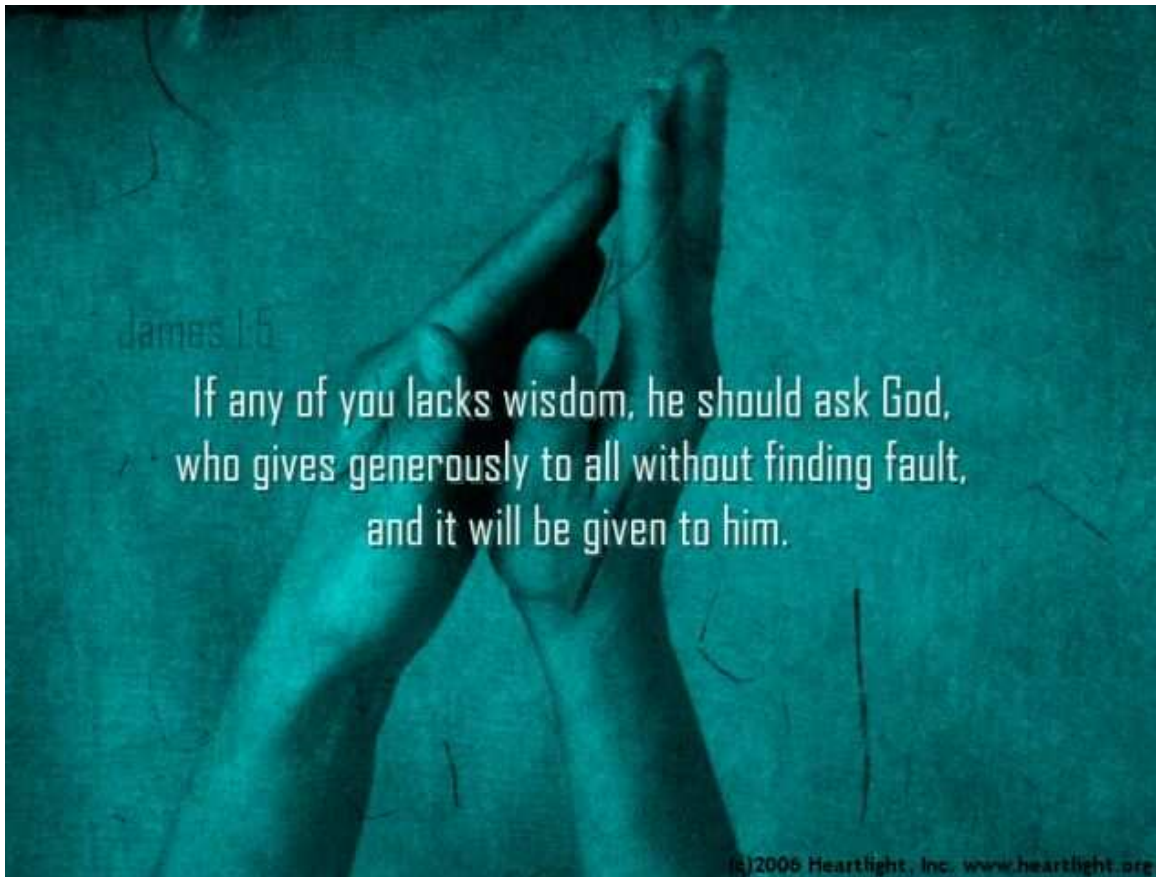




The General Epistle of James

A Practical Guide for Faithful Living

A Theological Exegesis by John W. (Jack) Carter



A publication of

***The American Journal of
Biblical Theology***



Illuminating God's Word

www.biblicaltheology.com

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ISSN 1531-7919



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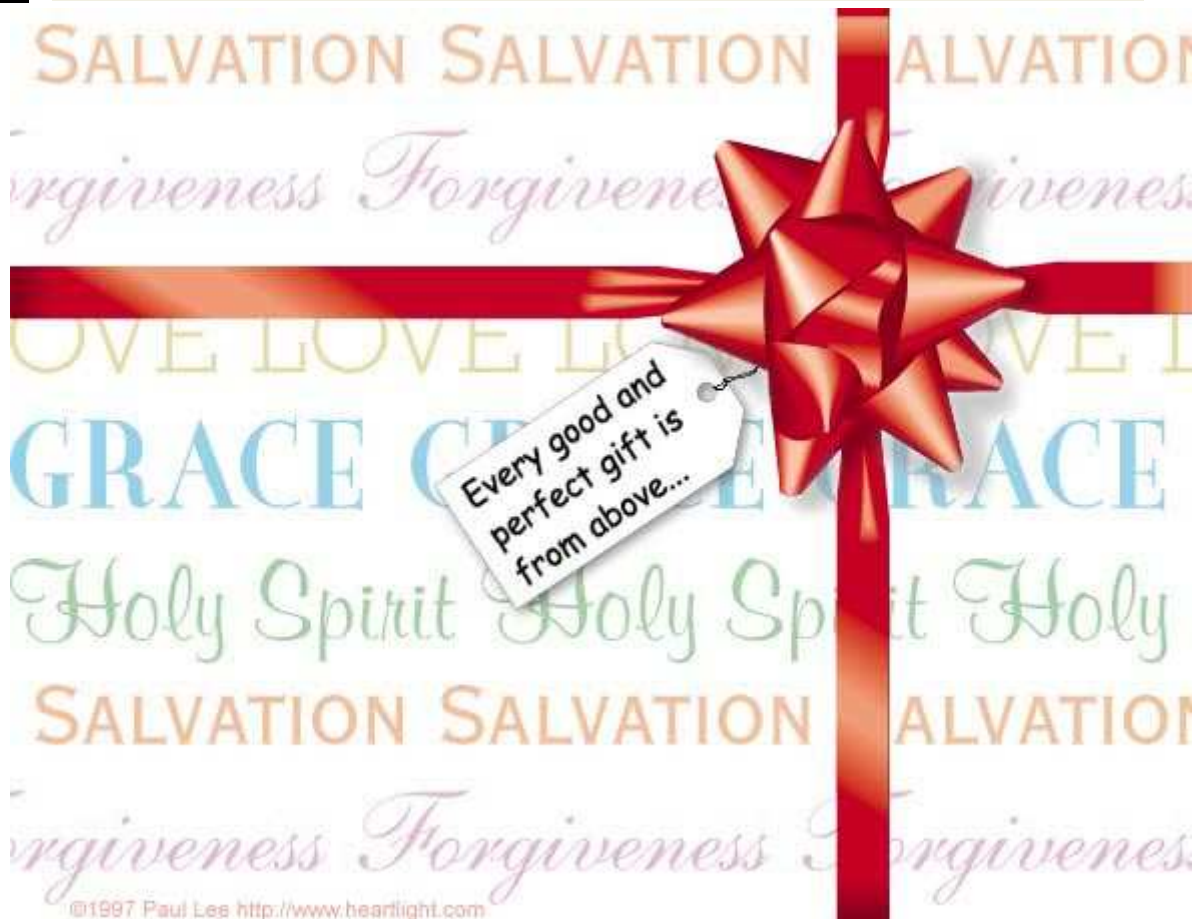
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- **Missouri.** A mile-wide tornado rips through a mid-western American town, destroying virtually every home and business. Several people are killed, and the survivors wander through the rubble trying to make sense of it all. Some are overwhelmed with grief, others are stalwart in their resolve, and all are in shock.
- **Raleigh.** A mother receives a late-night phone-call from the local police informing her that a drunk and unlicensed driver drove a borrowed SUV onto the interstate in the wrong direction, and her family has been lost in the resulting accident.
- **Massachusetts.** A wife and family suddenly learn that their indomitable father and husband has just been diagnosed with an extremely fast-growing and dangerous brain tumor that will surely bring his life to a sudden and difficult end.
- **China.** An earthquake of unprecedented violence brings down thousands of stacked block and concrete buildings and homes, crushing tens of thousands of people and leaving nearly a million homeless.
- **Washington, DC.** A brave father and mother fight back tears as the courage and bravery of their son is revealed to a nation as the President awards him a posthumous Medal of Honor.

All of these events are quite real, and all have taken place within the last few weeks. There is little doubt that life is eventful, and sometimes dramatically so. For many, life seems to be a series of one storm after another. For some, the difficult times come occasionally, but not without stress. After the devastation of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, people asked, as they often do in such disasters, "How can a loving God allow this to happen?" Romans 8:28 teaches us that God works all events for good for those who love Him, and yet it is sometimes difficult to impossible to see any good in the tumultuous events of life. The storms are going to come. God promises us an abundant life, one of peace and joy, yet our lives often seem to be frequently punctuated with everything but peace. How can we be better prepared to endure difficult times and difficult experiences? How can these experiences serve us instead of diminish us? God knows our need at such times, and when we look to Him we can find both direction and purpose, even in the most dramatic storms of life.

James writes to the Christian church after one or two generations of persecution at the hands of both the Jewish and Gentile cultures, but primarily the former. He and his church are located in Jerusalem where the persecution is the most severe. Christians are treated much like blacks were treated in the 19th century American South. They were not allowed to own land, often found employment withheld, and found it difficult to take part in the daily commerce of the community. They were considered a dangerous cult by the Jews and a threat to Caesar by the Romans. It has been two generations after the ascension of Jesus, and there are few who personally remember the events of Jesus' ministry. The early Christians were finding it harder and harder to live a life of faith when faced with such stress. Addressing this need, the New Testament writers, particularly James, John, and Peter, often provided instruction and encouragement pertaining to dealing with trials, persecutions, and loss. James' letter to the Christian church is more of a guide for Christian conduct than it is a doctrinal thesis. James sees the purpose behind the storms of life as they can serve to increase the Christian maturity and faith of the believer. Such growth is then appropriately expressed in the fruit of good works that bring Glory to God and serve to provide ministry one to another in difficult times. Stress comes into the life of a Christian from a variety of sources. All are subject to the ravages of natural disaster and disease. One who lives his/her faith openly is in conflict with this wicked world. Reviled and misrepresented by the biased news media, ridiculed and debased by the entertainment industry, Christians are described as intolerant and inept. All people suffer the consequences of sin as we see life devalued, and people living self-centered lives. Christians are not insulated from the consequences of sin in their own lives and in the lives of those who impact them. Divorce and suicide rates among Christians are comparable with the rest of the culture. James' book of encouragement and instruction is every bit as significant for us today as it was for those early Christians as it deals with these very important issues.

James 1:1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*

Who is James? It is rather obvious that if the writer is referring to his own name in this salutation, the author is named, "James." This would lead us to search the New Testament for individuals with this name. We find four: (1) James the Apostle, son of Zebedee, (2) James "the Just," half-brother of Christ (Gal. 1:19), (3) James the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:13) and (4) James the "Lesser," son of Mary and brother of Jesus (Matt 27:56). The son of Zebedee was martyred early in church history (44 A.D.) and does not figure greatly in the New Testament.¹ The latter two individuals did not have the background for the language used in the letter. Since the third century, the traditional author of this epistle has been James, the half-brother of Jesus, pastor of the church in Jerusalem.² However, there has been significant resistance to this conclusion by the Catholic church, driven by their preference to maintain Mary's virginity throughout her lifetime.³

The time of writing is not well proven. The use of "synagogue" points to early writing while references to persecution point to latter. Also, knowledge of 1 Peter and the sermon on the mount point to the latter dating. Furthermore, the initial description of his audience as being scattered implies that the writing took place after the most intense periods of persecution. It is the opinion of this author that the letter was written in the latter period, after 70 A.D.

James describes himself as a servant, *doulos*, or a bond-slave. This is the word for a slave who serves by choice with the purpose of paying off a debt, or a bond. This word speaks volumes about how James perceives the ordination and structure of church leadership. Like Paul, James sees himself as a minister, a servant of low esteem. James and Paul both teach that those in "high office" in the early church are not masters, but servants. This is quite contrary to the structure of worldly organizations. Often the organizations of the world permeates the church, and leaders take upon themselves the authority of a master, demanding to make the decisions, and to control the body. They see themselves at the top of the executive ladder. This model contradicts the teaching of the apostles. First-century church leaders are to act as willing volunteer servants, submissive to the will of God as revealed in His Word, through prayer, and through the testimony of other Christians who serve the same God.

To whom is James writing? James, like Paul, teaches that the Christian church is the new Israel, recipients of the promise of Abraham through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the "twelve tribes" is an idiomatic reference to all Christians, as in its literal sense it would have referred to all Jews. Furthermore, the Diaspora, the scattering of the faithful in Jerusalem to which James apparently refers was experienced first by the Christians, and later by the Jews. Also, the twelve tribes of Israel literally no longer exist. Most of the tribes were long ago assimilated through cultural immersion and

¹ Richardson, 39

² Burdick, 161

³ Ropes, 54-62.

through the various captivities. James is simply testifying to the sufferings and persecutions of the Church, and writes this letter to help to encourage its members and strengthen their faith. Unlike Paul's letters that were written to specific individuals, specific churches, or specific groups of churches, James writes to the entire church. Hence, this book is referred to as a "general" or "Catholic" epistle. The other Catholic epistles include Hebrews, 1-2 Peter, 1-2-3 John, Jude, and the Revelation of John.

James refers to God and the Lord separately, adding his testimony to the other gospel and epistle writers who understand the concept of the Holy Trinity. We do not honor one person of God without honoring the other. They are one and inseparable.

1. ENDURE WITH JOY.

James 1:2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

Certainly, the set of trials and tribulations experienced by people is diverse. Our natural response to difficulties in our lives is generally negative. So, when we read James' statement, we may find it difficult to understand. How can one experience joy amidst turmoil? James does not tell us to "be happy," he reminds us have joy. Though tribulation may diminish our happiness, James reminds us that it need not rob us of our joy. There is a difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is a transitory emotion. It is an experience that passes when the stimulus for happiness subsides. Joy, on the other hand, is an understanding and appreciation of God's love that engenders a deep and abiding peace that transcends any circumstance. Joy in the Lord is not predicated by events, but in contrast, can carry one through them. The true joy that comes from the LORD gives one a great strength.⁴

Philosophy teaches us to be calm, Christ teaches us to have a deep and abiding joy in Him. How and why should our response be one of joy rather than despair? Again, God has a purpose in all of the events that transpire in the life of a Christian, inclusive of those that do not bring immediate happiness. God also has a purpose for all those experiences that bring suffering and pain. James goes on to describe some of that purpose.

2. ENDURE WITH PATIENCE.

James 1:3. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

Trials exercise faith. Often we see strong faith in those who endure great hardship while others of weaker faith crumble under its load. Faith can be strengthened in the same way that one strengthens one's muscles. Muscles are strengthened under the continual application of a physical load. Likewise, faith can be strengthened under the

⁴ Nehemiah 8:10.

application of a spiritual or emotional load. What is the result of the 'trying' of your faith? Just as physical exercise strengthens the muscles, making it easier to carry heavy loads, James states that the exercising of faith produces patience or endurance. Paul is in complete agreement with James on this point:

Romans 5:1-5. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ²By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; ⁴And patience, experience; and experience, hope: ⁵And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

The exercise of one spiritual fruit produces others. Exercising patience produces a tremendous increase in the power of one's spiritual gifts.

James 1:4. *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

Often when we are enduring a conflict, our prayer is for God to remove the stressor from our lives. We would prefer to live a life that is free of conflict and pain, and our first desire is to simply have it removed calling upon God as if He serves us as our great spiritual surgeon who will excise pain at our pleasure. However, that is not God's purpose in tribulation. For God to work in our lives, the process can not be short-circuited. We are called upon to lean upon God and endure the suffering for its appropriate duration. Again, a physical workout metaphor is instructive. One is not going to strengthen muscles by avoiding exercise. I cannot go to the gym, pick up a 200-pound weight one time, set it down, and return home having accomplished anything except short-term pain and a waste of good time and resources. Likewise, by exercising patience instead of passion we can let the trials work their complete purpose, bearing all that God appoints for us. When we do this we will find our faith strengthened, and events that once hit us like a fiery dart⁵ lose their sting.

Heb. 10:35-36. *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*

3. ENDURE WITH WISDOM.

James 1:5. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

⁵ Ephesians 6:16.

When we find ourselves under the stresses of affliction we should pray. What should we pray for? Usually our natural response will be to focus on the stressor and make it the center of our interest and petitions. However, look at the difference in our response to the setting if we earnestly are seeking God's plan and purpose instead of our own. God promises to grant wisdom to those who earnestly ask, and His wisdom can carry us through the tough times and at the same time restore that joy that is lost when we focus on our circumstances instead of on Him.

