

Introduction

James has been compared to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, especially the Proverbs because of its emphasis on wise living. It has also been called a practical commentary of the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus. “In the 108 verses of the epistle there are references or allusions from 22 books of the Old Testament and at least 15 allusions to the teachings of Christ as embodied in the Sermon on the Mount” (*Ryrie Study Bible*).

Author

There are two prominent men in the New Testament named James. One is a disciple/apostle, the brother of the Apostle John, both being the “sons of Zebedee” (Mark 1:19). Because the Apostle James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2), before this book was written, he is eliminated as the author of the book of James.

That leaves James, the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). While Mary remained a virgin until after Jesus was born, Jesus had half-brothers and half-sisters, with Mary as their mother and Joseph as their father. Four of the brothers are named: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas [the writer of the epistle Jude] (Matthew 13:55). Although raised in the same home as Jesus, His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). James became a believer when Jesus *appeared to James, then to all the apostles* after His resurrection, before His ascension (1 Corinthians 15:7). Paul called James a *pillar* of the early church (Galatians 2:9). He was evidently head of the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Another evidence that this James wrote the epistle is the similarity between it and the speech of James in Acts 15.

Early church fathers and writers such as Origen, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Augustine, and others support the view that it was James, the half-brother of Jesus, who was the author of this epistle.

James was actually Jacob (Ἰάκωβος). It is not certain why the English translators chose “James” rather than “Jacob.” “James,” “Jake,” and “Jacob” all come from the same root. Bible translations in other languages tend to utilize the transliterated name from the actual Hebrew “Jacob” (יַעֲקֹב). Could it be that King James desired to see his name in the English translation he authorized? [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*]

Date

According to the early Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred in A.D. 62. Since no mention is made of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (A.D. 49), in which James was prominent, it’s likely the letter was written between A.D. 45-48, making it the earliest of the writings of the New Testament.

Other considerations would be the Jewish orientation of the epistle. James does not refer to the Gentiles, which may point to the time in the history of the early church when Gentiles were only beginning to be reached with the gospel. Also, there is no mention of the controversy of the Judaizers and their insistence on Gentile circumcision, issues which were settled at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Also, James’ references to the Old Testament and the teaching of Christ are significant. If the epistle were written later, you would expect a greater similarity to the writings of Paul, such as is apparent in 1 Peter, for example.

Canonicity

James was omitted from the earliest collections of the epistles, as were Hebrews, and 1 and 2 Peter.

It appears that while the churches of Rome and Carthage doubted the canonicity of James, it was nonetheless in use from an early date by the churches of Jerusalem and Alexandria and is included in the collections of scriptural books in Asia Minor. The reason is rather obvious. Written at Jerusalem and addressed to the Jews of the Eastern dispersion, those of the West were not so ready to accept the letter as Scripture [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*].

However, by the 300s, church leaders Eusebius and Jerome accepted the book as Scripture and in 397, the Council of Carthage, in the west, also recognized its canonicity.

Style

James opens with a salutation, but it is more of a lecture than a letter. It has no personal greetings or a benediction, common in Paul's letters, for example.

"The tone is clearly authoritative but not autocratic. James included 54 imperatives in his 108 verses—an average of one call for action in every other verse!... The Book of James probably has more figures of speech, analogies, and imagery from nature than all Paul's epistles together. Exhortations, rhetorical questions, and illustrations from everyday life give spice to this little book" [*BKC*].

A literary technique used by James is the practice of linking together clauses and sentences by the repetition of a leading word or one of its corresponding words. For example, *perseverance* (1:3) and *perseverance* (v. 4); *not lacking anything* (v. 4) and *if any of you lacks* (v. 5); *he should ask* (v. 5) and *when he asks* (v. 6); *he must...not doubt* (v. 6) and *he who doubts* (v. 6).

James makes reference to Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah, to the Law and the Ten Commandments, and includes allusions to passages in the Old Testament books of Genesis through Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and 7 of the 12 Minor Prophets. Also, his teaching resembles that of John the Baptist, whom he most likely heard during his lifetime.

The text used and receiving comment is the NASB translation of the Bible. Words quoted from a published Bible translation will be in italics.

Chapter 1

Verse 1—James—2 Corinthians 5:16 says about Jesus, *even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer*. James didn't use his half-brother human relationship to Jesus as his identity. Nor did he say he was Mary's son. Nor did he refer to himself as a leader in the Jerusalem church. On the other hand, he was probably well-known to the Jewish believers, not needing any further introduction.

— ***a bond-servant***—Rather, he saw himself as all believers should see themselves, as *a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. "For a Jew this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege" (NET). Referring to the Old Testament concept, when a slave was freed, he could choose to continue to be a bond-slave (Deuteronomy 15:17). A concept unknown today.

— ***of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ***—recognizing the deity of Christ, placing Him equal to God — ***To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad***—that is, among the Gentiles, similar to their Assyrian and Babylonian captivities described in the Old Testament. It seems that there were some from all twelve tribes who were believers (v. 2). It's interesting because at the time of Christ and the

apostles, there was just the tribe of Judah in the Land. They were scattered, but they were never lost (Revelation 7:5-8), and all 12 will be gathered again during the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom. —In these early days of the church, it was understood to be a Jewish entity. They did not have the revelation later given to Paul about the Gentile believers, or the reports of Paul’s missionary journeys among the Gentiles given in Acts 15. It is possible that these believers were part of the Jerusalem church, under the leadership of James, who were driven out after the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1, 4).

—**Greetings**—The Greek word χαίρειν, “to wish for joy to the one you are greeting,” which is similar to χαράν “joy” in verse 2, linking the two verses together. (I will be referring to some Greek words so we can see James’ “style,” as mentioned above.)

There are four things at the time of James’ writing of this book that should govern our understanding of the book:

- (1) James never addresses Gentile situations, only Jewish ones.
- (2) He does not yet have the revelation about the church in Galatians 3:23-25 that we are no longer under the Mosaic Law.
- (3) He does not deal with nor is he responding to Paul’s statement about justification by faith. He uses the words “saved” and “justification” in an Old Testament sense, and we’ll define that more specifically in chapter 2.
- (4) He points believers to the coming of Christ, for example, in 5:7-11, and their judgment by Christ at His coming, but he does not focus on heaven. It’s possible that heaven is never in James’ mind at all but rather the coming of Christ with His kingdom to follow, which due to Revelation 20 I call the millennial kingdom. [Constable]

Testing

Verse 2—Consider—“to hold a view or have an opinion with regard to something,” that is, to decide about it. You can decide to be a victim or decide to let God use the trial to help you mature.

—**it all joy**—[Gk. μακάριοϚ “a transcendent happiness”] Why? Because of the spiritual maturity that can result.

—**my brethren**—all believers in Jesus

—**when you encounter** (“to impact, to run into”) **various** [“variety of kinds”] **trials** [Gk.

πειράζω]—“Trials should not be seen as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity but something that must prompt rejoicing...James did *not* say that a believer should be joyous *for* the trials but *in* the trials” (BKC).

APPLICATION—Most people count it joy when they escape trials, not when they are in the midst of the trials. The trials we encounter will come in many shapes, shades, and degrees. It is not that every individual Christian will suffer every kind or degree of trouble, but that Christians in general are subject to troubles of every kind from every possible source. Whatever their nature or severity, these various trials are meant to test a believer’s faith. It is our attitude about it and response to it that reflects our spiritual condition.

—I don’t think we can say God is always the source of trials. Mostly, trials occur due to the circumstances of life. God says that facing the trials are a test of your faith, and His objective is your maturity as a believer and giving Him the glory. So He uses the trials in our life to test our faith.

—James uses the same Greek word for “trials” (v. 2) as “temptations” in verse 13. First, it makes sense with his use of “link” words throughout the book. But how to tell whether something is a trial or a temptation? It goes to the motivating results. God wants you to end in spiritual maturity. Satan wants you to end in sin. Can it be the same situation? Yes. If you make a godly moral decision, it is a trial, a testing of your faith, that will produce endurance and maturity. If you applied your lust to the situation, it is a temptation, which will result in sin and spiritual decay (death).

Verse 3—knowing—from God’s Word as well as our experience of enduring past trials —*that the testing of your faith*—endurance thus becomes the new aspect of the believer’s character that could not exist without testing. Note that the trial does not produce faith, the trial tests faith. —*produces endurance*—[Gk. ὑπομονή “persevere, endurance”—link word to verse 12]. “There is no gain in endurance without some investment in trials” (BKC). It is not the patience that passively endures. Instead, it is the quality that enables a person to stand on their feet facing the storm.

Verse 4—And let endurance have its perfect result—don’t endure for endurance’s sake, but let it go on to its result of maturing your character. It’s a process, a progress. —*so that you may be perfect* [i.e., mature] **and complete**—that is, it develops your all-over, in every part, Christian character of spiritual maturity [not sinlessness]. —*lacking* [Gk. λείπω] **in nothing**—Peter wrote, *After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect [mature], confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen* (1 Peter 5:10-11).

APPLICATION—“The root difficulty of the readers lies in a distorted conception of the nature of salvation by faith and its relation to daily life as the proving ground for the development of Christian character” [Constable]. God told Israel many times, ...*God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin* (Exodus 20:20).

Verse 5—But—contrast to *lacking in nothing*
—*if any of you lacks* [Gk. λείπω] **wisdom**—“The type of Greek conditional sentence found here assumes that people facing trials do lack wisdom” (BKC).
—*let him ask* [present tense, i.e., repeatedly] **of God**—God’s offer of help in your enduring trials. This is a command, not an option. Trials should increase our prayer life. *For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding* (Proverbs 2:6).
—(1) **who gives to all**—to **all** who ask, not just to some who ask. Most of this wisdom is contained in the Word of God. But do we look there? Do we want to obey this wisdom?
—(2) **generously**—He will generously give wisdom, not just “enough” but “generously,” a readiness to give more than is strictly necessary or expected
—(3) **and without reproach** [without finding fault]
—(4) **and it will be given to him**—it’s God’s promise to us

APPLICATION—God is more willing to give His wisdom than we are willing to ask for it! The “reproach” [disappointment or disapproval] of God comes when a person does NOT ask Him for wisdom, not when we do ask for wisdom.

Verse 6—But—contrast word between what God will do and what we are to do
—**he must ask in faith**—here the “link” words are *ask* [αἰτεῖν] *of God* and *ask* [αἰτεῖν] *in faith*. Verse 3 says that our trials are a testing of our faith [πίστις]. Here we see that prayer is to be *in faith* [πίστις].

APPLICATION—Can we say that trials increase our prayer life?

—*without any doubting*—Doubting is the opposite of faith. It’s doubting that my trial is for my spiritual maturity. It’s doubting that I will receive wisdom from God if I ask. It’s doubting that God will generously give me wisdom.
—*for the one who doubts is like the surf* [the tops of the waves] **of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind**—The sea is being driven by something outside of itself—the wind. It’s not going anywhere—not like a ship with a rudder or compass. Doubting means the outside circumstances control one’s

thinking and actions rather than the truth of the Word of God. You will be tossed. No direction. Chaos.

Verse 7—*For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord*—God will generously give wisdom, but a person might not receive that wisdom, if they don't ask for it in faith, without doubting.

Verse 8—*being a double-minded man*—Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24).

—***unstable in all his ways***—*A friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4)

APPLICATION—It is as though one soul declares, “I believe,” and the other soul in turn shouts, “I don't!” This sort of instability is not only apparent when the person prays, it marks “all he or she does.” In their personal life, family life, business life, social life, as well as spiritual life, indecisiveness negates effectiveness. A person like this will not “receive anything from the Lord” [EBC].
— Rather than simply perfecting maturity in the person through their trials, God now also has to discipline (educate) the believer regarding their attitude toward their trials [Constable].
—If you have a trial, and God's Word gives specific instruction regarding the situation, instead of trusting and obeying God's Word, you judge His Word to be wrong, don't come to Him for wisdom and judge His Word to be wrong at the same time. For example, *let all bitterness...be put away from you...forgiving each other* (Ephesians 4:31-32). But you reject that wisdom because “Paul didn't know what awful thing the other person did to you.” You refuse to forgive and choose to be bitter. This bitterness then permeates your family life, your social life, etc.

Since verse 12 is still talking about *a man who perseveres under trial*, verses 9–11 are also related to that same general topic.

Verse 9—*But*—contrast word

—***the brother***—the family relationship of believers to one another

—***of humble circumstances***—that is, physically poor. This was most likely the condition of most of the Jewish Christians who were *dispersed abroad* (v. 1). Definitely causing many trials as they were sent away from their homes in Israel, possibly scattered away from extended families, etc.

—***is to glory in his high position***—but spiritually rich, hope in the eternal future with God. Their poverty or humble conditions did not keep them from God.

Verses 10-11—*and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation*—perhaps that his riches cannot eliminate the trials, they could not deliver that person from the dispersion.

