

*The Epistle of
James*

"A Faith that Works"

*Study Weekend
Toronto East Ecclesia
March 2 – 3, 2024*

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*“Show me your faith apart from your works,
and I by my works will show you my faith.”*

James 2:18

PREFACE

It is my earnest prayer that you will find these notes helpful. James is a very practical epistle written to brethren and sisters undergoing a severe test of faith. Although their trials were of a more physical nature and of more immediate consequence – persecution, imprisonment, martyrdom – than are ours, James’ advice, if followed, will stand us in good stead too. Indeed, if we follow James’ teaching, we will be well-prepared should a time of persecution befall our Ecclesias as suddenly as it did the Ecclesia in Jerusalem in the first century. Now is the time to prepare for such a calamity. However, even if it please our heavenly Father not to preserve us from so dramatic a trial of our faith as persecution, James’ epistle can fortify us to persevere through the difficulties of everyday life. When the trials of life overtake us, our faith may be severely damaged or destroyed if we do not carefully nurture it when times are “good.”

James’ teaching may be summed up:

- Pray! Pray for wisdom to deal with the complexities and trials of life. Pray for your brethren and sisters. Pray earnestly! Pray frequently! Pray on your own! Pray with your brethren and sisters! Pray!
- Treat one another with dignity and respect – especially those whom you esteem to be “the least.” Love one another. Help one another. Listen to one another. Rescue one another. Do not be “respecters of persons” – esteeming one set of brethren and sisters more highly than another.
- Work for peace and harmony within your Ecclesia and between Ecclesias. Your labour will be blessed and you will be among the “children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Remember that the Father hates those who sow strife among brethren but that He loves those who work for peace!
- Finally, the theme of James’ epistle: with the Father’s help, build a faith that works in spite of any trial, which can bear any burden, and forgive any wrong. If you can do that, He will indeed “lift you up” - you will “mount up with wings as eagles; you will run and not be weary; and walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31).

If you wish to contact me about this study, please feel free to do so. I have much still to learn about this epistle and any questions or criticisms of any aspect of the study or notes will be very welcome.

With love in the hope we share,

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THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Setting the Stage

A Personal Note

My own fascination with the Epistle of James began several years ago when, during a discussion of James 5:14, 15, a point of view was being put forward regarding healing that seemed to contradict both scriptural precedent and common sense. In coming to terms with the true meaning of that passage, I came to appreciate both the spiritual depth and the practicality of the epistle.

James is as relevant today as it was in Jerusalem when it was written not very long after the Lord's ascension. The apostle (I use that title deliberately) has written words of instruction, advice, exhortation, and comfort which will assist us in our daily struggle to remain true to our Lord.

It is the aim of this study to let James' message and the challenge of his uncompromising stand for the truth coupled with his deep love for his brethren and sisters motivate us to greater efforts on our Lord's behalf. We may not be called upon, as was James, to die a martyr's death in the service of our Master but we are called upon to do the best we can with what talents and resources we have been given. An understanding of James' epistle will help us as we strive to be better "servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Beside the Lord himself, we could not choose a better role model than James. We will do well if we emulate his passion in the service of his Lord and of his brethren and sisters and his courage in the face of vicious persecution.

When was the epistle written?

I will not repeat here material which may be found in any reliable commentary. Suffice it to say that the epistle is considered to be the earliest of Christian writings. It may even have been written before the murder of Stephen but certainly not long thereafter. See James 5:6, "*You have condemned – you have murdered the **RIGHTEOUS** one; he does not oppose you.*"¹ [Emphasis from the "Diaglott" by Benjamin Wilson].

From the overall context of the epistle, which is one of exhortation to persevere in the face of trial and persecution, I favour the view which puts the writing of the epistle after the death of Stephen and dealing with the adversity which attended the persecution which followed. It was about AD 40 or earlier when James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John, who together were the "Sons of Thunder," wrote the epistle which was eventually to cost him his life.

¹ Wilson, Benjamin, The Emphatic Diaglott, Int'l Bible Students Assoc., 1942, page 771.

Setting the Stage, Continued

To whom was the epistle written?

There was, until the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, no clear distinction between Jews and Christians. In fact, even after Stephen's death, it took a long time for the distinction to be fully realized. Even as late as Acts 24:5, followers of the Lord are labeled as the "sect of the Nazarenes." The same word, "sect," is used to describe the Sadducees in Acts 5:17 and the Pharisees in Acts 15:5.

The apostles continually referred to the Jews and their leaders as "brethren" (Greek = adelphos). Cp. Acts 2:29; 7:2; 13:26; 38; 15:7,13 – the same form of address used in relation to brethren in Christ, 23:1,6; 28:17.

At this early stage of its development, the Ecclesia was closely identified with Judaism. Consider the following:

- **Acts 2:47** – followers of the Lord were to be found in the Temple and were held in favour by the people. They were not persecuted at this point nor were they perceived as a threat by the authorities. This "honeymoon" period was not to last long.
- **Acts 3:1** – Peter and John went up to the Temple "at the hour of prayer." *"...when 'Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour,' it must have been for the evening sacrifice, or rather half an hour later and, as the words indicate, for the prayer that accompanied the offering of incense."*²
- **Acts 6:7** – "...a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." These continued in their priestly roles. Eventually, they would be forced to decide between Christ and the law but for the moment the line of separation had not been drawn.
- **Acts 15:5** – "But there rose up certain of the sect of the *Pharisees which believed*, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses." There are two things to notice about this passage:
 - There were brethren who were believers and still Pharisees
 - As late as Acts 15 there was still a debate about the duty of a follower of Christ in regard to the Law of Moses.

Brethren and sisters maintained their membership in their synagogues until they were forced out by persecution. Consider the words of Paul: **Acts 22:19** *And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: (cp. Acts 26:11!)*

² Edersheim, Alfred, "The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ," W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, page 144

To whom was the epistle written? (cont'd)

- **Acts 21:17-24** – Even at this late date, James, the brother of the Lord, was urging Paul to demonstrate to the Jews in Jerusalem that, contrary to what they had heard about him, he “kept the Law.” Amazingly, Paul complied with an act of flexibility and spiritual maturity which should be much meditated upon today!
- **James 1:1** addresses the epistle to the “*twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*” or “*of the dispersion*” as the RV and RSV put it. In Greek, the word is “diaspora.” This fact takes on new significance when one reads in Acts 6 that it was the synagogues of the “diaspora” in Jerusalem which were taking the lead in persecuting followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In **Acts 6:9** we read: “*Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.*” These are the synagogues of the diaspora or more properly of the “diasporans,” located not in the far-flung reaches of Asia-minor nor of North Africa, Persia, or Italy but in Jerusalem. This makes sense considering the early date of the epistle.

The great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, had not yet begun to “turn the world upside down” with his preaching of the Gospel beyond the confines of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Due to the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, the brethren and sisters had indeed been scattered but not much further than Damascus and Antioch. Indeed, many brethren and sisters still lived in Jerusalem, and, in spite of the persecutions unleashed upon them, either would not or could not flee.

- The epistle was written and circulated primarily to the brethren and sisters who were members of the Synagogues of the “diaspora” and secondarily as a kind of “open letter” to the other members of these Synagogues as well. Hence the backlash that was to cost James his life as the leaders of the Jewish community reacted to his forthright condemnation of their persecution of the followers of the Lord.
- The contention that because James was the first epistle, he used the word Synagogue instead of Ecclesia to describe an assembly of Christians is an unnecessary assumption. James knew the word Ecclesia and used it appropriately in chapter 5 verse 14. When James talks about Synagogues, he means Jewish Synagogues and not a Christian community or meeting place.

Setting the Stage, Continued

To whom was the epistle written? (*cont'd*)

This interpretation helps to make sense of the “difficult” passages in James such as chapter 2:1-13; 3:9-15; 4:1- 5:6 which, if addressed to brethren only would give a very different picture from that of the harmony and Godly fellowship portrayed in the early chapters of Acts. Never mind the language which would be totally contradictory if applied to brethren in James’ day:

- **2:13** Judgement without mercy – in the context of persecution; are brethren sitting in judgment of brethren? This verse makes sense in terms of the judicial persecution, imprisonment, and condemnation of the followers of Jesus by their fellow Jews.
- **3:14-15** Brethren behaving in an earthly, sensual, demonic manner; creating tumult, faction, strife, and engaging in every vile (RV) deed? Read the accounts of Ecclesial harmony and love in the early chapters of Acts. This description does not fit the facts when applied to that wonderful Ecclesia.
- **4:1-4** The Jewish community was famous for its political infighting – the only thing that united them at this time was the growing hatred by the rich and powerful among them of the “sect of the Nazarenes.” How could the followers of the Lord be characterized by words such as, “Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain: ye fight and war...” The phrase, “desire to have” is, in the Greek, “*zelos*”. In their *zeal* they kill to get their way. Who does that phrase best characterize? Do we imagine for a moment that James was writing this of brethren and sisters?

Here are some passages that characterize the Ecclesia in James’ day:

- **Acts 2:41-46** – they sold their possessions and had all things common. Where are the grasping, greedy, rich in this scenario? Any such would have been scared straight into a Godly generosity by the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:11**). They were of one accord – united and not distressed by division and factional strife.
- **Acts 4:32** – those who believed were of one heart and one soul. There was no disunity and no strife at least not at the time period when it is generally accepted that this epistle was written.
- **Acts 6:1-6** – The one incidence of disunity was solved in a way that has shone forth as a beacon to brethren and sisters ever since. The members of the offended minority were put in charge of rectifying their own grievance! What faith and love was shown by these wonderful brethren and sisters! The wisdom of the apostles in letting the meeting decide how to handle the situation should be instructive to Arranging Brethren in our own day.

Setting the Stage, Continued

Who wrote the epistle?

Who wrote the epistle? It is generally accepted that James the Lord's brother was the author. However, the evidence for his authorship is very slim indeed. Usually a comparison is made between the speech in Acts 15 of James the Lord's brother and the epistle. In more than one set of published notes the following observations (set in *italics* below) are made:

- **James 1:1** *Greeting = wishes joy; occurs elsewhere only in Acts 15:23 (James the Lord's brother writing) and in Acts 23:26 (Lysias, the Roman commander writing). James' Greek is very formal as of one who was very talented in his use of the language but not a fluent native speaker such as the apostle Paul.* Firstly, it must be noted that this formal beginning to the epistle was not unique to James. It was a common form such as our "Dear Sir" and could have been used by anyone in any formal written communication (as in the letter of the Roman commander to his superior). So, this bit of evidence in favour of the authorship of James the Lord's brother is not very compelling.
- **James 1:16, 19; 2:5** *"Beloved brethren" – the word "beloved" occurs only here and in Acts 15:25.* I am not sure how this conclusion was reached. My count brings the number of occurrences to **62!** The word, *agapeetos*, is often used exactly as James used it (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:58).
- **James 2: 5** *"Hearken... brethren...." This expression is found only here and in Acts 15.* Not so. See Acts 7:2.
- **James 5:19, 20** *"converteth" is used twice and the same Greek word is used in Acts 15:19.* The force of this argument is greatly diminished when it is realized that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul also used the same word in the same context.
- **James 1:27** *"visit the fatherless and widow and keep yourselves un-spotted from the world is similar to Acts 15:14, 29.* This comparison is weak because others use the same words to convey the same idea: Paul in Acts 15:36; Stephen in Acts 7:23.
- **James 2:7; 5:10,14** *stress is laid upon "the name" as in Acts 15:14, 17, 26.* It is true that the one phrase in James 2:7 "that worthy name by which you were called" is similar to the one in Acts 15:17, "upon whom my name is called." However it must be noted that the phrase "the name" occurs more than 40 times in the New Testament between Acts and Revelation and almost always refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is instructive to meditate upon Philippians 2:10 where our Lord has been given by the Father, "The name which is above every name...." Not "a name" as the AV has it but "THE name." But that is another subject! In any case stress is laid upon the name of the Lord throughout the New Testament.

Setting the Stage, Continued

Who wrote the epistle? (cont'd)

The only other credible alternative to James the brother of the Lord as the author of the epistle is James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, one of the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). We can hear his thunderous condemnation in chapters 4 and 5 as he denounces the rich and worldly persecutors of his brethren. These words of righteous denunciation were so unlike those of James the brother of the Lord who was ever the conciliator between the Christian and Jewish communities (cp. Acts 21:18-25).

In Acts 12:1-3 Herod slew James, the son of Zebedee and he saw that it pleased the Jews. Why did he choose James? He targeted James first and only then arrested Peter. Why not Peter first? If the leaders of the Jewish community were particularly angry with James, it would have made sense for Herod to mark him as his first victim. James’ fearless denunciation of the leaders of the Jerusalem synagogues for their murderous designs on his brethren cost him his life. Like Stephen before him, he would almost certainly have known that in writing his epistle he was signing his own death warrant. Compare Stephen’s ringing condemnation in Acts 7 with that of James in chapter 5 of his epistle.

*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the **Just One (RV = Righteous One)**; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. – Acts 7:51-53*

*Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.... Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just (RV = **Righteous One**); and he doth not resist you. – James 5:1-6*

Who wrote the epistle? (cont'd)

The reaction of the Jewish authorities to James' letter was one of outrage and indignation – just as they had reacted to Stephen's brilliant indictment. Stephen they killed by their own hand but they were pleased beyond measure when Herod seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself with them and shed the blood of James the son of Zebedee who had so fearlessly shone the light of truth upon their corruption, violence, and greed.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. – John 3:19-21

James knew the risks when he penned his epistle yet he stood up courageously on behalf of his brethren and sisters. The example of Stephen and James must stir us to stand with them in outspoken defiance of a corrupt and evil world to bear witness to our Lord's coming and his Kingdom.