Rather than praying for the removal of the affliction, Christians can pray for the wisdom to understand God's purpose and seek our appropriate response to it. Wisdom will guide us in our judgment of the circumstances we are immersed in. Wisdom will govern our temper, and help us in the management of the details surrounding the stressful events. The ability to exercise godly wisdom in trying times is a gift from God, a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual. Seek God for wisdom. God has promised that when asking for wisdom we receive it. The act of sincere petition opens up our heart to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is when we are so opened that God can speak, and we can learn. The very humility of a true, faithful prayer in a time of stress is in itself an indicator of God's wisdom at work in you.

4. ENDURE WITH FAITH AND HUMILITY.

James 1:6. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

How important is it that one's faith be strong? After all, faith as small as a "mustard seed" has the power to save. However, weak faith is nothing to be proud of. Weak faith does not serve well to protect one from the pains and stressors of life. A Christian who has a weak faith, made so by an insufficient investment in and submission to the Word and will of God, finds him/herself challenged, or even knocked down by every small storm that passes. Life is a sequence of one crisis after another for such an individual. It is not God's desire that we be so weak in spirit, but rather that as we experience our sequence of days, we mature and be continually strengthened in our faith. A stronger faith can weather the storms, and by doing so, become even more strengthened against future events. A mature faith can be used of God to then minister to others who are also enduring similar storms of life.

When Jesus performed miracles of healing he often demanded unwavering faith on the part of those receiving the benefits of the event. This does not mean unwavering faith always results in healing? Your affliction may be in God's plan to teach you (or someone else) God's sovereignty, our frailty, etc.

James 1:7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

"Think" here could be translated "presume." God will reward an unwavering faith. Such a faith recognizes God's sovereignty and rejects our own authority over Him in deciding what is ultimately best for us. Many charlatans may preach or sell an easy fix to our problems, guaranteeing results, or blaming our failure to be delivered from our stress on our own weak faith. However, we are never in a position to presume that God will respond our way to our personal request as though He is simply a credit card that we can take from our wallet and redeem at our pleasure. God's purposes are far above our own desires and experience, and when we presume the nature of His response to our prayers, we reduce him to our own level or below. Consequently, wisdom exercised in faith will look to God's purpose, not to the emancipation from our predicament. We may wait with joyful expectation to see how the LORD is going to work in our lives, but it is quite inappropriate to place demands upon God concerning how He does that work. We also set ourselves up for disappointment if we place such demands upon God when His response does not match those demands. God's Word is consistent, and included in that Word is God's command that we not put Him to the test. Demanding God to act according to our will is placing God to such a test, particularly when we respond to Him with disappointment and criticism when our way is not God's way.

James 1:8. *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

Wavering, or vacillating, produces double-mindedness, a duality of purpose that is often characterized by one foot in the world and one foot in heaven; a Christian schizophrenic. A person who is spiritual in one circumstance and worldly in another is of no reasonable value in either realm. Such immaturity is characterized by a faith that rises and falls based upon the severity of life's issues and the circumstances of their surroundings. God does not vacillate, nor does His Spirit.

James 1:9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:*

Poverty or riches do not encumber our value to God. Abraham, Solomon and David were very rich, yet the poorest Christian is equal in God's eyes. We should not allow economics to define our values. Certainly, poverty is one of the great stressors of our world. The early church, because of the persecution that they endured, was often forced into poverty. Our social culture would stratify those in poverty into a lower state, and impress that status upon them. The result of such social persecution is a chronic lack of self-esteem or self-worth. One who is so persecuted will easily state that they are less intelligent, less attractive, and certainly of less value than their richer counterparts. Nothing could be further from the truth. God loves all people without regard to their possessions or social status. In fact, those who are rich face additional challenges...

5. ENDURE WITHOUT SUFFERING.

James 1:10-11. *But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. ¹¹For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*

He who places his value in his riches is made low by them. His riches cannot save him, and he will ultimately lose them either in this world or in passing to the next. Having been married for over 30 years, my wife would be the first to state, "my husband does not buy me flowers." I do purchase perennial flowering plants. Now, our lack of a green thumb, notwithstanding, may challenge this thesis, but we have usually been able to get plants to live longer than cut flowers. Cut flowers may be beautiful for a season, but they quickly fade, wither, and die. The life of a rich man is like those flowers. Life is but a moment in eternity, and the rich man who rejects God lives his life to the full, but only for a moment, for when his life is over, the riches remain behind, and an eternity separated from God is ... hell. In this, he will be made low. However, the Christian who he persecutes can look at him and recognize the lack of wisdom in his approach to life, and death. The Christian is encouraged to know that the contrast he is experiencing in life will be reversed at death, where an eternity with God is ... heaven.

The rich man of the world finds joy in his power and possessions of this world. Where does the man of faith find joy? The Christian can find joy in knowing the love of God and through experiencing it in this life, and in the knowledge that that God's love and blessings for them will never end. When fully expressed, this joy empowers the lowly in this earth to live a life of peace and joy while the rich man who appears happy is suffering from a myriad of maladies without a prospect of relief. When one closely observes the lifestyles of the rich and famous it is rare to find happiness that is longer than momentary. Most suffer from the stresses engendered by the actions needed to maintain their lifestyle.

Yet, even those who are not rich can experience suffering when they experience loss. Loss of personal property from natural events like hurricanes and tornados is experienced across economic social levels. Why is it that some people suffer so when they lose their home and its contents, yet others who lose the same stand with a firm resolve, thankful for their safety, and can even approach the situation with humor? Much of our suffering comes from our placing an inappropriate priority on the things that we accumulate around ourselves. In doing so we give them a form of authority that can become idolatrous. All of this "stuff" that we gather may contribute to our physical comfort and amusement, but contributes little to what is really important in our lives: our relationship with God and with each other. In fact, if we give authority to those possessions they can come between us and the appropriate expression of our faith. These things will all fade away. They are simply the wood, hay, and stubble of this world, a withering grass that may serve only to take from us our time and resources. If we would suffer greatly over the loss of our "stuff" it might profit us to

take a good look at under the exposing light of the Holy Spirit and determine its true value.

6. ENDURE WITHOUT TEMPTATION.

James 1:12. *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

What are some of the temptations that vex us when we fall into "diverse trials"? Certainly, one temptation is to do anything to remove the stressor. We have already seen in verse four that God calls upon us to endure, not conquer. We are blessed for the enduring, blessed with spiritual maturation that is characterized by the development of strengthened spiritual gifts, including patience and wisdom. Afflictions themselves do not make us miserable. Our response to them dictates this. A blessing is certainly missed in an inappropriate response. Why is it that two people respond so differently to the same stressor. One man who loses his legs in an accident is a fighter who rebounds from his injuries and resumes life fully. Another man who suffers an identical event withdraws, becomes depressed, and never walks again. It is not the injury that defeats us, it is falling into the temptations that would defeat us.

There is a reward for endurance. Part of the blessing described by James is a "Crown of Life". We bear the cross for a short while, but the crown of life is for eternity. It is a promise. When an American soldier is injured in battle he/she receives a Purple Heart award, a thirty-five cent bauble of brass and colored cloth. Like a crown, it is a badge, a symbol, and intrinsically it may have little or no value. However, the crown of life is salvation, the reward for placing one's faith and trust in God. This blessing is not given by God from any form of debt. God does not owe us, but rather gives to us out of his love and grace. The trials of this world serve to strengthen, purify, and bless our walk with the Lord when we submit to His wisdom in dealing with them.

James 1:13. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

God is not the author of any man's sin, nor does he give bad gifts. He does not cast us into affliction. We must never get the opinion, "Why did God do this to me" or "allow this to happen". A good example of this is answered when we look at the circumstances surrounding the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11/01. God did not bring down the Trade Towers. They were brought down by the deliberate and sinful actions of a handful of wicked men. Where was God? No person died who was below the point of impact of the towers. Less than 3,000 were killed in a community that usually housed over 50,000. The plane that hit the Pentagon struck at a point that was temporarily evacuated of its normal 5,000 employees. The planes that were destroyed, normally filled to capacity, were for some inexplicable reason populated to

only 25% capacity. Then, God was with every friend and family member who mourned this despicable act.

Sin is a choice that man makes. It is a self-centered, godless, response to personal desire. James describes the progression of impact that sin has on our lives in the next few verses.

James 1:14. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

From what source do afflictions arise? Does God make us sin? Does the devil make us sin? Satan is powerless when confronted by the power of the Holy Spirit, so by virtue of his own impotence he cannot make a Christian sin against their own will. However, it is the personal will that plays such an important part in sin and its impact on our lives. Circumstances and events transpire regularly in the lives of every person that give opportunity for sin. How we respond to that opportunity exposes our true nature, whether it is one of the will of the world, or one that seeks God's will. When one has his/her focus off of God and on one's self, it is easy to be drawn by such temptations into sinful actions. This is where the cycle of sin's destruction starts. And, with sinful destruction comes no shortage of trials and tribulations experienced by the sinner and all of those whom he/she impacts.

James 1:15. *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

Note the progression of degradation that transpires in the practice of sin experienced by the lost to its inevitable and final end. A temptation that is presented is embraced rather than rejected. Then, once embraced, the temptation is exercised in sin, a sin that separates one from God. Though Christians are protected from the eternal condemnation at life's end, they are not free of the affliction of its worldly consequences,⁶ nor will they receive the blessings, temporal or eternal, that would have been attained in obedience.

This chain of progression is broken when God's wisdom is used to reveal that our own action (sin) is the cause of the affliction. "Why did God do this to me?" "Why did God allow this to happen?" The truth is, I did it to myself. To blame God for our sin is unreasonable.

Several years back, while engaged in door-to-door visitation, I encountered a desperate and grieving woman who had just lost her child to the irresponsible actions of a drunk driver. Her toddler had wandered into the roadway to be immediately struck down and killed. She was angry with God, and angry with me for representing Him at this time. She attacked me with the question, "Why would your God do this to my

⁶ Aids, ravages of alcohol and drug abuse, victimization from crimes, etc.

baby." After a fervent and millisecond prayer, the answer was revealed. "Ma'am, God did not kill your baby. A drunk driver killed your baby." I purposely failed to ask why she was not supervising her child. My own toddler son once figured out how to pick the lock on the front door and wandered out into the street on a "Big Wheel" tricycle only to be saved by an observant driver. Sin is a choice to follow a lust to the point of conception, a conception that brings with it the consequences of the act.

7. ENDURE WITHOUT SIN.

James 1:16. *Do not err, my beloved brethren.*

Sin is often referred to as "missing the mark," making an error. When I throw a dart at the center of a regulation dartboard, it is generally predictable that the dart will land somewhere about six inches away from its intended point of impact. Why does the dart miss the bull's eye? There are many distractions that prevent precision, from physical limitations, to lack of skill, to lapses in concentration and poor decision making. Just as the bull's-eye is surrounded by territory where the dart does not belong, the center of the mark that God prescribes for us is so surrounded. His Word reveals the truth, and Christians are responsible for knowing and following it. Do not wander from the truth that you know. In temptation we are drawn to embrace sin as we willfully reject the prompting of the Holy Spirit to abstain from such behavior. When immersed in stress and affliction we are often tempted to follow a quick fix, one that is outside the spirit and timing of God, wide of the mark of obedience. The council of false teachers we have around us is particularly dangerous. Also, we may be our own worst counselor. Falling into error can and should be avoided, and can be mostly avoided through consistent prayer, Bible study, and Christian fellowship. However, when Christians do err, they have the opportunity to confess that sin before God, repent of it, and receive immediate and complete forgiveness.

8. ENDURANCE BRINGS REWARD.

James 1:17. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

God never changes. Though we may vacillate from day to day or from age to age, the timelessness of God dictates that he can never change. God is the One who illuminates every facet of our lives. God has created all that there is, and likewise everything good comes from Him. Those lusts prepared by the unholy one may look good, but beneath the gilded surface lie dead men's bones. That which comes from God is completely reliable and pure, always has been, and always will be. He is reliable. As the Father of Light, God chases away the darkness of wickedness and evil. The Holy Spirit, in His convicting and illuminating power reveals sin in our lives and gives us the opportunity and power to reject it.

James 1:18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

A true Christian is a new creature. He is as different as if he were formed again and born afresh. The Christian, though subjected to the consequences of the sins of this world, has been born of God with a power to be godly, a power to experience the joy of the Lord even through tough times, and by so doing is a testimony to the very nature, plan, and purpose of Jesus Christ. First fruits are those that were totally dedicated to God, often to the point of complete sacrifice. Likewise, a Christian is to be totally dedicated to God, abiding in Him, seeking His will. When a Christian lives such a life, God can use those storms that assail as lessons that teach the mind and mature the spirit. Then, as the Christian matures in wisdom, the impact of the storms lessens and the power of God in the life of the Christian increases. This is the pattern that James sees in the life of a Christian, and one of which all Christians can be acutely aware. By following this pattern, Christians can, indeed, count it joy when the storms assail.



James 1:19-2:21. Living the Word



The epistle of James is very practical, in that the writer is concerned, not so much with basic Christian doctrine, as he is with the application of that doctrine in the Christian life. His basic argument is that a life of one who is truly a child of God will show evidence of that relationship with God through a consistent and godly lifestyle, a life in which all trivial self-centered desires are overcome by a love of God and His Word. When a person moves to this level of spiritual understanding and maturity, true freedom from the law is fully experienced. In the passage of this study, James comments on some very specific areas of behavior that can be brought under control by the Holy Spirit in a necessary endeavor to achieve such freedom and the peace that it engenders.

This passage may appear detached from the previous verses, but close inspection reveals that it is fully contextual. In the first chapter, the writer clarifies the necessity of regeneration through the Word. This passage then continues this thought by describing the result of that regeneration, a life that is centered on that Word and obedient to it. The writer asserts that a life that shows no evidence of living in the Word is, indeed unregenerate. By describing specific ungodly behavioral patterns, James provides an opportunity for introspection, an opportunity to look into our own lives and observe what areas need 'cleaning up'. In these verses, James specifically

takes on those sins that seem to have the greatest impact on the body of Christ: self-will and prejudice towards others. These are normal and common characteristics of the world that have no place in the heart of one who loves the Lord.

James 1:19. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:*

The word, "wherefore" in the KJV, is more accurately translated in today's English as, "take note of this." James brings particular attention to the following point. A godly response to circumstances is one that is informed as it demonstrates God's agape love. To do this, the passions of impatience and self-will must be consciously restrained. So, James advises us to listen with the intent of fully understanding before speaking, and to do whatever it takes to avoid anger. One who lashes out with an angry voice is not characteristic of living a life that is immersed in the Word, but one who is more concerned with personal desires, passion, and influence.

Recall that James is writing to people who are enduring persecution and suffering. No doubt there is a lot of anger and frustration experienced by his readers. Instead of blaming God in our trials we should listen to what it is that God is telling us.

James 1:20. *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

James describes a very clear reason for suppressing and controlling anger. God's cause is better served by meekness and mildness than by wrath and fury. Furthermore, such fury simply does not demonstrate the righteousness of God, but rather the weakness of the individual who is not looking to God. Such loss of self-control is described by the writer of Ecclesiastes as 'foolishness,' the opposite of godly wisdom.

Ecc. 9:17. *The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools*

When studying for an academic career I was once told, "If you are not sure, just shout a little louder!" The idea was by shouting you can intimidate your students into believing what you have to say is true. There may be a grain of truth in the concept: if one is known to lack wisdom, they may have to raise their voice to be heard. However, when one is known to be wise, a quiet voice will quiet the crowd as they hope to hear.

One is not likely to hear God's voice while lashing out in anger, and one is certainly not demonstrating a Godly and loving testimony when doing so. Paul reminds us never to lash out at people, for the Christian battle is not against flesh and blood but against the

powers and principalities of the evil one.⁷ We may forget this truth and approach one another in anger while satan sits on the sidelines and laughs at us.

One who is quick to speak is also one who will tend to be quick to hurt others with thoughtless statements, or words that are not tempered by the spiritual fruit of self-control. All manner of error can be averted when we place more emphasis on listening and applying godly wisdom and unconditional love before speaking.