—***because like flowering grass he will pass away. 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***—taken from Isaiah 40:6-8, *All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the Lord blows on it...But the Word of our God stands forever.*

—***so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away***—It should be noted that it is the man who fades away. Nothing is said about his wealth. This fading takes place “even while he goes about his business.” Unexpectedly, in the midst of a busy life, the end comes. These are sobering thoughts that tend to reduce the rich to the level of men in general (EBC).

APPLICATION—When you lose a daughter, son, wife, husband, or other loved one, wealth is no comfort. When you lose your health, are betrayed by a friend, or are wrongfully maligned, money cannot buy peace of mind or decrease the pain. Trials are the great equalizer, bringing all of God's

children to dependence on Him. Wealth does not bring God closer, nor does poverty keep Him further away [“James,” MacArthur].

Verse 12—*Blessed* [Gk. μακάριος “a transcendent happiness”—linked word to “joy” in verse 2] —*is a man who perseveres* [Gk. ὑπομονή “persevere, endurance”—link word from verse 3] *under trial* [Gk. πειράζω—link word from verse 3].

APPLICATION—*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).*

—*for once he has been approved*—“to judge to be genuine, considered good or worthy on the basis of the testing” (2 Corinthians 10:18).

—*he will receive the crown* [wreath to show victory] *of life which [the Lord*—not in the Greek, but is inferred] *has promised to those who love Him*. In other words, perseverance does not *result in* salvation and eternal life, but is itself *the result* and evidence of salvation and eternal life. It is a joy for those who wait for when God will deliver us from all our trials and go into His glorious presence.

APPLICATION—“If a man, in his supposed love to God, has no ultimate regard except to his own happiness, as its supreme motive and end; if he delights in God, not for what He is, but for what He is to him; in such a sentiment there is no moral virtue. There is indeed great love of self, but no true love to God” (Gardiner Spring, early 19th century). That is, people who love God the way they perceive Him to be or want Him to be, not the way He actually is, is to love one’s self, not truly love God.

Temptation

Verse 13—*Let no one say when he is tempted* [Gk. link word πειράζω, translated both “trials” and “temptation”]—We are constantly in situations where we have to make moral decisions. Some situations are out-rightly sinful, such as lying, stealing, worshipping an idol, etc. Then you should not be tempted at all.

—*“I am being tempted by* [“origin, or source” not merely the agency] *God*”— If it is a choice situation, and you are being tempted, do NOT say that it is from God.

—*for God cannot be tempted by evil*—There is nothing in God to which evil can make an appeal. He has no vulnerability to evil and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. Everything God is, is holy, by definition. It’s His character. Who He is. He is aware of evil but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash.

—*and He Himself does not tempt anyone*—God NEVER tries to get someone to sin. So don’t blame Him for your sins or your temptations. It’s our lusts that create temptations from a situation.

APPLICATION—What are the sources of temptation? Satan’s world system (using things and people), our own sin nature, and Satan (Job 1–2; 1 John 2:16). Take any situation. How do you react? Do you consider it a trial and opportunity to be obedient to God? Or do you apply your own lust to it, leading to sin? Of course, there are outright sins, such as pornography, stealing, lying, etc. But many situations are without morals, i.e., you bring the moral to the situation.

Verse 14—*But each one*—There are no exceptions. This is true of every human being.

— *is tempted* [present tense, “repeatedly,” inescapable reality] *when*—Not everyone is tempted by the same things, but everyone will be tempted because we still have our sin natures. Something may be tempting to me and not be tempting to you at all and vice versa.

—*he is carried away* [ἐξέλκω— ἐξ means “ex-,” like in “exit.”] The whole word means “to draw out, to pull out, to lure away from, to cause a change of belief so as to correspond more with the beliefs of the person or factor causing the change.” Like a person exiting (going out of) a building. A word for “bait” in hunting. This aspect is to draw one away from what they believe.

—*and enticed*—to lure or entice someone to sin, to bait, may often be translated as ‘to make sinning look attractive’ or ‘to make sin taste good’ or ‘to wave sin in front of a person’s nose.’ A term very similar to “carried away” but here it is a fishing term used as lure or bait for fish, to get the fish to eat the bait. This aspect is to lure someone to believe something else.

APPLICATION—For example. You believe God is the only living God. Yet you see an article in the magazine about horoscopes, and you read it and attribute some event in your day to exactly what the horoscope said. You were drawn away from your belief in God. You were baited by the magazine to read the article. And you changed your belief by attributing an event to what the horoscope said.

—*by his own lust* [ἐπιθυμέω, “to greatly desire to do or have something”]. Something is not a temptation unless it is joined to your lust, to drag you into sin. Each person has their own lust. What I lust for can/will be different than what you lust for. For example, it was Eve who lusted after the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not Adam (Genesis 3:6).

APPLICATION—In the previous application example, what was the person’s lust? Possibly to pass moral responsibility on to the horoscope rather than be responsible for one’s own moral decisions. Perhaps it said something or gave permission to do something that the person really desired to do (lusted), but God’s Word would not allow it.

Verse 15—*Then when lust has conceived*—a physical example—when the sperm joins the egg, when lust joins the temptation

—*it gives birth to sin*—sin is the child

—*and when sin is accomplished*—completed, successful finish—with sin, the finish is death

—*it brings forth death*—it seems almost like an oxymoron: conception gives birth to death [Wow! Like abortion!! The womb becomes the grave!!] Rather than the mature spiritual life promised in enduring trials, when one gives in to the temptation and sins, you die spiritually—you go in the opposite direction of maturity.

APPLICATION—Paul said, some have *suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith* (1 Timothy 1:19). ...*some have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang* (1 Timothy 6:10). *We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it* (Hebrews 2:1). There is no standing still. You are either moving toward God or moving away from Him.

Verse 16—*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*—A big problem with believers today is that they are easily deceived. Job did not apply his sin nature to his situation and turn it from a trial, from a testing of his faith, into a temptation to sin (although encouraged by his wife in 2:9 to do that very thing). God had confidence in Job. He told Satan, *My servant Job, For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil* (Job 1:8). Then when Satan attacked Job, and his children were killed, Job “worshipped” God and *Through all this Job did not sin nor attribute evil to God* (Job 1:20-22; see also Job 31).

—The deception James is talking about is saying our temptation is from God, attributing evil to God. No. Our temptation comes from our own sinful desires. Don’t blame God. You are the guilty one!

APPLICATION—You need to change your desires. Practicing sin has a lot to do with living where sin is acceptable. Change where you live. Change the way you make decisions. Focus on compounding small choices in the desired direction. The smallest choices make the biggest difference.

Verse 17—*Every good thing given* [act of giving]—Negatively—*God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone*—He has **NO** responsibility for sin. Positively—*every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above*—He has total responsibility for only giving good things.

—*and every perfect* [without evil or sin or defect] *gift* [gift itself] *is from above*—instead of a sender of temptation and evil, God is the giver of every good gift. His gifts reflect His holy and truthful character.

—*coming down from the Father of lights*—God is light, not darkness and evil and death.

APPLICATION—Notice the *good thing given* and *perfect gift*—God is the giver of good gifts—For example, I give my child or grandchild a good gift for their birthday. Not because of what they've done or not done but it comes from my love for them. God loves us and gives good gifts to us. Thankfully those gifts come from His love and His character and not because of what we do.

—*with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*—The motions of the heavenly bodies cause shifting light/dark variations. For example, the shadows cast by the sun are minimal at noon, but just before sunset they stretch out for yards across the landscape. The shadows move. But there is no variation in the good things given by God and there is no “shifting shadow,” any kind of darkness or evil. There may be an eclipse of the sun, but there is no eclipse in the light of God.

APPLICATION—Malachi 3:6 says, *I, the Lord, do not change.*” John wrote, *God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all* (1 John 1:5). Hebrews 13:8 says, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.* Can God do anything/everything? No. It's impossible for Him to change or vary from His character. *There is no variation!!*

Verse 18—*In the exercise of His will*—His choice from His desire (Ephesians 1:4-9).

—*He brought us forth*—saved us to become one of His children

—*by the word of truth*—Jesus said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me* (John 14:6).

—*so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures* [“what has been created”]—rather than being destructive, causing death, God is constructive, giving life. “First fruits” are the very first fruit of the crop, a foretaste of the crop to come (Exodus 34:22 and Leviticus 23:10). There will be many more believers in the years ahead, after the time of James and these early believers. There will be still more who believe in the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom after our time.

APPLICATION—When we can have every good thing and perfect gift from God above, why should anything evil have the slightest attraction to us? Because we obey our sin nature and its sinful desires, that's why. It's the battle fought inside of us (Romans 7).

— Rather than viewing those temptations to depart from the will of God as heaven-sent, we must see them as the potential enemies of spiritual growth. Instead of caving in under their weight, we must brace ourselves against them.... Satan tempts us in order to bring out the worst in us, but God allows us to be tempted in order to bring out the best in us [Constable].

—James outlined the source of temptation, the steps in temptation, and the solution for temptation.

Hearing God's Word

Verses 19-20—*This you know* [γινώσκω, link word to v. 3, *knowing* (γινώσκω) *the testing of your faith produces endurance*]*—now James lists the way we are to respond correctly to the trials. We “know” this.*

—*my beloved brethren*—believers, in the family of God, James is talking about sanctification

—*But let everyone*—this applies to every single believer

—*be quick to hear*—the time between what is said and what you hear is to be very short, i.e., be attentive. Don't let your mind wander. Reluctance at this point will block the acceptance of truth. It also demands restrained speech. A continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says, or what God is saying in His Word. In any field of knowledge we learn by listening, not by speaking.

APPLICATION—“It is possible to be unfailingly regular in Bible reading, but to achieve no more than to have moved the book-mark forward: this is reading unrelated to an attentive spirit” (Constable).

—*slow to speak*—someone observed that we have two ears but only one mouth, so we should listen at least twice as much as we talk. James doesn't say we should not speak at all. But that we should not be in a hurry to speak. Do you listen only to be eager to say what is in your mind about what the person is talking about? (That's convicting ☺)

—*and slow to anger*—at this point, the ear is firmly closed, zero listening. Anger is simple annoyance or hostility or furious outrage. This hinders hearing and understanding what is said.

—*for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God*—*agape ...does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, endures all things, love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13).

Verse 21—*Therefore putting aside*—The Greek word translated “get rid of” (*apothemenoi*) was primarily used of taking off garments. Hebrews 12:1 speaks of throwing off any excessive weight, such as unnecessary clothing, to make ready for the race of faith.

—*All filthiness*—Translates *rhuparia*, which refers to any sort of moral defilement or impurity. It is closely related to a term used of wax in the ear, which impairs hearing, and is therefore especially appropriate in this context (MacArthur).

—*and all that remains*—“excess or prevalence”

—*of wickedness*—a word meaning “wicked intent.” It may remain hidden in your heart, with only you and God knowing about your intentions. It may not even materialize, but it's there.

APPLICATION—We often pray for safety instead of purity because we do not see impurity as dangerous. God said, “*The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick*” (Jeremiah 17:9). You are deceived if you think impurity will not affect you.

—*in humility*—It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting (“Dictionary of Words”). I'm not in charge. God is in charge.

—*receive the Word*—hearing means receiving the information given in the Word of God, allowing it to direct and control our lives. Peter wrote, *like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word* (1 Peter 2:2). Jesus said, “*If you abide in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine*” (John 8:31). Jesus' true disciples are to pay keen attention to the content of what they hear and read, measuring every idea, every principle, and every standard against the infallible and sovereign authority of God's Word (MacArthur).

—*implanted*—means planting a seed in the ground, the opposite of grafting, which is simply adding it to something else. God's Word is to take root in your heart and grow to a healthy plant, a mature believer, producing fruit for God's glory.

APPLICATION—There are 3 tests of a true believer: (1) how he or she responds to trials (vv. 2-12), (2) how he or she responds to temptations (vv. 13-18), and (3) how he or she responds to the Word of God (vv. 19-27).

—**which is able to save your souls**—Of course, our initial salvation happened when the Word brought the truth of the gospel to our unsaved heart. But James is talking to believers, so he is here saying the reason we should be hearers of the Word is because it is only through the Word that spiritual growth can happen.

- Jesus said, “*Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth*” (John 17:17).
- Peter wrote, *long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation* (1 Peter 2:2).
- Hebrews 4:12 says, *For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, ...able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*
- Paul wrote, *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

APPLICATION—Books, teaching, podcasts, movies, etc. can perhaps motivate you emotionally, but it is **only** through the Word of God that you can mature as a believer and grow in your faith. *So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). There is only one way to grow and mature, just as there was only one way to be saved.

Doing God's Word

Verse 22—**But prove** [“to be formed, to come to exist”] **yourselves doers of the Word**—A command! Paul wrote *by grace you have been saved through faith...not as a result of works* (Ephesians 2:8-9). But Paul goes on to say, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them* (2:10). God saved us, NOT by works, but FOR works.

