The Greek word ***dosis*** means “the act of giving and reflects the character of the giver.” The Greek word ***doresma*** means “*the gift itself and reflects the character of the giver.*” ***Telios*** is translated “*perfect*” and means “complete, full-grown, mature.” “*Every good and perfect gift is from above*” literally means “*every good act of giving (***dosis***) and every perfect gift (***doresma***) is from above.*”

In stark contrast with the morbid scene of death that descends from unbridled lust is the bright scene of new life that emanates from the Word of truth. The father of darkness, Satan, generates the offspring of sin and death (cf. Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13). The Father of the heavenly lights, who created the starry universe, gives salvation and life and is unchanging. Shadows from the sun shift, but not the One who made the sun!

### **God’s Choice and the Result**

Notice what James wrote concerning the way God exercises His will: “*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created*” (James 1:18). God chose and carried out His plan when “*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.*” He “birthed” Christians. Contrast this concept with “. . . *sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*” (James 1:15). Temptations, which are caused because of lust, conceive and give birth to sin that leads to death. God exercises His will and gives life. Since God chose that all people be saved and worked His plan through the centuries, He would not tempt them to sin.

God chose to give Christians birth through the Word, through the Word of truth. His Word begets life: “*Then you*

*will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). James wrote later in the first chapter that the planted Word saves: *"Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you"* (James 1:21). Peter wrote that birth comes through the enduring Word of God: *"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God"* (1 Peter 1:23).

Christians become *"a kind of firstfruits of all he created."* Firstfruits is that which is devoted or dedicated to God: *"Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest"* (Jeremiah 2:3). In John's vision the 144,000 redeemed were offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb: *"They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb"* (Revelation 14:4).

In the Old Testament, the first crops were dedicated to God in sacrifice: *"Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field"* (Exodus 23:16). The grain offering could be given to God as an offering of the first crops: *"You may bring them [grain offerings, ed.] to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits . . ."* (Leviticus 2:12).

Those who are born through the Word of truth, also present themselves as sacrifices to God: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship"* (Romans 12:1). First fruits might also imply that those born anew are a preview of the new creation. Paul indicates this in Romans 8:22-23:

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

God works in such a way that He brings about life. The solution for temptation is to be found in a close relationship with the Father and a constant response to His Word. One must rest in the unchangeable Lord of light and rely on His life-giving “Word of Truth” (cf. Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15).

Two of the author’s favorite verses are from the great Psalm 119. The Word of truth gives light and can keep a young man pure: *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word”* (Psalm 119:9). Obedience to that Word comes when Christians memorize God’s Word: *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you”* (Psalm 119:11). Christians need to continually spend time in the Word so they can be right with God.

### **The Proper Response to the Knowledge of God’s Character — A Controlled Disposition**

James begins another area of important discussion. The reader has learned about temptation. He has read that God is good, and He gives good gifts. He has learned that the Word of truth gives life. James now presents the proper response to the knowledge of God’s character.

Christians can be deceived by thinking that temptations and sin are not their fault. In the same way, Christians can also be deluded by thinking that hearing the great Message, assembling with the church, and listening to the Bible class teacher and the preacher is all that is necessary for them to do. That is a delusion. While it is absolutely essential to hear the Word of truth, Children of God need to apply it to their lives as well. James 1:19–20:

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*

Notice a few things about hearing the Word of God. James wrote that Christians need to be quick to hear. “Get on with it, be quick about it,” my Mom would say whenever there was a job to do around the house. “Mark Snell,” she would say, speaking German to me. In the same way, be quick to hear the Word of God; be quick to listen. Hear what God says, but “*be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*.” Some people are always ready to speak. Often the tongue gets these people in trouble because they are quick to speak. James wrote a lot about the tongue, especially in chapter three. He compares the tongue to a destructive fire.

The Greek word ***taxus*** is translated “*quick*.” Christians need to be quick to hear the Word of truth which begets and sustains life. They need to be “*slow*” which means “*dull or inactive*” to speak. Christians are to guard their words. They should speak words that are important and well thought out. The Greek word ***orge*** is translated “*slow to anger*” and means “*the calm anger*.” This anger usually seeks revenge or punishment. It is not the word that is often translated “*wrath*” which means “*the quick, boiling over anger*” which is damaging. Wrath is when a person is quickly angered, explodes, and then his anger disappears. When a person is filled with wrath, he does or says something terrible, and is quickly sorrowful.

In contrast to the person filled with wrath, is the person who allows anger to build up in his life. He lets his anger continue to get hotter, and hotter, until eventually it explodes. Quite often that person’s anger will do more damage than the one who gets angry quickly and calms down quickly. The Greek word ***orge*** comes from a word that describes fruits or plants that are swelling with juice and ready to burst forth. It is not pleasant when the fruit burst open and sprays the juice everywhere. In the same way anger is unpleasant when it burst forth. The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Christians need to control their anger. They need to



choose their words carefully when they are angry. Christians need to work on feeding themselves with good thoughts so that the anger will not be so strong. They need to be concerned about the righteousness of God. This kind of anger does not produce the righteousness of God in our lives. Anger fails to yield the righteous life that God desires, the goals to which the epistle of James is committed. God manifested His anger in a just way, in a proper way, when he dealt with sinful people.

Christians need to prepare to hear the Word of God by putting aside all filthiness in their lives: *“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you”* (James 1:21). Farmers and gardeners have to get the weeds out of the ground and prepare the ground so seeds can be planted. In the same way Christians must remove the “weeds” in their lives before the Seed, the Word of God can be planted. Sometimes people have to clean out their ears in order to hear properly. And before people can hear the Word of God they may need to get rid of the sin that is part of their lives. God’s children must put aside all filthiness, that which defiles one morally, be prepared to hear, and be ready to do what they hear. This verse makes a good sermon outline, “Be prepared to do what you hear.”

James wrote to put away all moral filth and evil. Put them to death. Put away all wickedness, and in humility receive the Word of God. Filth deals with moral character and conduct. Wickedness is evil treatment of others, the desire to injure.

Years ago a drug store was referred to as the apothecary. The English word *“apothecary”* comes from the Greek word in this verse which means *“a storehouse.”* James is saying, store your anger; get it in a warehouse and leave it there.

Put away all filthiness, that which defiles one morally, and all wickedness, that evil desire to injure. Receive the Word, the life-giving breath from God, with humility. Some translations use the word *“meekness”* instead of humility. Be strong enough

to receive the word of God. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is having the strength to say I will submit myself and my strengths to one greater than myself. Be willing to accept the idea that God's Word is greater than any person. Receive the Word with meekness, in humility. God's Word is able to save souls. Jesus made a similar statement: "*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). Christians need to know the Word of God to know what is truth. Truth leads to salvation, because salvation is taught in the true Word of God. James wrote that God chose to give Christians birth through the Word of Truth (cf. James 1:18). James wrote in verse 21 that the implanted Word is able to save. Young men secure their hearts by living according to the implanted Word. They treasure up the Word in their hearts.

## The Effect of The Word

### Responsiveness to the Word

It is not sufficient to merely receive the Word: "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says*" (James 1:22). Christians must respond to the Word, not merely listen to it. The Greek word *ginesthe* means to "*become*" or "*keep on becoming.*" One must become or keep on becoming a doer of the Word and not just a hearer.

Self-deception is possible. The deceived are those who do not put into practice the things they have heard. The word "*deceive*" means, "*to delude or to cheat.*" Those who are deceived are those who are being cheated. Christians cheat themselves if they think that hearing the message is all they need to do. Some church buildings have a sign at the back of the auditorium that says "Enter to worship, Exit to serve." The sign gives the idea that Christians have come here to be encouraged by the Word of truth, and they leave ready to live the Word. The real test of a sermon's power is not how the people hear it on Sunday, but how they live it on Monday.

Children of God need to prove the Word of God in the way they live. Listening to the Word is only the beginning; Christians must do what it says.

James wrote an illustration: *“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like”* (James 1:23-24). In high school many girls and some boys have mirrors in their lockers. They open the locker and check their appearance before going to the next class. After looking in the mirror, they walk away and then wonder if their appearance is satisfactory. How can a person forget so quickly? Everyone does it sometime.

How many times does a person read a scripture and later forget the scripture when confronted by temptation. The person knows what to do, but he does not do it. That is an example of a hearer only. Hearers easily forget. Hearers need to be doers of the Word.

### **To Look Into the Mirror of The Word of God Involves an Obligation**

The man who takes a deep intense look at the life giving, liberating Law will be blessed. James 1:25:

*But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

The intent and sustained look with a ready response is the key to spiritual strength and continued maturity. The Greek word *parakypsas* is translated *“looks intently into”* and means “to stoop down” in order to have a close look. *“Looks intently into”* are the same words that are used in John 20:5–6 when Peter and John rushed to the tomb, bent over, and noticed the

grave clothes, but did not find Jesus there. Christians do what they need to do to get a clear look into the perfect Law. They look with scrutiny, not with merely a passing glance. Christians inspect it intently.

The New American Standard translation says “*abides by it*” while the New International Version says “*continues to do this* [look intently, ed.].” In other words, the proper approach is to look more than once. Christians continue to look at the perfect Law, the Law of Liberty.

James did not write about the Law of Moses. At one time Luther may have thought that James was referring to the Law of Moses. But James wrote about the Law that liberates people, the Law that gives life. James wrote that Christians are brought forth by the Word of Truth (cf. James 1:18). They need to be quick to hear that Word and to receive that implanted Word that is able to save. This Word that comes from God is liberating.

The word law seems to imply restraint and, therefore, a lack of freedom. That statement is not true with God’s Law. His perfect Law provides true freedom. John 8:31–32:

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

James wrote that this person has not become a forgetful hearer, but rather he has become an effectual doer. He puts the perfect Law into practice. He does not forget like the person who looks at himself in a mirror and goes away forgetting what he looked like. He looks at the Word of God; he spends time in the Word of God. He walks away from the Word of God knowing how he ought to behave. He is a worker who gets involved. This person does what he knows he should be doing. He is blessed in what he does.

After Jesus washed his disciples' feet, He told them they would be blessed if they did the things they now knew: "*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them*" (John 13:17).

When a woman told Jesus that His mother was blessed because she gave birth to Him, He said that those who hear and obey the Word of God are blessed: "*He replied, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it'*" (Luke 11:28)

Christians must approach the Law of Liberty in a proper manner. They have to know the Word of God and look intently at it. Christians must abide in the Word. They must not be forgetful hearers, but they must be effectual doers of the Law of Liberty. Their work must be effective, beneficial, and helpful to others. One who does what God decrees will find full liberty and will be blessed in what he does. James 1:25 is a pivotal verse in the book because it tells the way to receive blessings from God.

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# The Relationship of Hearing and Doing

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## James 1:26–2:13

### Introduction

Ultimately the key both to responding to trials and resisting temptation is to be found in one's reaction to God's Word. Receptivity to the Word, responsiveness to the Word, and resignation to the Word are essential to spiritual growth. One must accept God's Word, act on it, and abide by it.

James made it clear that one's attitude toward receiving the saving Word is of the utmost importance to his response to that Word. It is essential to put away the abundance of evil, in humbly receiving the implanted Word. James impressed the fact that it is not sufficient to simply "receive" the Word. A person must respond to it in active obedience. The command is clear: "Do not merely listen to the word . . . Do what it says" (James 1:22).

## The Fruit of The Word

### One Who "Thinks" Himself to Be Religious

James wrote to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to become angry (cf. James 1:19). To hear the word of God a person must get rid of the filth and wickedness in his life. He needs to be a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer of the Word. James wrote that an effectual doer will be blessed in what he does.

James wrote about an apparent concern that was possibly being overlooked by the recipients of the letter: *“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless”* (James 1:26). A person who fears God and tries to follow Him is religious, but a person who does not control his tongue only thinks he is religious. The man who does not bridle his tongue goes on and on with sinful words, lies, unnecessary criticism, gossip, and blasphemy. Christians have to exercise self control to be pleasing to God. James wrote more about the tongue in other chapters of the book, especially in chapter three.

James warned the readers to not be deceived (cf. James 1:16), and he warned them to not deceive themselves (cf. James 1:22). The words “to delude” or “to deceive” are synonyms both in English and in the Greek language. Christians need to be careful lest they “play the part of a Christian” rather than “be” a Christian. God’s children need to be careful of the places they go, the things they do, and the way they use their tongue. The tongue can be used to praise God, honor men, or sin against God.

A Christian needs to bridle his tongue so he does not deceive his heart and cause his religion to be worthless. The word “worthless” means *“to be devoid of force, truth, success, or result.”* A “show” of worship to God is vain and worthless. Worship must be combined with a devoted-to-God heart and action of faith. Ones’ religion can and should be worthwhile and of great benefit to others.

### **One Who Continually Puts the Word Into Practice**

Apparently the recipients of James needed a reminder to put their belief into practice. *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”* (James 1:27).

James grew up as a Jew and, thus, understood the Law of Moses. Perhaps he was reminded of several Old Testament passages as he wrote this verse. There are many Old Testament scriptures where God told the Israelites to take care of the poor, the orphans, and the widows. These scriptures would make an interesting study. God is concerned about women who have lost their husbands and for children who have lost their parents. God wants His people to take care of these people. Jesus had the same concerns for the poor, the widowed, and orphans. In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus gave an example of caring for a person in distress (cf. Luke 10:25–37).

There are three important “practices” of pure and faultless religion. First, there must be the restraint of the tongue. A person who is truly religious will demonstrate it with controlled speech.

Second, there must be compassion toward widows, orphans, and any person in need. The writer does not intend for Christians to merely visit a widow or orphan, say hello, and then leave. The verb “*to look after*” comes from the same Greek word *episkopos* from which the noun “*to be a bishop*” comes. A bishop is one who looks over the affairs of another. “*To look after*” means “*to inspect or examine with the eyes in order to see how a person is doing.*” A bishop (elder) in the Lord's church should do more than merely speak to people. He should take care of the needs of the flock. Every elder who reads this book must fully understand this important concept. Elders (shepherds) need to offer some relief when people are in distress. In the same way, Christians have the responsibility to help care for widows and orphans in their distress. When Christians offer some kind of relief, they are putting their belief into action by their behavior. It is very important to take care of widows and orphans in their distress.

Third, Christians are also to keep themselves from the pollution of the world. They must be pure in heart. The world is a Christian's greatest enemy. It is easy to get close to the



world, participate in its activities, enjoy it, and think it's not hurting anyone spiritually. Consider Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:2:

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

John wrote that Christians should not love the world because the love of God would not be in the person who loves the world. 1 John 2:15–17:

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

Peter encourages Christians to prepare for the Lord's return by living blameless lives: "*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him*" (2 Peter 3:14). The goal of every Christian should be to walk maturely and practice holiness.

### **Following the Royal Law**

One who is properly involved in the Bible is also properly involved in the body of Christ. He who stands with confidence serves with compassion. James made it clear that true religion will find an outlet in service. It is a service which demands that a believer learn to accept others without prejudice and to assist others without presumption.

James wrote specific and direct admonitions and instructions. He was obviously displeased with the inconsistencies among the brethren. James pointed out the attitudes these believers displayed toward others. Then he expressed dissatisfaction with their failures to behave as they should. James condemned the attitude of favoritism and gave suggestions on how to combat this obstacle to spiritual maturity. Christians must learn to accept others, whatever their status or class. They must show courtesy, compassion, and consistency to everybody. Equity, love, and fidelity must also be shown to every person.

## **Attitude Toward Favoritism or Discrimination**

### **Discrimination is Prohibited**

James wrote about the mistreatment of the poor and the special treatment of the rich in chapter two. He warns the recipients to not show favoritism because it is contrary to their faith in Christ: *“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism”* (James 2:1). “Respect of persons” literally means “face receiving.”

