

# Notes on James

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## Introduction

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The writer of this epistle was evidently the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:19) and the brother of Jude, the writer of the epistle that bears his name (cf. Matt. 13:55).<sup>1</sup> This was the opinion of many of the early church fathers and writers.<sup>2</sup> This James was not the brother of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, who suffered martyrdom early in the history of the church (Mark 1:19; Acts 12:2). Neither was he the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18) or the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). He was the leading man in the Jerusalem church who spoke at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-21; cf. 12:17; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7). Some commentators believed that the similarities in the Greek of this epistle and James' speech in Acts 15 support his identification as the writer.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the writer wrote this epistle in very good Greek should not rule this James out. He would have been fluent in both Aramaic and Greek as a gifted Galilean.

The recipients of this letter were the Jewish Christians of the Diaspora, Jews who had scattered from Palestine and had come to faith in Christ (1:1). Several Jewish references in the book support the claim that a Jew wrote it to other Jews (e.g., 1:18; 2:2, 21; 3:6; 5:4, 7).

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<sup>1</sup>See Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 621-26; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, (2000), pp. 9-20.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, pp. 78-79 (bk. 2, ch. 23). Eusebius lived about A.D. 265-340. For fuller discussion, see Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, pp. 7-9; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, pp. xxxiii-lxi; and Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St James*, pp. i-lxv.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., D. Edmond Hiebert, *James*, pp. 17-18; Walter W. Wessel, "The Epistle of James," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1429.

Josephus said that James died in A.D. 62.<sup>1</sup> Josephus did not record the date, but he identified James' death with that of Portius Festus who died in A.D. 62. So James wrote the letter before that date. Many commentators believed that James' lack of reference to the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49) suggests that he wrote before that meeting. This is a very tenuous argument, however, since the issues James dealt with in this epistle are different from those the Jerusalem Council discussed. Reference to the Jerusalem Council in this letter would have been unnecessary. According to tradition, however, James wrote early.

It appears to many scholars that the epistle of James was probably the first divinely inspired one, and that James composed it in the middle or late 40s, perhaps A.D. 45-48,<sup>2</sup> or even earlier, perhaps as early as A.D. 34 or 35.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars have taken James' lack of references or allusions to other inspired New Testament epistles as additional support for this position. I believe there is no substantial reason to doubt the traditional early date.<sup>4</sup>

Since James lived in Jerusalem for most, if not all of his Christian life, that city seems to be the most likely place of writing.

"All the evidence left of his life suggests that he clung throughout his Christian life to Jerusalem and did not undertake such missionary labours as would entitle him to the designation of Apostle."<sup>5</sup>

According to Eusebius, the scribes and Pharisees threw James down from the pinnacle of the temple, which was 170 feet above the Kidron Valley below, then stoned him, and a fuller (a first-century cloth- or clothes-washer) beat out his brains with a club.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:9:1.

<sup>2</sup>See Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 4:2:9-10; Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, p. 162; Wessel, p. 1429; Moo, pp. 25-26.

<sup>3</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "The Epistle of James," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:1100.

<sup>4</sup>For thorough discussion of the date, see Mayor, pp. cxliv-clxxvii; or Davids, p. 4, who catalogued the opinions of 64 modern commentators regarding the date of composition.

<sup>5</sup>F. Rendall, "The Epistle to the Galatians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:156.

<sup>6</sup>*Eusebius*, p. 77 (bk. 2, ch. 23).

## SPECIAL FEATURES

"... as contemporary rhetorical criticism has pointed out, the NT documents were almost certainly intended for public reading in the churches. Thus James's letter is basically a speech or sermon, cast in written form."<sup>1</sup>

There are several unique features of this epistle. It contains no references to any of the specific individuals among the original recipients. There is no concluding benediction. There are very many imperatives in the letter, about one for every two verses.

"No other New Testament book contains such a concentration of commands."<sup>2</sup>

There are many figures of speech and analogies, probably more than in all of Paul's epistles.<sup>3</sup> James also alluded to over 20 Old Testament books. He referred to many Old Testament characters including Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah—as well as to the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. One commentator observed that this book "has a more Jewish cast than any other writing of the New Testament."<sup>4</sup>

There are many references to nature in James. This was characteristic of the Jewish rabbis' teaching in James' day, as well as the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are also many allusions to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount—more than in all the letters of the New Testament combined, according to G. Campbell Morgan.<sup>5</sup> Yet there are only two references to Jesus (1:1; 2:1), which led Martin Luther to question whether this book was worthy of being in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, p. 1101.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, p. 409.

<sup>3</sup>J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 816.

<sup>4</sup>Mayor, p. ii.

<sup>5</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 382. See Virgil V. Porter Jr., "The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):344-60; idem, "The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:648 (October-December 2005):470-82. See the charts in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 817 and 818, for James' references to nature and the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>6</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 28.

"... in his preface to the New Testament of 1522 James was stigmatized as 'an epistle of straw.' Once Luther remarked that he would give his doctor's beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul."<sup>1</sup>

Luther's problem was that he thought James was writing about becoming a Christian (justification). James was really writing to Christians about how to live the Christian life (sanctification).

"... perhaps no greater mistake can be made in interpreting James than to read his letter in the light of Paul. James, we must remember, is writing (we have argued) before Paul had written any of his letters ..."<sup>2</sup>

The margin of the Nestle Greek Testament version of James identifies 38 references to statements in Matthew. Both books seem to have been written about the same time, namely, in the late 40s A.D.

"Both writers [Matthew and James] seem to have to do with a similar type of community ..."<sup>3</sup>

Leading themes in James include perfection, wisdom, and the piety of the poor.<sup>4</sup>

"As soon as we read through the letter of James we say to ourselves, 'This man was a preacher before he was a writer.'"<sup>5</sup>

"In style it reminds one now of the Proverbs, now of the stern denunciations of the prophets, now of the parables in the Gospels."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Moo, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 14). See also Davids, pp. 47-48, for a chart of similarities between verses in James and those in the Synoptic Gospels, and Martin, pp. lxxv-lxxvi, for common links between Matthew and James.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, pp. lxxix-lxxxvi.

<sup>5</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Mayor, p. i.

"... one of the characteristics of the Epistle is the straightforward, transparent way in which things are put."<sup>1</sup>

"The Epistle of James is without doubt the least theological of all NT books, with the exception of Philemon. ...

"Three doctrines come to the surface more often than any others, and of these the most prominent is the doctrine of God. In keeping with the ethical nature of the epistle is the repeated stress on the doctrine of sin. And, surprisingly, the third most prominent theological theme is eschatology."<sup>2</sup>

"The epistle of James is no more anti-Pauline than is the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>3</sup>

"Is there not a significant appropriateness that Hebrews, which stresses *faith*, should be seconded by James, insisting on good *works*?—that First Peter, the epistle of future *hope*, should be followed by second Peter, which is all about present *growth* in grace?—that the epistles of John, with their emphasis on *love*, should be balanced by Jude, with its call to *contend* for the faith? And is it not an obviously perfective finale, that this progressive lesson in matching faith by good works, future hope by present growth, and brotherly love by contending for the faith, should be crowned by the characteristic promise of the Apocalypse—'To him that overcometh'?"<sup>4</sup>

## PURPOSE

"The design of the Epistle is on the one hand to encourage those to whom it is addressed to bear their trials patiently, and on the other hand to warn them against certain errors of doctrine and practice."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Oesterley, "The General Epistle of James," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 4:425.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, pp. 164-65.

<sup>3</sup>George M. Stulac, *James*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:283.

<sup>5</sup>Mayor, p. cxxviii.

"The purpose of this potent letter is to exhort the early believers to Christian maturity and holiness of life. This letter deals more with the practice of the Christian faith than with its precepts. James told his readers how to achieve spiritual maturity through a confident stand, compassionate service, careful speech, contrite submission, and concerned sharing. He dealt with every area of a Christian's life: what he is, what he does, what he says, what he feels, and what he has."<sup>1</sup>

"The chief aim of the Epistle is to strengthen the faith and loyalty of the Jewish Christians in the face of persecution from rich and overbearing Jews who were defrauding and oppressing them."<sup>2</sup>

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1
- II. Trials and true religion 1:2-27
  - A. The value of trials 1:2-11
    - 1. The proper attitude toward trials 1:2
    - 2. The end product of trials 1:3-4
    - 3. Help in adopting this attitude 1:5-8
    - 4. The larger view of circumstances 1:9-11
  - B. The options in trials 1:12-18
    - 1. The ultimate end of trials 1:12
    - 2. The source of temptation 1:13-14
    - 3. The progress of temptation 1:15
    - 4. The goodness of God 1:16-18
  - C. The proper response to trials 1:19-27
    - 1. The improper response 1:19-20
    - 2. The essential response 1:21
    - 3. The complete response 1:22-25

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<sup>1</sup>Blue, p. 818.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:6.

4. The external behavior 1:26-27
- III. Partiality and vital faith ch. 2
- A. The problem of favoritism 2:1-13
    1. The negative command 2:1
    2. The present improper practice 2:2-4
    3. The inconsistency of favoritism 2:5-7
    4. The Christian's duty 2:8-9
    5. The importance of partiality 2:10-11
    6. The implication of our own judgment 2:12-13
  - B. The importance of vital faith 2:14-26
    1. James' assertion 2:14
    2. James' illustration 2:15-16
    3. James' restatement of his point 2:17
    4. An objection 2:18
    5. James' rebuttal 2:19-23
    6. James' final argument 2:24-26
- IV. Speech and divine wisdom ch. 3
- A. Controlling the tongue 3:1-12
    1. The negative warning 3:1
    2. The reason for the warning 3:2
    3. Examples of the danger 3:3-8
    4. The uncontrollable nature of the tongue 3:7-8
    5. The inconsistency of the tongue 3:9-12
  - B. Controlling the mind 3:13-18
    1. The importance of humility 3:13
    2. The importance of graciousness 3:14-16
    3. The importance of loving peace 3:17-18
- V. Conflicts and humble submission ch. 4
- A. Interpersonal and inner personal tensions 4:1-10
    1. The source of conflict 4:1

2. The explanation of the conflict 4:2-3
  3. The nature of the choice 4:4-5
  4. The resources to choose right 4:6-10
- B. Self-exaltation 4:11-12
- C. Self-reliance 4:13-17
1. The self-centered person 4:13-16
  2. The concluding exhortation 4:17
- VI. Money and patient endurance 5:1-18
- A. Warnings for the rich 5:1-6
1. The introduction of the problem 5:1
  2. The corrosive effect of wealth 5:2-3
  3. The misuse of wealth 5:4-6
- B. The proper attitude 5:7-12
1. The exhortation to be patient 5:7-9
  2. Examples of endurance 5:10-11
  3. The evidence of patience 5:12
- C. The proper action 5:13-18
1. The way of release 5:13
  2. The prescription for help 5:14-16
  3. The power of prayer 5:17-18
- VII. The way back to living by faith 5:19-20

### **MESSAGE**

The Book of James teaches us that faith in God should result in behavior that is in harmony with God's will. The theme of the book is "living by faith" or "spiritual maturity." James is like a series of five sermons reworked for publication (cf. Hebrews and Jude).

James' concern was Christian behavior (ethics) as expressive of Christian belief (doctrine). James hardly mentioned most of the fundamental



Christian doctrines in this book. His preeminent concern was the practice of Christianity, the manifestation of salvation in shoe leather.

The teaching of this epistle has its roots in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. That was, of course, His great ethical discourse. James made no fewer than 18 references or allusions to Matthew 5—7 in his epistle. James is an exposition of the main ideas in that sermon. Jesus presented three great revelations in the Sermon on the Mount that James expounded in this book.

First, Jesus spoke of the behavior of believers. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus said: "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was speaking of how righteous behavior manifests itself. James commented on five behaviors in which his readers needed to demonstrate their righteousness. By the way, when James and Jesus spoke of "righteousness," they usually meant right conduct. This is the more common Old Testament use of the word. Paul, on the other hand, usually used "righteousness" when referring to one's right condition, namely: the believer's standing in Christ.

Second, Jesus clarified the believer's goal. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus said: "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This maturity into the image of Christ is God's goal for every Christian (cf. Eph. 4:13). In dealing with each of the five behaviors he selected, James clarified the goal the believer should bear in mind, and to which he or she should press.

Third, Jesus illuminated the method by which the believer can reach maturity (perfection) in the way he or she behaves. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus said: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." Jesus taught that believers should live to obtain God's approval rather than the approval of their fellow men. James explained what that means in each case for the five behaviors that he dealt with in this epistle. He showed how to live for God's approval rather than for man's approval.

These three great revelations by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount contribute the hidden framework on which James hung his challenges to his readers. All of these challenges deal with spiritual immaturity. The Sermon on the Mount is like the framework of a house. James covered the framework with his exposition, and what he said is connected to what Jesus said.

In chapter 1, the behavior dealt with is *trials*: the difficult experiences that every believer encounters in life. James revealed that God's goal for believers in allowing us to experience trials is personal maturity. He also explained that the method by which we attain this goal is by patiently accepting our trials as from God.

In chapter 2, the behavior in view is *prejudice*. God's goal for believers, that prejudice tends to thwart, is love for *all* people. The method by which we can reach this goal in God's plan is by exercising genuine faith in God. James explained the relationship between prejudice and faith in this chapter.

In chapter 3, the behavior is our *speech*. God's goal is that we bless others with our speech: God Himself, and all other people. The method is to receive and use wisdom from God.

In chapter 4, the behavior is *conflicts* in interpersonal and inner personal relationships. God's goal is that we maintain peace with others, and His method is submission to God.

In chapter 5, the behavior is our *use of money*. The goal is that we use money to serve others, rather than hoarding it for ourselves. The method of attaining this goal is twofold: patience with God, and prayer to God.

"His [James'] short, abrupt paragraphs have been likened to a string of pearls—each is a separate entity in itself."<sup>1</sup>

I would state the application of this epistle with the following two affirmations:

First, the life of faith is a life of *peril*. If we would achieve God's goal of righteous behavior, we must overcome the obstacles that stand in our way. Our opposition comes from three sources, each of which James dealt with in his exposition of each behavior.

We must challenge the "spirit (popular philosophy) of our world." The world system says: Avoid trials (ch. 1). Give preference to those who can help you (ch. 2). Promote yourself by what you say (ch. 3). Demand your rights (ch. 4). Grab all the money you can (ch. 5).

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<sup>1</sup>Wessel, p. 1430.

James wrote that we must also deny the "lusts of our flesh." The flesh is the second source of peril that we face. By the way, the New Testament writers used "flesh" in three ways, one literal and two metaphorical. Literally, it refers to our bodies. Metaphorically, it refers to all that we were in Adam before our regeneration, or it refers to our human nature that is sinful. Here James was speaking of our *sinful human nature*. The flesh says: Indulge yourself, and give in to the temptations that often accompany trials (ch. 1). Love yourself rather than others (ch. 2). Glorify yourself rather than promoting others and God (ch. 3). Assert yourself rather than submitting to God (ch. 4). Serve yourself rather than serving others (ch. 5).

James also cautioned us to "resist the devil," the third source of opposition to God's work of producing righteousness in our conduct. Satan says: God hates you, and your trials are an evidence of that (ch. 1). Satan says: God is withholding good things from you that you would surely receive if you showed favoritism to those who are able to favor you (ch. 2). Satan says: God has abandoned you, so you need to speak up for yourself (ch. 3). Satan says: God will not defend you, so you must be more self-assertive (ch. 4). Satan also says: God will not provide for you, so you must hoard your money rather than distributing it as a good steward (ch. 5).

The second affirmation that summarizes the application of the teaching of this epistle is this: The life of faith is a life of *power* as well as a life of peril. With each of the five major problems James dealt with, we can see that the life of faith is more powerful than the life of unbelief.

"Faith" is superior to the spirit (philosophy) of our world. It is stronger than the lusts of our flesh. It is stubborn against the attacks of the devil. Therefore, we should continue to live by faith. James' great theme is that we need to keep trusting and obeying God. As we began the Christian life by faith, so we need to continue to live by faith, day by day, rather than reverting to our former habit of trusting in ourselves and behaving like unbelievers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:123-40.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1

The writer first identified himself for the original recipients of this epistle, and greeted them, to introduce himself to his readers.

"James" (lit. "Jacob") was probably the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, who evidently became a believer late in Jesus' earthly ministry (cf. John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7). He became the leader of the church in Jerusalem early in its history (Gal. 2:9; Acts 15:13-21).

"Apart from Paul and Peter, no figure in the church of the first days plays a more substantial part upon the historic and legendary stage than James, first Bishop of Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

James described himself simply as "a bond-servant (Gr. *doulos*) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Only he and Jude, another half-brother of the Lord, described themselves simply as "bond-servants" in their epistles. This probably indicates that they were so well known in the early church that they did not need to describe themselves in more detail.<sup>2</sup> James did not refer to himself as "Jesus' brother" or as "the church's leader." He evidently purposed not to know Jesus "after the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16), but only as his "Lord and God." Being a *bond-servant of God* was his most important relationship (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:1). He placed Jesus on an equal level with God, by saying he was the bond-servant of *both* God *and* the Lord Jesus Christ.

The term "bond-servant" did not carry the degrading connotation in the first century that it does today. In the Septuagint, *doulos* described Israel's great leaders who occupied positions of privilege and honor (e.g., Moses [Deut. 34:5; et al.]; David [2 Sam. 7:5; et al.]; and the prophets [Jer. 7:25; 44:4; Amos 3:7]). By using this word, James was proudly asserting that he belonged to God and to Jesus Christ—body and soul.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. H. Rendall, *The Epistle of James and Judaic Christianity*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Mayor, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Burdick, p. 167.

"It is only his servanthood to the Lord Jesus Christ that matters to him here, for this is the theme of his letter: How shall we live as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ?"<sup>1</sup>

"The 12 tribes (cf. Matt. 19:28; Acts 26:7) scattered abroad" most naturally refer to Jewish Christians of the *Diaspora*, those who were living outside Palestine.<sup>2</sup> "The 12 tribes" was a synonym for the Jewish race.<sup>3</sup> Since this is a "catholic" epistle (addressed to a general audience as opposed to a particular church or individual), some scholars have concluded that James wrote to both unbelieving Jews and Christian Jews.<sup>4</sup> However, what he proceeded to write is aimed at believers, not unbelievers, as is clear from the contents of this epistle.

James knew nothing of the ten so-called "lost tribes;" he regarded Israel—in its unity and completeness—as consisting of "12 tribes." These Jews were very likely members of the Jerusalem church who had left Jerusalem shortly after Stephen's martyrdom (cf. Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19-20). Some scholars believed they lived within Palestine.<sup>5</sup> However, the location of the recipients does not significantly affect the interpretation of the epistle. What James wrote to them as a fellow Jewish Christian is normative for both Jewish and Gentile Christians, since both groups are one in Christ.

It is unnatural to take the 12 tribes as descriptive of the so-called "new Israel," the church, as some interpreters do.<sup>6</sup> "Israel" can, and always does, refer to the physical descendants of Jacob whenever it occurs in the New Testament, just as it does in the Old Testament. Furthermore, there is no other revelation (i.e., Scriptural teaching) that the church consists of 12 parts like the nation of Israel did.

James wrote in very good Greek; his grammar, syntax, and word choice were excellent. "Greetings" was a common Greek salutation familiar to his readers.

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<sup>1</sup>Stulac, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, pp. 32-34. Cf. Martin, pp. 8-11.

<sup>3</sup>Oesterley, 4:419.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p.1448.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, pp. 39-40; Motyer, p. 24; and Sidebottom, p. 26.

## II. TRIALS AND TRUE RELIGION 1:2-27

James began his letter, which is in many ways a lecture, by dealing with the problem of trials that all believers encounter. Jews who became Christians in the early history of the church experienced much antagonism and persecution from their unbelieving fellow Jews, as is clear in the Book of Acts. All Christians who take a stand for the Lord continue to have to deal with such trials. Thus James' inspired advice is perennially relevant.

### A. THE VALUE OF TRIALS 1:2-11

The writer pointed out the *value* of "trials," to encourage his readers to adopt a positive attitude toward these experiences, to endure them, and to view them as God's tools. God uses trials to shape believers into people who will glorify Himself.

#### 1. The proper attitude toward trials 1:2

What kinds of trials was James talking about? Did he mean troubles such as running out of money, or failing a test in school, or having to stay up all night with a sick child: everyday troubles? Yes. The Greek word translated "trials" (*peirasmois*) means a "proving," specifically, "the trial of a man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy ... also an enticement to sin, temptation."<sup>1</sup> Various temptations to depart from the will of God are in view. The context supports this conclusion. Verse 3 restates these trials as "the testing of your faith." James was speaking of the different kinds of trials in which we experience temptation to accompany sinners, rather than remaining faithful to the Savior. He was not distinguishing between internal and external temptations.<sup>2</sup> Trials come from both directions (cf. v. 14). Any trial can constitute a test of our faith, namely, a temptation to cease trusting and obeying God.