APPLICATION—The call to ‘do what it says’ lies at the center of all that James teaches. It sums up the message of the whole book: Put into practice what you profess to believe. Indeed, 1:22 may well be the key verse of James’s epistle [Constable].

—**not merely** [“alone, by itself”] **hearers**—James just spent time telling us to be good hearers, receivers of the Word of God, but now he says hearing should not be alone. First, we are not to accompany hearing with speaking or anger. But we are to accompany hearing with doing. The responsibility of those who hear is far greater than that of those who have never heard.

—**who delude themselves**—**Delude** is used in mathematics of a serious miscalculation. It’s the problem of developing the habit of going to Bible studies, listening to tapes, sermons, etc. regularly. It’s very easy to become a hearer, and when you leave, you’re deceived because you think you’ve done something about it, and you really haven’t. As you sit there, you agree that what was said is right, but as soon as you leave, you forget all about it. You’ve made a serious spiritual miscalculation!! Any failure to respond cannot be blamed on lack of understanding.

APPLICATION—Jesus said in the parable of the sower that one of four things can happen in a person when the Word of God is sown: (1) Satan can take away the Word so a person will not believe; (2) a person can receive the Word with joy but only believe for a while, and in time of temptation,

they fall away; (3) a person hears the Word, but as they *go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity*; (4) then there are those who hear the Word and *hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance* (Luke 8:4-15). James seems to be talking about #3. But encouraging us to be #4.

Verses 23-24—*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer—he is like a man who looks* [κατανοέω means “careful observation, intently”] *at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten* [ἐπιλανθάνομαι, “to not recall”] *what kind of person he was*—the point is not what a person sees in the mirror but the fact that they **forget** what they see in the mirror. All the careful looking suddenly becomes wasted.

APPLICATION—A person who looks at God’s Word, even if it is carefully and accurately done, and yet does not apply the truths he has discovered to his own life, is like someone who immediately forgets what he has just seen in a mirror—except that the consequences are immeasurably worse. He sees his sin portrayed for the horrible evil that it is and he also sees God’s gracious provision in Christ for a remedy, yet he goes on his way as if he were never exposed to those realities [MacArthur].

Verse 25—*But one who looks intently* [κατανοέω, linked to v. 23— “to look at something closely.” It’s used for John and Mary Magdalene who stooped over to look if Jesus was in the tomb (John 20:5, 11). It’s the idea of observation and thinking or interpreting the observation. —*at the perfect law, the law of liberty*—the Scriptures, written by a perfect God, give a true and undistorted (perfect) revelation of who you really are. “Laws” seem restraining, but God’s law is actually freedom from slavery to your sin nature. —*and abides* [continues to remain] *by it*—does not forget it —*not having become a forgetful* [v. 24, link word ἐπιλανθάνομαι, “to not recall”] *hearer*—It is assumed by the words “looks intently” that a person is studying and understanding and agreeing with the Bible. But, as with the mirror example, the point is the word **forgetful**. —*but an effectual* [energy or effort] *doer*—God did not reveal His Word simply to be learned, but to be obeyed and applied. Listening to truth is not an end in itself any more than gazing at one’s face in a mirror is an end in itself. You look in the mirror in order to change what is on your face. —*this man will be blessed* [linked to μακάριος “joy” in verse 2 and “blessed” in verse 12] *in what he does*—Just as in verse 2 a believer will find joy in trials as they endure (v. 12) and their faith is tested, and they mature in Christ, so the believer who receives and abides in the Word of God and practices what they know to be true, will find joy.

Verse 26—*If anyone thinks himself to be religious*—a word used only here in the NT, describing a devout person, being devoted to an outward expression of religious beliefs. Jesus said of the Pharisees at His time, when they gave alms, they sounded a trumpet before them; when they prayed, they prayed on the street corners to be seen by men; when they fasted, they put on a gloomy face in order to be seen fasting by men (Matthew 6:1-18). They thought they were appearing “religious.” —*yet does not bridle* [to control] *his tongue*—A test of spirituality is controlling what you say. James will return to this topic in 3:1-12. —*but deceives his own heart*—In verse 16, James warned the believers to not be deceived about temptations. They are not from God, who only gives good gifts. Here, a person is not to deceive themselves into thinking they are devout, dedicated followers of God, if they do not control what they say.

APPLICATION—Being deceived by others is really bad, but you deceiving your own heart is the worst. *The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick* (Jeremiah 17:9).

—*this man’s religion is worthless*—useless and empty to both others and to God

Verse 27—*This is pure and undefiled religion* [word used only 4 times in the NT, 2 by James] *in the sight of our God and Father* (contrasted to verse 26, where a person *thinks himself to be religious*). You can look good to yourself when you define what “good” is!!

(1) *to visit orphans and widows in their distress*—not all widows, but those in distress, those in need

(2) *and to keep oneself unstained by the world*—by its wrong ways of thinking, its faulty worldviews. Be holy and pure before God.

Chapter 2

Showing Partiality

Verse 1—*My brethren*—again stressing this is written to those who are already believers. James used this designation some 15 times in his book (such as 1:2, 16, 19; 2:5, 14; 4:11; 5:7).

— *do not hold* [“to hold on to”] *your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*—it’s not the faith of Christ but our faith in Christ. *Glorious* heightens the contradiction. *Our glorious Lord Jesus* does not show partiality to us earthly [non-glorious] believers, which shows the huge inconsistency of us doing that with fellow believers.

—*with an attitude of personal favoritism*—lit. means “to lift up one’s face,” i.e., to make a judgment totally on the appearance of their face, their outward appearance, not their character, abilities...

—The Greek verb form is actually “stop showing favoritism.” It indicates that this is already an ongoing behavior that is inconsistent with the faith a Christian claims to have. In fact, in verse 9, he says *if you show partiality, you are committing sin*.

—*favoritism*—to make unjust distinctions between people by treating one person better than another. Favoritism can happen because of:

- Predilection—a preconceived liking formed as a result of one’s background, temperament, etc. that inclines one to a particular preference. For example, a liking of hymns vs worship choruses.
- Prejudice—a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavorable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred. For example, political opinions.
- Bias—a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. For example, someone may have a bias for or against the color blue.

APPLICATION—James, writing primarily to Jewish believers, would understand that this idea is a leftover of living under the Law, where they were to make distinctions in the priests, the Levites, the king, the prophets, the Jews, the Gentiles, clean and unclean food, etc. But now, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are not to do that. No one is more a brother or sister than another one. *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction* (Romans 3:22). This is a new reality for our church age.

Verse 2—*For if a man* [“someone”] *comes into your assembly*—[Gk. συναγωγή, “synagogue”], when believers are assembling for teaching, prayer, fellowship, and Communion (Acts 2:42).

APPLICATION—ἐκκλησία [“called-out ones,” usually translated “church”]. Paul wrote *the church, which is His body* (Ephesians 1:22-23). Therefore, “church” refers to all believers in Jesus Christ. What the believers (church) does is “synagogue” [“gather” or “assemble”]. See 1 Corinthians 14:23, *the whole church* [ἐκκλησία] *should assemble together* [συναγωγή]. Gathering or

assembling is one of the things church/believers do. It does not define what a church/believer is. Believers do other things, too, such as evangelize, disciple, show mercy, teach, pray, etc.

—While this word “synagogue” was used as a particular definition in Judaism for a building where the Jews assembled for teaching, Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:23 is referring to assembling, not a building.

—*with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes*, a hyperbole to illustrate his point

Verse 3—*and you pay special attention* [to look with accompanying actions] *to the one who is wearing the fine* [“white, shining, brilliant,” as opposite of “dirty” as you can get] *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”* [lit. “under my footstool”]. A person wearing fine clothes would put his feet on the stool, but the man with filthy, dirty clothes is under the stool, suggesting even under the feet of the other person. Not merely a distinction but even a humiliation.

Verse 4—*have you not made distinctions* [to regard one person as more valuable or superior than someone else] *among yourselves*, i.e., among the believers

—*and become judges*—one who makes the decisions resulting in an action

—*with evil motives?*—sinful [worldly] reasoning or thinking, judging on outward appearances. Prejudice is an evil that shows the character of the one who practices it. The form of the question assumes a positive answer. Yes, they were doing that.

APPLICATION—Jesus warned about making judgments based on outward appearances. He described the scribes and Pharisees *hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness* (Matthew 23:27). First Samuel 16:7 says, *for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

Verse 5—*Listen, my beloved brethren*—once again, James is talking to believers, he asks 4 questions:

—(1) *did not God choose the poor of this world* (according to the world’s standard) *to be rich in faith*—One reason God “has chosen those who are poor” may be seen in the account of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-27). There Jesus indicated that those who have riches find it exceedingly difficult to enter God’s kingdom (vv. 23-25), apparently because their wealth stands in the way (in their thinking). A poor person looks at what they will gain in heaven (personal example of singing family from the Ukraine), but the rich often look at what they think they will lose.

—*heirs of the* [millennial] *kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*—this is promised to whoever loves Him, whether poor or rich.

Verse 6—*But you have dishonored the poor man*—by giving him the worst seat

—(2) *Is it not the rich who oppress you*—to cause severe hardship, lit. “to choke”

—(3) *personally drag you into court?*—“with their own hands,” drag by force, implying resistance

APPLICATION—A behavior left over from Judaism. Jesus said about the Pharisees, *they do all their deeds to be noticed by men... they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues* (Matthew 23:4-6). But *Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison* (Acts 8:3).

—So even from a practical standpoint, why would they make a distinction and honor the rich? It is also possible to make distinctions and honor the “poor” more than the “rich,” as is often done in our culture. Making distinctions, based on worldly motives, is the issue here.

Verse 7—(4) *Do they not blaspheme* [to speak disrespectfully of] *the fair name by which you have been called?* James could be referring to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, like Saul, who persecuted the Christians.

Verse 8—*If* [in Gk. translated “since” or “because”], *however, you are fulfilling the royal law*—“royal” in the sense that it is the supreme law to which all other laws governing human relationships are subordinate.

—*according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*—First given in Leviticus 19:18 and affirmed by Christ (Matthew 22:39), i.e., not making distinctions and not honoring the rich above the poor, but loving them both. There are no partialities or distinctions. If you understand this law to be true (have faith), then you will not show distinctions.

APPLICATION—Jesus told this command to the lawyer, who then asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with the Good Samaritan parable. The priest and Levite saw the beaten man and crossed the road and didn’t help him. The Samaritan man, however, a pagan in the Jewish mind, did help him. Jesus said the Samaritan was the neighbor, whose works showed he understood “love your neighbor as yourself” to be true, without distinctions.

—This is not advocating loving yourself but simply acknowledging what is basic to humans. Paul wrote, *no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it* (Ephesians 5:29).

—*you are doing well*—excellently, as contrasted to *committing sin* in verse 9

Verse 9—*But if* [in Gk. translated “since” or “because”] *you show partiality*—your works show that you do not understand the command to “love your neighbor” to be true (believe). Your works show what you believe to be true.

—*you are committing sin*—It’s not simply a social preference. It’s breaking the law of God, restated by Jesus. The greatest commandment is to love God. The second greatest is to love others. There are some who would consider their offense of prejudice as a trivial fault. They would hardly consider themselves as lawbreakers. James went on to make it clear that this was no small offense.

— *and are convicted* [proof of wrong doing] *by the law as transgressors*—a person who disobeys the law. For example, if you speed only one time, you become a person who breaks the speed limit.

Verse 10—*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point*—“stumbles” gives the impression that you may even think it is a “minor” sin. Again, he uses a hyperbole to make his point. Obedience cannot be selective, choosing to obey what we like, and disregarding the rest or those laws we consider to be minor.

—*he has become guilty of all*—that is, a law breaker. Doesn’t matter which law you break. The law is not fragments, it’s a whole. For example, if you have a window with many panes, and you break just one of the panes, doesn’t matter which one, you now have a broken window.

Verse 11—*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*—the same God said love one another and do not show partiality

—*you have become a transgressor of the law*—law breaker. Which law doesn’t matter. Consistency says if you break any law, even if it’s just one and it doesn’t matter which one, you are a law breaker. The consequences of different sins may be different, but all sins are equally a violation of God’s law. The same God gave all the laws.

Verse 12—*So speak and so act*—repeating “so” is for emphasis and for equating the verbs (what you say and what you do). The verbs are in the present tense, which means continuous action.

—*as those who are to be judged*—They have it backwards. When they show partiality, they are being judges (v. 4). Whereas, they are to speak and act as they are the ones who will be judged. When you judge someone, you are playing God. Only He has the right to judge. The rich “blaspheme” the name of God (v. 7), yet when you judge, you are blaspheming the name of God, playing God.