The apostle Paul portrays the spirit of James and indeed of all who are willing to take a stand for the Truth and bear the reproach of Christ when he wrote:

"...We will have none of the reticence of those who are ashamed, no deceitfulness or watering-down the word of God; but the way we commend ourselves to every human being with a conscience is by stating the Truth openly in the sight of God."

– **2 Corinthians 4:2**, (Jerusalem Bible)

Summary

The apostle James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John wrote this epistle. He wrote it to encourage his brethren and sisters who were enduring persecution at the hands of their relatives and former friends who were members of the same synagogues, primarily in Jerusalem, but perhaps as far away as Damascus and Antioch. He also addressed the persecutors knowing that an epistle circulating among the Christian members of the synagogue would be read by the other members too. His forthrightness cost him his life.

Although the authorship is generally ascribed to James, the Lord's brother, there is no convincing evidence to make this linkage. There is more convincing circumstantial evidence to link James, the son of Zebedee, as its author. The authorship, however, is not crucial to our understanding of the epistle. However, the exhortation in James' forthright stand for the Truth is one we must all take to heart.

Setting the Stage, Continued

Structure of the epistle **Purpose:** To encourage his brethren and sisters in their time of trial by offering them advice and spiritual counsel and by standing up to their persecutors.

The Salutation – identification of the writer and his audience: 1:1

Wisdom, Maturity, Patience: *to brethren and sisters* 1:2 – 18

- The purpose of trial 1:2 – 4
- Acquiring the divine perspective 1:4 – 11
- Trial and temptation 1:12 – 18

Pure Religion: *to the persecutors* 1:19 – 27

- Be doers of the word 1:19 – 25
- Pure religion and undefiled 1:26 – 27

Respect of Persons: *to brethren and sisters. and persecutors* 2:1 – 13

Faith and Works: *primarily to the persecutors* 2:14 – 26

The Wisdom that is from above: *to the persecutors* 3:1 – 4:10

- Be not many teachers 3:1
- The untamed tongue 3:2 – 12
- The wisdom of the true teacher 3:13 – 18

Friendship of the world is enmity with God: *to the persecutors* 4:1 – 5:6

- Friendship with the world 4:1 – 7
- Draw near to God 4:8 – 10
- Who are you that judgeth another 4:11 – 12
- What is your life 4:13 – 17
- Condemning the Conspirators 5:1 -6

Be patient; establish your hearts: *to brethren and sisters* 5:7 – 18

- The Divine perspective 5:7 – 11
- Swear not at all 5:12
- Healing for the weak 5:11 – 15
- Preventative medicine 5:16 – 18

Converting the sinner: *to brethren and sisters* 5:19 – 20

Note: The labeling in the above outline, “to the persecutors” and “to the brethren and sisters” is meant as a guide to the primary targets of James’ remarks. However, the principles he brings forth are as universal in their application as they are timeless no matter to whom they are primarily addressed.

The Salutation

James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

- ***a servant of God:*** Why does James not use the title of “Apostle” as do Peter and Paul? It is interesting that the Apostle John, James’ brother, did not use the title “Apostle” either but rather the unassuming title of “the elder.” We often think of John as the more prominent of the two but whenever they are mentioned together, James is mentioned first and John is identified by his kinship to James until James’ execution. This is evidence that James was, in the early days of the Jerusalem Ecclesia, very prominent indeed and second only to Peter in his influence. After writing this epistle, James briefly eclipsed Peter which, in the Father’s providence, shielded Peter from the evil designs of Herod. (Acts 12:2)

James introduces himself as a bondservant of God and of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He had learned a valuable lesson (cp. Mark 9: 34; 35; 10:35-37, 43) in the disputes among the disciples when they walked with the Lord, as to whom should be the greatest in the Kingdom. He and his brother had been the worst offenders in their misdirected ambition for recognition and greatness.

James “greatness” would lie in his willingness to serve his brethren and sisters even unto death. To serve one’s brethren and sisters is to serve the Lord himself. To do damage in any way to one’s brethren and sisters is to hurt the Lord himself. It is instructive to meditate upon the words of the Lord Jesus to Saul of Tarsus when he said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ...I am Jesus whom thou persecutest....” (Acts 9:4,5 cp. Matthew 25:40).

What a wonderful aspiration is expressed here! James no longer desires to be the “greatest” but rather to be the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cp. 1 Samuel 25:41).

May our ambition be so focused and our love for our brothers and sisters be so genuine as was that of James. In serving the “servants” of the son of David in humility and diligence we are serving him. In our sincere love for them we will discover the love of the son and of his Father for us. In that love is found the strength to do whatever we must in their service on behalf of our fellow servants.

- ***to the twelve tribes:*** James is addressing the twelve tribes of the “diaspora.” See the discussion on page 5 of the Introduction. The diaspora was represented in Jerusalem by synagogues which Jews from a particular region congregated. These Jews were “dwelling” in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5-11,41). “Dwelling” means to “house permanently.” Many of the converts from the day of Pentecost were from these synagogues.
- ***greeting:*** *wishes joy*; standard greeting and a nice transition to the next verse.

Wisdom, Maturity, Patience

The Purpose of Trial

James 1:2-3

*My brethren,
count it all joy
when ye fall into
divers tempta-
tions; Knowing
this, that the try-
ing of your faith
worketh pa-
tience....*

- **Count it all joy:** This is the divine perspective on life. But notice how it is up to us to choose that perspective. In 2 Peter 1, Peter reveals that God has given us all the tools but we have to choose to use them; we have to decide how we are going to react to the trials of life. “Count it all joy” – this is a commandment. It is up to us to cultivate the attitude which will allow us to obey. “*Let the peace of God rule in your hearts,*” says Paul in Colossians 3:15: “**Let**” means it is up to us to receive and act upon the gift of God. The joy we feel in trial is the same joy we feel in good times too. It is a constant. The trial does not produce joy (cp. Hebrews 12:11) in itself but rather it is in anticipation of the Father’s Kingdom that we rejoice. Trial serves to bring our vision of the Kingdom into sharper focus. The Lord Jesus endured “for the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:11) and so must we.
- **fall:** the word, “*fall*,” means to be surrounded by; or to come upon unexpectedly; or to be innocently involved in something. The brethren and sisters in James’ day encountered trial suddenly. Once the officials of temple and synagogue had formulated a plan of attack, the Ecclesia went suddenly from a position of being esteemed by the people (Acts 2:47) to one of being persecuted; its members arrested, and even executed by those who had been their friends and neighbours and perhaps even members of their own families.
- **Divers temptations:** means a variety of trials. They were being pressed from every side: at home, at work, in the synagogue. Imagine how it must have felt! Imagine how it would feel if the world were to suddenly turn on us. If you have had the courage to stand up for the truth in the face of opposition, you will already have a fellow-feeling for these courageous brethren and sisters of the first Ecclesia.
- **Knowing this:** Understanding this; being keenly aware of this.
- **The trying of your faith:** The only other occurrence of this form of the word for “*trying*” is in 1 Peter 1:7 where Peter compares the trial of faith to the refining of gold. The trials of this life prepare us for the glory of the next (James 1:12), purging the encrusted dross of the flesh with all its corruption.
- “**Worketh**” means produces; has as its end result. Cp. Romans 5:3-5.
- “**Patience**” a hopeful endurance. A key factor in the success of any endeavour which we undertake is to start with the end in mind. We will only endure if we take as our own the divine perspective on this life; if we are able to make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness the master vision and passion of our lives.
- **But let:** you must give permission. For God to work in you, you must be a willing participant (Philippians 2:12 – “*work out*” = same Greek word as “*worketh*” in James 1:3, *katargazomai*). Philippians 2:13 tells us that if we are engaged in working out our salvation it is God who empowers us to be successful: “*for it is God which worketh (energeo, energizes) in you.*” The grounds for rationalizing our weakness have been cut out from under us. See Philippians 4:12,13 – “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*”
- **perfect work:** The RSV renders this as “*let steadfastness have its full effect.*” The word for “perfect” means complete, whole, or mature. Endurance of trial will produce spiritual maturity, if we let it.

James 1: 4

*...But let pa-
tience have her
perfect work,
that ye may be
perfect and en-
tire, wanting
nothing*

Wisdom, Maturity, Patience, Continued

Acquiring the Divine Perspective:

James 1:5

"If any of you lack wisdom...."

- **lack:** "be destitute of." More than just an absence of a quality but to be in desperate need as a starving person lacks food.
- **wisdom:** not wisdom in general or intelligence but rather the spiritual insight to deal effectively with trials. When trials come upon us, we can respond, "**Why me?**" and be led down a path of self-pity, unhappiness, depression and loss of faith; or we can respond, "**Why not me?**" This is the divine perspective. Paul gives us an insight into this perspective when he talks about his own trials in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Here is a man who had no permanent home, who traipsed around the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, who was in constant danger, stoned, beaten, ship-wrecked and he talks about this "light affliction which is but for a moment!" Here is a faith that can withstand any hardship. This is the attitude which sings hymns of praise in the darkest dungeon. When he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," they were not empty words. This state of mind can be ours too: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus....," says Paul. There's that little word again, "**Let.**" It is up to you! Is it the hope of the Kingdom that motivates you? Is your faith powerful, by God's grace, to overcome the world with its temptations and trials? Or, do you let the trials and problems of life undermine your faith?

James 1:5,6

"...let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;

- **Let him ask of God:** If we attempt to be **self**-disciplined and **self**-controlled merely, we will fail. But if we lack discipline and self-control we will fail too. In fact there are many, many ways to fail in our walk to the Kingdom. There is only one way to succeed. We must be "strong in the strength which God supplies in His beloved son." To attain that strength we must PRAY! "Pray without ceasing," says Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18); without giving up; consistently; on behalf of ourselves and our fellows; yearning for the Kingdom (Isaiah 62:6,7).

Prayer is the fundamental action of the fully-clad spiritual warrior of Ephesians 6:10-18. It is in the hours of prayer that we can truly come to grips with the weaknesses that beset us; it is here, in humble supplication that our greatest victories can be won before ever we meet the temptation or the trial on the field of battle. Before the trial of the cross there must be a quiet Gethsemane. This is where the heart is set to endure all that the enemy can do. **1 John 5:4** *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

The prayer for wisdom is one petition which the Father will always grant. It is a promise. Let us have the courage to seize it. We will acquire on our knees the wisdom, the divine perspective, which will greet every trial in joyful anticipation of the Kingdom. Without this divine perspective we will fail in our attempt to follow our Lord through the trials of life. *With* this divine perspective, there is nothing we cannot accomplish in His name!

- **liberally:** This word means wholeheartedly or without reserve; no hidden motives or duplicity; single-mindedly. The Father and the son are determined that we should succeed in our walk to the Kingdom, if we will only do our small part. Cp. Matthew 7:7; Luke 12:32.

Wisdom, Maturity, Patience, Continued

Acquiring the Divine Perspective: (cont'd)

James 1:5,6

"... and upbraideth not and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

- **that ye may be perfect:** Again this word means mature, whole, complete. It does not mean completely without fault.
- **entire, wanting nothing:** complete in every part; balanced; cp. Acts 3:16
- **upbraideth not:** The word means to chastise; to revile. God commends his love towards us that when we were sinners, Christ died for us. The humble penitent who comes to Him seeking wisdom and strength to endure to the end, He will not cast out. He will instruct such a person in love and help to bear whatever trial or circumstance that life can offer.
- **it shall be given him:** This is an unqualified promise as in James 5:15 (see notes). There is no doubt that if we ask God for the wisdom of the divine perspective on the trials of life, it will be granted us.
- **But let him ask in faith:** If we have doubts, we need to deal with them. If we have questions, we must diligently search for answers. **Hebrews 11:6** - *but without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*
- **nothing wavering:** No doubting. Not one whit. No inner debate. Whatever other problems or trials we might have we must come to grips with the fundamental issue of faith. God not only exists but He answers prayer. Without that basic settled conviction, nothing else is possible. He will always answer affirmatively a prayer for wisdom in dealing with the trials and temptations of life.
- **he that wavereth:** This is the person who asks but, in asking, secretly doubts the outcome.
- **is like a wave of the sea:** Subject to the currents and eddies, winds and storms of circumstance, such a person has no settled faith; no foundation for growth; nowhere for the wisdom of God to take root.
- **driven with the wind and tossed:** Controlled by the winds of circumstance and not by the Spirit of the Father. To be tossed is to be in a state of constant agitation and anxiety. The peace of God is unknown to such a person. See Isaiah 57:20-21. This person weak in faith will eventually fall victim to wickedness. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The storm-tossed vessel is only safe with the Lord on board.
- **A double-minded man:** Such a person will receive nothing of God. The only relevant question to put to such a person is that which Elijah put to the people on Mt. Carmel: (1 Kings 18:21) "*And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.*" The decision is clear-cut. But how difficult a choice it is sometimes! The condemnation of Israel lay in the fact that they understood that the LORD was God but at the same time they worshipped Baal because the rites of Baal were very enticing to the flesh. We should meditate deeply upon the meaning of double-mindedness as it affects us. Is the modern Israel of God in any better state than they were in Elijah's day? Do we need to pray the prayer of the father of the possessed child when he became conscious of his need and of his weakness and cried out to Jesus with tears of despair: "*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!*" That man, in his grief and need had come to the place where faith could begin to grow. What will it take for each of us to be brought to that place?

Wisdom, Maturity, Patience, Continued

Acquiring the Divine perspective: (cont'd)

James 1:9-11:

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

- **Let the brother of low degree...but the rich:** The tendency is for the poor to envy the rich and for the rich to be caught up in the maintenance and acquisition of wealth, often at the expense of the poor. See **Proverbs 30:8,9** – materialism is a most subtle and damaging factor in the erosion of faith. Here it divides brethren and causes the rich among the Synagogue to turn in violence and fraud (see chapter 5:4) upon their much poorer brethren, followers of the carpenter from Galilee. Here is the ultimate double-mindedness of the persecutor: Blessing God in the Synagogue and Temple but then cursing and condemning his brethren who follow Christ in fear that his wealth and status were being threatened. See **John 11:48** for a bald statement of this greed-driven fear.