Faith is destroyed by favoritism for these eight reasons. First, showing favoritism is a sin (cf. James 2:9). Second, it causes divisions among the brethren (cf. James 2:3). Third, showing favoritism makes evil judges out of Christian brothers (cf. James 2:4). Fourth, when a Christian shows prejudice, he is in contradiction with God (cf. James 2:5). Fifth, showing favoritism causes one brother to dishonor another brother (cf. James 2:6). Sixth, it dishonors the name “Christian” and, thus, dishonors Christ (cf. James 2:7). Seventh, showing favoritism is contrary to the Law of Moses (cf. James 2:8–11). And eighth, it brings judgment without mercy (cf. James 2:12–13).

The very concept of “brethren” is contradictory to prejudice. Faith in Christ is the basis of love which contradicts showing favoritism. The sin of prejudice must not be in a

Christian's life. The New American Standard Bible has the words "*personal favoritism*" in verse one and "*partiality*" in verse nine. That version calls Jesus "*our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.*" Jesus is worthy of all glory. James wrote that Christians should not show favoritism and, thus, dishonor or disgrace our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Favoritism Illustrated.**

The people in the following illustration are guilty of not only discriminatory divisions, but they also assume the role of judges with evil thoughts of partiality. James 2:2–4:

*Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

A gold-fingered and brilliantly clothed man comes into the assembly. A poor man in shabby clothes also enters. The Greek word *ptochos* is translated "*poor man*" and means "a beggar, one dependent on the charity of others." The man who is poor is mistreated while the rich man is treated much better than he even deserved. Special attention and preferential seating is given to the rich man, but standing room only or an inferior seat on the floor is afforded the poor man. "*Show special attention*" means "to gaze upon." "*Sit on the floor by my feet*" means "under my footstool." The illustration is followed by a penetrating inquiry: "*have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*" The rhetorical question requires an affirmative answer. Yes, they are

guilty of showing favoritism and of assuming the role of judges with sinful thoughts.

A clique is an exclusive group of friends with things in common. A clique is sinful when people exclude other people because of their appearance, gender, wealth, or nationality. The problem is not with the group, but the attitude toward others outside the group.

Some people say there should not be any kind of clique whatsoever. Sometimes people are with friends who they like the best. Is this wrong? Did Jesus show personal favoritism when He spend time alone with the apostles? And even among the apostles, at times He was only with Peter, James and John. Was He showing partiality? Perhaps, but everything Jesus did was to accomplish His Father's will. Jesus sent His apostles to preach to the lost sheep of Israel. They were not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans (cf. Matthew 10:5–6). Was He showing partiality? Jesus was fulfilling God's purpose.

Apparently the churches in Palestine were showing favoritism based on a person's wealth and appearance so James wrote that this type of behavior is wrong. Christians need to strive to treat all people equally. Christians are not supposed to show special favors to people who dress well and are successful and show dishonor to those who do not.

The word that is translated "*favoritism*" in verse one and verse nine means "respect of persons, partiality or the fault of one who when called on to requite or give judgement has respect for the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits." It is very dangerous to have an attitude of favoritism or to show partiality because the judgements are based not on what a person is like, not on the person's internal merit, but simply on the person's physical appearance. Showing partiality has always been destructive in all societies. Christians need to understand that showing favoritism is against the will of God. An unshaven, ill smelling, homeless person should be treated as honorably as a man who drives an expensive car, has

expensive clothing and lives in a luxurious home. It is easy to make false judgements about people based on their personal appearance. What Christians believe needs to be manifested in proper behavior.

## Compassion for All

### The Sin of Preferential Judgment

God did choose the poor to be rich: “*Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*” (James 2:5). James wrote earlier that the brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position (cf. James 1:9). God chose those who are poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him. When two strangers walk into the assembly, one who is well-dressed and the other who is not, they are both equal in the possibility of inheriting the promises of God.

The recipients have dishonored God because God has honored the poor man. James 2:6–7:

*But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

It is ironic that it was the rich who were the enemies of Christianity, as it still is today. The rich people were mistreating the poor people by dragging them to court. James wrote that it is a shame to show this favoritism.

James presents four questions to prove his point about the sin of preferential judgment. First, “*Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to*

*inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"* Second, *"Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?"* Third, *"Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?"* Fourth, *"Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?"*

Believers belong to God, not to the rich exploiters. The recipients of the epistle of James would have to agree with these contentions and recognize that insulting the poor and favoring the rich was sinful.

James wrote again about the importance of doing and not merely believing: *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right"* (James 2:8). The words *"royal law"* comes from the Greek word **basilikon** which comes from the Greek word **basileus** which means "king." Because the *"royal law"* is decreed by the King of kings it is considered the king of laws.

Christians fulfill the *"royal law"* when they love their neighbors as themselves. Jesus answered the question *"And who is my neighbor?"* when He told the story of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:29–37). When the Pharisee asked about the greatest commandments, Jesus replied, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . and love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:37–39). Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 from the Old Law.

The word favoritism is the same word that is used in verse two: *"But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers"* (James 2:9). When Christians show favoritism, they are guilty of breaking God's law because it is the Royal Law that comes from King Jesus. They are not loving their neighbor as themselves. Christians should love all people no matter their race, economic situation, gender, social standing appearance or nationality.

If a Christian fails in one point, he has broken all the law: *"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one*

*point is guilty of breaking all of it*" (James 2:10). Some Christians tend to dismiss their offenses as trivial, but James made it clear that no offense is small or trivial. The Law of Moses was the same: one offense made a person guilty of breaking the entire law.

If a person has violated one of the commandments, he has violated the entire law: *"For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker"* (James 2:11). A person who commits adultery is as guilty as a person who commits murder. It is not like taking a test at school, getting 90% of the questions correct, and receiving a high grade. So Christians need to strive to obey all the teaching of God and live to glorify God.

All people will be judged by the law that gives freedom: James 2:12–13:

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

James wrote that the perfect law gives freedom (cf. James 1:25). God's law brings true freedom, but disobedience to God's law brings bondage. Christians can be set free from their sins. I am grateful that Christians will be judged by the law of liberty. I do not want to be judged by the law that simply observes my behavior and dooms me for destruction when I sin.

The Law that God gave through Moses, and all laws of society, whether religious or nonreligious, require proper behavior. Those laws do not make a provision for forgiveness for wrong doing. They only state the punishment. But Christians have a perfect law that gives opportunity for forgiveness. The blood of God's Son gives Christians who have shown mercy access to the law that gives freedom.

As love triumphs over prejudice, mercy triumphs over judgment. The verb “*triumphs*” comes from the Greek word *katakauchatai* which means “exults over.” God’s mercy is necessary for salvation: “*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy . . .*” (Titus 3:5). Christians are saved by the mercy of God

God made a righteous decision. He chose to punish Jesus Christ instead of punishing Christians for their sins. Of course a Christian has to have faith in Jesus, have his sins washed away at baptism, and live a life of faithfulness. If a Christian mistreats the poor, shows favoritism, and does not show mercy to others, he cannot expect to receive mercy from God.

Christians must be merciful. Jesus told a parable of a servant who had a very large debt. He went in to his master and begged for mercy since he was unable to pay the debt. The master canceled the debt. Then the man who had received mercy saw a fellow servant that owed him a small amount of money. The servant refused to show mercy and cancel the small debt. When the master heard what the servant had done, he had the servant thrown into prison (cf. Matthew 18:23–34). In the same way God will punish Christians who do not show mercy by forgiving other people. People who have been shown mercy, need to understand that compared to God they are poor. Only God can lead the merciful to the riches in Christ Jesus.

The merciful will be blessed by God: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). People who show mercy will receive mercy, but judgment will be without mercy to those who do not show mercy. A person cannot expect to receive mercy if he refuses to show mercy.

Both godly and unrighteous people will stand before God on judgment day (cf. 2 Peter 2:9). Every person will want mercy from God on that day, but “*mercy triumphs over judgment*” Christians who have shown mercy, can expect to receive mercy from God. That mercy can usher the righteous in to the eternal Kingdom of God. In one of Shakespeare’s plays



there is a man who says, “How canst thou expect to receive mercy seeing thou renderest none.”

God has ordained unalterable laws. Complete and consistent obedience is required if spiritual maturity is to be attained. The believer is commanded to accept his brother with mercy, compassion, and fairness.

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# Faith in Action

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## James 2:13–26

### Introduction

James wrote that the readers need to grow to maturity in Christ. They must unite belief and behavior. In this situation, they can manifest their faith by helping their brother who is in need, when they are able.

James 2:24 greatly disturbed Martin Luther because he thought the verse contradicted what Paul had written in Romans 3:20. This passage in James has played an important part in Biblical interpretation for centuries

Just as the law of love gives no excuse for respect of persons, so the possession of faith gives no license to dispense with good deeds or works. A believer must not only demonstrate his love by ready acceptance of others, but he must also demonstrate his faith by responsible aid to others. The expression of true faith will be emphasized and examples will be given.

## The Expression of True Faith

### Faith Without Deeds

James wrote often encouraging Christians to mature in Christ. The recipients were instructed to unite belief and behavior: “*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?*” (James 2:14). There has been much said about this verse throughout

the centuries, especially by Martin Luther during the reformation movement.

Luther was a Catholic priest who studied the scripture and believed a man was justified by faith in Christ Jesus and not by meritorious works. He had studied and delighted in his study of Romans and Galatians. When he studied James, Luther thought there was a contradiction. He thought for a long time that James did not belong in the scriptures.

There is every reason to accept James as being inspired of God. The “*deeds*” in James are quite different from “*the works*” that Paul wrote about. The importance of faith must be manifested in the works that Christians do.

The key to understanding this text lies basically in understanding three questions. First, of **whose** deeds is he speaking? Is it non-Christians or is it people who are saved? James is writing to Christians, people who have been saved. Receiving salvation is not under discussion; remaining saved is.

Second, **why** are these people working? Are they working in order to be saved? Or are they working because they are saved? The Christians are working because they are saved.

Third, **what kind** of works is under discussion? Is it meritorious works which Paul wrote to refute? Or is it simply the activity of God’s faithful people? The only way to accept James as being inspired of God without contradicting the writings of Paul is to accept the latter question. Paul wrote that a person cannot work his way to heaven. A person cannot “do” enough to earn his salvation. Rather, salvation is a gift from God. It is by His grace that Christians are saved (cf. Ephesians 2:8). The kind of works under discussion is simply the activity of God’s faithful people. The writings of James and Paul do not contradict each other. Rather, they compliment one another.

Some people have a hard time accepting Romans 3 and 4, the book of Galatians, and the book of James all being inspired.

Yet, it is quite interesting that there is never a dispute about Ephesians 2:8–10:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Paul made it very clear there that it is by grace Christians are saved and not of works. There is no doubt that the “good works” in verse ten are the works the saved people are doing out of gratitude to God for their salvation.

The Greek word *ergo* is translated “works.” The English word “energy” or “being energized to do something” comes from this word. In James 2:14–26 the word is used twelve times. It is the same Greek word that Paul used in Romans. In the King James Version, the American Standard Version, and the New American Standard, the word is translated “work” each of the twelve times. In the New International Version the word is translated “action” in James 2:17, 22. The word is translated “deeds” in James 2:14, 18, 20, 26. It is translated either “do,” “did,” or “does” in James 2:18, 21, 24, 25. The Greek word that means “working with” in James 2:22 is translated “wrought” in the King James Version and the American Standard Version.

For a long time when I read the scriptures about works, my mind automatically went to the concept of meritorious works, things I could do to earn my salvation. I thought I needed to contribute to what God had done to save me, knowing that I was justified freely by His grace which is in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 3:24). I could not believe that I did not need to contribute in any way to my salvation other than to obey God by responding in faith. Christians cannot earn salvation in any

way. I like Luther, wondered if James was contradicting Paul, but following the New International Version translation of the word *ergo* removed some of the preconceived thoughts about the word “works.” Such words as “deeds,” “action,” and “doing” as opposed to the word “works” gave me a better understanding of the meaning of the text. Those words helped me to understand that James had no reference to the works that would earn something for another, but rather the works that people do because of their salvation. They are the simply acts of faithful obedience, still believing and trusting completely in the grace of God.

The primary subject that James wrote about was not justification by works or justification by faith. The primary subject is Christians need to manifest their belief by doing good. James gave an illustration in James 2:15–16:

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?*

A brother or sister without food or clothing is told to be warmed and to be filled by the brother who probably is able to help. What good is it for a brother to say he is faithful, but only say kind words to a brother or sister and do nothing to help them when they are in need

A brother was able to provide the needs of his brother or sister, but choose not to help. It is as if he is saying, “Go in peace,” while he walks away, having failed to love his neighbor (cf. Matthew 5:43). This brother’s ability to help is not in question, only his faith is in question.

“What good is it, my brethren? . . .” (James 2:14). James was making the point there is great use to faithful living. When faith is lived out, it is of great benefit both to the Christian who is showing his faith and to the one receiving it. But what good

is that faith if Christians do nothing to manifest their belief in Christ. In verse twenty-four James asked the question, “*Can such faith save him?*” Because James was writing about brothers in Christ, the question is: Can that faith keep him saved? Can that faith keep a person saved if he chooses to do nothing to manifest what he believes? Can that faith without actions keep him saved? Can a faith that is without works, that no one knows about, keep Christians saved? Receiving salvation is not under discussion, but rather remaining saved is being discussed.

I wonder what look was on James’ face when he wrote verses fifteen and sixteen. Perhaps he was feeling angry and a bit of the anger was showing in his eyes. Indeed, all Christians ought to be upset when they are around people who say, “I am one of God’s children, but I am not going to do anything to help a brother or sister in need.” That is not right; that is not imitating God. For God has always held the poor and needy close to His heart.

### **The Truth Stated Bluntly and Boldly**

Faith must be seen: “*In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*” (James 2:17). Workless faith is worthless faith; faith must be manifested. Workless faith is unproductive, sterile, barren, dead! Great claims may be made about a corpse that is supposed to have come to life, but if it does not move, it is dead. If the corpse has no vital signs, no heartbeat, and no perceptible pulse, it is dead. False claims are silenced by the evidence.

## **The Evidence of True Faith Presented**

### **An Imaginary Respondent With an Unproven Faith**

James was anticipating the disputes from people who would try to justify themselves: “*But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds,*

*and I will show you my faith by what I do*” (James 2:18). When John the Baptizer was baptizing people in the Jordan River, Pharisees were boasting that they were “*the sons of Abraham.*” John then warned the Jews to “*produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*” John told them to share with those who have no clothing or food (cf. Luke 3:7–11).

Christians should not trust in their heritage or their name. A person’s heritage or name should never be an excuse to disobey the will of God. Perhaps that was the same problem that existed among the Christians to whom James wrote. How often do Christians try to justify themselves with words such as, “Yes, but I am a member of the Lord’s church?” Does being a member of the Lord’s church excuse anyone from doing the will of the Lord? No, being a member of Christ’s church means a person should do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (cf. Galatians 6:10). Look around any congregation and it is easy to tell who the faithful people are. They are the people who show their faith by what they do.

Unproductive faith is a demonic quality of faith: “*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder*” (James 2:19). It is good to believe that God is one, but that is not enough. The fact that demons believe in God does not mean they are justified, in a right condition before God. Demons shudder at the thought of God because even though they believe in God, they do not manifest that belief. Demons do not respect God. They do not follow God’s will. The demons’ “belief” in God is inadequate. Such a so-called but unreal faith is obviously unaccompanied by deeds. Belief in the devil does not make a person one of his children or a part of his church. Belief in God without deeds will save neither the devil nor man.

### **Faith without Deeds is Useless**

It is foolish to think that faith will stand alone without deeds: “*You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*” (James 2:20). Those are straightforward words by James. The adjective “*foolish*” comes from the Greek word *kene* which is usually translated “vain,” “empty,” or “hollow.”

