

Religion Pure and Undeiled

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (Condensed)

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK SERIES

By

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AUTHORSHIP. The author of the epistle simply identifies himself as “James, a servant of Jesus Christ.” In the New Testament there are three men of significance who are named James. In this study it will be assumed that the writer is James, the half-brother of our Lord.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING. The Epistle of James was probably written about A.D. 48-50. The martyrdom of James, the half-brother of the Lord, in A.D. 62 would set that as the latest date for the epistle. “Josephus mentions the martyrdom of James and in so doing supplies evidence of the prominence of James in the early Christian community” [BSB].

RECIPIENTS. The epistle was addressed to the Jewish Christians (1:1-2) who are “scattered abroad” in the Dispersion. “The Dispersion was composed of Jews who had left Palestine but kept in contact with their “fatherland,” returning home for the feasts when possible” [WIERSEB].

PURPOSE. The purpose of the epistle was to provide some directions for living the Christian life to those Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the world (with application to all Christians of any period).

THEME. While there are a number of emphases in the letter, the central theme of the epistle is “practical, realistic religion which manifests itself in the behavior or the “works” of those who profess to have faith” [BSB]. In simplest terms, the theme is Religion: Pure and Unadorned. The emphasis is the expression, or the manifestation of faith through one’s life, faith that works (faith works).

SPECIAL FEATURES. The Epistle of James is similar to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament in many ways, yet it is not simply a gathering of loose and unrelated moral teachings. There is a central theme (genuine faith is manifested by one’s works) that runs throughout the book.

James has been called “the Amos of the New Testament.” In 108 verses, the author uses 54 imperatives to stress the need for urgent action on the part of these early saints. In addition to the Old Testament flavor of the epistle the student of the Word will want to compare James with the epistles of Paul. It is also extraordinary in its parallels with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

JAMES AND PAUL. Martin Luther, who called James an “epistle of straw”, felt that James contradicted Paul on the subject of grace and works. However, there are no conflicts between James and Paul on the matter of justification by faith. James could not be contradicting Galatians because Galatians had not yet been written! “Paul explains that sinners are justified by faith (Rom. 3-4); James explains that a person’s faith is dead unless it is proved by works. We are not saved by works, but the faith that saves us leads to good works. Paul wrote about our

standing before God; James wrote about our witness before the world” [WW].

SUB-THEMES & KEY ISSUES.

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|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. TESTING, 1:2. | 2. ENDURANCE, 1:3. |
| 3. WISDOM, 1:5; 3:13-18. | 4. PRAYER, 1:5-8; 5:13-18. |
| 5. FAITH, 1:6; 2:14-26. | 6. RICHES, 1:9-11; 5:1-6. |
| 7. TONGUE, 1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11. | |

CHAPTER I

SALUTATION, 1:1.

JAMES. The letter begins with a conventional opening: the name of the writer, the people to whom the letter is addressed, and a word of greeting. “James was content with a simple introduction. The writer introduced himself modestly. He did not indicate his status in the church or that he was the Lord’s brother. The lack of title suggests that he was well known and had the authority to send a letter of this kind” [BKC].

A BOND-SERVANT OF GOD. Literally, James was a “slave” of God. The Book of James is written with an authoritative note, but James does not claim any special authority for himself, nor does he take any glory in his position. The average Pastor Search Committee today probably would not be too impressed with His Resume’.

TO THE TWELVE TRIBES WHO ARE DISPERSED ABROAD. It might seem at first glance that the epistle is addressed to all Jews who are scattered abroad among the nations of the world. But as we read the epistle we become aware of the fact that it was written to Christian Jews who were scattered abroad.

I. CHRISTIANS MAY FACE THE TRIALS OF LIFE WITH JOY, 1:2-11.

A. The Christian Must Expect His Faith to Be Tested, 1:2-4.

1:2 - MY BRETHREN. James, a very Jewish thinker writing to very Jewish readers, may have a double purpose in addressing them as his brethren. This Epistle would be of immeasurable help to Jewish converts to Christ as well as to those who might have been considering placing their trust in Him.

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY. In verses 2-4 we find that trials faced with joy produce endurance, and in turn, endurance produces maturity (growth and development) in Christ.

VARIOUS TRIALS. Trials is a better translation than temptations. We must pray that God will deliver us from temptations, but we face trials with a sense of joy because while temptations are attempts to seduce us to rebel against God, trials are opportunities for God to demonstrate what He can, and will, do to help us reach our potential. The Lord permits our faith to be tried or tested, but He will never tempt us to sin.

1:3 - THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH. As a Christian, you should “consider it all joy” when you encounter trials (vs. 2) “because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (NRSV).

ENDURANCE. Endurance denotes steadfastness. The result of facing trials and overcoming them is steadfastness. In modern usage the word patience might suggest that you have enough self control to count to ten before you blow your stack over some pet peeve.

1:4 - LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT. As Christians we can face the trials of life with “all joy” because we are assured of victory by the grace of God, and because we know that every victory produces greater endurance, or steadfastness.

B. Resources for Meeting the Trials of Life, 1:5-8.

1:5 - WISDOM. Wisdom is an indispensable resource for the Christian in overcoming the trials of life. Wisdom is more than simple knowledge or the accumulation of facts. It involves knowledge, experience, discernment, and faith to meet adversity. “With James, wisdom is the right use of one’s opportunities in holy living” [ATR].

LET HIM ASK OF GOD. He is the source of strength and wisdom - the source of all of our resources. He is a generous and loving Father, Who is ready to give us everything we need to experience victory over trials that are sure to come.

1:6 - ASK IN FAITH. Jesus taught, “...Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matt. 21:22, NKJV). James says when we need faith to deal with the trials of life we must “ask in faith.” This is a wisdom which only God can supply.

WITHOUT ANY DOUBTING. The doubter is always vacillating between belief and unbelief. We see here the metaphor of a wind tossed sea. What could be more unstable than a wave of the sea.

1:7 - THAT MAN OUGHT NOT TO EXPECT. By “that man” he means the doubter. It is understandable that one would doubt the ability, or the potential of man, but how can a believer doubt the omnipotent God? The absurdity of doubting God is illustrated by the

following statements taken from official documents, newspapers and magazines widely read during their day. Listen to what the “authorities” had to say:

1840 - "Anyone traveling at the speed of thirty miles per hour would surely suffocate."

1878 - "Electric lights are unworthy of serious attention."

1901 - "No possible combination can be united into a practical machine by which men shall fly."

1926 - (from a scientist) "This foolish idea of shooting at the moon is basically impossible."

1930 - (another scientist) "To harness the energy locked up in matter is impossible" [QV: BI].

It is amusing, if understandable, that at the time so-called experts doubted the potential of human achievement, but it is somewhat bewildering that a professing believer” would doubt Almighty God.