James brings them together, rich and poor, humble follower of the Lord Jesus and haughty persecutor, on the same level in a consideration of life in all its vanity. The destiny of the rich and of the poor is the same as far as this life is concerned. Only the judgement of God matters in the end. (cp. **Ecclesiastes 12:13**)

James warns his brethren of the danger of envying the rich. *“Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven”* says Jesus *“for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (**Matthew 6:19-21, 28-34; Psalm 103:15-17; Isaiah 40:6,7,30,31**). What an exhortation for us! Where is our treasure? Where do we invest our time and effort and resources? Materialism is a state of mind. You do not have to be rich to be materialistic. Materialism is always destructive of faith. The divine perspective shows us that we are no better than the grass of the field. Some blades are greener, taller, produce a gorgeous flower but in the end all wither and perish and fade away.

As in the days of Noah, when the people were preoccupied with their business and the cares of this life and *“knew not until the flood came and took them all away.”* James tells the rich (**5:3**) that they have laid up treasure for the last days” – a treasure of judgment, of terror, of bitter remorse and destruction.

God sees the end from the beginning and so does the eye of faith. It is that vision which sustains, which puts life in true perspective. Like our Lord, we can endure anything for the joy set before us if that joy is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

James exhorts his brethren to rejoice in their exaltation in Christ and to beware of envy and of honouring the rich merely because of their high station in life. The rich are warned too – these being almost exclusively non-Christians (remember the brethren and sisters had given up their riches for the common good) to remember that they were not excused from Godliness because of their self-serving “busy-ness.”

Trial and Temptation:

James 1:12-15

"Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:"

- **Blessed is that man that endures trial:** This is the underlying theme of James' epistle. He begins his letter in praise of faith tempered in the furnace of trial; he continues it now and comes back to it in chapter 5. It is no accident that he follows his words about the vanity of riches and the eventual fate of the rich with a deeper look at endurance, a powerful warning, and a cogent exhortation. (cp. **1 Peter 4:12-16; 3:12-14; Matthew 10:22**).

- **Temptations:** We must here differentiate between temptation to sin and temptation in the form of trial – our faith is tempered by the difficulties (trials/temptations) of life: persecution, subtle pressures to conform to fleshly thinking both in the world and in the Ecclesia, physical illness in ourselves or our loved ones, loss of loved ones, disastrous loss of possessions, employment, opportunity... in short the pressures which all of us must stand up to and which can weaken faith if taken the wrong way.

Temptation to sin cannot be attributed to God. However, trial can lead us into sin if we react unwisely. The conversation between Job and his wife illustrates this point:

Job 2:9,10 *Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.*

Job's faith and trust in his God did not depend upon a continuously blessed and happy life in terms of material comfort. That's what the adversary thought: Take away from Job everything he values in this world and he will turn away from God. The adversary was wrong about Job. Would he also be wrong if he said the same thing about us? The "Crown of Life" is the only thing of real value which we possess and we do possess it if we remain faithful to the end. (cp. **2 Timothy 4:5,8**)

- **I am tempted of God:** In the depths of despair and depression, rationalization reigns supreme and sin lies close at hand. Sin is justified because of the harshness of the present trial of faith. But God is faithful and will not ask us to endure that which we are unable to bear. In the end, failure is due to unwillingness to persevere rather than to inability.

1 Cor 10:13 *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

Trial and Temptation: (cont'd)

James 1:16-18

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.... Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning...”

- **Every man is tempted:** James places the responsibility for sin squarely where it belongs – with the sinner! The fact that James can only imagine God and the sinner’s own lust as a possible source of sin is a good point to bring up when talking to those who believe in a fallen angel tempter. James eliminates God as a possible source and we are left with human lust as the only source of sin. It is notable that wherever in the Bible the source of sin is spoken of, the “devil” is conspicuously absent. Consider the following: Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:14, 17, 18, 23; 8:6-8; Mark 7:21-23; 1 John 2:15-17.
- **Do not err:** “*Be not deceived*” is the real meaning of this phrase. We have the resources and capacity to overcome every trial which comes our way. It is useless to blame God for our failures. **Proverbs 19:3** (RSV) *When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD.*
- **Every good gift and every perfect gift:** “Good” because of the source of the gift and “perfect” because of its effect. “Good” means “excellent” and “perfect” means whole, complete, or mature. It is the same word used by James in 1:4: **“But let patience have her perfect work.”** The patient endurance of trial brings spiritual maturity.
- **From above:** The Lord Jesus understood this perfectly. He acknowledged the Father in every aspect of his life: The Father gave him his works (John 5:36); his disciples (John 6:37); his Name (17:11 cp. Philippians 2:9); all things (John 3:35). God has likewise given us all things that pertain to life and Godliness (2 Peter 1:3,4) therefore we must demonstrate our gratitude in every aspect of our lives: **1 Corinthians 10:31:** *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*
- **Father of lights:** God is the source of all light in the universe. His word generates light whether literal (Genesis 1:3 **“And God said, Let there be light....”**) or spiritual (Psalm 119:105 **“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”**). God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the “light of the world” (John 8:12 **“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”**). God is our Father too (Matthew 5:14 **“Ye are the light of the world.”**) Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:12; 1Thessalonians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6.
- **No variableness:** The Father is the very model of single-mindedness. He can only be the source of that which is good and right. He could never be the cause of sin. (1John 5:7 **“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”**). There is no shadow of turning as of a planet in its rotation turning from light to darkness. He is the source of all light, who *“dwells in unapproachable light”* (1 Timothy 6:16 RSV). The darkness and inconsistency in our lives is a product of our own weakness and are not of God’s devising. (John 3:19)

Trial and Temptation: (cont'd)

James 1:16-18

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures

- **Begat he us:** The Father does not lure us into evil but rather has caused us to be reborn according to His will (cp. John 1:12-13; 3:3-7); to be first-fruits of His new creation to eternal life. If we live according to our own will and not that of the Father, then what will be born is the firstfruits of lust, which is sin, and the end result of sin will be death.
- **with the word of truth:** The word is ever the instrument by which the Father performs his creative acts. (1 Peter 1:23) *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.* (2 Corinthians 4:6) *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
- **Firstfruits:** Christ is the firstfruits from among the dead; the firstborn of a new creation (1 Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:18). In Christ, we have become citizens of the new creation demonstrating our loyalty in all that we do. (Ephesians 4:24) The “firstfruits” in the Jewish order of sacrifice and offering was a prelude to a plentiful harvest. It meant that the first of all their abundance was dedicated to God. So it is with us. We are that offering of firstfruits offered in preparation for the great harvest to come. Let us see to it that our offering is acceptable to our God and Father. (Revelation 14:4).

Pure Religion

Be Doers of the Word

James 1:19, 20

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the right-eousness of God.

- **Wherefore my beloved brethren:** The word “wherefore” is different from the one normally used to denote “therefore” meaning to express a consequence of what has gone before. Rather, it marks the beginning of a new thought and is translated as, “Ye know this,” in the RV. If you can picture James writing to an assembled Synagogue, he has been writing to his brethren and sisters and now turns his attention to those who are not followers of the Lord. He is saying, “You already know this, my beloved brethren BUT...” Indeed his beloved brethren in Christ understood very well what he was about to say. However, there were many who read his letter who were not the brethren of “the Beloved” and who in wrath and jealousy were persecuting those who were.
- **Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:** These brethren by race needed to be, more than anything else “swift to hear.” The “poor” or common people among the Jews heard the word of the Lord Jesus Christ gladly. After careful consideration of Peter’s words in Acts 2:37 cried out, “*Men and brethren what shall we do?*” Their actions were those of loving obedience to the word which they had heard and understood.

The rich, on the other hand, were swift to speak: lying words taken under oath! When Stephen said to these rich and powerful men what Peter had said to the common people, they did not consider his words. They cried out against him in outraged indignation and stopped their ears and rushed upon him in wrath with murder in their hearts. (Acts 7:57) “*Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord....*”

- **For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:** James cautions these men with a truism that should have been obvious even to the most elementary student of God’s word. Alas, it is a truism that needs repeating in our own day in the Ecclesia of Christ! These individuals in their wrath against the followers of the Lord thought that they were doing God’s service! (John 16:2,3) “*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*” Note that the followers of the Lord had to be “put out” of the Synagogues. They did not leave voluntarily. One cannot achieve a righteous end by an unrighteous means. Those Jews who “knew the Father” were much more likely to come to know the Lord Jesus. But these evil, greedy, persecutors of Christ’s brethren knew not the Father nor did they understand the meaning of “true religion.” They saw everything through the prism of their avarice and pride. (Cp. Proverbs 2:5; Hosea 4:1; 6:6; 2 Peter 1:2)
- **Wherefore:** This is a different word from that used in verse 19. This word does mean “Therefore” and is used to express a consequence of that which has gone before. It is only by a willingness to carefully consider what others say to us and by abandoning the anger which shuts the mind and inflames the heart that we may lay aside the corruption of the flesh.

Be Doers of the Word (cont'd)

James 1:21

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

- **lay apart all filthiness:** To lay apart means to cast off as an athlete eager to run a race in ancient times would cast off his clothes. (cp. Romans 18:12; Ephesians 4:22,25; Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Peter 2:1). Filthiness is moral corruption, vileness (James 2:2); *“filth of the flesh”* meaning depravity (1 Peter 3:21).
- **superfluity of naughtiness:** Superfluity means super-abundance. Naughtiness means malice, malignity, depravity, wickedness (cp. Romans 1:28-32 – definitely not speaking of believers! “Maliciousness” in this passage is the same word as “naughtiness” in James.) This would hardly serve as a valid characterization of the early Ecclesia but is a very accurate picture of the attitudes of the persecuting zealots of the Jewish community.
- **receive with meekness:** Receive in humility. Meekness and humility go hand in hand (cp. Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; Matthew 11:29). In Galatians 5:23 it is associated with self-control. “...it is only the humble heart which is also the meek, and which, as such, does not fight against God and... struggle and contend with Him.”³ See Acts 5:39: The persecutors had not been able to persevere in following Gamaliel’s advice!
- **the engrafted word:** Engrafted should read implanted (RV, RSV). Implanted has the connotation of the germination and growth of a seed internally while engrafted has the connotation of the growth of an external addition. **1 Peter 1:23** *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.* Cp. Matthew 13:21. The word is not going to be helpful if it is an external add-on. It must affect us internally. It must be in our hearts as well as in our heads!
- **save your souls:** These people had put themselves out of the realm of salvation. Their hard-hearted viciousness knew no bounds. They could reverse the situation only by laying aside their “malignity” and by listening to the still, small, voice of God’s word (1 Kings 19:12). They were so hardened and filled with such persecuting zeal that even the most sensitive of their number to the word of God, Saul of Tarsus, had to be stopped dead in his tracks by the glorified Lord himself before he could bring himself to even consider the gospel message.

³ Vine’s Expository Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984 Revision, page 401, Article: Meek, Meekness

Be Doers of the Word (cont'd)

James 1:22-25

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

- **Be doers of the word and not hearers only:** “Doer” is the Greek word “Poietes” from which we derive our English word, “Poet” *See Acts 17:28*. It has the connotation of “performing” a play or a poem not just reciting it or creating it. The word must not only be heard but performed from the heart. What a wonderful exhortation to us all – to become performing poets of God’s word, bringing to the world of unbelief its beautiful message of hope! What a touching image James brings to the hardened hearts of these blind leaders of the blind. They were “hearers only” but having ears to hear, they heard not. Their actions were not generated by the beauty of God’s word but rather by the malicious envy which motivated every aspect of their lives. They reckoned that their descent from Abraham and their academic knowledge of the word would save them. *See Romans 2:27-29 and Matthew 3:9,10*. Not so, says James: they needed to be begotten of the word (v. 18); receive the word (v. 21); perform the word (v. 22).
- **deceiving your own selves:** *See Jeremiah 9:2-6*. Jeremiah seems to be speaking about these very people!
- **beholding his natural face in a glass:** this individual looks into a mirror and sees only a reflection of himself. It is an idealized version of himself too. Any glaring imperfections are soon glossed over by the mind of the flesh as he goes his way secure in his false image which is a far from accurate perception of his real state and the ugliness which, in reality, has overtaken him. These are the persecutors; the rich; the smug; the ruthless eradicators of anything that stands in their way. Everything in their universe is centred on themselves. However, even though the primary focus here is on the persecutor, there is a message for the follower of Christ too. If there is anything just as indicative of a lack of appreciation for the word of God as pride and malice it is a weak self-indulgent attitude. This person’s focus is on self too. He beholds his “natural” face and forgets that the image being created in him is that of the Lord. He focuses on his weakness and does not see beyond it. He forgets what manner of man he was – he was Christ’s man – but now he is lost in weakness and despair, justifying the sin which has allowed to overtake him.
- **But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty:** Here is the mirror of truth. If these doctors of the law would only “look into” – peer carefully and diligently; not into the law of bondage that they had forged from the Law of God given to Moses but with the attitude that it was rather “the perfect – whole, complete – law of liberty!” With this attitude their diligence to the law would inevitably lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:24).
- **doer of the work...blessed in his deed:** If they were to follow this course, they would graduate from being lawyers to being “poets” performing the work of God in spirit and in truth and be blessed in the doing.