"Trials rightly faced are harmless, but wrongly met become temptations to evil."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*peirasmos*."

<sup>2</sup>James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, p. 53; Sidebottom, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, 6:11.

Note that James was speaking to Christians: "my brethren." This title for the readers occurs 15 times in this epistle (cf. 1:16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19).

"Even a superficial reading of James 1:2-18 shows that the author regards his readers as Christians. It may be said that nowhere in the letter—not even in 2:14-26!—does he betray the slightest doubt that those in his audience are truly his brothers or sisters in the Lord. If we do not observe this simple and obvious fact, we may fall into a quagmire of skewed interpretations, just as so many expositors of James have actually done."<sup>1</sup>

What follows is instruction concerning how Christians should respond when they experience temptation to sin.

James counseled his readers to view the "various" kinds of "trials" and tribulations they were encountering in their lives as opportunities for growth. He did not urge them to rejoice that they were undergoing trials. He did not advocate a masochistic attitude that unnaturally rejoices in painful experiences. Rather, he commanded them to view their trials as *profitable*—even if unpleasant. Another translation of "all joy" can be "pure joy." The opposite would be "some joy" along with much grief. The attitude James advocated here can take all the bitterness out of even the most uncomfortable trials. Regardless of the source of our difficulties—the world, our flesh, or the devil—we can and should be glad as we go through them. The reason follows.

## 2. The end product of trials 1:3-4

Trials are the means that God uses to make believers the kind of people that bring honor to His name, namely, mature ("perfect and complete") Christians. "Testing" (Gr. *dokimion*) implies demonstrating the true quality of something when it undergoes a trial. The true nature of gold becomes evident when the refiner heats gold ore over a fire. Similarly, the character of God within a Christian—that is there because of the Holy Spirit's presence—becomes apparent through trials, if responded to properly.

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 18. See also Hiebert, p. 56; and Thomas D. Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 32.

These are trials ("testing[s]") of our "faith," in the sense that our trust in God and obedience to God are being stretched to the limit. Trials can result in "endurance," steadfastness, or perseverance (rather than "patience" [AV]). The Greek word translated "endurance" (*hypomonēn*) describes the quality that enables a person to stay on his or her feet when facing a storm.<sup>1</sup> If we submit to these tests, they will eventually make us *mature* (fully developed, "perfect," cf. Matt. 5:48; 19:21) and "complete" (developed in every essential area of our lives). The Greek word *holokleros* ("perfect") means one who fulfills the purpose for which God created him or her, and "those who fully attain to their high calling."<sup>2</sup> Therefore we should not try to escape from trials, but submit to the maturing process with patient "endurance" and "joy." We must learn patience or we will not learn much else.

God will bring every believer—who endures trials rather than running from them—to maturity, as he or she perseveres in them. James taught that, in view of this fact, we should rejoice in our trials rather than rebelling against them. They are God's instruments for perfecting us.

"After over a quarter century of ministry, I am convinced that spiritual immaturity is the number one problem in our churches."<sup>3</sup>

The concept of living by "faith," that James introduced here for the first time, seems to be the theme that unites all the parts of this epistle. Another writer suggested a variation of this theme, namely, "tests of a living faith."<sup>4</sup> The Christian, who, not only experienced justification by faith in the past, but is presently living by faith (trusting in God and obeying Him), has what James calls "a living faith." This use of *live faith* is very important to remember when we come to James' discussion of faith and works in 2:14-26.

"The root difficulty of the readers lies in a distorted conception of the nature of salvation by faith and its relation to daily life

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, pp. 144-45. Cf. Nigel Turner, *Christian Words*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>2</sup>Oesterley, 4:422.

<sup>3</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:529 (July-September 1978):224. See also the subtitle of the 1979 edition of his commentary on James.



as the proving ground for the development of Christian character."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Help in adopting this attitude 1:5-8

James' reference to "lacking ... nothing" (v. 4) led him to digress briefly from his discussion of trials, to explain (through v. 8) the wisdom necessary to deal with trials appropriately.

"One of the deficiencies that trouble often exposes is lack of wisdom. ... James is speaking of that particular wisdom needed to cope with the various trials they experience."<sup>2</sup>

1:5        What James just explained is *divine* "wisdom": God's view of life. However, the world, which does not have or accept this revealed wisdom, generally fails to appreciate the value of enduring trials. The Christian is apt to take the world's attitude toward his or her trials, rather than God's, and try to escape them at any cost. An evidence of this is that the divorce rate among Christians is about the same as the divorce rate among non-Christians, at least in the United States. Most people "count it all joy" when they escape trials, and they "count it all grief" when they have to endure them.

James used the word "wisdom" (Gr. *sophia*) in the sense in which the Old Testament wisdom literature used it. There it refers to what God has revealed about His will for human life. Wisdom denotes "a fixed, righteous order to which the wise man submits his life."<sup>3</sup> The New Testament writers often regarded wisdom as the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes identified it with the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the wise Christian is the one who views life in the light of God's revelation (i.e., His written Word).

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, *James*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, "The Epistle ...," p. 1102.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):238.

<sup>4</sup>J. A. Kirk, "The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1960):24-38.

If we do not understand God's view of life, James urged that we "keep on asking" (Gr. present active imperative) God to enable us to understand it. This is a first class condition, in the Greek text, that assumes a condition is true to reality for the sake of the argument. Every Christian lacks this wisdom to some extent. *Wisdom* is seeing life realistically from God's perspective. The Christian needing more wisdom, who repeatedly asks God to open his or her eyes and heart, can count on God *repeatedly* granting his or her request. He will give this wisdom freely and graciously ("generously and without reproach").

"He gives to the humble suppliant without upbraiding him with his past sin and ingratitude, or his future abuse of God's goodness."<sup>1</sup>

God will do this as often as we need help (cf. Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20). This description contrasts God with the double-minded man in verse 8.

We must read this verse in context to understand it correctly. This is not a promise that God will give everyone, who asks Him for wisdom, a *higher IQ*. What God promises, in this chapter's context, is the ability to see the importance of enduring trials and persevering in them faithfully.

1:6 In Scripture, asking "in faith" always means one of two things. It means either believing God *will* do what He has promised, or, if He has not promised it, believing that He *can* do what the person requesting is asking (cf. Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 4:35-41).

"James teaches that faith is the essential condition of prayer."<sup>2</sup>

The NASB translation "without any doubting, for the one who doubts" is unfortunate. The Greek word *diakrinomenos*, used twice in this verse, is better translated, "let him ask in faith,

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1448.

<sup>2</sup>Adamson, p. 57.

*free from divided motives and divisive attitudes, for such a person is like an ocean wave ...*"<sup>1</sup>

Lack of confidence in God's faithfulness or power manifests a lack of consistency in the believer's life. James compared the instability that this inconsistency produces to "the surf of the sea." Something other than itself drives it. The "surf" corresponds to the Christian, who, by not submitting consistently to the will of God, is driven by forces outside himself or herself—rather than by the Holy Spirit within. The "surf" (Gr. *kludon*) may refer to the tops of the waves that the wind blows off (cf. Luke 8:24). The low- and high-pressure conditions of life tend to blow us around in a similar fashion.

1:7 Such a person's problems are not only *subjective*, feeling his circumstances are directing him or her rather than God, but they will also be *objective* (real). He or she *really is* at the mercy of circumstances and events beyond their control. This type of inconsistent ("double-minded" or "unstable," v. 8) person resists God's work in his or her life. Rather than simply perfecting maturity in the person through his trials, God now also has to discipline (educate) him regarding his attitude toward his trials.

In the context, "anything" (v. 7) refers primarily to wisdom (v. 5). If such a person is not going to trust God ("ask in faith," v. 6), he or she will fail to enjoy the confidence that comes from knowing that God is in control of his or her trials, and "ought not to expect ... anything (i.e., spiritual wisdom) from the Lord." In a larger sense, of course, our failure to trust God can rob us of the confidence that comes when we know that all of what God has revealed is true.

1:8 In this context, the "double-minded" (*dipsychos*, lit. "two-sided"; cf. 4:8) man is one who trusts and obeys God only *part* of the time, but not consistently. A "double-minded" person is one who has a *divided* opinion or allegiance (e.g., Lot; cf. Matt.

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<sup>1</sup>See David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):741-43. Cf. 2:4.

6:24; 1 Clem. 11:2). He is "unstable," unsteady, fickle, staggering, and reeling like a drunken man.<sup>1</sup>

"... the man is a walking civil war in which trust and distrust of God wage a continual battle against each other."<sup>2</sup>

In summary, God will help us to take His view of trials, which James explained in verses 3 and 4, if we "ask" Him to do so in prayer. We can and should be *joyful* while experiencing trials that constitute temptations to depart from God's will. We can "count it all joy" because we know that, if we remain faithful to God, He will use these trials to produce what is glorifying for Him and what is good for us, namely, our spiritual maturity.

#### 4. The larger view of circumstances 1:9-11

James had been urging his readers to adopt God's view of their trials (vv. 2-4). Now he returned to this subject, broadened their perspective, and encouraged them to adopt God's viewpoint on all their present circumstances.

1:9            Materially poor ("humble") believers should derive joy from focusing their thinking on their spiritual riches ("high position").

1:10           Conversely, the materially wealthy ("the rich man") should remember that riches are temporary ("will pass away"), and that one's real condition before God is a very humble one ("is to glory in his humiliation").

"The Cross of Christ lifts up the poor and brings down the high. It is the great leveller [*sic*] of men."<sup>3</sup>

"The old adage says, 'There's no pocket in a shroud.'"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, 6:15.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, 6:15.

<sup>4</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:630.

Grass in many places is not very hardy, but in some parts of Palestine it only stays green a few weeks. The term "flowering grass" evidently goes back to Isaiah 40:6-8. It is a combination of two thoughts, namely, that "the grass withers" and "the flower fades." In Hebrew, mixing metaphors was a way of enriching the thought.<sup>1</sup>

The commentators differ in their understanding of who the "rich" people were to whom James referred. Many concluded they were *believers*, in view of James' parallel statement in verse 9. They take the verb *kauchaomai* ("glory" or "take pride in"), in verse 9, to also apply as the verb in verse 10. Likewise, the subject "brother," in verse 9, seems to be the subject of verse 10 again.<sup>2</sup> Other interpreters believe the context points to the rich being unsaved.<sup>3</sup> I think the evidence favors the view that they were Christians, probably Jewish Christians (cf. 5:1-6). But the fact that James did not make this clear suggests that he intended to state a general truth that applies to both kinds of people: riches are worthless in the face of death and judgment (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19).

"There is no higher honor than to be the object of God's gracious and loving concern."<sup>4</sup>

1:11 The "flower" of the "grass" refers to its stage of green, lush growth when it is at the peak of its vitality. Soon it "withers" and turns brown in the Middle East (cf. Matt. 6:30). Likewise "the rich man" may "fade" quickly "away" (cf. 4:13).

"Speaking of his friend, a poor Christian, a wealthy unbeliever remarked, 'When I die, I shall leave my riches. When he dies he will go to his.'"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1—72*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Mayor, pp. 45-46; Adamson, p. 62; Hiebert, *James*, p. 78; C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle of James*, p. 33; and Blue, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Davids, pp. 76-77; Stulac, pp. 195, 199; and Martin, pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Adamson, p. 66.

Our trials, as well as our triumphs on the earth, are only temporary. This fact should help us endure our trials, and keep us from becoming self-confident in our triumphs.<sup>1</sup>

"James seems to be indicating that trials erase any superficial distinctions that may be thought to separate the rich brother from the poor one."<sup>2</sup>

This introduction to the book (vv. 2-11) is in balance with the conclusion (5:7-20). Both sections talk about the need for patience (1:2-4; 5:7-12) and prayer (1:5-8; 5:13-18), and both end with an emphasis on all the contrasting circumstances of life (1:9-11; 5:19-20).<sup>3</sup>

## **B. THE OPTIONS IN TRIALS 1:12-18**

Thus far James revealed the value of trials, how God uses them to perfect the Christian, and how to obtain God's perspective on one's trials when this is difficult to see. Next he proceeded to explain the consequences of obedience and disobedience, and the source of temptations, so his readers could manage their trials effectively.

### **1. The ultimate end of trials 1:12**

In view of how God uses trials in our lives, we should persevere in the will of God joyfully.

"Every trial, every external difficulty, carries with it a temptation, an inner enticement to sin."<sup>4</sup>

The Christian who "perseveres under trial[s]," who does not yield to temptations to depart from the will of God, demonstrates his or her "love" for God. James used the same Greek word for "trials" here as in verse 2, but here the negative sense of the word ("temptations") is in view.<sup>5</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup>See James E. Allman, "Suffering in the Non-Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, p. p. 200-4.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>Motyer, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Moo, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup>See Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of James," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 419.

those who persevere under trials out of love for God, while being severely tempted, whom He will reward with "the crown of life" (cf. Rev. 2:10). Only the person who endures through severe testings and temptations will receive the *blessing*.<sup>1</sup>

"... James has begun the sentence with 'blessed' *makarios*, like a new beatitude recalling Matthew 5:3-10 and especially 5:11-12, where Jesus encouraged perseverance in trials 'because great is your reward in heaven.' ... the crown of life would be the ultimate reward, the fulfillment of eternal life and the exaltation with Christ which will be enjoyed by those who, because of faith in Christ, have loved God enough to live faithfully, obeying him even through trials."<sup>2</sup>

"It is evident that this 'life that God has promised' is more than the eternal life given to every believer at the time of his salvation (John 5:24). Since it is a reward for an accomplishment subsequent to initial faith, it must refer to a still higher quality of life."<sup>3</sup>

"Many Christians are presently following the same path which Esau took (considering the birthright to be of little value), and such Christians will one day come to the end of the matter in the same position as Esau. They, although presently in line to be blessed as the firstborn (every Christian is a firstborn child of God), will have forfeited this right; and they will be rejected for the blessing."<sup>4</sup>

"The idea that all Christians *do* love God is a fiction. Even our Lord felt it necessary to exhort His inner circle of eleven disciples on this point (cf. John 14:21-24). ... In no circumstances more than in trials does the presence or absence of love for God in a Christian become more apparent."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Mayor, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Stulac, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Burdick, p. 171. Cf. Curtis Vaughan, *James*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, pp. 26-27. See also Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 128-29, 140-51.

For other promises to those who love God, see Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:9; 30:16, 20; Judges 5:31; Psalm 5:11; Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9; and 2 Timothy 4:8. The other "crowns" to which the New Testament writers referred are probably parallel references to the *fullness* of the other special qualities mentioned in their contexts (cf. 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10). They are probably not material or physical *crowns*, but are probably, like this crown, also references to the fullness of the qualities—faithfulness, endurance, leadership, loyalty to Christ, preaching the gospel, overcoming the world—mentioned in their contexts. In other words, we should probably interpret them as metaphors rather than as literal crowns.

The New Testament also describes believers' rewards as precious metals (1 Cor. 3:8-14) and as garments (Rev. 3:5, 18; 19:7-8). Those who demonstrate their love for the Lord by persevering under trials will receive life to its fullest potential—in the present and in the future.

<b>BELIEVERS' CROWNS</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Reference</b>
An imperishable crown	For leading a disciplined life	1 Cor. 9:25
A crown of rejoicing	For evangelism and discipleship	1 Thess. 2:19
A crown of righteousness	For living the Lord's appearing	2 Tim. 4:8
A crown of life	For enduring trials	James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
A crown of glory	For shepherding God's flock faithfully	1 Pet. 5:4



### BELIEVERS' FUTURE INHERITANCE

What all believers will inherit	What faithful believers will additionally inherit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrance into God's kingdom (John 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5)</li> <li>• Eternal life (John 3:16, 36; et al.)</li> <li>• Acceptance by God (Rom. 5:1; 8:31-39)</li> <li>• No condemnation (Rom. 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thess. 1:10)</li> <li>• Resurrection or translation (1 Cor. 15:53-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)</li> <li>• Glorification (1 Pet. 1:9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundant eternal life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10)</li> <li>• Reigning with Christ (Luke 19:17, 19; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27)</li> <li>• Praise from God (Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17; John 12:26; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:7; 5:4)</li> <li>• Intimacy with Christ (John 15:14)</li> <li>• Various rewards (Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18; 10:41-42; 16:27; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 9:16-18, 25, 27; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Phil. 4:1; Col. 3:24; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:18; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8; Heb. 11:6; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 11:18; 22:12)</li> </ul>

## 2. The source of temptation 1:13-14

James did not want us to conclude that because God permits us to experience trials, He therefore must be the source of temptation. That deduction might encourage us to give in to sin.

1:13      God is never the source of temptation. He does not try to get us to sin ("He Himself does not tempt anyone"), even though some people blame God for their sins.

"Some Jews reasoned that since God created everything, he must have created the evil impulse. And since it is the evil impulse that tempts man to sin, ultimately God, who created it, is responsible for evil."<sup>1</sup>

God Himself is not even subject to temptation ("cannot be tempted by evil"), because He is totally separate from sin and not susceptible to evil.<sup>2</sup> The only sense in which God *appears* responsible for sin's existence is that He permits other things to tempt us, namely: the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. Job 1—2). James did not mention this here.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4). Jesus used a figure of speech (i.e., "litotes") in which He expressed a positive idea by negating the contrary. Other examples of *litotes* are: "not a few," meaning "many," and "no rare occurrence," meaning "a frequent occurrence." Neither James here, nor Jesus in the Lord's Prayer, were implying that God sometimes *does* lead us into temptation. James' point was that He can help us stay away from it. Essentially Jesus meant we should ask God to allow us to experience as little temptation as possible (cf. Mark 14:38). James was not contradicting Jesus' teaching.

"We all know only too many people who have ceased to walk with God under the pressure of trouble or tragedy ..."<sup>3</sup>

1:14 Rather than blaming God, we need to recognize that *we* are responsible when we yield to temptation, not God. There is *nothing* in God that responds positively to sin, but there is *much* in us that does.

"Desire (*epithymia*) does not always have a negative meaning (cf. Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23), but here, as most often in the New Testament, it refers to fleshly, selfish, illicit desire. While the

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<sup>1</sup>Wessel, p. 1431.

<sup>2</sup>Mayor, p. 53. See also his extended discussion of this subject on pp. 195-97.

<sup>3</sup>Motyer, p. 50.

word often describes specifically sexual passions, the use of the singular here suggests a broader conception."<sup>1</sup>

What *practical* difference does it make if God tempts us, or if He allows us to experience temptation from other sources? Perhaps we can better appreciate the difference if we think of God as our Father. No good earthly father would deliberately seduce his child into sin, by *trying* to make him or her fall. However, every good father will deliberately allow his child to enter situations in life in which the child must make moral choices. We realize that sending a child to school or into the community, at the proper age, is good for a child because it matures him or her. Likewise, God grows us up by allowing certain experiences (including temptations) to assail us, though He Himself only gives "good gifts" to His children (v. 18; Luke 11:13). Similarly, a good schoolteacher will test his students to help them grow, but he would never tempt them to do evil.

### 3. The progress of temptation 1:15

"Lust" in this context is simply the desire to do, have, or be something apart from the will of God. Lust is covert, but sometimes it manifests itself overtly. If we do not check (quickly control and stop) lust, it will lead to sin, and if we do not confess and forsake sin, it will lead to death (Rom. 6:21-23; 8:6). One commentator helpfully identified seven successive stages of temptation.<sup>2</sup>

"Sin is the result of the surrender of the will to the soliciting of *epithymia* [lust] instead of the guidance of reason."<sup>3</sup>

"Martin Luther expressed it in this novel way: 'You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.'"<sup>4</sup>

"Lust" can lead to physical death in a believer (1 John 5:16), and it can lead to physical and spiritual death in a non-believer. James' vivid illustration of the childbearing process graphically describes the cause and

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (1985), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>Mayor, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 5:636.

effect relationship between "lust," "sin," and "death." God desires to lead us into the fullness of life (v. 12), but if we respond improperly, and give in to temptations, we will not obtain the crown of life but death. "Death" in verse 15 is the opposite of "life" in verse 12. The ultimate outcome of capitulating to temptation is death (cf. Prov. 10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; and 19:16), but the ultimate outcome of resisting it is the fullness of life (cf. John 10:10).

"This attention-getting imagery is designed to stop sinners in their tracks, seeing that death is the natural and terrible end of a life of sin, not just an occasional result for some sinners."<sup>1</sup>

"Nip sin in the bud of lust."<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. The goodness of God 1:16-18

James now defended God to those who doubted His goodness or reliability, or who had given up hope in a time of testing, and had concluded that this was their "fate."<sup>3</sup> The theological term for a vindication of God's character is "theodicy."