APPLICATION—Most people feel free to judge others because they erroneously think they are somehow superior to others. The Pharisees thought they were exempt from judgment because they believed they perfectly measured up to the divine standards. The problem was that those were mere human standards that they, and others like them, had established far short of God’s holy and perfect law. When we assume the role of final, omniscient judge, we imply that we are qualified to judge—that we know and understand all the facts, all the circumstances, and all the motives involved. Also, *Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things...* (Romans 2:1–2).

—*by the law of liberty* [freedom]. We will not be judged for living in the Land of Israel and obeying the Mosaic Law, which made distinctions. We have a new law in Christ. The law of liberty from our sin nature, from obeying its lusts, etc. The Mosaic Law listed exactly what it meant to love your fellow Jews and other distinctions. But now, in the church age, we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ (because James started talking about those who come into the assembly in verses 1-3), no matter their nationality, country, age, social status, financial status, etc. There are no distinctions.

Verse 13—*For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy*—Mercy is a work that shows you understand that the law of “loving your neighbor as yourself” is true. [The fact that you will appear at the Bema of Christ instead of the Great White Throne is God showing you mercy.] —The point is (I think) that you will be accountable for what you do. As a teacher will have a stricter judgment (3:1) for what they teach. One who does not show mercy will have a merciless judgment.

APPLICATION—At this point, James does not have the information of future rewards, as is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, but he does recognize that what we do here and now will have eternal consequences. Paul wrote, *if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved* (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Mercy is a “gold” work, which will be rewarded. Works without mercy are wood, which will be burned up, not rewarded.

—*mercy triumphs over judgment* [showing partiality]. You may judge a person and make a distinction, but to show that person mercy is greater because it demonstrates your faith in God and His law of loving your neighbor.

APPLICATION—A poem about judgment:

Judge not the workings of his brain,
And of his heart thou cannot see.
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God’s pure light may only be
A scar brought from some well-won field
Where thou wouldst only faint and yield.

When you judge with evil motives (v. 4), such as judging by outward appearances, you make distinctions, thereby sinning and being a lawbreaker. But if you show mercy, you judge by the law of liberty, loving your neighbor as yourself, showing the works of your faith, and you will do well. Mercy is greater than judgment. Judgment is worldly. Mercy is godly. —Connected to the next verses—faith without mercy is useless.

Faith Without Works

The Significance of James Chapter 2

Comments by Dave DeWitt

The Understanding – Faith Connection

James did a number on our thinking about faith in God when he said demons have it. *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder* (James 2:19). How did the demons come to believe in God? Actually, they seem to believe at least three things about God: (1) God exists, (2) there is only one God, and (3) God is to be feared. Why do demons believe in the existence of God? Answer: Because they have an undeniable understanding that God is real. It is impossible for them to not believe in the existence of God. They live in the dimension where He dwells. God is manifested in (what is for them) a tangible reality. They believe in God as I believe the sky is blue and the grass is green. Demons could not choose to believe that God does not exist, any more than you could choose to believe I do not exist, if I were sitting across the table from you having a coffee in a restaurant.

But there is a limit to demonic faith. Demons believe God exists, but they do not believe God is good. Demons believe in God like atheists believe in the Bible. Atheists have to believe the Bible exists, because they understand it exists, but they do not understand it to be true.

Where Does Faith Come From?

How do people (or demons) come to believe what they believe? The inescapable answer is:

Faith is an inevitable, unavoidable decision to trust what we understand to be true.

Faith, like the demons' belief in the existence of God, is never something we can arbitrarily choose, or not choose, to have. No one can choose to not believe what they understand to be true. If I am standing with you in a room, you cannot choose to believe I am not in the room.

UNDERSTANDING => FAITH

What I understand
To be true => What I decide
to trust

Whether good or bad, true or false, strong or weak, we have no option but to believe what we understand to be true. Faith just flows out of understanding, inevitably. Faith also has a future projection. From my office window I can see my car in the parking lot. So I have to believe it is there. I also understand that I will drive it home. So, I believe that, too, but not quite as much as I believe it is parked in the lot. Faith in the future is based on faith in the present, but it diminishes as the certainty of my understanding it to be true diminishes. If I have information in the present (like the Bible) which tells me about the future (like in the Kingdom of Heaven) and I understand it to be true about the future, my faith in the future increases. For example, my airplane engine was running rough. But my mechanic told me it was just picking up carburetor ice and adding carburetor heat

would make it run smooth. So now I have more understanding, so I have more faith about flying my plane, in the future.

Without understanding, faith becomes a word used for conjuring up something separated from reason applied to the real world. It might describe non-existent imaginary characters, like those in Marvel comics, Star Wars, video games or Santa Claus. It might describe the “blind leap” of Kierkegaard (a term later placed on his idea that faith was something separated from reason). Whatever such an imaginative leap might be, it is not faith.

The Faith – Works Connection

I am going to guess that you do not believe in leprechauns, tooth fairies, or mermaids. Try to believe in them. Go ahead, I’ll wait. Try really hard. Did it work? No, it didn’t, because you cannot believe in something you do not believe. Take mermaids, for example. How do I know you do not believe in mermaids? Because you will not put on scuba gear and go looking for one (hopefully). You might lie about faith and do something to maintain the lie. For example, you might lie to your children and pretend there is a Santa Claus, but you will not take them to the North Pole to visit his workshop.

James 2:17 *Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

FAITH => WORKS

What I decide => WHAT I DO
to trust

Real faith inevitably and unavoidably (=>) is manifested in works.

James 2:14 *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?*

Of course, that faith can’t save him! Because faith that has no works does not exist. It may be a blind, irrational, or imaginative leap, but it is not faith.

Question: Can you be saved (in the sense of going to heaven) by a blind leap if it is a blind leap in the right direction, say, a blind leap that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead?

Answer: No, you can’t! Why? Because salvation requires faith, and a blind leap is not faith. It would be saying Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead, like Superman flies through the air and Spiderman climbs buildings.

James 2:18 *show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

James asks phony believers, like imaginers and blind leapers, to show their *faith without the works*. They can’t, because faith is only seen by works. Blind leap imagination may exist, but blind leap faith does not. By contrast, James said, *I will show you my faith by my works*.

Faith + Works Implies a *Useless* Faith

James pushed the issue further. He said,

James 2:20 *But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*

Many, such as the Roman Catholic Church, claim that works must be added to faith for salvation (salvation = faith + works). But James said, *faith without works is useless*. Faith that does not generate its own works automatically by the nature of the faith itself, is useless. So, if works must be added to faith to make it useful, then that faith must be *useless*. Any faith that needs works added to it in order to have eternal value, has no eternal value. But the faith James is talking about

produces those works all by itself, inevitably. *I will show you my faith by my works*. Even the faith of demons is reflected in their works: they *shudder*. But if you tell your kids there is a Santa Claus, it's a lie you don't believe. So, you can't just leave your imaginative Santa to himself to produce works. He won't fly in with his sleigh and come down the chimney. You have to add works to your imaginative, blind-leap, non-existent faith. So, you take the kids to the mall where they can sit on the lap of some fat guy in a red suit.

How Can There Be Justification by Works?

Then James pushed the issue even further. He described a path to God through justification based on works.

James 2:21-24 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

How can that be? Christ and the apostles placed great emphasis on salvation and spiritual growth based on faith alone (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:2-3). How can James say Abraham was *justified* (declared right before God) *by works*? James gave the answer, *faith was working with his works*, not added to his works. Abraham's work of obedience just flowed naturally out of his faith. Then James doubled down on his point.

James 2:25 *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?*

James emphasized this idea by telling us Rahab had the same justification by works. Why was Rahab *justified by works*? Because her works, rather than being added to her faith, flowed out of her faith. Because, unlike an imaginative leap, Rahab's faith expressed in works what she understood to be true. James concluded:

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

UNDERSTANDING => FAITH => WORKS

What I understand To be true => What I decide to trust => WHAT I DO

Whatever I understand to be true, inevitably, unavoidably leads to (=>) what I decide to trust, which inevitably, unavoidable leads to (=>) what I do.

What About Bad Works—Where Does Sin Come From?

Now let's look at this when there are bad works. Since understanding, faith, and works are inevitably connected, every sin we commit is the result of something lacking in our faith, which in turn reflects something lacking in our understanding. We sin because we think (understand that) we can get away with it. Sin is a work that is the result of partial faith, what Jesus called *little faith* (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke 12:28), which in turn is a result of an incomplete understanding of the truth of God's Word. There is no disconnect whatsoever between your faith and your works.

Let me prove to you that sin is a faith problem. Think of a stubborn sin in your life. Got one in mind? Now picture yourself standing before the judgment seat of Christ. There you are with Jesus actually visibly seated in front of you. You are next in line to face His *judgment seat* (2 Corinthians 5:10). I will guarantee you that you will not commit that stubborn sin, or any sin. Why? Because now, standing before Jesus manifested in person sitting on His *judgment seat*, your faith is 100%, so your sin is 0%. Your works will, as it always does, represent your faith. [I understand that in your

resurrected body you will also not have a sin nature, but even without talking about that, you will not stand before Jesus and sin.]

How Faith Worked throughout the Bible

This Understanding => Faith => Works equation is expressed throughout the Old and New Testament.

How Faith Worked in the Old Testament

In Hebrews 11, we have a list of Old Testament saints whom the author said, did what they did *by faith*. The interesting thing is, most of the heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11 are only described in the Old Testament as men and women of works. We like to quickly go to Genesis 15:6 and talk about the faith of Abraham. True, Abraham *believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*. But it is very hard to find any statements in the Old Testament about the faith of Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, or most of the prophets. Why is there usually no emphasis on, or even mention of, their faith? I suggest James would say it is because they show their faith by their works. There is no need to mention their faith, since their works inevitably, unavoidably flow out of their faith, which inevitably, unavoidably flows out of their understanding of the revelation of God.

How Faith Worked in the Teaching of Jesus

Jesus told His disciples,

Matthew 7:16-20 *You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit* (also Matthew 12:33).

Clearly the *fruit* in Jesus' analogy is what James called *works*, and Jesus claimed the fruit was inseparably connected to the tree. The tree is the person doing the work, which we have identified as the one who has faith based on understanding.

How Faith Worked in the Separation of the Sheep from the Goats in Matthew 25

Matthew 25:31-46 records Jesus talking about a future judgment of the Gentiles after His Second Coming. He divided them into two groups that He called the sheep and the goats. To the sheep, He said, *"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* To the goats, He said, *"Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."* The only reason Jesus gave for the distinction between the two groups is that the sheep fed, clothed, and visited *these brothers of mine* and the goats did not. [*Brothers of mine* probably refers to believers who would not take the mark of the beast during the tribulation.] Notice that their eternal destiny was determined by their works. There is no mention of their faith. Why? I suggest James would say, "it is because they show their faith by their works." There is no need to mention their faith, since their works are inevitably, unavoidably connected to their faith, which is inevitably, unavoidably connected to their understanding of the Word of God.

How Faith Worked in Romans 2

In Romans 2:6-8, Paul told us,

God will render to each person according to his deeds; to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

If salvation is by grace through faith, why is no faith mentioned in Paul's analysis of those who obtain *eternal life* and those who get *wrath and indignation*? Paul only says, *God will render to each person according to his deeds* (the same word elsewhere translated *works*). I suggest James would say, "it is because they show their faith by their works." There is no need to mention their faith, since their works are inevitably, unavoidably connected to their faith, which is inevitably, unavoidably connected to their understanding of the Word of God.

Verse 14—*What use is it*—benefit or advantage. What we do reveals who we are. Biblically speaking, to hear and not do is to not hear at all. God saved us *for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10), to be useful to God, for His glory. For example, a person buys a car to drive to work. If the car doesn't run, what use is it?

—***my brethren***—James again reminding us he is talking to believers, those already "saved."

—***if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?***—No, because faith that has no works does not exist.

Verses 15-16—*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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?*

Verse 17—*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself*—If a person lays there and is not doing anything (no breath, no heartbeat, etc.)—that person is dead. In the same way, faith that does not generate its own works automatically, by the nature of the faith itself, does not exist. So, if works must be added to faith to make it useful, to give it life, then that faith itself must be useless, dead. In the example, if they put a breathing tube and heart machine on the person, the person is useless, they are not alive. They can't breathe and have a heart beat on their own.

—For example, if you tell your kids there is a Santa Claus, it's a lie you don't believe. So, you can't just leave your imaginative Santa to himself to produce works. He won't fly in with his sleigh and come down the chimney. You have to add works to your imaginative, blind-leap, non-existent faith. So, you take the kids to the mall where they can sit on the lap of some fat guy in a red suit.

Verse 18—*But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works [it doesn't exist], and I will show you my faith by my works"*—Whatever you understand to be true is what you have faith in and will do works in accordance to that faith. For example, if you understand that life does not begin at conception and that the fetus is not a human being, you will have no problem in having an abortion. The works (abortion) shows the faith (understanding when life begins). It's impossible to have faith without works in accordance to that faith, and it is impossible to have works without faith in accordance to those works. You do what you believe and you believe what you do.