James 1:21. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

The word translated "lay apart" *apothemenoi*, refers to the removal of an encumbrance such as excess and unnecessary weight as one runs a race. One example of unnecessary weight to be shed is a "superfluity of naughtiness," a nice old-English idiom for "moral filth." In this phrase alone, James refers to a wide array of morally corrupt behaviors and desires. Such behaviors are sinful acts that would turn us away from the Word and ways of God, as such sin defiles the individual and grieves the Holy Spirit. Willful acts of sin may be seen by this world as evidence of one's individual powerful and cunning, but when illuminated by God's Word, it is simply sin.

However, living a Godly life does not mean a sacrifice of that power and cunning. James calls us to receive the Word in meekness: power under control. When all of the emotion, passion, and desires of the person are brought under the influence of the Holy Spirit, one's power is not diminished, but refocused and harmonized with the power of God, producing far more strength and character, a character that is an appropriate demonstration of the working of the Word of God in the life of a believer.

James also reminds us that it is the power of God that saves, not our own power. The things of this world have no ability to save us. Consequently, they are far less important than our willful submission to God's Word.

James 1:22. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

Is it sufficient to be only a patient listener to God's Word? Is it appropriate that the Christian listen to sermons, Bible studies, or even to the very Word of God through the scriptures and other sources, and not be changed? Should not the person's life start to respond to what is heard by a demonstration of sincere, Godly living? James fully believes that one who receives the Word, lives the Word. Like fruit that is produced by a vine, good works are produced in the lives of the faithful. Consequently, he defines a relationship between "doing" and "hearing". Hearing without action is powerless, having no more impact than noise on deaf ears. If one thinks that hearing alone is

⁷ Ephesians 6:12 ff.

sufficient, then they are deceived. The word "deceive" here is *para logi zomanoi*, one who argues sophistically to themselves to the point of self-deception: the blind leading the blind. What are we to do after hearing God's word? We are to act upon it. God's Word provides some very specific purposes in our lives:

2 Timothy 3:16-17. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

When hearing the Word, one can learn doctrine. However, our hearing is not for the learning of doctrine alone, but also for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. When we hear from the Lord through His Word (that includes impressions from prayer, scripture, sermons, Bible studies, advice from other Christians, etc.), we know when a response is appropriate, and to rationalize away that response is only an act of self-deception. Did the pastor "step on your toes" in his sermon last Sunday? If it was the Holy Spirit who is convicting you of your unrighteousness, then the appropriate response is to repent from the sin and experience more of the freedom from sin's burden that righteousness gives.

James 1:23-24. *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*

The word translated, "beholding", *katanoeo*, refers to a long and careful observation, rather than simply a quick glance. Spending such an effort in front of a mirror serves to reveal every blemish. In today's culture it is not unusual for women (and some men?) to spend an hour in front of a mirror while engaged in the primping that comes with putting on makeup, combing each hair, etc, in order to change one's natural appearance.

Just as a mirror shows our spots and defilement, so God's Word exposes our sin. A mirror does not flatter, but rather reveals the crystal clear truth, and when one hears God's Word the truth is revealed. Once the truth is revealed, what is our appropriate response. Here, James describes an inappropriate response, one that gives no heed to what has been heard.

After delivering a sermon, it is not unusual for members of the congregation, in making pleasant conversation, to compliment the sermon. My response is always a short, quiet, thanks. What I want to do is ask in return, "what change are you going to make in your life as a result of hearing the Word?" In many years of watching the exiting congregation, I have often wondered if anyone will remember anything. How many people fall under the hearing of the gospel, hear their need for God and the necessity for change in their lives and then forget it an hour after hearing it? These are "one-

hour Christians" whose single hour of reflection takes place on an occasional, forgotten, Sunday morning.

What kind of blessing comes from this manner of reflection? For many, it might be a heart warmed by the hearing, but the blessing quickly fades like a vapor when the hearer refuses to respond in a life change. James goes on to reveal the real blessing of an appropriate response.

James 1:25. *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

The word for "looketh" used here is different from that used in the mirror metaphor. *Parakrypto* refers to an observation with an intent to understand. It is this word that was used to describe John's observation of the empty tomb.⁸ Rather than listening to the word to receive a warm and fuzzy feeling, one who looks to the Word sincerely wishes to learn and understand what message God has for them.

When James refers to the "perfect law of liberty," he is using the word for law in a different context than his Jewish contemporaries might understand. The Law to the Jew refers only to the Old Testament writings and the Jewish traditional writings that surround them. This is a set of documents that define thousands upon thousands of laws that the righteous Jew is to follow. However, James sees the Law as fulfilled in the Messiah, the coming, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. James' Law then takes on a broader meaning. He sees a complete law that includes the sum total of God's truth. And unlike the Old Testament law that enslaves all of those who regard it, the fulfilled law sets one free of the condemnation that the Old Testament law engenders. The Law of liberty resides, not in the words of Scripture alone, but in the heart of the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort, convict, and to guide.

Jer. 31:33. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

James also describes this observation of the law with an intent to understand as an on-going lifestyle, not a momentary and forgotten effort. One who seeks the Word of God in sincerity, seeks it continually, day and night.⁹ Such an individual will be listening to what God has to reveal in every opportunity. Then, God's will can be found in scripture, in prayers, in the testimony and counsel of other Christians, and in any other form that God chooses. Furthermore, the sincere listener is not forgetful. This

⁸ John 20:5.

⁹ Psalm 1.

implies that the hearer makes a concerted and deliberate effort to remember what has been heard so that real learning takes place. What was the message that you learned from last Sunday's sermon? If you cannot remember, it is simply because of a lack of deliberate hearing as described in this verse. Some find it helpful to take notes while listening to a sermon, or while reading scripture. Such deliberate effort is an indication of a true desire to learn.

When listening results in learning, there is a life change that takes place. If the Spirit convicts one of a need for change, and one responds to that conviction, then change takes place. This is what James describes as a "doer" of the Word. If this person battles a foul tongue, people will see his/her language cleansed. If the person is battling addiction, people will see the individual seeking help. A doer is one who, when hearing the word, appropriates it into his/her life, and upon doing so experiences the blessing that comes from shedding the sin and guilt, and from seeing any manner of other results of obedience.

James 1:26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

What is "Vain religion"? In vain religion there is much show and an appearance of piety. Vain religion has all of the appearance of faith, but none of its power. Without power, there is no love, and the vain believer is exposed by their self-centeredness. In such an individual we will, in addition to their loud and confident prayers much self-aggrandizing, censoring, condemning, gossip, and distracting of others. This individual will want their own way to be followed in the congregation. Note how all of these offenses are committed using an unbridled tongue. This word, unbridled, is in many ways the opposite of the meekness that comes from true humility. The tongue of the humble is meek or bridled, as a horse is bridled, enabling its strength to be focused for a purpose. An unbridled tongue is like a wild horse loose in the congregation.

Such a person is deceived in their own heart. They may be truly sincere in their efforts to impress their own opinions and desires on the congregation, but they are still sincerely wrong. Theirs is a vain, or powerless, or love-less religion. Theirs is not a faith based upon God's love.

James 1:27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Rather than setting forth another law of works (as some have argued), James describes some of the characteristics of a person who has appropriated pure and undefiled faith. The acts done by a pure faith are done out of love, not out of obligation. The practitioner of a pure faith will be seen visiting the sick, the orphan, and the widow because he loves them and seeks to minister to them. Widows and

orphans are pointed out by James because, in their culture, these were the lowest people in their caste system. Seen by the Jews as lower than 'dogs', they were dependent upon the alms and good deeds of the people. In our culture, this refers to any person in desperate need. A 'doer of the Word" will be compassionate of those in need and will be driven by their love to do something.

James sees "true religion" as a sincere faith that is evident by the love in the heart of those who have appropriated it. We will simply see these people ministering to others in their times of need. We will see these people sacrifice their time and their resources for the benefit of God's kingdom, not out of obligation, but out of an uncontrollable love. This is what happens when the Holy Spirit is empowered in the life of a believer and not suppressed by selfish desires.

Finally, an individual who has a sincere faith will be learning of their sins and repenting as they mature in their faith. As this transformation takes place in life, they will be seen to have a righteous lifestyle, not one of following a legalist rule of law to maintain righteousness, but rather one who simply chooses to do the godly thing in response to the stimuli of the world. Such an individual will become "unspotted" from the world. That is, the selfish characteristics of this world culture that engenders no limit of sinful acts, will not be replicated in the one of true faith. Such a lifestyle of godliness is deliberate, as James states, "to keep himself." One must be diligent and vigilant to observe the insidious ways in which our lives can be infiltrated by the filth of this world, whether through the media, TV, Internet, or any other form. What the world defines as good and appropriate behavior is not necessarily, or probably never, godly. One must listen only to the Perfect Law of Liberty to ascertain righteousness.

James 2:1. *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.*

James is again writing of a practical application of God's Word in the lives of the faithful. It is a natural and selfish characteristic of the world to devalue the lives of others. Your life has no value to Satan, and no value in the world over which he exercises his rebellion. Satan does not experience agape love, and likewise, neither does the world. Consequently, we should not be surprised when we see the atrocious acts of godless men upon one another.

One very specific sin that creeps into the lives of Christians is that which James refers to as a lack of respect for other persons. One only need observe the characteristics of most individual congregations to find a very narrow social strata represented by its members. Prejudice and its inherent devaluing of others is a characteristic of this wicked world, and is prevalent within the body of Christ.

How did Jesus relate to the different social classes? We see in His life that there were no social classes to Christ. He saw all people as prized treasures of God's creation (Matt. 5), lost people in need of salvation. The Holy Spirit is not the author of

prejudice and ignorance. Consequently, such characteristics have no place in the life of a faithful believer.

James states that a true love and respect for all persons has a component of faith involved. We love because God loves, not because of the worthiness of the individual to be loved. This may be one of the most difficult battles for the Christian to deal with, as we regularly ignore the homeless, thinking only of our own wants and desires. We avoid contact with those who are not like ourselves, or in our own ignorance, think that any culture that is not found in our own back yards is somehow of lesser value.

James 2:2-4. *For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; ³And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: ⁴Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

One example of the expression of such prejudice takes place within the church assembly. This world, and each of its cultures, is made up of all sorts of people. Communities are becoming multi-cultural, multilingual, as they are already multi-ethnic, embracing the lives of a wide variety of people from the rich to the poor.

Under Jewish law, those who would enter the assembly would stand alike. This was not difficult for the Jew since those who were not like them were not allowed in the assembly. Much of this prejudice is replicated today in mono-ethnic congregations. Members will argue, "they will not be happy here ... let them worship with others like them." The key here is this "we - them" mentality. This is an indication of the sin of disrespect that so diminishes the practice of love. Christians who demonstrate such prejudice are revealed to be just as ungodly as those who James described in previous verses who are defiled by sin. Prejudice is a defiling sin, one which must be repented of by any true believer.

We separate ourselves from one another by setting up our own set of standards. God has no standards that separate people from Himself except the Standard of the Cross. God sees the potential of all people to have faith in Him, and does not base their value on their worldly state as contrasted with others.

It might be interesting to note the relativity of this argument. James is writing to believers who are persecuted by their culture. Among their assembly are the poorest of the land. Still, they have their definition of "goodly apparel" as a gold ring, and recognize the "vile raiment" of the poor. They feel victimized by the prejudice and unfair treatment of the rich and famous, but still exercise that same victimization of the strata in their own body. Prejudice knows no boundaries. Such prejudice has no

place in the heart of a faithful believer. This respect of persons is caused by the basic nature of man - to seek outward show rather than inward grace.¹⁰

James 2:5-7. *Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? ⁶But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? ⁷Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?*

James points out the paradox that is demonstrated by the venerating of the rich against the plight of the poor. In reality, those who are venerated deserve no such attention, as these are the ones who despise and oppress the poor. It is these people who use their power to drag the poor into the courts, taking their land and possessions. They blaspheme God by using His name but have not appropriated for themselves any of His power. Their lives are not characterized by agape love, and therefore, should be afforded no special place in the assembly. Where the natural bent is to respect the "rich and famous," those worthy and in need of our respect are the poor.

James 2:8-9. *If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: ⁹But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

Who is my neighbor? It is easy to love my neighbor when he looks, walks, talks, and smells like me. However, we pick our neighbors, befriending those of our own choosing. It is here that prejudice enters our lives. If there is any doubt as to the sinfulness of prejudice, James removes it here. If one demonstrates prejudice, or disrespect of other persons, they have committed a sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. If God put his law within us then His Spirit convinces us of our wrongdoing. We do not need a written law to tell us we have transgressed. Listening to the Word of God in our hearts far supersedes the searching of Bible text to defend or attack the righteousness of a given action.¹¹ We can look into our own hearts, as we were to gaze in a mirror, and determine whether we are in need of repentance.

James 2:10-11. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.*

With liberty comes responsibility to remain sensitive to what constitutes righteous living. Any unrighteousness is sin. Not all sins are equal, but they all carry the same contempt of the authority of the Lawgiver. Consequently, it is ridiculous to think our

¹⁰ Genesis 6:5

¹¹ Leviticus 19:15.

good deeds may outweigh our bad. It is our bad deeds which condemn us, and a single bad deed is such an offense. If we were without the forgiveness of sin that Christ affords, we would be the most miserable of creatures. But God has demonstrated that He is faithful to forgive sins when we confess them and repent (turn from those sins.) We are all guilty and in need of repentance and forgiveness. Consequently, as stated earlier in this chapter, we must listen to the Word and respond in a Godly manner.

Obedience is acceptable when the focus is on the will of God. Any disobedience is to be condemned. When we disobey we show contempt for the authority of God. If we look to the old law we stand condemned because we cannot keep it. When we look to the Perfect Law of Liberty we see an opportunity for forgiveness and restoration.

James 2:12-13. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

James concludes his discussion with an exhortation and a warning. The repetition of "so" places a very strong emphasis in the Greek form of the statement. James exhorts Christians to speak and act as those who are living by the Perfect Law of Liberty. That is, Christians are to listen to God's will in their lives and respond to Him in obedience. All Christians are subject to the sins of this world, and must be continually listening to the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to keep their lives undefiled. For most, there is much defilement in their lives already that must be cleansed in order to appropriate for themselves the full measure of blessing that God affords. James has described offenses of filthy morality, self-will, and prejudice. These and other sins vex the lives of Christians, and will continue to vex those who refuse to listen to God's Word and refuse to repent.

God has little mercy for those who show little mercy to others. This statement should be of concern to all Christians. Christians who truly love others will have a heart of compassion and mercy for all people. This compassion and mercy cannot be contained, and will be evident in their lives. This is a first step to fulfilling the Law of Liberty. Let us all be sensitive to the Holy Spirit at all times, observant of His Word, intently listening to biblical teaching, and as clay in the potters hands, teachable and flexible so that we can mature in the faith, come closer to God, and experience more of the blessings of the faith.



James 2:14-26. The True Work of Faith



As
the
body
without
the
spirit
is
dead,
so
faith
without
deeds
is
dead.

James 2:26

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By the time we arrive at this point in James' letter to the church, he has been making it very clear that there is evidence of true faith in the life of every believer. Jesus said in the "Sermon on the Mount", that "A City on a hill cannot be hidden." As the "light of the world," Christians are characterized by their love for one another and for the lost. Such love expresses itself as a natural fruit of the Spirit. When there is no such fruit in the life of one who claims to be a Christian, the integrity of that testimony comes into question. It is this same argument that James is making as he describes the relationship between faith and works.

Some theologians over the years, as great as Martin Luther, misunderstood the context of James' use of "works," arguing that James' emphasis on works is contradictory to Paul's assertion of salvation by faith alone. However, one must understand that when applied to this argument, each author is referring to a different kind of work. Paul, when he writes about works, is referring to works of the flesh ... tasks that people accomplish in their own strength and purpose in order to attain a goal. Works cannot serve to bring one salvation. James fully agrees with this. When James is referring to works, he is writing of works of the Spirit, the natural fruit of the

Spirit that are borne by a Christian without thought of self-interest, but rather inspired by a love for others. Again, when such fruit is absent, the validity of an individual's faith is called to question.

James 2:14. *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

Like a good teacher, James starts his argument with a pair of questions. The implication of his question, a point he will continue to defend, is that faith without works is not a saving faith. James is literally asking, "This type of faith cannot save, can it?, expecting a negative answer.

We will see in this argument the contrast between faith and belief. One can believe in Jesus and not have faith in Him. Many people believe that Jesus existed, and may even believe that all of the content of scripture is true, and in that belief they think themselves Christians. However, such belief does not have the power to save, as we will soon see. A testimony that is based solely on belief is not a saving testimony, and the fruit of the Spirit will not be evident in this individual's life.