1:8 - A DOUBLE MINDED MAN. The doubter, “*being a double-minded man,*” is predictably “*unstable in all his ways.*” In verses 5-8, James deals with faith as it is expressed in prayer.

C. The Rich Poor and the Poor Rich, 1:9-11.

1:9 - THE BROTHER OF HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. Wiersbe write, “Both rich and poor worshiped in the assemblies to which James wrote (2:1-9; 5:1), and James pointed out that trials benefit both groups. Trials remind the poor that they are rich in the Lord and therefore can lose nothing; trials remind the rich that they dare not live for riches or trust in them.”

1:10 - THE RICH MAN. Just as the poor man is to glory in being raised up by the glory of God, the rich man is “to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.” The metaphor was a familiar one: “As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more” (Ps. 103:15-16, NKJV).

1:11 - THE SUN RISES WITH A SCORCHING WIND. The Palestinian Jew would appreciate the metaphor. They had seen plains, green with grass and sprinkled with flowering plants, scorched and seared when the hot east wind suddenly swept in from the desert and baked the land.

II. BELIEVERS ARE ASSURED OF VICTORY, 1:12-27.

A. The Crown of Life, 1:12.

1:12 - BLESSED IS A MAN. This great verse begins with a wonderful beatitude and ends with a glorious promise (which actually is a part of the beatitude). The testing of one’s faith will

produce steadfastness (endurance in NAS; patience, KJV) and when steadfastness will lead to maturity.

ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED. Who is to be blessed? It is the one who has passed the tests of life successfully by the grace of God. With what will he be blessed? “The crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” And what is the crown of life? Eternal life.

CROWN OF LIFE. The crown of life is the most important blessing and the greatest reward a believer can receive - life itself.

B. The Source of Temptations, 1:13-15.

1:13 - LET NO ONE SAY WHEN HE IS TEMPTED. We must distinguish between trials that are designed to prove us and temptations that are designed to hurt us. The word translated “tempted” can mean to test or prove the quality of one’s character (1:2, 12), or it may denote the solicitation to commit evil, as here. You can never say, “I am being tempted by God.”

GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED BY EVIL. God is absolutely holy, which means that there is nothing in His nature that would respond to any temptation - He cannot be tempted by temptation.

HE HIMSELF DOES NOT TEMPT ANYONE. A Holy God, Who cannot be tempted, surely cannot tempt others to sin, for solicitation to sin is sin, and God cannot sin.

1:14 - EACH ONE IS TEMPTED. Since temptation to sin cannot come from God, and since all sin is rebellion against God, it must come from the enemy of God. There are **three sources of temptation**: Satan, the world, and the flesh.

1. **THE FLESH** - “...The Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Rom. 7:14).

2. **THE WORLD** - “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

3. **SATAN** - “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

ENTICED BY HIS OWN LUST. God cannot tempt man to sin and Satan cannot force him to sin, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and *enticed by his own lust*.” The words “drawn away” and “entice” (v. 14) are hunting terms; they form an image of a hunter or a fisherman using bait to lure the prey.

1:15 - WHEN LUST HAS CONCEIVED. James describes the source and path of sin.

First, enticement from without generates lust within. Second, lust, when it conceives and gives birth to sin. Third, sin brings death!

C. The Reason for the Gifts of God, 1:16-18.

1:16 - DO NOT BE DECEIVED. Deceit is as alien to the nature of God as sin and temptation (13-15), so if they are deceived, God is not the source of the deceit. If He is not the source, who is? Satan is the great deceiver, but we can be deceived by others and there is such a thing as self-deceit.

1:17 - EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN. All good things “and every perfect gift is from above.” All good things come from above - only good things come from above.

FATHER OF LIGHTS. It was God Who said, “Let there be light.” Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” God is the source of all light, whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual.

WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION. The Father of Lights, our Heavenly Father, is the changeless God of eternity. Immutable is one of the basic attributes of Almighty God. In Him there is “no variation or shadow of turning” NKJV).

1:18 - IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS WILL. Every believer should be as concerned with the will of God as were James and Paul. Our Lord, the Father of Lights, brought us forth by means of the gospel message (the Word of truth).

FIRST FRUITS. Among the early readers of this epistle were many Jews who could relate to this. There are 25 references to “first fruits” in the OT. They knew the Law.

D. Doers of the Word, 1:19-27.

1:19 - THIS YOU KNOW, MY BELOVED BRETHREN. They were well aware of the source of their salvation (vs. 18). They knew it because they were children of God, and as such, brethren in Christ. Only those whom God has brought forth by “the word of truth” are brothers and sisters in Christ.

QUICK TO HEAR. Christians must be quick to hear and obey the Word of God. Being quick to hear has nothing to do with how quickly one can grasp abstract thoughts or theological principles. The meaning is to give immediate attention, to listen with interest, and to apply that which he hears.

SLOW TO SPEAK. He does not say that we are to be dull of speech. The mature Christian will wait until he is sure what he has to say is within the framework of the will of God.

SLOW TO ANGER. Literally, it is slow to wrath. We must be slow to enter into heated dispute or arguments, slow to attack others, careful to avoid words that encourage bitterness and

strife. There is a clear connection between anger and speech. Either can greatly effect the other.

1:20 - FOR THE ANGER OF MAN. We are often warned of the danger of anger. “It is difficult for us to realize the suddenness, unreasonableness, and intensity of anger in Eastern countries, and, perhaps we may say, even especially among the Jews” [PHC: 521].

1:21 - PUTTING ASIDE ALL FILTHINESS. The word translated “filthiness” denotes moral corruption and filth commonly associated with the life of sin.

IN HUMILITY. Unfortunately, humility is not seen as a virtue by those who are into self-worth, self-esteem, self-love, and human potential.

RECEIVE THE WORD IMPLANTED. The Word of God is to be received in such a way that it is “implanted,” or “engrafted” (KJV), joined to the character of the inner person so as to become a living part of him.

1:22 - DOERS OF THE WORD. How unfortunate it is that some have read these words and concluded that the Epistle of James advocates a works righteousness. James is writing to believers who have already been born again (vs. 18) to emphasize how important it is for Christians to be obedient to their Lord; to manifest their faith through their works.

1:23 - A MIRROR. The Word of God reveals what we are on the inside, just as a mirror reveals how we appear on the outside. “When Christians look into the Word, they see themselves as God sees them and thus are able to examine their hearts and confess their sins” [WW].

1:24 - FOR. The contrast in verses 23-25 is a simple enough. There is a problem with being a mere hearer of the Word of God. The hearer is like a careless person looks in a mirror and forgets what he sees whereas the sincere person looks into the Word of God and takes some action based upon what he sees.