1:16 James wanted his readers to have no doubt about God's purposes and methods in dealing with them, His children. The same "Do not be deceived" expression occurs in 1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:33; Galatians 6:7; and 1 John 3:7. God definitely is not the author of temptation.

When God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a human sacrifice (Gen. 22:2), it only appeared to Abraham that God was *tempting* (leading) him to commit murder. But God prevented him from slaying his son (Gen. 22:12). This was a *test* of Abraham's obedience, not a solicitation to sin.

James clarified God's purposes and methods in the following two verses (cf. Gal. 4:7). Verse 15 warns against yielding to temptation by reminding us of the judgment of God, and verse 17 warns us by reminding us of the goodness of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Stulac, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1449.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 39.

1:17 Every act of gift-giving (better than "good thing bestowed," Gr. *dosis*), and every "perfect gift" given (Gr. *dorema*), has its source in God. This does not include temptations to sin. God created the sun and moon ("lights"), by which we see *variation* in light. However, there is "no variation" in God's dealings with His creatures (cf. 1 John 1:5). He always does everything for His own glory and His creatures' good.

"Being this, being the Father of those glorious fountains of light, and thus ... purer and clearer than they all, it cannot be that He should tempt to evil."<sup>1</sup>

"In the Greek text there are two separate words to describe God's giving. The first word (*dosis*) means 'the act of giving' and is accompanied by the adjective for *good*, while the second (*dorema*) denotes the actual gifts received and is preceded by the adjective for *perfect*. The first expression emphasizes the goodness of receiving something from God, while the second, the perfect quality of whatever God gives. God's giving is continuously good, and His gifts are always perfect."<sup>2</sup>

"From above" is the translation of the same Greek word (*anōthen*) Jesus used in John 3:7 when He told Nicodemus that he must be born "again." There, the new birth is the "good" or "perfect gift" from God that is in view.

1:18 The greatest of God's gifts for believers is the gift of new life in Christ. God's deliberate initiative ("the exercise of His will") provided this gift for us, and His special revelation communicated it to us (i.e., "the message (word) [marked by] truth"). This verse, along with the preceding one, shows clearly that James believed eternal life was *a gift of God's grace*.<sup>3</sup> We need to keep this in mind when we read James' discussion of faith and works that follows in chapter 2. James also agreed

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:2:282.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 2105.

<sup>3</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, pp. 43-53.

with Paul that our salvation springs from the sovereign volition of God (cf. Rom. 4:21-22; 2 Cor. 4:6). *He* initiated it by "the exercise of His will."

The "first fruits" probably refer to all Christians who persevere in spite of trials. All believers will bring glory to God's name, but believers who remain faithful to Christ will please Him greatly, as the first fruits in Israel were a special offering to God. The Greek word translated "first fruits" (*aparche*) refers to what is first in *honor*, as well as to what is first in order. The biblical writers used the term "of persons superior in excellence to others of the same class."<sup>1</sup>

The point of these verses (17-18) seems to be that God's intention for all people, and believers in particular, is invariably their blessing. Rather than viewing those temptations to depart from the will of God as heaven-sent, we must see them as the potential enemies of spiritual growth. Instead of caving in under their weight, we must brace ourselves against them. We can do this, knowing that the effort will make us better this side of the grave, and it will yield a wonderful reward the other side of the grave. Satan tempts us in order to bring out the *worst* in us, but God allows us to be tempted in order to bring out the *best* in us.

"James outlined the source of temptation, the steps in temptation, and the solution for temptation."<sup>2</sup>

### C. THE PROPER RESPONSE TO TRIALS 1:19-27

Having explained the value of trials and our options in trials, James next exhorted his readers to respond properly to their trials. In this section he stressed the Word of God, because it is the key to resisting temptations and responding to trials correctly (cf. Matt. 4:1-11).

"Receptivity to the Word, responsiveness to the Word, and resignation to the Word are essential to spiritual growth. One must accept God's Word, act on it, and abide by it."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*A Greek-English ...*, s.v. "*aparche*." Cf. Rev. 14:4.

<sup>2</sup>Blue, p. 822.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

## 1. The improper response 1:19-20

1:19 James' readers already knew what he had just reminded them of ("this you know") in the preceding verses (vv. 17-18; cf. Prov. 10:19; 13:3; 14:29; 15:1; 17:27-28; 29:11, 20; Eccles. 7:9). Nevertheless, they needed to act in harmony with this knowledge.

"He [James] drives home the teaching about our death-bound, sinful nature with the cry *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren* (16); he drives home the teaching about the new birth with the cry *Know this, my beloved brethren* (19a)."<sup>1</sup>

We may respond to trials by complaining about them and becoming angry over them. James advised his readers to remain silent ("slow to speak") and calm ("slow to anger"), and to listen submissively to ("quick to hear") the Word of God (v. 23).

"It is possible to be unfailingly regular in Bible reading, but to achieve no more than to have moved the book-mark forward: this is reading unrelated to an attentive spirit."<sup>2</sup>

Many people have observed that we have two ears and one mouth, which ought to remind us to listen twice as much as we speak (cf. Prov. 10:19; 17:27). Apparently Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, is the oldest known source of this observation.<sup>3</sup> The rabbis also noted that our ears are open and exposed, whereas our tongue is walled in behind the teeth and lips.<sup>4</sup>

"Ceaseless talkers may easily degenerate into fierce controversialists."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Motyer, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1450.

<sup>5</sup>Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, p. 38.

"The great talker is rarely a great listener, and never is the ear more firmly closed than when anger takes over."<sup>1</sup>

"The tribute was once paid to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages."<sup>2</sup>

"The most effective means of ministry ... is responding to need; not dumping our load."<sup>3</sup>

1:20 An angry response to temptations ("the anger of man") does not advance "the righteousness" in the character and conduct "of God," that He is seeking to produce in the believer. The difficulties of life are intended to make us "better," not *bitter*.

"The policy James condemns is one of seeking to promote the cause of freedom by politically motivated and engineered violence (an endeavor to be brought into the discussion at 4:1-3)."<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The essential response 1:21

The "filthiness" in view seems to refer to all kinds of unclean behavior that lies outside the will of God, including anger and wrath. The "remains of wickedness" are those evil habits of life we carry over from the unredeemed world (cf. Ps. 17:4; Luke 6:45). The believer should accept submissively what God has revealed ("in humility receive the word"), and should respond cooperatively to what He commands. The Word of God will then have good soil in which to grow, and it will yield an abundant harvest of righteous conduct in the believer.

"We pray for safety instead of purity because we do not see impurity as dangerous."<sup>5</sup>

Some interpreters have understood the phrase "which is able to save your souls" to imply that the souls of James' readers still needed to experience

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<sup>1</sup>Motyer, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Paul A. Cedar, *James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>Stulac, p. 71.



salvation from eternal damnation. However, since his readers were Christians (vv. 1-2), some interpreters believe that when a believer sins he loses his salvation and needs saving again. Yet the words James used, and their context, make it clear that this was not what he meant. "Save your lives" or "save your selves" (Gr. *psychas*) is a better translation used elsewhere (cf. Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; 9:56; James 5:20; 1 Pet. 1:9). I counted 40 instances in the New Testament where the translators of the AV rendered the Greek word *psyche* "life" rather than "soul."<sup>1</sup> The Greek word translated "soul," as contrasted with its English usage, often does not describe a part of the individual that is different from some other part of him or her such as the body; it often describes the whole person.

"... the expression ["save your souls"] is never found in any New Testament text which describes the conversion experience!"<sup>2</sup>

By obeying God's Word, the believer can save (preserve) his "life," himself (i.e., his entire self: body, soul, and spirit), from the consequences of sin. The ultimate consequence of sin for a believer is premature physical (not eternal) death (cf. 1:15; 5:19-20; Prov. 10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16; Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).<sup>3</sup> James was still talking about the consequences of obeying and disobeying God: "the crown of life" (v. 12) or "death" (v. 15).

"It has often been observed that the Epistle of James is, of all the New Testament writings, the one which most clearly reflects the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The theme of death as the consequence of sin is an extremely frequent one in the book of Proverbs. ... It should be evident that this is the Old Testament concept which furnishes the background for James' thought. A recognition of this fact clarifies a great deal."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See also Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 118-19; and Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>See Arlen L. Chitwood, *Salvation of the Soul*, pp. 25-34.

<sup>4</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 24-25.

### 3. The complete response 1:22-25

Whereas verses 19-21 stress the importance of listening to the Word, verses 22-25 emphasize the necessity of putting the Word into practice: applying it.

1:22 *Doing* the Word of God, in this context, means persevering in God's will when we experience temptation to depart from it. *Hearing* God's will is good as far as it goes, and it is indispensable, but obedience should follow. Some Christian disciples "delude themselves" by thinking that knowing God's will is all that is needed, but it is only foundational to doing God's will.

"The blessing does not come in *studying* the Word, but in *doing* the Word."<sup>1</sup>

"The call to 'do what it says' lies at the center of all that James teaches. It sums up the message of the whole book: Put into practice what you profess to believe. Indeed, 1:22 may well be the key verse of James's epistle."<sup>2</sup>

James' original readers would have been used to hearing their Scriptures read aloud weekly in their synagogues.<sup>3</sup>

1:23-24 This illustration is so clear and so common that it needs little comment. The Greek verb *katanoeo* refers to careful observation. It does not mean to cast a hasty superficial glance, as some have suggested.

1:25 The "law" to which James referred is the revelation of God's will contained in Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:17). It is "perfect" because it is the *perfect will* of a *perfect God*.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 16. Cf. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1932.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup>Oesterley, 4:432.

"Unlike the imperfect metal mirror in the previous illustration, this law is able to give the beholder a true and undistorted revelation of himself."<sup>1</sup>

"The law of God is perfect, first, because it perfectly expresses his nature and, secondly, because it perfectly matches ours."<sup>2</sup>

It is a law "of liberty" because, by obeying it, we find *true liberty* from sin and its consequences (i.e., real life).

"True freedom is the opportunity and the ability to give expression to what we truly are."<sup>3</sup>

Note James' agreement with Paul that Christians live in comparative *liberty* under the "law of Christ" (Gal. 5:1; 6:2; cf. Matt. 11:30). Obedient adherence to the Word of God is the key to experiencing God's blessing in life now, as well as in the eschatological future (cf. Matt. 5:3-11).

"... the letter ... is a 'law book' in a deeper and more pervasive sense than any other single writing in the New Testament."<sup>4</sup>

"The whole Epistle is founded on this perfect law of Christ, more especially on that declaration of it contained in the sermon on the mount ..."<sup>5</sup>

"Thus the passage falls into three sections, each with a distinct response to the word God speaks: hearing (19b-20), receiving (21) and obeying (22-25)."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Motyer, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Alford, 4:2:288.

<sup>6</sup>Motyer, p. 63.

#### 4. The external behavior 1:26-27

James proceeded to explain in 1:26—2:13 what a doer of works (1:25) does.

1:26 "Religious" (Gr. *threskos*, used only here in the New Testament) describes someone who fears or worships God. In particular, it refers to the outward consequences of what one believes (i.e., piety, good works), rather than to what he believes, or the fact that he believes deeply. The Jews, who were James' original readers, typically regarded alms-giving, prayer, fasting, regular attendance at worship services, and the observance of holy days and feasts—as signs of true spirituality (cf. Matt. 6:1-18). However, James said a better test of spirituality was a person's control of his or her "tongue" (cf. 3:1-12).

1:27 Taking care of "orphans" and "widows" (conduct) is a *duty* that lies close to the heart of God (cf. Exod. 22:22-24; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:28; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10). Yet many who professed to love Him neglected it (Ps. 68:5; Eccles. 4:1; Mark 12:40).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, personal moral purity (character) is an excellent external indicator of godliness (cf. Acts 15:20; 1 Tim. 5:22).

"When we read James's injunction to 'keep oneself unstained from the world' (James 1:27), we tend to interpret that in strictly moral terms—as an injunction not to sin. But it also means to keep ourselves 'unstained' from the world's wrong ways of thinking, its faulty worldviews. We must learn how to identify and resist the false worldviews dominant at our moment in history."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Richard D. Patterson, "The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:519 (July-September 1973):223-34.

<sup>2</sup>Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth*, p. 121.

James argued for reality. He did not want us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritual if our obedience to God is only superficial.

"Like Jesus, James sees worship not in terms of external law but as an expression of inner active goodness."<sup>1</sup>

"To summarize, vv. 22-27 insist that a person's religion must consist of more than superficial acts. It is not enough to listen to the statement of spiritual truth (vv. 22-25), nor is it sufficient to engage in formal religious activity (v. 26). The person whose religious experience is genuine will put spiritual truth into practice, and his life will be marked by love for others and holiness before God."<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, James dealt with the practical problem of trials and temptations. He used this subject to remind his readers of some very basic truths that have implications in many other areas of practical Christian living. Two of these areas are: consistent commitment to God and obedience to His Word. We will demonstrate behavior that is as genuinely religious as anything anyone can do, when we respond appropriately to temptations to depart from God's will. The appropriate response involves both rejecting them and rejoicing in them, because we believe that God is using them to mature us for His glory.

### III. PARTIALITY AND VITAL FAITH CH. 2

"In the epistle of James, the Holy Spirit has given the church a commentary on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain, a commentary that is rich in applications for daily life."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, pp. 176-77.

<sup>3</sup>Stulac, p. 34. Cf. Davids, pp. 47-50.

The similarities appear both in subject matter and in structure. Note the parallels between Matthew 7:1-27 and James 2:1-26 below, especially Matthew 7:12 (cf. Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18).<sup>1</sup>

<b>Matthew 7</b>		<b>James 2</b>	
vv. 1-2	Prohibition against judging	v. 1	Prohibition against judgmental favoritism
vv. 3-5	Illustration of removing one's own faults so that one can help remove others' faults	vv. 2-4	Illustration of removing one's own partiality so that one can judge or instruct others
v. 6	Warning not to despise what is sacred in favor of dogs or pigs that will harm you	vv. 5-7	Warning not to despise brothers who are rich in faith in favor of others who harm you
vv. 7-11	Encouragement to ask and to believe		
v. 12	Summary of the law as doing to others what you would want for yourself	vv. 8-11	Summary of the law as loving others as yourself
vv. 13-14	Summary admonition to follow the narrow way that leads to life	vv. 12-13	Summary admonition to follow the law that gives freedom
vv. 15-23	Warning against false prophets, with the true test presented: deeds	vv. 14-19	Warning against dead faith, with the true test presented: deeds
vv. 24-27	Parable to illustrate putting Christ's words into practice	vv. 20-26	Examples to illustrate putting faith into practice

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<sup>1</sup>Stulac, p. 92.

Chapter 2 of James deals with the subject of *partiality* (or favoritism) and vital faith. Verses 1-13 introduce the problem of favoritism. "Partiality" as practiced by Christians is a manifestation of inconsistent love for other people. We do not love some people as we should when we show favoritism. Throughout this epistle, James dealt with inconsistencies in Christian behavior. We saw this in chapter 1. There the inconsistency involved regarding trials as good gifts from God—sometimes—and as bad gifts at other times. In chapter 3, the inconsistency is with our speech. In chapter 2, it is inconsistent treatment of other people. Consistency is very important in both theology and practice, as well as in many other aspects of life, such as cooking.

### A. THE PROBLEM OF FAVORITISM 2:1-13

James' previous reference to hypocritical religiosity (1:26-27) seems to have led him to deal with one form of this problem that existed among Christian Jews of his day. It is still with us today. It is the problem of inconsistent love for other people, that manifests itself in how we treat them. James wrote this chapter to exhort his readers to deal with this very basic inconsistency in their lives, and so to progress toward spiritual maturity.

"The connection of this warning against social discrimination with the previous ch. 1 seems fairly obvious. Truckling to the rich and apathy or worse toward the poor are two sides of the same base coin rejected by the touchstone of 1:27 and of 2:8."<sup>1</sup>

"He [the believer] must show courtesy to all, compassion for all, and consistency to all. Equity, love, and fidelity are the vital ingredients."<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The negative command 2:1

James came right to the point; we know exactly what his concern was. Personal "favoritism" is hardly a *glorious* characteristic, and it is inconsistent for a Christian who worships the "glorious Lord Jesus Christ"

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Blue, p. 824.

to practice it (cf. Matt. 22:16 Acts 10:34). All earthly distinctions disappear in the presence of our glorious Lord (cf. Heb. 1:2-3). It was especially appropriate for James to address his readers as "my brethren" here, since he proceeded to encourage them to practice brotherly kindness. Such behavior would be glorious, in harmony with their "glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

"... the intensely Jewish character of this Epistle makes it reasonably certain that the familiar Jewish conception of the *Shekinah* is what the writer is here referring to [when he wrote "glorious"]. ... The *Shekinah* [from the Hebrew root *shkn*, meaning "to dwell"] was thus used by Jews as an indirect expression in place of God, the localized presence of the deity."<sup>1</sup>

"... a Christian is (or should be) the last person to be impressed by the sham glory of social status."<sup>2</sup>

It may be helpful to distinguish partiality or favoritism (Gr. *prosopolepsia*, Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; cf. Acts 10:34) from some of its synonyms. One definition of *prosopolepsia* is as follows.

It is "the fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts."<sup>3</sup>

"Favoritism" (partiality) implies an inclination to favor a person or thing because of strong fondness or attachment. We say that an orchestra conductor, for example, has a partiality for the works of a particular composer. Treating people with partiality may spring from predilection, or from prejudice, or from bias:

*Predilection* implies a preconceived liking formed as a result of one's background, temperament, etc., that inclines one to a particular

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<sup>1</sup>Oesterley, 4:435, 436.

<sup>2</sup>Adamson, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup>*A Greek-English ...*, s.v. "*prosopolepsia*," p. 551.



preference. We might say a certain person has a predilection for murder mysteries.

*Prejudice* implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavorable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred. We might say racial prejudice incited a certain lynch mob.

*Bias* implies a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. One might say someone has a bias toward the color blue. James was dealing primarily with partiality.

## 2. The present improper practice 2:2-4

The situation James described in verses 2 and 3 presents what some have called "the case of the nearsighted usher." Some interpreters believe this was a hypothetical situation that James constructed.<sup>1</sup> Others believe it was a real situation that he knew about.<sup>2</sup> There is no way of knowing this now, but whether the situation was hypothetical or real is insignificant.

"Someone has said, 'Some go to church to close their eyes, and others go to eye the clothes.'"<sup>3</sup>

2:2-3 "Assembly" is literally "synagogue." In the early history of the church, Jewish believers met in Jewish synagogues—until their unbelieving Jewish brethren forced them out! This reference suggests that James probably wrote this epistle early in the history of the church.

There is some debate among the commentators about whether a public worship service or a congregational meeting for the purpose of hearing a judicial case is in view.<sup>4</sup> The term "synagogue" meant a public worship service in early Christian literature, but the following verses may suggest a judicial setting. This issue does not affect the meaning of the passage significantly.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Davids, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Martin, pp. 60, 63.

<sup>3</sup>McGee, 5:646.

<sup>4</sup>Adamson, p. 105, argued for the first option and Martin, pp. 59, 61, for the second.

"... in its early days the Church was predominantly poor and humble; and therefore if a rich man was converted, and did come to the Christian fellowship, there must have been a very real temptation to make a fuss of him, and to treat him as a special trophy for Christ."<sup>1</sup>

"The 'gold ring' was an emblem of the upper-level Roman 'equestrian' class, although James may not intend quite so specific an identification."<sup>2</sup>

The synagogue official who directed people to their seats was called the *chazzan* (from the Hebrew root *hzn*, i.e., the man who "had charge").<sup>3</sup>

2:4 The form of James' question in the Greek text expects a positive answer: "You have, haven't you?" The usher made two errors. First, he showed favoritism because of what the rich man might do for the church if he received preferential treatment. He should have treated everyone graciously, as God does. This reflects a double-minded (and hypocritical) attitude in the usher, thinking like the world—in this special case—while thinking as God thinks in other respects (1:8).

Second, the usher, who represents all the believers, manifested evil motives in judging where to seat the two visitors. His motive was what the church could *obtain from* them, rather than what it could *impart to* them. The Christian and the church should primarily seek to serve others, rather than getting others to serve them (cf. Mark 10:45).

"Prejudice is an evil that exhibits the character of the one who practices it."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Moo, (2000), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Oesterley, 4:437.

<sup>4</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 139.

### 3. The inconsistency of favoritism 2:5-7

James' three questions in these verses all expect positive answers, as is clear in the construction of the Greek text.