Is James implying that works have the power to save? Then the last clause of this verse is taken out of context and the original language is ignored, it is possible to come to this conclusion. How do we reconcile James and Paul on this issue?¹² Paul refers to a different type of works. To Paul, a work is an action following the law of Moses, by those who valued themselves highly on this basis alone. James refers to an action which is prompted by God's love in your heart. An action which must be restrained by worldliness to be held back. They are part of the necessary effects and fruits of sound belief in and understanding of the gospel and God who gave it to us. Paul illustrates the insufficiency of the works of the law while James shows the genuine and necessary works that are the product of true Christian faith.

Furthermore, Paul and James were addressing opposite problems. Paul was addressing those who felt justified by their works under the Mosaic law and did not lean on a concept of faith in the Lord Jesus at all. James was addressing those who felt justified by an incomplete concept of faith and did not, therefore, point to works as part of it. Where the former Jews depended upon works of the law, the latter Jews depended upon belief. Both are dramatic errors that result only in permanent separation from God. When Paul addresses the faith/works function that James is considering his response is in total agreement.¹³

James 2:15. *If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,*

¹² Romans 3:28.

¹³ Gal 5:6, 1 Thes 1:3, Titus 3:8, 1 Cor 15:58, Phil 2:17, 2 Thes 1:11, Eph 4:11-13, Eph 2:8-10, Heb 6:10. Observe also John 17:18 and Matt 25:35.

Before answering his question, James gives an illustration. Presented is an example of one making contact with another individual who is in need. James uses two hyperboles "naked" and "destitute" to emphasize the dire need of the individual being referred to. This is not someone who simply needs a coat, or a meal, but someone who is in drastic need. How would you respond to meeting such an individual?

Few people have never experienced such a contact. One cannot travel in any of the world's cities without encountering the poor and homeless who are begging for gifts of food, money, or other needs. In James' example, however, he adds one other feature to the situation: the one in need is a brother or sister, one who is close in relationship and not simply a stranger on the street. How would you respond to such an individual?

Our answer to that question reveals something of our nature.

James 2:16. *And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

The phrase translated, "Depart in peace" is a common idiom, *hypagete en irene*, or "go in peace." It is a common Hebrew farewell. As a common idiom, it would be easily stated without any true thought or concern. It is much like the English idiom, "How do you do?", asked as a polite gesture with no real desire for an answer. In some areas of the US, the idiom has been reduced to a simple "Howdy" with few people even realizing what it means. James is referring to a similar, almost meaningless, phrase.

"Be ye warmed ..." places the responsibility on the restoration of the destitute individual on themselves. Modern English might be something like, "I hope that you find warmth and food." Yet, even still there is no true hope.

We have a person in close relationship and in dire need, and the response of the person who claims to have faith is simply to state a few meaningless and powerless words, with no intent of providing assistance. What has such a response proven? What we find is that the person claiming faith has no love. There is no fruit of compassion. Christians will often reject the pleas of the homeless when a street confrontation takes place because of fears of personal safety. Even when this takes place the Christian will feel some level of disappointment as the Holy Spirit convicts. If this person were someone close, as James' example implies, there would be no such fear, and a Christian would step in and help without a second thought. In this instance, the needs of the destitute individual are met, love is expressed, and a blessing is received by all involved. That is quite a contrast to the vanity of the response of James' example.

James 2:17. *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

In the previous chapter, James was referring to dead religion, and now he exposes how such a dead religion produces a dead faith. Many people profess faith. Still, if one does a survey of the United States, the majority of the people will profess faith in God. The majority of these will profess to be Christians. However, many of those who profess Christianity have never actually placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is not until such a profession of faith in Christ takes place does the Holy Spirit of God come and reside in one's heart. It is not until then that the individual's life is characterized by true agape love. Without true faith, there is no love, and there is no fruit of the Spirit. James describes such a faith as a dead faith. Death does not mean an end, but a separation. A dead faith is one that is separated from a relationship with God, and is not the type of faith that saves. One who claims to be a Christian but has not turned to Christ and appropriated His power in their lives stands separated from God, alone for eternity.

Often those Christians who have not turned to Christ as Savior and Lord are the most difficult to convince of their error. They fully believe in Jesus, so they think they are fully saved from eternal separation from God, from hell. James will shortly show the folly of this false faith.

James 2:18. *Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*

James contrasts the fruit (or lack thereof) of these two types of faith. As Jesus said, "A City on a hill cannot be hidden."¹⁴ James states this in a different and more personal way. "If I have the love of Christ in me, just look at me and watch what I do." We know true Christians by their love.¹⁵ If one claims to have faith, but does not have love, then the Spirit of Christ is not in them. When we see the Spirit of Christ in the life of a Christian, we can know that they own true faith.

The primary problem being addressed by James is the same problem keeping those who call themselves Christians from actually turning to Christ in saving faith. Our Christian churches today are filled with sincere and caring people who believe in Jesus Christ, and believe that all that they have heard of Him from scripture is true. It is that belief that they lean on when they call themselves "Christians". However, the scripture never states, "Believe in Jesus and you will be saved." Scripture always refers either to the "Name of Jesus" or the "Lord Jesus." This dramatic error is pointed out in the next verse.

James 2:19. *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

¹⁴ Matthew 5:14.

¹⁵ John 13:35.

A faith based upon belief alone is a faith of the devils. Believing there is a God, or even believing all that is in the scriptures is true does not distinguish us from the devil. Satan knows that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, that He is the Promised Messiah who was born of a virgin, was crucified, died, and rose again to sit at the "right hand" of the Father. If Satan believes all this to be true, and you believe all this to be true, what is the difference between you and Satan? The tragedy is that the demons tremble in fear of an eternity in hell, separated from the love of God, and those who exhibit a false faith do not. Thinking that their false faith will save them, such folks see no need for change, and have no fear of a hell that they think they will avoid.

Again, James is talking to those who call themselves Christians, but cannot be separated from Satan using this argument. If one bases their Christianity on belief alone, one is no closer to God than Satan himself. The difference has to do with what the individual does with that belief. Salvation is not by belief, but by faith alone.

What is faith? I can believe that a chair will hold my weight, but I have not expressed faith until I sit in it. Faith is putting belief into an action that makes us dependant upon the object of our belief. Placing faith in Jesus Christ means that, upon believing what we have seen and heard, we will trust Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Just as we trust the chair to hold us, we trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. If Jesus is your Lord, then, you will seek to be obedient to Him. Such a concept is alien to one who has not made such a profession, but is the natural and easy response to those who have.

James 2:20-21. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

The word translated "vain" is more accurately rendered "foolish" in modern English. James refers to the one of false faith as being foolish: presented with the truth and the facts but rejecting them because of pride and self-serving attitudes. How much proof does one need? Do you need another example?

Like other New Testament writers¹⁶ James turns to the life of Abraham as an example of a man with true faith. We find recorded in Genesis Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice as a response to God's simple command to do so.¹⁷ Often people misunderstand this incident and think that God truly wanted Abraham to think that he was to kill his own son. However, Abraham's faith was in God's promises. One such promise was that, through Isaac, there come a mighty nation of people. If God was true to his promise, Isaac would not be killed. God would find a way to save Isaac. Abraham fully believed this, and though he certainly have had doubts that brought him much anguish, like all Christians do when they analyze their faith, Abraham went so far as to build the altar, place Isaac on it, and raise the knife. Abraham's faith was not

¹⁶ Romans 4 and Galatians 3:6, for example.

¹⁷ Genesis 22:1-14.

so much rewarded, as it was proven when God provided an alternate sacrifice, a spotless ram caught in a nearby thicket. Abraham did not appropriate saving faith by keeping of the Mosaic law: it was written about 400 years later. Abraham simply put his full trust in God, and followed Him in obedience. This is saving faith: to put our full trust in God and follow Him in obedience. Jesus becomes our Lord. We take ourselves off of the throne of our lives and place God there.

James 2:22-23. *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? ²³And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

Why did Abraham go ahead with the sacrifice? Obedience to God was a natural and normal response for him. We can see the faith of Abraham by his love for God as demonstrated in the things he did. Just as he had instructed that people look at his own life to see true faith, he shows how we can look at others, like Abraham, to see the same contrast between false and true faith. By his actions, his faith was shown to be complete.

There were many other incidences in Abraham's life where he showed his consistent love for, and obedience to, God. The life of a true Christian will show a similar consistency of love for God as demonstrated by obedience to Him. This is what separates the belief of Satan from the faith of a true Christian.

James 2:24. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

Taken out of context, this verse might appear contradictory to Paul's insistence on salvation by faith alone. However, we are tripped up a little by the Greek grammar used in this phrase. James had indicated that works are the completion of true faith (verse 22), and are a natural fruit of it. Works are the evidence of saving faith, the evidence of justification. Paul also expressed that good works are the fruit of true faith.¹⁸ James is not saying that works justifies. However, a complete and perfect faith is made evident by good works that are based on the spontaneous expression of the agape love of God.

James 2:25. *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*

James' second example is one of self-denial. However, the individual is not respected for a life of righteousness, but rather this example is a woman, and she may be a prostitute. Together, she would be very low on the social ladder, as opposed to

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:10.

Abraham how sits at the top of the Hebrew Social Food Chain.. This shows early of evidence how faith saves those who are low in our human eyes. Note, however, we shouldn't push the harlot issue too hard since the word rendered prostitute can also be rendered "hostess". This latter translation fits the context wherein she was running a public house in the city wall. Upon hearing of Israel's God she believed in His presence and acted upon it to the risk of her own peril.

James 2:26. *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

The best of works, without faith, are dead and are profitable for nothing in regards to God's will and work, and are no indicator of an individual's eternal state. Any good work we do in faith is done with a focus on God and our true desire to do His will because His love in us prompts us to do it: Not simply because a book of law (printed or not) says so. A dead faith is one that is not based upon an acceptance of the Lordship of Christ, and is characterized by the lack of the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the "believer." Belief alone does not produce living faith, but rather an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, a decision that results in a transformation which spontaneously generates the good works that James describes.

It may be profitable at this time to examine your own state. Do you consider yourself a Christian because you believe in Jesus Christ? Remember, Satan believes and shall be separated from God from eternity. Since you believe, and Satan believes, what is the difference between you and Satan? Satan refuses to accept the Lordship of Jesus, choosing to be his own authority. Many Christians make this same mistake, refusing to turn to God through Jesus Christ. Or is your acceptance of Jesus as Lord a partial acceptance, giving authority to Jesus Christ in some areas of your life and not others. If this is the case, you have not accepted Jesus as Lord, because if He is not Lord of All, He is not Lord at all. Jesus is either your Lord, or He is not.

If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, your faith is dead. Take a moment and correct this error for eternity through a simple prayer: Acknowledge to God that you have sinned and have been rejecting His Lordship, sincerely ask for His Holy Spirit to help you to repent (turn back) from this sin, ask for His promised forgiveness, and commit your life to God through your newly found faith in Jesus Christ who is, indeed, your Savior and Lord.

If you are a Christian who seeks to live a life of obedience, are you hiding the light of God's love?¹⁹ If Jesus is Lord, than you will seek to be obedient to Him by letting your light shine. God can give you the courage to express His love in your life. Turn back to Him and watch your faith work.

¹⁹ Matthew 5:14.



James 3:1-12. Speaking with Love.

The book of James is referred to as one of the "Catholic Epistles," that is, it is written to the church community at large rather than to a specific church. Because of a misunderstanding of James' theological terms, some have considered the book as a weak member of the canon. Martin Luther referred to it as a "gospel of straw." During the time of the writing, the church was under persecution, the church in Jerusalem that he had been so integral a part of had been scattered. The people in the church were crying out against their mistreatment at the hands of those in power. James writes an encouraging letter that illustrates the good work that God is doing in this experience. He also points out that, just as they are complaining against those in power, much of their persecution is coming from within their own community. Like caged animals that fight for the amusement of their captors, the church is internally embattled while the evil world looks on. They are treating each other as badly as they are being treated by the Jewish authority. In the previous chapters James has been discussing the presence of spontaneous spiritual gifts in the life of a true believer. In this passage he focuses in on the gift of Spirit-led self-control as applied to the words we say. Just as spiritual gifts demonstrate love, the words that are said by a Christian should demonstrate that same love.

Surely, the modern church never sees any infighting or the sound of words spoken in anger, haste, or pride? Since a healthy church should be a refuge among people who love and trust each other, such behavior is dramatically more hurtful to its members when it originates from within the body. James has already laid a framework in this letter that describes true Christian faith as one that produces fruit of love. It is a faith that generates spontaneous works of agape love, characterizing its members in this manner. In verses 1:19 and 1:26, James has already mentioned that true faith is characterized by a controlled tongue. This chapter deals in far more detail with how Christians are to communicate with one another.

James 3:1. *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

The Greek word used here for masters (teachers, NIV) refers to more than just a simple teacher. It is one who uses words and actions to communicate the good news of the Kingdom of God to others. Who falls under that definition? This can include many members of the church as they teach one another and as they present the gospel to the lost world. It certainly refers to the ministers, pastors, teachers, and leaders. This letter is written to all of us, not just Sunday School teachers or preachers. Why would all Christians, who know the Truth, be judged more severely? With knowledge comes responsibility to use it wisely. James concludes this chapter by pointing this out.

Simply stated, those who have taken positions of authority in the church are subject to a higher standard of judgment, and when they abuse those positions, the consequences are significant. Pastors, deacons, and teachers should be particularly aware of this statement as they observe their own motives and actions within the church body. The word translated "condemnation" in the KJV is a harsh interpretation of the Greek *krima*, which refers to the final decision made by a judge upon hearing the complete case. Our modern English tends to imply condemnation as separation from God, an inappropriate application in this verse. A Christian will not be condemned to hell for any action, spoken or otherwise, as their salvation is secured by the Holy Spirit. However, Christians are responsible before God for their words and actions, and there is much scripture to defend the argument that God is in a position to discipline his children. Just as parents must make judgments pertaining to the actions of their young children that lead to reward or discipline, God makes those same judgments on his children. Just as an older child is held to a higher level of expectation than a baby, a teacher or preacher is held to a higher level of expectation, and should not be acting like a spiritual baby any longer. At this point James is turning the attention of the reader to the impact that their behavior is having on one another. In particular, he is referring to the ways in which our communication with one another can be destructive. What we say in our words reveals a lot of who we are. When one is living a false faith, it is evident when words do not match actions. A false faith is exposed when the words from an individual contradict God's Holy Spirit of love. A false faith as described in the previous verses may be exposed as one is conceited and judgmental (magisterial) with their words. Even those with true faith are subject to err in the same way. We are warned against a dictating, censorious, or mischievous use of the tongue.

We are not to use our tongues so as to lord it over others. Jesus is to be the Lord of the church, not us. Likewise, we must not make our own sentiments a standard by which to try all others. If the unity of the body of believers comes from Christ, then any effort to destroy that unity is evil, and church members who would disrupt that unity in order to attain their own ends are only agents of the evil one, and James would wonder about the integrity of their statement of faith.

Here we find an implication of responsibility that each Christian carries: a responsibility to demonstrate spiritual leadership rather than personal leadership, and failure to do so will bring hurt and disunity to the body, and condemnation by God. Listen to the Spirit before you utilize your authority as a pastor, teacher, or deacon, etc.

James 3:2. *For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.*

The grammar used in this sentence forms an explanation for the previous one. The primary tool of the preacher and the teacher is the voice, the tongue. It is with the tongue that most of the teaching and preaching takes place. The Greek word for

"offend" refers to a sin of stumbling, rather than an egregious act of rebellion. If anyone can manage his life such that he never commits such a sin of the tongue, that person demonstrates a level of self-control that, in turn, can bridle the entire body. This argument implies that the tongue is the most difficult part of the body to control, and few would argue with that.

Consequently, if one can control their tongue, they can also control the rest of their "body", or the rest of their life. It will be evident that James is very adamant about the power that the tongue has to destroy the work of the Spirit in the congregation of believers, and the need to bring it under control.

James 3:3. *Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence" (Psalm 39:1).*

The 'bridle' of verse 2 refers to the bridle that is placed on a horse or other beast of burden. James goes on to give some examples of what it means to subject something to a bridle. A horse is a large and powerful animal, capable of causing brutal injury if left to its own devices. Consequently, there is a need for the horse to be bridled, so that it can be guided, giving its power a useful purpose. A bridled horse is no less powerful than one that is unbridled. The difference is that the power of a bridled horse is focused as it serves its master as it serves a meaningful and positive purpose., The unfocused power of the unbridled horse is simply expended in random acts of self-will and violence. The bridled horse is following the lead of one who is guiding it with superior knowledge and wisdom.