1:25 - THE PERFECT LAW. The “perfect law, the law of liberty,” is the Scripture itself. Today, that would include the entire Bible, but at the time this letter was written it referred to the Old Testament (and the teachings of Christ). The Word of God is

1. The means of regeneration (v. 18).
2. The agency for Christian growth (v. 21).
3. A mirror that reflects our defects (v. 23).
4. The ethical guide for Christian living (v. 25; 2:8).
5. The standard for judgment (2:12).

1:26 - IF ANYONE THINKS HIMSELF TO BE RELIGIOUS. In verses 22-25, the

writer speaks of the private life of believers as they look into the Word of God. Verses 26-27 describe their public life, that is, their implementation of what they learn from the Word of God. “If” assumes that there are some who do think of themselves as religious, and the clear implication is that there are some who think so have little basis in it.

DOES NOT BRIDLE HIS TONGUE. Vain religion is expressed in many ways, not the least of which is an unbridled tongue. James will have a lot to say on the subject of the tongue, but at this point we should not forget the context. Genuine faith is contrasted with pseudo-faith. So, in keeping with his emphasis upon genuine faith and its manifestation through good works, James defines religion that is pure and undefiled (pure religion) in terms of one's ability (and willingness) to:

- (1) Control his tongue.
- (2) Minister to others (i.e., widows and orphans).
- (3) Pursuit of (and achieve of) moral purity.

But James will go on to list some key Christian virtues.

1. Avoiding partiality.
2. Providing for the physical needs of other believers.
3. Devoting oneself wholly to God.
4. Rejecting worldly attractions and temptations.
5. Handling financial resources wisely and honestly.
6. Cultivating consistency and fervency in prayer.

1:27 - PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION. True N.T. Christianity, which is pure and undefiled before God the Father, is identified by two basic characteristics: The first is a ministry to those in need, and the second is a godly life.

ORPHANS AND WIDOWS. In the first century widows and orphans were at the mercy of the world and when James refers to them, he certainly does not mean to limit our ministry to widows and orphans. He specifically refers to those who were in distress.

UNSTAINED BY THE WORLD. Religion that is pure and undefiled is not fulfilled in service to others alone. True Christianity is a relationship and the believer's relationship with a holy God will be reflected in a holy life.

CHAPTER II

I. PURE RELIGION PROHIBITS PARTIALITY, 2:1-7.

A. Warning Against Partiality, 2:1

2:1 - MY BRETHREN. James addresses his readers fifteen times in this epistle as “brethren”, or “my brethren”. He identifies with these First Century Jewish believer who struggles with the same temptations they face. As a Jew, James is their brother, but there is more to it than that. He is their brother in Christ. He is also a fellow sufferer.

DO NOT HOLD YOUR FAITH. The NKJV follows the KJV, “**the faith**,” whereas the NAS and NRSV translate it “**your faith**.” Literally, it is “My brethren, not with respect of persons have (or do have) **the faith** of our Lord Jesus Christ (Lord) of glory...” But why belabor the point? “**Your faith**” has to do with your belief in Jesus Christ for salvation and your trust in Him as Lord of your life. “**The Faith**” speaks of that which Jesus revealed of Himself and His will for man - the Gospel, sound doctrine.

PERSONAL FAVORITISM. Christians must not show personal favoritism. We must show no partiality, especially in regard to all those people to whom the world shows partiality - those of position, wealth, power, an reputation - who might come into the congregation “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” Literally, James says, the Lord, the Glory. He is our glory (Heb. 1:3).

B. The Absurdity of Partiality, 2:2-7.

2:2 - IF A MAN COMES INTO YOUR ASSEMBLY. The word translated assembly is literally, synagogue. This word here does not mean a Jewish synagogue, but here it denotes the meeting place for the church. “The use of this very Jewish word for the gathering of God's people for worship is an additional evidence for an early date for the Epistle of James” [BSB].

GOLD RING. We are told that it was not uncommon for some first century believers to wear several gold rings at the same time as a mark of wealth and social distinction (Luke 15:22).

2:3 - YOU PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION. There were those who assigned seats or positions to people based upon their dress and other signs of wealth. But how does that apply to us today?

FOOTSTOOL. This denotes a lowly place, in this case it probably means that the wealthy person was given the best seat in the house and the poor person was told to sit on the floor at his feet.

2:4 - HAVE YOU NOT MADE DISTINCTIONS. If we show partiality on the basis of wealth (or other circumstance over which people have no control) we have become “judges with evil motives?” It is sinful to show partiality to the rich.

2:5 - LISTEN, MY BELOVED BRETHREN. The appeal is both personal and urgent. Spiritual wealth, nor spiritual poverty, is determined by material things or the usual symbols of

wealth and success. Any person who has a genuine faith in God, and love for the Lord and other people is wealthy indeed.

2:6 - YOU HAVE DISHONORED THE POOR MAN. The absurdity of showing partiality is hard to miss - you dishonor the poor who do not oppress you, but show favoritism to “the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?”

2:7 - DO THEY NOT BLASPHEME. That is, do the rich not blaspheme “the fair name by which you have been called?” While there are many wealthy people who love the Lord and serve Him faithfully, it is still a fact that “the rich and famous” (and the powerful) have often abused the poor and mocked the name of Jesus Christ by which we are called.

II. THE ROYAL LAW, 2:2-13.

A. The Royal Law is the Law of Love, 2:8.

2:8 - THE ROYAL LAW. It is rightly called the royal law because it was given by the King, and because it is the supreme law governing the Christian’s relationship with others. The Greek word seems to suggest that the latter may be the emphasis here.

LOVE. Two words are translated love in the New Testament. The first is *phileo*, which means to be a friend to or to have a fondness for another. The second is *agapao* which is wider, embracing especially the judgment and deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety.

NEIGHBOR. When the command to love one’s neighbor is given in the NT, “various ‘neighbors’ are focused on: the desperate person in Luke 10:27; the weaker brother in Gal. 5:14; everyone in Rom. 13:9; and the poor man here” [RSB].

B. Partiality Violates the Royal Law, 2:9-13.

2:9 - IF YOU SHOW PARTIALITY. If you do show partiality (whether you admit to it or not) “you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

2:10 - WHOEVER KEEPS...YET STUMBLES. Even one sin, no matter how small or great, makes us sinner (“guilty of all”). One sin places one in violation of the whole law of God and bring the sinner under condemnation.

2:11 - FOR HE WHO SAID. If you do not actually commit murder, but brood over some injustice, whether real or imaginary, until you hate another, you are also guilty of sin.

2:12 - SO SPEAK AND SO ACT. We will be judged by a just and righteous Judge. Obedience to God’s law brings true freedom; disobedience brings bondage.

2:13 - MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT. Christians have to make judgments every day and many of those judgments have to do with other people. We should be very care about the criteria used in judging people.

