



# James

*A COMMENTARY OUTLINE*

THE PRACTICALITIES  
OF CHRISTIANITY

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# **T**he Trials of the Believer

*or “Building Endurance”*

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James 1:1-18

## TRIALS FROM WITHOUT 1:1-12

### THE AUTHOR AND RECIPIENTS 1:1

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings. ”

### The Author

#### *His Identity*

The author of this letter should be distinguished from the other Jameses of the New Testament. There was James the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21), and James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3), who is sometimes called the “less” because of either his stature or his age, and James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). The author of this letter is James, Jesus’ half-brother (Matthew 13:55).

#### *His Spiritual History*

According to John 7:5, James was not a believer during the public ministry of Jesus. He was a witness to the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:7) and, along with other relatives, joined the followers of Jesus after that event (Acts 1:14). At the convening of the church council in Acts 15, he is seen as the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13) .

#### *His Spiritual Maturity*

James could have honestly called himself the brother of the Lord, for he was His half-brother. Instead, he underscores his relationship to Jesus in terms of Christ’s lordship and his own servanthood. Notice that Jesus is viewed as deity, for to serve Him is to serve God.

## The Audience

The word *dispersed* was a technical term for the *diaspora*, or the Jews who had been scattered among the Gentile population and did not live in Palestine. They were therefore exposed to both gentile persecution and gentile conduct. That the twelve tribes are mentioned shows that Israel has never ceased to be a distinguishable entity in the sight of God.

This letter was written around A.D. 45 to 48, making it one of the first books of the New Testament. It is addressed to Christian Jews who were surrounded by various tests (1:2) and who had been mistreated by the rich (James 2:6, 5:1-6). Their spiritual state was low, as indicated by their speech (3:1-18), by their partiality (2:1-12), by their friendship with the world (4:1-17), and by their doctrinal confusion over the relationship of faith and works (2:14-26).

## THE DOCTRINE OF TESTING 1:2-12

### The Attitude for Testing 1:2

*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials...”*

The words *my brethren* show that the teaching to follow is exclusively for believers. It is saying, “This is personal mail; it is for Christians only.”

The imperative verb *consider* is the first of forty-six commands found in the book of James. It tells us the expected attitude toward testing. That it is a command shows that it is not a natural attitude but an attitude that must be learned. The words *all joy* come first in the sentence and are thus emphatic. As James views it, joy is the mental attitude derived from the settled conviction that everything that happens to us is intended to be an instrument to bring us to spiritual maturity. Joy is distinct from pleasure. Pleasure is an emotion derived from looking at an event and seeing how good it can make us feel; this happens occasionally. On the other hand, joy is a mental attitude that views an event and sees how it can make us grow; this can happen continuously. Unfortunately, many of us would rather feel good than grow well.

James, in a few short words, tells us three things about tests. First, tests are for every believer without exception. James does not say *if* we encounter tests; he says *when* we encounter tests. The word *when* is a particle used for things that one knows will occur. We do not know the nature of the tests to come our way or their intensity, but we do know their inevitability (I Peter 4:12, Acts 14:22). Second, tests come unannounced and unexpected. The word *encounter* means *to fall into something so as to be surrounded*. It is a compound verb made up of a word meaning *to fall* plus a preposition, *peri*, which means *around*. We find it in English words such as *perimeter*, meaning *meters around*. Luke 10:30 is a vivid example of this word, telling of the man who *fell among robbers*. Third, tests are many

faceted, as conveyed by the word *various*. It is used by the Septuagint to describe Joseph's varicolored tunic (Genesis 37:3).

### The Explanation of Testing 1:3

*"...knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."*

The word *knowing* is a participle that may express both cause and means. Knowledge is the means whereby we are enabled to maintain the attitude commanded in verse 2. It is also true that it is the cause of the attitude. The word translated *endurance* refers to load carrying capability and "stick-to-itiveness." There is a nice progression of thought from here through verse 12. Testing can produce endurance (1:3), maturity (1:4), wholeness of character (1:4), a true scale of values (1:9-10), and a crown (1:12).

Testing is not directed toward the strength of our body, our emotions, or our will; it is directed toward the strength of our faith. The word translated *testing* is *dokimon* and conveys two ideas with it. First, it may refer to the means of testing—the thing that does the testing—the crucible. Second, it may refer to the results of the testing. Applied in this passage, it refers to the part of our faith that remains after having been tested.

### The Benefit of Testing 1:4

*"And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

The word *let* describes our responsibility in the midst of testing. It is the second command we have met in the book of James. It reminds us that we may hinder and get in the way of what God wants to do for us through testing. It shows that we have a vital part in letting testing achieve a successful end.

The word *perfect* means *to be brought to a full end—to arrive at a mature end*. The word *complete*, literally translated, means *having all its parts*.

### The Provision for Testing 1:5-8

*"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup>But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup>being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

#### *The Single Difficulty 1:5a*

The word *if* introduces a first class conditional sentence, which means the condition described is assumed to be true—"if you lack wisdom, and you certainly do" is the idea. Wisdom refers to the

skill of applying truth to everyday life situations. Knowledge perceives truth, and wisdom applies truth. James is telling us how we should rejoice in testing, and this requires a big dose of wisdom.

### ***The Single Remedy 1:5b***

There is a link between wisdom and prayer. In the early church James was called “camel knees” because he was a man of prayer. James relates prayer to wisdom (1:5-8), to unity among Christians (4:1-3), to the believer’s emotional life (5:13a), to our physical life (5:13b), to our personal problems (5:16), and to material things (5:17). The order here is teaching concerning testing, followed by prayer for the ability to apply it, followed by God’s promise to give us this ability. We are to ask God for the ability to look at tests as we should.

### ***The Single Resource 1:5c***

On the positive side, God gives *generously*. The word *generously* means *sincerely and openly*. It refers to an act motivated solely by a desire to bless. It means *to give freely with no bargaining involved*. On the negative side, God gives *without reproach*. God never says we ask too much, for He is generous; and God never says we ask too often, for He does not rebuke us.

### ***The Single Condition 1:6-8***

The mention of faith refers back to the request made in verse 5. God is gracious and generous and does not rebuke our prayers; but on the other hand, He will not be called a liar, which is what absence of faith does. To be *double-minded* means *to halt between two opinions*, which always manifests itself in instability and immaturity.

## **The Attitude in Testing 1:9-11**

*“But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; <sup>10</sup>and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup>For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.”*

### ***Testing Helps the Poor Believer Gain a True Scale of Values 1:9***

The words *humble circumstances* refer to the believer’s earthly surroundings. How could humble surroundings help one gain a true scale of values? Humble circumstances cause the believer to look away from material possessions so that he will see his spiritual possessions. The high position would call to attention his position in Christ. True wealth is found in our position in Christ.