Pure Religion and Undefined

James 1:26

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”

- ***seem to be religious:*** He has the outward appearance of religion. Cp. Luke 16:15; Matthew 23:27; 2 Timothy 3:5. They have a form of Godliness but deny to themselves its power! There is a powerful exhortation here for us. There is a danger in any religious movement of the ossifying process which sees the structure of the religion become more important than its substance. It happened to Judaism; it eventually happened to “Christianity;” it can happen to us. Indeed, some would argue that the process has already begun. The words of the Lord, spoken to his Jewish brethren, have had their grim fulfillment down the centuries:

John 5:39 (RSV): *You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*

- ***bridleth not his tongue:*** The disproportionate power of the tongue is a key theme in James’ epistle. He will come back to it powerfully in chapter 3. To bridle means to control as a powerful horse is controlled with a bit (Cp. James 3:2,3). **Matthew 12:34** *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* These people defiled themselves with lies and false witness and cursing of their brethren who followed Jesus.
- ***deceiveth his own heart:*** See Ephesians 5:6 for another occurrence of the same word and Titus 1:10 for a related word expressing this idea. Self deception is the hallmark of false religion. The deluded person is apt to react in unreasoning hatred of that which threatens his delusion. To experience anger, wrath, and malice in defence of what one believes to be true is a sure sign that one is “deceiving his own heart.”

2 Tim 3:12 *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.*

- ***religion is vain:*** This form of religion is empty. It lacks the power to transform or do anything except breed strife and unhappiness. It is idolatry (Acts 14:15); it is pompous falsehood (1 Corinthians 3:20); it is empty tradition (1 Peter 1:18).

Mark 7:6,7 *This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Pure Religion and Undefiled

James 1:27

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

- **Pure religion and undefiled:** Pure is from the Greek word “Katharos” which means to “purify” or purge from it all unclean elements. These rich and powerful persecutors were so heady and high-minded in their approach to the law that they had forgotten what were the “weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.” When Jesus defined the “weightier matters of the law,” he also provided us with a very simple definition of what faith is. His words were taken from Micah 6:8:
He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
The Lord chose to say, “faith” rather than “to walk humbly with thy God” and in so doing brilliantly gave us an insight into the most basic element of a faith pleasing to the Father: to walk in humility *with* Him. What more perfect expression of Divine fellowship could we wish for? “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up,” says James in 4:10. But they would not. Cp. 1 John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:22.
This religion is undefiled because it is free from the destructive mixture of pride and hypocrisy which so characterized the religion of the rich. They could scrupulously observe the laws of contamination in their dealings with Pilate but willfully shed the blood of the Son of God.
- **visit the fatherless and widows:** Pure religion is a simple thing. One test of true religion is its product. Is there an active concern for the weak and the needy? Or is there a narrow-minded bigotry which is so engaged in strife and self-aggrandizement that the “weightier matters” are missed and the innocent suffer from the neglect or active malice of a foolish leadership? These Jewish doctors of the law should have known these fundamentals of pure religion but they were so involved in protecting their traditions, their place and their nation that they were blind to the meaning of their Father’s word: Cp. Psalm 68:5, 10:14; Isaiah 1:16,17; 1 John 3:7-19; John 13:35.
Rather than plead the cause of the widow and orphan, they were actively engaged in creating more widows and orphans in the community of their brethren who followed the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **keep himself unspotted from the world:** A paraphrase might be “to guard against the morally staining effects of worldliness.” The rich who saw the way of Christ as such a threat to themselves and their position (cp. John 11:48) had long ago given themselves up to every kind of worldly corruption. The word “unspotted” means “unblemished” as in a sacrifice. (Cp. 2 Peter 3:14). They were utterly “conformed to this world” and so their religion was worthless. (Cp. Matthew 6:19-21).

Respect of Persons

James 2:1-4

*"My brethren,
have not the
faith of our Lord
Jesus Christ, the
Lord of glory,
with respect of
persons. For if
there come unto
your assembly a
man with a gold
ring, in goodly
apparel, and
there come in
also a poor man
in vile raiment;
And ye have re-
spect to him that
weareth the gay
clothing, and say
unto him, Sit
thou here in a
good place; and
say to the poor,
Stand thou there,
or sit here under
my footstool:*

Respect of persons: James is warning against favouritism on two fronts, that of the brethren and sisters and that of the rich persecutors. The word has the connotation of "...one who, when responsible to give judgment, has respect to the position, rank, popularity, or circumstances of men, instead of their intrinsic conditions, preferring the rich and powerful to those who are not."⁴ See 2 Chronicles 19:7; Proverbs 24:23; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17.

The fundamental principle which should have informed all of their actions was that stated by Paul:

Romans 2:11 *"For there is no respect of persons with God."*

Cp. Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17; Proverbs 24:23; Acts 6:11,13

The rich were, because of their willingness to bribe witnesses and officials (cp. Amos 5:11,12), and subvert justice, the epitome of this fault. James here is employing irony, gently at first, and then more sternly. The brethren and sisters were still in awe of the rich and powerful leaders of the Synagogue, those who occupied the Chief Seats.

*"...the rulers of the synagogue, Rabbis, distinguished Pharisees, and others, who sought honour of men, claimed the 'chief seats,' which were placed with their backs to the ark, and facing the worshippers. These seats... were made objects of special ambition (Matthew 23:6), and rank, dignity, or seniority entitled a Rabbi or other influential man to priority. Our Lord expressly refers to this (Matthew 23:6) as one of the characteristic manifestations of Pharisaical Pride."*⁵ These men whom the followers of Christ had always esteemed were now actively engaged in persecuting them or their brethren. Yet old habits die hard. Even brethren in Christ were still obsequious as these men entered the Synagogue! They still dishonoured the poor by their attitude even though many of them were their brethren in Christ!

partial in yourselves: Partiality is a significant symptom of doublemindedness. The word means to separate thoroughly; make a difference. It is as if we can separate our minds into two compartments: one reserved for our life in the world and another for our life in the Ecclesia. It is only when "endurance (continuing experience of standing up for Christ) has had its effect of making us whole" (paraphrase of James 1:4) that the walls which the flesh sets up to fracture our lives and dissipate our energies come down. Christ will make us whole, if we let him; if we will "come to him that we might have life!"

⁴ Vine's Expository Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984 Revision, page 469, Article: Persons

⁵ Edersheim, A. "The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ," W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, page 241

Respect of Persons, Continued

James 2:4
(cont'd)

*Are ye not then
partial in your-
selves, and are
become judges
of evil thoughts?*

partial in yourselves (cont'd): We cry with the Psalmist “Unite my heart to fear thy name” ⁶ – we are torn in so many directions but, as the Lord instructed Martha, “...one thing is needful...” and that is to draw near to the Master and listen in loving attention to his word. It is that word upon which we should act and not upon the vain and foolish voices of the flesh.

become judges of evil thoughts: Would you too become judges with evil thoughts? Meditate on this. To make distinctions between brethren, to disdain some while honouring others, for whatever reason, is horribly wrong. The word “*evil*” here is “poneros” which means hurtful, diseased, malicious, and carries the connotation of being culpable, subject to condemnation. That is what factious thinking is in the Ecclesia. I wonder if we would be so quick to gossip or to slander our brethren and sisters if we really took to heart such passages as: ***Proverbs 6:19*** – the LORD hates those who sow discord between brethren. Do we really want to number ourselves among those whom the Lord hates? ***Matthew 5:22*** – to consider one’s brethren contemptible is to put oneself on the wrong side of judgment. ***Hebrews 12:15*** – strife and division can cause “many to be defiled.” Our Lord died for us, gave everything in an attempt to save us when we were indeed contemptible. What right have we, then, to sit in judgment on our brethren and sisters?

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 *"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."*

The love of Christ “constrains us” – ***sets our limits***. That is what “constrains” means. Our duty is to love and nurture one another. Period. It is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” and if we are among those who are continually backbiting and fostering division for whatever reason, we have put ourselves outside the circle of the Father’s love and stepped into that unhappy circle of those whom He hates. The flesh loves division – it is a method of self-aggrandizement for those who perpetrate it whether out of Pharisaic self-righteousness or a smug liberal superiority. We seem to be especially prone to “cliques” and judging others on appearance or social status. Remember that we will be judged on the basis of our treatment of others and especially of those who are esteemed by us to be the “least.” Do you have the courage to reach out to those who are not in your circle and to really include them and make them feel welcome? Your Father will bless you if you do!

⁶ Psalm 86:11,12, Note the order: Teach me thy way; I will walk in thy truth; unite my heart; I will praise Thee with all my heart; glorify Thy name forever more. We too must learn the truth and lead a life of wholehearted praise in order to glorify Him in immortal joy.

Respect of Persons, Continued

James 2:5-9

"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:"

Hearken, my beloved brethren: "Listen carefully my beloved brethren, says James. Notice his attitude when correcting his errant brethren. It is an attitude we would do well to emulate. Cp. 2 Timothy 2:24,25

Hath not God chosen the poor: Poverty of itself is no virtue. The poor can be as susceptible as anyone to the root of all kinds of evil: the love of material wealth. But an attitude devoid of materialism combined with a wealth of faith will enable one to become an heir of the Kingdom. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness..." said the Lord Jesus, and everything else in your life will fall into place. That is a promise! Paul said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and how to abound" (Philippians 4:11, 12). In other words, his material circumstances were irrelevant to his attitude and to his faith! That is the attitude we need to cultivate! That is the faith which overcomes the world – it is invincible! "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37).

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Do not rich men oppress you: This same class of individuals who were so intent on eradicating the Ecclesia of Christ, who occupied the chief seats in the Synagogue and who demanded to sit at the head of the table when invited to dine, were still being kowtowed to by misguided servants of Christ. Why? For no other reason than their wealth and their status and the habitual observance of these exaggerated courtesies. One can almost see James shake his head in disbelief as he pens these words!

Do not they blaspheme that worthy name: The name of Christ is that "worthy name" by which they are called. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. He has been given **The Name** which is above every name (Philippians 2:9) and he is the full expression of the Father's glory. These rich men to whom James refers are not brethren. They are blasphemers, filled with implacable hatred. James exhorts his brethren to put away partiality and to love all for the love of Christ. They greatly err if they think that flattering the rich will make any difference in the day of persecution. Rather they are in danger of losing everything in their attempt to straddle both worlds (cp. 1 Kings 18:21). So might we.

The Royal Law: Paul says that the Law of Moses is summed up by this law (Romans 13:9 cp. Matthew 22:37-40). It is notable that the context of Leviticus 19:15-18 is identical to that of James' teaching. Some brethren in Christ were breaking this law in a minor way compared to the persecutors, a point of irony which would not be lost upon the persecutors.

Respect of Persons, Continued

James 2:9-13

“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

- ***convinced of the law as transgressors:*** In chastising his brethren in Christ, James launches a burning shaft at the persecutors who are also reading his letter. Everything that James says to his misguided brethren applies much more specifically to the rich persecutors. They are truly the blasphemers, the respecters of persons, the sinners, and worst of all, transgressors of the law. They took such charges seriously. In fact, their consciences were so raw that they reacted in absolute fury when confronted with just such a charge by Stephen (Acts 7:53). They boasted that they had preserved the law, “built a hedge around it,” but, in reality, they had *“received the law by the disposition of angels and had not kept it.”*
- ***offend in one point:*** See Galatians 3:10; Romans 7:7,8. The law was meant to engender faith. Judaism had gone down the wrong path. They attempted to keep the law in every point and so earn salvation by works. They could not do it. They could not stand to have this principle, which would destroy their entire religious edifice, stated so baldly.
- ***adultery and murder:*** Here James is speaking indirectly to the persecuting rich by using examples which would be extreme if applied to brethren. These examples make perfect sense in the context of the non-Christian readers of the epistle. Their adulterous liaisons were infamous. They could put away their wives on a whim and as lightly take another (Matthew 19:3-9). They had now become killers with hearts full of hatred (Acts 7:52-60; James 5:6). They were transgressors and had put themselves outside the bounds of the covenant (Romans 2:27).
- ***so speak and so do:*** This statement was as applicable to the brethren in Christ in James’ day as it was to the Jewish persecutors as it is to us. James reveals his attitude toward the law by calling it the “law of liberty.” Judaism had made it into a law of bondage. The true keeper of the law is, as Micah put it, he who “does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God.” We must all speak and act knowing that we shall be held accountable for our words and deeds. (Hebrews 9:27; James 5:9).
- ***judgment without mercy:*** The brethren in Christ had to adjust their thinking to the new reality of life in Christ and would be humbled and made wiser by these words. But how James’ words would have stung the persecutor! He who plotted and lied and perverted judgment! (cp. Proverbs 21:13; Romans 2:2-5; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10,11)
- ***mercy rejoiceth against judgment:*** The Father is merciful. All our righteousness is as filthy rags before Him. The great mystery is that he is still willing to love us; to provide garments of righteousness if we will demonstrate our love for Him by our obedience to His Son and our love for one another (Lamentations 3:22,23; Psalm 103:3,4).

Faith and Works

James 2:14-18

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ...Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works."