FAMILY - A family united by love for one another, and a commitment to God is a blessing to each member. The home is the first institution God instituted for human beings, and after all these centuries it has never lost its importance to society and to the individual.

III. FAITH AND WORKS, 2:14-26.

A. Living Faith and Dead Faith Contrasted, 2:14-20.

1. The inadequacy of a dead faith, 2:14.

There are two obvious problems with a dead faith. In the first place, a dead faith cannot save. In the second place, a dead faith cannot work.

2:14 - CAN THAT FAITH SAVE HIM? James did not ask “Can faith save him?” What he asked was, “Can *that* faith save him?” Can that kind of faith save? What kind of faith? A dormant, benign, non-working faith.

Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.

2. A living faith illustrated, 2:15-17.

2:15 - IF. The average believer does not show his faith through mighty deeds comparable to those acts of faith in Hebrews 11, but by simple, practical deeds as they are needed from day to day.

2:16 - AND ONE OF YOU SAYS. Suppose there is a genuine need in your community and you say 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?’*” We call this paying lip service; we recognize it and loathe it - in others. Would I ever be guilty of anything like this? Never! Yet...

2:17 - FAITH, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD. A workless faith is a worthless faith. **Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.** The point is, a dead faith is no faith.

B. True Religion Requires a Living Faith, 2:18-20.

1. True faith manifests itself in service, 2:18.

2:18 - BUT SOME MAY SAY. James began this hypothetical argument in 2:14, and now he brings a new person into the debate - a person who takes James' position. This hypothetical speaker agrees with James that you cannot have faith without works. The point here is not how a person is brought into right relationship with God but how to let other people know you have faith in Him.

SHOW ME YOUR FAITH. "The challenger's statement ends before the first use of the word "show". James's reply begins there. This is not an invitation to all believers to show off their faith. But to the person who says he has faith but does not manifest it in obedience and service, James says, "show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

2. Saving faith is more than acknowledging His existence, 2:19.

2:19 - YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE. Do you give assent to the existence of God? Do you believe there is but one God? Well, Congratulations! "You do well," James says, "the demons also believe, and shudder."

GOD IS ONE. "The unity of God was a fundamental belief in Judaism, but if that belief did not produce good deeds it was no better than the monotheism of the demons" [RSB].

2:20 - FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS USELESS. Faith without works is not faith at all.

C. Abraham's Faith Was Vindicated By Works, 2:21-23.

1. With Abraham faith worked, 2:21-22.

2:21 - ABRAHAM OUR FATHER. This question has been held to be directly opposed to Paul's statement that Abraham's faith, not his works, caused God to declare him righteous (Rom. 4:1-5). Paul, however, was arguing for the *priority* of faith. James argued for the *proof* of faith.

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS. Abraham believed God, and this faith was accounted unto Him as righteousness (Gen. 15:1-6; Rom. 4:1-5).

2:22 - FAITH WAS WORKING WITH HIS WORKS. In a sense Paul is emphasizing the root (faith) and James the fruit (works) of our justification (salvation). There is no conflict between Paul and James - this is not an "epistle of straw." Genuine faith is affirmed by our works.

FAITH WAS PERFECTED. “Perfected” denotes completion of fulfillment. Faith is both completed and manifested in actions. Faith is the force behind the act.

2. Abraham Believed God, 2:23.

2:23 - THE SCRIPTURE WAS FULFILLED. This simple statement echos an earlier statement by Jesus, Who once, “I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mark 14:4, KJV).

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD. It is important to note that James did not say Abraham believed in God. He did not say that he believed there is a god. What he said is Abraham believed God.

RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness “and he was called the friend of God.” This is the imputed righteousness of which Paul writes so poignantly in Romans. Paul used Genesis 15:6 to show that God justified Abraham simply by faith (Romans 4:1-5).

FRIEND OF GOD. This title comes from 2 Chron. 20:7 and Isa. 41:8. How much richer it is to be called “the friend of God!” What does it mean to be called “the friend of God”? Clarke says it is “The highest character ever given to man.

3. Faith works, 2:24.

2:24 - BY FAITH ALONE. There are three theories of Justification [In *The Bible Notebook* Series, studies in Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians by this writer all include this emphasis].

1. **JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS.** The Scripture clearly rejects this approach.. In Ephesians 2:9, Paul writes that our salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast.” See Galatians 2:16.

2. **JUSTIFICATION BY A COMBINATION OF WORKS AND GRACE.** Paul was inspired to write to the Romans that grace and works are mutually exclusive because they are absolutely incompatible in regards to our salvation. He wrote, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6). See Gal. 3:3.

3. **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE.** In Ephesians 2:8-10, we read, “For **by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift of God**.”

D. Preeminence of Faith Reiterated, 2:25-26.

1. Rahab was an unlikely example, 2:25.

2:25 - RAHAB. James' second illustration is Rahab (Josh. 2; 6:17-27). This woman was a sinner, yet her name is listed in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Hebrews 11:31 reveals that she was a woman of faith. She lived in the condemned city of Jericho, and she heard that God had judged the enemies of Israel.

2. Faith without works is dead, 2:26.

2:26 - FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD. The whole matter of faith and works is summed up in Eph. 2:8-10, as we have already seen.

- (1) the work God does for us (salvation)—“For by grace you have been saved...not of works”.
- (2) the work God does in us (sanctification)—“For we are His workmanship”.
- (3) the work God does through us (service)—“created...for good works”.

CHAPTER III

I. PURE RELIGION AND THE TONGUE, 3:1-12.

A. The Tongue and the Teacher, 3:1.

3:1 - MY BRETHREN. With “my brethren James give a clear indication that he is about to introduce a new topic. In doing so he wants to be fully identify with them as a Jewish believer in Jesus Christ.

TEACHERS. It seems that too many of the new Jewish Christians aspired to the position of teacher, possibly assuming something of the rank and admiration given to Rabbis.

B. The Tongue Reveals Our Maturity, 3:2.

3:2 - IF ONE DOES NOT STUMBLE. The primary emphasis here does not seem to be on one who deliberately develops a false system of theology. When we stumble, it is usually by accident - because we were not watching where we were going.

A PERFECT MAN. The theme of verses 1-12 is found in the second clause: If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Perfect means ‘mature, of full moral and spiritual growth.

C. The Power of the Tongue, 3:3-5.

3:3 - THE BIT. We can control horses with a small bit, but the tongue is a greater challenge. The unbridled tongue is a destructive power, easily given to slander, profanity, gossip, and false teaching.

3:4 - LOOK AT THE SHIPS. The rudder is a small part of the ship, but it is with the rudder that the pilot controls the direction of the ship.