***Testing Helps the Rich Believer Gain a True Scale of Values 1:10-11***

As in verse 9, the believer's earthly surroundings are in view, except this man is rich. The reference to his humiliation indicates that one day he will lose his riches. The lesson flowing from this testing rests on the fact that material possessions tend to make one feel secure; their removal forces one to turn to God for security. Verse 11 illustrates the transitory nature of material wealth.

**The Reward of Testing 1:12**

*"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

Notice that the reward comes after the testing has been endured. There may be much time wrapped up in the word *once*. It is also important to see that the reward is eternal, not temporal; it is given then, not now.

**TEMPTATIONS FROM WITHIN 1:13-18****THE ERROR TO BE CORRECTED 1:13A**

*"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God...' "*

Temptation and testing must be distinguished, though the same Greek word is often used for each. First, testing may be defined as *pressure brought by God to assist in the development of the believer's faith*. Its purpose is to bring out the good (James 1:1-12). Second, temptation is *the solicitation to sin issuing from the world, the flesh, and the devil*. Its purpose is to bring out the bad (James 1:13-18). God is never the source of latter.

**THE TRUTH TO BE LEARNED 1:13B-18****Concerning God's Sinless Nature 1:13b**

*"...for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one."*

God cannot be tempted because there is nothing within His character to which sin may appeal. One cannot be tempted to respond to that which is not a potential pleasure, and God knows no pleasure in sin. It therefore follows that He does not tempt any man to sin. Notice that the action of God is explained by the character of God. God acts in harmony with His perfect and sinless nature in all things.

### Concerning Man's Sinful Nature 1:14-16

*"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. <sup>15</sup>Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. <sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."*

#### *The Source of Temptation 1:14*

This verse tells us where temptation originates. The term *his own lust* points to the source. Everyone has an innate responder to sin; Paul often calls it the flesh, and sometimes we refer to it as the sin nature. It cannot be abolished nor improved upon nor refined. We can learn, however, to say no to its sinful promptings. The word *lust* may be translated *desire*. From simple desire, a chain is forged. Simple desire becomes strong imagination, which engages in vicarious participation, leading to actual participation. What is vicariously enjoyed will eventually be actually enjoyed.

This verse also tells us how the sin nature works. The verb *carried away* is a hunting term for luring an animal away from its place of shelter. The verb *enticed* is a fishing term meaning *to ensnare by using bait*.

#### *The Sequence of Temptation 1:15-16*

The word then marks the point in time at which man yields to the suggestion of sin. Verse 14 speaks of the presence of desire (*lust*); verse 15 speaks of the pregnancy of desire. The metaphor of pregnancy and childbirth is appropriate. Sin, like a child at birth, has long been alive but is now made manifest. All sin incubates in the mind before it becomes overt. The sequence is conception, which takes place in the mind, then the birth of sin, and finally death. The expression *brings forth* was a technical medical term for a safe delivery. The words *do not be deceived* prohibit an action that is in progress. We could say, "Stop being deceived."

### Concerning God's Good Nature 1:17-18

*"Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. <sup>18</sup>In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."*

#### *God's Goodness in the Natural Sphere 1:17*

First, James focuses on the gifts of God. Nothing but good issues from God (I Timothy 4:4, 6:17). Second, he focuses on the giver Himself. Why is God called the *Father of lights*? The word *lights* is used of the heavenly bodies such as stars, planets, and constellations. This gives reason for the title: The heavenly bodies exist in lavish abundance; we have yet to discover their number. So with God, His goodnesses are without number. Linked to this fact is the

truth that such a lavish giver never changes. The word *variation* was used of the rising and setting of the sun, thus continual change. *Shifting shadow* literally translated would read *shadow cast by turning*. The turning of the earth causes part of it to be black, but God has no dark side.

### ***God's Goodness in the Spiritual Sphere 1:18***

First, God is the cause of the new birth, for it comes about in the *exercise of His will*. Second, the means of the new birth is expressed by the words *word of truth*. Third, the purpose of the new birth is that we might be His *first fruits*. With the mention of the *word of truth*, James hints at the theme of verses 19-27, the believer's relationship to the word of God.

## **APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING**

***Due to the good purpose of God in testing, we as believers should have a very relaxed mental attitude (1:2).***

***It is important that we cooperate with the Lord in not fighting testing (1:4).***

***Our thought process is of extreme importance since it may incubate sin and experience deception (1:14-16).*** This presents strong argument for the study and memorization of the word of God. It is truly our only alternative to deception.

***Even where a perfect testimony exists, a family member may go years before coming to know Christ (1:1).*** James was exposed to the life and teaching of Jesus for thirty years before he came to know Him.

***The issue is the same in every test we experience: "Do I believe the word of God?" (1:8)*** The nature of the test is not the important issue; our response to the test is the issue.

## NOTES



# **T**he Believer and the Word of God *or “Receiving the Saving Word”*

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James 1:19-27

## **THE BELIEVER’S DUTY TO THE WORD OF GOD 1:19-21**

### **OUR DUTY SUMMARIZED 1:19**

*“This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger...”*

Mention was made of the *word of truth* in verse 18. The subject of the rest of James, chapter 1, is how to treat the word of truth that we have received. Verses 19 and 20 are written in order to clear the way for the command of verse 22. These verses spell out the preparation necessary for the proper reception of the word of God.

First, we are to be *quick to hear*. Speed associated with hearing suggests readiness and eagerness to listen. The believer must have aggressive ears. James himself is a good example of ears open to the word. In this letter James alludes to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, I Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and seven of the minor prophets! Second, we are to *be slow to speak*. Notice that speed is associated with the learning process, and slowness is associated with the proclaiming process. Proclaiming truth is very important, and James is not discouraging it; but there can be no effective proclaiming unless we possess truth. Third, we are to be *slow to anger*. Much talk often ends with someone saying something that makes others angry; therefore, this command is the logical result of the first two.

### **OUR DUTY SUPPORTED 1:20**

*“...for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”*

An angry attitude is not the atmosphere in which righteousness flourishes.

## OUR DUTY IMPLEMENTED 1:21

“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

### On the Negative Side of Things 1:21a

The word *therefore* introduces what we must do in order to properly receive God’s word—we must handle sin. Fellowship with the Lord is the first step of Bible study. Sin is handled via confession, as indicated by I John 1:9. The word of God needs clean soil in which to grow.

### On the Positive Side of Things 1:21b

The word *receive* means *to welcome warmly and readily*. Doing this *in humility* refers to a docile, submissive, child-like attitude. The word *implanted* indicates that those being addressed are genuine believers. The word was linked to the new birth in James 1:18. The ability of the word to save our souls refers to its cleansing and health bringing work that it does in the life of the believer as he responds to it.