- 2:5 Since God has chosen "the poor of this world" to be the recipients ("heirs") of His blessings ("the kingdom"), it is inconsistent for Christians to withhold blessings from them (cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20). In reality, God has chosen *more* "poor" people than rich (cf. Luke 1:52; 1 Cor. 1:26). The "kingdom" is probably the messianic millennial kingdom, in which Christians will participate with Christ whom they love.<sup>1</sup> This seems clear from the context. The "heirs" of this kingdom, those who will receive it, are *believers* (cf. 1:12; Matt. 5:3, 5; Mark 10:17-22; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). Another view is that the "heirs" of the kingdom are faithful disciples.<sup>2</sup>
- 2:6 When a Christian dishonors "the poor," he or she treats them exactly opposite to the way God treats them (cf. 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Pet. 2:17). Instead of favoring Christians, James reminded his readers that the characteristic response of "the rich" to them had been to "oppress" them (cf. Mark 13:9; Acts 4:1-3; 13:50; 16:19; 19:23-41). How inconsistent it is to despise one's friends and honor one's foes! The oppression in view could have been physical and or legal ("personally drag you into court").
- 2:7 The rich not only typically oppose Christians, they also typically speak against Christ ("blaspheme the fair name"). This was as true in James' world as it is in ours. It is inconsistent to give special honor to those who despise the Lord—whom believers love and serve! To "blaspheme" or slander (Gr. *blasphemeo*) means to mock deliberately, or to speak contemptuously of God. Perhaps those who were blaspheming Christ's name were unbelieving Jews (cf. Acts 13:45).<sup>3</sup> "The ... name by which

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 141; Oesterley, 4:438; Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup>See Hodges, *The Hungry ...*, pp. 96-107.

<sup>3</sup>Mayor, p. 88.

you have been called" does not mean the name that they bore, but the name under whose protection they stood.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Christian's duty 2:8-9

- 2:8 James did not mean Christians should avoid honoring the rich, but that we should love *everyone*, and treat *every* individual as we would treat ourselves (Matt. 7:12; cf. Lev. 19:18). The "royal (Gr. *basilikos*) law" is "royal," in that it is the law *of the King* who heads the kingdom (Gr. *basilikon*) that believers will inherit (v. 5).<sup>2</sup> It is also "royal" in that it is *primary*, it governs all other laws dealing with human relationships (Matt. 22:39; cf. Lev. 19:18). Moreover, it is "conduct of a high order that is worthy of a king."<sup>3</sup> The phrase "royal law" reflects the Latin *lex regia*, which was known throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup>
- 2:9 In this verse, James used the verb form ("show partiality") of the same Greek word he used in verse 1, namely, *prosopolepteo*. The type of preferential treatment James dealt with in this pericope (2:1-13) violates the royal law, because it treats some as inferior and others as sources of special favor (cf. Acts 10:34). It also violates specific commands found in God's Word that reveal God's will in interpersonal dealings (Matt. 7:12; cf. Lev. 19:15).

"The passage calls us to consistent love, not just polite ushering. People of low income are to be fully welcomed into the life of the church. The passage calls us to be blind to economic differences in how we offer our ministries. The poor person is as worthy of our discipling and pastoral care and love as the person who has the means to rescue our church from its budget crisis."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oesterley, 4:440.

<sup>2</sup>Motyer, pp. 96-97.

<sup>3</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>Blue, p. 825.

<sup>5</sup>Stulac, p. 93.

"Anyone who shows favoritism breaks the supreme law of love for his neighbor, the law that comprehends all laws governing one's relationships to one's fellowmen."<sup>1</sup>

### 5. The importance of partiality 2:10-11

2:10 James anticipated that some of his readers might feel that preferential treatment was not very important. Consequently he pointed out that the practice of preferring certain individuals makes one a violator of God's "law." We "become guilty of all" in the sense that we have violated *God's law*, not that we have violated every commandment in that law. One can never claim to behave righteously because he or she keeps only part of God's laws.

"The Jew was very apt to regard the law as a series of detached injunctions. To keep one of these injunctions was to gain credit; to break one was to incur debt. Therefore, a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke, and, as it were emerge with a credit or a debit balance."<sup>2</sup>

"Our obedience to God's will cannot be on a selective basis; we cannot choose that part that is to our liking and disregard the rest. God's will is not fragmentary; the entire law is the expression of His will for His people; it constitutes a grand unity. To break out one corner of a window pane is to become guilty of breaking the whole pane. He who crosses a forbidden boundary at one point or another is guilty of having crossed the boundary."<sup>3</sup>

2:11 James illustrated this point with a hypothetical case involving two very severe violations of the law. Not all sins are equally serious, in that the consequences of some sins are greater

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<sup>1</sup>Burdick, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 148.

than others, but all sins *are* equally serious, in that any sin is a violation of God's will.

### 6. The implication of our own judgment 2:12-13

2:12 The "law of liberty" (1:25) is the law of God that liberates us now: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free" (Gal. 5:1). It is the same as the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), in contrast to the Mosaic Law. As *free* as we are under the law of Christ, we need to remember that God will judge us (Rom. 14:10-13; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). We need to speak and act accordingly, namely, without prejudice toward others.

"Since he is speaking to believers, the judgment to which he refers must be the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10)."<sup>1</sup>

2:13 God will not judge us with partiality: He will punish the unmerciful unmercifully ("be merciless to one who has shown no mercy"). We need to understand this statement in the light of other revelations concerning how God will judge believers. We are in no danger of losing our salvation or even experiencing God's wrath. However, we will suffer a loss of reward if we sin by practicing unmerciful favoritism (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Matt. 5:7; 6:15; 7:1; 18:23-25).

On the other hand, if we are merciful in dealing with our fellow men, God will be merciful in dealing with us when we stand before Him (cf. Matt. 25:34-40). "Mercy triumphs over (trumps) judgment," just as love triumphs over (trumps) partiality. We should accept one another with courtesy, compassion, and consistency.<sup>2</sup>

In modern life, partiality sometimes arises because of differences in economic levels, race, religious preferences, political views, educational

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<sup>1</sup>Burdick, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup>Blue, p. 825.

backgrounds, and personal opinions, to name a few causes.<sup>1</sup> For Christians, it is sometimes harder to be impartial toward sinners who flaunt their sin, than it is to those who acknowledge that they have sinned. However, because Christ died for all, we should reach out to all as He did—rather than being unfriendly and cliquish. This is true whether the sinners are homosexuals, AIDS patients, the murderers of unborn children, liars, adulterers, thieves, gossips, or gluttons, for example. This reaching out will be an accurate indicator of the extent to which Christ's love controls us (cf. 1:27).

This section of verses may raise a question in some minds concerning how James viewed the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law. Was he implying that we are responsible to keep the whole Mosaic Code? His own words at the Jerusalem Council show that this was not his view (cf. Acts 15:13-21). God gave the Mosaic Law both to regulate the life of the Israelites, and to reveal the character and purposes of God to the Israelites and all other people. Its regulatory function ceased when Jesus died on the cross (Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:12). Its revelatory value remains forever; it is part of "all Scripture" that is still profitable (2 Tim. 3:16).

The moral revelation James referred to, here, is as applicable now as it was before the Cross. God still expects people to live in its light. Whereas God has terminated the Mosaic Law as a codified body of law, some individual commands within this covenant continue in force under the new "law of liberty." These are the laws affecting all human conduct presently, in contrast to those affecting only the life of the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. Christians live under a new set of rules, the law of liberty. Israelites lived under a different set of rules, the Law of Moses. The fact that the "golden rule" was part of both the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ, does not mean that we are still under the Mosaic Law.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Larry A. Mercer, "A Biblical and Cultural Study of the Problem of Racism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:609 (January-March 1996):87-103.

<sup>2</sup>For further discussion of the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law, see Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):239-47; and J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):227-33.

## **B. THE IMPORTANCE OF VITAL FAITH 2:14-26**

Some have seen this section as dealing with a new subject, the relationship of faith and works, whereas the previous one dealt with partiality (vv. 1-13). It seems to me and to others, however, that this section relates to the preceding one in the same way 1:19-27 relates to 1:2-18. It deals with a larger, more basic issue that connects with and underlies the practical problem just discussed.

"In this section St. James proceeds to enlarge on the meaning and nature of that faith in Jesus Christ which was spoken of in ver. 1 as inconsistent with *prosopolempsia* [respect of persons]."<sup>1</sup>

In his discussion of favoritism, James argued for genuineness, and warned of superficial self-deception. The larger issue is the whole matter of *faith in God*. James wrote this section to challenge his readers to examine the vitality of their faith in God. Were they really putting their faith into practice, applying their beliefs to their behavior? Their preferential treatment of some people raised this question in James' mind.

"Not only is the mature Christian patient in testing (James 1), but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. Immature people talk about their beliefs, but the mature person lives his faith. Hearing God's Word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God's Word can never substitute for doing God's Word."<sup>2</sup>

There have been three primary interpretations of this passage of Scripture. The first view is that it refers to a person who was a believer but has lost his salvation. He used to have saving faith but does not have it any longer. This is the view of most Arminians. The second view is that it refers to an unbeliever who professes to be a Christian, but has never truly exercised saving faith in Christ. His faith is only intellectual assent to gospel truth, not saving faith.<sup>3</sup> One advocate of this interpretation wrote: "His [James'] contrast is between two kinds of faith: one that saves and one that

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<sup>1</sup>Mayor, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Burdick; Tasker; Motyer; Fanning, pp. 424-27; and John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 139-55.



doesn't."<sup>1</sup> The third view is that it refers to a believer who is not living by faith. He is not behaving consistently with what he believes.<sup>2</sup> The first two views say this passage describes unbelievers, whereas the third view says it describes believers. By examining the passage, we should be able to decide which view is correct.

### 1. James' assertion 2:14

The Arminian interpretation of this verse (view one above) is as follows. If a person claims to be a Christian, but gives no evidence of true faith by the way he lives, he may never have been saved, or he may no longer be saved. One Reformed view (view two above) is that if a person claims to be a Christian, but gives no evidence of true faith by the way he lives, he was never saved.<sup>3</sup> The third interpretation (view three above) is that if a person claims to be a Christian, but gives no evidence of true faith by the way he lives, there are two possibilities. He may not be saved, or he may be saved, but he is not living by faith, practicing his faith.

James just dealt with the Christian who professed to love others, but by practicing personal favoritism, demonstrated that he did not. Now he raised the larger issue of the believer who gives no evidence of his faith in the way he lives. He began by questioning the vitality of that faith. The form of this question in the Greek expects a negative response. If we translate it, "Can that *kind of* faith save him?" or, "Can *such* faith save him?"—we may mislead the reader. The same construction exists in 1:2-4; 2:17, 18, 20, 22, 26; and 1 Corinthians 13:4—where the addition of "kind of" or "such" gives a more obviously improper translation. The presence of the definite article "the" with the abstract noun "faith" emphasizes the noun. James was saying that faith without works ("actions done in obedience to God"<sup>4</sup>) cannot save a person. Works *are* a condition for some kind of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Hodges; Wiersbe; Dillow; and R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, Charles C. Bing, *Simply by Grace*, pp. 87-90.

<sup>3</sup>For a response to advocates of lordship salvation that hold this position, see Robert N. Wilkin, "Can Faith Without Works Save? James 2:14," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:5 (September-October 1994):2-3.

<sup>4</sup>Moo, (2000), p. 123.

This statement seems to contradict Paul's affirmation that works are *not* a condition for salvation (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6; et al.). However, Paul and James were talking about different aspects of salvation. This is clear from James' earlier assertion that his Christian readers (1:18) would be able to save their "souls" (better "lives") if they obeyed God's Word (1:21).

"As someone has said, 'Paul and James do not stand face to face, fighting against each other, but they stand back to back, fighting opposite foes.'"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus also gave similar warnings, that if His disciples did not continue to follow Him, they could lose their "souls" (i.e., lives; cf. Matt. 16:24-26; Mark 3:4; 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-25). He used the same Greek word that James did, to describe one's whole *person* or *life* (i.e., *psyche*). The translation "life" for "soul" may mislead us, however, into concluding that only the physical life is in view whenever we read this word (*psyche*). Rather, it is the "total person" that *psyche* describes, not just our physical life or our eternal life (cf. 1 Pet. 1:9). Any aspect of our life may be in view, and the context will help us determine what it is.

"We are not saved *by* deeds; we are saved *for* deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. And Paul's whole emphasis is on the first truth, and James's whole emphasis is on the second truth."<sup>2</sup>

In verse 14, James returned to his thought in 1:21-22 about saving one's life from death. His point here was that faith is no substitute for obedience. Orthodox faith *without good works* cannot protect the Christian from sin's deadly consequences in this life (i.e., a deadening of fellowship with God at least, and at most physical death; cf. 5:20; 1 John 5:16). *That faith* cannot save him from God's discipline of him as a believer. *Good works in addition* to faith are necessary for that kind of deliverance (salvation). Many commentators believe that James was referring to *eschatological* salvation (i.e., salvation from eternal damnation). This interpretation obviously involves bringing *works* in as some type of condition for that aspect of

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 5:649.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 87.

salvation, which contradicts the clear revelation that salvation from hell is by grace alone.

"It would be difficult to find a concept which is richer and more varied in meaning than the biblical concept of salvation. The breadth of salvation is so sweeping and its intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean 'deliverance from hell' or 'go to heaven when you die.' It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of 'salvation' (Gk. *soteria*) would have been the least likely meaning to come to the mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century. Indeed, in 812 usages of the various Hebrew words translated 'to save' or 'salvation' in the Old Testament, only 58 (7.1 percent) refer to eternal salvation."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. James' illustration 2:15-16

As he did before (vv. 2-4), James provided a concrete situation to illustrate his point (vv. 15-16). He envisioned a situation that may very well have taken place in his church, in Jerusalem, where there were many poor saints (Rom. 15:25-31; 1 Cor. 16:3). All of the people in the illustration seem to be genuine Christians, in view of the terms James used to describe them (cf. "brethren" in 1:2; 2:1, 14; 3:1). The situation he described highlights the absurdity of claiming vital faith (i.e., that one is putting his faith into practice), but at the same time not doing good works (i.e., not obeying the Word of God; cf. 1 John 3:17-18). A benediction cannot save a starving man from death; only bread can do that.

One Greek scholar paraphrased verses 14-17 as follows:

"What good does it do, my Christian brothers, if someone among you says he has faith and yet does not act on that

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<sup>1</sup>Dillow, p. 112. Cf. pp. 187-94. See also Alfred Plummer, *The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*, p. 137; Martin Dibelius, *James*, p. 178; and W. Nicol, "Faith and Works in the Letter of James," *Neotestamentica* 9 (1975):7-24. For a short, popular discussion, see Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation, Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 2 (Spring 1989):14.

faith? Faith certainly cannot preserve his life, can it? It would be the same thing as if one of you spoke to some Christian brother or sister who was destitute of the necessities of life and you said, 'Go home peacefully and get warmed and filled.' But if you did not give them the very things they needed for bodily life, what good would it do? Would their lives be saved by your confident words? In the same way when faith stands all by itself, because you fail to act on it, your inactive faith is as dead as your useless words to your destitute Christian brother. It has no life-preserving power at all!"<sup>1</sup>

### 3. James' restatement of his point 2:17

James was not saying that a person who responds to another Christian's need, as in verses 15-16, shows that he has failed to exercise saving faith and is devoid of eternal life. He was saying that "faith," if "works" (i.e., obedience to the Word of God) do not accompany it, is "dead" (i.e., inactive).

"We can make statements in all sincerity of mind and emotion: 'I feel sorry for the poor; I don't condone racism.' But James will say, 'What good is that if you aren't doing something to help the poor or to heal the distrust and injustice between races?' Some Christians attempt a stance of personal belief without personal action, saying, for example, 'I personally disagree with abortion, but I won't try to change others' minds.' James persists in asking us: What are you doing to protect the victims—both the victimized baby and the victimized mother?"<sup>2</sup>

"Dead" does not mean non-existent but inactive, no longer vital, dormant, useless (cf. v. 14). This is a very important point.

"It has not usually been considered too deeply why James chose the term 'dead' to describe a faith that is not working. But the moment we relate this to the controlling theme of 'saving the life,' everything becomes plain. The issue that concerns James is an issue of life or death. (He is *not*

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<sup>1</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *Dead Faith: What Is It?* p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Stulac, p. 120.

discussing salvation from hell!) The truth which he has in mind is that of Proverbs: 'Righteousness tendeth to life ... he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.' [Prov. 11:19; cf. Prov. 10:27; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16] Can a *dead* faith save the Christian from *death*? The question answers itself. The choice of the adjective 'dead' is perfectly suited to James' argument."<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. An objection 2:18**

James next introduced an objection to his thesis that "faith is dead (inoperative) without works." He put it in the mouth of a hypothetical objector. This literary device of objection and response was a common one that Paul also used (e.g., Rom. 9:19-20; 1 Cor. 15:35-36). It is the "diatribe."<sup>2</sup> The form of the diatribe helps us identify that what follows, is the statement of the objector, and what follows that, is James' response to the objector.

The NIV, by its use of quotation marks, has the objector saying only the first part of this verse, "You have faith; I have deeds," and James responding in the last part of the verse. The NASB has the objector saying the whole verse. Which is correct? There were no punctuation marks in the Greek text, so we have to determine this on the basis of what makes the most sense. The objector seems to be making a point by way of argument, rather than making a simple statement. This fact seems clear from the context in which James responds with a rebuttal (vv. 19-23). Consequently I prefer the NASB punctuation of this verse.

The objector claims that good "works" are the necessary sign of saving faith. He says, "You cannot prove you have faith unless you have works, but because I have works you can see that I have faith."<sup>3</sup> This is the argument that many evangelicals have used: the necessary evidence that a person has been saved (justified) is his good works (sanctification). If he is not doing good works, he is therefore unsaved. Works *always* evidence

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel ...*, p. 27. See also Don Anderson, *James: Running Uphill into the Wind*, pp. 124, 134.

<sup>2</sup>See Hiebert, *James*, p. 131; and Sidebottom, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Adamson, p. 124.

faith, they say. But if this view is true, why did Jesus teach His disciples that some who are "in Me" bear no fruit (John 15:2, 6)?

The idea that evidence of sanctification must be present before the sinner can have full assurance of his justification, is one that certain Reformed preachers after the time of John Calvin popularized. This idea is neither scriptural, nor did John Calvin hold it. Theodore Beza in Geneva, and William Perkins in England, were leading figures in the Calvinists' departure from John Calvin's own teaching concerning faith and assurance.<sup>1</sup>

The basis of our assurance that we are saved is primarily the promise of God in Scripture (John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:27-29; 20:31; et al.). It is not the presence of good works (fruit) in our lives. Jesus taught that some branches of the vine "do not bear fruit" (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:7; Luke 8:14; John 15:2, 6). Nevertheless they still share in the life of the vine. It seems clear that every true believer experiences a radical transformation in his life when he trusts Jesus Christ as his Savior (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13; et al.). However, the Scriptures do not say that every true believer's lifestyle will inevitably experience external transformation. The outward manifestation depends on the believer's response to God's will.

"The tree *shows* its life by its fruits, but it was alive before either fruits or even leaves appeared."<sup>2</sup>

"To *show* faith to man, works in some form or other are needed: we are justified judicially by God (Rom. 8:33), meritoriously, by Christ (Isa. 53:11), mediately, by faith (Rom. 5:1); evidentially, by works."<sup>3</sup>

*Carnal* Christians (1 Cor. 3:1-4), are those who choose to indulge the flesh, rather than submitting to the Spirit's control. Fruit is the *outward* evidence of inner life. Just as some fruit trees bear little or no fruit, it is possible for some genuine Christians to bear little or no external evidence of their eternal life. The Holy Spirit effects inner transformation in every believer. Normally He will produce outer transformation as well, unless the believer

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<sup>1</sup>See R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*; idem., *Once Saved ...*, pp. 207-17; and M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1453.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

quenches and grieves Him while He seeks to manifest the life of Christ through him or her to others.

### 5. James' rebuttal 2:19-23

2:19 James refuted the argument of the objector stated in verse 18. Genuine faith does not *always* result in good works. The demons "believe" that what God has revealed about Himself is true. The *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) was and is the pious Jew's daily confession of his faith. In spite of the truth that "God is one," the sovereign Lord over all creation, the demons continue practicing evil works. They understand and "believe" what their behavior will bring upon them, but rather than turning from their evil ways, they only "shudder" as they anticipate their inevitable judgment.

I think James selected the demons as an illustration, because they are the most extreme and clear example of beings whose belief is correct, but whose behavior is not. He did not select them because they are lost, which they are. Throughout this book, James was speaking to genuine Christians (cf. vv. 14, 15, 21, 23, 25, et al.). Just like the demons, Christians can persist in rebelling against God's will, even though they know they will stand before the judgment seat of Christ some day (2 Cor. 5:10).