3:5 - SO ALSO THE TONGUE. A forest fire which destroys thousands of acres of prime timber is often started by a spark (“small fire”). The point here is that, though a small member of the body, the tongue often commits the whole body to a course of action.

D. The Potential of the Tongue for Evil, 3:6-8.

1. It is a fire, vs. 6.

3:6 - THE TONGUE IS A FIRE. When a fire breaks out in the tinder-dry forest it is soon out of control. The tongue is a raging fire, which in countless ways can set on fire an individual heart, a family, a church, or even a nation. See Proverbs 16:27.

WORLD OF INIQUITY. All kinds of evil that are in the world “are exhibited there in miniature in the tongue; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth” [BARNES]. Study the list below and see if you can recall times when you have seen someone else sin in this manner.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Gossip | 2. Slander |
| 3. Profanity | 4. Obscenity |
| 5. Flattery | 6. Lying |
| 7. Planting doubts | 8. Causing pain |
| 9. Judging | 10. Deception |

Now complete this exercise by prayerfully considering a time when you have been guilty of some of these sins. Have you repented?

DEFILES THE WHOLE BODY. One may become infected by a microscopic organism which quickly spreads through the whole body, incapacitating the individual for days. The tongue has the potential for that kind of misery in an individual’s life - and in the body of Christ.

2. The tongue is by man untamable, 3:7-8.

3:7 - TAMED BY THE HUMAN RACE. What does James mean by “tamed?” Does it not mean to make both controllable and useful? Human beings have tamed animals so that they might render service, provide companionship, and bring pleasure.

3:8 - NO ONE CAN TAME THE TONGUE. Not one single person, regardless of all the

positive qualities he or she may possess - patience, gentleness, and humility, compassion - can tame either his own tongue or that of another person.

FULL OF DEADLY POISON. The tongue is never more venomous than when it injects its deadly poison into another person or group by means of gossip or slander.

E. The Tongue Is Inconsistent, 3:9-12.

3:9 - WE BLESS OUR LORD. No one has ever used his tongue to bless the Lord more than the ancient Jew. When ever God's name was mentioned, a pious Jew responded, "Blessed be He!" In his daily prayer ritual he said, "Blessed be Thou, O God" over fifty times a day.

IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD. Ryrie comments on this: "The divine image has been marred by sin but not totally obliterated. Our being made in the image of God is the basis for not cursing our fellow man" [RSB].

3:10 - FROM THE SAME MOUTH. Aesop once wrote that the tongue was, equally, the best and worst of things. In his fables a man is able to blow both hot and cold breaths at the same time.

3:11 - A FOUNTAIN. What James portrays here is man's inner being (his heart) as a fountain or spring that shoots out fresh water and bitter from the same opening. Both types of springs were common in Palestine and are sometimes found very close to each other, but fresh water and bitter water never come out of the same hole.

3:12 - A FIG TREE. Experiments with grafts notwithstanding, trees in their native state do not produce alien fruit. How then do we who have been saved and sanctified use our tongue do dishonor an honorable and glorious God?

II. PURE RELIGION AND THE TRY WISE MAN, 3: 13-18.

A. True Wisdom Is Expressed By Works, Not Words Alone, 3:13.

This section contrasts heavenly and earthly wisdom (*sophia*). "The wisdom of which James speaks is practical and relational, not philosophical or speculative. It is evidenced by godly attitudes and actions (vv. 13, 17, 18). James 4:1-5:20 further contrasts and develops, by way of illustration, the truths of this paragraph" [BSB].

3:13 - WHO AMONG YOU IS WISE? The question with which the author opens this section (13-18) is also the theme of the section. But what is the answer to the question? The person who faces up to his moral responsibilities. James contrasted traits of earthly and heavenly wisdom..

LET HIM SHOW BY HIS GOOD BEHAVIOR. If any one has wisdom, “let him show it by his good life” (NIV). Wisdom is expressed in action, not just words. “As with faith (2:18), good deeds demonstrate wisdom, not merely good words” [NCWB].

B. False Wisdom Is Characterized By Jealousy and strife, 3:14.

3:14 - IF YOU HAVE BITTER JEALOUSY. All jealousy has the potential to become bitter, but there is a “bitter jealousy” which destroys and a righteous zeal which defends.

SELFISH AMBITION. The Greek word denotes a “factional rivalry” (seeking personal gain).

DO NOT BE ARROGANT. James has in mind the kind of selfish ambition that results in rivalry. Like bitterness and jealousy, arrogance finds its origin within, but soon finds an outlet.

LIE AGAINST THE TRUTH. All lies are against the truth, and all are guilty at one time or another. To speak as though you are both wise and righteous when in fact you are not is to lie against the truth, and to do so is to prove your disqualification as a teacher.

C. False Wisdom Is not of God, 3:15-16.

3:15 - WISDOM...NOT FROM ABOVE. The kind of wisdom that is characterized by “bitter jealousy”, “selfish ambition”, and arrogance (vs. 14) is “earthly, natural, and demonic.”

NATURAL. By “natural” he means, pertaining to man’s soul, the soulish part of man, as opposed to the body or the spirit. The same Greek word is used to describe men who do not have the Spirit living in them (Jude 19) - thence, a lost person.

DEMONIC. This wisdom does not descend from above, it ascends from below. It has its origin in hell! It is demonic. “Who among you is wise” (vs. 13) clearly implies that a lot of so-called intellectuals lack true wisdom.

3:16 - WHERE THERE IS JEALOUSY. Jealousy and selfish ambition produce disunity in the church, family and community. The jealous person must be first in everything and cannot stand to see anyone else in the limelight instead of himself.

D. The Character of Wisdom From Above, 3:17-18.

3:17 - WISDOM FROM ABOVE...IS FIRST PURE. The wisdom that is from above is characterized as:

1. **Pure** - Wisdom from above makes us chaste, holy, and clean.

2. **Peaceable** - This means living in peace with others and promoting peace among others.
3. **Gentle** - Modest, considerate, forbearing.
4. **Reasonable** - God's wisdom is not stubborn, open to reason, not hard to get along with.
5. **Full of mercy** - So important is this trait that it is included in the Beatitudes.
6. **Good fruit** - God's wisdom produces good deeds.
7. **Unwavering** - Impartial in love and service.
8. **Without hypocrisy** - The wisdom of God makes us genuine believers and not fakes.

3:18 - THE SEED. In 3:16, James summarizes the results of the worldly wisdom that has been described in 3:15. Now, in 3:18, he summarizes the consequences of living according to the wisdom of God which he describes in 3:17. The fruits of the wisdom of the world are reaped immediately, but "a seed whose fruit is righteousness" will ripen over a period of time..

BY THOSE WHO MAKE PEACE. "Peacemakers" as in the Beatitudes. In keeping with the husbandry metaphor, a peacemaker is one who cultivates peace.