The works of the tongue follow this metaphor closely. A tongue that is unbridled by God's wisdom as taught by His Word and the Holy Spirit's promptings is like the untamed horse, full of random acts of self-will and violence. When the tongue is brought under the Lordship of the Spirit, its power is focused by one with superior knowledge and wisdom, allowing the speaker to be a useful participant in God's kingdom.

James 3:4. *Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.*

A second example of bridling is the influence of the rudder on a boat. The rudder is a small, movable, part of the boat's tiller, a blade that cuts through the water beneath the rear of the boat. When the rudder is turned, a small amount of water is pushed to the side, turning the boat. Just as the rudder is a small part of the boat, the tongue is also a small part of the body. Governing a tiller properly provides control over the ship in the greatest of storms. How does this correlate to governing the tongue? The tiller of a boat defines its direction. The tongue defines the direction of

the person who wields it. When one listens to another person's words in a variety of situations, it does not take long to see the true direction in which that person is heading. Just as we can "see through" the hypocrisy of others by the things they say, others will see through our own hypocrisy.

Like the bridle on the horse, the rudder does not stop the progress of the ship, but simply guides it on its appropriate course. Likewise, the tongue that is brought under the control of the Holy Spirit can be guided to good purpose. There is no other source of guidance that is appropriate for the Christian.

James 3:5. *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*

We are taught to dread an unruly tongue. Compare:

Ecc. 5:6, *"Do not let your mouth lead you into sin."*

What are some examples of damage done by the unruly, self-centered tongue? People are misled and hurt. The affairs of the church are often thrown into confusion. Relationships are damaged or broken, and the testimony for Christ is lost. Entire congregations can lose their testimony to the lost world when they are characterized by vocal infighting. Such churches will gain few members and see few conversions to the faith.

Why is the tongue so dangerous and powerful a weapon? The tongue is our primary means of communication. It is a representation of who we are, the authority that we have been given, and the influence we have in the community. Words have power to change other's behaviors. If I am walking down the street and see you walking ahead of me, what will you do when I shout your name? You will turn. I just influenced your behavior. Some ancient cultures did not reveal their names to strangers because they felt to do so was to give this power away. The tongue can produce great damage. James goes on to develop the metaphor of the fire of the unwise tongue.

James 3:6. *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

What is it that starts the largest of wildfires? Usually, it is a single, small spark. That spark ignites a small amount of dry tinder that, in turn, ignites larger twigs, branches, bushes, trees, and large structures. When such a wildfire starts, the only appropriate action for man or beast is to flee. As you would dread the devastation of such fire and flames, you should dread the consequences of contentions, revilings, slanders, lies, and every thing that would kindle the fire of anger in your own spirit or in the spirit of others.

What causes the tongue to be so inflammable? For many of us, the tongue seems to be tied to our personal will and emotions, and we tend to use it without thinking of the consequences of our words. It is easily driven by our basic nature, a nature of sin, and just as the rest of our person must come under the Lordship of Christ, so should our tongue. Somehow, many Christians fail to understand this, and though they profess faith in Christ, they use their tongue to promote their own self-will, and like a raging fire, destroy the very relationships that God is desiring that they develop. Only Satan wins when our basic sin nature is empowered by our tongue.

The consequences of our words is rapid. They can elicit a prompt response before the talker considers those consequences. Words cannot be taken back. Like toothpaste from a tube, once let out, it is out. Trust can be destroyed with a single word, and once trust is lost, it can only be regained by repentance, forgiveness, and a period of integrity. Simply stated words can be devastating to another person. People's lives have been radically altered by the words of others. Words shouted in anger have broken relationships and resulted in fights and death. What would be your response if your Bible study teacher suddenly started speaking out of character with words of slander, obscenities, lies and rage? At the very least you would be witnessing a loss of control, and at worst, you may be witnessing the true nature of a hypocrite. Certainly, the integrity of the teaching from such an individual would be called into question.

James 3:7-8. *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: ⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

Imagine, like Daniel in the lion's den, you are in a closed room, surrounded by dangerous animals such as lions, tigers, and bears (oh, my!). What would be on your mind? One would probably be looking for some place to hide. These animals can all be tamed through several different means, both physiological and psychological. However, no such taming of the tongue is as successful. We can tame the dumbest of animals, but cannot tame the most intelligent of animal expressions. Here James teaches how difficult it is to control the tongue. During the history of mankind he has brought every type of wild animal under his dominion. Though the tamed animals may be caged, the tongue is always liable to slip out of the bars and devour with a venomous bite. So, not only does it need to be watched and guarded and controlled, but much more care and pain will be needed to prevent outbursts. The deadly poison of verse 8 is reminiscent of the venomous viper in the grass that quickly strikes.

James 3:9-10. *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*

Not all that the tongue produces is necessarily bad. James is referring in these verses to the unruly tongue, a tongue that is not brought under the control of the Lord Jesus. What are some of the proper uses of our most prevalent means of communication? Sharing prayers and needs, edifying, teaching, preaching, counseling, singing. This verse also speaks of the consequences of hurting others. When we despise and hurt others we are despising God who made them. We are directly sinning against God. If we find it so easy to condemn and criticize others, what does this say about our relationship with God? Such behavior is not appropriate for a Christian who professes Jesus as Lord.

It is absurd that a tongue that praises God in one breath curses God or man in the second. James is referring to the inconsistency of a tongue that is not brought under the power of the Holy Spirit. If such an inconsistency exists in oneself, he should examine the source of his faith. Note that the scripture reveals that it is God's privilege to condemn, not ours. When we see reason to accuse and condemn others, we should always note if it is truly our responsibility to do so. Consider the archangel Michael when contending with the Devil.

Jude 1-9. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

Michael would not even lose his temper against Satan. Why should such an inconsistency not be? Like our works led of the Spirit, our speech should also be led of the Spirit, and His works are always consistently administered in love.

Why is the tongue so much more inconsistent than our works? We have time to consider our works as we choose to serve one another. Often the time it take between thought and word is immeasurably small. I once complimented a friend stating, "I really respect the fact that you never answer a question without pausing to think." His answer was (after a long delay), "Jack, you don't understand, it simply takes me that long to think of an answer." What he stated was humble, and true. It takes him time because he thinks about the question before blurting out his own thoughts, as I would normally do myself. There seems to be little lead time in what we say, particularly when the content of our speech is emotionally charged. James calls for integrity and consistency in our speech as well as in other areas of our lives.

James 3:11-12. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? ¹²Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

James refers to fruit generated in nature. A true and living faith will not allow such inconsistencies in word or action. How many hurts and sins would be prevented if we were able to make all of our words and actions consistent with the Spirit that God

has given us. How can we make our words and our spirit be more consistent with God's word and His spirit?

Col. 3:8-11. *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

What should we do when we experience emotions of anger to avoid speaking malice, slander, or filthy language? What should we do when we experience prejudicial feelings of superiority over other races, creeds, religions, etc? The scripture calls upon us to look to the Spirit who has given you a new self. That new self is not led of Satan to confuse and destroy, but rather led of the Spirit to reconcile and build up.

1 Peter 3:8-11. *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*

In the previous chapters we have noted how James equates the works of the Spirit and the nature of true faith. Works of the Spirit are the fruit of faith, and like a fig tree that produces figs, true faith will produce the true fruit of love that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Christian who truly loves God has no choice but to bear fruit as his nature changes from a self-centered focus to one that is seeking obedience to the Lord. Obedience to the Lord is then demonstrated by that true fruit in both what we do and in what we say. Consequently, if one professes to be a true believer but fails to produce fruit that is consistent with the love of God, that person's testimony of true faith comes into question.

Let each of us look into our own hearts and examine the way we use our tongue, particularly as we use it to communicate with the body of Christ. If we see a pattern of behavior that is motivated by our own self-will rather than that of the Holy Spirit, we have an opportunity to confess that sin to God, to repent, and to seek His forgiveness as we seek to make our lives a testimony to Him rather than to ourselves, and in so doing we can be a productive agent for God's kingdom on this earth.



James 3:13-18.
The Wisdom of God and Man.



The previous passage in the epistle of James to the church included a comprehensive evaluation of the damage to the kingdom work that can be done by words that are not brought under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. James characterizes the uncontrolled tongue as an evil that can be compared with the violence of an untamed animal. James continues by examining the power of unwise speech to create the same destruction within the fellowship of believers, words that sow havoc instead of peace.

Much damage is done to the work of God by those who profess wisdom and exert their views on others based upon their own pride-filled opinion. True wisdom is shown by meekness and the absence of pride, jealousy, and faction. Strife arises from evil desires, and from worldliness. Our natural spirit covets the goods of others, and so leads to envy. James reminds us that the grace of God can overturn our natural disposition. Therefore he counsels us to submit to God and resist the devil; draw near to God in humility and he will exalt you.

James 3:13. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

True wisdom will be known by its works. Two examples of a lifestyle that shows wisdom and understanding included here are,

- A lifestyle of righteousness and uncompromising good.
- a lifestyle that is active in works of and for the Lord, done out of love for God and others instead of for attention or self gratification.
- What is humility? Recognizing and responding to your true place in God's plan.
- What is meekness? Strength and power under wise control.
- What is wisdom? The Godly application of knowledge.

A truly wise person is a knowing person. He will not accept the reputation of being wise without putting great emphasis on knowledge to facilitate understanding.

Note, though this passage follows the dissertation on the tongue, this verse refers to the lifestyle, or conversation (old English)

James 3:14. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.*

A lack of wisdom is exposed when harbored envy and selfish ambition is demonstrated in words and action. Such a spirit is a contradiction to the love which is otherwise professed, thus denying the truth.

Envying and strife are opposed to meekness and wisdom. They are mutually exclusive. "Holy zeal and bitter envying are as different as the flames of seraphim and the fire of hell."²⁰

James 3:15. *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*

The source of such false wisdom is clearly from earthly principles and earthly motives. It is sensual, indulging in the flesh, driven by base desires which we share with the rest of the animal kingdom.²¹

James 3:16. *For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

Envy and selfish ambition produces confusion and disorder. The proprietor of such motivation is not truly concerned with the good of others, and is not going to contribute to the common good. By imposing one's personal lust for power or position, the Godly order of things is set off-balance. Things will not progress in a sound and loving

²⁰ Matthew Henry.

²¹ 1 Timothy 3:6.

manner, but rather in a manner which is reactionary (reacting to stimulus), and consequently unpredictable.

Such motivation produces decision making based upon rationalization rather than upon wisdom. Rather than seeking God's will, His will is presupposed and defended by arguments rationalized by that selfish desire.

Those who are lifted up with such false wisdom as this must fall into rebuke and condemnation.

James 3:17. *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

Contrast the wisdom of the world described in verses 14-16 with the wisdom from God. True wisdom is a gift of God. It is not gained by conversing with the world or by knowledge of the world, but rather it comes from above.

It is pure, without mixture of error which would defile it. It is guarded against sin, testing the spirits and motives against the love of God.

God's wisdom is peaceable. It is not going to incite strife or disunity, but rather, will move in ways to promote peace, reconciliation and restoration. It is gentle, not standing upon extreme right in matters of property, not furious in opinions, urging the will of self above others, neither rude, overbearing, harsh or cruel. All these are opposed to gentleness.

Heavenly wisdom contains the humility to be submissive to the Word and will of God whether it is perceived from scripture, the Holy Spirit, or even the testimony and works of other Christians. It doesn't insist that it is always correct, but can discern truth and be persuaded to change where error is evident..

The nature of Godly wisdom is to generate good works motivated by mercy and love. There will be a predisposition to forgive those who offend in all instances which present themselves.

Godly wisdom is impartial and sincere. The Greek word refers to a freedom from judging, making no undue differences in conduct towards individuals. It is sincere and open, steady and uniform, and consistent with itself.

It is a wisdom without hypocrisy. It has no disguises nor deceptions.

James 3:18. *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

Let others reap the fruits of contentions and self promotion, and all the advantages they can attain through their actions. Let us go on peaceably, sowing the seeds of righteousness, and we may depend on the fact that our labor will not be in vain. "For light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.



James 4:1-17.

Practical Atheism: Leaving God Out of our Choices.



There are many forms of church polity in our Christian denominations today, ranging from groups in which a dogmatic church hierarchy has total control over doctrine and practice to those where this authority resides entirely with the local congregation. Regardless of the polity model, all of these churches are managed on a daily basis by people. In some groups, those people give little or no authority to the Holy Spirit in their daily administration, and in others the leaders are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit, seeking to follow the Lord in all they do. As a consequence, many churches and church groups today give only lip-service to God, and are more characterized as social clubs than as the body of Christ. Who controls your church? Is it controlled by a board of directors? Is it controlled by a deacon or group of deacons? Is it controlled by an influential family? Is it controlled by a pastor?

Or, is it controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Chances are, your church may not be characterized by this latter attribute. Though we desire our church to be under the control of God, immersed in His will by the power of the Holy Spirit, such congregations are rare, and when found they quickly grow in number. However, that growth often brings with it changes that extinguish the flame.

What is going on here? What is the sin that is so rampant in the church that has changed it into a set of social clubs with a Christian theme? The problem is certainly not new. James is writing this letter to the churches of his day, and is addressing this same problem. It has been two generations since anyone had seen Jesus, so to many the original testimonies sounded like fables. The generations of persecution and abuse at the hands of the Jews also impacted the church, and unlike the church of today, they did not have the resources of the gospel writings, or the letters of Peter, James, John and Paul. Like today, the churches were groups of people, administered by people, and that administration was rarely led of the Spirit, but by men, and such a leadership model brings with it the sins of men.

James 4:1. *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

The Jews were a very seditious people, continually warring with all their neighbors as well as within themselves. It was an inherent trait of their culture. It is evident that the conflicts wherein they were engaged in secular society was brought into the church. Certainly, there is never any conflict in our churches today. Actually, we all know that quite the opposite is true. James talks about wars and fightings within the church. These two words, *polemoi* and *machai* refer to forms of conflict that take place in a national, or corporate setting. The first refers to conflict that arises from the division of people over issues. Often when issues arise in the church, leaders divide, and by so doing, polarize the congregation into a multiple of conflicting groups. The second refers to self-destructive quarrelling between individuals or small groups. It is these forms of conflict that James sees within the church, and we often see today.

What are some of the reasons that people are so quick to ignore the still-quiet voice of the Holy Spirit and impose their own opinions on others in the church, and create disunity? James describes the source is those same conflicts that reside within the individual person or persons that are expressed in self-centered means. Certainly, the most damaging lust is the lust of self-centered pride, a power that rules the world, but is not appropriate in the body of Christ. People, driven by their own pride, will not hesitate to create a conflict in order to defend their own desires for doctrine, tradition, church practice, the type of music played, the color of the carpets, etc. There is no limit to the subjects of conflict when people turn their eyes away from God.

James 4:2. *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.*

James states that you think you can secure great pleasures and happiness by overthrowing everything that stands in the way of your eager wishes, but in the act of overthrowing you lose your labor, your direction, and destroy one another. The conflict that James is addressing is significant. The word translated "kill" refers to pre-meditated acts that result in an intended separation. Of course, murder fits this

definition. However, it is unlikely that church members were murdering each other by taking their lives. However, we kill church members every day when we drive a permanent wedge of separation. In this context, death refers to permanent separation. People want their own way, they want to express their own selfish desires and motives, and will easily hurt and drive away those who oppose them. The result is a church in conflict, whether that conflict is loud and explosive, or quiet and smoldering. Then, amidst this pool of self-will the people are astonished that they are not seeing God working in their lives. They see the form of religion in their body, but none of its power. They will voice wonderfully stated prayers that simply end with an "Amen," and the adjournment of the meeting, and all go home unchanged.

These people think that they should obtain by aggression, but God seeks us to obtain his blessings in his grace. How do we obtain things by his grace? We ask God through prayer, and receive according to His will. If our prayers are to be answered in the way of our choosing, our choices must be in His will, not our own. If you want something, consider stating the desire in the form of a prayer and see if it is consistent with what would seem to be God's will for your life, or for the situation. For example consider the prayer, "Dear God, please cause my adversary to break out in boils." What does such a prayer imply? How would God most probably respond? It is unlikely that God shares our selfish desire for retribution against the individual. Jesus commands us to love one another and pray for those from whom we receive persecution.