## OUR OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD 1:22-25

### THE COMMAND TO OBEDIENCE 1:22

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

The word *prove* translates the Greek word *ginomai*, which means *to become*. It is used of the movement from one state or condition to another. It is used of the incarnation of Christ—“the Word became flesh...” (John 1:14). It is in the present tense and thus refers to an ongoing process. We could say, “Keep on becoming doers of the word....” Learning obedience is a continual process; we never arrive. Every time we become a doer it is time to become a doer again. James 1:19 told us to be *quick to hear*, but lest we misunderstand, we are reminded that the process does not end with our ears. James 1:22 expands by saying “don’t be hearers only.”

The word *doer* is used six times in the New Testament, and four are found in James. The term *hearer* was used to identify a person who attended the synagogue services without necessarily becoming disciples. As a result, the hearer might develop great admiration for the rabbi or teacher or receive emotional and intellectual stimulation; but the New Testament has no room for this kind of person. We are not to audit the word of God; we are to obey the word of God.

## THE ILLUSTRATION OF OBEDIENCE 1:23-25

### From a Negative Standpoint 1:23-24

*“For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup>for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”*

The word *looks* emphasizes a quick glance. A word heard and never put into practice is soon forgotten. As a result of the quick look, he forgets what he saw. “Out of sight is out of mind” is his motto.

### From a Positive Standpoint 1:25

*“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.”*

The word *looks* in this verse is different than the word *looks* in verses 23-24. It means *to stoop over to look* and thus *look intently*. It refers to a long, intense, deep gaze. It is used in John 20:5 and 11 to describe the look of those who peered into the empty tomb of Jesus. It takes little imagination to visualize the kind of look that saw the empty tomb. Long observation lessens the possibility of forgetting and thus opens the way for obedience. Careful attention to God’s word creates obedience. The word is called *the perfect law, the law of liberty*. This is appropriate because its perfection is seen in its flawless accuracy and its absolute sufficiency. The word *liberty* is used because the word frees us from false views and leads us into the freedom of truth.

## OUR MANIFESTATION OF THE WORD OF GOD 1:26-27

*“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup>This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”*

### IN OUR SPEECH 1:26

#### The Man’s Opinion

The word *religious* means *to observe a very careful outward form of worship*. It is to be religiously meticulous. James is very hard on those who profess more than they practice. James tests spiritual reality by conduct.

**The Man's Sin**

James will have much to say about the tongue, and this verse is his first statement. He will teach us that if we gain control of our tongues, we will have control of everything else. The *bridle* is used to keep the horse from running away.

**The Man's Delusion**

| Performance religion blinds!

**The Man's Worth**

| James says that when a tongue runs away (loose at both ends), this proves the flesh controls us and our *religion* is worthless.

**IN OUR BENEVOLENCE 1:27A**

| The *orphans and widows* were the most bereft class of individuals in the Old Testament. The Old Testament law made some very special provisions for their care. They had no help except that which others provided.

**IN OUR PURITY 1:27B**

| The believer may be “dirtied” by the environment that surrounds him. This verse will be amplified when we come to chapter 4.

**APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING**

*Personal preparation is the prelude to personal application of the word of God (1:21).*

*Profession is inadequate to establish the reality of one's relationship to the Lord (1:26).*

*The word of God becomes part of us only when we focus on it with intensity (1:25).*

# The Sin of Favoritism

*or “Catering to the Man with the Gold Ring”*

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James 2:1-13

## THE COMMAND CONCERNING FAVORITISM 2:1

*“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.”*

The address *my brethren* shows us that James is discussing defects among believers. The verb *hold* is in present tense and forbids the continuation of an existing attitude—“do not continue holding....” Faith in Christ and favoritism are totally incompatible; they cannot coexist. Why is this so? Because Christ died for all sorts of men without respect to their merit, their wealth, or their social status. To select some for preferential treatment is to exhibit an attitude foreign to God’s. The single noun translated *personal favoritism* is colorful. It is the compound word *prosopolampsia*. It is the noun *prosopon*, which means *face*, and the verb *lambano*, which means *to receive*. It was used for a judge who allowed his decision to be affected by the person rather than the facts of the case. The statue of justice is a woman blindfolded. She is not to consider the status or appearance of the one who stands before her. That favoritism is foreign to God is seen by the repeated statement in Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, and Colossians 3:25.

Since partiality is the theme of these verses, it would be well to make a few observations in the interest of a balanced view. First, impartiality does not mean everyone is to be treated equally and in the same way. I Timothy 5 has a long list of qualities that a widow must have if she is to be enrolled by the church. To treat everyone the same would destroy leadership and contradict sound reason. Second, impartiality does mean that all are to be treated fairly and scripturally.

## THE EXAMPLE OF FAVORITISM 2:2-3

### THE TWO VISITORS 2:2

“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes...”

#### The Well Dressed

The word *if* introduces a third class conditional sentence showing that James is introducing a hypothetical case. The word *assembly* is *sunagoga* (synagogue), which means *a meeting place*. A gold ring was part of being opulently dressed (Luke 15:22). The term *fine clothes* means *bright and shining—striking!*

#### The Poorly Dressed

### THE TWO RESPONSES 2:3

“...and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool...’ ”

#### The Response to the Well Dressed 2:3a

Notice that both responses are superficial in that they are based solely on external appearance. First, the well dressed man is given a special courtesy. The word *you* is emphatic and thus picks him out from among all the others. Second, he is given special seating. Our translation overlooks the word that means *please* indicating overdone courtesy.

#### The Response to the Poorly Dressed 2:3b

He is treated discourteously, for he may either *stand* or *sit*. He is not even offered a chair; he either stands up or sits on the floor. The footstool is the place where the speaker would put his feet.

## THE CONDEMNATION OF FAVORITISM 2:4

### THE MIND OF DOUBLE ALLEGIANCE

The word *distinctions* means *to be divided in one’s mind*. The single mind is one that operates solely on the basis of doctrine and rejects man’s viewpoint. Beginning with verse 5, James will present the doctrinal concepts that favoritism contradicts.

### THE MIND OF EVIL MOTIVES

The word *motives* refers to one’s whole way of thinking, one’s mental attitude approach to life. One does not have to be very

perceptive to guess what evil motive lurks behind the usher's treatment of the well-to-do visitor. Churches rarely forget the offering plate!

## THE CONTRADICTIONS OF FAVORITISM 2:5-13

### FAVORITISM CONTRADICTS THE CHOICES OF GOD 2:5A

*"Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world..."*

The makeup of the church does not reflect the higher social classes or the wealthy. In fact, the pattern is just the opposite. When God chose an earthly family for His Son to enter, He chose Joseph and Mary who were poor (albeit there were other reasons). When God chose a place for His son to lie as a baby, He chose the feeding trough for animals. Paul develops this point in an expanded form in I Corinthians 1:26-31. See *Commentary and Outline of I Corinthians* pages 9-10.