CHAPTER IV

I. WORLDLINESS, 4:1-17.

A. The Source, Nature, and Results of Strife, 4:1-3.

1. The source of man's strife is his own lusts, 4:1.

The chapter division falls in the middle of the third section of the book (3:13-4:10). "This section deals with the two different kinds of wisdom and is typified by two ways of life, that is, two kinds of friendship: the one with the world and the other with God" [NAC].

4:1 - THE SOURCE OF QUARRELS. This was not written in a vacuum. Clearly, there were carnal divisions and disputes among these Jewish believers in James' day. One cause was the selfish, even arrogant desire of many to be teachers (3:1), but a more basic cause was disobedience.

YOUR PLEASURES. Or, your lusts. This was the source of the Jewish contentions that led to the growth of various sects in James' day.

2. The consequences of strife, 4:2-3.

4:2 - YOU LUST AND DO NOT HAVE. The word “lusts” does not necessarily mean sensual passions. It simply means desires.

MURDER. Lust does not always lead to murder, but it has that potential, as Jesus clearly warns.

YOU FIGHT AND QUARREL. The source of the conflict here was their envy: “You are envious and cannot obtain.”

YOU DO NOT HAVE. God responds faith, not friction; love, not lust; prayer, not pride. “People who grab for everything they can get and then hold grudges when they don’t get what they want are hardly the type of people God listens to. If they did start asking God instead of fighting for everything, they would soon stop fighting” [NCWB].

4:3 - YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE. This verse must be considered in any study of prayer. There are many “religious” people who pray fervently, but they ask for the wrong motives.

B. Worldliness Condemned By God, 4:4-6.

Certain points are made in these verses, not the least of which are the following:

1. Man must choose between God and the world.
2. The friend of the world cannot be the friend of God.
3. There is glory in humility, but anguish in pride.

4:4 - ADULTERESSES. Instead of the customary, “My brethren,” James charges, “You adulterous people!” The Jews, because of their covenant relationship with God are considered to be wed to God in the Old Testament, just as the church is the bride of Christ in the New Testament. For that reason, idolatry is called spiritual harlotry.

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD. The Greek word is *philia*, indicating a reciprocal relationship. Unfaithful people love the world, and the world loves them.

A FRIEND OF THE WORLD. With “*therefore*,” James ties together the two parts of this verse, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? **Therefore** whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (emphasis added).”

4:5 - THE SCRIPTURE. Based on internal claims, external proofs, and my own experience with Scripture I subscribe to the position of inerrancy. This is not a political position, but a theological conviction. Reason supports this position as far as I am concerned. If God could not have produced a perfect Book, why call Him God? If He could have produced a perfect Book but would not do it, what kind of God is He?

HE JEALOUSLY DESIRES THE SPIRIT. Instead of pursuing the wisdom from above that counsels humility and peace, they had allowed the wisdom from below to dominate their aspirations (vv. 15-17). “This dichotomous movement of the will back and forth between different worlds of desire and deed was what James had in mind” [NAC: 179].

4:6 - A GREATER GRACE. James is quoting Proverbs 3:34. In 4:4, James made the point that “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” And pride is of the world. Jesus taught that, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son to die on a cruel cross to provide for the redemption of those who humble themselves before Him, but God is emphatically opposed to (resists) the proud.

GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Whether a believer is called to resist his human spirit (vs. 5) which tends toward envy or to rejoice in the Holy Spirit who jealously yearns for each believer’s edification, the call is to eschew pride and to submit humbly to the authority of God.

C. Repentance Is Demanded, 4:7-10.

This passage (4:7-10) contains 10 of the 54 imperatives:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) submission to God | (2) resisting the devil |
| (3) drawing near to God | (4) cleansing of hands |
| (5) purifying the heart | (6) lamentation |
| (7) mourning | (8) weeping |
| (9) turning | (10) humbling oneself before the Lord |

4:7 - SUBMIT THEREFORE TO GOD. Submit here is a military term, meaning to be in subjection to, or to render obedience to another.

RESIST THE DEVIL AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. Resist is another military term, meaning to take a stand. We must maintain the order set forth here - you must never try to resist the devil until you have submitted yourself to God.

AN EXERCISE: List some modern occult games which, if played by children, will open their hearts and minds to the influence of Satan. What do you know about

1. Dungeons and Dragons
2. Harry Potter
3. Pokemon

4:8 - DRAW NEAR TO GOD. The Christian is assured that any time he draws near to God,

the Lord will meet him more than half way. Furthermore, we cannot draw near to God! He must draw us to Himself, and it is in submission to Him that He will draw us to Himself.

CLEANSE YOUR HANDS, YOU SINNERS. Both “cleanse” and “purify” are verbs that refer to ceremonial cleansing, a figure that would not be wasted on these Jewish converts. These verbs spoke volumes to them. The need for this cleansing is clearly seen in the way James addressed his readers, “you sinners” and “you double-minded.”

PURIFY YOUR HEARTS. This denotes inner cleanness.

YOU DOUBLE-MINDED. See also, James 1:8. Without a doubt, James has in mind those who were vacillating in their commitment to God. Their hearts and minds were not firmly fixed on God.

4:9 - MOURN AND WEEP. The cleansing of verse 8 requires a serious spirit of confession and repentance. The language James uses “implies a deep, intense sorrow like the mourning at a funeral. In 5:1, James tells the rich men to “weep and howl.”

LAUGHTER TURNED INTO MOURNING. Laughter is sometimes desirable (cf. Ps. 126:2), but not when it reflects worldly frivolity. There is a time for laughter and there is a time for tears. Sin is nothing to laugh about, and genuine repentance is not a laughing matter.

4:10 - HUMBLE YOURSELVES. Humility is demanded of all who would come into the presence of God. Peter wrote, “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).
D. Selfish Strife and Worldliness Leads to Slander, 4:11-12.

4:11 - DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER. James now moves on to the matter of criticism, as he continues his instruction on the theme of trouble with control of the tongue. Whether it is criticism, slander, or quarreling, all the trouble we get into with our tongues can be traced right back to the selfish desires inside ourselves (4:1).

SPEAKS AGAINST THE LAW. To judge another is in reality a judgment against the Law of God. “The slanderer is sentenced by the Law; the self-styled judge is jeopardized by the Law; only the humble person is honored. True justice is rendered when a believer subjects himself to God in humility and obedience” [BKC].

4:12 - ONE LAWGIVER The word “Lawgiver” is a compound noun used only here in the New Testament. It means “to set, place, constitute, or lay down.” God not only set down the Law, He also administers it.

ABLE TO SAVE AND DESTROY. God, and He alone, is the One who is able to save and destroy. There is one Author of the Law, one Judge over the Law, and there is one Savior from the Law’s condemnation.