Faith is something that is seen. It is actions, obedience, and deeds. Faith and works is an important theme in James. James wrote that Christians are not to merely listen to the word, but they are to do what it says (cf. James 1:22). God is pleased when His children care for orphans and widows and live pure lives (cf. James 1:27). Christians must not merely say they have faith, but they must unite belief and behavior. Faith without works is of no benefit.

### **Examples of True Faith**

#### **Example of Abraham**

Abraham was considered righteous: “*Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?*” (James 2:21). The Jews knew Abraham well. Abraham was the one to whom God gave the promise first. He was considered the father of the Jew. More was written about Abraham in Hebrews 11 than anyone else. He is a true hero of the faith.

Abraham was “*considered righteous*” which means he was “declared worthy” not “made worthy.” He was “justified” or “in a right relationship” with God when he offered up Isaac.

Abraham’s faith was made complete when he combined belief with action: “*You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did*” (James 2:22). Abraham’s faith reached “completeness” when he offered his son. At that moment, he could not have



shown any more that he believed God. Faith is obvious when faith is manifested.

Abraham was not “lost” before he offered his son and then “saved” after he offered him. He remained in a state of justification; his action merely showed his faith. Abraham’s action fulfilled the statement that God had made many years before Isaac was even born: “*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness*” (Genesis 15:6).

James wrote that Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled: “*And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend*” (James 2:23). Abraham was justified by God because he believed God would give him a son, an heir (cf. Genesis 15:4). His belief was accounted unto him as righteousness. This put him in the right standing with God. Offering Isaac, an act of faithfulness, manifested that his faith was reaching its complete state. Because of this work, his faith in God, “*he was called God’s friend.*” Who are the friends of God? They are the people who put their faith into action.

Abraham’s offering of Isaac proved his faith: “*You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone*” (James 2:24). Again, emphasis is placed on the importance of works, not works of merit, but works that are showing one’s faith, the activities of faith. These works are the manifestation of faith. What if Abraham had believed God would raise up an heir, but he refused to offer his son. Would Christians know he had faith in the promise and in the One who made the promise? Abraham offered his only begotten son knowing that God was able to raise him from the dead (cf. Hebrews 11:17, 19). Abraham’s son was a type. God recognized that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son as God was willing to sacrifice His Son. Abraham was faithful in action, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Christians should also be faithful in action.

They can manifest their belief in God by providing for those in need.

### **Example of Rahab**

Rahab was considered to be righteous because of the way she treated the spies. James 2:25:

*In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?*

After the death of Moses when the Israelites were getting ready to cross the Jordan River into the promised land, Joshua sent two spies to look over the land, especially the city of Jericho. Rahab hid the spies in her house because she had heard how God had dried up the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape from the Egyptians and how the Israelites destroyed the Amorites. The people of Jericho were afraid of the Israelites and their God, but Rahab believed in the power of God. She believed God was sending His people to destroy Jericho and that God had given the Israelites the land. Rahab asked the spies to show kindness to her family because she had shown kindness to them. Rahab manifested her faith by the things she did to protect the spies so they could safely return to the Israelites. When the Israelites came to Jericho, the Lord delivered it into their hands. They burned the whole city and everything in it, but Joshua spared Rahab and her family (cf. Joshua 2:1–12; 5:13–25).

Rahab was also considered a hero of the faith: “*By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient*” (Hebrews 11:31). Rahab showed by her actions that she had faith. Later, she gave birth to a son, named Boaz, who was the great-grandfather of King David (cf. Matthew 1:5–6). The example of the faith of

Rahab, a Gentile prostitute, was in contrast to the faith of Abraham, a rich, powerful Israelite man. Perhaps James wrote about these two people to illustrate the warning against showing favoritism.

Faith must be manifested, or it is a dead faith: *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”* (James 2:26). When the spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. Also, faith without works is dead. James strongly warns Christians to put their faith into practice. Unite belief with behavior. Grow to maturity in Christ because of belief. Christianity is an action religion. Christians are to do more than merely come to the church building for an hour or two each week. Christianity is more than worshiping God each week and giving of one’s income, although they are important. Christianity is daily living the will of God. Christians need to attempt to put into practice all the great teachings of God. Faith and deeds are as essential to each other as the body and the spirit.

James wrote of the importance of showing kindness and helping those who are in need. Christians are to accept all members of God’s family without showing favoritism. To gain spiritual maturity a believer must be what God wants him to be and do what God wants him to do. Christians must manifest their belief in God.

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## Wisdom and The Tongue

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**Romans 3:4, 21–23, 27; 4:1–6; James 3:1–16**

### **Justification By Faith**

#### **Introduction**

The study of Romans 3:4 shows that what Paul wrote and what James wrote concerning the subject of works compliment each other. That passage is very important to understanding why Martin Luther had trouble accepting and understanding the book of James. For a time Luther considered the book of James “an epistle of straw.” Luther thought James 2:14–26 was weak, as mentioned in chapter five. He did not think James belonged in the Canon. It is important to note again that later in Luther’s life he did recognize the book of James as being from God, but he did not consider it to be the best book of the Bible.

In this chapter the purpose of James’ discussion of justification and Paul’s discussion will be presented. Luther believed that James mixed up the Law and works. And Luther said the interpretation of Paul’s gospel was an impossible task.

If Paul wrote about justification by faith and not by meritorious works, and if the works under discussion in the book of James are works of merit, then agreement with Luther would be necessary. I would have the same problem Luther had. As was pointed out in chapter five, the works that James wrote about are not meritorious works. The works are not done in order to earn something from God, but rather they are the activities of faithful people.

### **Justification Possible to All People**

Christians are justified in Christ Jesus as is clearly seen in these verses written by the Apostle Paul. Romans 3:21–23:

*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

God through His grace has made justification possible to all people. God has done the work. Believers only have to be obedient and faithful to Him. A response to God does not in any way cause the believer to earn the gift of salvation.

Paul is saying that both sinful pagans and sinful Jews are lost. Neither of the two is righteous; both need God because they are outside of Christ Jesus. “But now” is in contrast to any other system that might justify a person, including the old Law.

Notice several things about justification or righteousness. First, Paul wrote that it is apart from the Law. In other words, a person cannot be justified as a part of the Law of Moses. Righteousness is manifested by God in another way.

Second, righteousness was witnessed by the Law and the prophets throughout the Old Testament. They were giving witness that God would justify people by their faith. Third, through faith in Christ Jesus the righteousness has been manifested. The one who is not forgiven of sin, who needs to be right with God, must have faith in Christ Jesus to be considered righteous. Fourth, this justification is universally available; Paul wrote it was for all those who believed. In other words, it was not for the Jews only, but for the Gentiles as well. This righteousness from God is for both Jew and Gentile who believe in Jesus Christ. The justification is universally needed

because Paul wrote *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

## **Righteousness Given By Grace**

The following verse is very important because everyone needs the righteousness given by grace: *“And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3:24). Paul is making four very important points concerning justification. First, it is without human cause. Children of God are justified by a gift. In other words, they did not do anything to earn this gift; it was freely given. Second, it was without human contribution. Christians have been justified by a gift from God, His grace. Third, God’s provision has given Christians what they do not deserve. Every person deserves death because everyone has sinned. No one is perfect except Jesus Christ. Fourth, redemption is by Divine cause and by Divine cost. Redemption came through the death of Christ Jesus. Redemption is when someone pays a ransom price to rescue another person who was taken captive. Lost people have been taken captive by Satan, but Jesus paid the ransom on the cross. Christians are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Justification is freely given, *“by His grace”* means a free gift.

God allowed Jesus to go to the cross: *“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood . . .”* (Romans 3:25). Jesus’ sacrifice satisfied God’s just decree against sin. The word *“propitiation”* is used in the New American Standard translation while *“atoning sacrifice”* is used in the New International Version and means that God is satisfied. Why does God need to be satisfied? Because God is angry about sin.

### **Examples of God's Anger**

Witness of God's anger is shown in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (cf. Genesis 3:23), in the worldwide flood that destroyed every living thing except Noah and his family (cf. Genesis 7:23), in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 19:24), and in the destruction of the wicked nation of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 17:18). God is made angry by sin. What could satisfy the anger of God? Only Jesus Christ's death satisfied God's anger. God made atonement possible for all people. It is possible because God is at work. People simply need to respond through faith.

### **Faith Apart From Works**

Paul wrote that boasting is excluded: *"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith"* (Romans 3:27). Boasting is excluded on the principle of faith.

A person is found righteous by faith apart from works of merit: *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law"* (Romans 3:28). Works of merit is when a man has a job with certain conditions. At the end of the week if those conditions are met, he is paid the money promised. That money is not a free gift from the boss. It is merely what is earned. If righteousness can be earned, then God gives it because the man has done so well and can then boast about it. But Paul wrote there is no boasting in this righteousness. God gives Christians this free gift in spite of what they are, sinners. Belief and obedience in Jesus Christ bring salvation.

Paul went back in history to show that the principle of boasting was excluded on the principle of faith even before the cross. Romans 4:1–2:

*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was*

*justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.*

If salvation can be earned, Abraham did not have to thank God. He was justified by his works, and he could boast about them.

Abraham was justified because he believed God according to Genesis 15:6, James 2:23, and Romans 4:3: *“What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”* The man, like Abraham, who does not work to earn his way, but instead believes God, his faith is credited as righteousness. That does not mean he does nothing to manifest his faith. He manifests his faith because he is saved.

Wages are not a gift. *“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness”* (Romans 4:4–5). The man who works to earn his wage is not given a gift; he has earned his salary so there is no gift involved. The man who does not work but trusts God has faith that saves him.

### **God Credits Righteousness Apart From Works**

Paul wrote a strong message quoting David saying that man cannot be saved by works. *“David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works”* (Romans 4:6). Paul then quotes Psalm 32:1–2: *“‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.’”* A person can be justified only when his sins are forgiven.

Christians must show their faith by their works. Paul wrote in Romans 3 and 4 that the non-Christian seeking to be justified should not try to earn his way, but he should seek faith in Jesus Christ so God could give him the free gift of salvation.

A person cannot earn salvation and the forgiveness of sins committed before baptism with works, nor can a person earn



salvation, forgiveness of sins, by works for sins that have been committed after baptism. It is the blood of Jesus that continues to cleanse a repentant Christian: *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Faithful living is a necessary part of spiritual salvation. Christians must follow Jesus’ example. They must show their faith by their works. Christians should let their faithfulness be known. They must be both hearers of the Word and doers of the Word. Luther had good reason to be concerned about the book of James, but further study indicates that the works that Paul wrote about were not the same kind of works that James wrote about. The writings of Paul and the writings of James are in agreement in every way.

## **Problems With the Tongue**

### **Introduction**

In the early church the teachers were of first importance. Wherever they are mentioned, they are mentioned with honor. In the church at Antioch they were ranked with the prophets who sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:1). In Paul’s list of those who hold great gifts within the church, they come second only to the apostles and to the prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28). The apostles and the prophets were forever on the move. Their field was the whole church; they did not stay long in any one congregation. But the teachers worked within a congregation and their supreme importance was for instruction in the Gospel and for edification in the Christian faith.

James wrote about the importance of the tongue and Christian speech in chapter three. What a Christian says is so very, very important. Think for a moment of all the sins that can be committed with the tongue. It might be good to list them on a sheet of paper. Lying, blasphemy, gossip, cursing, fighting,

boasting, and complaining would be on the list. Slander, mocking, foolish talk, coarse jesting, quarreling, and foul language would appear on the list. These sins should not be a part of a Christian's life. The sinful list is very long.

The use of the tongue can also be beneficial. The will of God can be fulfilled when Christians carefully choose the right words. Christians should be truthful, teach and preach the truth of God, and encourage and challenge one another. Believers should use their tongue to praise one another and praise God. With words children of God can pray, confess sin, and teach lost people the truths of the Gospel.

The tongue is an extremely powerful part of the body. It can be used for evil or for good. Christians who mature and become more like Jesus Christ will learn to use the tongue in a beneficial way. Children of God manifest their belief through their behavior. They train themselves to carefully select the words that they use.

### **Being Responsible Teachers**

James wrote about the importance of being responsible teachers. All teachers need to be careful how they teach and what they teach because they will be judged more strictly: *"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly"* (James 3:1). Teachers must speak only the truth because they will be held accountable for what they teach. James is not discouraging Christians from teaching. He is warning those who teach to be sober and to correctly teach God's Word. Teaching is an awesome challenge, and those Christians who use their gift of teaching need to carefully consider how they use their tongue.

In the New Testament there were teachers who failed in their responsibility and became false teachers. There were teachers who tried to turn Christianity into another kind of Judaism by binding circumcision and the keeping of the Law

(cf. Acts 15:24). There were teachers who did not live the truth which they taught to others. Their lives were a contradiction of the truth they taught, and they brought dishonor to the faith they represented (cf. Romans 2:17–29). There were teachers who tried to teach before they were mature enough (cf. 1 Timothy 1:6–7) and others who pandered to the false desires of the crowd (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3).

### **James's Emphasis on Teaching**

James previously wrote that Christians should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (cf. James 1:19). Careless use of the tongue can lead a person into sin and his religion can become worthless: *"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless"* (James 1:26). James also wrote: *"Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged . . ."* (James 5:9). Correctly teaching the Word of God is very important. James wrote that God chose to give birth through the Word of truth (cf. James 1:18). The Word is able to save souls (cf. James 1:21). So teaching the Word must not be lightly regarded knowing *"that we who teach will be judged more strictly."* Teachers must be able to handle the Word of God correctly because they are accountable to God. A teacher's condemnation is greater because having professed to have a clear knowledge of duty, he is all the more bound to obey it.

James did not write to discourage teaching, but rather to help the teacher focus on the seriousness of the task: *"We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check"* (James 3:2). The reality is that all Christians slip at times, but they ought to be striving to control their tongues. To control the tongue is to control the whole body. Moving toward maturity should be the goal of every Christian.

How a Christian uses his tongue at home with his spouse and children, on the job site, and with brothers in the Lord is so very, very important. Christians should encourage others to be truthful and speak words of comfort. Before they speak, Christians should carefully think about the effect their words will have on other people.

### **The Power of Small Things**

Bits in a horse' mouth will control the horse. James 3:3–5:

*When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*

A large, strong horse can be controlled with merely a small bit in his mouth. Large ships are able to carry huge amounts of cargo, and a very small rudder enables the pilot to direct the ship. The tongue is a small part of the body, yet it boasts of great things. Like the bit in the horse's mouth and the rudder on the ship, the tongue can control the body. A person's speech tells a lot about the person. When a Christian curses, lies, or commits other sins mentioned earlier, his character and reputation are affected. Christians must be very careful about the words they use. All Christians should strive for maturity by controlling their tongue as the bit controls the horse and the rudder controls the ship.

### **The Tongue Can Be Untamed**

The tongue like fire can be used for good or for evil: *"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the*

*body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell*" (James 3:6). Hearts are saddened when a small spark destroys valuables, a home, or a beautiful forest.

Animals can be tamed, but no man can tame the tongue: *"All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison"* (James 3:7–8). Christians must guard their tongue and use it correctly. They should not poison others with their uncontrolled tongue because words can kill relationships.

### **The Tongue Is Polluted**

Praise and cursing should not come out of the same mouth: *"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be"* (James 3:9–10). While my family was on a vacation in Iowa years ago, one of my sisters got poison ivy. I remember our ride home to Colorado. The trip home was miserable for her and for all of the family because at one moment she was begging and pleading with God to ease the pain. Before long she was cursing everything in sight because of the pain she was experiencing. These things ought not to be.