James 4:3. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Asking with the wrong motives results in God's rejection of the request. People in the church fight and do not succeed because they do not sincerely pray. God will respond to our needs in a fashion which is consistent with His nature. How can we form our requests of God in a manner which would be pleasing to Him?

Our prayer requests should be consistent with his nature. They should address items which are true needs, not necessarily basic needs, but all needs that are real.

What are some of the things God has promised to us in his word that are available for the asking? Some things that come to mind include wisdom, guidance, fellowship, basic needs, and love. Is it inconsistent, then, to pray for things which bring us pleasure? That may depend upon or definition of "pleasure." The word used here, hedonon, from which we get the English word, hedonism, that refers to a philosophy wherein personal pleasure is the primary god of life. Consequently, we need to differentiate between pleasures which are Godly, and pleasures which are lustful. Let us seek in our prayers for success, that our prayers sincerely desire the ends of such success be right in the eyes of God. The result of the prayer should glorify God and further His kingdom's work in our lives or the lives of others. When our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears, we may be wise to examine our true motives.

James 4:4. *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

How do you suppose the word "adulterer" applies to these people? Jewish tradition and writings often used the metaphor of marriage to describe the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. When Israel would turn from God, they would be referred to as adulterers by the prophets. Even the New Testament describes the church as the "Bride of Christ". To turn from God to another is a form of adultery. Adultery in this context can be described as serving one other than the One who deserves true allegiance. Who is the mistress in this example, the one who is turning people away from their first love? James describes it as friendship with the world.²²

These are some pretty harsh words which should cause us to examine our relationship with the world. Our relationship with the ungodly world is so intimate that it is difficult or impossible to see the line between them. Instead of running our churches according to the Holy Spirit's lead, we run them using a worldly business model, instituting secular forms of authority in its members. When we do this, our churches quickly become a business whose primary purpose is meeting the social desires of its members.

Some churches do not place much emphasis on either Lordship, or the Bible, and are not much different from the world. Others are so careful to avoid the world that they are cloistered and often set up hedge laws to protect them from defilement. The churches at both ends of this spectrum are doing little to promote the Kingdom of God in the world.

There are probably three ways to relate to the world, and we have a choice of which one we will seek:

- Be of it. You may or may not be a Christian. The world contains those things in which you find security and pleasure, and you are satisfied to live with these. For you, church is simply a social enterprise within which you find friends and a shallow form of peace. You attend once a week out of obligation or tradition, and during the services you are watching the clock in anticipation of returning to your true home.
- Be on the fence. You have a foot in both the world and in God's kingdom, a spiritual schizophrenic. You are a Christian who has not completely left the world. There are areas in your life and experience that are still causing you to turn your focus away from God. You must be continually reminded to look back to God because the things of the world easily distract you. You avoid criticism

²² See Matthew 6:24.

for your church affiliation by keeping it a secret from your co-workers and worldly friends.

- You are God's missionary to the world. Your excursions into the world are on God's mission with the Holy Spirit accompanying you as your supporter and paraclete. You are able to step outside of the Christian subculture and be a useful tool for God's witness in the world.

Which of these characterizes your spiritual walk? Most likely, none of the three are accurate, yet your experience is characterized by a little bit of each. However, it is the third model that should be the spontaneous result of our faith. If we fall short of that model, we would be well to confess the sin that is keeping us from God's will, repent, and seek Him.

James 4:5. *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*

It is the nature of man to be prideful, covetous and envying.²³ It is the nature of God to be humble, generous and gracious. These natures are mutually exclusive. However, when the world and the things of it are the focus of his children, this differentiation gets confused. When pride enters the picture it is possible to rationalize away ungodly actions in the name of a perceived godly purpose. This was happening at the time when the Jewish Christians were warring and fighting among themselves.

What are some of the motives generated by our lusts? Some might include greed (characterized by a need for control and power), pride, selfishness, disunity, etc. What motives are prompted by the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit inspires love, peace and reconciliation. Again, we will often find the works of the world and the works of the Spirit to be mutually exclusive.

James 4:6. *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

We are taught to observe the difference God makes between pride and humility.²⁴ God sets himself against the proud. *Antitassomai*, (an-tee-TAS-som-ae) signifies God setting himself in battle array against the proud. Many of us would be astonished to realize that, when we stand before the congregation and make demands, as spiritual as they may sound, that God has set Himself in a battle array against us. There can be no greater disgrace for the Christian than to set himself against God by overruling His authority, yet we do it every day. The Christian becomes a traitor to the authority and dignity of God.

²³ Genesis 6:5.

²⁴ Psalm 18:27.

Man is insufficient to handle the conflict. If God is our enemy there is no hope. A prideful motivation is a disgrace. How do we avoid this tragic and destructive error? Replace pride with humility. The opposite of pride is humility, and the opposite of disgrace is grace. God gives grace to the humble.²⁵ The humble recognize their need for God's grace. They seek it, pray for it, and in doing so demonstrate a true recognition of God's authority. The humble recognize that God's wisdom so far exceeds our own, that no choice of our own can supersede the prompting of the Holy Spirit regardless of how logically correct it sounds. The humble cannot take a stand on an issue without being clearly led to do so by God.

James 4:7. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Consequently, we are taught to submit ourselves entirely to God. We should forsake the friendship with the world with its envy and pride. The world will hurt you when it has dominion over you. God's dominion over you will never hurt you, but will do you only good.

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to resist the Devil and the world of his dominion. When confronted by the power of God, Satan and his dominion is totally powerless.²⁶ However, we cannot resist the devil on our own natural power, but only in the power of His Holy Spirit. Yet, God promises that the Holy Spirit will protect us from evil by our simple resistance to it. We can resist evil by seeking God first in all of our decisions.²⁷

James 4:8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

Verses 8-10 direct how to act towards God in becoming submissive to him. The rebellious heart must be brought to the throne of God. Draw near to Him in humility and he will respond in grace.

The hands of the worldly are soiled with the impurity of that world. They must be washed. How is this to be done? God is faithful to forgive those who place their faith and trust in Him, confess their sin and repent of it. It is that sin that stains their hands.

The hearts of the worldly are wholly impure. In what way are they impure? We take into our hearts the nature and desires of the world, and like a glass of clear water that is darkened by even a small drop of ink, our hearts are made impure by a drop of worldly lust. How can such a heart be made clean? God is faithful to forgive those who confess their sin and repent of it. It is that sin that stains their hearts.

²⁵ Proverbs 3:34.

²⁶ Deuteronomy 28:7.

²⁷ Matthew 6:33.

The minds of the worldly is inconsistent, with its focus vacillating between that which is of the world and that which is of God. We fill our minds with images of violence, lust, and power as we submit ourselves to secular entertainment. We perceive and define the issues of the day based upon the content and opinions of the secular media. It is no surprise that we are confused. How can this problem be solved? Paul provides some good advice to the church at Philippi,

Philippians 4:8-9. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

James 4:9. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.*

James is speaking to those who have been set against God by their pride, covetousness and greed who need to come to a recognition of their error. As we observe their behavior in the body, we see people who are happy, confident, and think that all is going well since all within the body is being run in their own way. The response to such recognition should be significant remorse. The arrogant laughter currently being heard should be replaced by mourning the true state of the sinner. The joy of the worldly success should be replaced by the gloom of such a holy failure. Consequently, the recognition of a worldly state in the hearts and minds of God's people should make us feel tremendous regret and sorrow. It should produce true humility and cause us to seek the forgiveness of God. Without His grace our position is quite hopeless.

James 4:10. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

This well-known verse is often used in the entirety of its own message in many different contexts, and those applications are probably quite meaningful and useful. However, within the context of this letter, we see that James is specifically addressing the problem of worldly behavior within the body of Christ. In God there is hope. The outward act of humility should be the response of the inward feelings of grief concerning our sin.²⁸ God has promised a reward for those who seek Him.²⁹

²⁸ Matthew 23:12.

²⁹ Hebrews 11:6.

If we are truly penitent and humble we will see the fruits of His grace.³⁰ God will hear the humble desire for forgiveness.³¹ The highest honor in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

James 4:11. *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*

James is considered to have a very practical message. He must have seen the practices of his day and, as a result, had a grave concern for the people's lack of acknowledgment of God in their lives. In these verses James is identifying a people who have left God out of their lives, even though they might profess otherwise. James is still exposing the actions of those who have a false religion, a false faith, and a false sense of Christian authority. These actions may be the normal manner of the lost; we as His children must guard against the same actions.

James exposes that those individuals to whom he is writing are attacking each other in word as well as in deed. Note in the previous verses how James identified that they were warring with each other even unto death. Here he identifies that they are slandering each other. What is slander? *Katalaleo*: refers to speech that is stated with the clear intent of hurting or causing injury to another.

I find that, as an elder in a denomination that utilizes congregational polity, I am criticized for virtually every decision I make. Regardless of the simplicity or severity of the decision someone will either directly, or indirectly through another individual, desire a verbal defense of the decision. People will express a desire that I do something in a particular way, and upon acceding to their request, someone else will complain that the action was taken. Why do people do this? It is little surprise that the average tenure for a pastor in a modern New Testament church is less than three years.

Church members who act this way are generally making comparative judgments that are outside of the arena of their true authority. We squelch the expression of the gifts of others when, by judging those expressions, place ourselves in authority over them, an authority that is reserved for the Holy Spirit. What has this got to do with the law, the law of liberty? Judgment is reserved solely for God. He is the only authority who has pure wisdom and knows the heart sufficiently to judge us. Those who judge and slander one another are placing themselves above those of whom they speak and judge, and are usurping this position that is reserved for God alone.

³⁰ Isaiah 57:15.

³¹ Psalm 10:17.

When we leave God out of the manner in which we speak (or think) of others, His nature of agape love is replaced by our nature of self-centered pride, spitefulness and vengeance. Our lips should be guided by kindness, truth and love.

James 4:12. *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*

Again, here James exposes the arrogance of those who speak in slander and judgment. Their pride and arrogance give them the self-appointed position of little gods. James says, "Who do you think you are?" If God is the only lawgiver, does this mean that man is not to create laws? In this context, God's law refers to ultimate truth that supersedes any of man's rules or regulations concerning himself. We may properly establish laws and authority in order to maintain civil control, but we should never forget that God and his word represent the ultimate authority. The accepted laws of civil society should fit within the context of God's purposes for mankind. If God is the only judge, are we to abstain from judgment? God is the ultimate judge, and though we must make judgments in order to function in society, we must recognize our limitations when confronted with the judgment of the character and condition of other men's souls.

God's word advises us to reprove and correct one another when necessary. How do we do this and not compromise James' teaching on judgment? When we leave God out of our judgments, his nature in us is replaced by our own: one of arrogance and pride. Christians can make proper judgments when those judgments are tempered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such temperance comes from sincere humility expressed in prayer and demonstrated in love.

James 4:13. *Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:*

Here James describes the foolishness of leaving God out of our plans. It is our nature to "be in control", or at least strive to be. The speaker here is making several assumptions concerning his immediate future. What are they?

- He is going to travel to a specific place.
- He is going to spend a year there.
- He is going to carry on a business there.
- He is going to make a profit.

These types of statements may be part of any typical business decision, but what are some things that can happen to obstruct those plans? Again, these statements imply an arrogance, identifying that the speaker is in total control of his destiny. He is the master of his fate, the controller of his destiny.

What is the error here? What is the effect of such an error? He has left out the most important resource for decision making: God's will. Important decisions that are made in ignorance of God's will may ignore the effect of true probabilities as well as natural and supernatural events. For example, you want a big, impressive, new house that brags your position in life. You really know you cannot afford it. How do you convince yourself to go ahead and make the purchase? How do you approach such a decision properly? Your selfish desire inspires you to buy it and deal with the consequences later, consequences that will diminish the quality of your life as you are enslaved by the commitment to mortgage payments. Your ability to support God's work is diminished, and you find yourself stressing over unpaid bills. If the decision was approached through humble prayer, the Holy Spirit would clearly and easily reveal to you that such a purchase is foolish. You would clearly know the "right thing" to do.

James 4:14. *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

The impact of our foolish commitments is real. Here James describes how fragile life really is. What guarantees do we have concerning tomorrow? What can we accurately predict? We can only predict things in terms of past patterns, and past patterns can be broken. Do you know for certain that you will even be alive tomorrow? You only make that assumption because you are alive today. You look at the pattern of your previous days and make such an assumption. If you were gravely ill, that pattern would be changed and your consideration changes.

James describes life itself as a mist or vapor. Where does it come from, where does it go? He illustrates using a vapor as a very unpredictable phenomenon. A mist is totally subject to its environment, and is not self-determinant. We are subject to God's creation and His ultimate will. What happens when we ignore its authority over us? Like the mist that is swept away in the wind, our lives without God are swept to and fro by every wind of the world.³²

James 4:15. *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

If life is so temporal and unpredictable, is it foolishness to make plans? Again, it is necessary to make plans in order to achieve a goal. Otherwise we may poorly define our objectives and direction and ultimately fail for lack of preparation alone. However, we should always recognize God's ultimate will for us. How do we do this?

- Lift up prayers that are characterized by true humility and sincerity.
- Listen to the still-small voice of the Holy Spirit. Many times we ignore the Spirit's warning signals. What are they?

³² Ephesians 2:14

Sometimes it may be a lack of peace concerning a decision, a set of unresolved concerns, etc. Often we use the idiom of a "red flag" to describe such a concern. When we see this "red flag" we know what the right thing to do really is. Consider the context of the argument. Is it the right (or righteous) choice? Is the choice within the context of God's will for your life?

Ask the question, "Who is glorified or lifted up as a result of the decision?" Is this truly for God, or does it benefit me or my purposes? Does it promote God's kingdom or my own?

Some verses that help the planning and decision making process include Matt. 6:33, Prov. 3:5-10, Ps. 5:8, 27:11, 143:10, 119:30-37, 139:23. How do we include God in our plans?

James 4:16. *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*

To what is James referring here? James is describing unwarranted self-flattery motivated by self-centered pride and arrogance. Is there anything wrong with self-confidence? Some level of self confidence and self esteem is a basic need. We find in the first chapter of Joshua how God encouraged Joshua to be confident in what God had for him to do. When does self-confidence become harmful? Self confidence becomes damaging when it blinds one to their true state and/or hurts ones self, other individuals, or God's kingdom. If the source of self-confidence is pride, the result is damaging to the kingdom. When our confidence comes from God, recognizing our true, undeserving nature, His work can be done in our lives.

James 4:17. *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

What is James saying here? We sin when we do not do what we know is right. When we leave God out of our words, our deeds, and our actions, what happens to our capacity to do what is right? We sin by both commission and by omission. James has been describing the devastating result of the expression of self-centered pride in our actions. James also reminds us that when we fail to listen to the Holy Spirit's call and fail to do what God has called us to do, we have also sinned.

This passage of scripture addresses some very difficult and sensitive issues, issues that warrant our attention. Do we experience conflict within the body of Christ? Is our church not accomplishing the ministry to which God has ordained his Church? It is evident that the church in James' day also fell short of God's purpose, and James wrote to them to expose their pride, their party spirit (divisiveness), and the practice of practical atheism (ignoring God) in the church. As we read James' words, let us look to our own hearts and see if there is something to be learned here. If we have allowed

ourselves to fall into the error or errors that James exposes here, let us confess those sins before God and seek His forgiveness as we also seek the power of the Holy Spirit to change our motives from those which are self-centered to those which are God-centered. Only then will we fully understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and experience the true joy and peace that He offers.



James 5:1-6. The Pitfall of Worldly Wealth.

It certainly does not take an advanced degree in economics to identify that greed is alive and well in this world. The world-wide economy is based primarily on consumer demand. When consumers are confident in their environment, they purchase products, driving production and creating jobs. When consumer confidence is reduced, the demand for products is reduced, resulting in an economic recession, or a slowing down of the accelerating economic engine. One side-effect of this type of economy is the power that the greedy have to influence it. This century has been marked by a greed-based economy that bought large, built large, and built false confidence on claims of great opportunities. When the hype and greed was exposed, the hyper-inflated market found its proper value, costing investors billions of dollars. We saw a similar pattern at the beginning of both the 19th and 20th centuries. In each of these three periods the economy was driven to a level too high to sustain, and market values came crashing down when it found its true value.