### FAVORITISM CONTRADICTS POSITIONAL TRUTH 2:5B

*"...to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"*

Positional truth is that body of doctrine that tells us of our union with Christ and its repercussions. The poorly dressed believer had been viewed as truly poor. This is not true; there is no such thing as a genuinely poor believer if we understand what true riches are. Faith is more important than clothing, and they had plenty of that; and God's kingdom, of which they were heirs, involves fabulous wealth. We are to treat one another on the basis of our position in Christ (Romans 15:7).

### FAVORITISM CONTRADICTS REALITIES OF LIFE 2:6-7

*"But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?"*

### In Terms of How the World Treats the Believer 2:6

The word *you* is emphatic and establishes a contrast. The contrast is between how God views these poor believers and how you treat them. God chose them; you disgraced them. A few examples of how the rich treat believers may be found in Acts 4:1-3 where they arrested them, 13:50 where they persecuted the first two missionaries, 16:19 where Paul and Silas were dragged into court, and 19:23-41 where they roused the people against Paul. Even some of those to whom James writes had been mistreated by them (James 5:6).

| Favoritism is illogical: They honored their oppressors and dishonored their friends.

### **In Terms of How the World Views Christ 2:7**

| The rich of this world have no use for Christ; they dishonor our Lord.

## **FAVORITISM CONTRADICTS SCRIPTURE 2:8-13**

### **The RX for Favoritism: Love 2:8**

| *“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”*

| Why is Scripture called the *royal law*? First, because its source is the king of the universe, the sovereign God. Second, because its recipients were a *kingdom of priests* (Exodus 19:6). A prime evidence of love is the refusal to pass judgment on another by externals.

### **The Pointed Condemnation of Favoritism: It Is Sin 2:9**

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

| The word *if* introduces a first class conditional sentence, which assumes the statement to be true. They were, as a matter of fact, showing partiality. In so doing, the word of God defines and condemns their sin.

### **The Sober Truth: Any and All Disobedience to the Word of God is Extremely Serious 2:10-13**

| *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. <sup>11</sup>For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup>So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup>For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

#### ***The Point Demonstrated 2:10***

| The Law issues only two grades: pass or fail. James is attacking the kind of thinking that believes that obedience in one area will somehow compensate for disobedience in another. The Law is like a pane of glass—when any part is broken, it is all broken. This characteristic of the Law is why attempting to obey it cannot bring salvation but only condemnation (Galatians 5:1-4).

#### ***The Point Illustrated 2:11***

| All of the word of God comes from the same source, and disobedience to any part of it is disobedience to the same God.



***The Point Applied 2:12-13***

The word of God is our critic and judge. It informs us of our problems and informs us of their solutions—total coverage. In what sense are we judged by the law of liberty? The judgment of sin took place, and the cross need never be repeated. The judgment spoken of here is that of discipline within the family of God.

**APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING**

*We must never forget that true doctrine and right conduct are inseparable (2:5-13).*

*We must view one another from the standpoint of our position in Christ—this is unconditional love (2:5).*

*The church must keep free from material motivations for the biggest giver.*

**NOTES**

## NOTES

# Faith and Works

or “Faith Professed or Possessed”

James 2:14-26

## FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD 2:14-17

### THE ARGUMENT OF JAMES 2:14

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?”

### The Profession Made 2:14a

James does not say that this person *has* faith; he says the person *says* he has faith. In other words, his faith is professed but not possessed. It is a faith that exists only in words, not in reality. The verse is not saying one man has faith and the other has works; it is saying one man says he has faith, and the other has works. James is dealing with profession, and this must be kept in mind in order to understand these verses.

### The Question Asked 2:14b

The question “Can that faith save him?” is constructed in such a way so as to expect a “no” answer. The word *that* with the noun *faith* is a definite article and means *can the aforementioned faith (lip faith) save him?* The answer is obvious—no, it cannot. Faith is a matter of the heart, not the mouth. Faith that is genuine is determined by works, not by words. James and Paul harmonize perfectly when one sees the perspective of each. Paul links works to the keeping of the Law and notes that they cannot bring salvation (Romans 3:20). James, on the other hand, links works and faith together as fruit and root. In regard to justification by faith, James uses the same verse, Genesis 15:6, that Paul uses repeatedly to teach justification by faith (James 2:23). Paul emphasizes that faith alone justifies; James emphasizes that works prove the reality of faith. In Paul, faith is the root of righteousness; in James, works is the fruit of righteousness.

## THE ILLUSTRATION OF JAMES 2:15-16

*“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”*

Notice the continued emphasis upon lip service. The person does nothing but only says, “Go in peace....” Empty words are again the focal point. The words are empty because the works are missing.

## THE CONCLUSION OF JAMES 2:17

*“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”*

Though omitted in our translation, the noun *faith* has the definite article *the* with it. The emphasis is not on faith in general, but rather on a particular kind of faith—that is, professed faith. Inoperative sympathy indicates inoperative faith. While we are saved by faith alone, genuine faith is never alone. The issue, therefore, is not to attempt to crank out some works to go along with faith; the issue is to determine the reality of faith by examining one’s works.

## FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEMONIAL 2:18-26

### THE ARGUMENT OF JAMES 2:18-20

*“But someone may well say, ‘You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ <sup>19</sup>You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. <sup>20</sup>But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”*

Note that the demonstration of faith spoken of here is not toward God but toward man—show *me* James says. The pronoun *me* shows that the demonstration is directed manward, not Godward. God can look at the heart and tell what is genuine—man cannot; man must have some kind of tangible evidence. The verb *show* means *to prove by producing evidence*. Matthew 8:4 is a good illustration of the word. A leper has been healed, and the Lord tells him to “show yourself to the priest.” He is to present himself to the priest as evidence to be examined. Verse 19 refers to another type of faith—faith in the oneness of God. The faith of demons is given in terms of its content. Demons believe in the unity and oneness of God. This is not the kind of faith that saves. Faith without works is not inconsistent with the orthodoxy of demons. The orthodoxy of demons is shown by verses such as Mark 1:24, 34, and 3:11, where they assert truth concerning Jesus.

## THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF JAMES 2:21-25

### Abraham Illustrates the Link of Faith and Works 2:21-24

#### *The Justification of Abraham in the Eyes of Man 2:21-22*

*“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup>You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.”*

It is important to note that the justification of Abraham is linked to distinct and separate occasions. In verses 21-22 it is linked to the offering of Isaac found in Genesis 22; in verse 23 it is linked to the event of Genesis 15. Some thirty years lie between the two events, and yet his justification is directly linked to each. How can this be? The answer lies in that Genesis 15 speaks of his justification as God saw it, and Genesis 22 speaks of his justification as proved before the eyes of man. Genesis 15 tells of the condition of his heart without any outward proof; Genesis 22 gives evidence that man can see—the offering of his son Isaac. The faith of Genesis 15 was genuine but invisible to man; the faith of Genesis 22 was visible to man. A man who would offer his son in obedience to God is obviously a man of true faith. Genesis 15 was the inception of his faith; Genesis 22 was the demonstration of his faith.