Should Christians bless God and curse those who are made in the likeness of Him? That question is very important. Some Christians look on non-Christians with disdain, especially those who are unkind. Non-Christians, too, have been made in the likeness of God. Christians must not curse anyone for all have been made in the likeness of God.

James wrote two rhetorical questions: *"Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water"* (James 3:11–12). A

believer's tongue should not be an instrument of inconsistency. The tongue is small and powerful, but it must be controlled. The tongue must be cleansed.

## Cultivate Right Thinking Or Thoughts

### Godly Wisdom Is Humble

Controlling the tongue begins with right thoughts. The tongue is contained in a cage of teeth and lips, but it still escapes. It is not intelligence that keeps the lock on that cage. It is wisdom, a wisdom that is characterized by humility, grace, and peace.

James wrote another rhetorical question: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom”* (James 3:13–14). *“Wise”* comes from the Greek word *soshos* which describes one with moral insight and skill in the practical issues of life. *“Understanding”* refers to intellectual perception and scientific insight. Wisdom is not measured by the number of university degrees a person has earned. Wisdom is measured by the good deeds a person does. Wisdom and understanding are not a matter of acquiring truth in lectures, but of applying the truth to life.

### Godly Wisdom Is Gracious

True wisdom makes no room for *“bitter envy”* or for *“selfish ambition.”* That wisdom is from the devil. James 3:14–16:

*But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

Envy and strife are clear indicators that a person's so-called "*wisdom*" is not from above. That kind of wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and sensual. Envy and selfish ambition can only produce disorder, confusion, and "*every evil practice*." A truly wise person does not seek glory; he is gracious and giving.

To achieve righteousness, spiritual maturity, and practical holiness, the theme of James, a Christian must learn to speak with care. Winsome speech comes from a wise spirit. A controlled tongue is possible only with cultured thought. A mouth filled with praise results from a mind filled with purity. A believer should stand confidently (chapter one), serve compassionately (chapter two), and speak carefully (chapter three). He should be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, and speak as God wants him to speak.

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## Submit With Contrition

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**James 3:17-4:6**

### **Introduction**

Fights, quarrels, lust, hate, envy, pride, and sin are words that stain this portion of James' letter like inkblots. In stark contrast with the closing words of chapter three, "*peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*," but chapter four opens with "*fights and quarrels*." James confronts this despicable behavior with valor. Furthermore, he gave clear advice on how to quell the storms that are so detrimental to spiritual growth and maturity. Christians must turn hatred into humility, judgment into justice, and boasting into belief.

### **Cultivate Right Thinking Or Thought**

#### **Contrast of Two Kinds of Wisdom**

The wisdom Christians need is from heaven: "*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere*" (James 3:17). Wisdom from heaven is wisdom from God. There are eight characteristics that James mentioned that are part of the wisdom from heaven. These eight characteristics are similar to the beatitudes given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew: 5:3–10). There were eight beatitudes given by Jesus and several of those are repeated in verse eighteen by James. **First**, the wisdom that is from above is pure, sacred, holy, and able to be clearly seen.

**Second**, it is "*peace-loving*" or "*peaceable*" as the New American Standard text states. There are people who love to



cause problems, quarrels and wars. Then there are people who love to make peace. The wisdom that is from above is peaceable.

**Third**, the wisdom that is from above is considerate. It is gentle, fair, or suitable. Christians need to have concern for other people and be considerate of them.

**Fourth**, the wisdom from above is submissive. In other words, it is reasonable, compliant, and obeys easily. God's people need to be submissive. They need to be willing to submit to God and to His authority.

**Fifth**, the wisdom that is from above is full of mercy. Christians who want mercy from God need to show mercy to other people: “ . . . *judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful . . .*” (James 2:13). Mercy is shown when a believer does not show favoritism to any person no matter their economic situation, race, gender, or appearance (cf. James 2:1). Since Jesus was merciful, Christians should show mercy.

**Sixth**, not only are God's people to be full of mercy, but they are also to be full of good fruit. They should do good deeds that benefit others. Every Christian should be sharing what he knows and what he has in Christ Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22–26) in believers can be shared.

**Seventh**, the wisdom from above is impartial. It is without partiality or bias. The man of God should be unwavering and consistent in the way he treats others. He should treat all people the same way. Impartial is not the same word that is translated favoritism in chapter two, but it does have a very similar meaning.

**Eighth**, the wisdom from above is sincere. It is without a disguise or hypocrisy. The Greek word *anupokritos* sounds like hypocrite. Hypocrite was the terms used for actors in the first century Greek world because the actor would play a roll on stage, even if it was different from his life off stage. In the first century the word hypocrite was a positive term. In time it

became a word of disrespect because it spoke of a Christian who treated a person one way in a particular setting but a different way in another setting. Christians are never to behave that way. Their lives are to be without this kind of hypocritical activity. Their lives are to be consistent and fair.

Wisdom that is earthly, natural, and demonic sets people at odds with one another. It creates havoc, war, and disorder of every kind because people are jealous and filled with selfish ambition. But there is a better way, God's way. The better way with wisdom from above is wise and understands people. Christians can choose the better way with pure, peaceful, and gentle behavior.

Christians are to plant seeds of peace: "*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*" (James 3:18). Christians who sow seeds of peace reap a great harvest of righteousness. Those who make peace will be blessed. Which wisdom will Christians follow? Which wisdom is from God? The second question is easy to answer, but what about the first one? Which kind of wisdom will Christians follow? As mentioned, the verse about wisdom is similar to the beatitudes that Jesus gave about living in His kingdom and according to His righteousness. Matthew 5:3–11:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you*

*and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

Righteousness and peace go together. Christians know what they ought to do to pursue righteousness and peace. They know they have to get rid of envy, jealousy, selfish ambition, and everything that says “put me on the throne.” It is really all about who is in control of their lives. When they put themselves on the throne, they have little room for God in their lives and little opportunity for His influence. Wise Christians show their wisdom by their good behavior.

## **Turn Hatred Into Humility**

### **The Cause of Conflict**

James introduced this section with a rhetorical, penetrating question: “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?*” (James 4:1). The source of quarrels and conflicts is desires that are waging war within a person seeking to satisfy his own pleasures. If a person is filled with jealousy and selfish ambition, he will seek to satisfy his own selfish pleasures. He is desirous of things he cannot have so he hurts others.

James wrote earlier about envy and selfish ambition leading to disorder and evil practice (cf. James 3:16). Jealousy also leads to disorder and evil practice. “Putting self on the throne” means destruction not only to the person on the throne but also to people around him. It means removal of God from the person’s life which will eventually destroy him. Self ambition is the reason there are fights, bickering, and so much conflict.

Put two children in a room with one television set and one remote control. Control of the remote control may cause the children to argue and fight. Selfishness may cause friction over the program the children watch. That is an example of childish

immaturity. Christians sometimes manifest the same kind of immaturity by trying to get control. Hedonism, the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure mankind's chief end, still wages battle in people's hearts.

Lust brings about murder: *"You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God"* (James 4:2). The Christians to whom James wrote were not literally committing murder, they were sinning because they were coveting. In the sermon on the Mount Jesus quoted the sixth commandment (cf. Exodus 20:13), and then he told His disciples that hatred is as sinful as murder: *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment..."* (Matthew 5:21–22). People who have lust desire something that is not theirs and despise the person that has it. They are envious and jealous of that person. It is as if they are killing the person because they do not want them alive. Lust and envy lead to fights and quarrels. Because of selfish desires people are discredited and trouble is stirred up.

James wrote that people do not have because they do not ask God. He did not say Christians would get everything they want if they pray. James said they do not have what they really need because they are not asking God.

### **The Consequence of Conflict**

Even if the recipients of the book of James did ask God, they would not get what they wanted: *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures"* (James 4:3). The people would not get what they wanted because they were asking with the wrong motives. The Christians wanted to spend what they got on their own selfish pleasures. There is a powerful message for Christians today about their prayer life. If a person spends

most of his time praying “Lord, give me, give me, give me things for selfish pleasure,” he should not be surprised when he does not receive them. Even if he does receive them, they may destroy him. God might give them so the person can realize how foolish the request was.

After preaching for a long time, I have learned that God gives His children what they need, but not always what they want. There is an example in Israel’s history when God gave the people what they wanted. They wanted a king like the nations around them (cf. 1 Samuel 8:5). Samuel was really upset, but God gave them a king. Saul, the first king, caused a lot of trouble for Israel. Christians need to be careful because God might give them what they ask; God sometimes answers prayers to teach a lesson. God may answer prayers in such a way to help a person see the futility, the wrongness, and the selfishness of the request so he might return to God. Christians should not ask for what they want, but they should ask for what they need, and God will give them what they need.

James is direct and to the point: *“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”* (James 4:4). James has already called them murderers and fighters. Now he calls them *“adulterous people.”* Why would he call them *“adulterous people?”* Throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament adultery was a word that was used to refer to those people who were unfaithful to God, those people who had abandoned God. The adulterous people had left God and had chosen to no longer serve Him.

In the New American Standard version the word “adulteresses,” the feminine case, is used. God is depicted as a husband and His people, the church is His wife. The church is the bride of Christ. So James wrote to these people, who were committing adultery against their God because they had made friends with the world.

In the time of Moses and Joshua as the Israelites were getting ready to go into the promised land, God told the people not to intermarry with the people of the land (cf. Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:12). They were told not to give their daughters to the people around them or take foreign women for their sons because they would turn the sons away from following God to serve other gods. Instead, they were told to destroy the people totally and show them no mercy. God told the Israelites to break down their altars, smash their idols, to burn their idols (cf. Deuteronomy 7:4–5). If they did not obey, they would violate the covenant they had made with God and become adulteresses.

In a similar way, if a Christian becomes a friend with the world, he is committing adultery. *“Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”* This is a sobering thought. How appealing is the world? How valuable is popularity of the world? How much will a person sacrifice in order to have the things of the world? A person cannot have one foot in the world and one foot in God’s Kingdom. Be a friend of God and be blessed. A Christian must carefully choose his friends. A child of God must be involved in the lives of those “in the world” to evangelize them, but he must not become a part of the world. A Christian must remain faithful to God all the days of his life.

### **The Cure for Conflict**

James 4:5–6 is one of the most difficult verses to translate in the entire letter:

*Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

A very literal translation would be:

Or think you that vainly the Scripture says to envy yearns the spirit which was made to dwell in you, but He gives great grace. The scripture is speaking to Christians when it says God jealously desires the spirit which is made to dwell in us?

James' rhetorical question introduces the section. The scripture that James refers to is not a direct quotation of any passage in the Bible. It is assumed that he quoted some other sacred writing or he referred to the general sense of Scripture.

It seems reasonable to assume that he focused on the quotation in verse six which is clearly taken from Proverbs 3:24 and quoted in 1 Peter 5:5: “. . . *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” The word “*opposes*” is translated from the Greek word *antitassetai* which is a military term meaning “to battle against.” This verse is a call to shun pride and to submit humbly to God's authority.

God is a jealous lover who wants no rival. God who has made man in His image, wants to be a part of the life of His created being. But man is filled with selfish ambition, jealousy, lust, and desires to feed his own selfish pleasures. God is far from man but wants to be closer. He will respond to prayers and be a part of a man's life. That has always been God's desire. God created Adam and Eve and put them in the garden. He wanted to have fellowship with them. His heart was broken when they sinned and He had to send them away.

God desired fellowship with man so the tabernacle was built by Moses and all Israel understood that it was God's dwelling place. God wanted to be near the people when the law was given. The first Old Testament commandment was: “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). The second commandment was: “*You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God . . .*” (Exodus 20:4–5).

The cure for conflict is a humble spirit which is rewarded by God's unmerited favor. James continued by showing in verses seven through twelve how humility is related to peaceful justice. These verses will be discussed in chapter eight.



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# The Problem of Worldliness

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## James 3:17–4:10

### Introduction

There is an inevitable reaction to the picture of God as the jealous lover. If God is like that, how can any man give to Him the devotion He demands? James' answer is that, if God makes a great demand, He gives great grace to fulfill it. The greater the demand, the greater the grace God gives.

### Two Kinds of Wisdom

At the end of chapter three James wrote about God's believer who is wise and understanding showing his wisdom and understanding by his behavior. James contrasted the wisdom that is from above with the wisdom from the world. The wisdom from the world is earthly, natural, and demonic. Worldly wisdom is there because of jealousy, envy selfish ambition, and people wanting to please themselves.

James wrote about the wisdom from above: *"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"* (James 3:17). Wisdom from above is pure or holy and peace-loving or peaceable. It is gentle which means fair or considerate. Wisdom from above is reasonable and full of mercy. It is full of good fruits which are beneficial to others and to self. It is impartial and sincere.

Peace is the seed sown that yields a harvest of righteousness: *"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest*

*of righteousness*” (James 3:18). The truly wise man is a man of peace. Righteousness and peace go together.

## Turn Hatred Into Humility

### The Cause of Conflict

James explained the cause of conflict: *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”* (James 4:1). Conflict comes from inner sensual lusts or pleasures. James wrote that the recipients *“want something but don't get it . . . (James 4:2)”* As a result, there is disunity, anger, disgust, fighting, quarreling, and even hatred for other people.

James further wrote in James 4:2–3:

*. . . You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

The people are not following the love of Christ, and they do not have concern for other people. James revealed the clear source of conflict which is deep in covetous human hearts.

James wrote of the royal law that is from the Law of Moses: *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right”* (James 2:8). This is the kind of love, wisdom, and understanding that a Christian should have. The person who shows these characteristics has the same attitude as Christ Jesus (cf. Philippians 2:5), but the person who does not seek the best interest of others does not have Jesus' attitude.

### The Consequence of Conflict

James called the covetous people murderers, fighters, and adulterous people. They have violated the covenant they have

made with God by making friendship with the world. James wrote that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. James 4:4:

*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

As much as Christians would like to be friends of the world, they cannot. James 4:4 is very much like what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount. Matthew 6:24:

*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

Christians have to make a break from the world and devote themselves to God. It is apparent that fighting is caused by friendship with the world. That is why selfish ambition, quarreling, and jealousy existed among them.

### **The Cure for Conflict**

These verses have puzzled scholars for many years. James 4:5–6:

*Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

To what scripture is James referring? Many people have wondered what James had in mind since this scripture appears nowhere in the Old Testament. I think a wise way to interpret

it, is to look at the general thought. As mentioned in the previous chapter, God desires to dwell among His people. God has given His Spirit to Christians and desires that they respond to Him. It is natural for a person who is blessed with a gift to respond to the giver. I think James is writing to encourage the recipients of the letter to stop being friends with the world. James wants the people to realize that God has given them His own Spirit to dwell in them, and He wants that relationship to continue. God jealously desires that His Spirit dwell in His children.

Through the years I have given a lot of love and kindness to my three children, but I have not been as good a father as I would have liked to have been. I am sure my children would say “amen” to that statement. When I gave gifts to my children, I wanted them to respond in a way that was pleasing to me; how much more does the Father in heaven want a pleasing response from His children? He does not want them to be friends with the world. The Father wants His children to be devoted to Him. He jealously desires that His Spirit dwell in them.

James wrote “*God . . . gives grace.*” The wording in the original language is literally “*greater he gives grace.*” God gives grace to His people that is greater than the friendship of the world. Then James quotes from Proverbs: “*He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble*” (Proverbs 3:34). God is not pleased with arrogant, prideful people. He opposes them. God does not want to commune with or devote Himself to those who are filled with pride because prideful people are not able to submit to Him. God gives grace, and Christians need to humble themselves before Him. God’s kindness is often not accepted or received by proud, arrogant people, but they are the ones who need it the most. Yet they usually will not admit their need for grace. Grace is given to those people who confess their need to God. The need for humility is the central thought of the first ten verses of James 4. The enemies of humility are seen in the first four verses of the chapter. Prideful character, fighting, warring,

selfish ambition, lust, and friendship with the world are all enemies of humility.