Some people have concluded that James' reason for using the demons as an illustration, was to show that intellectual assent to the truth is not enough. To experience regeneration, a person must not only accept the gospel message as true, but also rely on the Savior to save him. Whereas it is true that intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel is not adequate for regeneration, that does not appear to be the point James was making in this illustration.

His point seems to be that good works do not *always* result from correct belief (cf. 1:26-27; 4:17). They did in Abraham's case (vv. 21-22), but not in the case of the demons. Further evidence that this is the correct conclusion, is that *what* James said the demons believe is not equivalent to the gospel

message. James was not talking about what is necessary to become a Christian.

"... this verse which is often quoted to show that some creatures can believe but not be saved is irrelevant to the issue of salvation, for it says only that demons are monotheists."<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars believe that the objector is speaking in verse 19 as well as in verse 18.<sup>2</sup> Some of them base this conclusion on the fact that the Greek word *choris* (translated "without") is *ek* (translated "by") in some ancient Greek manuscripts. Most Greek scholars believe *choris* is the proper word and that James is speaking in verse 19.<sup>3</sup> I agree with them on this point.

2:20 James thought his objector's argument was foolish. He still asserted that "without" good "works," a person's faith in God is *useless*, not non-existent, but "useless" (Gr. *argos*, ineffectual, lit. "idle," "unemployed"; cf. Matt. 20:3, 6).

A Christian who has stopped living by faith, day by day, is similar to a person who has a non-functioning organ in his body. Just as the organ is dead, so the faith of such a Christian is dead—useless. Furthermore, his dead faith will contribute to his physical death, like a dead organ will shorten physical life.

James then proceeded to explain what he meant by "useless" in verses 21-23. Note how often James said that he was writing about the *uselessness* of faith unaccompanied by works, not the *absence* of faith unaccompanied by works (1:26; 2:14, 16, 20).

2:21 This verse at first seems to contradict other verses that say God declared Abraham righteous when Abraham *believed* God's promise (Gen. 15:1-6; Rom. 4:1-5). The solution to the problem lies in the meaning of "justified." This word always

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<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Mayor, p. 101; R. F. Weymouth, *The New Testament in Modern Speech*, pp. 561-62; and Zane C. Hodges, "Light on James Two from Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):343-47.

<sup>3</sup>See Martin, p. 89.



means to *declare* someone righteous in the sight of the law, not to *make* someone righteous in his or her conduct (cf. Exod. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32). The failure to define "justification" biblically, is what has led some Reformed interpreters to conclude that *everyone* who is truly justified will inevitably behave righteously.

The NIV translation "considered righteous" is a bit misleading (cf. v. 25). "Abraham" was *declared* righteous more than once. Most interpreters understand the first scriptural statement of his justification as describing his "new birth," to use the New Testament term (Gen. 15:6). This is when *God* declared Abraham righteous. James explained that about 20 years after Abraham was declared righteous, he was "justified" *again*. Scripture consistently teaches that believers whom God declares righteous never lose their righteous standing before God (Rom. 5:1; 8:1; et al.). They do not need to be saved again.

Abraham's subsequent, second "justification," evidently refers to a second *declaration* of his righteousness. James said this second time Abraham's *works* declared him righteous. They gave testimony (bore witness) to his faith.<sup>1</sup> Works do not *always* evidence faith (v. 19), but sometimes they do. They do so, whenever a person who has become a believer by faith, *continues to live by faith*. Abraham is a good example of a believer whose good works (obedience to God) bore witness to his righteousness. He continued to *live* by faith, just as he had been *declared righteous* by faith.

"Surely it is clear that he [i.e., James] himself is speaking of the declaration, not the imputation, of righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

"The justification of which Paul speaks is different from that spoken of by James; the one speaks of

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<sup>1</sup>See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1—17*, p. 441; and Robertson, 6:37.

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:17:12.

our persons being justified before God, the other speaks of our faith being justified before men ..."<sup>1</sup>

2:22 Abraham's faith was "perfected" by his works, in the sense that his works made his faith *stronger*. This is another way of expressing the same idea that James stated in 1:2-4. Maturity comes as we persevere in the will of God when we encounter trials. When God spared Isaac's life, Abraham's faith doubtless became much stronger than it had been.

"The faith which justifies ... can have an active and vital role in the life of the obedient believer. As with Abraham, it can be the dynamic for superb acts of obedience. In the process, faith itself can be 'perfected.' The Greek word suggests development and motivation. Faith is thus nourished and strengthened by works."<sup>2</sup>

The singular "you" in this verse in the Greek text indicates that James was still addressing his objector.

2:23 Genesis 15:6 was "fulfilled" when Abraham offered Isaac, in the sense that Abraham's faith became abundantly clear on that occasion. What God had previously said about Abraham became obviously and outwardly true, when the patriarch trusted and obeyed God when he was tested.

"In the sacrifice of Isaac was shown the full meaning of the word (Gen. 15:6) spoken ... years before in commendation of Abraham's belief in the promise of a child."<sup>3</sup>

James seems to have included the fact that God called Abraham His "friend" for the following reason. He wanted to show that continued obedient faith, not just initial saving faith,

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 1933. See also Paul D. Weaver, "James," in *Surveying Hebrews through Revelation*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup>Mayor, p. 104.

is what makes a person God's intimate friend (cf. 4:4; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; John 14:21; 15:14).

"When a man is justified by faith he finds an unqualified acceptance before God ... (Rom. 4:6). But only God can see this spiritual transaction. When, however, a man is justified by works he achieves an intimacy with God that is manifest to men. He can then be called 'the friend of God,' even as Jesus said, 'You are my friends if you do whatever I command you' (John 15:14)."<sup>1</sup>

Why did James bring Abraham into his argument? Abraham is a clear example that it is possible to be declared righteous by God but not *inevitably* or *necessarily* to be declared righteous by one's works. It was only as Abraham continued to live by faith (continued to trust and obey God) that, about 20 years after his justification by faith in God, his works declared that he was righteous. By continuing to trust and obey God, as Abraham did, James' Christian readers could also validate their justification by faith in God by their good works—and thus become true friends of God.

## 6. James' final argument 2:24-26

2:24 The use of the plural "you" in this verse, in the Greek text, shows that James had completed his response to the objector. He was now addressing his readers directly again (cf. vv. 14-17).

"Works" *do* declare us righteous (Gr. present passive indicative of *dikaioo*), in the sense that our works testify to onlookers that we have exercised saving faith. They are the external fruit that bears witness to the eternal life within. "You see ... by [his] works." However, James previously said that not every believer will bear visible fruit (v. 17; cf. John 15:2). Such a believer's faith is not productive but "dead." Nevertheless he has faith. Some unbelievers appear to bear the fruit of saving

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel ...*, p. 31. See also Fanning, p. 429.

faith, but God will one day expose their "wheat" as "tares" (Matt. 13:30).

"... Paul and James are best understood as addressing quite dissimilar situations ... Whereas Paul's audience is in danger of relying on 'works' for salvation, James' readers are excusing themselves from good works, thereby showing only a faith that is dead ..." <sup>1</sup>

One writer argued for the view that the vindication (justification) in view here is universal (for all believers), and is stated in a salvific context.<sup>2</sup> My view is that the vindication is only before others, and is not in a salvific context.

2:25 James could have ended his argument about the "revered patriarch" Abraham, but he chose to add the illustration of "Rahab," the "redeemed prostitute."<sup>3</sup>

"Rahab ... is superbly suited to tie the strands of his thoughts together. This passage had begun, as we have seen, with an allusion to his theme of 'saving the life' (2:14; 1:21). Not surprisingly, therefore, Rahab is selected as a striking example of a person whose physical life was 'saved' precisely because she had works."<sup>4</sup>

Apparently Rahab trusted in God before the spies ever arrived at her door (cf. Josh. 2:9-13). Rather than being originally part of the Israelite nation, she was a proselyte to Judaism. Thus, with these two examples, James showed the necessity of works for believers, regardless of one's background and origins. Abraham and Rahab were poles apart.

"The contrast is neat: Abraham, a major Bible figure; Rahab, a minor participant. Abraham the

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>C. Ryan Jenkins, "Faith and Works in Paul and James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:633 (January-March 2002):62-78.

<sup>3</sup>Blue, p. 826.

<sup>4</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel ...*, p. 32.

father of the faithful; Rahab a foreigner. Abraham the respected; Rahab the disreputable. Abraham a man; Rahab a woman. As so often, the contrast is intended to alert us to the fact that a fully comprehensive statement is being made—as it were, covering the situation all the way from Abraham to Rahab and back again. The primary works of faith, then, are the works of Abraham and Rahab and they apply to all without exception.

"What was the work of Abraham? He held nothing back from God. God said, 'I want your son' and Abraham 'rose early in the morning' (Gn. 22:3) in prompt obedience. What was the work of Rahab? She reached out and took into her own care those who were needy and helpless, regardless of the cost to herself."<sup>1</sup>

2:26 "Faith without works" is as "dead" as a "body without" a human "spirit." It is of no practical value. This is James' final illustration and affirmation on the subject. Our faith becomes only dead orthodoxy when we stop obeying God. *Vital* (living) faith, then, becomes "dead" faith. Both a dead body and dead faith were alive at one time.

"Does James then contradict Paul's doctrine of full grace, or John's insistence on faith as the single condition for eternal life? Far from it. But neither does he offer support to the widespread notion that a 'dead faith' cannot exist in the life of a Christian. Ironically, that is exactly what he is warning against. Thus the misconstruction of his words has not only bred unnecessary confusion about the terms for eternal life, but it has also deprived the church of a much needed and salutary warning.

"The dangers of a dying faith are real. But they do not include hell, and nothing James writes suggests this. Nevertheless, sin remains a deadly nemesis to Christian experience which can end our physical lives themselves. To that, the wisdom of the

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<sup>1</sup>Motyer, pp. 115-16.

Old Testament adds its witness to the warnings of James. And if a man is to be saved from *such* a consequence, he *must* have works."<sup>1</sup>

"Never once does James question whether the rich—or poor—have been saved. Neither does he admonish them in such a way that should cause them to question whether they have been saved. He never says, for example, 'The trouble with you people is that you are not saved.' He does not come forward with a plan of salvation; he does not warn them of a false assurance; he does not go over the basis of saving faith."<sup>2</sup>

The key to understanding this passage is a correct understanding of what "dead faith" is. James used "dead" (vv. 17, 26) as a synonym for "useless" (vv. 14, 16, 20). He was not saying the person with dead faith has **no** faith, that he is unsaved. He meant that the person with dead faith has saving faith, but he is *not living by faith* now. His faith has no vital effect on the way he presently lives. He is not trusting and obeying God day by day. "Useless" means of no practical value; it does not mean nonexistent. Other important terms to define correctly in this passage are "justify" and "save." "Justify" (vv. 21, 24) means to "declare righteous," not to *make* righteous. And "save" (v. 14) is an umbrella term that covers justification, sanctification, and glorification, not simply justification.

"The faith which is mentioned in this section [2:14-26] can be presupposed in every Christian ... [James'] intention is not dogmatically oriented, but practically oriented: *he wishes to admonish the Christians to practice their faith, i.e. their Christianity, by works.*"<sup>3</sup>

To summarize, I believe what James wrote in verses 14-26 means this: Good works are not necessary to keep us from going to hell. However, they are necessary to keep us from falling under God's disciplinary punishment, that may even result in premature physical death. It is possible for a Christian not to use his or her faith, to stop "walking by faith." In such a case, his or her faith is of no practical use here and now. Therefore, we who are Christians should be careful to continue—day by day—to keep trusting

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<sup>1</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel ...*, p. 33. See also idem, *The Hungry ...*, pp. 81-95.

<sup>2</sup>Kendall, *Once Saved ...*, p. 208. Cf. Chitwood, *Salvation of ...*, pp. 45-54.

<sup>3</sup>Dibelius, p. 178. The italics are his.

and obeying God. It is possible for a Christian to exercise "saving faith" and then to stop "walking by faith." That is what James is warning us to avoid. He is dealing with sanctification primarily, not justification, here and throughout this epistle. This is Christian life teaching, not teaching on how to become a Christian.

"James' emphasis on faith alone shows that he affirms the necessity of faith; what he is opposing is a faith that denies the obligation to obey Christ as Lord."<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16), He was giving a general way of evaluating people, not that a person's works always and inevitably indicate his or her salvation. If that were the case, then every time a Christian sins, he or she would be giving evidence that he or she is unsaved. Works are a fairly reliable guide to a person's salvation, but not a completely reliable guide. There are many exceptions (e.g., Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares; Matt. 13:24-41). Some Christians live in a state of carnality for years, and even die in it. Nevertheless, they go to heaven when they die, because they once trusted in Christ, He forgave their sins, and He declared them righteous.

I believe James' point was that we should continue to live by faith, and to trust God day by day, not just to receive eternal life by faith. Many Christians trust God *very little* as they live day by day. An evidence of this is their prayer life. In this chapter, James said that partiality (favoritism) may indicate that one is not living by faith. Good works are normal for a Christian, but they are not automatic or inevitable. Colossians 2:6 says, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so walk in Him*." Titus 3:8 says that those who have believed in God should *be careful* to practice good deeds. 2 Peter 1:5-7 says, "Applying all *diligence*, with your faith supply moral excellence, and knowledge, and self-control, and perseverance, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and love."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stulac, p. 116. See also Robert N. Wilkin, "Another View of Faith and Works in James 2," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15:29 (Autumn 2002):3-21.

<sup>2</sup>See also Michael D. Fiorello, "The Ethical Implication of Holiness in James 2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:3 (September 2012):557-72.

#### IV. SPEECH AND DIVINE WISDOM CH. 3

One of the most important aspects of our works, which James had been discussing, is our words. We conduct much of our work with words. We also may express partiality with our words. James next gave his readers directions concerning their words, to help them understand and apply God's will to this area of their lives.

"The more the idea prevailed, that faith, without corresponding obedience, was all that is needful, the more men would eagerly press forward to teach: as indeed the Church has found in all ages when such an opinion has become prevalent: for then teachers and preachers of their own appointing have rapidly multiplied."<sup>1</sup>

##### A. CONTROLLING THE TONGUE 3:1-12

It is particularly the misuse of the tongue in Christian worship, teaching, and church life, that James addressed (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 14:27-39). From the subject of idle faith, James proceeded to discuss idle speech.

"... in his usual 'rondo' manner [James] returns to the theme of speech (1:19, 26) and warns his true Christians of the dangers of the tongue ..."<sup>2</sup>

"It [this chapter] is also connected with that overvaluation of theory as compared with practice which formed the subject of the last chapter."<sup>3</sup>

"Those in his line of sight are evidently leaders who are summoned to control and guide the course of the church's life and destiny. Hence the twin imagery of the horse's bit (v 3) and the ship's rudder (v 4)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 4:2:302.

<sup>2</sup>Adamson, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Mayor, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 104.



### 1. The negative warning 3:1

As in the previous two chapters, James introduced a new subject with a command (cf. 1:2; 2:1).

Every Christian is responsible to "teach" (share, impart to) others what God has revealed in His Word (Matt. 28:19; Heb. 5:12). However, James was evidently speaking of people *becoming* "teachers," like the rabbis in his day who were, namely, "professional" teachers. He may have been cautioning those who were considering teaching in the church, and suggesting that some who were ministering in this capacity unworthily should step down.<sup>1</sup>

"Teachers are necessary, but incompetent and unworthy ones do much harm."<sup>2</sup>

The Jews regarded teachers (rabbis) with great awe, and gave them much honor in James' day (cf. Matt. 23:8). The synagogue service allowed opportunity for the men in the congregation to rise and address the rest of the assembly (cf. Acts 13:15). The Christians carried this opportunity over into the meetings of the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26-33). Consequently there were many in James' audience, who, though not qualified with ability, aspired to teach others publicly, for the sake of prestige or some other motive. James warned that someone will "judge" a teacher *more strictly* than a non-teacher, because a teacher presumably knows the truth and claims to live by it. That "someone" might be a listener to the teaching, but He will definitely be God.<sup>3</sup>

"This is not an attack upon the office of the teacher or the teaching function, for James at once identifies himself as a teacher. Rather, he is seeking to restrain the rush to teach on the part of those not qualified."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, 6:39.

<sup>3</sup>Cedar, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 185.

"Any teacher runs the risk of becoming 'Sir Oracle.' No profession is more liable to beget spiritual and intellectual pride."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The reason for the warning 3:2

The person who speaks much is going to err ("stumble") much in his or her speech, because the "tongue" (vv. 5-12) is the hardest member of the "body" to control. No one has been able to master it yet, except Jesus Christ. Yet spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue (cf. Titus 1:11).

"Although not all sins laid to the account of one person are necessarily the same as those shared by others, all persons have at least one sin in common, namely, the sin of the tongue."<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Examples of the danger 3:3-6

3:3 It is the same with "horses" as it is with humans. If we can control the tongue, we can bring the "whole" animal (or "body") under control.

"Nothing seems to trip a believer more than a dangling tongue."<sup>3</sup>

3:4 This second illustration adds another element. The controlled tongue can overcome great obstacles. James had observed many "ships" on the Sea of Galilee, and perhaps on the Mediterranean, "driven by strong winds," yet "directed by a very small rudder."

3:5 The two previous illustrations share a characteristic that James pointed out next. Though small and comparatively insignificant, the tongue can effect great change out of all proportion to its size. The bit, the rudder, and the tongue, even though they are small, all have *power to direct*. This

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 94. His allusion is to William Shakespear's *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 1, Line 93: "I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my lips let no dog bark!"

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>Blue, p. 827.

interpretation seems preferable to the one that takes verse 5a as a statement that the tongue can make pretentious claims. James did not state that idea previously, but this sentence claims a connection with what precedes.

The tongue has as much destructive power as a spark ("small fire") that can burn down a large "forest." It is petite but powerful ("small ... yet boasts of great things").

3:6 "Fire" is a good illustration of the tongue's effect. It is a "world of iniquity," perverse as well as powerful.

"... all the evil characteristics of a fallen world, its covetousness, its idolatry, its blasphemy, its lust, its rapacious greed, find expression through the tongue."<sup>1</sup>

"From the context it seems best to accept that James thinks of the tongue as a vast system of iniquity."<sup>2</sup>

The tongue is the gate through which the evil influences of hell can spread like fire ("set on fire by hell") to inflame all the areas of life that we touch ("defiles ... and sets on fire the course of our life"). This is the only place in the New Testament where "hell" (Gr. *geennes*) occurs outside the Synoptic Gospels. Here the "entire body" (Gr. *soma*) represents the whole person. However, it may also allude to the church as well.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4. The uncontrollable nature of the tongue 3:7-8**

3:7 Human beings have brought all the major forms ("every species") of animal life under control. For example, people have taught lions, tigers, and monkeys to jump through hoops. They have taught parrots and canaries to speak and sing. They have charmed snakes. They have trained dolphins and whales to

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<sup>1</sup>Tasker, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, pp. 111, 112, and 123.

perform various tricks and tasks. The ancients took pride in the ability of humans to tame and control the animal kingdom.<sup>1</sup> "Tamed" is perhaps too strong a word. "Subdued" might be a better translation of the Greek word (*damazo*). All animals have been controlled but not necessarily domesticated.

3:8 Apart from the Holy Spirit's help, no human being has ever been able to *subdue* (meaning of "tame") his or her own "tongue." It is much more dangerous than any deadly animal, because it never rests, and it can destroy simply with words (cf. Ps. 62:4). Fire, animals, and the tongue all have *power to destroy* (cf. v. 5).

### 5. The inconsistency of the tongue 3:9-12

3:9 We honor God with our words, but then we turn right around and dishonor ("curse") other people with what we say. This is inconsistent because people are made in the "image (likeness) of God" (Gen. 1:27).

"The lesson is that he who curses him who was made in the image of God implicitly curses the prototype as well."<sup>2</sup>

"To bless God is the sublimest function of the human tongue; thrice daily the devout Jew recited 'the Eighteen Benedictions,' with their ending 'Blessed art Thou, O God.'"<sup>3</sup>

"It was the pious practice among the Jews, both in speaking and in writing, to add 'Blessed [be] He' after each utterance of the name of God. No doubt, the readers of this epistle still continued this practice whenever God was mentioned."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Oesterley, 4:454.

<sup>3</sup>Adamson, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 201. Cf. Oesterley, 4:453; Mark 14:61.

3:10 Not only is this contradictory phenomenon ("from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing") contrary to the will of God, it is also contrary to the natural order of things.