Faith and works are inseparable. The word *perfected* means *to bring something to its goal*. Faith gets its manifestation through the vehicle of works.

#### *The Justification of Abraham in the Eyes of God 2:23-24*

*“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup>You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”*

James has no quarrel with Paul for he marks the point of Abraham’s justification at the same place. The word *reckoned* is a bookkeeping term for entry into a ledger. This is developed in a doctrinal way in Romans 4, the “imputation” chapter of the New Testament.

### Rahab Illustrates the Link of Faith and Works 2:25

*“And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”*

Hebrews 11:31 reads, “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.” This verse in Hebrews links Rahab’s justification to her receiving of the messengers; the verse in James adds the words *and sent them out by another way*. James would argue that we could not know that she had faith just because she received the messengers; we can know she had faith only when we see the

| messengers coming safely out of her house. Once again, James argues that justification can only be verified by men when they observe the works that accompany it.

### THE CONCLUSION OF JAMES 2:26

| *“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”*

| Faith without works is not unlike a corpse, a telling metaphor.

| See the appendix of these notes entitled “Observations on Faith” for further study in the doctrine of faith.

### APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

*Does my faith consist of words only?* If so, then we should examine its reality. The stress of James is not “do more works,” but rather “examine your faith.”

*Do my works sufficiently demonstrate my faith before men?* This does not mean we should live our lives as unto men; it does show the importance of a living testimony of the reality of our relationship to the Lord.

# **T**he Tongue

## or “The Tiny Titanic”

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James 3:1-12

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TONGUE 3:1-2

*“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup>For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”*

#### RELATIVE TO TEACHING 3:1

##### Concerning the Number of Teachers 3:1a

The tongue seems to be James’s favorite subject since he refers to it in 1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11; and 5:12. The position of teacher was very important in the early church. Their prominence is demonstrated by the place they held in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1).

I Corinthians 12:28 lists gifts in order of importance saying, “...first apostles, second prophets, third teachers....” Truly, teachers were important for they were communicators of truth and doctrine.

The number of teachers, however, should be few. The structure of verse 1 is such that it forbids a practice that was going on. Thus, we could translate, “Stop the practice of many of you becoming teachers.” The tongue is the teacher’s chief tool, and yet it is the means whereby all of us stumble the most (3:2). The link between teaching and stumbling is indicated by the word *for* at the beginning of verse 2. The action expressed by the participle *knowing* precedes the action of the verb *become*. This means that the accountability involved in teaching should be understood before one takes on the responsibility of teaching.

##### Concerning the Accountability of Teachers 3:1b

The last half of verse 1 shows there is good reason for not becoming a teacher. Teachers face a stricter judgment. Why should this be? The answer is not hard to find. Since they are called upon to

teach and apply truth, they would naturally find themselves passing judgment in regard to the lives of others. They have a greater responsibility because the instrument of their work is the tongue; and as we shall see, it wields great influence. Deep involvement with truth increases accountability.

## RELATIVE TO STUMBLING 3:2

### The Bridled Tongue Is the Sign of Maturity

The word *all* in verse 2 is an emphatic form. It stresses that there are no exceptions to what James is saying. The emphatic form is followed by the phrase *in what he says* placed in the emphatic position. The usual word for man is *anthropos*, which is generic and can take in women also. This, however, is not the word used here. James uses *anar*; which is often used to mean *husband*. He may well have in mind a quality of a good husband.

### The Bridled Tongue Is the Sign of Total Self Control

The word *stumble* is used by James for a sin committed against God's word. This is easily seen to be the case by referring back to James 2:10 where stumbling is a synonym of sinning. The words *in what he says* are in the emphatic position emphasizing the theme of verse 2. Ability to control the tongue is ability to control the entire person.

## THE POWER OF THE TONGUE 3:3-6

### ITS POWER TO GUIDE 3:3-4

*"Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. <sup>4</sup>Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires."*

The point common to each illustration of the power of the tongue is this: Each is very small in relationship to the influence it exerts. The horse has both size and strength, all guided by the bit in the mouth. The ship is acted upon by the powerful forces of nature, and yet the tiny rudder sets its direction. The ideas involved are guidance, ability to control, and influence. Verse 5 shows that self-exaltation is the thing the tongue busies itself with the most.

### ITS POWER TO HARM 3:5-6

*"So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell."*



The tongue is viewed from the standpoint of its contents, for it holds the very world of iniquity; its pervasiveness is seen in that it defiles the entire body, and its effects are pictured as setting on fire the course of life. Finally, James points to its source—set on fire by hell.

## THE INSUBORDINATION OF THE TONGUE 3:7-8

*“For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup>But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”*

### THE ANIMAL KINGDOM CAN BE TAMED BY MAN 3:7

The verb *is tamed* is present tense and points to a commonly understood ongoing activity. The term *has been tamed* is perfect tense, referring to the successful activities of the past and the assured successes of the future. We could say man controls his dog better than he controls his tongue! The serpent is charmed by music quicker than the tongue submits to the will of God.

### THE HUMAN TONGUE CANNOT BE TAMED BY MAN 3:8

It is a *restless evil*, like a ferocious animal waiting to attack; it is *full of deadly poison* like a serpent ready to inject its venom. The deadliness of the tongue is seen in that it suggests sin, it commits sin, and finally, it defends the sin.

## THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE TONGUE 3:9-12

*“With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup>from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. <sup>11</sup>Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh.”*

### THE INCONSISTENCY INTRODUCED 3:9-10

We use the same instrument to offer praise to God that we use to curse the driver who cuts us off on the freeway. This is an incongruity which *ought not to be*. The tongue reflects the control of the Holy Spirit or the control of the sin nature, and both cannot control at the same time.

### THE INCONSISTENCY ILLUSTRATED 3:11-12

Creation offers a consistency that rebukes the inconsistency of man. See the appendix of these notes for a study of the biblical words for speech sins.

### APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

*We must ever keep in mind the power of our words—for good or for evil (3:2).*  
How many times have the words of another stuck in our minds, never to be forgotten?

*The control of our tongue is more revealing than the control of our temper (3:8).*

### NOTES

# The Two Kinds of Wisdom

*or “Wisdom from Below and  
Wisdom from Above”*

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James 3:13-18

## THE DEMAND FOR WISDOM 3:13

| “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

### THE QUESTION 3:13A

| The question may be paraphrased by saying, “Who among you knows the facts and is able to apply them to life (has understanding and wisdom both)?” The word translated *understanding* is used only here in the New Testament. It refers to a skilled, scientific person—an expert. This knowledge must be demonstrated in some way. The following verses show how to test it in order to determine its origin.