Verses five and six show how God has provided the environment for humility. God has sent His spirit, and He desires that His children give themselves to Him. Further, God stands opposed to the arrogant, but gives grace to the humble. Thus, Christians have been placed in the environment of humility.

## **Turn Judgment Into Justice**

### **Advice for Justice**

James wrote the exaltation of humility in verses seven through ten. He wrote how Christians are blessed, strengthened, and given the opportunity to be more like God when they humble themselves before Him. So what is the response of the humble, the one who does not make himself a friend with the world? *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). God stands against the proud and the arrogant, but he gives grace to the humble so submit yourself to God and receive His grace and kindness.

The writer of Hebrews encouraged Christians to draw near to God: *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). Mercy and grace is found at the throne of God. God is the giver of grace. God’s grace is something that He gives when faith is expressed in baptism and forgiveness of sin cleanses a person from all unrighteousness. Titus 2:11–13:

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present*

*age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*

God continues to provide grace to those Christians who continue to humble themselves. “*Submit yourselves, then, to God*” is a military term meaning “to arrange under, to subordinate, to yield to another.” Christians need to yield to God, to subordinate to Him. When a person is about to enter the freeway and sees a big eighteen wheeler barreling down the inside lane, the yield sign means to let him pass before entering the highway. Yielding is wise; it is smart thinking. If a person is about to enter the freeway driving a large pick-up, and sees the same yield sign with only a small car approaching, should the driver of the large pick-up yield to the small car? Of course, the driver of the pick-up should allow the small car to go first. The power or the size of the approaching vehicle does not determine who yields. The driver who has the yield sign should yield no matter the size of the approaching vehicle.

In the same way, Christians must yield to God. They need to submit to Him because that is the best way. Christians are not to yield because God is more powerful, but because it is the proper thing to do. They need to submit to God because He “*gives grace to the humble.*” It takes humility to submit, does it not?

James also wrote in verse seven: “*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” “*Resist the devil*” means “to take a stand against.” Christians need to refuse to join themselves to the devil. They need to draw near to God and turn their thoughts to Him (cf. Hebrews 4:16).

When Jesus was tempted by and resisted the devil, the devil left Him until an opportune time (cf. Luke 4:1–13). The fact that the devil left Him does not mean he is never coming back. Christians know all too well that he is likely to return. When Christians submit to God and resists the devil, he will go

away. They need to resist him by trusting in the promises of God because He is faithful. 1 Corinthians 10:13:

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

There is no new temptation. The devil has previously tried every temptation on man. God will not allow a person to be tempted beyond what he is able to bear, and with every temptation He will provide a way of escape. When a Christian looks for the way of escape, the devil's temptations become weaker. God will show a Christian a way to escape.

First, Christians need to submit to God. Second, they must resist the devil. Third, Christians need to draw near to God: *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"* (James 4:8). In the midst of temptation when Satan is near and a child of God is considering returning to the world, he needs to turn his thoughts to God. The Christian needs to seek help from God. If a Christian will draw near to God, He will draw near to His child.

*"Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"* is a call to repentance. James encouraged Christians to purify their hearts by cleaning the inner man. The Greek word ***dipsychol*** is translated *"double-minded"* and means "a person's mind or allegiance is divided when he sought to be friends with both God and the world."

If a person's hands are involved in sin, and they are then cleansed, that means they are clean and ready to get dirty again. The person needs to purify his heart. In the Sermon on the Mount and in many other Scriptures, Christians are told to be pure in heart. Jesus said: *"And if your eye causes you to sin,*

*pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell*" (Mark 9:47). Jesus was not saying to literally get rid of the eye. He was telling the people to take care of their heart problem. James told the double-minded people to purify their hearts. He used the same word that he used in the first chapter when he wrote that the double-minded man was unstable in all he did. He prayed doubting God and was like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind (cf. James 1:8).

The word *dipsychol* is similar to the word that is translated disorder. The words come from the same root word. Disorder means "two different parts going in different directions." If a Christian's heart is not devoted to God, he is divided; he is double-minded and needs to make some changes. He needs to discontinue his friendship with the world. The sinner needs to get away from the disunity, anger, disgust, fighting, quarreling, hatred, and lusting. He needs to draw near to God, submit to Him, resist the devil, purify his heart, and be completely devoted to God.

Both "wash" and "purify" are verbs that refer to ceremonial cleansing, a figure that spoke eloquently to Jewish converts. The need for cleansing is clear from the way James addressed his readers, "adulterous people" and "you double-minded."

James wrote something very interesting: "*Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom*" (James 4:9). Reading verse nine makes a Bible reader wonder why James wrote the verse. In this context, why is James telling the people to grieve, mourn, and wail? If a person does not follow the admonitions given in verses seven and eight, then he will grieve, wail, and change his laughter to mourning. In verses seven and eight James wrote to submit to God, resist the devil, and purify the heart or get ready to face sorrow. He wrote about the need to submit to God, and in verse nine he gives the consequences of not submitting.



Recognition of the tremendous need for cleansing allows no room for merriment. A contrite spirit of confession is essential for God's cleansing. Grieving, mourning, and wailing are the typical prophetic words for humbling oneself (cf. Isaiah 22:4; Jeremiah 4:28). The miserable, the mourning, and the wailing is characteristic of those who would be friends of the world. Friendship with the world is certainly an enemy of God and of humility. Resist the devil, and he will go away. Come near to God, and He will come near.

### **Advantage of Justice**

The world does not give this message: "*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up*" (James 4:10). The world says if a person humbles himself, he will be beaten down and destroyed, but the message of the Bible is, be humble before God, and be lifted high. James quoted from Proverbs 3:34 "*. . . God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*" (James 4:6). "*Humble yourselves*" means "to make or to bring low; to be ranked below others who are honored; to have a modest opinion of oneself; to behave in an unassuming manner devoid of all haughtiness." To have a modest opinion of oneself, to behave in an unassuming manner, needs to be characteristic of all Christians. Humility will help to overcome the desire to be friends with the world. Humbling oneself before the Lord is a willful decision made after drawing near to Him. Humility always precedes and guarantees exaltation (cf. Luke 14:11). The lowly people become the ones lifted up. Humility eventually brings honor.

Christians need to remember that they are in the presence of God. He is in their lives and near them. Reading Scripture, spending time in prayer, and being with godly people will help Christians to resist temptation. Greatness is found in humility. This exaltation comes from God.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said do not do acts of righteousness to be seen of men: "*Be careful not to do your*

*‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 6:1). Jesus teaches about giving to the needy, praying, and fasting with the right attitude. He said those who do it just to be seen of men will get a reward from men, not God. When a Christian gives, prays, and fasts in secret, God is pleased. There is a great reward found in God’s way.

The disciples came to Jesus and asked who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a child and had him stand among them. Matthew 18:3–4:

*And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Children are not always highly exalted or respected in society. Sweet, innocent, wonderful children are humble because of their very nature. Jesus told the disciples that they needed to become like the child. They needed to humble themselves like the child to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The world does not look at greatness like God does. Christians must choose to be friends of the world or be God’s friend.

Jesus spoke strong words to the Jewish leaders of His day. The Jewish leaders were exalting themselves among men. They were trying to seek the favor of men. Jesus told the crowds and His disciples to obey the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, but not to do what they did for they did not practice what they preached. Everything they did was done for men to see. So Jesus said: *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matthew 23:12).

Paul wrote a wonderful passage that speaks of the incarnation of Jesus. Philippians 2:6–11:

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Even though Jesus was made in human likeness, He made Himself nothing and became a servant. He humbled Himself by being obedient to death. Because Jesus humbled Himself, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name. Eventually every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. There is great exaltation in humility. The teachings of Jesus, manifested by His life, are taught by James.

Peter also quoted the thoughts from Proverbs 3:34: *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time”* (1 Peter 5:6 ). God cannot exalt a Christian if he is not first willing to humble himself.

The enemy of humility is being friends of the world, but there is an environment where a believer can gain humility. God provides grace and His Spirit to dwell in His children. He desires that believers give themselves to Him completely because there is exaltation in humility. Christians must humble themselves in the presence of the Lord before He will exalt them. Exaltation may not come as soon as some people would desire, but what matters is that God will do it. Christians choose the people that they want to spend time with, but they cannot choose friends of the world and be a friend to God.

The key to living as God's people in the world is giving oneself to God. James wrote about the two types of wisdom. When there is fighting and quarreling, people are following the wisdom of the world. The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and peace-loving. Amid hostility and hard times a Christian should gain wisdom from above, submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, and humble himself.

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# Solution to The Problem of Worldliness

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## **James 4:11–5:7**

### **Introduction**

Apparently the Jewish believers to whom James wrote tended not only to have conflict and jealousy, but also to be condemning and judgmental. Justice, not judgment, is what God requires. Upright, righteous relationships are essential to spiritual growth. Pointed advice for justice is given, the clear advantage of justice is revealed, and the divine author of justice is named.

## **Turn Judgment Into Justice**

### **The Author of Justice**

James wrote that Christians ought not to speak against a brother: *“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it?”* (James 4:11).

It appears that James made an abrupt change of subjects. Indeed he wrote something different from the previous section that dealt with humility in light of the challenge to be a friend of God or a friend of the world. While James may have changed the subject, he certainly did not introduce a new subject. James has discussed the subject previously. James 4:11–12 parallels James 1:19–20 where James warned Christians to be slow to

become angry because the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. The verses are also parallel to James's warning against favoritism (cf. James 2:1–13). When a Christian shows partiality, he is showing favoritism and very likely speaking against his brother. Certainly his actions are speaking against and slandering him. Cursing and using the tongue improperly (cf. James 3:9–10) is another way Christians speak against a brother. When there is fighting and quarreling (cf. James 4:1–2), it is very likely that one person is speaking against another person. James changed the subject, he did not introduce a new subject. Christians should be quick to listen and slow to speak because man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires (cf. James 1:10–20).

*“Do not slander one another”* means “to not incriminate and defame.” Christians should never speak evil against another person in a discriminatory, critical, or slanderous way. The one who slanders a brother is judging the brother, speaking against the law, and judging the law. What law is James referring to? It is possible that James was speaking about the Law of Moses. Martin Luther felt that James referred too often to the Law of Moses, but there is nothing to indicate that James is referring to the Law of Moses in verse eleven. James wrote about the importance of looking intently into the perfect law that law that sets believers free (cf. James 1:25). Another possibility could be the royal law that James also wrote about: *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right”* (James 2:8). So what law is it that James is referring to? I think it is the later of the three possibilities, the royal law. *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* will not be fulfilled when Christians are speaking against or judging a brother. He who speaks against or judges a brother speaks against the law that says you should love your neighbor. If a Christian is loving his neighbor, he cannot speak evil of him.

The people who “*judge the law*” are not “*keeping it*.” Again, James gives great emphasis to being doers of the word, and not hearers only (cf. James 1:22). If a Christian is a doer of the Word and practices the royal law by loving his neighbor, he will not judge his brother. If a Christian decides to take a stand against that law, of course he is judging the law. To judge the law is equal to saying that the law is not good or practical.

### **The Author of Justice**

Leave judgement to God: “*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judges your neighbor?*” (James 4:12). God is the one lawgiver and judge. He is only One who is above the Law. He alone has the right to modify or overrule it. A Christian needs to be careful when he speaks against his neighbor. When he hurts a person’s reputation or slanders him, then he is trying to become the judge. But James wrote that God is the one and only Judge. How dare anyone presume to take His position. God is the Judge, the one who is able both to save and to destroy. There needs to be respect and honor shown to the Judge. In today’s society it is easy to be critical or find fault, so children of God need to be very careful to not follow the behavior of people around them. People of the world seem to want to find something bad about another person so he can be criticized. Christians should never display that type of behavior. This problem has probably plagued humanity from the beginning because it was apparently occurring in the churches to whom James wrote.

This is the only time that the compound word “*Lawgiver*” is used in the New Testament. It is translated from the Greek word ***nomothetes*** which means “law” and from the Greek word ***tithemi*** which means “to set, place, constitute, or lay down.” God not only authored the Law, but He also administrates it. He serves as both the executive and judicial branches of the divine government.

This reminder of a truth well known by the Jewish readers of James was also a rebuke to their haughty attitudes and judgmental actions. *“But who are you who judges your neighbor?”* is another of James’ typical penetrating rhetorical questions. A humble attitude and just actions are essential for spiritual growth.

Christians must speak against sin, in love. They must be careful as they speak against sin to not be overly critical, acting like faultfinders. Today’s society is a polite, do not be judgmental, mind your own business kind of society that basically says leave me alone. People today say, “do not be critical of my behavior. Do your thing, and I will do my thing.” A Christian should not go to such an extreme. He should stand against sin by rebuking the person who is sinning. He should rebuke him by loving him as he loves himself (cf. James 2:8). When a Christian sees a brother in sin, he needs to work to bring about repentance and change in a loving manner. A believer should put these verses into practice.

## **Turning Boasting Into Belief**

In addition to conflict and a judgmental spirit among the brethren, bragging was also apparently prevalent. James gives an example of a boastful statement, struck a condemnatory sentence on such boasting, and offers a practical solution for boasting. In this section of Scripture James deals with the importance of living one’s life properly in view of its brevity. He emphasizes the need to follow the will of the Lord. James 4:13–17 is the subject of a personal pet peeve of mine, because on many occasions verse seventeen is used out of context and made to say something James never intended. Sometimes it is used to intimidate someone. In this study the verse will be studied in its proper context.



### **Statement of Boasting**

The interjection both goads the reader and gains his undivided attention: *“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money’”* (James 4:13). The thought is today or tomorrow a person is going to a particular city to make a lot of money. James is not condemning the making of money, but he is condemning a person who looks at the certainty of tomorrow and making plans according to his own will in order to fulfill his own selfish desires. The person is self-assertive in his travel plans, self-confident in his time schedule, and self-centered in his trade relationships. A vivid picture is given of the Jewish merchant who is getting business with the primary object of making lots of money. Previously James wrote that the rich were exploiting the poor, dragging the poor into court, and slandering the noble name of Jesus (cf. James 2:6–7). Later in the book James gives another example of the rich living for financial prosperity (James 5:1–6). His statements are strong against mistreating the poor in order to live in luxury.

### **Sentence on Boasting**

Yet to the selfish hustler James wrote that no person knows what life will be like tomorrow: *“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes”* (James 4:14). So if someone is going to contemplate tomorrow, he needs to understand it in the light of the Lord’s will. Man’s plans should always be tentative because his plans are not his own. Time is not his own. In fact, life is not his own. James wrote that life is a mist or a puff of steam that will appear for a little while and then vanish away. Believers need this godly perspective on their earthly sojourn. Among other things, it blasts boasting out of the selfish, proud quagmire from which it emerged.

### **Solution for Boasting**

The Lord's will should guide a Christian's actions: *"Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'"* (James 4:15). These are not so much words to be used like some charm, but they are a realistic attitude that affects all of one's being and behavior. The idea of making plans for tomorrow with no thought of the temporal nature of humanity or with no thought of what God wants done is wrong. The Lord's will should be at the center of every Christian's life. Since a person does not know what tomorrow will be like, he should be seeking God's will and His glory in all his plans. James was concerned about those who were making plans about tomorrow without even thinking of the Lord's will. Anything that is not done according to the will of God is sinful.

To make sure the readers understood, James reiterated that boasting and bragging are evil: *"As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil"* (James 4:16). Previously James wrote that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (cf. James 4:6). The Christians were boasting in their arrogance, which is evil. They needed to humble themselves. Self-centered bragging must be replaced by God-honoring trust. The cure for boasting is belief and humility.