Verse 19—*You believe that God is one* [i.e., that there is one God]. ***You do well;***

—***the demons also believe***—they believe at least 3 things about God: (1) God exists, (2) there is only one God, and (3) God is to be feared (they *shudder*). They have an undeniable understanding that God is real. They live in the dimension where He dwells. They could not choose to believe that God does not exist any more than you could choose to believe I do not exist if I was sitting here talking to you. No one can choose to not believe what they understand to be true.

—However, demons do not believe God is good. Similar to an atheist who believes the Bible exists but does not understand it to be true.

—***and shudder*** (in fear)—Even the faith of demons is reflected in their works: they shudder. They have a fear of God, not peace with God.

Verse 20—*But are you willing to recognize*—It has the idea of coming together with, to join together.

—*you foolish fellow*—stupid, empty, a complete lack of comprehension of spiritual truth

—*that faith without works is useless?* Spiritual works are the evidence, not the energizer, of faith. These works include making no distinctions in the body of Christ and showing mercy instead of judgment. These are the law of liberty, loving your neighbor as yourself.

Two Examples:

This is not a new concept. It was, in fact, true of those who put their faith in God in the Old Testament, too. For example:

Verse 21—*Was not Abraham our father*—could be a reference to the Jewish believers (1:1), or it could be referring to Abraham, who is the model of saving faith for both Jew and Gentile, a man whose faith was living and acceptable to God (Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:7). Either way, Abraham was a highly esteemed man of faith in the past history of Scriptures.

—*justified* [“declared righteous” not made righteous] *by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?* Works serve as the barometer of justification, while faith is the basis for justification.

This event happened many years after God declared him to be righteous (Genesis 12:1–7; 15:6). For example, at a wedding, after the bride and groom say “I do” and are married, the official will say, “I now give to you Mr. and Mrs.” They are already married. Now he is declaring them to be married. So your works declare that you have faith.

Verse 22—*You see that faith was working with his works*—not added to his works. He was not dealing with the *means* of salvation at all, but rather with its *outcome*, the evidence that it had genuinely occurred.

APPLICATION—Abraham was not a perfect man. He sinned many times, as recorded in Scripture. But he was a man of faith—he obeyed God when God told him to leave Ur. He obeyed God when God told him to offer Isaac. You cannot hold him accountable to further revelation, such as the Mosaic Law. He had faith in what he understood to be true about God, which was shown by the works he did in obedience to what God told him to do.

— *and as a result of the works, faith was perfected*—*τελειόω*, shown to be true. Jesus said the purpose of a plant is to produce fruit (Matthew 7:19-20). For example, if you plant an apple tree, you watch it grow, until one day it produces an apple. Yay!! It was perfected. The fruit fulfilled or showed to be true that you had an apple tree.

Verse 23—*and the Scripture was fulfilled* [caused to happen] *which says, “And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned* [regarded as] *to him as righteousness,”*—the Scripture was proven to be true when it said that God regarded Abraham’s faith as righteousness.

—*he was called the friend of God*—one for whom there is affection or personal regard. The scope of the word depends on the one saying it. Abraham was one person of faith in God in the midst of totally pagan idol-worshipping world of people. One can probably say he was the only one at that time called the friend of God.

APPLICATION—Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God/Jesus is our friend. He is our God. “What a friend we have in Jesus” is not true. It should be “What a God we have in Jesus.” Seeing God as your friend is way too casual, putting Jesus on our level, rather than as an all-powerful deity who is to be obeyed and worshipped.

Verse 24—*You see that a man is justified* [declared righteous] *by works and not by faith alone*—what I understand to be true results in what I have faith in, which results in what I do. There is no disconnect whatsoever between your faith (what you believe to be true) and your works (what you do).

Verse 25—*In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot*—far different from Abraham, Rahab was a Gentile pagan, a woman, and a prostitute. She believed in the God of Israel before the spies ever came to her door (Joshua 2:9-13).

—*also justified* [“declared righteous”] *by works*—Because her works, rather than being added to her faith, flowed out of her faith in the God of Israel (Joshua 2:8-13; Hebrews 11:31—*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace*).

—*when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*—By the way, it was not her lie about the spies that demonstrated her faith. Lying is always sinful. It was welcoming the spies into her house and sending them out away, saving their lives, from the city’s guards that demonstrated her faith in the God of Israel.

APPLICATION—The contrast between these two people couldn’t be greater. Abraham is revered for thousands of years as the father of the entire Jewish people. Rahab is a pagan prostitute with nothing to revere about her (like the poor dirty person in verse 1). Yet that’s where the earthly distinction ends because they both equally spiritually came to faith in God, proved by their works.

Under Judaism, there would be a distinction between Abraham and Rahab. But both had faith in God as is proved by their works, so there is no distinction between them.

Verse 26—*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead*—faith and works are inseparable. If there are no acts springing from faith, that faith is no more alive than “the body without the spirit.”

Chapter 3

Teachers

Verse 1—*Let not many of you become teachers*, not simply teaching something, we all are to do that (Matthew 28:19; Hebrews 5:12). But one who is recognized as a teacher has a greater understanding and influence and accountability. There should not be many people who want to be a teacher. Peter warned, *...there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep* (2 Peter 2:1–3; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; Jude 8, 10, 16).

APPLICATION—Teachers who misrepresent God’s Word can do more spiritual and moral damage to God’s people than a hundred atheists or secularists attacking from outside. That is why it is so foolish and spiritually dangerous to have newly converted celebrities, or any other new convert, as well as those untrained and unaccountable, speaking and teaching. Every teacher, without exception, is to be *diligent to present* [himself or herself] *approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15).

—*my brethren*—again, referring to his audience as believers, brothers and sisters in Christ

—*knowing that as such we*—James includes himself as a teacher

—*will incur a stricter judgment*—When teaching God’s Word, there is a huge responsibility to be faithful to that Word. One’s words will be evaluated very carefully both by those who are taught and by God. Teaching is a work that will be strictly judged—is it gold or wood and hay (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)?

The Tongue

The tongue is directive (vv. 1-4), it directs your life. Two examples: bits and rudders (both small, like tongues, yet controlling something vastly bigger than themselves).

Verse 2—*For* [connecting to verse 1—teaching is about using your tongue] *we* [James included] *all stumble* [“to err, to sin”] *in many ways*—Many different sins for different people. The problem of “spiritual failure” is common to all, with the sad verdict that by one slip all are guilty of breaking the entire law (2:10).

—*If anyone does not stumble in what he says*—it’s the one sin we all have in common.

—*he is a perfect man*—Jesus Christ was the only human able to control His tongue. He was the perfect man, without any sin. James uses the word “perfect” is τελειόω, *teleo*, also used in verse 22, to be spiritually mature and have a sanctified heart that is expressed through mature, sanctified, God-honoring speaking and teaching. The idea is that only spiritually mature believers can control their tongues. And controlling the tongue is one of the works of faith, what we understand to be true.

—*able to bridle* [control] *the whole body as well*. Since sins of the tongue are the hardest to avoid, anyone who could control his or her tongue would surely be able to also keep their whole body from being used as an instrument of sin.

Verse 3—*Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well*—a tongue can direct, i.e. effect great change, out of all proportion to its size. Whereas the bit in the horse is to control it, the function of the tongue is not to control the whole body. But James is using it as an example. The tongue is small compared to the body, as a bit is to a horse’s body.

APPLICATION—Because James is talking about teachers in the body of Christ, this illustration shows how what a false teacher says can direct the whole body of Christ in their influence of what they say. We’ve seen this in action, for example, with Rob Bell’s influence. Conversely, the tongue of a faithful teacher of God’s Word can also steer the body of Christ. Be careful what words you listen to. It is much harder to unlearn than it is to learn. Therefore, be careful what you learn.

Verse 4—*Look at 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*—strong winds can be the suffering and destruction from the world that buffets the body of Christ, yet through those storms, the words of God can direct the believer. The words are being controlled by the desires of the pilot, so what we believe to be true controls our tongues.

The tongue is destructive (vv. 5-6), like the fire of hell.

Verse 5—*So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things*—“These are not empty claims. The tongue is able to sway multitudes. It can alter the destinies of nations” (EBC). Consider Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, for example. In the two examples of the bit and rudder, the tongue can be a great good thing. But it can also be a destructive thing, as in the next example.

—*See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!*—Literally, one small spark can end up destroying a huge forest.

Verse 6—*And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity*—“All the evil characteristics of a fallen world, its covetousness, its idolatry, its blasphemy, its lust, its rapacious [insatiable] greed, find expression through the tongue” (Constable). “It is as though all the wickedness in the whole world were wrapped up in that little piece of flesh. There are few sins people commit in which the tongue is not involved” (EBC).

—***the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body***—The tongue is not independent of the body, it does not act alone. It’s the one member of our body that can and does defile the entire body.

—***and sets on fire the course of our life***—It not only can defile the whole body, but it can destroy the entire course of your life. How many courses of life such as feuds, wars, divorces, etc. were started by what someone said. ALL of them!!

—***and is set on fire by hell***—[γέεννα, *Gehenna*, used only here outside of the Gospels). The Valley of Hinnom, on the south side of Jerusalem, came to be used as a place where human excrement and rubbish from the Temple were disposed of and continually burned. It was a lake of fire. When we first started traveling to Israel, they still used these “lakes of fire” as disposal sites. I saw one. Jesus likened it to hell (Matthew 5:22). The source of the evilness of the tongue is hell itself.

APPLICATION—So be careful that you are not being directed, making life decisions, by the evil someone says. And also, you must be careful to not speak evil. Do you even realize the impact your evil words in can have in someone else’s life?

The tongue is uncontrollable (vv. 7-8), unlike animals which can be controlled.

Verse 7—*For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is* [continues to be] ***tamed*** [to bring under control] ***and has been tamed by the human race***—From the moment of creation, God said, “*Let us make man in Our image, ...and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth*” (Genesis 1:26).

Verse 8—*But no one* [human] ***can tame*** [to bring under control] ***the tongue***—Whereas it is possible to secure a caged animal so as to prevent an escape, this is not so with the tongue.

—***it is a restless evil***—In the present context, it forms the picture of a caged animal pacing back and forth and seeking an opportunity to escape. With roots in the sin nature, the tongue is unstable, agitated, keyed up, wanting to blurt out its evil. James is not saying the tongue never says anything good, but it is always ready and eager to say something evil. It never rests.

—***and full of deadly poison***—Like a poisonous deadly snake, the tongue is loaded with the venom of hate and death-dealing gossip. It can destroy simply with words.

APPLICATION—No one by themselves can control the tongue. But God can control the tongue, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

The tongue is inconsistent (vv. 9-12). Four examples of contrast. It’s inconsistency is another perversion of the tongue.

Verse 9—*With it we bless* [to praise, speak well of] ***our Lord and Father***—in conversation or perhaps in an assembly of believers, gathered to praise and worship God

—***and with it we curse*** [to utter offensive words in anger or annoyance] ***men***—such as at home or at work

—***who have been made in the likeness of God***—Genesis 1:27. When you curse the one made in the image of God, you are indirectly cursing God in whose image mankind was made.

Verse 10—*from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing*—For example, a single mouth can produce two effects—to fan a flame, to spit on a fire to extinguish it.

—*My brethren*—speaking to believers

—*these things ought not to be this way*—as believers, we have a new nature in Christ. We are not to talk as the world talks. We have a higher calling, to bless God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Verse 11—*Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?* No. Even nature is more consistent than a believer’s speech.

Verse 12—*Can a fig tree, my brethren* [believers], *produce olives*—No

—*or a vine produce figs?* No

—*Nor can salt water produce fresh?* No

APPLICATION—The point is that unbelievers consistently speak evil words. Even when they speak “good” words, they are often for evil motives. However, believers are to speak loving words, out of their new nature in Christ. Yet, they can choose to *quench the Spirit* (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and *grieve the Holy Spirit of God* (Ephesians 4:30). Paul wrote, *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear* (Ephesians 4:29). The *law of liberty* (1:25) means we have a choice to make when we speak. We don’t have to speak evil words.

Two Kinds of Wisdom

Verse 13—*Who among you* [believers] *is wise*—σοφός [philosopher] pertaining to specialized knowledge resulting in the skill for accomplishing some purpose. For example, like a specialized skill for playing the piano.

—*and understanding?* being able to understand and evaluate —‘insightful, understanding.’ For example, like to be able to listen to a song played on the piano and evaluate its accuracy and artistry.

—*Let him show by his good behavior his deeds*—it’s not about acquiring truth in lectures but about applying that truth to life, to what you do. For example, a teacher is under obligation to show the truth they are teaching in what he or she does in their everyday life. Paul wrote, *you who teach another, do you not teach yourself?* (Romans 2:21).