### THE ANSWER 3:13B

| If any among you believe you can answer the question by saying “I do,” then it will reveal itself in behavior. James never accepts words or profession as a proof of reality. It is not what we say but what we are and what we do that counts. Evidence must be tangible.

| If any among you believe you can answer the question by saying “I do,” then it will reveal itself in humility. Negatively stated, humility is the absence of self-assertion. Verses 14-16 will tell us more about true wisdom and humility by way of contrast to the false.

## THE DESCRIPTION OF WISDOM 3:14-18

### THE WISDOM FROM BELOW 3:14-16

*“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”*

#### Its Motives Are Sinful 3:14

The word *lie* means *to play false*. Arrogance plays false in regard to the truth. This shows the difference between legitimate self-confidence and arrogance. Arrogance is an attitude contrary to the facts; legitimate confidence is not.

#### Its Source Is Sinful 3:15

That it is earthly points to the world; that it is natural points to the flesh; that it is demonic points to the devil.

#### Its Products Are Sinful 3:16

### THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE 3:17-18

*“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

The word *pure* refers to the characteristic of shrinking from contamination; and *peaceable* means *one always seeks a peaceful solution to a problem*. To be *gentle* means *to make allowances for others*.

## APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

*No one is wise who is not also good.* As far as the word of God is concerned, there are no wise bad people. Wisdom is a moral quality, not merely an intellectual quality.

*If the seed of wisdom and righteousness is to grow, it must have a peaceful environment in which to do it (3.18).*

# Rebuke of Worldliness

*or “Analyzing and Avoiding Hedonism”*

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James 4:1-17

## THE ATTITUDE OF WORLDLINESS 4:1-10

### ITS SOURCE 4:1

*“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”*

The word *pleasures* is the Greek word *hadona* from which our English word *hedonism* comes. It is a philosophical term that considers the *summum bonum* of life. It is the approach to life that says the highest good is self-gratification. In fact, “desire for self-gratification” would be a good translation. It is used three times outside the book of James. First, it is the mark of a false teacher (II Peter 2:13). Second, it describes the life style of the unbeliever (Titus 3:3). Third, its presence will cause the word of God to be smothered out of our lives (Luke 8:14).

### ITS RESULTS 4:2-3

*“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

### It Results in a Life of Continual Frustration 4:2

Notice the twice repeated chain of desire—frustration—violence. Frustration follows desire because every time desire is fulfilled it comes back desiring more. Man’s “wanter” is never satisfied, and yet millions are spent in an effort to fulfill it.

### It Results in a Life of Wrongly Motivated Prayer 4:3

The last sentence of verse 2 presents an important truth: The only source of real and lasting pleasure is God Himself. We often do not go to God with our desires because we are sure He doesn’t offer

what we think we want. The words *wrong motives* in verse 3 translate the single Greek word *kakos*, which means *evil*. The word *pleasures* is the word *hadona*, which we have in verse 1. It is possible to pray with evil motives, centering around self-gratification.

### ITS DESCRIPTION 4:4-5

*“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?”*

### The Name Applied to Worldliness

Worldliness is adultery. Why is this figure appropriate? Because the nature of marriage is exclusiveness, and adultery is the violation of that condition. Worldliness violates our exclusive relationship to Christ. Revelation 21:9 views the church as Christ’s bride.

### The Position Brought About by Worldliness

The word *wishes* focuses on our volition. This does not mean we may not have friends who are unbelievers, nor does it mean we should move to an isolated spot in the wilderness. The issue is our will; we are not to desire friendship with the world. The reasoning is this: To be on warm terms with the world is to be on warm terms with the enemy of God, which in turn makes us the enemy of God also.

The word *world* refers to all activities and attitudes that are actively or passively contrary to the will of God.

### The Indwelling Resistance to Worldliness

It seems best to take the noun *Spirit* as a reference, not to our human spirit, but rather to the indwelling Holy Spirit. To speak of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us is normal New Testament usage. The verb *dwell* refers to a permanent residency. God is always intolerant of divided allegiance because He is described as “a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). See also Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 32:16, and Zechariah 8:2.

### ITS REMEDY 4:6-10

#### As Always, Solutions Start with Divine Provision 4:6

*“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ ”*

God’s grace is the only thing that is greater than man’s need. There are four concepts about God’s grace in this verse. First, we must realize its availability—*He gives*. Second, we must realize its ade-

quacy—*greater grace*. Third, we must realize it can be hindered by pride. Fourth, we must realize its condition—*grace to the humble*.

### **As Always, Divine Provisions Entail Human Responsibility 4:7-10**

*“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

*<sup>8</sup>Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”*

The link between divine provision and human responsibility is seen in the word *therefore*. Since the solution is *from* God, we must respond *to* God.

#### ***We Are to Submit to God***

Submission is the single greatest responsibility of the believer. It is used of our relationship to God; a wife’s responsibility to her husband; a slave’s relationship to his master; and a child’s relationship to his parents.

#### ***We Are to Resist the Devil***

The word *resist* means *to take one’s stand*. How is this to be done? We are to do it by the exercise of faith (Ephesians 6:16); we are to do it by alertness (I Peter 5:8).

#### ***We Are to Draw Near to God***

This is James’s way of saying, “Maintain fellowship with the Lord.”

#### ***We Are to Keep Our Hands Clean***

The word for *cleanse* is the same as the one used in I John 1:9.

#### ***We Are to Purify Our Hearts***

I John 3:3 says, “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself.”

#### ***We Are to be Miserable and Weep***

Within the present context, the meaning of this is that sin is serious; and we are not to have a flippant attitude toward it. Christ came to bear our sins; and no laughter is recorded of Him, only tears.

#### ***We Are to Humble Ourselves***

James 4:6 shows how this is done. We humble ourselves by submitting to the grace of God.

## THE MANIFESTATION OF WORLDLINESS 4:11-12

*“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.  
<sup>12</sup>There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”*

### THE PROHIBITION 4:11

The word translated *speak against* is *katalaleo*, which is a compound of *kata*, meaning *down*, and *laleo*, meaning *to speak*. To slander is to make false accusations that damage another’s reputation. The word is broad enough to cover any form of speech directed against another person. The grammatical construction views this as a practice going on and forbids its continuance.

The law being violated is probably Leviticus 19:18, which commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves. When we disregard God’s word, we are sitting as judges on it; we are elevating ourselves to the position of its critic.

### THE AUDACITY 4:12

| Further, to pass judgment on God’s word is to play God.

## THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF WORLDLINESS 4:13-17

### THE PLAN 4:13

*“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ ”*

This verse is a prime example of worldliness. Worldliness is not revealed by what the person spoken of in this verse does, but rather in what he does not do. He plans and arranges his life without regard to God. Worldliness is living life as though God does not exist.