"Although the believer has in the indwelling Holy Spirit the potential for controlling the tongue, he may not be appropriating this potential."<sup>1</sup>

"To the person who speaks praise to God in the worship service and then abuses people verbally at home or at work, James commands, 'Purify your speech through the week.' With the person who says, 'Oh, I know I talk too much,' and laughs it off, James is not amused. He insists, 'Be quick to listen, slow to speak.' By the person who boasts, 'I always speak my mind, no matter who gets hurt,' James is not impressed. He commands, 'Discipline your speaking.' Of the person who says, 'I know I gossip too much, but I just can't help it,' James still requires, 'Control your tongue.' Of the person who is in the habit of speaking with insults, ridicule or sarcasm, James demands, 'Change your speech habits.' He expects discipline to be happening in the life of a Christian. Any Christian can ask for the grace needed, for God gives good gifts (1:17) and gives them generously (1:5). There is, then, no justification for corrupt habits of speech in our churches today."<sup>2</sup>

"... the Bible nowhere places much value on knowledge that remains merely cerebral or credal [*sic*]. Nothing is known until it also reshapes the life."<sup>3</sup>

"The reference is not to the use of profanity in vulgar speech but apparently seems to envision

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<sup>1</sup>Burdick, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Stulac, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup>Motyer, p. 130.

angry disputes and slanderous remarks in inner-church party strife (cf. 4:1-2, 11-12)."<sup>1</sup>

3:11-12 Illustrations highlight this natural inconsistency (cf. Matt. 7:16). A water source ("fountain") can yield only one kind of water (fresh or not fresh). A "tree" can only produce fruit of its own kind. A "salt" spring cannot produce "fresh" water, any more than a fallen human nature can naturally produce pure words. A fountain, a tree, and the tongue all have *power to delight* (cf. vv. 5, 8).

"Small and influential, the tongue must be controlled; satanic and infectious, the tongue must be corralled; salty and inconsistent, the tongue must be cleansed."<sup>2</sup>

James was dealing, as in the preceding chapters, with root causes of human behavior as it is—*naturally*—and out of harmony with God's will. His teaching contrasts strongly with that of the religious teachers whom Jesus rebuked for their superficiality and hypocrisy. James was, of course, picturing human behavior as it is naturally apart from the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

### **B. CONTROLLING THE MIND 3:13-18**

As in the previous chapters, James began his discussion of human speech with a practical exhortation, and then continued to deal with increasingly basic issues. He spoke next of the importance of controlling one's mind, in order to enable his readers to understand how to control their tongues. Wisdom in the mind affects one's use of his or her tongue. Note the key words "wise" and "wisdom" (vv. 13, 17), which bracket the thought of this section, as well of the prominence of "peaceable" and "peace" that conclude it (vv. 17, 18).

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>Blue, p. 828.

### 1. The importance of humility 3:13

The real qualifications of a teacher (v. 1) are "wisdom" (the ability to view life from God's perspective) and "understanding" (mental perception and comprehension). James probably had the Old Testament sage in mind.<sup>1</sup> We can perceive understanding in others quite easily, but wisdom is more difficult to identify. James said to look at a person's behavior if you want to see if he or she is wise. The wisdom James had in mind did not result so much in what one thinks or says but in what one does.<sup>2</sup>

One of the marks of wisdom is "gentleness" (or meekness, or humility). The Greek word *prauteti* ("gentleness") occurs in non-biblical literature to describe a horse that someone had broken and had trained to submit to a bridle.<sup>3</sup> It pictures strength under control, specifically the Holy Spirit's control. The evidence of this attitude is a deliberate placing of oneself under divine authority. The only way to control the tongue is to place one's mind deliberately under the authority of God and to let Him control it (have His way with it; cf. Matt. 11:27; 2 Cor. 10:1). James' concept of wisdom was Hebraic rather than Greek, moral more than intellectual (cf. 1:5).

"The problem seems to be that some self-styled chief people, thinking they were endowed with superior wisdom and understanding, had divided the church because of their teaching, which betrayed a misuse of the tongue."<sup>4</sup>

"The pride of knowledge has always been the besetting sin of professional teachers."<sup>5</sup>

"It is very difficult to be a teacher or a preacher and to remain humble; but however difficult it is, it is absolutely necessary."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

<sup>2</sup>James H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, *New Testament ...*, pp. 241-42.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup>Wessel, p. 1436.

<sup>6</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 107.

## 2. The importance of graciousness 3:14-16

3:14 "Bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" are motives that must not inhabit the heart of a teacher, or he will find himself saying things he should not. These are attitudes toward others and self that are the antithesis of graciousness, which seeks the welfare of others before self.

"*Bitter envy* (v. 14). The Greek word for 'bitter,' *pikros*, is the same word James uses to describe the bitter water which comes from the spring (3:11). The word denotes a sharp, pungent characteristic. Envy is *zelos*, which can also be translated as jealousy or zeal. In verse 16, James contends that such envy leads to confusion and every evil thing.

"*Self-seeking* (v. 14). This word in Greek is *eritheia*, which is better translated as 'strife.' The most graphic translation of the word would be 'faction' or those involved in 'party split.' This is the expression of mankind's sinful nature which is preoccupied with the indulgence of wanting our own way—doing our own thing. It creates the 'we-they' syndrome with which we are all so familiar. It is selfish ambition at its worst."<sup>1</sup>

"Jealousy" and "ambition" are manifestations of *arrogance* (Gr. *katakauchaomai*, boasting), and they result in promoting self—rather than "the truth" the teacher is responsible to communicate. *Lying* (Gr. *pseudomai*) "against the truth" means teaching untrue things, things that oppose the truth. Those who *boast* of wisdom are not following God, because *humility* does not mark their lives. This is as true of Christians as it is of non-Christians.

3:15 This type of so-called "wisdom," which springs from jealousy and ambition, does not have its source in the fear of the Lord. It comes from the "earthly" spirit (philosophy) of this world

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<sup>1</sup>Cedar, p. 74.



(cf. 2:1-7). It consists of only what is "natural," excluding the supernatural influence of God's Spirit. Furthermore, it is "demonic": *demon*-like in its deception, hypocrisy, and evil. Note the correspondence between "earthly, natural, demonic" and the three spiritual enemies of man: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

"Wisdom is not measured by degrees but by deeds. It is not a matter of acquiring truth in lectures but of applying truth to life."<sup>1</sup>

3:16 God is not the God of "disorder" (Gr. *akatastasia*, commotion, tumult), but of order and peace (Gen. 1; 1 Cor. 14:33). He opposes "every evil thing" (1 John 1:5). Therefore, *ungracious* "jealousy" and personal ("selfish") "ambition" are not a part of the wisdom He provides.

"There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever; he has an acute brain and a skilful [*sic*] tongue; but his effect in any committee, in any Church, in any group, is to cause trouble, to drive people apart, to foment strife, to make trouble, to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom that that man possesses is devilish rather than divine, and that such a man is engaged on Satan's work and not on God's work."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The importance of loving peace 3:17-18

3:17 In contrast, "the wisdom from above," that God gives, has several characteristics: It is "pure" (Gr. *hagnos*), meaning free of the defilements mentioned. It is "peaceable" (Gr. *eirenikos*), namely: peace-loving, peace-practicing, and peace-yielding. It is "gentle" (Gr. *epiekes*) or considerate of others. It is "reasonable" (Gr. *eupeithes*), that is, open to reason and willing to yield to reasonable requests. It is "full of mercy" (Gr. *eleos*) in that it is actively sympathetic to the needy, and it is

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<sup>1</sup>Blue, p. 828.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, *The Letters ...*, p. 110.

"full of ... good fruits" (Gr. *karpos*, good works). It is "unwavering" (Gr. *adiakritos*): single-minded in its devotion to God, rather than double-minded. It is, finally, "without hypocrisy" (Gr. *anupokritos*), namely, true to appearances.

"Thus 'purity' is not just one quality among others but the key to them all."<sup>1</sup>

3:18 People committed to preserving ("making") "peace" must teach the Word of God peacefully (sow "the seed ... in peace") in order to reap a harvest of "righteousness" (cf. 1:20). *That* good fruit will not come if teachers sow it in words and ways that inflame and antagonize people (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:14, 24-26).

"The wisdom from above is concerned with justice and peace."<sup>2</sup>

"To 'raise a harvest of righteousness' demands a certain kind of climate. A crop of righteousness cannot be produced in the climate of bitterness and self-seeking. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace."<sup>3</sup>

"Winsome speech comes from a wise spirit. A controlled tongue is possible only with cultured thought. A mouth filled with praise results from a mind filled with purity."<sup>4</sup>

To restate James' thought in this chapter, our words are very important as we seek to carry out the ministry God has called us to fulfill. We cannot control our tongues easily. Therefore we should not be too quick to take on a teaching ministry. The only One who can control our tongues is God, who alone can give us the "from above" wisdom. The marks of the wisdom He provides are humility, graciousness, and peace.

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Cedar, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Burdick, pp. 191-92.

<sup>4</sup>Blue, p. 829.

James warns against anything that does not bear the fruit of good works: unfruitful religion (1:25-26), unfruitful faith (2:26), and unfruitful wisdom (3:17-18).

## **V. CONFLICTS AND HUMBLE SUBMISSION CH. 4**

In this chapter, James gave direction to his readers to encourage and enable them to live at peace with God, others, and themselves. It ties in closely to chapter 1 (cf. 4:6 and 1:5, 21; 4:8b and 1:6-8, 15, 21, 27; 4:9-10 and 1:21).

### **A. INTERPERSONAL AND INNER PERSONAL TENSIONS 4:1-10**

"James 4 continues the same topic of strife, and addresses now not only the teachers of 3:14 but also the rest of the brotherhood who are in similar sin: strife springs from within (vv. 1-3) and is fostered by worldliness; love of the world and love of God cannot coexist (vv. 4-6); Christians must resist the devil and draw near to God (vv. 7-10)."<sup>1</sup>

#### **1. The source of conflict 4:1**

As in the previous chapters, James began this one with a clear introduction of a practical problem his readers faced. He had just been referring to the importance of avoiding strife (3:14-16) and loving peace (3:13, 17-18). Now he attacked the problem of conflict ("quarrels and conflicts") within and among believers.

"James had in mind not wars between nations but quarrels and factions among Christians."<sup>2</sup>

The absence of the word "my brethren" (cf. 1:2; 2:1; 3:1) indicates the severity of this section and the one to follow (v. 13).

In view of the terrible nature of the sins mentioned, and the absence of the address "brethren" here, some commentators have concluded that James

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Wessel, p. 1436.

wrote this exhortation to unbelieving Jews.<sup>1</sup> However, Christians have been guilty of all the sins mentioned; they are not beyond the capability of believers. Furthermore, the absence of "brethren" does not prove that James was writing to Jews who were not his Christian brethren. Rather, it is more natural to take his frequent use of "brethren" throughout this epistle as evidence that he was addressing his Christian brethren in every section.

"The sudden transition from the beautiful picture in 3:17-18 of a life governed by heavenly wisdom to the appalling picture in the opening verses of chapter 4 is startling, but it demonstrates effectively the need for this vigorous rebuke now administered to the spirit of worldliness. ...

"The spirit of worldliness has always been a problem for the church; it manifests itself in varied and often subtle ways. James discusses its manifestation in the lives of believers in four different areas. Worldliness reveals itself in their selfish strife (4:1-12), in an attitude of presumptuous self-sufficiency in business planning (4:13-17), in wrong reactions to experiences of injustice (5:1-11), and in the use of self-serving oaths (5:12)."<sup>2</sup>

"Quarrels" (Gr. *polemoi*, wars) could refer to disputes between several or many individuals, whereas "conflicts" (Gr. *machoi*, battles) probably describes the tensions within one individual or between a few individuals. Both types of conflict, large and small, are the enemies of peace. James was using diatribe (cf. 2:18), so "among you" has a general reference, aimed at no particular group.<sup>3</sup>

Using a rhetorical question, James identified *pleasures* as the source of both kinds of conflict. "Pleasures" are satisfied desires (cf. Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3). James did not say the pleasures war *against each other* in the believer but that, as a besieging army, they inevitably assail him or her. People often think that most conflicts arise because of external circumstances, but James traced their root to internal lusts. The satisfaction of desire, which is what pleasure is, is something people spend vast quantities of time,

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Gaebelien, 4:2:29-30.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *James*, pp. 219, 220.

<sup>3</sup>Sidebottom, p. 51.

money, and energy to obtain. Am I spending these vast resources to satisfy my personal desires or God's desires primarily? Our personal desires are part of our human nature, and we will never escape their pull as long as we live in our present bodies. Nevertheless they must not dominate our lives. God's desires must do that (Matt. 6:33a). Our culture glorifies the satisfaction of personal desire, and it is the primary pursuit of most people, including Christians.

## 2. The explanation of the conflict 4:2-3

4:2 The ultimate end (result) of "lust," a strong desire that a person might or might not satisfy, is "murder." We can see this throughout human history, all the way from Cain (Gen. 4), through David and Ahab (cf. 2 Sam. 11; 1 Kings 21), down to the present. James was probably not accusing his readers literally of murder, though at least one scholar believed he was.<sup>1</sup> He was probably reminding them of the serious ultimate consequences of living merely to satisfy personal desires.

"In the context of forceful words such as *polemoi* ('wars') and *machai* ('battles'), it seems better to take *phoneuete* ('you kill') as hyperbole for hatred. This also resolves the problem of seeming anticlimactic word order. To say 'You hate and covet' is a much more natural order than to say 'You murder and covet.' Furthermore, Matthew 5:21-22 and 1 John 3:15 show that hatred is equal to murder."<sup>2</sup>

By the same principle, fights and arguments follow when we do not obtain our desires.

"There are indeed few evils in human life that cannot be traced to covetousness and envy in the sense in which we find these words used in this verse. Covetousness does not always lead to possession, envy does not always attain to the

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, p. 193. Cf. Motyer, pp. 140,164-65.

position of its rivals—and the inevitable result is conflict and strife."<sup>1</sup>

"This is the condition to which lust consigns its votaries; it disappoints them, and makes them mutual tormentors."<sup>2</sup>

"Unsatisfied desire leads to murder ...; disappointed ambition leads to quarrelling and fighting."<sup>3</sup>

The only way to obtain satisfaction is to "ask" God to give it. We "do not have" what God wants us to have, because we "do not ask" *Him* for these things.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the most important verses in the Bible concerning prayer. There are some things we can have from God that we will not have *unless we ask* Him for them (cf. Luke 11:5-13).

"Is it not true that one of the great problems of your prayer lives is simply the fact that we don't pray?"<sup>5</sup>

"... to know God as the master and bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and not ask of him—this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him."<sup>6</sup>

4:3      However, we often ask God for things to enable us to satisfy our own selfish desires ("ask with wrong motives"). For example, we request more time, more money, more energy—so we can do things that we desire ("spend it on [our] pleasures"), but that God does not desire for us. What we need

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<sup>1</sup>Tasker, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>Edwin T. Winkler, "Commentary on the Epistle of James," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Mayor, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Fanning, pp. 432-33.

<sup>5</sup>Cedar, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup>Calvin, 3:20:1.

to ask Him to give us is more desire for what He promises and commands (for His will). We also need less desire for what is contrary to His will for us (cf. Matt. 7:7-11).

"If prayer is no more than a formula (saying the right words, believe hard enough, confess; it will happen), then Christians are back to a type of magic: They can manipulate God or impose their will on God, for he *has* to answer. In contrast, New Testament prayer grows out of a trusting relationship with a father whose will is supreme."<sup>1</sup>

"In the life of a full-time Christian minister, some may devote themselves to the activist pursuits of endless caring for the sick and house-to-house ministry to the unsaved, and skimp sermon preparation. It may be called 'getting our priorities right', but it may simply be an exercise in self-pleasing. Others lock the study door behind them. When they descend the pulpit steps on one Sunday they are already mentally climbing the same steps next Sunday. They may say that the pulpit is the best place to exercise pastoral care, and that they are putting first things first—but they may in fact just be indulging a passion."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The nature of the choice 4:4-5

4:4 The real issue is: Which will I love, "God" or "the world"?

"In the simplest sense of the word, the world is each man's natural environment, that into which he enters at birth, and from which he departs in death. It is the immediate present, the seen and temporal, of which our senses bear witness, in contrast to the unseen and eternal ..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davids, pp. 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> Motyer, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Mayor, p. 225.

"The world" urges us to love ourselves, to put our pleasures before God's pleasures. If we agree with that idea, we are unfaithful as the Lord's spiritual brides, and become "an enemy of God." We have deliberately chosen to follow the world's philosophy rather than God's will. We cannot be on friendly terms with God if we follow the world's philosophy (Matt. 6:24). The world wants us to exclude God from all aspects of life. God wants us to include Him in *all* of life, because He *is in all* of life, and without Him we "can do nothing" (John 15:5).

"... no man who makes worldly success his aim can be also a friend of God"<sup>1</sup>

4:5 In this verse, James gave scriptural support for what he just asserted (v. 4). However, he did not quote a particular verse, but instead evidently summarized the scriptural teaching on God's jealousy (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Ps. 42:1; 84:2; Zech. 8:2) in a new statement.<sup>2</sup>

It is very difficult to translate this statement, but the best rendering seems to be something such as the following: "God jealously longs for the spirit that He made to live in us."<sup>3</sup> Another translation is: "The Spirit which He made to dwell in us jealously yearns for the entire devotion of the heart" (cf. Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:30; John 7:39; 16:7).<sup>4</sup>

Both translations fit the preceding context well. God's people *who love the world* have committed spiritual *adultery* against Him (v. 4), yet God (or His Spirit) "jealously longs for (desires)" their love (v. 5).

Furthermore, these translations accurately represent the Greek text. The phrase *pros phthonon* literally means "to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>See Sophie S. Laws, "Does Scripture Speak in Vain? A Reconsideration of James IV. 5," *New Testament Studies* 20 (1973-74):210-15; and Stulac, pp. 146-47.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. J. William Johnston, "James 4:5 and the Jealous Spirit," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:679 (July-September 2013):344-60.

<sup>4</sup>Mayor, p. 141. Cf. Oesterley, 4:459.



envy," but it is also an adverbial idiom meaning "jealously."<sup>1</sup> The verb *epipothei* means "to long for" or "to yearn for" rather than "to tend toward."

"It is a most striking passage which tells of the love of the Holy Spirit, as (in one sense) distinct from that of the Father or that of the Son; in connection with it should be read Rom. viii. 26-28; Eph. iv. 30; 1 Thess. v. 19."<sup>2</sup>

Another view, that I do not think is correct, is that the human spirit in us lusts enviously.<sup>3</sup>

"Thus, in v. 4 James has accused his readers of spiritual unfaithfulness. If they are not willing to accept this indictment, he asks in v. 5 what they think about the OT passages dealing with God's jealous longing for his people. This is the significance of the introductory conjunction 'or.' Do they think Scripture speaks 'without reason' or emptily? Of course they don't think this. Consequently, it is necessary to believe that friendship with the world is enmity toward God, and thus it is spiritual unfaithfulness."<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. The resources to choose right 4:6-10

4:6 God has set a high standard of wholehearted love and devotion for His people, but He gives "grace" that is "greater" than His rigorous demand. Proverbs 3:34, quoted here, reminds us that God *opposes* "the proud": those who pursue their own pleasures. However, He *gives grace* to "the humble": those who put God's desires first in their lives. He gives "grace"

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<sup>1</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. "*phthonon*," p. 718. See also Ropes, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Oesterley, 4:459.

<sup>3</sup> See Sidebottom, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Burdick, p. 194. Cf. Martin, p. 151.

(help) to withstand the onslaughts of the flesh within and the world without.

4:7 In view of God's certain supply of this grace, we need to adopt a definite stance toward the people involved in this conflict. Ten aorist imperatives in verses 7-10 demand decisive action. They sound like military commands, and reflect how seriously James viewed double-mindedness.<sup>1</sup>

Toward God, we must "submit" in humility. This means making what is of importance to Him important to us, ordering our priorities in harmony with God's priorities. It means not living to fulfill our personal ambitions, but using our lives to fulfill His desires. Submission is not identical to obedience. Submission involves the surrender of the will, which allows for obedience.

We must "resist" Satan strongly (cf. 1 Pet. 5:9). When we do, he will flee from us. What is Satan trying to get us to do? The record of his temptations, including those of Eve and Jesus Christ, indicates that he wants to make us doubt, deny, disregard, and disobey God's Word (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). We "resist the devil" by refusing to do these things.