- ***What doth it profit:*** What advantage is there to faith if it is contradicted by one's manner of life? Can faith – belief alone – save him? Clearly the answer to the rhetorical question is, "No!" However, those in many other denominations would have us believe that an inward faith is all sufficient to earmark one for salvation. This is a pernicious doctrine because it relieves us from the necessity of doing our part in the process of salvation. "Work out your own salvation..." says Paul, "for it is God which worketh in you." The brethren who were being partial to the rich in their Synagogues were guilty of despising the poor in their disrespectful treatment of them. However, in James' day, the care of the poor within the Ecclesia was very carefully and lovingly maintained (cp. Acts 2:44; 4:32; 6:1, "the daily ministration"). The rich, however, far from caring for the poor of their number were actively engaged in their oppression, whether or not they were followers of the Lord. (See James 5:4)
- ***faith if it hath not works:*** A "faith" which has no positive outward expression is not faith. It is a dead thing, useless, and of no advantage. It is "alone" – not connected to the Father. When and if such a person prays he is talking to himself. The brethren to whom James is writing were guilty of the fault of respecting persons. James chastises them in love but the rich persecutors feel the full brunt of his righteous indignation. Their religion is vain – as empty as their Herod-built temple. Their works were the works of greed, ambition, and avarice. They had taken a God-given Law, a thing of beauty and simplicity and turned it, for their own material advantage into a corrupting cadaver upon which they fed like so many filthy maggots! They, of all people, were in desperate need of the regenerating work of Christ.
- ***Matthew 3:7-9*** *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."*
- ***I will show thee my faith by my works:*** Faith is not faith which has no outward demonstration in the life of the believer. James challenges these people to show their faith by works of loving kindness and open-handed charity (cp. Deuteronomy 24:14-22; Jeremiah 7:6) the very things which the Law set out as standards of righteous living. The persecutors were very good at pious platitudes but they were loathe to part with their money even to support their own families! (Mark 7:11-13). In this the followers of Jesus were superior and James invites a close comparison. Who truly followed the spirit of the Law? The answer was clear. (Cp. Acts 4:35).

Faith and Works continued

James 2:19-26

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: is justified, and not by faith only.... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

the demons believe and tremble (shudder): Even the insane believe in God. They cannot produce works of faith because of their mental disability but these rich persecutors cannot produce works of faith because of their moral disability. They are blind and deaf to the things of the spirit. (Cp. Jeremiah 5:21; Matthew 13:13-15; Romans 8:5-8). They do well to believe but without the works of faith there is only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:27). Well might they tremble and shudder at such a prospect! That these rich fools knew the enormity of their crimes is indicated by passages such as John 3:2 in which Nicodemus says, "We **know** you are a teacher come from God." The "we" in this passage includes the same people to whom James is now writing! They are "vain men" indeed; empty men; men without hope trapped in the clutches of their own greed.

justified by works: James very ironically appeals to the example of Abraham. He could have chosen any number of examples from Abraham's life, his obedience to leave the land of his fathers for example. But no, James chooses the ultimate example of faith expressed in works, the offering of his only son. Just as Stephen had done before him, James is rubbing their noses in their unholy murder of the promised seed, the latter-day Isaac, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works:

Romans 4:20-21 *"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."*

The word "staggered" in Romans 4:20 is "diakrino" the same as in James 1:6, "waver" or "doubt" and in 2:4 "partial" or of "divided mind." Abraham wholeheartedly believed. The word for "strong" means to be "empowered." That is the essence of true faith. It is empowering, enabling one to move forward in faithful action! Because Abraham knew without any shadow of a doubt that what God had promised he was able to perform, so he himself was able to perform any act in God's service, even the offering of his only son. He knew that the promise was to be fulfilled in Isaac. He knew that if he were to offer Isaac, God would have to raise him from the dead. In this knowledge, he did not hesitate to act (Hebrews 11:17-19!). Abraham's faith empowered him to live for God. Works in themselves do not justify but a faith that works does! Abraham's faith was "perfected" by his works. An inactive faith is a spiritless corpse. The spirit of God is shown by the works of those who are true doers, "poets," of His word, performing His will with all their hearts.

The Wisdom From Above

Be not many teachers

James 3:1

"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

brethren be not many teachers: In some measure these words applied to the household of faith but more pointedly did they apply to the rich: the Pharisee, the Sadducees and the Scribes. See Romans 2:17-21! They were so proud of their understanding of the law and yet they understood not one jot of it. How pathetically sad that the belief they held so tenaciously would be but a one-way ticket to destruction at the judgment seat of their long-awaited Messiah. May the same not be true of us!

greater condemnation: Greater responsibility. Knowledge brings responsibility. The greater one's knowledge the more good or ill one may do. With the responsibility of teaching comes the duty to live an exemplary life. A teacher is looked-up to and his example emulated by those who hear him. A teacher who does not live what he teaches gives the adversary a golden opportunity to "speak reproachfully" and so the Lord himself is brought into disrepute by those who claim to speak for him.

The untamed tongue

James 3:2-5

"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths Behold also the ships Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

offend all: We all make many mistakes. The mistakes of the teacher can have tremendous negative effects in precept and example. These vile usurpers of the Law were factious, corrupt, and eager to engage in acrimonious debate. Wherever they went they dishonoured God's name (see Ezekiel 36:22) and when they taught the proselyte they made him "twice the child of hell than themselves." (Matthew 23:15 – hell = gehenna which is the same word for hell used in James 3:6).

offend not in word: If anyone can control his tongue, that person is spiritually mature (perfect = mature). The "Logos" of God, His word which is His creative instrument is the "outward expression of the inward thought." So with us. When Peter denied his Lord, those standing by said that his speech betrayed him. They were talking about his thick Galilean accent but then Peter opened his mouth and truly betrayed himself as he vehemently denied being a follower of Jesus. The first place a poverty of ideals or ideas will show itself is in our speech. (See Matthew 12:34-36!). Someone once said, *"I don't know what I think until I hear what I say."* Meditate upon this principle. Examine yourself. Does your speech betray a heart that is far removed from the Kingdom of God? *"For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."* (Cp. Colossians 4:5,6).

of horses and ships and little flames of fire: a bit is a small piece of equipment but it controls the direction of a large animal. Huge ships are controlled by a relatively tiny rudder. The rider and the pilot are ultimately in control and bear responsibility for the horse or the ship. So the direction of our lives is expressed and sometimes betrayed by the words which we speak. How great a fire is started by a little flame. Where I grew up, vast forests have been destroyed by a match carelessly tossed aside. So our words can have effects for good or ill far beyond what we imagine.

The Wisdom From Above, Continued

The untamed tongue (cont'd)

James 3:6-12

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

the tongue is a fire: the word fire is “pur” and is almost always associated with judgement. Peter talks about the “fiery trial” which has overtaken believers (cp. 1 Peter 4:12; 1:7). We can all be guilty to some degree of this fault in thoughtless talk, gossip, and slander. However, the rich Jews of the ruling council were at the far end of the wrong side of the scale of evil use of the tongue. They lied; they railed; they falsely accused; by subtle argument and overt oppression they deliberately tried to derail the faith of the followers of the Lord; they sat in condemnatory judgment of their Christian brethren. Woe to them! The Lord hates those who sow strife and discord among brethren! Let us take that to heart the next time we feel inclined to talk about someone behind their backs and to denigrate their character or point of view. Let us remember that, at such times, we are willfully stepping into the circle of those whom the Lord hates! If that thought alone does not still our wayward tongues then nothing will.

We must learn to act in the spirit of Christ, the spirit of “Agape” love, at all times, in all circumstances, towards all people, no matter how strongly we feel about them or about an issue that divides us. There is no choice in this matter. There is no excuse. If the flesh overcomes us then we must withdraw from the arena of discussion and pray earnestly for that “wisdom from above” which will enable us to deal in love with our brethren “for Christ’s sake.” Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “the love of Christ sets my limits.” He has set our limits too. (See 1 John 4:7).

defileth the whole body: vicious persecution was defiling the whole body of believers in the Synagogues. Although this is, I think, the primary focus of James’ remarks, the principle is absolutely true of the Ecclesia today. Strife and division and the acrimonious debate surrounding them have too often been left to go unchecked and brethren have separated from one another in anger. It sometimes takes generations for such feelings to heal. (See Hebrews 12:15). It is the duty of every brother and sister, constrained by the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, to strive to heal any breach between brethren.

setteth on fire the course of nature: literally “ignites the wheel of genesis.” It defiles all of the Father’s creation. The unbridled tongue can do so much damage! Look what it did in the Synagogues of James’ day with pious frauds pretending to defend what they considered to be the “truth” but in reality, they were protecting their “turf.” There is a general application of this principle to which we would do well to take heed!

set on fire by hell: Hell = Gehenna, the valley of the son of Hinnom, Jerusalem’s garbage dump. What fires your speech? Is it ignited by the garbage of this world? (1 John 2:15-17) or is it on fire with the spirit word of God?

The untamed tongue(cont'd)

James 3:7-12

"For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh."

For every kind of beasts and birds: Mankind has been able to tame every kind of wild and venomous animal – serpents are charmed, falcons trained to hunt, lions purr like kittens, and killer whales jump through hoops. But no human can, unaided, tame the tongue. The tongue and the temperament behind it can only be tamed by God:

1 Peter 2:21-23 *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:"*

Self-discipline is not enough; the tongue must be the subject of divine discipline. (Cp. 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; Philippians 4:11-13) May our tongues be ignited with the fire of the Father's spirit-word that our words may ever be gracious, healing, instructive. Corrupt and vain communication is the bane of our existence today. The world is consumed by the most trivial and Godless vanity – fashion, sports, celebrity of every kind, visual entertainment which revels in perversion and violence. Sadly, our conversation far too often reflects our association with the things of the world rather than our love of the Father. (Cp. Psalm 101:3 and Psalm 26:2,3 – we need to meditate deeply on these words of the Psalmist!)

Ephesians 4:29 *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."*

Psalms 12:7-8 (RSV): *"Do thou, O LORD, protect us, guard us ever from this generation. On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the sons of men."*

unruly evil full of deadly poison: The rich persecutors were like serpents lying in wait, ready to strike, their tongues full of deadly venom (Acts 9:1).

blessing and cursing: "cursing" is used almost always in a context of persecution or judicial condemnation (see Matthew 5:44; 25:41; Hebrews 6:8). The pious worshippers in the Synagogues on the Sabbath were the same vile men who cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" at the Lord's trial and who screamed in tormented rage at Stephen as they hauled him away to die. At our level, how often have we worshipped the Father and found ourselves, sometimes within the hour, slandering, backbiting and gossiping against our brethren and sisters? "These things ought not so to be!"

figs, olives, grapes, fountains: James is warning against the danger of hypocrisy. A "hypocrite" is an actor who assumes a different mask for each role he must play. Our face must never be a mask concealing insincerity but at all times it must reflect the visage of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6)

The Wisdom From Above, Continued

True Wisdom: James 3:13-18

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Who is wise and endued with knowledge: who is a man of understanding among you? Let him prove it by his way of life. Here is the conjunction of words and works. Sometimes "what" is said is not as important as the example of the one who says it. The spiritually wise person will demonstrate his wisdom in meekness. (See John 3:20,21).

meekness: What is meekness? It is that inner quality produced in one who has sincerely sought the fellowship of the Father and is expressed in the love of justice and mercy and is worked out and refined day by day as one walks humbly with Him. It is an umbrella description of the "fruit of the spirit." It is the fundamental character of those who will inherit the Kingdom (Matthew 5:5; Luke 22:26,27). It is the expression of the glory of God in the life of an individual. It is a wonderful mixture of humility, strength, and wisdom which is attainable only by those who are "servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Cp. John 1:14, 16; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:8,9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Acts 6:15)

bitter envying and strife: bitter = piercing; envying = zealotry; strife = contention and intrigue (nasty politics). The wisdom from above was not the hallmark of the rich persecutor but rather a bitter zeal full of contention and hatred. They were proud of it but in their heart of hearts, they knew they were caught up in a self-serving lie. (John 3:2; 11:48).

earthly, sensual, devilish: Everyone who embarks on a campaign of separation or who begins an engagement of strife within a group claims to have superior insight and wisdom. The real reason for such difficulties is usually political. Pride of place and fear of loss due to change often lie at the root of such problems. So it was with the rich in the Synagogues in their fanatical zeal to eliminate the followers of the Lord. Such factional "wisdom" is not from God. It is of the earth; it is born of lust, pride, and fear; it is demonic, sparked by the madness of the flesh unrestrained. Its hallmark is a mean-spirited zealotry and its result is irreparable damage to all who are caught-up in its coils.

confusion and every evil work: this phrase means tumult, upheaval and every foul or wicked deed. The word "**work**" in Greek is "**pragma**" from which we get our word "**pragmatic**." The connotation of "pragmatic" is not to act according to principle when the principle is difficult to apply. One then acts out of expediency rather than principle. Indeed, the expedient resort to a zealous contention in anger and wrath is sometimes even used in a misguided defence of the Truth. No doubt these persecutors had rationalized their actions in just such a way.

The Wisdom From Above, Continued

True Wisdom: **James 3:13-18**

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”

wisdom from above: Unlike the wisdom from the earth, the result of which is chaos, tumult, division, and every evil work, the end result of the wisdom from above is peace and unity yielding the “fruit of righteousness.”

first pure then peaceable: This phrase has been wrested from time to time in order to justify strife and contention. “First we must have purity! Then we will have peace!” Peace must characterize all of our dealings all of the time.

pure: The word “Pure” is “Hagnos” in Greek. It means “Holy.” It does not mean perfection of understanding. It does not mean that everyone in a group must agree about everything all the time. It does mean we must be utterly separate from the “wisdom that is from the earth.” Nothing can be sadder or more ironic than the spectacle of a misguided brother or sister engendering strife and contention within the Ecclesia and claiming to be defending the “purity of the Truth.” (Hebrews 12:14,15 – note the “root of bitterness” which is a result of unholy actions).

peaceable: The heart that has been freed of the tumult and commotion of earthly wisdom is truly at peace. It is whole. It understands the Lord’s words when he commands us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.”

gentle: this word means “moderate,” “patient,” the same word is translated as “moderation” in Philippians 4:5 and means “yieldingness” or “not insisting on the letter of the law”⁷ (2 Timothy 2:24,25). This person knows when to give ground and when to stand firm but in doing either he is full of the love of Christ.

easy to be entreated: “ready to be persuaded” and when persuaded to obey even if one’s position about an issue must be changed.

full of mercy and good fruits: filled with compassion and the fruit of the spirit. Conscious of the grace he has received, this person extends that same grace to others (John 1:16).

without partiality and hypocrisy: “without uncertainty or insincerity” (RSV). No divided loyalties and no playing of roles.

the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace: Hebrews 12:11 instructs us that those who bear the chastening of the Lord and grow and learn from the trials of life produce the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” These are the peacemakers, the builders of harmony and brotherly love whom the Lord calls “blessed.” They are the children of life and light. Those who sow strife and discord are the children of darkness, hated by the Lord. They serve in misguided zeal or in outright pretense.