First, the one spoken of here confidently selects his time—*today or tomorrow*. Second, he confidently selects his place—*such and such a city*. Third, he confidently plans the length of his stay—*spend a year there*. Fourth, he confidently plans his activity—*engage in business*. Finally, he confidently plans his profit—*make a profit*. The organization and planning is all well and good, but it has a fatal flaw—it leaves out God.

### THE CORRECTION 4:14-16

| *“Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”<sup>15</sup>Instead, you*



| ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'  
| <sup>16</sup>But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil."

#### **You Are Overlooking the Uncertainty of Life 4:14**

| The person of verse 13 has planned his whole year; and yet in reality, he may not see the light of another day. When man omits God, he loses perspective on himself. To be ignorant of God is to be ignorant of ourselves. Worldliness turns man into an irrational creature wherein he forgets the most obvious truths of life. Worldliness is ordering our lives as though we are going to be here forever.

#### **You Are Overlooking the Sovereignty of God 4:15**

| The first word of verse 15 is *anti*, which is the Greek preposition of direct substitution. The submissive attitude of verse 15 should be substituted for the arrogant attitude of verse 13. The word *if* introduces a third class conditional sentence, meaning maybe he will or maybe he will not.

#### **You Are Overlooking Your Personal Arrogance 4:16**

| The antithesis to submission to the will of God is personal arrogance.

#### **THE CONCLUSION 4:17**

| "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."

| An important principle is seen in this verse—knowledge obligates! The words *right thing*, considered in their context, refer to the concept of submission to God found in verse 15.

### **APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING**

*Growth in the Christian life is nothing more than a continual replacement of the idiocy of our own minds with the intelligence of God's word (4:6).*

*Desire for self-gratification lies at the heart of all conflict among believers (4:1).*

## NOTES

# C<sup>o</sup>ndemnation and Exhortation

or “Riches, Patience, and Prayer”

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James 5:1-20

## CONDEMNATION OF MATERIALISM 5:1-6

### THE COMING JUDGMENT 5:1

*“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.”*

The rich ones addressed here appear to be unbelievers for two reasons. First, they are not numbered among the righteous (5:6); and second, the address to the brethren resumes with verse 7. The lessons concerning material wealth are for all, however. James 5:1-6 is a picture of the money-mad world in which we live.

### THE EXISTING CRIMES 5:2-6

#### The Wealth Was Not Put to Profitable Use 5:2-3

*“Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.  
<sup>3</sup>Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!”*

There were three basic forms of wealth in the ancient world. First, there was possession of oil and corn. The verb *rotted* would apply to them. The corn and oil would rot because of extended non-use. Second, there was possession of garments. The verb *have become moth-eaten* would apply to them. Once again, extended non-use is in view. Third, there was wealth in the form of gold and silver. The verb *have rusted* applies to this form of wealth. None of these three forms of wealth was used as intended, i.e., the welfare of man and the glory of God.

The decayed condition of the wealth will someday testify against its possessors. Money talks! And what will it say? It will testify to man’s greed and selfishness. The term *consume your flesh like fire* is a graphic way of saying their greed will result in their destruction.

### It Is Obtained Dishonestly 5:4

*“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”*

The biblical concept of wages results from dual principles: work deserves pay (James 5:4), and pay demands work (II Thessalonians 3:10). James doubtless has Deuteronomy 24:14-15 in mind at this point. The wealth spoken of in verse 4 was accumulated by unpaid bills. The omnipotent God is on the side of those who have been defrauded.

### It Is Used for Self-Indulgence 5:5

*“You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.”*

The luxurious living refers to a soft, enervating luxury that demoralizes. The words *wanton pleasure* point to extravagant and wasteful indulgences. The metaphor *fattened your hearts* says they are like cattle that gorge themselves right up to the day of slaughter. They are unaware that they are preparing themselves for slaughter.

### It Is Obtained Ruthlessly 5:6

*“You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.”*

Considering the context, the persecution of the righteous has to do with the obtaining of wealth. The last half of the verse points to the defenselessness of the righteous.

## EXHORTATION TO PATIENCE AND PRAYER 5:7-20

### BE PATIENT 5:7-12

#### We Are to be Patient Like a Farmer 5:7-9

*“Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. <sup>8</sup>You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”*

James has warned the oppressors of believers in a very stern manner—judgment is coming! However, it is typical of God to be very slow in executing judgment; God is extremely longsuffering. This requires the oppressed believer to be patient until that time.

There are two Greek words for patience, and both are found in these verses. First is *makrothymeo* and means *to possess the ability not to retaliate*. Its antonym would be expressed by the noun *revenge*. It relates primarily to one's reaction to mistreatment by people. It is listed in Galatians 5:22 among the fruits of the Spirit. The second is *hupomona* and means *ability to carry a load*. It relates primarily to our reactions to unfortunate events.

The reference to *early and late rains* is important. Palestine has two seasons, October to April and May to September. The first period brings the early rains, and the second brings the late rains. In the Old Testament the coming of these seasons was a reflection of the faithfulness of God (Deuteronomy 11:13-14). We should be patient because we can depend on the faithfulness of God. Verse 8 makes application of this fact. Patience is exhorted on the basis that we know the end. The nearness of the coming of the Lord may be understood only if we relate it to eternity. James points us in two directions—forward to the coming of the Lord and backward to the end of Job as seen in 5:11.

The word *complain* found in the command of verse 9 means *to moan or sigh*. The word is far reaching with more emphasis on inner distress than on outward complaint. It takes in unexpressed bitterness.

### **We Are to be Patient Like the Prophets 5:10**

*“As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”*

There is no prophet about whom we have information who is not an example of suffering and patience. Jeremiah, for example, was put in stocks (Jeremiah 20:2); he was thrown in prison (32:2); he was put in a dungeon (38:6)—all of this without recrimination.

### **We Are to be Steadfast Like Job 5:11-12**

*“Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. <sup>12</sup>But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.”*

Job was a patient man, as a look at Job 1:21-22, 2:10, 13:15, and 19:25-27 shows. He also had great load carrying capacity. The word translated *endurance* means just that. The type of oath referred to here is not the formal oath in such places as courts of law. James is referring to the oaths of informal conversation. A Christian should be honest and straightforward, not needing to enforce everything with an oath.

## BE PRAYERFUL 5:13-16

### In General 5:13

*“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”*

The emphasis here lies on the appropriateness of prayer in the whole gamut of life’s experiences. It is to be practiced when suffering, and it is to be practiced when cheerful. Jesus is the perfect example of prayer increasing as suffering increased (Luke 22:44).