Understanding Scripture in its context is extremely important. Be careful that no verse is made a "catch all" for any kind of activity that is left undone. This verse is sometimes used out of context: *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins"* (James 4:17). I remember a preacher who was very concerned about church leadership in his congregation. He was desirous that two faithful men who had been asked to serve as elders in a congregation accept the invitation. The preacher, in order to persuade these men, read James 4:17. He boldly said serving as an elder is a good thing and refusing would be a sin, based on this verse. The preacher had taken the verse completely out of its context. The context

of the Scripture is not only the problem of boasting, but also includes all the advice given thus far in the epistle.

Imagine what we could do with this verse if we just wanted to say any time “you know a right thing to do but if you don't do it, it is sin.” A story was told long ago about a disagreement in a men's business meeting at a certain congregation. One of the brothers got so upset that he punched another brother in the face. Another brother reminded the group that they were Christians and the fighting was wrong. The man who threw the punch justified his actions by using James 4:17. He said he did the right thing by punching the brother because to him who *“knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.”* That story may be stretching the point a little bit, but it certainly illustrates the importance of reading Scripture and looking at verses in their proper context.

What is the sin? What is the right thing to do? It is very clear. The right thing to do is to do things according to the will of God. Instead of making plans on the morrow, a Christian ought to say, “If the Lord wills, here are the plans.” But to do things that are not according to His will, would be sinful.

This is a four-step criteria to help a person determine whether an action is the right thing to do or whether it is the sinful thing to do. First, tomorrow should be viewed through the lens of the transitory and temporary nature of humanity. If a person looks at his future life as being immortal, untouchable, or indestructible, he is not following God's teaching. No one will live forever and be able make endless plans.

Second, a person who views his life as a vapor or a mist is doing the right thing. A Christian needs to make the most of his life by being wise in the decisions he makes and carrying out those decisions in a way that is pleasing to God.

Third, while making decisions and planning the future, a Christian must submit to the will of God. He should seek the Lord's will in all he does.

Fourth, a child of God who wants to do the right thing must be humble, not arrogant. God opposes the proud (cf. James 4:6). To him who knows to be humble but is arrogant, to him it is sin.

It is so important to look for God's will. Occasionally someone says "if the Lord wills" so often it actually bothers people. "Tomorrow I am going to visit my friends, if the Lord wills. And then I am going to eat lunch if the Lord wills at McDonald's. Probably in the afternoon, if the Lord wills, I will go shopping." The point is not what is verbally said, but that a person's mind and the actions are submitting to the Lord's will. People of God need to make the most of their lives since they are on earth for only a short time. Christians are not eternal creatures. Rather, they are subject to the eternal Creator. Christians need to consider how to be humble and to act in accordance with the will of the Lord.

To attain spiritual maturity a believer must do the good he now knows. He must stand confidently on God's Word even in trials and temptations. He must compassionately serve his brethren without prejudicial favoritism but with practical faith. He must speak carefully with a controlled tongue and wise, cultivated thoughts. He must submit in contrition to his all-powerful Father, Lawgiver, and Judge with a humble spirit, just action, and a trusting heart. He must be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, speak as God wants him to speak, and sense what God wants him to sense.

## **The Responsibilities of Stewardship**

### **Consternation from Wealth**

James really has some strong things to say: "*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you*" (James 5:1). The fifth chapter begins the same way James 4: 13 began "*Now listen.*" To whom is James speaking? "*Now listen, you rich people,*" is he speaking to the

rich in the world or is he speaking to the rich Christian or is it both? Is he making a general statement that would apply to both? The following verses may help to answer the questions. James 5:2–7:

*Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.*

The “then” in verse seven is revealing. The word “therefore” is used in the New American Standard version. The word “therefore,” is important in light of what is said in the first few verses and the situation presented. James wrote that the brethren should be patient, therefore, until the coming of the Lord, even as the farmer waits. The idea is given that some kind of punishment is about to come upon the rich, and the brethren need to be patient until that time comes. The importance of patience is discussed more fully in verses seven through eleven.

Who is James addressing in the first six verses of chapter five? It would be very easy to think he is talking to the rich who are not Christians, merely giving them a warning. Usually Biblical literature is written to God’s people, but not always, especially in the Old Testament. There are a few prophets whose prophecies are spoken against non-Israelite nations. But

it is likely, that James wrote to Christians as well as non-Christians, simply because of the way the chapter begins. In James 4:13 when he wrote "*Now listen,*" James was definitely addressing non-Christians. So it is likely James was addressing non-Christians in chapter five, but it was written for God's people who were being oppressed by the rich to assure them God was going to "take care" of the rich people.

James previously spoke some strong words against the rich (cf. James 1:10). The brother of humble circumstances is to take pride in his high position, and the rich man should take pride in his low position because like wild flowers he will pass away. These are not the words the rich would want to hear.

James also made reference to the rich when he denounced showing favoritism. God loves the poor; James wrote that God had chosen those who are poor in the sight of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom. James also wrote that it was the rich who were exploiting the poor and dragging them to court. The rich are the ones who blaspheme the fair name by which Christians have been called (cf. James 2:1-7). Again James spoke very strongly against the rich. Some people may say that perhaps James was reared in poverty, and he is prejudiced against the rich. That thought may be overdoing it a little bit if a person were to draw a firm conclusion.

There are numerous warnings and admonitions directed to the rich. Jesus said that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! (cf. Luke 18:24) It is more difficult for the rich to live a Christian life, but nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that the rich are condemned because they are rich. There are rich, God-fearing people (cf. Genesis 13:2; Matthew 27:57). James denounced the rich people who were or are not paying the wages that were due the laborers. The rich have lived in luxury and self-indulgence. James wrote that the cries of the mistreated laborers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty and the day is coming when they will face some type of punishment. With these thoughts in mind, it is important to

again emphasize that the rich are not condemned because they are rich, but they are rebuked, admonished, and warned to use their riches in a wise way. The rich people to whom James wrote certainly need to repent of their selfish, cruel behavior to the poor people.

Looking again at verse one, James told the rich people to get ready to weep and howl for the miseries which are about to come upon them. In verse two he said that their riches and garments were about to become moth eaten. The rich people were about to face trouble; their gold and silver had rusted. They had stored the things for the big day, but the day would bring their punishment to their shame. But the real problem was that they had withheld wages from their laborers. This thought will be continued in the next chapter.

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# Punishment and Patience

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## James 5:7–11

### Introduction

From the rich, James turned to the restless. For these people he again used the friendly address, “brothers.” The tone turned from stark condemnation to sensitive consolation. James condemned the rich but encouraged the receptive. He appealed to his brethren to be patient. He defined the essence of patience, gave some examples of patience, and indicated an evidence of patience.

## The Necessity and Benefits of Patience

### The Essence of Patience

The rich need to heed the warning from James about their garments being moth eaten and their gold and silver rusting. In the last days they have stored up for themselves treasures. The idea is given that the last days may be on the horizon: “*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains*” (James 5:7). James used an illustration of the farmer who waits for the precious produce of the soil. He is patient until the land gets the early and late rains. The exhortation “*Be patient, then, brothers,*” is a direct corollary to the coming judgment of the wicked rich. “*Be patient*” comes from the Greek word *makrothymesate* which comes from the compound of “long” and “temper.” The idea is to set the timer of one’s temper for a



long run. Focus on the final lap in the race of life. Have a very long fuse.

Strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:8–9:

*You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

In verses one through six James wrote about the important need for patience. Some people were being mistreated and thinking it was not right that they were being mistreated. Some people were crying out for help; their cries had been heard by the Lord of Sabaoth. So James told them to be patient until the coming of the Lord because the coming of the Lord was near, and the Judge was standing at the door.

To what was James referring when he wrote “*the Lord's coming is near?*” Could it be that the Lord’s coming and the Lord standing at the door of judgement is something that the recipients thought would happen soon. The right way to understand this passage is that Christians need to be patient until it happens, but realize God is going to get involved.

Looking at verse eight one might say it is very clear that the coming of the Lord is near. But what is the meaning of “*the Lord's coming?*” What was James referring to? Was he referring to the final coming of the Lord? Some people who read scripture, especially today, think that His return will happen immediately. Maybe they have forgotten that this book was written nearly two thousand years ago. Could His return be near now, but it was not near when James said it was near? It might be a mistake to make this passage mean that the Lord’s coming was his literal return.

Historically, in the Old Testament, there were times when God “came” to bring judgment on ungodly and disobedient

people. “Is *near*” means “to bring near, has come nigh, in proximity” and should be taken literally. Thus, “*the Lord's coming*” had to have happened long ago.

What the angels, the two men dressed in white, said to the eleven Apostles as they beheld Jesus ascending into heaven refers to His literal coming. Acts 1:10–11:

*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

But in Matthew 24 Jesus was speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and making reference to the Lord’s coming in judgement upon the nation of Israel (cf. Matthew 24:1–25). He was not referring to His literal, bodily return. Jesus was probably referring to judgment that came on the nation of Israel in A.D. 70. In Revelation there are several times when John told the churches in Asia to repent or the Lord was going to come to punish them (cf. Revelation 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19). What if the people did not repent? If they did not repent, when the Lord makes his final return, they will receive their eternal punishment.

In this context in James, who will be judged when the Lord comes? It is obvious that it is the rich people. The rich have been criticized by James in the first six verses in chapter five. The rich were told that they would be weeping, their goods would be rusting, and God had heard the cries of the laborers. The cries of the righteous people have come to the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. This Lord is the Judge who is standing at the door. The recipients of James know what will happen to the rich. The coming of the Lord that was near was some type of

judgement, directed toward the rich who were mistreating the poor.

The writer said in verse seven to *“be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming”* just as the farmer is patient. Early in the springtime when the farmer goes out to plant his crop, he is not expecting to harvest two or three days later. He must be patient. He must wait awhile until God brings about that growth. In a similar way, James wrote that the recipients needed to be patient, stand firm, and strengthen their hearts because the Lord's coming was near.

James wrote that Christians are not to complain against one another. Why would this subject be mentioned in the midst of the discussion about the coming of the Lord? What happens when people are not patient? They find it so easy to complain, do they not? When people are mistreated, they tend to gripe and complain and get angry at one another. They even tend to gripe and complain against God. They complain that God is not doing anything to relieve their agony. Do not complain. Be patient instead. When people begin to complain, they fall into the group of people who will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door ready to pronounce judgment. This judgment is about to happen. So instead of complaining, be patient.

### **Examples of Patience**

The need for patience is exemplified by the prophets of old: *“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord”* (James 5:10). The words patience, perseverance, and longsuffering have to do with dealing with difficulties. The Greek word ***makrothymia*** which is translated *“patience”* is used when a person is dealing with difficult people. James wrote the recipients to encourage them to be patient as they dealt with the rich people who had mistreated them. They were to be patient with people, like the farmer who patiently waits for his crops.

Did the prophets have to deal with difficult people? Isaiah certainly did! Jeremiah did, too. His life was threatened many times. Amos faced some rebellious people in the north who did not want him there. Nearly all the prophets faced some kind of adversity that made their life and ministry difficult. James wrote that the prophets were an example of people who were patient as they suffered because they spoke the name of the Lord.

I am grateful to have the Bible which is filled with so many examples of faithful people who endured difficult times because I am called to endure difficult times. Christians today face difficult moments in their lives. How are they to respond? They are supposed to respond in a godly way.

Some people want assurance that patiently enduring difficult times with difficult people will result in a blessing. James 5:11:

*As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

God's faithful prophets were blessed by God because of their faithfulness and perseverance. "*We consider blessed*" refers to people who are "happy or fortunate." The Greek word ***hypomonen*** is translated "*perseverance, endurance, steadfastness*" and is used when a person is dealing with difficult situations.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that Christians are not to be lazy, but they are to imitate those who through faith and patience will inherit what has been promised (cf. Hebrews 6:12). They are to believe in God as they go through difficult times; they need to be patient as they wait on the day of the Lord. The prophets were blessed because they endured difficult times as they spoke in the name of the Lord.

The need for endurance and perseverance was exemplified by Job. The Lord honored Job's perseverance with multiplied blessings (cf. Job 42:12–16). James did not say that Job had "patience," but he said that Job had "perseverance." James wrote previously that perseverance brings maturity: James 1:3–4:

*Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Paul wrote the church in Colosse to encourage them to live a life worthy of the Lord, to grow in knowledge of God, and be strengthened in power so they might have great endurance and patience. Colossians 1:10–12:

*And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

People often use the expression, "He (or she) has the patience of Job." James 5:11 is the only New Testament reference to the man named Job. Job is a wonderful book about a man who endured some very difficult situations in his life. Even the prophet Ezekiel referred to Job as a man of great righteousness (cf. Ezekiel 14:14). Yet, Job apparently struggled with the reasons for his adversity before coming to peace with God's decisions.

Job was one of the wealthiest men in the world. He was blameless and upright. Job feared God and shunned evil (cf. Job 1:1). All of a sudden, he lost his livestock, his children, and his good health. In the rest of the book Job is dealing with his losses. He has friends, if you can call them friends, who try to convince Job that his loss is caused by his sin. They believe that suffering is the result of sin because God always punishes sin. But Job is certain that he has not sinned. Then another friend tells Job that suffering is not necessarily the result of sin. The friend argues that suffering is often used by God to teach lessons and to strengthen a person. Throughout the book Job maintains his innocence. God Himself speaks to Job and demands to know what right Job has to question the Creator of the universe about His ways. Job's humble response demonstrates the depth of his righteous character. At the end of the book Job is blessed. Once again he has numerous possessions, including more children. Job's prosperity is restored to him.

One does not find all the answers one might wish in the book of Job. That in itself is part of what Job learned. In this life man will never know all of God's wisdom. In some respects man is not even in a position to ask the question: "Why?"

Christians struggle sometimes, do they not? Bad things do happen to good people. Job struggled with that situation even though he was blameless, upright, feared God and shunned evil. He did not curse God when he lost his children, his servants, his animals, and his wealth. Instead, he tore his robe, shaved his head, and worshiped God.

God is full of compassion, and He is merciful. God is aware of the pain of His children. God is concerned about them when they hurt and when they suffer. When God's people are being mistreated by rich people, God is concerned. God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts Christians in their times of troubles (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

God is rich in mercy (cf. Ephesians 2:4). God will help and bless His children.

When Christians suffer or when they are tempted to sin, they must not abandon their faith in God. They must remember that bad things do happen to good people. Christians need to remember that they are only here on this earth temporarily. Their life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. After death everything will be glorious for believers who have remained faithful. They will get to be in the presence of God for all of eternity. Christians need to remember, while they are suffering and being mistreated in this earthly life, that God is aware of their mistreatment. He is compassionate and merciful.

Christians can be confident that God is working in their lives even though they do not know how He is working. The prophet Habakkuk poses the questions about how long must he call for God's help? How can a righteous God permit injustice to even exist? (cf. Habakkuk 1:2–3). Although God does not provide all the answers in the book of Habakkuk, He does answer the central question. The righteous will live by his faith; sin always brings death (cf. Habakkuk 2:4).

When the prophet Jeremiah cried out to God, God said He had been working in Jeremiah's life even before he was born: *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations"* (Jeremiah 1:5). God had been involved in his life long before Jeremiah knew about it. Christians can be confident that God is working in their lives even though they do not know it. And though Christians may be mistreated by the rich, they need to be patient until the end of time. They need to follow the example of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord even when they were mistreated.

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# Prayer and Faithfulness

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## James 5:12–20

### Introduction

A fitting climax to James' letter is his emphasis on prayer. The greatest assistance any believer can offer a brother is faithful prayer. Prayer is clear evidence of care. Prayer is the "hotline" to the One who can provide for any need no matter how complex or impossible it may seem. To share in prayer, a believer must have a sensitivity to someone's needs, engage in diligent supplication for those needs, and recognize the significance of those needs.