E. Pure Religion Puts Things in Their Proper Perspective, 4:13-17.

4:13 - WE WILL GO. “Come now” introduces a new subject. The person James has in mind is a typical businessman who makes his plans without considering God. “He is self-assertive in his travel plans: **we will go to this or that city**; self-confident in his time schedule, **spend a year there**; and self-centered in his trade relationships, **carry on business and make money**” [BKC].

4:14 - YOU DO NOT KNOW. Only God knows what tomorrow holds. The Christian must reason, “I do not know what tomorrow holds, but I know Who holds tomorrow.”

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? Regardless of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological answers, we must come back to this verse - life is “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” The ultimate answer to the questions of life are spiritual!

4:15 - IF THE LORD WILLS. It is unfortunate that some students of the Word have concluded that Paul and James contradicted each other, when in fact James and Paul complement each other. For example, in all his travel plans, Paul used this expression (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19)—but not always (Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:28; 1 Cor. 16:5, 8).

4:16 - YOU BOAST. It is appropriate to boast in God. It is inappropriate to boast in the wrong things: “They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves” (Ps. 94:4).

IN YOUR ARROGANCE. The seed bed of boasting is human arrogance. Pride, criticism, and self-confidence go hand in hand.

4:17 - TO HIM WHO KNOWS TO DO GOOD. This verse sums up the chapter and points out that we can sin by neglecting to do the things we should, just as surely as we can by deliberate action. The Puritans were right when they talked about “sins of commission” and “sins of omission.”

CHAPTER V

I. A WARNING TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN MATERIAL WEALTH, 5:1-6.

A. God’s Judgement Will Be Severe for Those Who Trust in Riches, 5:1.

5:1 - COME NOW. James opens this subject with the same attention getter he used in 4:13. James was addressing wealthy Jewish men who were known for how much money they had rather than for the good they did

with it. These wealthy employers were in a position to cause serious problems to Jews who became Christians.

YOU RICH. Liberal politicians have used class envy as a primary tool in dividing the American society, pitting the haves against the have-nots to serve their own political purpose. They are willing to sacrifice our culture on the altar of their own ambition. Let us mark this down: it is a sin for a rich person to hate or abuse a poor person - and it is a sin for a poor person to hate or envy a rich person.

WEEP AND HOWL. This means to scream or shriek in terror. James may be speaking prophetically of “the destruction that was coming upon the Jews, not only in Judea, but in all the provinces where they sojourned.

MISERIES. The judgment of God will cause frenzied terror.

B. Reasons for the Judgment, 5:2-6.

1. They hoarded riches, 2-3.
2. Injustice to their laborers, 4.
3. Sinful extravagance, 5.
4. Violent acts against others, 6.

5:2 - YOUR RICHES ARE CORRUPTED. They hoarded riches only to see them depreciate, corrode, rust, or lost in some other way. The word here translated “corrupted” does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It means, to cause to rot, to corrupt, to destroy.

YOUR GARMENTS ARE MOTH-EATEN. Expensive garments were worn by some wealthy individuals as a testimony to their riches. Achan sinned because of he coveted such “beautiful mantle from Shinar” (Joshua 7:20-21, KJV).

5:3 - A WITNESS AGAINST YOU. The corroded coins, like the moth-eaten garments stood as a testimony to the fact that their whole lives were spent accumulating something that did not do them any good.

EAT YOUR FLESH AS IT WERE FIRE. “Just as the process of decay devoured their wealth, the awareness of the futility of all they have done will eat away at their minds” [NCWB].

HEAPED UP TREASURE TOGETHER FOR THE LAST DAYS. In Luke 12:19, the rich man’s act of treasuring up wealth is matched by God’s act of storing up wrath, and that wrath will be poured out on him in God’s judgment.

5:4 - PAY....WITHHELD. They may not want to hear him, but they should know that God has heard the cries of the people they have oppressed. It is not the wealth itself that is condemned, but “their greedy attitude toward it and the grisly actions with which it was obtained. God is not deaf to the cries of injustice that rise both

from wages withheld in fraud and from the laborers who have been oppressed by the rich" [BKC].

5:5 - YOU HAVE LIVED ON THE EARTH IN PLEASURE. They lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous, contemptuous of the poor and insensitive to their needs. To appreciate this, read the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

FATTENED YOUR HEARTS. This is a rather sarcastic illustration but a vivid one for these Jewish believers who had seen many fattened sheep and oxen meet their fates in sacrifice and for celebrations. This reminds us of the charge God made against the women of Israel, delivered by the prophet Amos, when He called the "kine of Bashan"-a bunch of fat cows! (Amos 4:1).

5:6 - MURDERED THE JUST. Had some of these wealthy Jews actually "murdered the just" without having to answer to the courts? Certainly, Jezebel had Naboth murdered so that Ahab could have his vineyard. These men may have been more subtle than that. In their quest for more wealth, some of these rich people had used their influence in courts of justice, and in the process they were guilty of bringing condemnation and even death to innocent men who offered no resistance.

II. HOPE IN THE LORD'S RETURN ENCOURAGES PATIENCE, 5:7-12.

A. The Second Coming Gives Hope and Develops Patience, 7-9.

5:7 - BE PATIENT BRETHREN. -At this point James turns from the rich men, about whom he has been writing, to the believers. In the rest of the chapter he is talking to Christians

UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD. James encourages these suffering saints to keep their eyes on the promised return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the New Testament, Christians who are facing trials are encouraged to keep their eyes on the Lord, look to the Second Coming of Christ, and trust Him to take care of them. Paul deals with this in his letters to the church at Thessalonica (see 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

5:8 - BE PATIENT. As we have seen in verse 7, the word "patient" does not mean that they were to sit idly by, doing nothing. It carries the idea of endurance, or steadfastness, a willingness to bearing the burdens and trials, and fight the battles every Christian must face until the Lord returns. James uses several illustrations to hammer home this lesson of patience.

- (1) There is the farmer (verses 7-8).
- (2) The judge (v. 9).
- (3) The prophets (vv. 10-11).

THE COMING OF THE LORD. From Corinth, Paul wrote two epistles to the church at Thessalonica, encouraging them to look to the coming of the Lord, and to straighten out

misconceptions and false teachings about the Second Coming. Later, from Ephesus, he would write to the church at Corinth declare to the believes there the truth about the return of the Lord.

5:9 - DO NOT COMPLAIN. The Greek verb translated “complain” here means to “groan.” This points, not open criticism of someone, but a muffled mutter, a complaint under your breath that says you disapprove of someone or something but don’t have the courage to confront him with it.

SO THAT YOU YOURSELVES MAY NOT BE JUDGED. There are few things that are more unpleasant than a judgmental person. There are those who continually attribute ulterior motive to others. There is a striking difference between a discerning spirit and a judgmental attitude.