"Don't argue with the Devil," he [Luther] said. "He has had five thousand years of experience. He has tried out all his tricks on Adam, Abraham, and David, and he knows exactly the weak spots."<sup>2</sup>

4:8 While resisting Satan on the one hand, we must also "draw near to God" on the other. When we do, "He will draw near to [us]." To draw near to God, we must go through a purification process reminiscent of what the priests in Israel underwent. We must "wash (cleanse) [our] hands," symbolic of our outward actions, as well as "purify [our divided] hearts," symbolic of our inner attitudes and motives. We "cleanse" and "purify" them by confession and repentance. We must remove *sin* from our hands, and *duplicity* from our hearts. *Single-mindedness* involves singleness of purpose, namely, living for

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup>Bainton, p. 284.

the glory of God *only*—rather than for both God's glory and our own selfish desires (cf. 1:8).

4:9 James was calling readers, who had compromised with the world by following hedonism, to get right with God. There is laughter and joy in the pursuit of personal desires, but we must abandon these in the process of repenting. James was not saying Christians must be *constantly* miserable, mourning, weeping, and gloomy. These are only the outward signs of repentance from a formerly sinful attitude and lifestyle (cf. Matt. 5:3-4).

4:10 In concluding this section of direct advice (vv. 7-10), James sounded the same note with which he began: submission to God in humility ("humble yourselves" in God's presence), putting Him before self. This always results in God lifting one up ("He will exalt you"), both immediately and eventually. Since this is the condition in which God can best use us, He will proceed to do so for His glory (cf. Matt. 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:6).

"The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth."<sup>1</sup>

"Ralph Bell, an associate evangelist with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, is a godly man who tells of learning grace-reliance in a deeply personal way. Bell is a Canadian-born black man who lives and ministers in the United States. As a young man, he struggled with experiences of racial insults and discrimination. Being so treated by fellow Christians, who were disobeying James's instructions about impartiality, was especially hurtful. Bell shared his struggles with his mother, who counseled him to keep his eyes on Jesus, because Jesus would never disappoint him. As he sought to apply that advice, he began to find the grace to see others' racism as their problem. He further sought grace from God to purify his own life of hatred toward those who mistreated him. In James's terms, Ralph Bell humbled himself before the Lord, and he found himself being lifted up by the grace of God to be able to

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 1936.

love his enemies. How does one love hostile and hurtful people? The answer is supernaturally, by relying on the grace that God gives to the humble."<sup>1</sup>

### **B. SELF-EXALTATION 4:11-12**

Having dealt with the source of interpersonal and inner personal conflicts that believers in particular, and all people generally, experience, James dealt next with a different aspect of the same problem. He did so to motivate his readers further to forsake the philosophy of the world that puts self first. Criticizing others is dangerous, not only because it is a form of selfishness, but also because the critic exalts himself *even over God* when he or she criticizes.

4:11        The *speaking* (Gr. *katalaleo*, speak evil, malign) in view is speaking disparagingly of, or down on, another Christian. To criticize ("speak against") another, a person must conclude that he himself is right, and the person he is criticizing is wrong. This is passing judgment, taking the role of a courtroom judge. The "law" in view probably refers to God's law generally, in view of the context. We *sin* "against [God's] law" when we criticize a brother, because God has revealed that we should not speak against, or pass judgment on, our Christian brethren (cf. Lev. 19:15-18; Matt. 7:1). We should submit to one another (e.g., Gal. 5:13; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3). Rather than taking a position of humility, such a person exalts himself to the role of "judge" (cf. v. 10).

"We must be careful to note the far-reaching consequences of James' teaching here: respect for law and order is necessary (as we are often told) for the health of modern society, but James goes on to remind us (v. 12) that, since God is the source of all law, what is ultimately at stake in a 'permissive society' is respect for the authority of God himself."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stulac, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Adamson, p. 177.

4:12 James was speaking of judging other people without divine authorization to do so, since "there is only one Lawgiver and Judge." Obviously God has delegated the responsibility of judging some civil acts to human governments, some church conduct to elders, and the behavior of children to their parents. Similarly, Christians who are walking by the Spirit, who observe other Christians overtaken by some fault, should seek to restore them *in love*, not ignore them (Gal. 6:1).

Criticizing our equals is a common sport, but it is inappropriate for mere mortals. We all are responsible to God, ultimately, and must leave the judgment of His servants up to Him (Rom. 14:1-13). We need to remember that we are on the same level with those we may wish to judge. We are brothers and neighbors (cf. Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6-7; 2 Kings 5:7). James' point in this passage was that we should be extremely careful about judging other people, because God will judge us with the same severity with which we have judged one another (cf. Matt. 7:2). His point was not that we should never *criticize* anybody, but we should never "pass judgment" in the sense of *condemning* someone, passing ultimate judgment, since only the final Judge has the authority to do that.

### C. SELF-RELIANCE 4:13-17

As in the previous chapters, James began with the exposition of a practical problem, and then moved on to its larger contextual problem, that is, its context in life. He already identified the source of interpersonal and inner personal conflicts as *self-centeredness*, and explained that criticism places the critic in a seat that only God should occupy. Now he pictured a self-centered person living his or her life. He did this to enable his readers to see the root of this problem clearly.

"James gave an example of a boastful statement [v. 13], struck a condemnatory sentence on such boasting [v. 14], and offered a practical solution for boasting [vv. 15-17]."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Blue, p. 831.

### 1. The self-centered person 4:13-16

4:13 James confronted his audience as the Old Testament prophets did. He began, "Come now" (cf. Isa. 1:18; et al.). The person in James' illustration was probably a traveling Jewish merchant, "... the materialist core of the contemporary bourgeois prosperity."<sup>1</sup> Jewish merchants were common in the culture of James' day, and undoubtedly some of them were Christian Jews. The man's plans were not wrong in themselves.

4:14 The problem is what the merchant did *not* consider: his complete dependence on God (cf. Luke 12:18-20; John 15:5).

"To what extent is your life directed by the knowledge that Christ is coming back? Much of our thinking and behavior is shaped by what we can see of present circumstances or past events. Yet Scripture speaks forcefully of Christ's return as a fact that should be directing how we live now. Christians are to be motivated by the certainty of this future event."<sup>2</sup>

4:15 The merchant should have made his planning in conscious dependence on God ("If the Lord wills, we will live and ... do this ..."), recognizing His sovereign control over all of life (cf. Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Phil. 2:19, 24). The Latin phrase, *deo volente* ("God willing," abbreviated D.V.), remains in use even today among some Christians.

"A study of the use of this conditional clause ["If the Lord wills ..."] in the NT makes it clear that we are not to repeat it mechanically in connection with every statement of future plans. Paul, for example, employs it in Acts 18:21 and 1 Corinthians 4:19, but he does not use it in Acts 19:21; Romans 15:28; or 1 Corinthians 16:5, 8. Yet it is obvious that whether Paul explicitly

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Stulac, p. 156.

stated it or not, he always conditioned his plans on the will of God."<sup>1</sup>

4:16 James rebuked those of his readers who were living with this God-neglecting attitude. They derived joy from feeling that they controlled their own destiny. Here is the picture of the "self-made man" taking credit for what God has given him ("you boast in your arrogance"). "Boasting" of this kind is unrealistic. It betrays an attitude that puts man in God's place. For this reason it "is evil."

In these verses, James presented four arguments that show the foolishness of ignoring God's will: the complexity of life (v. 13), the uncertainty of life (v. 14a), the brevity of life (v. 14b), and the frailty of man (v. 16).<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The concluding exhortation 4:17

The person James just pictured was guilty of a sin of omission ("the one who knows the right [good] thing ... and does not do it ... it is sin"; cf. Luke 16:19-31). It is probably not just any sin of omission that is in view here, but the sin of failing to do good by acknowledging dependence on the Lord (v. 15).<sup>3</sup> The independent person in view failed to acknowledge the place God occupies in life (cf. John 9:41).

In concluding this discussion of conflicts, James reminded his readers to put into practice what they knew. They should avoid presumption and self-confidence, and they should submit themselves humbly to God. Failure to do this "is sin."

"They cannot take refuge in the plea that they have done nothing positively wrong; as Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of *omission* are as real and serious as sins of *commission*."<sup>4</sup>

The verse that concludes each major section of James' epistle, i.e., each chapter, is a proverbial statement. Each concluding verse summarizes James' point in the preceding section, and states it in a pithy way that is

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<sup>1</sup>Burdick, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, pp. 130-33.

<sup>3</sup>Alford, 4:2:320.

<sup>4</sup>Moo, (1985), p. 158.

easy to remember. However, the statement in this verse (4:17) is applicable to *all* that James wrote in this book.

## VI. MONEY AND PATIENT ENDURANCE 5:1-18

The final practical problem James addressed involves money. He wrote these instructions to warn his readers of a danger, to inform them of the ramifications of the problem, and to exhort them to deal with the situation appropriately. This is his third reference to the rich and the poor (cf. 1:9-11; 2:1-12). We might also consider 4:13-17, as well as 5:1-6, as dealing with the rich.<sup>1</sup>

### A. WARNINGS FOR THE RICH 5:1-6

It is characteristic of James' well-balanced style that he opened and closed his exhortations (in 2:1—5:6) with references to the rich. There is also a return in this chapter to James' encouragement to persevere in the will of God when tempted to depart from it (cf. ch. 1). Thus the book demonstrates a somewhat chiasmic structure.

"... wealth brings consternation [v. 1], ends up in corrosion [vv. 2-3], and results in condemnation [vv. 4-6]."<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. The introduction of the problem 5:1

Again James confronted his readers as a prophet (cf. 4:13). "Rich" people are usually happy that they have wealth. However, James challenged his rich readers to "weep and howl" in anguish, not repentance. The Bible nowhere condemns the rich for being rich. Money is not evil (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). Nevertheless, God's Word consistently warns the rich of the *temptations* that financial abundance brings with it. These temptations include: a false sense of security, a desire to control others, and personal

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<sup>1</sup>For some helpful insights on the way Christians might speak and act when confronted with wealth, status, and power on the one hand, or poverty, ignorance, and helplessness on the other, see Duane Warden, "The Rich and Poor in James: Implications for Institutionalized Partiality," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:2 (June 2000):253-57.

<sup>2</sup>Blue, p. 832.



pride. The rich should not rejoice too much. Material misery could be just around the corner (cf. 1:10-11).

"The persons here addressed are not the same as those addressed in iv. 13. It is no longer the careless worldliness of the bustling trader which is condemned, but the more deadly worldliness of the unjust capitalist or landlord."<sup>1</sup>

Probably James had in mind "the rich" as a *class*, not exclusively wealthy believers or wealthy unbelievers.

## 2. The corrosive effect of wealth 5:2-3

5:2 The "riches" that *rot* are presumably perishable commodities such as food and drink. "Garments" were one of the most popular forms of wealth in the biblical world. People even used them to pay for things, and they were also heirlooms and popular presents (cf. Matt. 6:19).

5:3 "Gold" and "silver" do not literally *rust*. Rather they corrode and tarnish. Nevertheless corrosion does the same thing as rust. It destroys the value of the metal. Christians should use money, not hoard it. Therefore, the presence of "rust" or corroded gold, in the rich man's treasury, will bear "witness" to his unfaithful stewardship of his wealth. James warned that the process that destroys gold and silver is the same process that destroys the people who collect these precious metals. *Hoarding wealth* is a particularly serious sin for Christians, since we are living in "the last days," the days immediately preceding the Lord's return (cf. Luke 12:20-21). We should be using our money to get the Lord's work done, not to enable us to live lives of luxury and laziness (cf. Matt. 6:19-24).

"To lay up treasure in heaven means to use all that we have as stewards of God's wealth. You and I may *possess* many things, but we do not *own* them. God is the Owner of everything, and we are His stewards.

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<sup>1</sup>Mayor, p. 153.

"The Bible does not discourage saving, or even investing; but it does condemn hoarding."<sup>1</sup>

Hoarding, as used here, means accumulating wealth just to have lots of it, for security, prestige, or just selfishness.

### **3. The misuse of wealth 5:4-6**

5:4 Some of James' readers were evidently getting rich by cheating their hired workers out of their fair wages (cf. Deut. 24:15). "Cries" for justice from these oppressed people had entered God's "ears," even though their employers were deaf to them (cf. Gen. 4:5; 18:20-21).<sup>2</sup> The title "Lord of Sabaoth" (lit. "Lord of Hosts," i.e., Lord Almighty; cf. Isa. 5:9; Rom. 9:29) emphasizes the sovereign omnipotence of God. Although the oppressed may appear to have no defenders on earth, they have as their helper the Lord God omnipotent in heaven.

5:5 The rich are often soft and self-indulgent (cf. Luke 16:19-31; Amos 6:1-6). This is the connotation of "luxury," a condition that our culture condones but Scripture condemns. "Wanton pleasure" implies extravagance and waste. In their greedy acquisitiveness, the rich fatten themselves figuratively ("fattened your hearts"), and sometimes literally, not realizing that they are just preparing themselves for "slaughter" (judgment), like so many sacrificial animals.

"Like an OT prophet James denounces the wanton luxury of the rich, warning of their coming doom."<sup>3</sup>

This warning should challenge believers to avoid extravagance and self-indulgence when purchasing goods for themselves. We need to evaluate our expenditures periodically. One way to do this is to check your income tax records. How much are you

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>See Keith D. Campbell, "Lament in James and Its Significance for the Church," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:1 (March 2017):125-38.

<sup>3</sup>Adamson, p. 87.

giving away (deductions) compared to how much are you taking in (income)?

5:6 The oppression of the rich extends to "*putting to death*" those who stand in their way, even though these people only "resist" the rich righteously (i.e., not violently). As in 4:2, James may have been using "put to death" hyperbolically. Many Christians have experienced persecution from people who are trying to guard their own financial security (e.g., Acts 8:18-24; 19:23-28). However, if day laborers do not get their wages ("pay") daily, they *can die*.

"... for day laborers it was very serious not to find work or not to be paid. For this reason James personifies the salary, seeing it as the very blood of the exploited workers crying out pitifully. The case was the same for the peasants. The peasants die because they pour out their strength in their work, but the fruit of their work does not come back to them. They cannot regain their strength because the rich withhold their salaries. Therefore James accuses the rich of condemning and killing the just (5:6)."<sup>1</sup>

These are strong words of warning. James evidently believed that his readers were erring in this area of their lives, and needed a severe shock! The Jews' gift for making money, and their interest in this pursuit, needed control. We need this warning too, since modern culture values money very highly.

As with 1:10, there is a question about whether James was referring to rich Christians or rich unbelievers in this pericope. Here, as there, I tend to think that James was probably referring to rich *Christians*. He seems to be addressing his readers rather than "speaking rhetorically, formally addressing non-Christians in 1:10 as well as ... in 5:1-6, but saying this really for the benefit of his Christian readers, who were suffering at the hands of rich persecutors."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works is Dead*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Stulac, p. 199.

<b>"The World's View of Riches</b>	<b>The Word's View of Riches</b>
Money brings freedom.	The desire for money can be enslaving and lead to destruction; only Christ brings true freedom (1 Tim. 6:7-10).
Money brings security.	Worldly wealth is very insecure; it will quickly pass away (1:10). Real security is found in knowing and trusting God (Jer. 9:23, 24; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).
Money is what matters.	Christ and the kingdom of God are what matters (Matt. 6:33; Phil. 3:7-10).
Money is power.	Power comes from being filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 3:1-10).
Money establishes not only your net worth, but your worth as a person.	Your worth is based on what God says, not what your bank statement says (John 3:16; Eph. 1:3-14).
Money makes you successful.	Success comes from knowing and doing what God says (Josh. 1:8).
Money gives you options.	God is the One who ultimately gives you options (Eph. 3:20).
Money brings happiness.	The happiness that money brings is short-lived. And in the long run, money can actually produce 'many sorrows' (1 Tim. 6:10). Lasting joy comes from knowing God (5:1-6; John 15:11; 16:24).
Money is your reward. Save it, and spend it on yourself.	Give as much as you can (Matt. 6:19-24; Acts 20:35; 2 Cor. 9:6-11; 1 Tim. 6:18).

Money is your possession. Spend it on whatever you want.	All that you have is God's to do with as He pleases. You are merely a manager of His possessions (Ps. 24:1; Luke 19:11-27; 2 Cor. 5:10)." <sup>1</sup>
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## **B. THE PROPER ATTITUDE 5:7-12**

Essentially the attitude of the rich that James condemned was: "Get all you can, as fast as you can, any way you can." In the following pericope, he counseled a different attitude: to urge his readers, rich and poor, to practice patience.

### **1. The exhortation to be patient 5:7-9**

5:7 Because of the dangers James just expounded, believers should adopt a "patient" attitude. The verb *makrothymesate* ("be patient") describes "self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong."<sup>2</sup> The Lord's return ("coming") "is near" (v. 8; cf. Mark 13:32-37; Phil. 4:5; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 John 2:18).

"The word *parousias* ('coming') was a common term used to describe the visit of a king to a city or province of his kingdom and thus depicts Christ as a royal personage."<sup>3</sup>

The "early" rains came shortly after planting in Palestine in late October and early November. The "late rains" followed, as the crop was maturing, in late March and early April. This reference may imply a Palestinian origin for the epistle. James knew agriculture in Palestine. The point of James' illustration of "the farmer" seems to be, that as Christians we are primarily sowing and cultivating in this life, not mainly reaping rewards.

"The picture is that of the small farmer in Palestine ... The small farmer plants his carefully saved seed and hopes for a harvest, living on short

<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 2104.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Burdick, p. 201.

rations and suffering hunger during the last weeks. The whole livelihood, indeed the life itself, of the family depends on a good harvest: the loss of the farm, semistarvation, or death could result from a bad year. So the farmer waits for an expected future event (*ekdechetai*); no one but he could know how precious the grain really is ..."<sup>1</sup>

5:8 When the Lord returns, we will receive our reward at the judgment seat of Christ. In the meantime, we should be "patient" and encouraged ("strengthen [our] hearts"), knowing that our reward lies ahead, as God has promised (cf. Matt. 6:20). The rich, who behave as typical rich people, either do not have or have lost sight of this hope. They live only to accumulate as much "reward" *here and now* as they can.

"... the finish line is just ahead: the important point is not to give up now and lose all that for which one has already suffered."<sup>2</sup>

"Anything that *must* happen, and *could* happen *today*, is in a very legitimate sense *at hand*."<sup>3</sup>

5:9 It is easy for us to blame ("complain against") one another for our present discomforts.

"What is forbidden is not the loud and bitter denunciation of others but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a groan or a sigh."<sup>4</sup>

James forbade this, because it involves improper *judging* (cf. 4:11-12). Judgment of believers will take place soon. This verse is a clear indication that the early Christians expected the Lord Jesus to return imminently.<sup>5</sup> If (Since) Jesus could

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<sup>1</sup> Davids, *The Epistle ...*, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Burdick, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> See Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, ch. 6: "The Imminency of the Coming of Christ for the Church," pp. 108-37.

return at any moment, therefore He will return before the seven-year Tribulation, which Scripture says must precede His Second Coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. Thus the Rapture must be distinct from the Second Coming, separated by at least seven years.

"The early Christians' conviction that the *parousia* was 'near', or 'imminent', meant that they fully believed that it *could* transpire within a very short period of time—not that it *had* to."<sup>1</sup>

"Imminent" means something *could* happen very soon, not that it *must*.<sup>2</sup>

"In light of the concept of the imminent coming of Christ and the fact that the New Testament does teach His imminent coming, we can conclude that the Pretribulation Rapture view is the only view of the Rapture of the church that comfortably fits the New Testament teaching of the imminent coming of Christ. It is the only view that can honestly say that Christ could return at any moment, because it alone teaches that Christ will come to rapture the church before the 70th week of Daniel 9 or the Tribulation period begins and that nothing else must happen before His return."<sup>3</sup>

James pictured Jesus ("the Judge") poised ("standing right") "at the door" of heaven, ready to welcome Christians into His heavenly throne room. The hope of His imminent (any

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<sup>1</sup>Moo, (1985), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert G. Bratcher, *A Translator's Guide to the Letters from James, Peter, and Jude*, p. 55; M. F. Sadler, *The General Epistles of SS. James, Peter, John and Jude*, pp. 68-69; Adamson, pp. 191-92; Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Practical Epistle of James*, p. 112; Vernon D. Doerksen, *James*, p. 123; E. C. Blackman, *The Epistle of James*, p. 146; J. Alec Motyer, *The Tests of Faith*, p. 107; Mitton, p. 186; Spiros Zodhiates, *The Patience of Hope*, p. 90; David P. Scaer, *James the Apostle of Faith*, p. 126; Homer A. Kent Jr., *Faith that Works*, p. 176; Harold T. Bryson, *How Faith Works*, pp. 116-17, 119; Davids, p. 185; and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, p. 149.

moment) return should strongly motivate us to live patiently and sacrificially now.