Perhaps the two greatest weaknesses in the average church today are the areas of prayer and praise. The reason for these weaknesses may be traced to insensitivity. There is much need for prayer and much cause to praise. Suffering should elicit prayer. Sufficiency should elicit praise. James used several questions to stress these points.

## The Necessity and Benefits of Patience

### Patience in Practice

James previously wrote that a religious person should keep a tight rein on his tongue (cf. James 1:26). If a Christian keeps the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," he will choose his words carefully when he speaks (cf. James 2:8). James wrote to speak and act as people who are going to be judged by the law (cf. James 2:12). He also wrote that a Christian's words must be followed by action. Faith must be accompanied by action (cf. James 2:14–17). James wrote



that those who teach will be judged more strictly (cf. James 3:1). The tongue is compared to a bit in a horse's mouth and to a ship's rudder. Although they are small, the bit guides the horse and the rudder guides a ship. Like a spark that can set a forest on fire, the tongue is also a fire. The tongue can be used for good or for evil, but praise and cursing should never come out of the same mouth (cf. James 3:1–10). James encouraged the recipients of his letter, who were quarreling and fighting, to submit to God (cf. James 4:1–4). He told them to stop slandering each other. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him, is trying to take God's job. God is the only Lawgiver and Judge (cf. James 4:11–12). James, also, told the brothers to not grumble against each other because they would one day be judged by the Judge (cf. James 5:9).

James once again deals with the importance of the tongue, what is said and how it is said: *"Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No', no, or you will be condemned"* (James 5:12). Children of God should keep their speech simple and trustworthy, and they should never swear (use foul language). This verse is a strong reference to honesty. Words from the mouth of a Christian should be dependable and trustworthy. He should speak in such a way that others can always consider his words to be true. This verse is not a prohibition against taking oaths or vows. Jesus made an oath (cf. Matthew 26:63–64).

The language in verse twelve is very similar to the language Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:33–37:

*Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord." But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem,*

*for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

Apparently in the time of Jesus, people were swearing by the name of the Lord, by the temple, or by other things, but their words were meaningless because they were not standing by those words. People could not count on other people to do what they said. Both Jesus and James encouraged people not to swear.

One of the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God was: *"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name"* (Exodus 20:7). If a person swears by the name of God that a certain thing is true, he is taking the Lord's name in vain. The person is misusing the name of the Lord. If a person swears by the name of the Lord and is not telling the truth, he is misusing the name of the Lord. Some people today say, "I swear on a stack of Bibles," but then they do not always tell the truth. That phrase has become vain speech for some people. But Christians should always speak only words that are truthful. They should never misuse the name of God. The coming of the Lord, the Judge who stands at the door (cf. James 5:9), is motivation enough for a Christian to be honest and trustworthy in his speech.

## **Sharing Our Resources in Prayer**

### **Brothers Must Be Connected to God**

James wrote previously about the importance of prayer. He told the man who lacked wisdom to ask God because God will give generously to all. The man who lacks wisdom, who does not understand the suffering and trials that have come upon

him, should count it pure joy because it will be an opportunity to grow spiritually. But he must ask in faith, without doubting (cf. James 1:2–6). Prayer offered in faith is very important. *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights . . .”* (James 1:17). Christians need to understand that God is a giving God who is dependable, and they need to approach Him with all faithfulness.

James refers to three life situations where God and faithful brothers are needed. James 5:13–14:

*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

The New American Standard Bible translates the first question: *“Is anyone among you suffering?”* *“Among you”* is a phrase that stresses the point that brothers must be connected to God. When a person is *“in trouble”* or *“suffering,”* he should seek God’s help. *“In trouble”* means “to suffer or endure hardships, troubles, or afflictions.” It is a term that is often used to explain the hardships of military service (cf. 2 Timothy 2:3, 9; 4:5).

*“Is anyone happy?”* is translated *“is anyone cheerful”* in the New American Standard Version. *“Happy”* or *“cheerful”* means “to put in good spirits, to gladden the heart, to be joyful, or to be of good courage.” The same word is translated *“keep up your courage”* when Paul encouraged the men during the storm at sea on the way to Rome (cf. Acts 27:22, 25). When life is going well, offer praise to God for He is worthy. Be thankful for situations that bring about cheerfulness and happiness.

### **Supplication for Needs**

Verse fourteen is a little more specific. If anyone is sick, he is to call the elders of the church so they can pray over him. The

elders of the church are to pray over him. Why call the elders of the church? They are the spiritual leaders or overseers of the church (cf. 1 Peter 5:2). The elders of the church are men of respect and of wisdom (cf. 1 Timothy 3:2–7). They are men who ought to help fellow Christians approach God. Call these righteous men for prayers because the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (cf. James 5:16). In the Old Testament there were leaders, elders among the Israelites, who were respected. They were men who the people could look to for help and assistance.

God needs to be involved in the lives of every Christian. If they are suffering, they should approach God in prayer. Christians should devote themselves to prayer (cf. Colossians 4:2). When they are filled with joy, they should express their thanks by singing praises to God. If a child of God is sick, he should call for the elders to pray over him.

Why are the elders to “*anoint him with oil?*” Gary Hollaway’s commentary, in the NIV College Press Series, mentions several possibilities. One of his suggestions is that the elders were using the oil medicinally, for a medicinal purpose. When the Samaritan came upon the man who had been beaten, he poured oil on his body (Luke 10:33–34). The apostles drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them, but God was involved in the healing process (cf. Mark 6:13).

There are other references in the Bible to the use of anointing oil. Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers to show that he would become the second king of Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 16:13). Anointing oil was poured on Aaron’s head when he was ordained as the first high priest of Israel as symbolism of God’s approval and involvement in his life (cf. Exodus 29:7). It was a special blessing from God.

### **Looking At the Sickness From a Spiritual Viewpoint**

What kind of sickness is James referring to? Bible scholars offer two interpretations of the text. Some men say James is referring to a physical sickness, while other men say he was writing about a spiritual sickness? The word “*sick*” can be translated “weak.” The same Greek word is translated “*weak*” when Paul wrote about the stronger and the weaker brother and disputable matters (cf. Romans 14:1–2). There are a number of other places where the word “*weak*” refers to spiritual weakness, not physical sickness (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:22; Romans 6:19).

The Greek word for “*sick*” could be referring to Christians who had grown weary, who had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of suffering. “*Anoint him with oil*” could refer to the common practice of using oil as a means of bestowing honor, refreshment, and grooming. There are several examples given in the New Testament of people who poured oil on another person to show honor. Luke 7:37–38:

*When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

Jesus told his disciples that when they were fasting they should not look somber like the hypocrites, but they should put oil on their head and wash their face so only the Father would know they were fasting (cf. Matthew 6:16–17). Thus, James’ point could be that the weak and weary would be refreshed, encouraged, and uplifted by the elders who prayed over the sick person and anointed him with oil.

### **Looking At The Sickness As a Physical Sickness**

Was James describing a person who was merely weak and without power or strength to accomplish what he would like to accomplish or was he describing a person who was physically ill? The best way to interpret the use of the anointing of oil, I believe, is to consider that it was used for a physical sickness, as a medicinal help. Even today people have oils to rub on their bodies to relieve aches and pains that they may experience. So anointing with oil and praying for a sick person can result in healing. The way this verse is written in the Greek indicates that the person is lying down and the elders extend their hands over him to pray

The prayer offered in faith is so important; there should be no doubting of God's power. There are two Greek words the New Testament writers used which are translated "*to pray*." The Greek word that occurs in this verse means "to devote oneself, to seek God's help, and to offer oneself completely to God." There are three results of the prayer that is offered in faith. First, it will restore the one who is sick. Second, the Lord will raise up the sick person. Third, if he has committed sins, his sins will be forgiven.

What about the times when a person is sick, the elders are called, but God does not heal the sick person. Did the elders not pray enough? Did they not anoint the person with enough oil? Was their faith not strong enough? I think God's will must be considered with this passage. There are times when the will of God does not bring about a miraculous, rapid healing, or even a slow healing. Sometimes the will of God is that a person must endure the physical infirmities of the sickness.

There were apostles who had the ability to heal people. Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Paul had the ability to heal him, but he did not heal him. Apparently, it was not the Lord's will for Trophimus to be healed (cf. 2 Timothy 4:20). Paul wrote that he was sending his brother and fellow worker, Epaphroditus, back to Philippi. Epaphroditus had been very ill

and almost died, but God had mercy on him and healed him (cf. Philippians 2:27). Seek God's help, and if it is God's will, the prayer that is offered in faith will restore a sick man. It will bring him back to health. The Lord will raise him up, restore him, and forgive his sins, if needed. There will be both physical and spiritual healing.

The next verse indicates that James was referring to a physically sick person: *"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven"* (James 5:15). If James was referring to a spiritual sickness, he might follow this line of thought: "The prayer offered in faith will restore a person who is sick. God will raise him up and give him spiritual life." James would not have written: *"If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."* If there was a spiritual sickness caused by sin, there would be no need for the word *"if."* When a person is sick, he may sin in the process. He may curse God because he is sick. He may be angry and do things that he would not normally do because he is not responding well to his sickness. Some people become ill because of their sins. God is able to restore the person who seeks help from the elders, who pray and anoint oil. If this sick person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven.

The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and God will raise him up. If sin has been committed, the sins will be forgiven, which leads into the next verse: *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16). God needs to be a part of the solution to the problems that Christians face in their daily lives. Confessing sins to another person is making it known that sin has been committed and help is needed.

Verses fifteen and sixteen are closely linked together. Confessing sins and praying for one another is a healing solution. When someone confesses sin, he usually is asking for prayer for strength so God will continue the cleansing and

healing of the person's life. Christians ought to take seriously the admonition to confess their sins to another person. Christians need to let other people know their weaknesses so the other person can pray and help him guard against sinning again. When a Christian asks a brother to pray for him, it lets the brother know of his need for God. It also lets people know of his need for others in his life. The brother knows the struggles a person is having so he can pray more specifically for him. Praying for another person should inspire the person who is praying to help his brother resist the sin in the future. When a Christian confesses sin to a brother, it may help the brother recognize the sin in his own life. The brother may be struggling with the same sin, and he might feel a little more comfortable to confess his own sin. This is a mutual responsibility; both people must be willing to confess sin and to pray for the other person.

Prayer can be very beneficial: *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."* Who receives the effect of the prayers? All the people involved in the situation are benefitted. The sick person is a recipient of healing. The person who is praying is benefitted because his devotion to God strengthens him. He will gain strength as he sees how God is working. How does God respond to his prayers? Does He respond immediately? I have found that God never responds as quickly as I would like, but He does respond. Prayers are not always answered the way the person who is praying would like. God answers prayers knowing what is best for him. A mutual concern for one another is the way to combat discouragement. The cure is in personal confession and prayerful concern.

To illustrate prayer James wrote about Elijah, a well-known example to the Jewish recipients. James 5:17–18:

*Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for*



*three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

Elijah prayed fervently that it would not rain. And it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the heavens poured rain and the earth produced crops. James was referring to a time in Old Testament history when there was a famine in the land of Israel. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had introduced Baal worship. There was a contest on Mount Carmel between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. Elijah wanted the people to make a choice between God and Baal. Each group put a bull on wood. The prophets of Baal cried out and danced around asking their gods to send fire, but there was no response. Elijah also put a bull on the wood on an altar of stone, but then he poured a lot of water on it. This was a time of famine, and the people did not have much water. Elijah poured a lot of water to make it obvious that God was more powerful than Baal. Elijah prayed to God, and the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and it also licked up all the water. There was no doubt that God was involved. All the prophets of Baal were slaughtered at the command of Elijah. Elijah told King Ahab that rain was coming. God brought heavy rains upon the earth because Elijah had prayed (cf. 1 Kings 16:31; 17:1; 18:16–45).

The statement “*Elijah was a man just like us*” is more significant in this text than the historical circumstance. Sometimes biblical men are so highly esteemed that ordinary men feel they can never reach that level of spiritual maturity. Elijah was a Biblical hero, but he had problems with people and doubts about God. When Elijah experienced struggles, he prayed. He prayed earnestly, which is the key to a successful prayer life. Christians ought to give the same attention to their prayers.

Charles Hodge wrote an interesting comment in his book Prayer the Voice of Faith. He wrote, “I do not believe in prayer.

I believe in God; therefore, I pray.” Prayer is not a magical formula for a person to attempt to get what he wants. Prayer is about building a relationship with God and then deepening the relationship with Him. That is why James encourages us to pray when in trouble, sing songs of praise when happy, and call the elders for prayer when sick (cf. James 5:13–14). The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective because he is deepening his relationship with God. The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. The Greek word used previously in chapter five for prayer means “to devote oneself to God when speaking to Him.” But in verse sixteen the Greek words translated “*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*” means “a supplication.” This admission of need is so very important, but the prayer is primarily a prayer of devotion to God. The righteous man is seeking God and His help. This is the only time in this chapter that the Greek word for prayer, which means supplication, appears. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He prayed earnestly. He sought the help of God, and the sky poured forth rain and produced the crops that had been lacking.

### **Deeds That Cover a Multitude of Sins**

For the sixteenth time James refers to his readers as my brothers. James 5:19–20:

*My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

The possibility, the action, and the result are given in these two verses. Christians can wander from the truth; they can be led into error. The Greek word *planao* is translated “wander” and means “to go astray, to roam about like a planet, to be led

away.” Brothers can be deceived and be led along the wrong path.

Action must be taken when a brother wanders from the truth. Someone must turn him back. Jesus told a parable concerning a shepherd who had one hundred sheep, but he lost one of them. The one that was gone was so important that he left the ninety-nine sheep to find the one lost sheep. The shepherd called his friends and neighbors to rejoice because the lost sheep was found (cf. Luke 15:3–6). Then Jesus said in the next verse:

*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

Jesus also told the parable of the lost coin and the lost son. (cf. Luke 15:8–32)

Christians should not stand idly by when a brother wanders from the truth. They must help him turn from his sin. Jesus said, *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over”* (Matthew 18:15). The result of turning *“a sinner from the error of his way”* will save his soul. The work Christians do to rescue a brother from *“the error of his way”* leads to his salvation and will cover over a multitude of sins.

Is this an abrupt ending? Or, is James summarizing his letter by showing that brothers need to have concern for one another, helping each other to resist sin? One of the greatest concerns of every Christian should be to help a brother overcome sin. The writer of Hebrews told Christians to encourage one another to stay faithful: *“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness”* (Hebrews 3:13). The writer of Hebrews also wrote that Christians should encourage

one another and not give up meeting together: “*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:25). The writer of Hebrews said to reach out to people and bring them to Jesus so that no one would miss the grace of God (cf. Hebrews 12:15)

It may be that every problem discussed in the epistle of James can cause a person to slowly drift and to eventually “*wander from the truth*” if there is no correction. In response to each problem presented in the epistle, there is the potential for a person to stray from the truth or to mature as a Christian. So brothers in the Lord must be concerned about one another and encourage each other.

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# Review of The Book of James

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## **Introduction**

In the final chapter of the study of the book of James all the previous chapters will be summarized. Several of the themes and characteristics of the book will be reviewed.

The importance of uniting belief and behavior is emphasized in the book of James. The book is very helpful for individual study, for teaching other people, and for preaching from the pulpit. One of the problems in the church is a failure of some Christians to unite their belief and their behavior. James deals with this problem because it is very important for God's people to believe the teachings of God. It is equally important that His teachings be put into practice.

In every area of life, belief determines behavior. Atheism bear witness to that statement. Several years ago Madeline Murray O'Hare, a declared atheist, let people know she did not believe in God. Her actions manifested her lack of belief very clearly. The author of this book, Ron Bontrager's daughter hates spiders. When she sees a spider, believing they are the worst creatures in the world, she screams, gets her dad's attention, and asks him to put an end to the spider's life. The daughter's actions reflect her belief.