⁷ Vine’s Expository Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984 Revision, page 401, Article: *Gentleness*

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God

Friendship with the world

James 4:1, 2

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill...."

From whence come wars and fightings: What is the source of battling and controversy? The source was the unbridled lust of the flesh. "Lust" is the Greek word, "hedone" from which we get our word hedonism. It means self-seeking; given over to satisfying the desires of the flesh. Verse 3 indicates that the rich and powerful were utterly preoccupied with the sating of their fleshly desires and ambitions – even their worship and prayers were focused to that end! "My will be done," was their prayer. These battles and contentious encounters were absolutely characteristic of the Jewish community in Jerusalem in James' day. They were utterly uncharacteristic of the followers of the Lord who were suffering at the hands of these misguided zealots but, who, at that time, enjoyed an extraordinary degree of harmony, unity, and spirituality.

war in your members: The word "war" is different from the first occurrence in this verse. The first word meant "battles" but this word means "an organized campaign." The flesh is every bit as "clever" as the "Devil" of popular superstition. That is why it is personified in the New Testament. Unless we marshal our forces to confront the flesh at every opportunity, the flesh will engage and defeat us in spite of our best intentions. The lesson of the spiritual warrior in Ephesians 6 is very helpful in this regard – especially verse 18! Paul's battle with the flesh described in Romans 7 is also helpful as we engage the enemy in our own life and death struggle. Paul's experience proves that, in Christ, there is no excuse for weakness. All the resources we need are at our disposal. We may fail. We may need to beg for forgiveness and strength to do better in the future but there is no "excuse" which we can provide which will "let us off the hook." Paul acknowledges his own inability to "keep" the law and his wretched failure when, as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, he attempted to fulfill it in his own strength. It was only when he came to the Lord Jesus Christ that victory was possible. These wretched persecutors whom James indicted had no such resource.

ye lust and have not: James' primary target, the rich and powerful persecutors, were sunk in hedonism. In Romans 7:8 the word translated here as "lust" (AV) means "concupiscence" or inordinate sexual desire. It is translated as "all kinds of covetousness" in the RSV.

You covet and are never satisfied is what this phrase could mean in a general sense (cp. Ecclesiastes 1:8!). However, the RSV sheds some light on James' meaning: "you desire and do not have; so you kill." The rich persecutors, desperate to maintain the status quo, coveted the growing popularity of the followers of the carpenter from Nazareth and feared the change which they heralded. "You are desperate to have your own way with these people but you do not succeed so you resort even to murder to achieve your goals!"

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Friendship with the world (cont'd)

James 4:2-4

“and desire to have ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses”

desire to have: the Greek word for “desire” is “zeloo” from which we get our word “zeal.” These were zealots for the law – see Acts 7:9 (the word “envy” is zeloo; and again in Acts 17:5 – note the context!) In Acts 22:3, Paul explains that his zeal (Greek “zelotes” from “zeloo”) for the law led him to “persecute this way unto the death.” Remember that Saul, when James was writing, either was a member of this persecuting class or had not long ago left it. When Paul describes his attitude as a persecutor, we are being given an insight into the warped and hateful thinking of many who would have read James’ epistle. May we have the courage to make our community one which is characterized as being “zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:11-14).

cannot obtain: because they measured themselves and their success by the standards of the flesh, they never attained their goals. Envy is never satisfied; greed feeds on itself until it is consumed in the fiery judgments of God.

ye fight and war: because they had no understanding of the Father’s love and grace, especially as it was expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ, these individuals were continuously striving to have their own way by their own power. This led to never-ending quarrels and strife among them which settled nothing but rather stirred up more ill feeling and controversy.

because ye ask not: the same word “ask” occurs in James 1:5, 6. They never achieved their goals and their goals were out of alignment because they did not seek the Father in humble prayer. Oh, they prayed but they were not heard. They were in the circle of those who caused strife and division; of those who hated their brethren. Therefore, they themselves were hated by their God. Their prayers were an abomination! (Cp. 4:15-17).

ye ask and receive not: When they did pray they were so full of pride and arrogance that they could not be heard. The Father said through Isaiah, “*but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*” (Isaiah 66:2). The rich persecutors were the antithesis of that spirit. When they prayed, they prayed “with themselves” and no one heard save themselves. Sadly, they were satisfied with that (see Psalm 66:18).

ye adulterers and adulteresses: they were indeed adulterers and adulteresses because of their pernicious law of divorce. However, they were also adulterers and adulteresses in that they were apostate. They had defiled their relationship with God. (See Jeremiah 9:2-6!). While claiming to be “God’s people,” they were having an affair with the world and their hearts belonged to their paramour. A person having an adulterous affair observes the form of the marriage relationship but the life of such a person is filled with lies and guilty secrets. So it is with the believer who is untrue to God.

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Friendship with the world (cont'd)

James 4:4, 5

“know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”

adulterers and adulteresses (cont'd): Spiritual adultery is akin to hypocrisy because it involves playing roles and leading a fragmented life. Israel's condemnation was not merely that they became idolaters. Rather, it lay in the fact that while they worshipped wood and stone they also attempted to worship God! They understood the truth to a degree but the rites associated with pagan worship were so tempting! So, they tried to do both. *“How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him,”* said Elijah. *“Choose you this day whom you will serve!”* challenged Joshua. The choice must still be made today. May we not, like the rich persecutors in the Synagogues to whom James wrote, make the wrong choice (Matthew 15:7-9). Our lives are at stake!

friendship of the world: In James 2:23, a closely related word refers to Abraham as a “friend” of God. Jesus says, *“ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”* Paul says in Romans 6, *“you belong to whomever you obey.”* If you obey God then you are the children of God and will be blessed with eternal life. However, even if you profess Christ but yet give yourself to the works of sin then to sin you belong and in the end you will be rewarded with death. These hypocrites of whom James writes were truly friends of the world. What does it mean to be a “friend of the world?” Paul has an extremely challenging statement in his epistle to the Romans, 14:23: *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* What would our lives be like if everything we said and did, our entertainment, our career choices, our friends, our activities, etc., proceeded from our faith? What if we governed our lives by asking the question John implies in 1 John 2:16: “Is what I am about to say or do ‘of the Father’ or is it ‘of the world?’ Does it have as its source the spirit of God or the lust of the flesh?”

enmity with God: This is a very severe indictment. It is a death sentence. The word means hatred. These words of James find an echo in Paul's condemnation of Elymas, the Jewish sorcerer, in Acts 13:10: *“O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”* Elymas, a rich and influential Jew, opposed the preaching of Christ. He was struck with physical blindness that he might receive his true sight. James, with these words, struck to the heart of the evil which so consumed the rich. They were “friends of the world” and proclaimed it loud and clear when they cried against the Lord Jesus, “Away with him! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar!” Who is your king?

the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy: James is saying, *“Do you think the scripture says for no reason that our nature craves to fulfill the lusts of the flesh and enthrall us to a life ruled by a malicious envy?”* (Cp. Jeremiah 17:9, 10; Titus 3:3: these are the people to whom James wrote!)

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Friendship with the world (cont'd)

James 4:6,7

“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

giveth more grace: The odds are not stacked in our favour! Left to our own devices, we would be hopeless indeed. The spirit of the flesh which dwells in us yearns to consummate its illicit desires. Paul cried, *“Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?”* That was not a rhetorical question. Paul had the answer. It was *“God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* who would deliver him. He would be delivered by the grace of God. The freely offered wisdom and strength to overcome the will of the flesh (See John 1:11, 12!) is available to all who seek it. 2 Corinthians 12:9 *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* (1 John 5:4; Revelation 3:21). *“He giveth more grace”* means that as tough as the struggle might be we will always be given the means to be victorious (1 Corinthians 10:13). “More” also has the connotation of “elder” or “mature,” a choice of words which fits one of James’ overall themes perfectly: *“let endurance have its maturing effect”* (1:4). These individuals whom James is upbraiding have no resource to restrain the flesh. They have completely misapplied the law (Acts 7:53) and they would not, in their pride and fear, come to Christ (John 5:39, 40). Let us ensure that we do not become like them, searching the scriptures but never “coming” to the Lord Jesus for the grace and help he can provide in time of need. For us it is ever a time of need! *“Be thou for ever near me, my master and my friend”* (Hymn 153).

resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble: God marshals His forces against the proud but gives freely His wisdom, help, and strength to those who are meek and lowly of heart and who tremble at His word.

submit yourselves to God: submit means to relinquish control; to “let go and let God.” (See Hebrews 12:9). The rich persecutors needed to be in control; to be in charge; to be the “top dogs.” Giving up control was perhaps the most difficult thing to have asked them to do. The flesh does not like to obey rules but it certainly loves to make them! These people wanted to be the rule makers. Although they were always very careful about other people’s obedience, they often excused themselves (Matthew 15:9; 23:3,4). This kind of individual constantly compares himself against the unrighteousness (often imagined) of others (Cp. 1 Corinthians 10:12).

resist the devil and he will flee: “resist” means to stand up against. James encourages them to ***submit, resist the flesh, draw near to God.*** That is what these rich men had to do. For anyone who has fallen away, this is the only successful back to God. If, in humble submission to the Father’s will, we will prayerfully take a stand against those impulses of the flesh which continually beset us and lead us into sin, we will overcome them!

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Friendship with the world
(cont'd)

James 4:8, 9

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: As in the parable of the prodigal son, the Father is ready to meet us much more than half-way. If these people had been willing to show any inclination towards repentance, God would have made every effort to encourage them. Is this what happened to Saul of Tarsus? In spite of his "threatening" words and deeds, the Father looked upon his heart and saw the torment of conscience as the brilliant indictment of Stephen's speech had their effect upon him (2 Chronicles 15:2; Lamentations 3:57; Zechariah 1:2-6; Malachi 3:5-7; Luke 15:20).

Cleanse your hands ye sinners: These were people who focused on outward appearance. They were fakes; empty shells. Outwardly they were clean but inwardly they were full of corruption and every evil work. Outwardly they pretended to be children of God, sons and daughters of promise, but inwardly they were something else. (Matthew 23:25-27; Luke 11:39 - ravening = extortion, plunder). In **2 Corinthians 6:17 - 7:1**, Paul says that separation from the things of the flesh in the faith that God will receive us is the way to begin the cleansing process. In **2 Peter 1:3-4**, Peter says that only by a sincere appreciation for God's great and precious promises can anyone "*escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.*" Worldliness is really due to a lack of faith. If we have faith in the Father's "great and precious promises" then we have a powerful motivation to live as He wants us to live. We must not be like these rich Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, trapped in a sanctimonious rut while living the life of the world.

purify your hearts ye double-minded: purify means make holy. To be in the world but not of the world; to choose that which is of the Father and to utterly reject that which is of the world is to be holy. The trick is to be "holy" without being "self-righteous." It is our job to strive to be models of righteousness. It is not our task to impose arbitrary rules on others. "Double-minded" means "two-souled." Hypocrisy brings with it a tremendous tension. In the end, something has to give, usually with painful results, like the backlash of an overstretched cable. In the case of these people, the malicious persecution of their Christian brethren was their way of trying to snuff out the light which had exposed them and their weakness.

be afflicted and mourn and weep: "be afflicted" means to realize one's wretched state before God. It is the same word used by Paul when he cried, "*O wretched man that I am!*" Without Christ, all mankind is truly wretched. True repentance, a sincere recognition of our position before God; a real understanding of what havoc the will of the flesh has wrought in God's world will lead to mourning and weeping! But what joy follows the dark night of remorse and regret as the "Sun of righteousness" arises with healing in his beams (Psalm 30:5; Malachi 4:2; Matthew 5:4).

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Friendship with the world
(cont'd)

James 4:8-10

"Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

be afflicted and mourn and weep (cont'd) : "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted," said the Lord. "Comforted" means "brought near." Not many of these people had the courage to enter into this redemptive process. Imagine the tears and mourning that lay behind the simple words of Paul the Apostle: "*I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Ecclesia of God.*" The rich persecutors in the Synagogues of Jerusalem would have to undergo a similar transformation if they were to be saved from their fate.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord: These were they who "did all their works for to be seen of men" (Matthew 23:5). To be saved, they would truly have to enter into a relationship with the Father. This they were not willing to do. It would seem that there were few of the mettle of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Saul of Tarsus. "In the sight of" means "in the presence of." These men and women had failed to realize that they were ever in the presence of God. During Stephen's trial, where had the presence of God shone forth? In the dank precincts of their glorious temple built by that epitome of the putrescence of the flesh, Herod? No! It shone forth in all its glory in the face of that man who was the focus of their hatred and fear, Stephen: "*And they beheld his face, as it were, the face of an angel.*" (Acts 6:15). David asks "*whither shall I flee from Thy presence?*" (Psalm 139:7-12). That is impossible. We may "burrow in cherished darkness" (John 3:19) but wherever we may go, He is there. Our cover of sinful darkness only prevents us from seeing Him; it does nothing to prevent Him from seeing us (Hebrews 4:12,13).