What we are witnessing is greed in action. The greedy have no care for the impact that the consequences of their actions has on others, particularly those who lose their jobs or their property when the market checks. Yet, even when the consequences of unbridled greed are evident, those who are so addicted do not change. People seek great wealth as if it is something of value to be attained, only to find emptiness in a ledger with a lot of numbers, or in a home full of stuff that simply depreciates and gathers dust. Wealth that is obtained at the expense of others, whether directly through fraud or indirectly through a lack of godly stewardship, serves as a testimony against the one who lives such a self-centered life.

James 5:1. (NIV) *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.*

Here James is reiterating the statement of the Lord from Luke 6:24.

Luke 6:24. *But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.*

James is sending this message to the worldly and/or unbelieving Jews. For the most part, the poor among the Jews were the ones to receive the gospel. Most of the rich were arrogant, self-sufficient, and actively persecuted the believing Jews. This verse is the first prophesy of the Lord concerning the judgment to come.³³ What is the reason for the necessity of their weeping and wailing? It is not the riches themselves that will surely bring such suffering, but rather the astonishment that will come when they discover their lost state at the final judgment. James is aware of their lost state

³³ Matthew 13:41-42.

simply because of their lack of spiritual fruit, expressed in the wickedness of their ways.

Being wealthy in and of itself is not an indication of a lost state. Nor is there any biblical imperative against the proper pursuit of wealth. However, one should be aware of the dangers that come with the attainment of wealth. Wealth can bring a false sense of personal security when one may think they can rely on that wealth rather than upon the LORD. Again, the attainment of wealth can often be accomplished at the expense of others and the expense of contribution to the LORD's work. Some may hold that the attainment of wealth and generosity are mutually exclusive. Note that the rich are more impacted by calamity than the poor. In times of public disaster they complain the loudest. There is actually very little of true value that is found in the attainment of great wealth.

James 5:2. (NIV) *Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.*

The misery that is experienced by the rich will rise from the very things they value. Property values depreciate. Stock and investment values fall. They will have, at the end of this life, lost those things that they consider of greatest value. What is being stated here is literally that those things of value will be revealed as valueless.

Much of spiritual maturity is realized by what one considers of greatest importance. Those who are lost, or those who are spiritually immature place great value in the things of this world: power, influence, and possessions. They are often driven by pride and arrogance, demanding their own way within their social circles, and willing to step on others in order to obtain it. One who is spiritually mature understands and appreciates the folly of such a temporal and destructive attitude and instead places great importance upon the maintenance of positive and affirming relationships with the LORD and with others. The primary difference in these two views is that the first relies on those things that will be left behind in this life, and the latter develops relationships that will continue for eternity.

James 5:3 (NIV) *Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.*

The rich think that they heap up treasures against their last days. The shiny gold coins that we may so value belonged to someone else before we held them, and will belong to someone else when we have left this world. This does not imply that it is inappropriate to invest in retirement programs. It would be unwise to place ourselves in an intentional dependency on others when God has given us the means to be better stewards of what He has provided for us. Planning and preparing for latter years is certainly appropriate. The inference here is not so much as an effort of planning and preparation as it is an effort of hoarding at the expense of others and at the expense of

God's kingdom work. Many may think that they are simply planning and preparing, but also argue that they cannot financially afford to demonstrate proper stewardship through the tithe. It is also these who are condemned by James' indictment.

If that big retirement account is your priority, and if its collection has come at the expense of proper generosity and stewardship, it will expose you in the last days. You won't be able to hide it, but rather, it will have displaced God as the true priority in your life.

James 5:4 (NIV) *Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.*

James shows here one of the ways the stored up riches are going to be a witness against the rich in the last days. Exposed here is a lack of honesty and stewardship motivated by greed and contempt for God. Earlier in the book James addressed this same problem when speaking to the persecuted. Now he is exposing the folly of greed. However, the indictment also reaches to those who deny payment to God's work. When we consider harvesters, we may also include those who harvest souls, both in foreign, domestic, and local ministries. Self-centered greed also replaces the generous spirit that God would have us demonstrate towards the work of His laborers. When pastors, missionaries, and others who have committed themselves to the fields of the kingdom find themselves in need, that need cries out against those who fail to support them.

Shown here also is an abuse of power. What is the response of the laborers who have been cheated? The title of the Lord used here, *Kerion Sabaoth*, is from the Old Testament and was used when the people of God were defenseless and needed protection. Those who are abused by the rich have no recourse, and their defender is God, and God alone. People would probably not knowingly place themselves in a position where the LORD is called upon to defend others against them. The LORD is an awesome adversary who will come to the aid of those who cry out to Him.

James 5:5 (NIV) *You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.*

Another of the effects of wanton greed is the lifestyle that such a poorly-gained treasure promotes. What happens when someone comes into a large sum of money? What temptations are evident?³⁴ These are those who have great resources when those around them face calamity. Rather than demonstrate generosity in such times, they use their comfort to insulate themselves against the needy. Such a position further drives the needy into a state of greater stress and need.

³⁴ Hosea 13:6.

One who is both wealthy and righteous recognizes the needs of those in the community and rises up to help in times of distress. Such an individual is used of God in such times of calamity, and though some material wealth may be sacrificed in such times, the individual receives the blessing of knowing that God has used them for His purposes rather than for their own. Furthermore, God works in the lives of the faithful, and promises to bless those who use their resources for God's kingdom work.

James 5:6 (NIV) *You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.*

Another sin of the rich, caused by the same self-centered motivations of greed, are the persecution of others simply due to the power over others such riches can enable. Here we see that the power gained from wealth was used to persecute the righteous even to the point of death. Furthermore, those who were persecuted did not even stand in the way of the rich man. When one comes to rely on their own resources rather than upon the resources of God, one stands no taller than their own stature. All of their riches are immersed in the same sinfulness that so characterizes the human spirit. The result of such a self-defined life is a spirit of cruelty and contempt.

However, when one places their property under the authority of the LORD and seeks the Holy Spirit's guidance in utilizing it in this life, a great dynamic is realized. Rather than limiting our resources by our own stature, giving our resources to God places them at a point where they are limited only by His stature. Our possessions take on a greater power than we ever imagined when they are laid at the throne of grace. Rather than being empowered by our own skills and desires, our possessions become empowered by His purposes of grace.

Keeping and hoarding our wealth for ourselves is a task fraught only with pitfalls of our own sinfulness. However, dedicating our possessions completely to the LORD brings a dynamic to them that is attainable in no other way. James has seen this principle in action in the life of the early church, and he warned the faithful Jews not to fall into the error that ensnares so many of their community. Not much has changed over the years. People are still sinful and self-centered. Consequently, James' instruction is as relevant today as it was in the first century. Let each of us reflect upon how we relate to our possessions, observe how we may be using them in a self-serving manner, consider how we support God's kingdom work with them, and seek ways to dedicate them entirely to the LORD.



James 5:7-11. Patience Until Christ's Return.

When we spend some time in the letter of James to the early church, we cannot help but come away with the realization that this church is dealing with a lot of troubling issues that largely stem from the persecution that they are receiving from others in their community. Though James' letter is intended for all of the churches, his experience is largely drawn from the events surrounding the life of the church in Jerusalem, arguably the most persecuted of any of the early Christian fellowships.

The stress of persecution can cause the church membership to respond in a variety of ways, and we have seen from this letter that those ways included conflict within the body. James wrote to encourage the church to recognize the true source of the conflict and to continue to conduct themselves with love towards one another and to express their faith through good works, not just among themselves but also to others in the community.

Likewise, the Christian church of the 21st century faces similar challenges. The church is widely criticized and challenged by a culture with a similar epicurean humanism that considers any expression of faith to be unenlightened and ignorant. The church finds itself blocked by anti-faith movements at every venue of public expression. The American constitution simply states that the government will make no law to limit the expression of religion where that expression causes no harm. However, our population is ignorant enough of that constitutional amendment to buy into an assumed "separation of church and state" philosophy that was never intended. Armed with this philosophy, anti-faith groups systematically resist the work of the Christian church.

Like the early church, even the church itself is guilty of persecution as denominations deny one another, condemn one another's practices, and consider themselves somehow better, resulting in a fractured church that is now a mosaic of independent groups.

How long is conflict from without and from within going to keep the church embattled? One can probably safely state that the conflict will remain as long as satan is the prince of this world, a period that will last until the second coming of the LORD. If the church is to remain so persecuted, how should it respond to this cultural climate?

James 5:7. *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.*

These words are addressed to the saints who may be experiencing the injustice of those just spoken to, thus providing some encouragement to God's afflicted people. Three admonishments are given:

- (1) Be patient,
- (2) establish your hearts, and,
- (3) grudge not one against the other.

Be patient. Bear your continuing afflictions without murmuring. How long are we to be so patient? The Greek word that is rendered patient is “*makrothumeo*,” a continuing tense verb that refers to the patient endurance of an on-going stress. It is an agricultural term that can refer to the patience that a farmer expresses when he waits upon the sown seed to grow to fruition when growth is challenged by drought, blight, and other damaging forces. Consequently, the example given has to do with the farmer who waits on the fruit of the earth.

How does this metaphor correlate to bearing affliction within the body of the church? Growth in faith is not unlike growth in the fields. Seeds of truth are planted in the hearts of the church fellowship and is subject to resistance from many worldly influences. Labor is involved in the planting and the nurturing of the spiritual seed, just as it is required of the physical seed, including cultivating and weeding through continuing Bible study and discipleship. Nourishment for growth, whether physical or spiritual comes only from God.

Makrothumeo is an active patience that is characterized by more than a simple yielding to the current stress, but rather one that looks forward and beyond the affliction with the hope of the final harvest. For the Christian that harvest includes the promised blessings of God, including an eternal relationship with Him. That promise makes the labor worth it all, just as the physical harvest is worth the farmer's labor.

James 5:8. *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

Establish your hearts. The Greek text uses the word, *ste-ri'-zo*, to stand fast, or to turn resolutely in a certain direction. An established heart is one that is not easily swayed by falsehood, but rather stands firm on the Word of God without wavering. Decisions are not made capriciously, but rather with a deep sense of God's purpose and plan in one's life. An established heart has its focus fixed firmly on God and heaven despite all of the distractions, sufferings, and temptations of this world.

The prosperity of the wicked has always resulted in the affliction of the righteous and poor.³⁵ It is possible that some to whom James wrote were more accurately described by verses 1-6. Their hearts must also be established.

³⁵ Psalm 73:2-20.

The Coming is Near. Hope is a powerful weapon against circumstances that would encourage despair. It is evident that the apostles thought that Jesus' return was imminent, likely taking place in their lifetimes. Consequently, they always taught that Jesus' return is coming soon. Whether Jesus does come back in our lifetime, or we meet Him at the end of our lifetime, the hope is still the same. We can know that we will not be defeated by that which would attack us in this world. If we lived as though Jesus' return is imminent, we might react differently to the circumstances of this world, probably placing them into a more spiritually mature perspective. The importance of this life's issues would be better illuminated by God's plan and purpose, and we might not consider them of such great significance when compared with that purpose. We can live every day as though Jesus' return is imminent, and if we did, we would have less need for enduring patience.

James 5:9. *Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.*

Grudge not against one another. The Greek word, *sten-ad'-zo* means to sigh, to murmur, or to create strife. One common response to persecution is to strike back at any target within sight, and that target is often those who are closest to us. When we are under stress, it is often a very difficult task to refrain from lashing out at those around us. We may be reminded of Paul's counsel that the enemy of the faithful is never people, but rather the influence of the evil one: the one true enemy.³⁶ However, the emotions of the moment blind us to that truth and we tend to commit sin ourselves when we take the battle to the wrong enemy.

Fretfulness and discontent expose us to the just judgment of God, and we bring more calamities upon ourselves by our murmuring, our distrustful, envious groans and grudging against one another, than we may be aware of.

How can we respond to persecutions in a way that do not cause us to attack one another?

- Realize that fellow Christians are never the enemy: satan is the enemy. Rally together to confront the true enemy: satan and sin.
- Seek to establish the true source of the affliction, and bring that affliction together to the LORD in prayer.
- Rather than share in a spirit of defeat, stand firm together on the promise of God's victory over sin and death.
- Minister one to another as some are more defeated by stress than others.

³⁶ Ephesians 6:12, ff.

Certainly, this list goes on. There are many positive responses that we can employ to negative circumstances. James reminds us that some spiritual wisdom needs to be engaged so that we will not practice a negative response to stressful events.

James 5:10. *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.*

We are encouraged to be patient by the example of the Old Testament prophets. The prophets of God who received God's greatest honor and favor usually found themselves treated quite differently by their community. This is not unlike the state of the faithful in this wicked world today. When we look at how the sin-filled world treated the prophets we should not be surprised that that same wicked world treats modern-day prophets in a similar manner. James has pointed out that even those within the church are joining the world in their persecution of the faithful. Certainly this was true during the lives of the Old Testament prophets also.

Did the prophets find peace and resolution in their lifetimes? Most of the prophets lived out their lives in persecution and because they would not compromise their testimony in the presence of the wickedness of the community, they were often tortured and killed by wicked leadership. We may be reminded of the brutal imprisonment of Jeremiah by the Jerusalem leadership during the Babylonian occupation prior to the city's destruction.

Though we may experience various forms of persecution from both within and without the walls of the church, most of the faithful will not experience torture and imprisonment. However, there are even today some locations around the world where people of Christian faith are systematically tortured, imprisoned, and killed. Consequently, when persecution is experienced, one can remember that the necessity for the endurance of that persecution is a common affliction of the faithful.

Rather than focus on the affliction, the Old Testament prophets focused upon the LORD and held true to their message without lashing out at others. They endured persecution, sometimes unto death, without committing the sin of hurting others. Their love for the LORD and their love for the faithful was only strengthened by persecution because they understood its true source and depended upon the LORD for their deliverance. James points out that the experience of these is instructive to all of us as we respond to the vagaries of this wicked world.

James 5:11. *Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*

God provides a hope in the future to every believer. When one endures the conflicts of this world for the sake of God's kingdom, there is a unique reward, whether it be experienced in this world as a deeply felt peace and joy, or experienced in heaven as

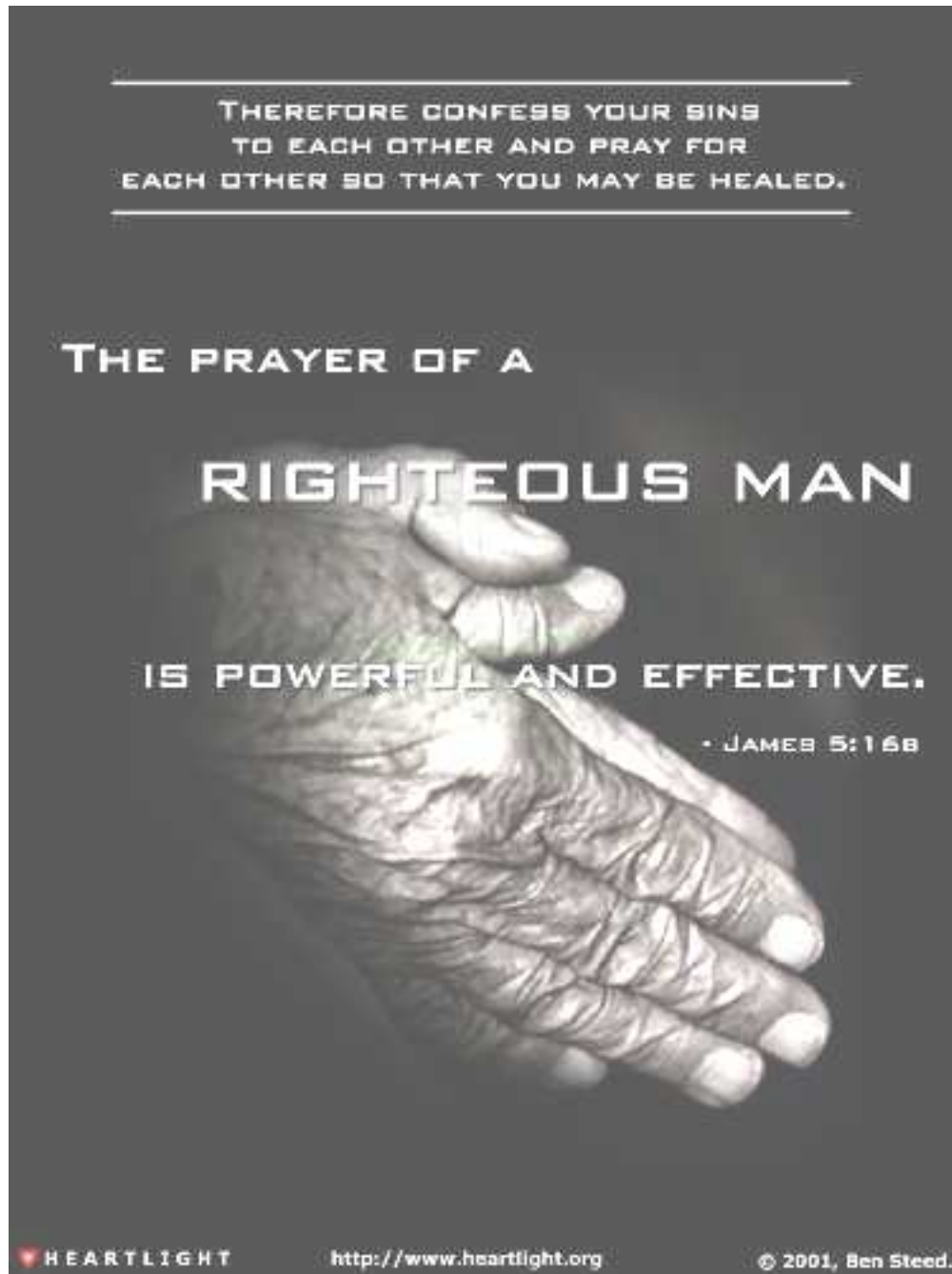
a promised “crown.” What does James mean when he states that those who endure without compromising their faith are counted as “happy?” Certainly, there is little to produce happiness in the experience of conflict, persecution, and stress. However, when that conflict, persecution, and stress comes directly from one’s faithfulness, the knowledge of that enduring faithfulness can bring a deep joy that is attained no other way. Paul often testified to the joy that he experienced in the knowledge of his own endurance.³⁷ James includes the example of Job’s experience of faithfulness, loss, and restoration. We are given the privilege of witnessing the end of the story of Job’s life. We will not see our own until we meet the end of our lives. The LORD responds to our patient obedience with mercy. Consequently we have an advocate and paraclete in the LORD who is with us through the tough times, particularly when they are made tough because of abuse that we receive by others as a direct result of our faithfulness to God.