### In Particular 5:14-16a

*“Is anyone among you sick? 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; <sup>15</sup>and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. <sup>16</sup>Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed....”*

A few preliminary observations should be made on these verses. First, they are used in Roman Catholic theology as a basis for extreme unction. A person *in extremis* has his ears, eyes, nostrils, hands, and feet anointed by a priest for sins he is not able to confess. The Douay translation says this is clearly taught here. That translation replaces the word *elders* with the word *priests*. The fatal objection to this teaching is that extreme unction anticipates imminent death, whereas these verses anticipate healing and recovery. Second, these verses are used by some who are so-called faith healers. The problem this raises is one of initiative. The elders do not say, “Come to us for healing”; it is rather the sick person who takes the initiative. Faith healing rests on the false premise that it is the will of God for all to be in robust health.

Some take the anointing to be medicinal. This has two problems with it. First, oil is not a medication for everything, even though it was widely used in the first century. Second, the restoration of the man is due to prayer, not anointing (5:15).

Verse 16 speaks of confession of sin to *one another*. This reciprocal pronoun must be interpreted by the context. The term *one another* takes in the sick person and the elders only; it does not refer to general confession of sin to fellow believers. It is also important to note that the existence of a need was expressed by the one who was experiencing the need. The sick person seeks out the elders, not the other way around.

The main verb of verse 14 is *let them pray*. This expresses the primary action to be taken. The word *anointing* is a participle and expresses the secondary or accompanying action. The word is a little misleading because it implies a sacramental or liturgical action. The word found here is not used for this kind of anointing.

It means *to smear or daub*. It appears to me that the oil is best taken to be symbolical of faith. Verse 14 speaks of prayer and anointing; verse 15 speaks of prayer and faith. Is faith a synonym of anointing in these verses? If so, the oil is a tangible symbol of faith. In John 9:1-7 Jesus anoints the man's eyes with spit, which is obviously symbolic.

It may be asked, where does this anointing take place? Since the sick person calls for the elders, it must take place in his home. These verses, then, are speaking of a private meeting, not a public meeting. This is not an activity of the congregation but of the elders.

The words *if he has committed sins* introduce a third class conditional sentence, which is hypothetical but leans toward probability. This would mean that the sickness may be discipline for sin. If this is so, then the confession of verse 16 would be anticipated.

## BE PERSISTENT 5:16B-18

### Statement of Fact 5:16b

*"...The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."*

The type of prayer James is talking about is defined two ways. First, it is persistent. The word *effective* is the Greek word *energo* (English *energy*) and refers to a working, operative thing. It is in the present tense and thus describes an ongoing thing. Second, it is powerful.

### An Illustration of Fact 5:17-18

*"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup>And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit."*

#### *Elijah as to His Person*

By nature Elijah was a man just like us. He was a human being through and through. Why should such a remark be needed? Because he was semi-deified by the Jews. God answered prayer for a man just like us; we too can pray successfully.

#### *Elijah as to His Prayer*

I Kings 17 does not directly state that Elijah prayed. I Kings 17:1 strongly implies that he prayed with the statement he makes concerning the Lord "before whom I stand...." There are two chief elements in Elijah's prayer. First, it was in harmony with the will of God. God had revealed when rain would be withheld (I Kings 17:1); God also revealed when rain would return (I Kings 18:42-45). Second, it was persistent.

**BE HELPFUL 5:19-20**

*“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, <sup>20</sup>let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”*

The word *brethren* indicates a believer-to-believer relationship. The result of the restoration viewed negatively is that the one restored is spared the possible discipline of physical death. The result of the restoration viewed positively is the putting aside of sins.

**APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING**

*God’s word never condemns money per se; it does condemn its selfish use (5:1-6).*

*We must never forget the effectiveness of prayer (5:16).* It does not violate the sovereignty of God in any way.



# Observations on Faith

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## **FAITH DEMANDS CONTENT**

If one is to believe, there must be something in which to believe. This means that faith must be preceded by teaching. This is why Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Deficient faith is evidence of deficient teaching. One cannot believe what one does not know. Faith is initiated by teaching, and faith grows by teaching.

## **THE TOTAL VALUE OF FAITH LIES IN ITS OBJECT**

A person may fervently believe that by keeping the golden rule one will gain entry to heaven, but this faith is of no value because the object in which it is placed is untrue. The issue with faith is not *how much* but *in what* it is placed.

## **FAITH IS INITIATED BY HEARING TRUTH**

Galatians 3:2 reads, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” In Acts 15:7 Peter speaks of how the Gentiles by his mouth “should hear the word of the gospel and believe.” God responded to those who heard truth and believed it by “giving them the Holy Spirit....”

## **FAITH IS THE ONLY ACT THAT IS EXCLUDED FROM THE WORKS CATEGORY IN BECOMING A CHRISTIAN**

Romans 4:5 says, “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” Faith is clearly set opposite works when it comes to the issue of justification.

## **JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE BECAUSE SALVATION IS BY GRACE**

Romans 4:16 makes this clear saying, “For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace....” To add conditions for salvation in addition to faith is to destroy grace. It is by faith because it is by grace.

### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS VERY INSTRUCTIVE ON THE SUBJECT OF BELIEF

John's purpose in writing is clearly stated in John 20:30-31, "...but these (signs) have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." If anything in addition to faith is required for salvation, then John failed to accomplish his purpose. John has been called the "Gospel of Belief." Matthew uses the word *believe* eleven times, Mark uses it fifteen times, and Luke uses it nine times. John, on the other hand, uses the word one hundred times. Not once, however, does John use the noun *faith*. It is always the verb *pisteuo*. This means John is focusing on the activity of believing. It is the activity of directing one's confidence toward Christ that saves.

# Observations on Speech Sins

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## DIABOLOS

This word occurs some thirty-eight times in the New Testament. It is a compound word meaning *to cast against* and is transliterated as the proper noun *devil*. Thirty-four of the thirty-eight times it is used to designate Satan. It is used one time of Judas and two of believers. The first is found in I Timothy 3:11, which says, “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips....” The term *malicious gossips*, translating *diabolos*, is in feminine gender. It could be translated *she-devils*. The second is found in Titus 2:3, where it is also translated *malicious gossips*. John Calvin said, “It is an innate disease of mankind to seek reputation by blaming others.”

## BLASPHAMIA

This word means *to speak in such a way as to injure the reputation of another*. It is used in Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8 and is translated *slander* in both places. It is set in the context of evil motives such as bitterness or anger.

## EPIPLASSO

Literally translated, this word means *to smite with the fist* or, metaphorically, *to smite with words*. It is addressed to younger men, where they are told not to sharply rebuke an older man (I Timothy 5:1).

## MOROLOGIA

Believers are warned of this speech sin by being told they are not to engage in *silly talk* (Ephesians 5:4). This does not refer to having fun and a good sense of humor. It refers rather to the communication of human viewpoint.