THE JUDGE IS STANDING AT THE DOOR! Other Scriptures use the same picture (Gen. 4:7; Matt. 24:33; Ps. 24:7). Because of their hope of the Lord’s imminent return, believers should cease the petty conflicts to which James alluded in chapter 4.

B. Patience Is Illustrated, 10-11.

5:10 - THE PROPHETS...AN EXAMPLE. They were well aware of their history, a history taught in the synagogue schools and in their homes. The Jews knew their history as no other people ever had, and one reason they knew their history so well was the written message of the prophets.

5:11 - BLESSED. Believers may be called upon to endure hardships, trials, even persecution for the glory of God. See Matthew 5:10-12.

ENDURED. There are two kinds of patience. The Greek word here is similar to, but not the same as, the word for “patience” in 5:10. This word is properly translated “endurance” here. There are people who show a very passive patience in accepting their lot in life, while others “actively endure what God has for them. That is the kind of patience these prophets demonstrated. James uses the same Greek word in 1:3 when he talks about patience that actively grows” [CLARKE].

THE ENDURANCE OF JOB. Job was stripped of all his worldly possessions, “deprived at a stroke of all his children, tortured in body with sore disease, tempted by the devil, harassed by his wife, and calumniated by his friends, he nevertheless held fast his integrity, resigned himself to the Divine dispensations, and charged not God foolishly” [CLARKE].

THE OUTCOME. Job’s suffering had been very intense, but in the end we see that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

FULL OF COMPASSION. Just as the Lord was filled with compassion for Job, we know He will be full of compassion for us.

C. Swearing Is Prohibited, 12.

5:12 -DO NOT SWEAR. Not all oaths are prohibited by this verse, only flippant, profane, or blasphemous ones. Oaths in the sense of solemn affirmations were enjoined in the law (Ex. 22:11). This verse resounds the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:33-37.

LEST YOU FALL INTO JUDGMENT. We live in a profane and vulgar world. Words that were never used “in mixed company” fifty years ago are spewed forth in public places by men and women alike. Children often do not understand why they are not allowed to use certain words at school when both parents use them at home.

III. CHRISTIANS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PRAY, 5:13-18.

A. Occasions for Prayer, 13-14.

5:13 - SUFFERING. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a health and wealth Gospel. Nowhere are we told that once you become a Christian your troubles are over. Jesus never promised peace, He promised a sword. To take up the cross and follow Him is to lay your life on the line for Him.

5:14 - SICK. In verse 13, the reference was to affliction in general, and the believer’s response to it. The subject of sickness is important to us because we are all subject to it. “Nothing is said here respecting the degree of sickness, whether it is that which would be fatal if these means were used or not; but the direction pertains to any kind of illness” [BARNES].

ANOINT HIM WITH OIL. The word “anoint” is the common word for “massage”; it is used in Mark 16:1, where the women wanted to prepare the body of Christ for burial. Oil was commonly used as a medicine in James’ day. Physicians often anointed the sick with oil (Luke 10:34). The picture here is of saints not only praying for one another but also using appropriate medication. What are Christians to do when a brother or sister is sick? Pray for them **and** seek medical attention.

B. The Power of Prayer, 15.

5:15 - THE PRAYER OF FAITH. Both healing and forgiveness are promised when God’s children pray, believing. Christians do get sick, as we all know, but some students of the Word see in this verse an implication that the sickness to which James refers is the result of sin (see 1 Cor. 11:30). What should the believers do when there is sickness? They should call the leaders of the church and ask for prayer.

THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP. Sooner or later we will all have to deal with health problems. We are concerned for family members and friends who are suffering from cancer or heart disease. I believe in faith healing. I believe in faith and I believe in healing. You see, it

is the faith healers that often give me a problem.

HE WILL BE FORGIVEN. Forgiveness does not come as a result of sickness and suffering.

No one merits Heaven through suffering, sickness, or because she had a sorry husband! God promises forgiveness to those who confess their sins and repent. “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).

C. The Conditions Under Which Prayers Are Answered, 16-18.

1. Confession of sin.
2. A right relationship with others.
3. Personal righteousness.

5:16 - CONFESS. In this verse, James summarizes the lesson: Christians are to confess their sins and pray for each other. This, however, does not mean that the Christian should confess everything he or she knows to everyone who comes along. They should confess sins committed against each other. The Greek word (*exomologew*) means to confess, to agree, or in a broader sense, to say (or name) the same thing. We only confess our sins when we are in agreement with God as to the nature, consequences, and seriousness of that specific sin.

TRESPASSES. The word James uses (*hamartia*) denotes missing the mark. An archer whose arrow falls short of the target has missed the mark.

FERVENT PRAYER. “James continues, “...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The Greek words denote an *energetic supplication*. Such a prayer is **suggested, directed, and energized by the Holy Spirit.**

D. An Illustration of the Power of Prayer, 5:17-18.

5:17 - ELIJAH. The devout Jew was well aware of Elijah, who, though a non-writing prophet, is the one prophet who is the representative prophet. As Moses was to the Law, so is Elijah to the Prophets.

5:18 - HE PRAYED. In 1 Kings 18:42, we read , “...But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees.” We are not told in that verse that Elijah prayed, but the Holy Spirit inspired James to write that he prayed. In response to his prayer God sent rain and the earth once again produced its fruit after a three year drought.

IV. CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE SINNED ARE URGED TO REPENT, 5:19-20.

A. Backsliders Have Strayed From the Truth, 5:19.

5:19 - IF ANYONE ...WANDERS. If anyone wanders from the truth - and someone will - Christians are in a unique position to help reclaim them. “If” anyone wanders? Everyone is at risk at all times, and whether we wander for only a short time or for many years, it is serious. It is sin, and it is beyond the power of the wanderer to return on his own.

FROM THE TRUTH. Backsliders are people who have embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and then wandered “from the truth.” What exactly does that mean? One may wander *practically* through sin, or he may wander *theologically* through false doctrines. In either case the wanderer needs to be restored, and God has determined that He will use the faithful to help reclaim and restore the unfaithful.

B. We Can Help Reach the Lost for Christ, 5:20.

20 - TURNS A SINNER FROM THE ERROR. In verse 19, we see that God uses Christians to reclaim those who have “wandered from the truth.” Here, we see that it is God’s purpose to use His children to bring the lost to Him for His salvation.

CONCLUSION

The Epistle of James is both deeply theological and intensely practical. As stated in the Introduction, “The major challenge of the Epistle of James is not in the interpretation of it, but in the application of it.” God’s people are to be doers of the Word and not hears only. The following verses provide a fitting conclusion to this magnificent epistle:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:2-5).

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

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (4:7-8).

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you, (4:10).