—*in the gentleness*—humble, meekness [If you think it is weak to be meek, try being meek for a week!!] “The word was used to describe a horse that had been broken and trained to submit to the bridle” (EBC). It’s the opposite of harshness, i.e., not being harsh with people.

—*of wisdom*—practical wisdom that enables one to live a life of godliness.

Verses 14-15—*But*—contrast to the wisdom, good behavior, and gentleness of verse 13:

—*if you have bitter* [same word as *bitter water* in verse 11]—harsh, sharp, cutting, and destructive, having no concern for the feelings or welfare of those who are its objects. Their lives are based on and motivated by human, ungodly wisdom and are inevitably self-centered, living in a world in which their own personal ideas, desires, and standards are the measure of everything. They resent anyone or anything that comes between them and their own objectives.

—*jealousy*—resentment or envy of someone

—*and selfish ambition*—wanting to be better than someone else or wanting to make people think they are better, rivalry, extreme selfishness.

—*in your heart*—Sins originate in the heart. Jesus said, “*out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders*” (Matthew 15:19). Solomon warned, “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life*” (Proverbs 4:23).

—*do not be arrogant*—to boast about something by downgrading something or someone else

—*and so lie against the truth*—if a person claims to be a believer but is motivated by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, that person is lying. They are promoting self rather than the truth.

—**This wisdom is *not* that which comes down from above**—this bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and arrogance are not from God, not a wisdom from Him

—**but is *earthly, natural, demonic***—that heart and behavior are from the earth, natural, i.e., from the sin nature, and demonic. As the tongue that is full of iniquity is set on fire by hell (v. 6), so this behavior is demonic.

Verse 16—*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing*—

There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever; who has an acute brain and a skillful tongue; but whose effect ... is to drive people apart, to foment [stir up] strife, to make trouble, to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom that that person possesses is devilish rather than divine, and that such a person is engaged on Satan's work and not on God's work [Constable].

Verse 17—*But*—contrasted to the *earthly, natural, demonic* “wisdom”

—**the wisdom from above**—from heaven, from God. Rather than describing the wisdom, James is giving the results of the wisdom from above.

—**is first pure**—The first and underlying characteristic of heavenly wisdom is an absence of any sinful attitude or motive, free from any defilements

—**then peaceable**—instead of jealousy and selfish ambition which creates conflict by its selfishness, peace is produced by a person's humility (see Philippians 2:1-4).

—**gentle**—considerate of others, not to speak evil of anyone, nor to be quarrelsome or harsh

—**reasonable**—open to reason, willing to listen

—**full of mercy**—concern and compassion for anyone you encounter who is suffering or who needs any kind of support or assistance, especially concern for fellow believers

—**good fruit**—the fruit of the Spirit (*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*—Galatians 5:22-23).

—**unwavering**—literally means not to be parted or divided, therefore, without uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency, vacillation, or doubtfulness

—**without hypocrisy**—Hypocrisy is one of the sins Jesus condemned most (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 22:18; 23:27-28; 24:50-51; Luke 12:1). It means being genuine and sincere, lacking in pretense or show. Hypocrisy is the idea of a person on stage acting as someone they really are not.

APPLICATION—My observation is that people (especially parents) make a decision and are unwavering, unwilling to discuss it. But then if/when they hear reasonable arguments, they waver in their decision. The wisdom discussed in this verse says that reasoning should come first. Then when there is a good reason, the decision should be unwavering.

Verse 18—*And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*—

Godly wisdom produces a continuing cycle of righteousness, which is planted and harvested in a peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and His faithful people and between those people themselves. The believer should be what God wants him or her to be, do what God wants him or her to do, and speak as God wants him or her to speak.

APPLICATION—Earthly wisdom results in *disorder and every evil thing* (v. 16). The wisdom from above, from God, results in *righteousness* and *peace* (v. 18).

Chapter 4

Conflicts

Verse 1—*What is the source*—[πόθεν, from where, or why?] Jesus used this word: “*I know where [πόθεν] I came from and where [πόθεν] I am going*” (John 8:14).

—*of quarrels*—state of being at war, where conflicts could erupt at any moment

—*and conflicts*—individual battles

—*among you?*—James is so upset by this infighting, he does not call them “brothers” but “you.” It’s personal, to the individual person. This war is so serious, it can even result in murder (v. 2).

APPLICATION—Believers can act *fleshly*, according to their sin nature instead of according to their new nature in Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “*I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Three causes of internal conflict:

(1) Uncontrolled desire (4:1b)

—*Is not the source your pleasures*—ἡδονή, *hedonon*, from which we get the English word “hedonism,” sensual self-indulgence. “Pleasure is the overriding desire of their lives. Nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of its realization” (EBC).

—*that wage war in your members?* Our personal desires are part of our human sin nature, and we will never escape their pull as long as we live in our present bodies. “Our culture glorifies the satisfaction of personal desire, and it is the primary pursuit of most people, including Christians” (Constable). We are bombarded with it on commercials, TV programs, movies, music, etc.

(2) Unfulfilled desire (4:2a)

Verse 2—*You lust* [“to greatly desire to do or have something—to long for, to desire very much”]. John tells us where lust comes from. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world* (1 John 2:16).

“Lust” does not originate with God. It originates from the world, which results in the tongue, which *defiles the entire body... sets on fire the course of our life and is set on fire by hell* (3:6) and “wisdom” *earthly, natural, demonic* (3:15). So there are three sources: our own sin nature, the world, and Satan.

—*and do not have*—So *there is disorder and every evil thing* (3:16).

—*so you commit murder*—In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said that hatred is equal to murder. John wrote, *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer* (1 John 3:15).

APPLICATION—The very nature of lust is that it cannot be satisfied. It’s the result of rejecting God and His righteousness. Therefore, it must end in hatred and every evil thing, demonic, set on fire by hell. Paul said that people who *do not honor Him [God] as God... God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity* (Romans 1:18f). If you do not honor God in your life, fulfilling your lusts will consume you.

(3) Selfish desire (4:2b-3)

—*You are envious*—[“to set one’s heart on something that belongs to someone else—‘to covet.’”]. Whereas lust seems to originate within our own sin nature, envy originates as we observe and desire something belonging to someone else.

—*and cannot obtain*—both lust and envy cannot be obtained or fulfilled. They are never satisfied.

—*so you fight and quarrel*—which results in these conflicts

—*You do not have because you do not ask*. Obviously, James is not telling them to ask God for their lusts and what they envy. In the context, James has said to ask God for wisdom from above (1:5), which results in peace and righteousness (3:17-18). James started 4:1 by asking them what their *source* was. Conflicts have their source in lusts and envying. But peace and righteousness have their source in wisdom from God, which is available for those who ask.

Verse 3—*You ask and do not receive*—However, not everyone who asks will receive. Why don't they receive?

—(1) *because you ask with wrong motives*—“**With wrong motives** translates the single Greek word κακός *kakos*, which has the basic meaning of bad, evil, or wicked, as it is sometimes rendered. Linking that word to **motives** is appropriate but only implied” (MacArthur). What is a bad motive?

—(2) *so that you may spend it*—δαπανάω *dapanaoe* (**spend**) means to completely use up or squander and was used by Jesus to describe the prodigal son's wasteful squandering of his inheritance (Luke 15:13).

—*on your pleasures*—ἡδονή, *hedonon*, same as *pleasures* in verse 1.

Verse 4—*You adulteresses*—from the context, we know this is a figure of speech describing their spiritual unfaithfulness. It's a shocking word, getting their attention. This was an Old Testament picture of Israel, such as in Hosea 2:2-5; 3:1-5; 9:1. It is not used of pagan Gentiles. Only God's people, whether in the Old Testament or in our age, can be unfaithful to God and our relationship to Him. As physical adultery is only possible if a person is in a marriage relationship.

APPLICATION—Spiritual unfaithfulness does not mean they lose their salvation. Salvation depends on God (John 10:28-29), not on your works. You did no works to get saved (Ephesians 2:8-9), and no works will cause you to lose your salvation.

—*do you not know that friendship* [φιλία, *philea*, brotherly love, indicates a reciprocal relationship—you love the world and the world loves you]

—*with the world*—in 1:27, James wrote, *to keep oneself unstained by the world*. Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31).

—*is hostility toward God?* Lit. “being an enemy,” opposition, resistance, fighting against

—*Therefore whoever wishes* [“desires and makes plans to reach that goal”] *to be a friend of the world*—mutual affection between you and Satan, the ruler of this world system

—*makes himself*—you can't blame anyone or anything else. You are making yourself to be this.

—*an enemy of God*—same word as “hostility.” The second phrase adds the information that the person “wishes” for the friendship with the world and “makes himself” the enemy of God.

APPLICATION—You do what you believe and you believe what you do. You cannot blame anyone else. You made yourself into the enemy of God!!

Verses 5 is the most difficult verse of the book to translate, and commentaries vary. James seems to have a specific Scripture in mind, but which Scripture? “No OT verse is worded exactly this way. This is either a statement about the general teaching of scripture or a quotation from an ancient translation of the Hebrew text that no longer exists today” (NET).

Verse 5—*Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose*, that is, that Scripture is empty? Useless? Whatever Scripture James had in mind, he has a high regard for it as being from God. It is not useless or empty.

—Another view is that James is that the Scripture James is referring to is verse 6, a quote from Proverbs 3:34.

—“*He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us*”?

“Is the ‘spirit’ the Holy Spirit or the human spirit? Is the spirit to be taken as the subject of the verb ‘yearns’ or as its object? Is ‘envy’ to be seen as ‘unrighteous desire’ or as ‘righteous jealousy’?” [BKC]. “He” is not in the text, and the Greek does not have capitals [S].

—“It is not clear whether James cites these words to confirm the statement of vv 1–3 (that human-kind is indeed infected with jealous tendencies) or to combat the sins mentioned in vv 4–5 (that God jealously opposes sinful action in those who claim to be his people)” (WBC).

- “The Spirit who indwells you jealously yearns [for you] and He gives more grace.” It is natural, therefore, to expect v.5 to speak of God’s jealous longing for his people’s love, rather than of their envious spirit” (BKC). “Thus, in v.4 James has accused his readers of spiritual unfaithfulness. If they are not willing to accept this indictment, he asks in v.5 what they think about the OT passages dealing with God’s jealous longing for his people?” (EBC).
- “He [God] yearns jealously for the Holy Spirit which indwells you and He gives more grace.” An unlikely translation.
- “The [human] spirit which indwells you yearns to envy (v. 2b), but He [God] gives more grace.” The NIV favors this idea.

Verse 6—*But He gives a greater grace*—“It is better, therefore, to end v. 5 with a question mark and to make the clause “but He gives more grace” a new sentence. The meaning of vv. 4-6 would then be that God has set a high standard for wholehearted love and devotion on the part of His people, but He gives grace that is greater than the rigorous demand He has made” [EBC].

—***Therefore it [the Scriptures] says, “God is opposed to the proud*** [who pursue their own pleasures]—quoting Proverbs 3:34.

—***but gives grace to the humble***—“The humble” are the people who willingly submit to God’s desire for them rather than proudly insisting on satisfying their own desires for pleasure (cf. vv.1-3)” [EBC]. Also quoted in 1 Peter 5:5. “God in grace gives his people the help they need to resist the appeal of the world and to remain loyal to him” [EBC].

APPLICATION—My conclusion is that the lusts of our sin nature and the envying of the pleasures of the world want to draw us away from God. But we have the Spirit of God living in us, and the promise of God that if we ask for His wisdom, He will give His wisdom, peace, and righteousness to us, when we humble ourselves before Him. Whatever hostility we had, toward God and other believers because of our submitting to our pleasures, His grace is greater.

Next, James issues a series of ten aorist imperatives, i.e., commands, in verses 7-10. They are a forceful demand for action, for obedience.

Verse 7—(1) *Submit therefore to God*—Because *God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble* (v. 6), therefore, the believer should submit to Him. Submission is not the same as obedience. Instead, it is the surrender of one’s will, which leads to obedience. We need the Spirit of God to apply the Word of God to our thinking, and to renew our minds, so that the desired transformation will occur (Romans 12:1-2).

—(2) ***Resist*** [be against, do not give in to, don’t be susceptible to] ***the devil***—take a stand against the devil, and his world system (1 John 5:19)—the things that formerly were attractive to you, the pleasures of your lusts and envying. The command to resist indicates it is possible to do it. Nowhere in the epistles are we told to cast out Satan or demons. Jesus and the disciples/apostles did it, but they never instructed us to do it. Paul wrote to *Be strong in the Lord...put on the full armor of God...stand firm against the schemes of the devil* (Ephesians 6:10-11). Jesus prayed, *keep them from*

the evil one (John 17:15). Peter wrote, *be on the alert. Your adversary the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith...* (1 Peter 1:8-9).