Beliefs can affect behavior in a positive way. Merely ask any couple who have recently become grandparents. They believe being grandparents is very special, and they show it by

their behavior. If a person is a loyal sports fan, he will let it be known who he believes is the best player and the best team. So it is with God's people, or so it should be. A Christian who believes that Jesus was raised from the dead, ought to reflect that belief in his life. He should strive to live a sinless life that fulfills the will of God. His behavior ought to manifest his belief: *"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do"* (James 2:18).

Uniting belief and behavior is emphasized throughout the Bible. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that everyone who hears His words and acts upon them is like the wise man who built his house on the rock. When the storms came, his house did not fall. But Jesus said that everyone who hears His words and does not act upon them is like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. His house did not withstand the storms (cf. Matthew 7:24–27). There is even a children's song about the wise man and the foolish man that teaches people of any age that hearing God's Word and obeying it is important.

### **Examples of Faithful and Unfaithful People**

Belief and behavior were demonstrated by God's faithful people. Examine the life of the Apostle Paul for a moment. Did Paul believe that the Gospel was for all people? Did he believe that God wanted the Gospel preached to every creature? By the things Paul did, a person can know that Paul believed that God wanted the Gospel preached to every person. After becoming a Christian, Paul endured ill treatment and made long journeys so many could hear the Good News (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23–28). Paul's behavior reflected what He believed. Did Jesus believe that He had to be a perfect, sinless sacrifice in order to save lost people from their sins? That is the reason Jesus struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane, but He left the garden ready to obey

God by going to the cross (cf. Mark 14:32–42). Jesus' behavior reflected what He believed.

At times the principle of belief and behavior has been ignored. There are people in the Bible who said they believed, but they did not practice their belief. Ananias and Sapphira claimed to be followers of God, but they did not show evidence of their belief when they lied about the amount of money they gave to the church. Both Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead because their belief was not reflected by their behavior. Great fear seized the whole church after their deaths (cf. Acts 4:1–11). All Christians need to unite the principle of belief and behavior in their lives. King David, a man after God's own heart, ignored the principle of belief and behavior when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband Uriah murdered (cf. 2 Samuel 11).

What are some of the dangers when this principle is ignored? What if someone claims to have belief, but his behavior does not show any faith? James answers that question: *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"* (James 2:14 ) Will faith save a person who refuses to assist a needy person who asks for help? If the Christian believes in Jesus and knows the needy person ought to be helped, how can he refuse to help? What good is the man's faith, James asks. Deeds done without faith in God are also useless. A person who attends a worship assembly merely to look good or to make business contacts, without a belief in God, is not benefitted. James emphasizes the importance of a living, active faith that pleases God.

### **Guide for Personal Growth**

As Christians read the book of James they will find the book to be an excellent guide for their own personal growth. Every Christian has trials. James wrote about the proper

response to trials. He encouraged the recipients to consider it pure joy when their life was uncertain because the testing of their faith developed perseverance, maturity, and completeness. Anyone one who lacks wisdom should ask God, who gives generously. When he asks, he must believe and not doubt (cf. James 1:2–6).

How should Christians respond to the Word of God, the world's number one best-selling book? They are to be quick to listen to Scripture. People of God are not to merely listen to the Word and deceive themselves. They are to do what it says! Christians who listen to the Bible and obey it will be blessed. Believers need to strive to keep a tight rein on their tongue, never show favoritism, but show mercy to others. They should humbly accept the Word that can save them (cf. James 1:19–26). Christians do not know what life will bring them, but they can experience personal growth if they listen to the Word and obey it.

Children of God need to show love to their neighbors if they want that love shown to them. A brother or sister in need should be shown compassion. More than kind words, kind actions should be given. How should a believer respond to the sinful desires of jealousy, arrogance, and lust that characterize the lives of some of God's people? He needs to resist the devil and submit to God (cf. James 3:13–4:8).

How do Christians respond when evil men mistreat them? They could hurt the people. But God desires that His children rejoice and count it all joy. That response might help the evil men to change. Christians need to be patient and strengthen their hearts by waiting on the Lord, who is full of compassion and mercy (cf. James 5:7–11). This is an example of uniting belief with behavior.

James wrote about praying for one another, and seeking God's help. The greatest assistance any believer can offer another person is faithful prayer. Prayer is clear evidence of



care. A righteous man's prayer is powerful and effective (cf. James 5:13–16).

### **Themes in The Book of James**

A Bible class teacher might have the opportunity to teach the book of James. The best way is to teach the whole book. But if the teacher does not have the opportunity to teach the entire book, a thematic study may be possible. Several themes can be taught or only one theme.

Patience during difficult times is one theme in the book of James. James wrote about the right attitudes that Christians should exhibit during the midst of trials and difficult times. Trials make a Christian stronger. Most Americans are rich. How should they respond to people who do not have as much? James answers that question. Christ brings the poor man a new sense of his own value. Christ brings the rich man a new sense of humility. Persevering trials produce joy and the crown of life! (Cf. James 1:2–12).

Prayer is another of the major themes in the book. There is much need for prayer and much cause to praise. Suffering should elicit prayer. Sufficiency should elicit praise. Sharing prayer life with brothers is of utmost importance in continued faithfulness. A mutual concern for one another through prayer is the way to combat discouragement. The word "to pray" has to do with devotion to God, not to men. It is the lowering of self as a person approaches one greater than self. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (cf. James 5:13–16). I, believe that prayer is effective. Does my prayer life show my belief?

Another theme is the use of the tongue. There is reference to the use of the tongue in every chapter of the book of James. A measure of spiritual maturity is a believer's speech. James wrote that Christians need to bridle the tongue. Christians must not be complainers. They must not be involved in judging

others or speaking evil of other people. Teachers of the Word are cautioned to carefully control their tongue lest they discredit the message they teach. It is difficult to tame the tongue, but children of God must control their tongues. The key to controlling one's tongue is controlling one's thoughts. To achieve spiritual maturity, a believer must learn to speak with care (cf. James 3:1–12).

Another of the major themes in the book of James is judgement with mercy. Just as love triumphs over prejudice, mercy triumphs over judgment. Christians must show mercy to others in the same way God shows mercy because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. (cf. James 2:13). Anyone who judges his brother judges the law (cf. James 4:11). To judge the law is equal to saying that the law is not good. Christians must be careful about setting themselves up as judges.

Wisdom is another one of the themes that could be taught. If a person desires wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt (cf. James 1:5). James contrasts earthly wisdom that is unspiritual and demonic with wisdom from above that is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (cf. James 3:15,17).

A major theme in the book of James is uniting belief and behavior. This theme is found several times in these passages. *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"* (James 1:22). The man who look intently into the perfect law and obeys it will be blessed for his obedience (cf. James 1:25). Christians are to speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (cf. James 2:12). Even so, if faith is not accompanied by action, it is dead (cf. James 2:17). Wisdom and understanding should be shown by the good deeds Christians do (cf. James 3:17). The one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, sins (cf. James 4:17). Knowing the will of God is not enough, the actions of

Christians must exhibit His will. Uniting belief and behavior is very important. These few verses in the book of James make a good study of the relationship of hearing and doing.

### **Teaching and Preaching Topics**

The final section of the review of James includes fourteen suggested preaching topics. Christians who are interested in teaching or preaching through the book of James might consider Warren Wiersbe's book, Be Mature, which is divided in a homiletical way. Wiersbe has several practical points and several good illustrations. He divides the scriptures in outline form in a very effective and helpful way. Also, Rubel Shelly has written a book on James that outlines the book by preaching units. Both books can be helpful.

The first teaching or preaching topic could be the testing of faith produces endurance. The title of the sermon should reflect a believer's behavior. They should welcome troubles because they are opportunities for growth. People who believe the statement to be true behave in a way that manifests their belief.

Another topic for study is wisdom. God gives wisdom generously. If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask without doubting, secretly (cf. James 1:5-6). Often when a Christian prays in public, there is something that causes doubt. Can God do this? Is God powerful enough? Can God really help? Wisdom is a message that is needed.

The third teaching or preaching topic concerns wealth. Hoarded wealth will result in corrosion and condemnation. The greedy attitude toward wealth is condemned (cf. James 5:1-6). Rich people like flowers will pass away (1 Peter 1:24). Christians need to rejoice in their spiritual position. They should not rejoice according to the world's standard, but they should rejoice because of their position in Christ.

A fourth topic might be endurance. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial. Good gifts are from God; temptations

come from evil desires. After desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin gives birth to death. Christians need to endure, express faith in God, and never blame Him. God cannot be tempted by evil and He does not tempt anyone. Christians should resist temptations from the evil one and endure to the end (cf. James 1:12–15).

Fifth, the relation of hearing and doing is another topical study. Children of God must not only attentively hear the Word, they must also respond to the Word. The command is clear, do not merely listen to the Word, do what it says. Everyone should be slow to speak, but quick to listen. Be prepared to hear and obey (cf. James 1:19–25). Enjoy the blessings that come. Christians ought to get rid of the trash and filth in their lives and be ready to do what they hear. This topic will help a person trying to unite belief with behavior.

Favoritism might be a sixth sermon or teaching topic. It is sinful for believers to show favoritism. Making a judgment about a person on his outward appearance is wrong. Abstain from favoritism and manifest mercy. One must learn to accept all people just as Jesus did. God's people must be courteous, compassionate, loving, and kind. Because Christians receive mercy from God, they are called to show mercy among His people.

Seventh, faith could be another study topic. Faith is not known to anyone until it is manifested. Faith in God is evident when Christians serve people. Christians not only need to tell about their belief in God, they need to show it. James wrote that Abraham was considered righteous when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. In the same way Rahab, the prostitute, was considered righteous when she gave lodging to the spies. They both brought praise to God. Believers bring praise to God when they serve others here on earth (James 2:14-26).

An eighth topic might be the misuse of the tongue. There is strong emphasis in James on the proper use of the tongue. Teachers should carefully control their tongue lest they

discredit the message they teach. The tongue can be a powerful tool for good or a powerful tool for evil. Praise and cursing should not come from the same mouth. Therefore, a Christian should bridle his tongue. He should control his tongue in the same way a bridle controls a horse and a small rudder controls a large ship. As a small spark can set fire to an entire forest, so the tongue can corrupt the entire body and set a person's life on fire. The tongue is small, but very powerful. It can be a wonderful blessing, but it can also lead a person into sin (cf. James 3:1–12).

Another sermon or teaching topic could be wisdom. God's wisdom bears righteousness and is meek, gracious, and humble. A wise person has moral insight and skill in the practical issues of life. Wisdom is not measured by university degrees but by deeds. A truly wise person does not seek glory or gain. To achieve spiritual maturity, the theme of the book of James, and wisdom a believer must learn to speak with care. A controlled tongue is possible only with cultured thought. A mouth filled with praise results from a mind filled with purity. Wisdom from above is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. Wisdom is manifested in the things that are being done (cf. James 3:13–18).

Tenth, the problem of worldliness might be another study topic. Friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Apparently the Jewish believers to whom James wrote tended to have conflict, and they were jealous and judgmental. Justice not judgment, is what God requires. Bragging was also apparently prevalent. Humility was needed. Christians must humble themselves, or they will stumble. They are to submit to God and resist the devil. Selfish ambition is the way to destruction. A child of God must humble himself in the sight of God so God can lift him up (cf. James 4:1–10).

An eleventh topic might be a Christian's speech. A Christian should never speak against his brother or judge him

because he will be judging the law. To judge the law is equal to saying the law is not good or practical (cf. James 4:11). Christians must be doers of the law and not judges of the law (cf. James 1:22). Christians are not to grumble against each other, nor are they to swear because the Judge is standing at the door! The Lord's coming is near (James 5:8–9, 12). A Christian needs to avoid that kind of language. If his speech is not pure, it means that his thoughts are impure. It is sometimes difficult to do what is right and avoid doing that which is wrong. When God makes a demand, He gives grace to fulfil it.

Turning boasting into belief is another topic for study. James gave an example of a boastful person who would go to this or that city with the intention of making money and with no thought about God. Arrogance is manifested in this example. Life is short; it is like a mist that appears for only a short time. A possible lesson or sermon title for this passage might be, Making the Most of your Mist. Since life is short, Christians should use every day to the Lord's glory. They should live their lives to please Him. In chapter five James continued his attack on self-centered merchants who seem to succeed in their businesses by oppressing other people. Money brings merriment only temporarily; hoarded wealth eventually results in misery. Hoarding for "the last days" only gives more fuel for the fire that will consume the lost. James condemned the rich but encouraged the righteous. He appealed to his brethren to be patient. Christians need to wait on the Lord even in the midst of hard times because the Lord is full of compassion, and He is merciful. Christians need be like the prophets and persevere (cf. James 4:13–5:11).

Another topical study is God's respond to the prayers of the righteous. God brings about healing and restoration. Therefore, this study might be entitled Pray and Praise. A Christian needs to devote himself to God through prayer. He should seek His power and His strength in order to relieve some of the suffering and sickness. Praise is also needed. It is usually

easy to pray when life is not going well and God's help is needed. When life is going well, when there is abundant joy, Christians should pause to thank God. They should seek His favor all the time.

The last topic for study could be straying from the truth. Yes, Christians can wander from the truth. Christians need to seek a lost brother and save him from death. The emphasis in verse nineteen is not on an alien sinner, a non-Christian who has never been forgiven. Christians certainly need to seek non-Christians, but James' reference in chapter five is to God's people who have wandered away. These Christians were once a part of the fellowship, but they are no longer a part of the body, and they need help to return to the fellowship. The person who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him and cover over a multitude of sins (cf. James 5:19–20). Part of maturity includes our relationship with one another. One of the greatest concerns of every Christian should be to help a brother to overcome sin.

These are some study suggestions from the book of James that can be used in a Bible study or in a sermon. James wrote some good instructions to God's people on how they ought to live. He gave many principles for living a life that will be pleasing to the Father. He wrote directions about how His people ought to manifest what they believe and the characteristics that should be exhibited in their lives. James stated that Christians are letting people know what they believe about God and His Word by the way they live, by their actions. Because Christians believe that God's way is best, their teaching and preaching show that truth. James wrote some practical ways Christians can mature.

As previously stated, James has been thought by some to be a book of sermon outlines. James gives brief points on confident Christian living. Christians are encouraged to be strong in the Lord and move toward maturity. It is my sincere hope and prayer that this study of James will be of help. I hope

that truth has been taught and that it will be applied in lives so God may be glorified. God is good. God is wonderful. He offers great blessings. My prayers go with you that God will bless you. May you learn His truth, give your life to Him, and always glorify Him.

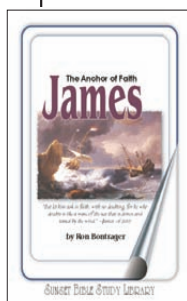


# Ron Bontrager



**RON BONTRAGER** is a 1981 graduate of the Sunset School of Preaching. He also has a Master's Degree from Harding Graduate School. He preached for churches in Gail, TX and Alamogordo, NM before going as a missionary to Salvador, Brazil (1984-88). After his return he preached in Searcy, AR (1988-97). He returned to Sunset in 1997 as instructor and dean of the School of Preaching Ministries.

**FAITH** is at the heart of the book of James, and the living out of that faith permeates all that the writer teaches. Beginning with the trials and temptations that all believers face, James connects believing and doing. This is illustrated best by two examples he gives. In the first, hearing God's Word is compared to looking into a mirror. If the hearer of the Word does not do what he hears, there is no blessing. The second example related dealt with seeing the need of others, and saying, "be warmed and filled," while doing nothing to actually relieve their distress. Again, that kind of faith is empty. We welcome you to this study of this great book in a small package!



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