James clearly teaches that the faithful will experience various forms of persecution by this wicked world, and by those of the faith who succumb to it. If one does not show some battle scars, one is not taking part in the battle, and does not know the measure of peace and joy that James refers to. However, those who are in the battle share the scars of persecution from both within the body of believers and from without. James teaches that our response to that persecution can be one that is spiritually mature and godly, one that strengthens us and better prepares us to faithfully serve the LORD throughout our days.

³⁷ Acts 16:33, ff; 2 Corinthians 6:5, ff; Galatians 6:17



[James 5:12-20.](#)
[Using Godly Words.](#)



James 5:12. *But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

James, in this letter to the early church, laid down some tough arguments for the damage that was being done to the early church by speech that lacked the implementation of the wisdom of God. Like, Paul, James does not leave us with an

unanswered criticism, but rather, provides a detailed solution for those who are willing to change.

First, James addresses the practice of the swearing of oaths. He introduces this by saying "But above all...". Consequently, he considers this of grave importance. This verse is often misapplied as a command to abstain from coarse or foul words, words that are objectionable to the culture as a whole. There is much to defend any command of such abstinence, supported by sound biblical doctrine. Certainly, the Holy Spirit does not lead one to be an offense to another. Offensive behavior demonstrates a lack of agape love towards the one offended. However, this is not the application of this particular passage.

Another example of improper speech is the "taking of the LORD's name in vain," literally the refusal to recognize God for who He really is. If one refuses to accept the LORD for who He truly is, and takes that rejection to the grave, that individual will be eternally lost. Again, though this is an appropriate teaching, this is not the application of this particular passage.

Cursing and taking the LORD's name in vain are both examples of improper speech. James dealt with some of the context of this argument in chapter three. Here, James describes yet a third, and very important, example of improper speech, a practice that has significant consequences.

This passage refers to stating oaths by the authority of a second source, for example "I swear on my mother's name", "In God's name I swear," "I swear on the Bible," etc. This practice was common in both the Greek and Jewish communities where people would swear by the reputation of their ancestors, or upon the names of their pagan gods. James expressly forbids this practice, and when one stops to consider what it really means to swear on the authority of another, the prohibition makes good sense. The true nature of this type of oath is to pawn the reputation of some certain, more powerful, more respected, or greater thing for the defense of some lesser thing. Such action leads to the literal swearing by the creature as if he were God; and so advancing himself into the place and authority of God. That is, to swear by the authority of another is to claim for one's self the other's authority. The error of this practice is illustrated when one breaks an oath so stated, because the nature of the oath itself implies that the power of the other is what keeps the oath sacred. James instructs that the borrowing of another's authority is not necessary. Your "yes" and "no" should be confirmed by your own integrity, an integrity that is maintained because of your faith in God.

Does this forbid oaths, such as a public oath of office that necessitates a hand on a Bible and the words, "so help me, God"? Such oaths are simply understood to a workable verbal form of a written signature. This way, when one is formally "under oath" they may be held legally accountable for their statements in the same way that they would be held accountable to the contents of a written document. Consequently,

this teaching can easily place a Christian into an ethical dilemma when one is forced by the protocol of some agency, such as the military, or the courts, to state such an oath. One answer to this dilemma might be found within the context of Jesus' command to "render to Caesar that which is Caesar's." Christians are to respect the laws of their respective governments, and the taking of such oaths is a component of that law. Furthermore, we are reminded that the Bible is not a book of law to the Christian, since God looks upon the individual's heart-felt understanding of God's word as led of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, how one responds to this dilemma is a matter of personal choice. Some may find the practice offensive and choose to resist the swearing of an oath in open court. Others may find honor in stating their firm intent, such as the oath to defend the constitution that is required of military and federal officials.

Engaging in a protracted argument concerning the participation in legal oaths may require taking James' statement to the extreme. James is simply stating here that the word of a Christian should be reliable, honest, and stand on his/her own merit, a merit that is found in a reputation of one who is fully submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. One who demonstrates such godly integrity has no need to borrow from the authority of another.

James 5:13. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

James continues with examples of ways of adding godly speech to our vocabulary. As we experience our pilgrimage from salvation to the gates of Heaven, we are subject to a road full of hilltops and valleys. The way we respond to these experiences illustrates much about our maturity in the Lord.

Responding to the mountaintops...

What would be a natural way to respond to the hilltop experiences which result from successes, gains, blessings, etc.? We are quite capable, without the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate pride, self-congratulations, self-satisfaction, complacency, expectation of continuation, and heightened dependence upon ourselves.

What would be the Godly way to respond to hilltop experiences? The Holy Spirit leads us to demonstrate praise and thanksgiving, stewardship, and generosity.

Responding to the valleys...

What would be a natural way to respond to the valley experiences which result from failure, loss, etc.? We are quite capable, without the power of the Holy Spirit to respond with condemnation of others, rejection of responsibility, depression, anger, bitterness, low self-esteem, and lashing out.

What would be a Godly way to respond to the valleys? The Holy Spirit leads us to humility, prayer, thanksgiving, faith, and confidence in God's provision and your value in his sight, and recognition of the value of the valleys in our lives.

The Greek word that is rendered “psalms” refers literally to the act of singing. According to historical writings of Pliny, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, it is evident that the early Christians were accustomed to the singing of hymns taken from both scripture and private composition.³⁸ Literally, the singing of psalms could be rendered as a gospel ordinance. In either case, hilltop or valley, we should respond in a manner which is in service to the Lord's kingdom.

James 5:14. *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

James next addresses the way to respond to times of sickness. What would be the natural way to respond to sickness? We might respond by placing blame, experiencing depression, lashing out at God with statements such as “Why did you let this happen?”, search for quick remedy, dependence on others, self pity, or other negative behaviors. As James writes, he is dealing with a culture that responded to sickness in an even more negative manner. Virtually nothing was known about the causes of sickness of disease, so with the absence of medical science, people understood sickness as a punishment for their sins. Consequently, they blamed and despised one another when any form of sickness was evident. Our penchant for despising one another for sickness has ebbed over the centuries, but has not been entirely eliminated. There are still some who will place blame on one another for sickness, particularly those illnesses that seem to be the result of life choices.

James provides some Godly responses to sickness. The first is to notify the elders of the church. The Greek form of the word that is rendered *elder* refers to those older and mature members who will respond to the need in a godly manner, in love, and in prayer. Note that the necessity of personal prayer is already identified in the previous verse. By notifying the elders, they can serve God by praying for you and enjoining others to pray also, so that their own ministry can be exercised, and that the afflicted may further understand the real source of healing.

Why do you suppose James advises the practice of anointing with oil? Anointing with oil does not in itself provide healing except for a few rare instances. To better understand the ritual of anointing we might draw from Israel's history the anointing its kings. The ritual of anointing is intended to symbolize one as being separated out for God's total purpose, placing the individual completely into the Lord's hands. Note that modern usage is often variant with the scriptural purpose. It is not meant for the

³⁸ This latter form was rejected by 17th century Baptists.

cleansing or ridding of sin as is used in the extreme unction of last rights. Anointing with oil serves as a reminder of who the LORD of healing truly is as we submit ourselves entirely to Him and pray to Him for the healing that only He provides.

James 5:15. *And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*

Note here that the healing source is prayer and not the anointing with oil. Furthermore, that prayer should be offered up in faith that ultimately recognizes and desires the fulfillment of God's will, not our own.

Did miraculous healing end with the apostolic age? All healing is ultimately miraculous, from the tiny scratch to the devastation of the body due to illness and trauma. Is this verse a medical credit card which can be used to assure healing in all instances of our desire? We do not know God's complete and ultimate purpose for our lives. We know only that we do not want to be afflicted. God has a purpose behind all of our experience, and calls upon us to place our trust in Him alone.³⁹

Some notes about modern "Faith Healing": Many will take these two verses out of the context of God's holy and true attributes, and use them to justify the practice of healing-on-demand. Some problems encountered with this philosophy include:

- Healing-on-demand rejects God's ultimate purpose for the afflicted,
- healing-on-demand treats God as our servant who will obey our commands.

If faith-healing practices were useful as practiced by these why do any faith healers experience sickness? How would any faithful man die? Total faith healing leads to earthly immortality. We Christians would have to jump in front of trains to die, and that might not even work. Often the demand of healing amounts to no more than the testing of God, and results in no more than the evaluation of the supposed lack of faith in those who are not "miraculously" healed.

Often our affliction is a direct consequence of our sin or the sin of others. For example, we may abuse our bodies through smoking, overindulgence, sloth, or a variety of other means. A prayer in faith recognizes this sin as sin. It then seeks and receives forgiveness for that sin, but God requires repentance. That repentance alone can be used of God to provide healing from a wide variety of life-choice induced illnesses.

James 5:16a. *Confess your faults one to another,*

James encourages us to share with each other our needs, our afflictions, and even the confession of our sins. Why is it so helpful to be able to share our faults with one

³⁹ Romans 8:28-29.

another? Certainly, by so doing we are sharing a very important need with one another so that we can help one another to overcome the conflict in our lives through love, support, and prayer. That is God's purpose for us as we help one another as we stumble through some of life's experiences.

Why is it typically so difficult for us to confess our sins one to another? The truth is simply that we often do not have enough trust in one another because of the limited expression of agape love in our relationships. If our relationships are characterized by judging, condemning and criticizing one another, one can only expect judgment, condemnation and criticism, leaving us without the love and support that we need when we need it the most. Christians often tend to require others to live up to a set of rules, and limit their relationships based upon those rules. Any time we place conditions on our love of one another we are exercising only a worldly phileo love, and not the unconditional agape love that God requires.

A second common impediment to sharing is found when people repeat to others statements that are made in confidence. Trust is destroyed by such behavior. When we cannot trust an individual to keep in confidence that which we share in confidence we cannot feel confident in "confessing our faults" one to another. It is not possible to effectively share our faults with one another so that we can pray for and support one another in an environment that lacks trust.

How do we earn the trust in one another that is necessary to be able to minister to one another in the manner that James advises? Earning trust will only come when we put away our self-centered ways and truly love one another. Through such love we can put away our critical spirit, and stand firm on the integrity that only God can provide for us when we depend wholly on Him. Then, our prayers for one another will be truly sincere.

James 5:16b. ..., and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Note that the 13th verse directs Christians to pray for themselves; the 14th verse directs Christians to seek for the prayers of ministers or leaders; and the 16th directs Christians to pray one for another. There is little doubt of the priority that James places on the power of prayer. The sincere prayer of a righteous man is empowered by the Holy Spirit, a power greater than any other in the universe. Therefore, it is evident that a form of righteousness is paramount. No man can be righteous on his own, but rather is made righteous only by the mercy of God through Christ in his true desire for that which is of God, and a true disdain for that which is not.⁴⁰

Note James' words imply a sincere and fervent pouring out of the heart to God.

⁴⁰ Psalm 66:18.

James 5:17-18. *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. ¹⁸And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

As we read the scriptures we find many examples of God's response to sincere and fervent prayer. One such example might be the parting of the Red Sea that followed Moses' prayer for deliverance. James draws an example from the experience of Elijah as recorded in 1 Kings, chapter 18. God had a purpose of using Elijah to demonstrate His sovereignty to the ungodly King Ahab. Throughout this event Elijah maintained a close relationship to God and was, through the act of prayer, made aware of God's purpose.

How can we attain a righteousness that produces such an effective prayer life? Elijah knew the will of God because of a continued long-term obedience and personal desire for God that was guided by prayer.

What keeps us from having as dynamic a prayer experience as that which James describes? We see that Elijah made prayer a high priority in his life. How much of a priority is prayer in our lives? James is speaking to the need of all Christians to develop a relationship with God that is characterized by continued and fervent prayer. Without such prayer we simply cannot realize the blessings that God has for us, blessings that come from a close and personal relationship with Him. When we choose to place this world and our own desires at a priority greater than that of God, we are replacing the abundance that God promises with those things of this world. James is reminding us of the importance of prayer and encourages us to make it the priority in our lives that it needs to be.

James 5:19-20. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; ²⁰Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

Not only are we to pray for one another, but also we are to put "feet to our prayers" as we minister one to another in ways that promote our understanding the truth of God. James specifically refers to discipling and training one another. How can we speak in a way to help others from wandering from the truth? First, one must know the truth if one is going to help another to understand it. One must be sensitive to falsehood, to that which would lead away from the truth, and then respond to it in a way to promote truth. Some will take this passage out of context to defend apostasy. However, adherence to and communication of the truth has two effects as illustrated here. One is the salvation of the lost, and the second is the affirmation the saved. In either case, the result of successful communication is repentance.

In this verse the two examples are illustrated. If a sinner receives the gospel, the result of the communication is repentance and salvation. If a saved person receives the truth and repents he is restored to the fellowship.

Consequently, what is the result when one who has not yet given their heart to the LORD rejects the truth? Such an individual will remain separated from God. When one is obedient to God and shares the truth with a lost person there is always the potential that the Holy Spirit will use that testimony to bring the lost person to salvation.

What is the result when someone who is saved rejects the truth? When one who claims the name of Christ acts in sin and disobedience, he/she falls out of fellowship with God, and possibly other Christians. When one is obedient to God and shares the truth with an unrepentant believer there is always the potential that the Holy Spirit will use that testimony to restore that person to fellowship, and by so doing open back up the doors of blessing that had been shut by sin.

In either case, whether the testimony is given to one who is lost, or one who is saved, that testimony is always a testimony of truth that is immersed in God's unconditional agape love. James does not call upon us to beat on each other when we see a need for correction, but rather to communicate in love with the intent of redemption and restoration.

As James writes to the first-century church, he writes to a fellowship that has been finding persecution from just about every facet of their culture. James was most familiar with those who came from Jewish backgrounds who found themselves rejected by their families. They lost their entitlement to land and property as well as their jobs. They found it difficult to engage in commerce with the Jews. Gentile members found themselves to be considered ignorant and unenlightened by the Hellenistic society. It is easy in this type of environment for people to turn upon each other, blaming one another for their state, and destroying the relationships they need most as they try to live a life that is faithful to God. In this brief letter, James acknowledges the true source of the persecution and speaks to God's purpose in it for those who endure. He then points out how the fellowship is adding to their stress by the way they are treating each other. Finally, he shows us that we can reject satan's attempt to use us to disrupt the fellowship and live a life of love and obedience as we pray for one another and help one another through the tough times and tough experiences. This is God's purpose for all people, that we would love Him and glorify Him as we also love one another. Sometimes we simply need to be reminded of this truth.



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