—**and he will flee from you**—run off, beat a hasty retreat, scam, skedaddle. Sometimes, it's only for a moment you need to resist, and he will flee. But this is something we need to deal with as long as we are alive in this world. Satan cannot hold you against your will. When Jesus resisted the devil, he fled (Matthew 4:11).

APPLICATION—What you need to resist in your teens, your 20s, your 40s, your 60s, yes, even in your 80s, will be different. In my Bible, I have a note, “Practicing sin has a lot to do with living where sin is acceptable.” Look at your environment. Who is at home there—God or Satan?

Verse 8—(3) **Draw near to God**—lusts and pleasures all move a believer away from God. *We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it* (Hebrews 2:1) Isaiah wrote a very convicting verse about the Israelites. *This people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote* (Isaiah 29:13). It's easy to say words and practice traditions, but what about the heart? Is it moving toward God or drifting away from Him?

—**and He will draw near to you**—He gives greater grace to those who draw near to Him.

APPLICATION—It's the promise of God in all dispensations. When Adam sinned, God came into the garden and called to the man, “*Where are you?*” (Genesis 3:9). David wrote, *the Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth* (Psalm 145:18). David also told his son Solomon, *Know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him* (1 Chronicles 28:9). God told Jeremiah, *You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29:13). Drawing near to God is a choice for you to make.

—(4) **Cleanse your hands, you sinners**—However, it is not in any person's power—even the power of a believer—to cleanse himself spiritually. That is why our Lord promises that, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). Remember, when Jesus was washing the feet of the disciples, He told Peter, “*He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean*” (John 13:10). We are positionally clean as believers, but we need to confess our sins, to *cleanse your hands* (wash our feet). It has to do with what you do each day.

—(5) **and purify your hearts, you double-minded**—this has to do with what you think, your decisions. You cannot love the pleasures of the world and the righteousness of God at the same time. Remember, Jesus said, “*Out of the heart, come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders*” (Matthew 15:19). You do what you believe, and you believe what you do.

Verse 9—(6) **Be miserable** (7) **and mourn** (8) **and weep**—(9) **let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom**—James is calling us to grieve over the pleasures and lusts of the flesh that turned us away from God. He's not saying to live a miserable life, but to be genuinely sorry for a sinful attitude and lifestyle. Christians often have too casual an attitude toward the sin in their lives.

Verse 10—(10) **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord**—and we return to verse 6, where James says that God will give grace to the humble. Much of our hurts and anger stem from our pride, because we think people are not treating us as well as we deserve!! Jesus was the most humble man to ever live. He *emptied Himself, ...being made in the likeness of men. And being found in*

appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him... (Philippians 2:7-9).

APPLICATION—Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. Can we listen to what someone else says without thinking of our own comment, our own story, what we want to say? Do we want them to hurry up and finish so we can talk?

—*and He will exalt you*—“The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth” (Constable).

Verse 11—*Do not speak against one another, brethren*—καταλαλέω [katalaleite] refers to any form of speaking against a person. What is said may be true in its content but harsh and unkind in the manner of its presentation. The construction of the sentence means to stop doing what they were already doing—criticizing one another.

—*He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother*—judging is the result of feeling you are superior to the another believer. It’s the harsh, unkind, critical spirit that continually finds fault with others.

—*speaks against the law and judges the law*—probably referring to Leviticus 19:18, loving your neighbor as yourself. If you judge yourself superior to your fellow Christian, you are also judging yourself superior to the law, which said to love, not judge.

—*but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it*—Obviously, if you judge the believer and the law, you are not obeying the law of love, you are judging yourself superior to that law.

Verse 12—*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge*—Only God is above the law. He is the originator of the law, and the administrator and enforcer of the law.

—*the One who is able to save and to destroy*, that is, enforce the law, rewarding those who keep it and punishing those who break it.

—*but who are you who judge your neighbor?*—You are usurping God’s authority when you judge.

APPLICATION—We are to be on guard against false teaching (Acts 20:29-31), and are to “*help the weak*”(Acts 20:35). Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:16). Paul wrote, “*if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness*” (Galatians 6:1). So what is James saying? Be humble, don’t have an attitude of being harsh and critical of others, and if you observe actual sin, approach them in gentleness, with the focus on restoring, not judging them.

Arrogance

Verse 13—*Come now*—lit. “pay attention”

—*you who say*—they were leaving God completely out of their plans, acting like they were the ones in control of what happens to them. They planned as if they were omniscient, omnipotent, and invulnerable.

—*“Today or tomorrow*—they chose their own time

All four verbs are in future tense:

—*we will go to such and such a city*—they chose their own destination or location

—*and [will] spend a year there*—they chose their own duration

—*and [will] engage in business*—they chose their own project

—*[will] make a profit*—they chose their own goal or objective

This is foolish to leave God out of your plans because:

Verse 14—(1) *Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow*—a person does not know unforeseen circumstances. They have been planning as if they know exactly what the future holds or even as if they have control of the future. But their knowledge is limited.

Life is far from simple. It is a complex matrix of forces, events, people, contingencies, and circumstances over which we have little or no control, making it impossible for anyone to ascertain, design, or assure any specific future. Despite that, some people foolishly imagine that they are in charge of their lives. [MacArthur]

—(2) *You are just a vapor* [or mist] *that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*—even their very life itself is uncertain and it is brief. You do not know if you will even be here later in the day or tomorrow. David wrote, *As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer* (Psalm 103:15–16).

APPLICATION—The question is, how does one approach life in the light of not knowing the outcome? Trusting in God, and not a well-thought-out plan, is the only way to face the future. In Luke 12:16-21, Jesus told a parable about the foolishness of leaving God out of one’s plans.

Verse 15—*Instead*—lit. an alternative, serving as a contrast

—*you ought to say*—these are not words used as a charm but a heart attitude of dependence on God’s will or desire. The present infinitive of the verb reveals that submission to God’s will must be habitual and continual. In every aspect of the believer’s life and in every decision they face.

—*“If the Lord wills*—

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

—*we will live*—David wrote, *...in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them* (Psalm 139:16).

—*and also do this or that*—*The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps* (Proverbs 16:9).

Verse 16—*But as it is*—But some of the believers rejected this teaching of “if the Lord wills” and continued to have confidence in their own plans and decisions

—*you boast*—lit. an unusually high degree of confidence in someone or something

—*in your arrogance*—pride. In the famous poem “Invictus,” are the lines: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” That is evil.

—*all such boasting is evil*—*πονηρός*: [*poneros*] (a title for the Devil, literally ‘the evil one’) the one who is essentially evil or in a sense personifies evil is the Scripture’s name for the Devil, the original boastful sinner (Isaiah 14:13-14) [Louw & Nida Lexicon].

—“The first wrong response to God’s will is presumptuously ignoring it, living as though God and His will do not exist. But there are also those who, while acknowledging that God exists and has a will, nevertheless arrogantly reject it.” [MacArthur]

Verse 17—*Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do* [we can list everything in the book] *and does not do it, to him it is sin*— “They cannot take refuge in the plea that they have done

nothing positively wrong; as Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of omission are as real and serious as sins of commission.” [Constable]

Chapter 5

The Danger of Loving Money

Verse 1—*Come now*—lit. “pay attention”

—*you rich*—i.e., those who are devoted to their riches, where their heart treasure is. Jesus said, “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*” *Because of that, Jesus exhorted, “Do not store up* (“treasure,” or even “hoard”) *for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:19–21).

—It’s not being rich (everyone possesses wealth and material goods to one degree or another). In fact, it is God *who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy* (1 Timothy 6:17). It’s the “love” of money that is the problem for a person (1 Timothy 6:10), no matter how much money they have. Money brings temptations such as a false sense of security, a desire to control others, personal pride, thinking you deserve it or you earned it.

—*weep and howl*—a word that is lit. an animal sound—the reason for their intense remorse is...

—*for your miseries* [lit. “to have nothing”] *which are coming upon you*—James now gives examples of things which cause miseries, which you cannot control, no matter how much riches you have.

Verse 2—*Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten*—because, Jesus said, this is what happens to the treasures of earth. They are perishable, like food. For example, hundreds of houses burned in forest fires in California, houses destroyed in floods of the Mississippi River, or in the hurricanes in New Orleans. Unpredictable natural disasters can and do destroy earthly riches.

Verse 3—*Your gold and your silver have rusted*—lit. tarnished or corroded. Solomon wrote, *I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). You cannot guard against time and chance, no matter how hard you try. Your house deteriorates, the stock market goes down, your car rusts.....

—*and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire*—The same process that destroys gold and silver destroys people. You can eat healthy and exercise, yet still get a disease. For example, you can never smoke but still get lung cancer.

—*It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!*— You have put all your energy, etc. into something that has no eternal value. You will not take any of it with you when you stand before the Bema seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Also, we are in the last days before the Second Coming of Christ. The Rapture could happen today, or tomorrow, or next week...and you’ll leave it all behind. ...*for the coming of the Lord is near* (v. 8).

Verse 4—*Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld* [to purposely defraud or deprive] *by you*—some were getting rich by cheating their workers out of their fair wages. The Mosaic Law said, *You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the Lord and it become sin in you* (Deuteronomy 24:15).

—*cries out against you and the outcry* [shouts] *of those who did the harvesting* [harvest done—indicating the owners now have the money to pay] *has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth*—an

Old Testament name for Lord of Hosts (1 Samuel 1:3), God Almighty. You may not hear the outcry of the laborer, but God does hear their outcry.

Verse 5—*You have lived* [lifestyle] *luxuriously on the earth*—extravagantly, self-indulgence, non-essentials, grandeur.

APPLICATION—Interestingly, I talked to an extremely rich woman once, and she said that riches just bump you up to another social level, in which you then feel like you need more to keep up. You may have 3 houses now, but others have 5 houses, etc. We are always looking up at what others have that we don't have, rather than being thankful for what we do have.

—*and led a life of wanton* [excessive, meaningless, empty] *pleasure* [satisfying your own lusts and appetites]—

—*you have fattened your hearts* [given your heart everything you desired, gorging yourself] *in a day of slaughter* [death and judgment]—An illustration from nature—imagine a chicken that is fattened up, only to be slaughtered, completely unaware that the slaughter is coming. Rather than getting the end you desire from your gorging, everything you invest in on earth will not be taken with you when you die. Will your descendants just hire an estate group to come in and get rid of all your stuff? Maybe Aunt Sophie's crystal bowl meant something to you, but your kids don't even know Aunt Sophie!!

APPLICATION—It's amazing how it seems like the richer people are, the more they invest in leaving an earthly treasure with their name (Rockefeller Center, Trump Tower, VanAndel Arena, Meijer Gardens). But once they die, in the next generations, the name is associated with the object, not the person for whom it is named. We are temporarily on the earth, and who we are is temporarily on the earth. Think of the billions of people who have lived, of whom we know nothing. Yet we cry out to be immortal—God says, “You ARE immortal” but in heaven, not on the earth.

Verse 6—*You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you* [defenseless or chooses to not fight back]—“probably refers to a class of people rather than to one individual). What began as an interest in money ended as an insensitivity to murder” (BKC). Examples include John the Baptist, Jesus, Stephen, Paul killing believers, etc., all righteous people killed by the rich, ruling class of people, such as the Sanhedrin, Roman rulers, etc.

To sum up (WBC):

1. The *folly of hoarding* goods that are by nature subject to the ravages of decay and dissolution is vividly shown in vv 1–3. Food items such as grain become stale and unusable; garments are attacked by moths; gold is blighted by rust. The point of this descriptive passage is an obvious one: use your possessions or they get wasted.
2. Even more culpable is the *crime of dishonesty* (in v 4). The rich landowners have become so captivated by their wealth that they do not pay their legal and honest obligations.
3. The aim in life is self-pleasing to the point of excess and gluttony. . . .philosophers call the hedonistic fallacy. This comes from the Greek word *hedone*, pleasure. It has been observed that if we pursue pleasure we fail to get it. Pleasure is a by-product of many activities. . . . The problem arises because of the mysterious tendency in our nature: we try to separate the pleasure from the act that gives it and go after it for its own sake. Unfortunately, it does not work for long . . . because the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake is always ultimately unsatisfying . . . and (becomes) addictive.
4. . . .the martyrdom of one whose character was blameless. This has happened to Christians down through the centuries, and is increasing in our day. Also, think of the murder of the innocent babies, where the womb becomes their grave.

Exhortation to be Patient

Verse 7—Therefore—because of the miseries (temporary) nature of our life and the coming judgment

—**be patient**—self-restraint, not trying to get even

—**brethren**—believers to whom this epistle was sent (and us)

—**until the coming** ο[παρουσία *parousia*] **of the Lord**—when Jesus comes again. This has the idea of both purpose and time. He will set free the oppressed and punish the evil doers. It's having an eternal perspective, not an earthly perspective. An affluent, indulgent, worldly believer has little interest in the Lord's return which will end his/her lifestyle. Focusing on the coming of Jesus will motivate the believer to godly living.