He shall lift you up: See Isaiah 40:28-31. The cross always comes before the crown of glory. Humility is a prerequisite to honour. (See Proverbs 15:33; 18:12; 29:3). The ultimate role model both in humility and in being glorified by his Father, is the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:3-11). In his experience is the guarantee of our hope. "**Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.**"

It is your choice just as it was theirs in the first century. If you walk in humility with your Heavenly Father and His son, you will indeed be "lifted up" on that great day when you stand before the "judge of all the earth" to give an account of your life. The exhortation, in context, is directed at the evil persecutors but it was not lost on James' brethren nor should it be lost on us. Pride, arrogance, self-reliance, pettiness, vindictiveness, misdirected zeal, wrath, anger, and malice were not qualities restricted only to those people. Even in the Ecclesia of Christ there is a danger that these evil qualities might spring up like defiling "*roots of bitterness*" (Hebrews 12:15). We too would do well to heed James' warning!

Who are you that judgeth another?

James 4:11,12

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?"

Speak not evil one of another: James is not referring to gossip or back-biting but especially to slander and false witness. The word translated "speak not evil" is "katalaleo" and occurs in only two other places: 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16. In both cases, persecution by unprincipled slanderers is the context. James is chastising the persecutors who are bearing false witness against their Christian brethren.

judgeth his brother speaks evil of the law and judgeth the law: whoever sits in judgment – real judgment with dire consequences – is slandering the law (see Acts 23:3) and setting himself above the law. It was ever thus. Those who make the rules are seldom as keen to be bound by them. They applied different standards to different types of people. The standards applied to those who were "one of them" were much more loosely interpreted than to those who were outside of their circle. This violates the law of unjust weights and measures. (See Deuteronomy 25:13; Proverbs 20:10, 23). The Father considers this kind of "partiality" to be an abomination – a disgusting practice. Those who do such things will be held accountable. Remember that judgment will be largely based on how we treat those with whom we have difficulty and antipathy (See Matthew 5:38-48). If we can reach out to those who have shunned us or to those with whom we find it difficult to get along, THEN we will be the children of our heavenly Father. Remember that Job was blessed only when he prayed for his "friends" who had been sitting in smug judgment upon him. (Job 42:10).

if thou judge the law: James accuses these people of some very serious offenses. In their kangaroo courts they are taking the name of the Lord their God in vain; bearing false witness; committing murder. They had indeed abrogated the law and become a law unto themselves. (See John 5:45 John 8:50). They had perverted the law by their traditions (See Matthew 15:3-6; Mark 7:6-13 – "in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.") They were sitting in false judgment on their Christian brethren. In fact, they had usurped the prerogative of God. They had become lawmakers and dispensers of condemnation.

who are you that judgest another: how these words must have struck home! James shone the light of truth and righteous indignation upon their guilt and shame just as Stephen had. Sadly, his fate would be the same as Stephen's. They had assumed the mantle of judge, jury, and executioner. James' cry, "Who do you think you are??" or, in other words, "How dare you!" The word "another" here is rendered, "neighbour" by the RSV, NEB, NIV, TEV, Jerusalem Bible. They were judging their erstwhile friends, neighbours, and, in some cases, relatives. **John 16:2** "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (Cp. Matthew 10:23).

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

What is your life?

James 4:13-14

"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Go to now: This phrase means "Come now." Or, more loosely, "Don't you people understand anything?" These rich men were so consumed by their money-grubbing busy-ness that they left God out of their calculations entirely. James says, "Put things in perspective!" Even the pagans understood that, "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

ye know not what shall be on the morrow: they were like the rich fool in the parable – Luke 12:15-21. They laid up for themselves treasure upon earth but were impoverished regarding the things of the spirit. Although James is writing to the rich in the Synagogues, the same careless attitude can overtake an Ecclesia as it did the Ecclesia in Laodicea (see Revelation 3:14-18). The rich fool died in the midst of his getting and spending. The people in Noah's day and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were caught up in the petty affairs of this life (Luke 17:26-30). Sudden destruction overtook them unawares. So did it overtake the rich persecutors when all of their wealth and those who survived were carried away to enrich the coffers of the Roman Empire. We must be ever on our guard lest such an attitude overtake us and render us spiritually unconscious until it is too late.

what is your life: a marvelous question! Shakespeare unintentionally describes life apart from the hope which God provides in Christ:

*"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more; it is a tale
told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing."⁸*

It is this realization that helps us to "*number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*" (Psalm 90:12). James says our lives are no more than an obscure mist that quickly dissipates leaving no trace behind. I once read the following verse on a gravestone in New England. The woman beneath the stone had been dead for more than 200 years. The verse read:

*"Death is a debt to nature due,
Which I have paid,
And so must you."*

All that was left of this woman's hopes and fears and passions and achievements were gone and she herself is dust. Let us "number our days" so that our lives will be secure in the life of "*him who loved us and gave himself for us.*" (See Colossians 3:1-4).

vanisheth away: to disappear into corruption and leave no trace behind.

⁸ From Shakespeare's "Macbeth"

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

What is your life? (cont'd)

James 4:15-17

"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

If the Lord will: They did not take God into account in their plans. Their religion was a vehicle for their pride. (See Hosea 4:1-3; Romans 1:28,29!) They worshipped their pride and the works of their own hands. They were, in a very real sense, idolaters. The apostle Paul learned this lesson upon coming to Christ. (See Acts 18:21; Philippians 2:24). This phrase should be so much more than a formula for us. If we use it at all times, and especially outside the Ecclesial environment, saying, "God willing," can be a positive witness.

rejoice in your boastings: "boast in your arrogance" (RSV). Pride and arrogance were their stock in trade. Their religion was little more than a framework for preserving their status and protecting their language and culture. Their joy was not in God. They did not recognize the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. Their joy would be turned to ashes. Such rejoicing is evil because it generates pride and envy and leads to every evil work.

knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin: knowledge always brings responsibility. Sins of omission are every bit as serious as those which we commit. In the Lord's parable (See Matthew 25:45) those who were not accepted were condemned for what they had not done! In John 15:20-24, Jesus himself condemns these same people to whom James is writing. They are without a "*cloak for their sin*." They knew what was the right thing to do. They knew the Lord was "*a teacher come from God*;" their consciences were goaded but they could not come to him because they chose their "great possessions" over eternal life. (John 3:2; Acts 9:5; Matthew 19:22, 23). The same challenge is made by Paul in Romans 14:23!

Condemnation of the Conspirators:

James 5:1-2

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten."

Go to now, ye rich men: James takes the gloves off just as Stephen did at the end of his speech to the Sanhedrin. (Acts 7:51-53) He is about to rub their noses into their guilt and shame and sin. In the name of the "Lord of Hosts" he pronounces righteous and inspired judgment upon these hard-hearted, corrupt, and evil people.

weep and howl: James tells them to shriek in anguish and helpless fear for the "calamities" that are about to befall them. (See Luke 6:25). Their only hope is to repent in mourning and weeping and to utterly change their ways. They would weep and howl indeed when the siege engines of Titus' legions broke down Jerusalem's walls! (Cp. Jeremiah 4:7,8)

riches are corrupted: they had laid up for themselves treasure on earth but they had nothing in their heavenly accounts (see Matthew 6:19-21). The divine perspective would have allowed them to see the true value of the things of the spirit vs. those of the flesh (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Condemnation of the Con- spirators (cont'd)

James 5:3, 4

"Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

cankered and rust: "cankered" means corroded; rust means just that but it also means "venom" or "poison" (the same word occurs in Romans 3:13 and James 3:8). Greed is the venom that poisons the life of the spirit.

shall be witness against you: like digging up some vile, polluted grave, the evidence of their guilt would be made manifest to all.

shall eat your flesh as it were fire: the corrosion and corruption of their lives would eventually catch up to them. As the Lord Jesus said, "the judgment you give will be the judgment you get." (Matthew 7:1,2). The consuming fire of judgment would be their ultimate reward. (2 Peter 3:7).

Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days: the fire of judgment (see Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3; Psalm 21:9; Isaiah 10:16, 17; Amos 5:6; 1 Corinthians 3:13; Hebrews 12:29). AD 70 saw the "last days of Judah's commonwealth" end in fire and blood.

the hire of the labourers kept back by fraud crieth: Cries in accusation like the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:10) cried from the ground. Note that both the crime itself and the pleas of the victims have reached God's ears. God knew what had happened before a single one of the defrauded labourers had cried to Him.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 *"Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee."*

the ears of the Lord: Passages such as Jeremiah 23:23 and Hebrews 4:13 demonstrate that God is aware of everything that goes on in His universe at all times. We are fooling only ourselves if we think that, in the end, we will get away with evil committed secretly. See Deuteronomy 27:15.

Hebrews 4:13 *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

Lord of Sabaoth: The Lord of Sabaoth – the Lord of Hosts. God had set Himself in battle array against these people. Jerusalem and its inhabitants would suffer divine retribution. Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:22) says that *"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."* But there is a limit. As Peter says (2 Peter 3:10) *"The day of the Lord will come."* Let us humble ourselves today so that, in *"the day of the Lord,"* He may lift us up to immortal life and power in His Kingdom.

Friendship of the World is Enmity with God, Continued

Condemnation of the Con- spirators (cont'd)

James 5:5, 6

*"Ye have lived
in pleasure on
the earth, and
been wanton; ye
have nourished
your hearts, as
in a day of
slaughter. Ye
have condemned
and killed the
just; and he doth
not resist you."*

lived in pleasure: They were like rich man in the parable of Lazarus (Luke 16:19). The word means to indulge in luxury. They lived in luxury while others starved. Their prosperity was not due to their own qualities of industriousness but rather it was due to fraud and manipulation and corruption of every kind over which had been slathered a veneer of self-righteous moralism.

wanton: The only other occurrence of this word is in 1 Timothy 5:6. It means to be preoccupied with the pleasures of the flesh. The things of the flesh are utterly incompatible with the things of the spirit. In these last days the pressures on our community, in the orbit of Europe and America at any rate (including Australia, South Africa, and Canada), come from a popular culture which glorifies and gratifies the flesh at every opportunity. We may indeed have to face a time of trial as did the brethren and sisters in the first century in Jerusalem but if we have been neglecting the things of the spirit in favour of gratifying the pleasures of the flesh, our faith will not survive. Whether or not there is a widespread and systematic time of trial, rest assured your faith will be tested; you will have to make difficult choices. If you have fortified yourself to withstand "in the evil day," you will overcome every difficulty and make correct choices. Your faith will endure and you will grow in grace to spiritual maturity. (See Romans 8:5-8)

nourished your hearts: they had "fattened their hearts" (RSV) for the slaughter like dumb animals being prepared for the butcher's knife. All of their wealth, their preparation for their heirs, their scheming and fraud and greed would be for nothing. The Romans would come and, in the realization of their worst fears, would "*take away their place and their nation.*" (John 11:48). Their place (i.e. the temple) and their nation indeed! The Lord of Hosts would show them whose place and nation it was! They had fattened themselves for the benefit of a Roman butcher! Who would escape the horror of the Tenth Legion's siege of Jerusalem? Only those who heeded the warning of the Galileean carpenter! So it will be in our day.

you have condemned and killed the just: just = righteous one (Diaglott). If anything proves that James was not writing about rich brethren and sisters, this phrase does. In Acts 2:37, when the common people heard these words, they were "cut to the heart" (RSV) and were filled with repentance. When the rich and powerful heard the same words from the mouth of Stephen in Acts 7:52, they too were "cut to the heart" but their response was one of vicious outrage. James knew his audience. Even though he was not immediately in their hands as Stephen was, he knew what the end result of his forthright accusation would be. He had become a marked man and the primary target of their implacable zeal (Acts 12:1-3).

Be Patient; Stablish your Hearts

The Divine Perspective

James 5:7

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it..."

Be patient therefore brethren: "Now as for you brethren" (Living Bible) James turns his attention away from the persecutors. He has nothing more to say to them. They might turn from their sin in awful realization of their guilt and shame or, more likely, they might turn on him in murderous rage. What was important to James was that he had stood up for his Master and his brethren and sisters. The consequences would take care of themselves.

Mark 8:38 *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

James has taken away any false hope that his brethren might have nurtured that the rich and powerful possessed some shred of decency and so the persecution might soon be abated. They must be patient, a different word from the "*patience*" of chapter 1, which has the connotation of a quality of character forged in the furnace of trial. This word means to assess the situation and to therefore set oneself to endure. Patience in James 1 is a result but "*be patient*" in James 5:7 is a determination beforehand. To think about how one would react to trials and temptations before they happen is an effective way to prepare for the inevitable trials of life.

unto the coming of the Lord: this phrase has a dual meaning. It means the coming of the Lord to end "Judah's commonwealth" culminating in the utter destruction of Jerusalem and also to the final coming of the Lord in glory to set up the Father's kingdom on earth. Both Matthew 24 and Luke 21 have this duality of meaning. James focuses the attention of his brethren and sisters on the end which God will bring about. If we live our lives with the purpose of the Father firmly fixed in our minds, we will be able to "endure unto the end." We need to have spiritual foresight:

Hebrews 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

The faithful knew and understood the promises: they **saw** them, had them in mind. They were **persuaded** – i.e. accepted by logic the truth of them. They **embraced** them – they were deeply committed emotionally to the promises. They **confessed** them – if one is truly persuaded of the truth and emotionally charged by it, one must witness. If our witness is weak, we must determine what is missing: Persuasion? Emotion?

Behold the husbandman: look at the patience of the farmer. He has a tremendous investment in his crop. He waits patiently because he knows he cannot afford to give up. Neither can we. (Galatians 6:7-9)

Be Patient; Stablish your Hearts, Continued

The Divine Perspective (cont'd)

James 5:7 - 9

"until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."

early and the latter rain: These are the heavy rains which prepared the ground for ploughing and later protected the crops from the drought of summer. In Joel 2 the former and latter rains speak of the coming of the first and second advents of the Messiah, the "former rains moderately" ("in righteousness" - margin). For James, only the burning hope of the coming Kingdom of God will enable his brethren and sisters to endure. But they must take the long view. They were in the time of the "early rain" and they must prepare their hearts to endure patiently until the "latter rain" of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same is true for us.

stablish your hearts: be resolute and unflinching in the face of trial. The coming, "parousia," (presence) of the Lord is at hand" (RSV). Indeed the presence of the Lord would soon be felt in Jerusalem in the form of the rampaging legions of Rome.