## 2. Examples of endurance 5:10-11

5:10 One could use just about any one of the Hebrew "prophets" as an example of patient endurance in "suffering" (cf. 1:4).

5:11 "Job" was not always patient, but he did determine to *endure* whatever might befall him, as he waited for God to clear up the mystery of his suffering (cf. Job 13:10, 15; 16:19-21; 19:25).

"Though he showed much of impatience, yet he always returned to this, that he committed himself wholly to God, and at last showed a perfect spirit of enduring submission."<sup>1</sup>

In verses 7-10, James pleaded for "patience" (*makrothymia*) that restrains itself and does not retaliate. Here he advocated "perseverance" (*hypomone*) through difficult circumstances (cf. 1:3; Heb. 11:25).

Job reaped a great *reward* at the end of his trial ("the outcome of the Lord's dealings"). We see God's "compassion" and "mercy" especially at the end of Job's experience, though God manifested these characteristics earlier as well. Job determined to continue to live by faith, even when he experienced the temptation to depart from the will of God (cf. 1:2-4). (This is the only reference to Job in the New Testament.)

"James has been concerned to help believers to overcome the tendency to react like the world to the injustices heaped on them by the world. The world, by its very nature antagonistic to God and His kingdom, will continue to oppose God's people. But if these truths grip the hearts of His people, it will enable

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1459.



them to overcome the spirit of worldliness by refraining from a worldly reaction to the world's injustices."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The evidence of patience 5:12

*Swearing* is an evidence of impatience.

"What he [James] means is that of all the manifestations of impatience in times of stress and affliction the most frequent is the taking of the Lord's name in vain by the use of explosive utterances and hasty and irreverent oaths."<sup>2</sup>

When we become impatient and lose self-control, we tend to say things better left unspoken. These include swearing, abusing the Lord's name, and appealing to "heaven," "earth," or whatever—as confirmation that we are speaking the truth (cf. Matt. 5:33-37).

"It should be obvious that what is referred to in Matthew and James is the light, casual use of oaths in informal conversation—not formal oaths in such places as courts of law [cf. Ps. 110:4; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20]."<sup>3</sup>

"The Jews were wont to split hairs in their use of profanity, and by avoiding God's name imagine that they were not really guilty of this sin, just as professing Christians today use 'pious oaths' which violate the prohibition of Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

What is not in view in this discussion is the use of "dirty" speech.

"James's wisdom amounts to this: we should never need to use an oath to prove that 'this time I really mean it!' Instead we should *always* 'really mean it.'"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup>Tasker, p. 124. Cf. Mayor, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup>Burdick, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, 6:63.

<sup>5</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 115. Cf. Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:3-4; Hos. 4:2; Jer. 5:2; Zech. 5:3-4; Mal. 3:5.

"Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete."<sup>1</sup>

The root problem with the improper behavior that often characterizes the rich, as James saw it, is an attitude of impatience that results from rejecting or forgetting divine revelation concerning the future. Knowledge of the future, as God has revealed it in Scripture, has very direct application to everyday living. It should affect the way we think about money, among other things.

### C. THE PROPER ACTION 5:13-18

James encouraged his readers to pray, as well as to be patient, in order to enable them to overcome the temptation to live only for the present and stop living by faith. James not only begins and ends his epistle with references to trials, but he "also begins (1:5-8) and ends (5:13-18) with prayer as the instrumental means for managing trials."<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. The way of release 5:13

Prayer to God, not profanity, is the proper outlet for feelings of sadness caused by "suffering" as we patiently endure.

"James's emphasis on prayer in this section is especially noteworthy since few things undergird perseverance more effectively than prayer. In the final analysis, a persevering life is also a prayerful life."<sup>3</sup>

The right way to express joy is by praising God ("sing praises"), not swearing.

#### 2. The prescription for help 5:14-16

It is not surprising to find that James dealt with sickness (Gr. *asthenai*, weakness) in this epistle. He referred to the fact that departure from the will of God sets the Christian on a course that, unless corrected, may result

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<sup>1</sup>Mitton, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>C. Richard Wells, "The Theology of Prayer in James," *Criswell Theological Review* 1:1 (Fall 1986):86.

<sup>3</sup>Hodges, *The Epistle ...*, p. 113.

in his or her premature physical death (1:15, 21; 5:20). Spiritual weakness, and sometimes physical sickness, result from sinful living. James gave instructions about how to deal with these maladies in verses 14-20.

5:14 Times of spiritual weakness or physical sickness are usually occasions in which it is especially difficult to be patient (e.g., Job).

"Anointing ... with oil" was the equivalent in James' day of applying medication (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23).

"... oil among the ancients was highly valued for its therapeutic qualities (Isa. 1:16; Luke 10:34)."<sup>1</sup>

The "oil" provided more refreshment and soothing comfort than it did real relief for serious ailments, but people drank it as well as rubbing it on themselves as a medication. The term translated "anointing him with oil" in Greek refers to medicinal anointing, not religious ceremonial anointing.<sup>2</sup> James used *aleiphein* ("rub") here rather than *chriein* ("anoint"). The former word is the "mundane and profane" term—referring to all kinds of rubbing, whereas the latter is the "sacred and religious" word used to describe religious ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>

James instructed that in times of weakness, spiritual or physical, Christians should ask ("call for") their church "elders" to visit them, to "pray" for them, and to minister to them, "anointing" them in Jesus' "name" (i.e., as His servants).<sup>4</sup>

"James specifically exhorts the sick to call for the elders, not deacons, friends, or miracle workers. He assumes that all congregations, as in

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill F. Unger, "Divine Healing," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):236. Cf. Adamson, p. 197. See also Mayor, pp. 170-71, for extrabiblical references.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, 6:64-65.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 129. See also Burdick, p. 204; and McGee, 5:669-70.

<sup>4</sup>See John Wilkinson, "Healing in the Epistle of James," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971):338-40.

Jerusalem, have an official, recognized body of elders to call on for help."<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkable how many Christians today, who go into the hospital, fail to send out a request to the elders of their church to come and pray for them. More common is it for them to simply send out a general request for prayer to their friends and or fellow church members.

"Prayer is the more significant of the two ministries performed by the elders. 'Pray' is the main verb, while 'anoint' is a participle. Moreover, the overall emphasis of the paragraph is on prayer. So the anointing is a secondary action."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the ailing or weary person was to "summon (call for) the elders" gives a clue that this person's sickness connects with some spiritual condition. This proves to be the case in verse 15. Today a skilled physician normally provides the medical attention. The elders need to deal with the spiritual factors affecting the sick person, if any, since they have a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the flock (Heb. 13:17).

Some Christians believe that anointing with oil was a *Jewish* custom, and therefore it was not meant to be perpetuated in the church.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not *just* a Jewish practice, and so it seems optional for today.

In this context, James had in view a sickness with spiritual roots. Actually, all sickness is traceable to the Fall, though not all sin can be traceable to some specific sin (cf. John 9:3).

"When our oldest son, Daniel, was a little boy, he contracted a very serious illness. He was rushed to the Denver Children's Hospital where he was under the care of an outstanding pediatrician who was a committed Christian. As my wife, Jean, and

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 284. See pp. 284-91.

<sup>2</sup>Burdick, p. 204. See also Frank E. Gaebelien, *Faith that Lives*, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., A. C. Gaebelien, 4:2:40.

I stood with the doctor next to Dan's bed which was covered by an oxygen tent, the doctor shared some counsel with us which I shall never forget.

"He said, 'I have done everything I can do. Dan has the best that medicine can offer. Now we must entrust him to God.' He then continued, 'I have found the best combination for healing is a healthy blend of penicillin and prayer.'"<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting that James did not tell his readers to call for someone with the gift of healing. Evidently such people were rare, even in the very early history of the church when James wrote.

Probably this treatment reminded the sick person of the *power of the Holy Spirit*, that "anointing with oil" symbolized in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

"*Aleiphein* ... may have been chosen over *chriein* because of standard usage yet still with the intention of conveying the thought that the anointing of oil was symbolic."<sup>3</sup>

This verse is the basis for the Roman Catholic doctrine of extreme unction (i.e., anointing someone with oil at death to gain merit with God for so doing).<sup>4</sup> This practice began in the eighth century.<sup>5</sup>

5:15 "Difficulties in deciding what exactly in the preceding verse is meant by anointing should not cause us to overlook the main point of vv 13-18, which is prayer. It is prayer—not the anointing—which leads to the healing of the sick person."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cedar, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Fanning, p. 433. Cf. Gary S. Shogren, "Will God Heal Us—A Re-examination of James 5:14-16a," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989):99-108.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup>For refutation of this view, see Calvin, 4:19:18-21; and Adamson, pp. 204-5.

<sup>5</sup>Blue, p. 834.

<sup>6</sup>Martin, p. 209.

The elders' prayers "offered in faith will restore" (lit. "save," Gr. *sosei*, "make well"; cf. Matt. 9:21-22; Mark 6:56) "the sick (one)," and revitalize (Gr. *egerei*, "raise up") him or her. "Offered in faith" means: presented with confidence in God's power to heal *if* that is His will in this case (cf. Matt. 8:1-13; Mark 5:35-42). By the same token, "the Lord will raise him" to health *if* this is His will (John 14:13; 1 John 5:14).<sup>1</sup>

"The medicine does not heal the sick, but it helps nature (God) do it. The doctor cooperates with God in nature."<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin Franklin reportedly said, "God heals, and the doctor collects the fee."

There is no basis in Scripture for the popular idea that praying in faith means praying with confidence that something will happen just because we pray (cf. 1:5-6; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Faith always must have the Person or promise of God as its object to be effective.

"It is a prayer of faith, i.e. the prayer which expresses trust in God and flows out of commitment to him, for only such prayers are effective ..."<sup>3</sup>

Neither does James' statement mean that God will raise the sick person up by resurrection after he or she dies. Nowhere in Scripture is resurrection conditioned on prayer. It is something that God will do to every person without reference to prayer.

Some take the "faith" in view here as a special, God-given assurance that it is His will to heal in this instance (cf. 1 Cor.

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<sup>1</sup>See Anderson, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, 6:65.

<sup>3</sup>Dauids, *The Epistle ...*, p. 194. See also Thomas L. Constable, "The Doctrine of Prayer" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969), p. 111; and Mayor. p. 173.

12:9).<sup>1</sup> However, simple faith in God seems to be in view, since James did not qualify it.

If the sufferer "has committed" some sin or "sins" that caused his or her debilitated condition, James added, God will *forgive* those sins. This happens when the sinner confesses the sin(s) to God (1 John 1:9; cf. Matt. 6:12). Not all sickness is the direct result of some sin(s) (cf. John 9:1-3).

"James's point is simply that both must be dealt with when they are linked."<sup>2</sup>

5:16 In view of the possibility of spiritual and physical sickness following sin, believers should "confess [their] sins (against one another) to one another" (normally privately). Furthermore they should "pray for one another" so God may *heal* them (both spiritually and physically).

"Much is assumed here that is not expressed."<sup>3</sup>

James assumed these facts, I believe, that are consistent with other revelation concerning prayer that the writers of Scripture give elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

"In the ancient mind sin and sickness went together, and so confession of sin was necessary if prayer for the sick was to be effective. The confession is to be not only to the elders (or other ministers) but *to one another*, that is, probably to those they have wronged."<sup>5</sup>

Husbands and wives need to create an atmosphere in the home that promotes transparency (cf. Col. 3:12-13). We need to demonstrate total acceptance of our mate (cf. 1 John 4:18).

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith*, p. 322; idem, *James*, p. 297; Guy H. King, *A Belief That Behaves: An Expository Study of the Epistle of James*, p. 124; and Motyer, *The Message ...*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Fanning, p. 434.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, 6:65.

<sup>4</sup>See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>5</sup>Adamson, p. 189.

We also need to show an attitude of constant forgiveness (Eph. 4:31-32). Spouses should make a commitment to verbalize their emotions without pulling back or quitting. This involves acknowledging our emotions, explaining and describing our feelings, and sharing our feelings regardless of our mate's response.

Here are some suggestions for improving your ability to express your emotions. Practice sharing your emotions with your mate. Find a model of transparency and study him or her. Read the psalms to see how the psalmists expressed their emotions. Memorize selected proverbs that deal with specific areas in which you have difficulty. Focus on communication as a special subject of study. Share laughter together.<sup>1</sup>

"We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin's influence. Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession. It is wrong for Christians to 'hang dirty wash in public,' for such 'confessing' might do more harm than the original sin."<sup>2</sup>

"Perhaps ... the 'sins' that need to be confessed and remitted are those lapses from faithful endurance that James has written to warn about throughout the course of this hortatory tract."<sup>3</sup>

"Does all this mean that confession to a brother is a divine law? No, confession is not a law, it is an offer of divine help for the sinner. It is possible that a person may by God's grace break through to certainty, new life, the Cross, and fellowship without benefit of confession to a brother. It is possible that a person may never know what it is to doubt his own forgiveness and despair of his own confession of sin, that he may be given everything in his own private confession to God.

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<sup>1</sup> *Family Life Conference*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, p. 170. See also John R. W. Stott, *Confess your Sins*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, p. 215.



We have spoken here for those who cannot make this assertion. Luther himself was one of those for whom the Christian life was unthinkable without mutual, brotherly confession. In the *Large Catechism* he said: 'Therefore when I admonish you to confession I am admonishing you to be a Christian'. Those who, despite all their seeking and trying, cannot find the great joy of fellowship, the Cross, the new life, and certainty should be shown the blessing that God offers us in mutual confession. Confession is within the liberty of the Christian. Who can refuse, without suffering loss, a help that God has deemed it necessary to offer?"<sup>1</sup>

"The practice of auricular confession was not made generally obligatory even by the Church of Rome till the Lateran Council of 1215 under Innocent III., which ordered that every adult person should confess to the priest at least once in the year. In all other Churches it is still optional."<sup>2</sup>

A "righteous man's prayer[s]" can accomplish much, in the spiritual and physical deliverance of someone else, as Elijah's praying illustrates (vv. 17-18). In this verse, the "righteous man" is the person who has confessed his sins and has received forgiveness.

"Prayer is powerful for only one reason. It is the means whereby we avail ourselves of the power of God."<sup>3</sup>

Evidently James practiced what he preached about prayer. Eusebius, the early church historian, quoted Hegesippus, an earlier commentator, who gave, Eusebius claimed, an accurate account of James:

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Mayor, p. 176. See also Alford, 4:2:328.

<sup>3</sup>C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God's Ear*, p. 214.

"He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as [a] camel's, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God."<sup>1</sup>

"The truth of James 5:13-16 is applicable for believers today. James was not discussing sickness in general, nor necessarily severe illness that doctors cannot heal. Rather he was speaking of sickness that is the result of unrighteous behavior. James did not write to give a definitive statement on the healing of all sickness for Christians. The passage sheds light on God's dealing with those in the early church whose actions were not pleasing to him. This text speaks about individuals who sin against the Lord and, in light of the context for the book, especially those who sin with their tongues. If church members today took this passage seriously, it would bring about significant results, just as did Elijah's prayer. When Christians recognize sinful attitudes and wrongful behavior and turn to the Lord, the result is forgiveness and restoration and, in specific cases in which sickness is the result of a particular sin, there can be physical healing."<sup>2</sup>

"There is no such thing as (so to speak) 'non-spiritual' healing. When the aspirin works, it is the Lord who has made it work; when the surgeon sets the broken limb and the bone knits, it is the Lord who has made it knit. *Every* good gift is from above! ... On no occasion should a Christian approach the doctor without also approaching God ..."<sup>3</sup>

### **3. The power of prayer 5:17-18**

To illustrate the power of prayer, James referred to Elijah's experience (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41-45). In view of the remarkable answers Elijah received,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ecclesiastical ...*, p. 76. See also Baxter, 6:285.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell G. Johnston, "Does James Give Believers a Pattern for Dealing with Sickness and Healing?" in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Motyer, *The Message ...*, p. 193.

James reminded his audience that the prophet was an ordinary man ("with a nature like ours").

"Here the point is not that Elijah put up a particularly fervent prayer but that praying was precisely what he did."<sup>1</sup>

"Prayed earnestly" is literally "prayed with prayer." This verse is not a call for *fervent* prayer so much as a call for *prayer* period (cf. 4:16). Alford interpreted this phrase: "made it a special matter of prayer."<sup>2</sup> A "righteous man" who prays can accomplish much. Therefore, answers to prayer are within the reach of any believer (cf. Luke 11:9-13). However, as mentioned previously, James used "righteousness" as Jesus did, to refer to right conduct.

By means of his praying, Elijah influenced God in the outworking of His decree.<sup>3</sup> God allows us to influence Him (in how He controls events) through prayer even today, as well in certain areas of His will. One of these areas is how He deals with Christians who have departed from His will.

"... Elijah confidently made his audacious petitions to Jehovah because he was conscious that they were in harmony with the will of God. He could confidently persist in his request for rain (1 Ki 18:42-44) because he knew that God had promised to send the rain he was asking for (1 Ki 18:2 [*sic* 1]). He could persevere in prayer because he knew his petition was in harmony with the expressed will of God.

"Knowing the will of God is the sure foundation for effective prayer [1 John 5:14].

"When the Scriptural teaching that prayer is a definite means of working with God is apprehended, we feel that this is fully in keeping with His gracious character. God yearns to take His sons into His confidence and let them share with Him in the accomplishment of His purposes. He has so arranged this world that there is a definite place for answered prayer in the divine government. He deliberately so constituted things that His

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<sup>1</sup>Adamson, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 4:2:329.

<sup>3</sup>See Thomas L. Constable, "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 105-111.

believing children may have, and are invited to have, a definite share in the fulfillment of His saving purpose with mankind through intercessory prayer. The Scriptures are replete with illustrations of how the cause of the Lord was furthered as God answered the prayers of His people."<sup>1</sup>

"So the example of Elijah is used as a counterpoint to stress once again the need for a peaceful solution gained by prayer and submission to the divine will."<sup>2</sup>

In an interesting article, one writer argued that James 5:13-18 does not refer to physical healing generally, but specifically to discouragement and depression.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the Greek words for "sick" (vv. 14, 15) and "healed" (v. 16) allow this interpretation, I believe we should prefer their normal meaning here, primarily because of the context. There is nothing in the context that would limit the healing to psychological conditions. I believe that James used the case of a *sick* person to demonstrate the powerful effect that praying can have, in order to encourage his readers to pray for those who are sick *because of sin*. He also did so to encourage them to exercise patience rather than living for the present.

## VII. THE WAY BACK TO LIVING BY FAITH 5:19-20

James concluded this major section and his entire epistle, by explaining how a brother who had erred could return to fellowship with God, and could resume living by faith. These instructions apply directly to what James just explained in chapter 5. However, they also show the way back—to any who may have stumbled in the other errors James dealt with in this book.

5:19        This verse also ties in with what James had just said about the privilege and duty of prayer. "Any" believer ("among you"), not just the elders, can help a brother "back" into the right way (v. 14; cf. Ezek. 33:1-9).

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working With God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel R. Hayden, "Calling the Elders to Pray," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):258-66. See Wells, pp. 105-6, for a modified version of this view.

"It was easy then, and is now, to be led astray from Christ, who is the Truth."<sup>1</sup>

5:20 The "soul ... saved ... from death" is that of the backslider to whom also belongs the "multitude of sins." We should probably understand the "soul" to represent the whole person here, as well as elsewhere in James' epistle (cf. 1:21).<sup>2</sup> "Death" represents the temporal destruction of the person, not his or her eternal damnation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; 1 John 5:16). The repentance of the reclaimed sinning believer "covers" or results in the forgiveness (*covering*) of his or her sins. This description of forgiveness harks back to Old Testament usage, where the biblical writers described sin as covered when forgiven. Such usage was understandable for James, who was a Jewish believer writing to other Jews primarily (1:1; cf. Matt. 7:1-5; Gal. 6:1-5). His description does not contradict other New Testament revelation concerning forgiveness.

This epistle deals with five practical problems that every believer, immature or mature, encounters as he or she seeks to live by faith—and the issues underlying these problems. As a skillful physician, James not only identified the problems, but he uncovered their sources, pointed out complicating factors, and prescribed treatment to overcome them—with a view to his readers' becoming more spiritually mature. The problems themselves, as well as James' method of dealing with them, account for the popularity of this epistle throughout church history, and for its perennial value in ministry.

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, 6:67.

<sup>2</sup>See Bob Wilkin, "Soul Talk, Soul Food, and 'Soul Salvation,'" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:12 (December 1991):2; and idem, "'Soul Salvation,' Part 2; Saving the Soul of a Fellow Christian; James 5:19-20," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 7:1 (January 1992):2.

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