—**The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil**—i.e., the harvest

—**being patient about it**—there is nothing the farmer can do to speed up this process of the harvest and the rain.

—**until it gets the early and late rains**—early rains are immediately after the seed is sown. Late rains are as the crops are maturing.

Verse 8—You too be patient—like the farmer. We wait. We cannot control Christ's return.

—**strengthen your hearts**—be strong in the inner person, spiritually mature

—**for the coming of the Lord is near**—it must happen—and it could happen today. It's nearer today than it was yesterday. This idea of nearness keeps the tension of the end times before us. If you knew the exact time, you would live a different life until that moment. But not knowing when it will happen, but the assurance that it will happen, should guide your life every moment of every day. [It's amazing that someone will do something in the presence of God that they would never do in the presence of another person.] Also, it is our assurance that God's righteousness will defeat the evil that is in the world, that is causing all the suffering.

APPLICATION—*But the day of the Lord will come...and the earth and its works will be burned up...But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells...since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:10-18).*

Verse 9—Do not complain [intensive and excessive], **brethren, against one another**—reminding us of 4:11, *Do not speak against one another, brethren.*

—**so that you yourselves may not be judged**—All deeds will be judged. For believers, *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)*, i.e., no judgment for sins that were paid for on the cross. But there is a Bema Seat judgment for the deeds done (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). When Jesus came the first time, *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him (John 3:17)*. But His Second Coming is as Judge.

—**behold, the Judge is standing right at the door**—Jesus, the rightful Judge, James describes as *the One who is able to save and to destroy (4:12)*.

Examples of Endurance

Verse 10—As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience—the same word as the command in verse 8 to *be patient*

—*take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord*—Jeremiah was lowered into a cistern, Ezekiel lost his wife, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, Daniel was thrown into a lions’ den, etc.

Verse 11—*We count those blessed who endured*—the list is in Hebrews 11:32-39. Of course, God counted them as blessed, but we do, too. We don’t condemn those who suffer for Christ. In this context, endurance is to be understood in the same way as in 1:2–5, 9, 12, 19; 4:6, 8, 10, where James sets it against the background of God’s sovereign control of events and the need to wait for Him to act in His own time and way.

—*You have heard of the endurance of Job*—Job was not very patient (in spite of the common phrase, “The patience of Job,” which is not in the Bible). It’s not clear why James chose to give Job as an example. He was not a silent party to his suffering. Instead, he was one who complained bitterly to God because of his awful circumstances (Job 7:11-16; 10:18; 23:2; 30:20-23). However, he did endure what he suffered. He never stopped believing in God nor did he curse God. [BTW, this is the only reference to Job in the New Testament.]

—*and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings*—James is not promising that temporary steadfastness in the face of suffering will produce material prosperity, as the end of Job’s story would suggest. As pointed out in verses 7-11, a believer must endure, in God’s time and God’s way, either until they die or until the Lord returns. In our age, the outcome of our endurance and suffering is eternal rewards.

—*that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful*—It’s a comfort to us, knowing that, when facing our Bema Seat judgment, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

APPLICATION—Job’s example offers the Christian hope because it becomes apparent from the biblical story that Christians can withstand [extreme] adversity. By examining Job’s life, the readers may appreciate that there was a purpose behind what happened to him (again the sovereignty of God is in view; see 4:15). Job came to understand God’s faithful nature (Job 42:5) before his material possessions were restored, and as he persevered, he found his closest communion with God in the midst of adversity. [WBC—NT]

Verse 12—*But above all, my brethren*—*above all* does not necessarily imply a worse sin, but simply that what follows is important. It sounds like it is somehow connected to what James has just said. Oaths usually indicate an impatience with a situation, to try to manipulate God into changing whatever the situation (especially suffering) is.

—*do not swear*—i.e., take an oath, saying, “I promise...” Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 5:34-37, in which He forbid taking an oath altogether.

—*either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath*—taking an oath assumes that your normal “yes” or “no” is not the truth and cannot be trusted. Sometimes people make promises to God if He would remove their suffering. For example, during war, soldiers would make promises to God if He would deliver them from the trenches and attacks of the enemy.

—*but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no*—your word is one of your most valuable assets. *A good name is to be more desired than great riches* (Proverbs 22:1).

—*so that you may not fall under judgment*—usually oaths use “so help me God,” invoking God’s name. Then when the oath is broken, there will be a judgment because you included God (see v. 9).

APPLICATION—An oath should not be made at a wedding either. A simple “yes” is sufficient. If your spouse divorces you, you will have broken the oath, even though you are not the one initiating the divorce. Jesus said, “*make no oath at all...let your statement be, ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil* (Matthew 5:38).

APPLICATION—There are two “P” words a Christian should never say: “proud” and “promise.” Both things assume you have the omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), and omnipresence of God, who is the only One who can absolutely do what He says.

Verse 13—*Is anyone among you suffering?*—from the trials in their lives—James brings us full-circle back to the trials at the beginning of chapter 1.

—***Then he must pray***—prayer, not making oaths, is the proper outlet for feelings caused by suffering, as we patiently endure. A persevering life is also a prayerful life. “Prayer” is mentioned in each verse through verse 18. Eusebius (an early church historian, quoted Hegeppus, an earlier commentator), who said, James “...was often found upon his bended knees, ...so that his knees became as hard as [a] camel’s, in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God.”

—***Is anyone cheerful*** [“encouraged”]?—This does not necessarily mean there is no suffering. There can and should be praise in the midst of suffering. There’s always something to be encouraged about and thankful for.

APPLICATION—But also, of course, we should be praising God for the good things in our lives (James 1:17). When Moses was instructing the Israelites about entering the Promised Land, where food, cities, vineyards, etc. would be plentiful, he said, “*You shall eat and be satisfied, then watch yourself, let your forget the Lord...*” (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). Suffering usually results in desperate prayers. But prosperity usually brings forgetting to pray. It’s the tendency.

—***He is to sing praises***—praises and thanksgiving are also prayers. Someone has said, turning to God in prayer for suffering is half the truth. Turning to God with praise is the other half.

A great deal of misunderstanding has resulted from these next verses: (1) Some seem to teach from this passage that full physical health is always just a prayer away. (2) The Roman Catholics have found in this passage justification for “extreme unction” (a practice of anointing someone with oil at death to gain merit with God for so doing, which began in the eighth century). (3) Still others have tried to relate the process outlined by James to the modern practice of invoking God (“pray over him”) and using medicine (“anoint him with oil”)—prayer plus a physician.

Verse 14—*Is anyone among you sick?*—ἀσθενέω, *astheneo*, means “to be weak.”

Though it is used in the Gospels for physical maladies, it is generally used in Acts and the Epistles to refer to a weak faith or a weak conscience (cf. Acts 20:35; Rom. 6:19; 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:9-12). [BKC]

First Thessalonians 5:14 says, *And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.*

—***Then he must call for the elders of the church***—lit. “older men.” This has no institutional identification. It’s simply the older, mature (v. 16), believers. I read one commentary that said physically sick people were not healed because laymen believers prayed over them instead of the “elders” (clergy). That is a clergy/layman distinction not made in the epistles. Clergy do not have some “power” the rest of us believers do not have!! We are all equally brothers and sisters in Christ. James has repeatedly mentioned “brethren.”

—***and they are to pray over him***—the suffering person must pray (v. 13), and other believers are to pray with that person, too. We apply this by asking other believers to remember us in their prayers. It is very encouraging to me when someone tells me they are praying for me.

—***anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord***—

It is significant that the word “anoint” is ἀλείψαντες (“rub with oil”) not χρίω (“ceremonially anoint”). The former is the “mundane” word and the latter is “the sacred and religious word”.... Therefore James is not suggesting a ceremonial or ritual anointing as a means of

divine healing; instead, he is referring to the common practice of using oil as a means of bestowing honor, refreshment, and grooming. [BKC]

...when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men... (Matthew 6:17-18).

Verse 15—*and the prayer offered in faith*—Review James 1:5-8. *Ask in faith without any doubting...one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*

APPLICATION—Have you ever thought about what you should pray, before you pray? Solomon wrote, *Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God* (Ecclesiastes 5:2). James wrote, “...you ought to say, *‘If the Lord wills...’*” (James 4:15). Do we pray for what we perceive as solutions? Micro-managing God? Walt Henrichsen once said, “Thank God He did not give me everything I asked for!”

—*will restore* [to the former state] ***the one who is sick*** [κόμνω, “worn out, wasting away, to become tired in spirit, to become discouraged, to give up”]. “That the restoration is spiritual, not physical, is further clarified by the assurance, **if he has sinned, he will be forgiven**” (BKC).

Many physically ill Christians have called on elders to pray for them and to anoint them with oil, but a sizable percentage of them have remained sick. This fact suggests that the passage may have been mistakenly understood as physical restoration rather than spiritual restoration. [BKC]

—*and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him*. Forgiveness for sin can only come from God. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

APPLICATION—Sadly, our sin nature wants us to justify our sin or blame others for our sin, rather than confess our sin as sin. Admitting our sin is the only road to cleansing. The more you justify it, the more the sin will grow.

—Sometimes the sin of someone else may cause discouragement for the believer, a weakness or suffering. Others do not sin in a vacuum either. We need to pray for the believer suffering because of the sin of someone else.

Verse 16—*Therefore, confess your sins to one another*—the result here is that this will deal with sin early before it results in total spiritual defeat. This also helps us realize the satanic attack we all face and the spiritual warfare common to all believers.

—*and pray for one another*—prayer must be according to God’s will for us—i.e., our sanctification. *...to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect* (Romans 12:1).

—*so that you may be healed*—*Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ...so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed* (Hebrews 12:13).

—***The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much***—It’s a judgment you make as to who to ask to pray for you. That’s why the elders of verse 14 are mature believers. You want believers who, along with the Holy Spirit, intercede according to the will of God, with the purpose of conforming us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:26-30). Those who will pray for your sanctification.

Verses 17-18—*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*—ὁμοιοπαθής, “pertaining to having the same kinds of feelings or desires.” He did not have supernatural powers. James has now used OT characters of Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, Job, and Elijah.

—*and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months* (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-46).

—*Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit*—Elijah prayed earnestly and persistently.

APPLICATION—This is an example of what the prayer of a righteous man accomplished. Elijah, with a nature like ours, earnestly and persistently prayed to God. Righteous people pray!!

Verse 19—*My brethren, if any among you*—fellow believers. This is not about salvation but is about sanctification, the spiritual life of believers.

—*strays from the truth*—the one who strays from the truth is sick and suffering spiritually, their sanctification is dying, and they are on the road to a multitude of sins.

—*and one turns him back*—the burden rests on the believers to reclaim the one straying from the truth.

Verse 20—*let him know that he who turns a sinner*—this is a hope and encouragement to reach out to those who are straying from the truth

—*from the error of his way*—straying from the truth. Paul wrote that some have *suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith* (1 Timothy 1:19). *...some have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang* (1 Timothy 6:10, 21). *...men who have gone astray from the truth* (2 Timothy 2:18). *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). *...men who turn away from the truth* (Titus 1:14).

—*will save his soul from death*—his soul is his personality, i.e., he’s not talking about physical death. This person’s faith is dead, i.e., useless to God.

—*and will cover a multitude of sins*—sin has a multiplying effect. Sin never happens in isolation.

APPLICATION—Taking verses 13–18 together, the meaning seems to be if a believer is discouraged or weak, those who are mature should pray over them and possibly offer some encouraging or refreshing help. If they have sin which is causing the discouragement, it will be forgiven by God and can be confessed to other believers if appropriate (those whom they had wronged, for example). Then that believer is healed, restored, turned from that sin. Many sins have been enumerated in this book: being double-minded, anger, not bridling one’s tongue, showing partiality and favoritism, blessing God but cursing people, quarrels, conflicts, friendship with the world, speaking against other believers, not doing the right thing.....

To say this passage is talking about physical sickness, praying and anointing by clergy, promised healing...

- (1) Does not fit the context of verses 13-18, or even the context of the whole book.
- (2) Assumes a clergy/layman distinction.
- (3) Is the result of the words the translators used (“sick” and “healed”).
- (4) Assumes the gift of healing is passed on to the “elders/clergy,” which has no evidence either in the Bible or throughout church history. OK—I read this and could not believe it— “Much is assumed here that is not expressed.” Well, I guess they don’t need the “expressed” words of the Bible for their beliefs.
- (5) Claims a promise of healing that God did not make. There are ministries based on these verses. If it was true, why wouldn’t everyone do that, and why is there any sickness? Every once in a while we hear about parents who did not bring their child to a hospital but instead “prayed” for them, and the child died. They claimed a promise that did not exist.