Grudge not one against another: The Greek word for "grudge" is "stenazo" which means to sigh or mutter. Bear with one another. Be tolerant. Do not be frustrated and impatient with one another. You could be guilty of adding the final straw which breaks the faith of an already weak brother or sister and thus be subject to condemnation at the judgment seat of Christ. (See Matthew 5:22 – note that "without a cause" is not in the original text; Romans 15:1; Philippians 2:1-5).

We need to be conscious of the fact that the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to help and guide us at all times. However, just as the goodness of the Father is represented in his son, so also is His severity. It will do us good to remind ourselves frequently that we are ever in the presence of the "judge of all the earth" and govern ourselves accordingly. (Romans 11:22; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

It is a sobering fact that one of the primary bases of judgment will be the way in which we have interacted with our brethren and sisters. "*How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" writes the Psalmist, "It is like the precious anointing oil" upon the head of the high priest that runs down his garments and sanctifies the whole body.

"Grudge not," says James: do not "sigh against" in exasperation. Rather teach, reach out, and help in whatever positive way you can. Finally, do not let others denigrate brethren and sisters in your hearing. Forbid it. Invoke Matthew 18 if you have to. The salvation of the murmurer and of those who tolerate such unhelpful talk are on the line. Remember, the Father "**hates**" those who sow discord among brethren. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Hebrews 10:31).

The Divine Perspective (cont'd)

James 5:10-11

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

take, my brethren, the prophets... as an example of suffering: This is a foundation principle for successfully living life in Christ: familiarity with the word will be a tremendous fortification and source of strength when confronted with “fiery trials.” Paul says in Romans 15:4 “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*”

We are comforted in the fellowship of suffering endured by those who have gone before (see 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12; Philippians 3:10). The courage of believers such as Stephen and James are an inspiration. The example of the Lord Jesus Christ is powerful beyond words.

The word gives us a sense of heritage and community and continuity with a wonderful past. In this vein we should take the time to become familiar with our own heritage and history as a Christadelphian community. The writings of our pioneers and the current issues and developments within the brotherhood today should be topics of prayer and discussion in the spirit of the Master. We need to prayerfully sink our roots deeply into the word and into our community for therein lies the strength to overcome every trial and temptation. The Lord is present in the place of prayer; he is present in the word; and he is present “where two or three are gathered together,” in the community of the faithful. We must want to be where the Master is. That is the place of power.

suffering affliction: this phrase is from one Greek word, “*kakopatheia*” and means “to be beset by the afflictions of this world”⁹ or hardship due to persecution for the sake of the gospel. (2 Timothy 2:3, 9; 4:5 - hardness, suffer trouble, endure afflictions).

count them blessed (RV) which endured: we can look back on their example and have their lives in perfect perspective. They are happy because, no matter what hardships they had to endure, “*theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:10; see 2 Timothy 4:8).

patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord: or rather “*the end which the Lord brought about.*” The same word is used in Matthew 26:58. Peter did not go to see the “end of Jesus.” He followed along “to see how it would turn out.” The word teaches us that the Father is very compassionate and full of mercy and so we believe, no matter how difficult the trial, that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28) and that the end which the Lord will bring about will be glorious beyond our imagination. (See 1 Corinthians 2:9)

⁹ Kittel and Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985, page 803

Be Patient; Stablish your Hearts, Continued

Swear not at all James 5:12

"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."

above all things... swear not at all: before anything else, says James, refrain from taking oaths. See Ecclesiastes 5:2-6: "*suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin.*" There may be, in the context of persecution and trial, a warning against the practice of having followers of the Lord renounce him with an oath or face dire consequences. Also, the practice of swearing oaths was a testimony to the dishonesty of society in James' day. Where men and women are honest, no oaths are needed. Society was so corrupt that they sought to mitigate their responsibility in oath-taking by swearing by things of assigned value such as the temple and the altar or the gold upon the altar or by one's own head! The oaths were more or less binding depending on the importance of the item sworn by. The Lord expressly forbids this practice (see Matthew 5:34-37).

fall into condemnation: "become a hypocrite." They might avoid persecution by denying Christ but if they still truly believed they would have to play the role of supporting the rich and powerful while harbouring a secret allegiance to the Lord as did Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

Healing for the weak

James 5:13

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you?"

Is any among you afflicted: afflicted is the same word as in verse 10. It means suffering affliction (for Christ). It describes one who is in an unhappy situation. It is the opposite of "merry." "Depressed" would be a good synonym for this word.

let him pray: pray earnestly; pray for your tormentors (Matthew 5:44); pray always and everywhere (Ephesians 6:18)

Is any merry: the opposite of afflicted: happy, cheerful. Express your joy in holy poetry and song. What are the songs on our lips? Are they the songs of Zion or of Babylon? (Psalm 137:3).

Is any sick among you: The context clearly shows that the verses which follow do not teach anything about the healing of physical illness. Providentially, the very choice of words to describe the "sick" one removes any shadow of doubt about James' intended meaning.

The word "sick" in this verse is "Astheneo." Sometimes this word denotes a physical illness and sometimes a spiritual one. E.g.:

Acts 20:35 – weak (widows, orphans, infirm)

Romans 4:19 – weak in faith

8:3 – weak (through the flesh)

14:1,2 – weak in the faith; weak (immature)

14:21 – made weak (offended)

1 Corinthians 8:9-12 – weak (in faith); weak (conscience);
weak brother; weak conscience

Be Patient; Stablish your Hearts, Continued

Healing for the weak (cont'd)

James 5:14

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: "

Is any sick among you (cont'd): There is a clear case for taking this word, on its own merits, to read, "***weak in the faith***" and not "sick" as it has been translated here. However, we are left in no uncertainty by the word which is translated "sick" in verse 15. It is the Greek word "Kamno" and it occurs only here and in two other places:

Hebrews 12:3 – wearied (and faint in your minds); to be worn out by the "contradiction of sinners."

Revelation 2:3 – fainted (hast laboured and hast not fainted)

The two words for sick refer to one another. The first word can be taken either of two ways – physical or spiritual weakness. However, the second word for sick never refers to a physical weakness. Therefore, the weight of evidence falls in favour of the meaning of "spiritual weakness" for the first word, "Astheneo." When viewed in this light, these verses make perfect sense and fit precisely into the context of the epistle.

let him call for the elders of the Ecclesia: The elders must concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of those in their care. However, James articulates a first-principle which applies to every "helping" profession. No one can be helped out of a spiritual problem unless they first want to help themselves. When the spiritually weak person takes the first step back to his or her Ecclesial family, then it is possible to restore such a person but not before. The father was able to help the Prodigal Son only after his wayward boy had decided on his own to come home. Then the father ran to meet him!

let them pray over him: this phrase along with the anointing with oil, seems to indicate a formal readmission to fellowship. The importance of prayer cannot be overemphasized in Ecclesial affairs. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we do all of our work before the eyes of the Lord. (See Acts 20:36; Acts 12:12; Acts 2:42 indicate that regular meeting for prayer was an integral part of the practice of the early Ecclesia).

anointing him with oil: This custom was appropriate given the Jewish nature of the brotherhood in James' day. To anoint with olive oil meant: welcome: Luke 7:46

joy: Psalm 23:5; 141:6

dedication: Psalm 133:2

All of these implications are perfectly suitable to the restoration to fellowship of one who was falling away. The association in scripture of oil with the word of God is also very appropriate to this context: (See Matthew 25:1-8).

Be Patient; Stablish your Hearts, Continued

Healing for the weak (cont'd)

James 5:15

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

the prayer of faith: if we take this to be in the context of physical illness, a very real danger exists of expecting a cure – there is no hedging here: the prayer of faith **will** save the sick – and of adding a burden of guilt upon those whose prayer for healing is not answered. Since it is a prayer of faith, then if healing does not take place, it must be due to lack of faith! Personal experience alone teaches us that this is not true. Often the greatest examples of faith and courage are given by brethren and sisters who live with a chronic or terminal illness. If this were a true principle why were Paul's prayers not answered (2 Corinthians 12:8)? Did Paul lack sufficient faith? What about Timothy and his digestive problems? Why did Paul prescribe wine rather than the "prayer of faith" (1 Timothy 5:23)? The Father will heal if it is His will. But he does not heal on demand. This passage does not support this kind of "faith healing." Thankfully, we are not left in any doubt about the real meaning or context of this passage.

The word prayer here is different from the word for prayer used in verses 15, 17, and 18. It is "**Euche**" and it means a vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23 – only other occurrences). It is the vow of renewed faith that **will** "save the one who is falling away." That is one form of healing that is absolutely certain. The Father rejoices over one sinner who repents. He is eager to forgive when forgiveness is sought. His sins **shall be** forgiven.

raise him up: the same word for raise is used of the risen Christ in Romans 6:4, 9 in the context of baptism. (See John 5:25!).

if he have committed sins: "*if he is the power of unforgiven sin.*" This phrase fits perfectly the context of someone who has been weak in the faith and who has fallen prey to temptation as in chapter 1:12-16. The brother or sister who returns will find a ready welcome from the Father. He or she should find no less a welcome from us. Note the context again: the "vow" of faith **shall** save: restore to salvation (Psalm 51:10-12)
the Lord **shall** raise him up (as at baptism)
his sins **shall** be forgiven

The context of the rest of the chapter supports this view entirely:

v.16 confess faults and pray for one another to be "healed"

vv. 17, 18 the example of Elijah, one subject to spiritual depression

v. 19 if any "among" (RV) you (same phrase as v. 14) err from the truth and one convert him

v. 20 convert a sinner from the error of his way; save a soul from death (i.e. raise him up!); cover a multitude of sins

Preventative Medicine

James 5:16-18

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Confess your faults one to another: This is a difficult piece of advice to follow. We have all (at least in my antiquated generation!) heard the now out of date joke: "telegraph, telephone, tell-a-Christadelphian!" Alas, the joke is out of date due to technological advances and not to an improvement in our handling of sensitive information. Lack of confidentiality is a huge issue in our community. We need to develop the trait of being able to maintain a confidence. Only then will we be in a position to help one another because the basis of confidence is trust. Whom do you trust? Is there anyone in whom you can confide and trust that the subject under discussion will remain a matter between you and your confidant? James is telling us to trust one another and to rely on one another. This is true fellowship. In revealing our inmost faults and in learning to love one another at that level we enter into the Agape love of the Father for his beloved son.

pray for one another: true agape love and fellowship leads naturally to prayer (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 1:3; 4:3). Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote:

*"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of; Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep and goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."*

that ye may be healed: this healing is in the context of revealing faults. The intent is to be healed from some besetting weakness which is interfering with one's walk to the Kingdom. (See 1 Peter 2:24! Isaiah 53:5).

the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much: the RSV renders this phrase: "*The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.*" James always returns to the word for a powerful example of what he means. Elijah was a man like us, serving God as best he could but subject to extremes of depression due to the persistence of outside pressures on his faith. But look at the outcome of his prayer! Even in his darkest moments, Elijah never stopped praying. He prayed earnestly, with passion and honesty. Even when he felt most alone, he was heard by the Father and his needs were met. Never give up on prayer and never give up praying for each other!

Converting the Sinner

James 5:19-20

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth: James concludes his epistle with an appeal to his brethren and sisters to stand by one another in this time of trial and persecution. If one lacks the wisdom to "count it all joy" when the time of testing strikes, he or she is in danger of falling prey to despondency and sin. To "err" is to be turned away or seduced from the truth.

one convert him: cause him to turn back to the truth. Notice that the concern is not about contamination by maintaining contact with the one who has erred; rather it is about saving one's brother or sister. Love is at work here not self-righteousness. **1 Peter 2:25** *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."* Our work in caring for our brethren and sisters is an extension of the work of the Lord. Woe unto us if we act in an uncaring manner towards the brother or sister "for whom Christ died!" Rather let us be like those spoken of by Daniel:

Daniel 12:3 *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."*

Or Malachi:

Malachi 2:6 *"The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity."*

from the error of his way: his way... not the Father's way. Any way that we choose for ourselves apart from the Father's loving guidance, will be the way of error. (See Proverbs 3:5, 6; 16:25)

save a soul from death: the only way to reach someone is if they really want to be reached and if they are convinced of the genuineness of our love and concern. (Matthew 10:28; 2 Corinthians 5:13-17; Philippians 3:13,14)

hide a multitude of sins: "hide" means to "cover" or "cause to be forgotten." **Psalms 103:12** *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."* Peter says that love between brethren "covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Love does not easily take offence because it is not self-centred.

Proverbs 10:12 *"Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins."*

Conclusion

So James ends his epistle. No flowery conclusion. He simply says: You must be about the Lord's business. You have a commission to convert sinners from the error of their ways. The first sinner who needs converting is you. In this, James is in agreement with David:

***Psalms 51:8-13** "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. **Then** will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."*

You cannot come to the kingdom of God alone. If you have no desire to see your brethren and sisters in the Kingdom and do not intend to work energetically to that end, you are as apostate as any believer in false doctrine.

The message of James is to persevere by the Father's grace; to develop divine wisdom by prayer and in the cultivation of the heritage and hope provided in His word. Work in your Ecclesial community. Help your brethren and sisters and young people to cope with the trials of life. Do not shun the weak. Work energetically on the Father's behalf to save them.

James wants us to be doers – *poets* – of God's word. He does not want lawyers who fret about what is not really important. He wants poets, men and women of deep sensitivity to the spirit of His word.

"I, by my works, will show you my faith"

